Prosodi: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra
Vol. 20 – No. 2, Oktober 2026, pp.279 - 290
https://doi.org/10.21107/prosodi.v20i2.36234
Open Access:
https://journal.trunojoyo.ac.id/prosodi

ISSN 1907-6665 (Print)
ISSN 2622-0474 (Online)

THE REJECTION OF PERFECT LIFE IN MATT HAIG'S *THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY*: A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

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Article History

Received : 15/09/2026
Revised : 19/10/2026
Accepted : 30/10/2026
Published : 01/11/2026

Keywords:
Delegitimation, Metanarrative, Postmodernism, Perfect Life

Kata Kunci:
Delegitimasi, kehidupan sempurna, metanarasi, postmodernisme.

Abstract. The study aims to find the metanarratives that make the concept of the "perfect life", specifically the metanarratives of success, romance, and morality, to analyze how the main character in the novel *The Midnight Library* rejects the metanarratives through the character's life experience. This study uses a qualitative method and the data were analyzed using Jean-François Lyotard's theory of postmodernism, especially the concepts of metanarrative and delegitimation, to identify the metanarrative in *The Midnight Library* and how the main character, Nora Seed, rejects the metanarrative.The research findings show that this novel presents how the character's response ultimately rejects that metanarrative by showing that achievement, romantic relationships, and social acceptance do not always lead to happiness. This study concludes that Nora Seed, the main character, rejects the concept of a perfect life that is established by social standards.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi metanarasi yang membentuk konsep "kehidupan sempurna", khususnya metanarasi tentang kesuksesan, romansa, dan moralitas, serta menganalisis bagaimana tokoh utama dalam novel *The Midnight Library* menolak metanarasi tersebut melalui pengalaman hidupnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dan data dianalisis menggunakan teori postmodernisme Jean-François Lyotard, khususnya konsep metanarasi dan delegitimasi, untuk mengidentifikasi metanarasi dalam *The Midnight Library* serta bagaimana tokoh utama, Nora Seed, menolak metanarasi tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa novel ini menggambarkan bagaimana respons tokoh utama yang pada akhirnya menolak metanarasi tersebut dengan menunjukkan bahwa pencapaian, hubungan romantis, dan penerimaan sosial tidak selalu membawa kebahagiaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Nora Seed, sebagai tokoh utama, menolak konsep kehidupan sempurna yang dibentuk oleh standar-standar sosial.

How to Cite: Putri, F. S., & Roifah, M. (2026). THE REJECTION OF PERFECT LIFE IN MATT HAIG'S *THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY*: A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE *Prosodi: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra*, 20 (2), 279 - 290.
https://doi.org/10.21107/prosodi.v20i2.36234

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INTRODUCTION

Human condition is often colored by reflection of the past and regret that encourages people to imagine life 'What if?' According to Byrne (2016), people spontaneously create counterfactual alternatives to reality when they imagine how the past could have been different. Such reflections often lead individuals to believe that a different decision might have resulted in a better or more fulfilling life. As implied by William Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, "For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (Shakespeare, 1965, p. 62). This quotation suggests that the concepts of a "good" or "perfect" life are not fixed standards but are shaped by individual perspectives and interpretations.

However, in the modern era, subjective search for the meaning of life often clashes with external demands in the form of perfectionism. This perfectionism is no longer an encouragement about growth, but rather about an attempt to avoid judgement. Brené Brown explained: "Perfectionism is not about healthy achievement and growth. Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfect, look perfect, and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgment,

and shame. It's a shield. Perfectionism is a twenty-ton shield that we lug around thinking it will protect us when, in fact, it's the thing that's really preventing us from taking flight" (Brown, 2010, p. 55).

This condition is reinforced by broader social structures, Giddens (1991) argues that in modern society individuals increasingly treat their lives as on going projects requiring continuous evaluation and improvement, so that personal worth becomes measured through external standards rather than self-understanding. Erich Fromm links this condition to alienation, Erich Fromm states, "Alienation as we find it in modern society is almost total. it pervades the relationship of man to his work, to the things he consumes, to the state, to his fellow man, and to himself" (Fromm, 1955, p. 121). Baudrillard (1994) also describes this phenomenon as a hyperreal condition in which "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 55). The life that is considered "perfect" is nothing more than a social illusion, a false image of happiness built on the recognition of others, not on true self-understanding.

