

Depression in Harry's Moments Prior to Death in Ernest Hemingway's Short Story *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*

Elsa Jati Khoirullina

Undergraduate Student

English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University
Semarang City, Indonesia

elsajtkrln1406@students.undip.ac.id

***Jumino**

Lecturer

English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University
Semarang City, Indonesia

jumino@live.undip.ac.id

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Abstract

*This article analyzes the depiction of depression prior to death experienced by Harry, the main character in Ernest Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. The objectives of this article are to examine how Harry's thoughts and behaviors reflect his depression as he approaches death. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a psychological approach. The analysis applies Aaron T. Beck's cognitive triad as the main theory, supported by depressive symptoms such as self-criticism, guilty feelings, use of humor, absolutistic thinking, and view of problems as overwhelming, passivity, and avoidance. The results show that Harry evaluates himself as a failed writer, interprets his past as a series of mistakes, and sees no possibility of changing his future. These negative thoughts influence his behavior, which is reflected in his refusal to move, his doubts about medical treatment, and his acceptance of death. This article shows that depression affects both thought patterns and behavior prior to death.*

Keywords: Behavioral, Cognitive, Depression Prior to Death, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis penggambaran depresi menjelang kematian yang dialami oleh Harry, tokoh utama dalam *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* karya Ernest Hemingway. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana pikiran dan perilaku Harry mencerminkan depresinya saat ia mendekati kematian. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan psikologis. Analisis ini menerapkan cognitive triad Aaron T. Beck sebagai teori utama, yang didukung oleh gejala-gejala depresi seperti kritik diri, perasaan bersalah, penggunaan humor, pemikiran absolutistik, pandangan terhadap masalah sebagai sesuatu yang sangat berat, pasivitas, dan penghindaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Harry menilai dirinya sebagai seorang penulis yang gagal, menafsirkan masa lalunya sebagai serangkaian kesalahan, dan tidak melihat adanya kemungkinan untuk mengubah masa depannya. Pikiran-pikiran negatif tersebut memengaruhi perilakunya, yang tercermin dalam penolakannya untuk bergerak, keraguannya terhadap pengobatan medis, dan penerimaannya terhadap kematian. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa depresi memengaruhi pola pikir dan perilaku menjelang kematian..

Kata Kunci: Perilaku, Kognitif, Depresi Menjelang Kematian, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*

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1. Introduction

Depression is an existential change experienced by a person, not only merely experiencing a bad mood, but also feeling emptiness in life (Ratcliffe, 2015:250). Depression is related to cognitive processes that make a person interpret life through a negative perspective (Beck et al., 1979:11). A person can feel hopeless and lose the meaning of life because of significant changes experienced in life. People who suffer from depression tend to find it difficult to see situations from a good perspective because of strong emotional pressure. From this perspective, depression in this article is understood as a cognitive condition reflected through negative thought pattern. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 21 million adults have at least one major depressive episode in 2022 (Inungu et al., 2024:1). Depression clearly affects mental health, which also affects the way a person lives their life. In 2020, one in five adults in the United States is diagnosed with depression (Lee et al., 2023:646). According to the health data obtained, the highest number of people who suffer from depression is in the young adult group, which is in the age range of 18–24 years (Lee et al., 2023:647).

There have been several previous studies analyzing *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. The first previous study is an article entitled Gift and Curse of Freedom: A Study of *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* from Sartre's Philosophy of Existentialism by Zheng Chang (2014). This article uses Sartre's existentialism theory developed by Jean-Paul Sartre to examine Harry's freedom in determining his life along with the responsibility and existential anxiety he experiences. The article emphasizes the moral conflict and meaning of freedom possessed by Harry and shows that this freedom becomes both a source of choices and inner pressure as well as regret. The second previous study is an article entitled From Memories to Counterfactuals: A Conceptual Journey in Ernest Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* by Gabriela Tucan (2015). This article uses a cognitive poetics approach to examine Harry's cognitive journey through memories, imagination, and counterfactual thinking as he faces death. The article also employs the conceptual metaphor "life is a journey" developed by Turner and Johnson as well as counterfactual thinking theory proposed by Roese and Olson and Dannenberg. The findings show that Harry's physical journey is replaced by a mental journey through cognitive processes.

The third previous study is an article entitled Hedonism as Reflected in Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* by Setyaningrum and Samanik (2018). This article uses a sociological approach with hedonism theory developed by Daniel Michael Weijers, including Folk Hedonism and Motivational Hedonism, to analyze Harry's hedonistic lifestyle. The findings show that this behavior leads Harry to abandon his potential as a writer and become trapped in a materialistic life shaped by the social environment. The fourth previous study is an article entitled An Analysis of Hemingway's Symbolism in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* by Peiyan Li (2023). This article uses symbolism theory to analyze various

symbols in the story such as snow, gangrene, wine, the leopard, and Mount Kilimanjaro as representations of Harry's life journey and death. The findings show that these symbols strengthen the meaning of reflection on life and death of the main character.

Through the previous article that has been presented, it is known that the focus of the discussion lies on existentialism, cognitive poetics, sociology, and symbolism. This article will discuss how the main character's thought patterns are reflected in his behavior leading up to his death. Currently, no article has analyzed depression leading up to death in the main character of *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. This gap is an opportunity that can be used to analyze the psychological condition of the main character who suffers from depression before his death. Through this analysis, we expect to provide a further understanding of the psychological condition of a person experiencing depression, especially when it is related to depression before death.

2. Method

This article employs a psychological approach to examine the psychological state of the main character in the short story *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. A psychological approach is the study of psychological types and principles found in literary works (Wellek & Warren, 1949:75). This approach concentrates on personal aspects, including thoughts and motivation (Rossiter, 1999, as cited in Merriam, 2009:33). More specifically, this study uses qualitative research to explore, understand, and interpret a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009:22). Qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpretation and produces descriptive explanations of the topic being analyzed (Merriam, 2009:14). The data collection method used in this study was library research. Library research is a technique used to identify and obtain sources that provide information related to a research topic (George, 2008:6). The data collected in this study consisted of documents related to the topic under discussion. Documents are evidence that already exists and are not produced by the researcher (McCulloch, 2005:22). Documents as the main data source are classified into two types: primary and secondary sources. Primary documents function as the main source of analysis, where literary works include texts such as fiction, poetry, or drama (Klarer, 2005:4). Secondary documents are supporting materials relevant to the primary document used, such as books, journal articles, essays, scientific papers, and student theses (Klarer, 2005:4). In this study, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* by Ernest Hemingway serves as the primary source. Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher read the story repeatedly to understand the psychological condition of the main character. Second, relevant dialogues, narrations, and events were identified and selected. Third, the data were classified according to Aaron T. Beck's cognitive theory of depression. Finally, the data were interpreted descriptively to explain Harry's depression prior to death.

3. Result and Discussion

The analysis of Harry's condition in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* reveals two major themes related to depression prior to death, namely thought patterns indicating depression prior to death and behavioral

patterns indicating depression prior to death. These two themes emerged because depression affects not only the way a person thinks, but also the way a person behaves. According to Beck's cognitive theory, depression is reflected in negative thought patterns related to the self, life experiences, and the future. Harry's awareness of his worsening physical condition and approaching death influences the way he interprets himself and his situation negatively. These negative thoughts are reflected in several depressive symptoms and gradually affect his responses and actions. Therefore, the findings are divided into two subtopics because Harry's depression is shown through both cognitive processes and behavioral manifestations.

Thought Patterns Indicating Depression Prior to Death

Depression is a psychological condition that occurs due to stressful life events and cognitive vulnerability. Depression is related to cognitive processes that make individuals tend to interpret situations in a negative way (Beck et al., 1979:11). Beck introduces the concept of cognitive triad as three negative thinking patterns in how a person views themselves, their life experiences, and their future in a negative way (Beck et al., 1979:11). In Ernest Hemingway's *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, Harry as the main character shows depression prior to his death through the concept of the cognitive triad, which is the way a person evaluates themselves through negative thoughts about the self, life experiences, and the future. The root of his problem is Harry's declining physical condition caused by a gangrene infection in his leg. Harry realizes that he is dying in the African wilderness, far from adequate medical assistance. He also realizes how severe his condition is because of the infection. In this condition, Harry is portrayed as seeing and evaluating himself from a negative perspective.

The cognitive triad consists of negative view of the self, negative interpretation of life experiences, and negative view of the future. Negative view of the self refers to how a person sees themselves as unworthy, full of flaws, and unable to achieve happiness (Beck et al., 1979:11). Harry's thought pattern regarding negative view of the self refers to his negative evaluation of himself because he feels like a failure and is disappointed in himself. Negative view of life experiences refers to how a person interprets past and present events as failures or difficult situations (Beck et al., 1979:11). Harry reviews his life experiences and focuses on the decisions he makes in the past. He believes that the decisions he chooses in the past are mistakes, which causes his present life to reach its lowest point. Negative view of the future refers to a pessimistic belief that current suffering continues and things do not improve (Beck et al., 1979:11). His negative thoughts about the future are based on his hopelessness toward a life that is about to end. This hopelessness develops from his negative evaluation of himself and his negative interpretation of his unpleasant life experiences.