This condition opens space for postmodernist theory to challenge the universal idea of a "perfect life". Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* defines the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984). Reflecting a skepticism toward the existence of a single, absolute truth that is considered valid for everyone. In the context of life, this implies rejecting the statement that happiness must follow one fixed model applicable to all individuals. Linda Hutcheon states, "A more general questioning of any totalizing or homogenizing system. Provisionality and heterogeneity contaminate any neat attempts at unifying coherence (formal or thematic)" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 12), she also notes, "The questioning of the universal and totalizing in the name of the local and particular does not automatically entail the end of all consensus" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 12). It means that agreement can still exist, but only within particular, contextual boundaries rather than as a universal rule. Beyond critiquing universal claims, postmodernism grants individuals the freedom to construct their own meaning, "Postmodernism is the idea that individuals have both the intelligence and the right to decide for themselves what truth is" (Farhan, 2019). Bertens (1995) situates this within a broader intellectual shift, describing postmodernism as a complex of anti-modernist artistic strategies which emerged in the 1950s and developed momentum in the course of the 1960s. Postmodernism can be seen as conscious rejection of the ideological foundations of modernism, the belief that there is only one true or perfect way to life.

The postmodern idea of individual freedom in determining the meaning of life and rejecting the single truth can be seen manifestly in modern literary works, one of them is *The Midnight Library* (2020) by Matt Haig. Matt Haig is a British novelist and journalist known for exploring themes of mental health, identity, regret, and self-discovery in his works. *The Midnight Library* became an international bestseller and received widespread recognition, including winning the Goodreads Choice Award for Fiction in 2020. The novel depicts a postmodernist's concept of a perfect life. The main character, Nora Seed, feels that her life is full of regrets and failures until she decides to end her life. However, she wakes up in a mysterious library containing books about different versions of her life, a life she could have lived if she had made a different choice. Through this journey, Haig presents the inner conflicts of modern humans caught between past regrets and the search for true meaning in life. From this arises the main problem that needs to be studied, that is, how *The Midnight Library* represents the rejection of the concept of perfect life through the perspective of postmodernism.

The main tension of the novel when Nora Seed, tries to find a life that is considered perfect, but instead finds that perfection never really exists. Each version of life that Nora choose has its own unhappiness. It illustrates the postmodern view that the meaning of truth is not singular, but it formed from individual interpretation and individual experience. In this study, the researcher focuses on the rejection of a perfect life through Nora Seed's inner journey. Using a postmodernist perspective, this study discusses how the story in the novel critiques the standards of happiness in

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modern society. In addition, this study also aims to examine how the main character ultimately develops a new understanding of the meaning of life.

Previous research on metanarratives and postmodernism provides an important theoritical foundation for this study. Greene (2025) shows that postmodernism skepticism challenges metanarratives by viewing truth as something relative, context dependent, and social formed. His findings confirm that in the postmodern era, narrative authority is no longer fixed or universal, but constantly quistioned and reinterpreted. In addition to conceptual studies, research on postmodernism in Indonesian literary work also fiurther strengthens the basis of the study. Muhsyanur (2019) and Alfadilah (2020) show that postmodern elements, such as parody, irony, eclecticism, pastiche, and camp, appear in various novels and serve to undermine the singular meaning in the text. Their findings show that literary works often become a space for responding to or criticizing estabilished narrative structure. This studies highlight how postmodernism in literature tends to be diverse. The studies that specifically on *The Midnight Library* provide important insights through a psychological approach. Sabrina (2022) examined Nora Seed's development of self-efficacy and revealed significant emotional transformation, while Salsabilla (2023) analyzed the types of anxiety and defense mechanisms Nora uses to cope with her internal conflicts. Although these studies deepen the understanding of Nora's psychological journey, none of them approaches the novel through Lyotard's postmodern framework, particularly in relation to the construction and rejection of metanarratives. Therefore, the present research aims to address this gap by offering a postmodern metanarrative analysis that has not been explored in previous studies.

Based on this background, the study aims to describe how Nora Seed rejects the metanarrative of a "perfect life" in *The Midnight Library*, focusing on the character's utterances and narrator's word that reveal this rejection through the character's lived experience.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs qualitative research to analyze the narrative structures in *The Midnight Library* (2020). Qualitative research is selected because it offers a comprehensive approach to understanding and interpreting the underlying themes, characters, and ideologies in the text, focusing on textual data. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is characterized by its reliance on text and image data, its distinct steps in data analysis, and its emphasis on interpreting the meanings derived from the collected data to understand social and cultural phenomena. Creswell (2013) also explains that qualitative research generally follows an inductive logic, moving from specific observations toward broader themes and understandings rather than beginning with predetermined theoretical assumptions. Qualitative research is descriptive because the findings are presented through detailed descriptions and interpretations rather than numerical measurements (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the writer describes and interprets the character's utterances and narator's word that writer found in *The Midnight Library*. Qualitative research is also naturalistic because the data are examined in their original form and context without manipulation (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the author analyzes the original word in the original novel and not change anything.

The primary source of data for this study is the novel *The Midnight Library* (2020) by Matt Haig. This text serves as the central material from which data are drawn, focusing on the narrative, character interactions, and thematic elements related to the rejection of the concept of a "perfect life". The data consists of character's utterance and narator's words in the novel that highlight the protagonist, Nora Seed's internal struggles and her search for meaning in life. These elements reflect the rejection or reinforcement of various metanarratives, particularly those related to success, happiness, and moral ideals. Through Nora's encounters with different versions of her life, the novel explores the complexity of decision-making, the impact of regret, and the quest for personal fulfillment. Secondary data are drawn from relevant theoretical works on postmodernism

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and metanarrative, most centrally Jean-François Lyotard's writings, which provide the theoretical framework for interpreting the primary data.

In this study, the researcher functions as the primary research instrument. Creswell (2014) explain that in qualitative research the researcher is directly responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, selecting relevant passages, organizing them thematically, and interpreting the text through the lens of postmodern theory. Data were collected through close reading of the novel. An initial complete reading established an overall understanding of plot, character, and theme. After which the researcher identified passages relevant to the metanarratives, systematically highlighted and recorded them, and organized them into thematic categories to allow for comparison and analysis. Throughout this process, recurring motifs, character developments, and important events were noted to identify.

Data analysis followed the general qualitative procedure outlined by Creswell (2014), who explains that such steps "include organizing and preparing the data; an initial reading through the information; coding the data; developing from the codes a description and thematic analysis... representing the findings in tables, graphs, and figures; and interpreting the findings" (Creswell, 2014, p. 327). In this research, these steps are applied to the analysis of *The Midnight Library* as follows. First, the writer organizes and prepares the data by compiling all selected quotations, dialogues, and narrative descriptions into one file. Then, close reading will be repeated to understand the context of each quote in relation to the plot and characters. After that, the writer categorizes the data into categories of the types of metanarratives. From that data, writers develop descriptions and analyses that show how the novel responds to the metanarrative of a "perfect life". Finally, the findings are presented in the form of written discussions rather than tables or images, and interpreted using postmodern theoretical frameworks, especially Lyotard's concept of metanarratives and delegitimation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents relevant data to answer the research questions. This table answers the research question about the metanarratives in the novel *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig and how Nora reject to the life she had lived in the novel *The Midnight Library*.

Table 4. 1 Data of Metanarratives and Nora's Responses in The Midnight Library

No	Findings		Quantity
2	Nora's Rejection to the Metanarratives of Perfect Life	a) The Rejection to Metanarratives of Success	3
		b) The Rejection to Metanarratives of Romance	5
		c) The Rejection to Metanarratives of Morality	2
		d) The Rejection to Metanarratives of Perfect Life	6
Total			16

Rejection of the Metanarrative of Success

Metanarratives of success can be seen as a framework that shape and define ideas of achievement in society. Andrade-Molina (2021) explains that dominant narratives of success position individuals as responsible for achieving socially recognized forms of accomplishment and fulfillment, while failure is often viewed as personal inadequacy. Through this perspective, success is no longer seen as merely a personal aspiration, but as a social standard that determines

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whether a person is considered valuable and successful. As a result, individuals who fail to meet those expectations may begin to view themselves as a failure.