Self-criticism is the way a person blames themselves excessively because they see themselves as a person full of shortcomings and embarrassment, which worsens their psychological condition (Beck et al., 1979:190). Self-criticism is a form of self-evaluation in which Harry's criticism toward himself is influenced by his negative view of himself. Harry sees himself as a person who fails, so his thoughts

focus on blaming himself for the failures he experiences. At first, Harry is a writer who sells his writings to support his life. His meeting with Helen changes his life significantly because without having to work hard, Harry can enjoy Helen's wealth. As a writer, producing literary works gives him personal satisfaction. Harry becomes complacent with the financial comfort he receives, so he stops writing. Harry's first self-criticism in the story is shown in the quotation, "now he would never write the things that he had saved to write..." (Hemingway, 1936:3). This self-criticism is based on his realization that he will no longer have the chance to write again. Harry sees himself as a failed writer because he only keeps those stories in his mind. He realizes that the stories stored in his memory should have been preserved through his writing. Through writing, he can give meaning to his experiences and preserve them.

His next guilty feeling results from his decision to marry Helen. Harry decides to marry Helen because he knows that Helen is a wealthy woman who falls in love with him. Harry associates Helen's wealth with the loss of his motivation to write. There are two quotations that reflect Harry's regret for stopping writing: "your bloody money" (Hemingway, 1936:3) and "your damned money was my armour" (Hemingway, 1936:6). Although both statements are addressed to Helen, they represent Harry's thoughts about his past decisions, which he considers wrong and harmful. There is also irony in these statements. On one hand, money protects him from life's difficulties. On the other hand, he believes that money weakens his struggle and ambition as a writer.

A depressed person tends to use humor as a sharp satire toward painful life experiences (Beck et al., 1979:172). This becomes a temporary defense mechanism for a depressed person to escape from their sadness for a moment. The use of humor in a bad condition reflects his actual mental exhaustion. Humor does not always consist of jokes intended to be funny but can also appear as dark jokes full of sarcasm. One of Harry's sarcastic statements is shown in the quotation, "or you can shoot me. You're a good shot now. I taught you to shoot didn't I?" (Hemingway, 1936:2). This statement is a form of sarcasm directed at Helen. Harry fully realizes his poor physical condition and clearly rejects Helen's concern. Instead of accepting Helen's encouragement, he chooses to be shot rather than continue to suffer from the infection. Through his thoughts, Harry creates emotional distance from his pain, which he then expresses through his words. His humor does not remove the pain but helps him express his hopelessness indirectly.

Absolutistic thinking is a rigid way of thinking. In this case, a person's thoughts are fixed on the bad condition that happens and regards it as something very harmful and impossible to change (Beck et al., 1979:194). In other words, a person with depression sees that their life is ruined. As a person who experiences depression prior to death, Harry firmly believes that his negative thoughts are valid. This absolute thinking reflects his depression because he focuses on his condition only from a negative point of view with complete conviction. Harry ignores all the experiences and happiness he once has and becomes absorbed in these thoughts. "He had had his life and it was over and then he went on living it again with different people and more money..." (Hemingway, 1936:7). Through this quotation, the narrator shows that Harry believes the meaningful and valuable part of his life is already over. His body is still alive and struggling against the pain caused by the gangrene infection, but his soul feels empty

because his thoughts are chaotic and complicated. Harry does not want death to come, but his condition clearly leads toward it and he cannot resist it.

A depressed person tends to see an unfavorable condition as a very difficult problem to overcome (Beck et al., 1979:188). This condition generally makes a person feel unable to bear and face the problems that occur. This depressive symptom appears when a person sees a problem as too great. In this condition, Harry realizes and thinks rationally about his dying state. He sees the gangrene infection in his leg as a very serious problem because it causes him to lose control over himself. Through his way of thinking, Harry loses the motivation to survive because his condition becomes a major problem that he feels unable to face. His thoughts focus only on the negative aspects. "Don't be silly. I'm dying now. Ask those bastards" (Hemingway, 1936:2). This statement is addressed to Helen, who continues to encourage Harry not to give up, while "those bastards" refers to the birds around the tent where Harry and Helen stay with their servant, Molo. This quotation shows Harry's anger and frustration clearly. He says this because he does not see any way out of his problem. This response illustrates how depression reduces a person's capacity to recognize hope even when support is still available.

Harry's thoughts in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* strongly reflect the depression he experiences prior to his death. He sees himself as a failed writer, interprets his past as a series of wasted opportunities, and sees no possibility of surviving to redeem his mistakes and failures. These patterns appear through self-criticism regarding his failure as a writer, followed by guilty feelings over his past decisions. He also uses humor to appear fine even though he is physically and emotionally wounded. In addition, he sees his physical suffering as too overwhelming to face because he is not motivated to survive. His absolutistic thinking reflects his negative thoughts. It can be concluded that Harry's thoughts serve as clear evidence that he experiences depression prior to his death.