In late modern society, success is often no longer treated as a personal preference, but as a social standard that shapes how individuals evaluate their own worth. Giddens (1991) explains that in late modernity, the self becomes a reflexive project in which individuals are expected to continuously shape and assess themselves in relation to social expectations. This suggests that people are pressured to improve themselves and prove their value through visible progress. In addition, Bauman (2000) also argue that modern society increasingly shifts the responsibility for achieving goals on individuals, which turns social demands into personal burdens. As a result, the success metanarrative functions as a cultural rule that justifies that achievement as the main indicator of a meaningful and "perfect" life.

At the beginning of the novel, Nora believes that success is achieved through socially recognized accomplishments such as career achievement, financial stability, and personal milestones. This belief reflects the dominant societal narrative that equates success with measurable outcomes and external recognition. However, after experiencing various alternative lives in the Midnight Library, Nora realizes that even lives filled with extraordinary achievements fail to provide lasting happiness and fulfillment. As a result, she begins to question and reject the assumption that success can be objectively measured through conventional standards. This rejection becomes explicit when Nora reflects on her experiences and states:

> "And . . . and the thing is . . . the thing is . . . what we consider to be the most successful route for us to take, actually isn't. Because too often our view of success is about some external bullshit idea of achievement – an Olympic medal, the ideal husband, a good salary. And we have all these metrics that we try and reach. When really success isn't something you measure, and life isn't a race you can win. It's all . . . bollocks, actually . . ." (Haig, 2020, p. 104).

The quotation demonstrates Nora's growing skepticism toward socially constructed definitions of success. The phrase "external ... idea of achievement" suggests that success is often defined by standards imposed by society rather than by personal fulfillment. The examples she provides, such as "an Olympic medal", "the ideal husband", and "a good salary" represent conventional indicators of success that are widely celebrated and admired. However, despite experiencing lives that contain these achievements, Nora discovers that they do not automatically lead to happiness. This supports Ammar et al.'s (2022) argument that reality is not absolute but socially constructed through cultural values and shared beliefs. In Nora's case, the idea of success is revealed to be a social construct rather than an objective truth. This realization also reflects Lyotard's (1984) concept of delegitimation, in which grand narratives lose their authority to define universal standards and meanings. Therefore, the metanarrative of success is exposed as a socially constructed belief rather than an absolute pathway to fulfillment.

Nora's rejection becomes even more evident when she states that "success isn't something you measure." This statement directly challenges the assumption that human worth can be quantified through achievements. Throughout her journey, Nora inhabits lives in which she becomes an Olympic champion and a respected public figure, all of which represent society's conventional standards of success. These lives continue to contain problem, such as dissatisfaction and personal struggles. Her experiences reveal that success cannot be reduced to measurable accomplishments because personal meaning cannot be objectively quantified. This idea aligns with Fromm's (1955) argument that individuals may become alienated from themselves when they define their worth according to external standards rather than their authentic needs and desires. Although Nora achieves what society considers success, these accomplishments fail to provide the fulfillment she expected.

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Nora's statement that "life isn't a race you can win" illustrates her rejection of the metanarrative of success. According to Lyotard (1984), metanarratives claim to provide universal truths that guide human life. However, Nora comes to realize that success cannot be defined through a single standard applicable to everyone. Rather than viewing life as a competition with one correct destination, she recognizes that different individuals may find fulfillment in different ways. Therefore, her reflection represents a clear rejection of the metanarrative of success, as she no longer accepts external achievements as the ultimate measure of a meaningful life.

Rejection of the Metanarrative of Romance

Romantic metanarratives is a cultural framework that positions romantic love and coupledom as central to a meaningful life. As Fresno-Calleja (2023) notes in *New Romantic Narratives for the Twenty-First Century*, the romance story functions as a guiding story that provides coherence and meaning in people's lives, in which individuals are expected to bond with a suitable partner within a social and relational framework. This narrative constructs the couple as a near-mandatory norm. Consequently, society widely accepts romantic success as a standard, which being in a relationship becoming a key of a fulfilling life.