Behavioral Patterns Indicating Depression Prior to Death

Beck introduces the concept of passivity as a behavioral symptom of depression, which also includes avoidance. The behavioral symptoms of depression are explained through passivity, in which avoidance is also present in depressed individuals. Harry refuses to move, doubts medical treatment, avoids emotional involvement with Helen, and chooses not to confront the regrets that have haunted him. This behavior shows that Harry has lost the motivation to survive because he is no longer able to find anything valuable enough to fight for. Even his writing talent, which has long been an important part of his life, is no longer meaningful enough to encourage him to hold on until help arrives. Passivity is a behavioral change in individuals experiencing depression characterized by a decrease in daily activities even though they still can perform them (Beck et al., 1979:197). Passivity is reflected in statements such as, "It is pointless to try," "I cannot do it," and "I am too tired to do anything" (Beck et al., 1979:198). Avoidance is a form of depressive behavior characterized by avoiding situations that are perceived as stressful, unfavorable, and potentially leading to failure (Beck et al., 1979:198). Harry is described as a man lying motionless on a cot under a tree, "The cot the man lay on was in the wide shade of a mimosa tree" (Hemingway, 1936: 1). This description directly emphasizes his physical inactivity. Harry spends most of his time merely

observing the birds and the surroundings of his camp. There is no sign that he truly believes rescue will come soon, even though Helen repeatedly expresses that possibility. Physically, Harry is still alive, but mentally he begins to deteriorate and moves toward depression prior to death. Harry directly expresses his passivity and avoidant tendency when he says, “I don’t want to move... There is no sense in moving now except to make it easier for you” (Hemingway, 1936: 2). This statement shows that Harry not only refuses to move but also avoids actions that he believes will not bring any change. From Harry’s point of view, moving means maintaining hope, while he no longer believes that such hope still exists. Therefore, he chooses to do nothing. This attitude reflects passivity, while his belief that such action is useless shows avoidance toward efforts to save himself.

Harry finally reaches a state of complete surrender, as shown in the quotation, “All right. Now he would not care for death” (Hemingway, 1936: 19). This sentence shows that Harry no longer tries to resist death. He also no longer thinks about the consequences of losing his life. Harry responds to the death that draws closer by choosing to accept and make peace with his condition rather than continuing to struggle against his thoughts and feelings. This attitude reflects passivity because he stops fighting, and at the same time reflects avoidance because he chooses to detach himself from anxiety by no longer caring.

Overall, Harry’s behavior prior to his death shows that the depression he experiences develops from merely negative thinking patterns into a condition that clearly affects his actions. Harry not only views himself and his future pessimistically but also expresses that view through a passive attitude and a tendency to avoid anything that still requires effort, hope, or emotional involvement. His refusal to move, his doubts about medical treatment, his indifference toward the possibility of survival, and his acceptance of death show that he has lost the motivation to preserve his life. From Harry’s point of view, struggling no longer has any meaning because he feels that there is nothing valuable enough to save. Thus, Harry’s behavioral symptoms show that depression can make a person not only think negatively but also stop acting and gradually surrender to the circumstances he faces.

4. Conclusion

Harry’s depression is reflected through several psychological symptoms. He criticizes himself for wasting his talent, feels guilty about the choices he makes, uses humor to express emotional pain, thinks in absolute terms, and sees his situation as too overwhelming to overcome. These symptoms show that Harry becomes trapped in a pattern of thinking that reinforces his sense of failure and hopelessness. These negative thoughts gradually affect his behavior, as he becomes increasingly passive and avoids actions that still require effort or hope. He refuses to move, doubts the possibility of medical treatment, distances himself emotionally from Helen, and ultimately accepts death without resistance. This article reveals that Harry’s condition prior to his death in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* reflects a clear portrayal of depression. As Harry faces death caused by a gangrene infection in his leg, his thoughts become dominated by regret, disappointment, and hopelessness. These negative views shape how he understands himself, his experiences, and his future. This article contributes to a better understanding of

the relationship between literature and psychology by showing how a fictional character can realistically reflect the emotional and behavioral symptoms of depression. This study has several limitations. The analysis focuses on only one literary work and applies Aaron T. Beck's cognitive theory as the main framework for understanding Harry's psychological condition. Therefore, the findings are limited to one psychological perspective and may produce different interpretations if analyzed using other approaches. Future research is suggested to examine psychological conditions in literary works through different theoretical perspectives or by comparing several literary works to provide broader insights into the portrayal of depression and other psychological conditions in literature.

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