Beyond simply giving life meaning, romantic metanarratives also play a significant role in shaping how individuals define what an ideal relationship should look like, as well as how they evaluate the overall success of their own lives. Manalili & Malcampo (2025) explain that the standards we set for a potential partner and our romantic ideals are heavily influenced by the constant media portrayals we see, prevailing cultural norms, and our own personal experiences. This highlights the reality that our deeply held beliefs about love and commitment do not emerge purely from within us as individuals. Instead, they are actively developed and reinforced within a much broader framework of social and cultural influences. In addition, Giddens (1992) argues that intimate relationships have become closely connected to personal identity and emotional security. Because of this, having a stable romantic relationship is often seen not only as a personal desire but also as an important life goal. Therefore, romantic metanarrative creates a shared expectation that a perfect life includes love, commitment, and family.

Nora's rejection of the metanarrative of romance emerges through her experiences in several alternative lives. Throughout her journey in the Midnight Library, she is confronted with different forms of romantic relationships that initially appear capable of providing happiness and fulfillment. However, these experiences gradually challenge the belief that love, marriage, or an ideal partner can guarantee a perfect life. One of the earliest indications of this rejection can be seen in her experience of a life where she is married to Dan:

> "'Well, since the stuff with Erin.'
> She stared at him like he was a Rorschach inkblot in which she saw no clear image.
> 'Erin? The one I was speaking to tonight?'
> 'Am I going to be beaten up for ever about one stupid drunken moment?' On the street outside, the wind was picking up, howling through trees as if attempting a language.
> This was the life she had been in mourning for. This was the life she had beaten herself up for not living. This was the timeline she thought she had regretted not existing in" (Haig, 2020, p. 52-53)

This life represents one of the versions she believed would have made her happier, as she once regretted not choosing it. However, this expectation is immediately challenged when Nora is confronted with the reality of Dan's infidelity, as shown in the dialogue "Well, since the stuff with Erin" This moment reveals that the relationship is not as stable or ideal as she had imagined. Nora's reaction further emphasizes her confusion and emotional distance, as she "stared at him like he

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was a Rorschach inkblot in which she saw no clear image", suggesting that the life she once thought meaningful now feels unfamiliar and unclear.

The narration shows that "this was the life she had been in mourning for" and "the timeline she thought she had regretted not existing in". These sentences show that Nora had previously wanted this life as a better alternative, which was formed because of regret in her life. However, this hope is shattered when she is faced with the fact of Dan's infidelity. This moment reveals that the life she once considered ideal is actually disappointing. This shows that Nora's perception of the "perfect life" is not based on real experiences, but on assumptions formed by Nora's own regrets and imagination. This idea aligns with Ammar et al. (2022), who argue that in postmodern thought, reality is not absolute but socially constructed. This is further supported by Greene (2025), who states that postmodernism is characterized by a skepticism toward universal truth and metanarratives. In other words, what Nora thinks of as a perfect life is just an assumption she made herself. Therefore, Nora's experience shows how the metanarrative of a "perfect life" by way of marriage begins to crumble, because the life she once craved has failed to live up to her expectations.

In this context, Nora's experience demonstrates how the metanarrative of a perfect life begins to lose its credibility. The life that she once considered ideal fails to provide the happiness and fulfillment she expected, revealing the gap between expectation and reality. Therefore, this moment marks an early stage of Nora's rejection of the metanarrative, as she begins to realize that the life she once desired is not as perfect as she believed.

Rejection of the Metanarrative of Morality

Moral metanarratives are cultural stories that define what it means to be a "good" and responsible person. They establish normative standards that guide behavior and shape distinctions between right and wrong. As Causadias et al. state "morality specifies ideals, norms, values, virtues, ethics, and goals, informing the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, fair and unfair, and meaningful and meaningless" (Causadias et al., 2018, p. 828)**.** This suggests that morality functions as a standard through which individuals evaluate their actions in relation to societal expectations. Consequently, moral metanarratives shape how individuals perceive their own sense of goodness and whether their lives align with socially constructed norms.

Moral metanarratives strongly influence how we judge our own lives. Society's ideas of right and wrong often become a core part of our personal identity. Vanello (2025) explains this through moral identity theory, stating that people naturally want to do the right thing when being a "good person" is important to who they are. Because of this, we constantly evaluate our past choices using society's moral standards. Ultimately, moral metanarratives do more than just tell us how to behave, they shape how we see ourselves and force us to question if we are truly living a "good" life.

In *The Midnight Library*, Metanarrative of moral become important thing in Nora's life because Nora's character is describe as person who always judge herself based on assumptions about being a "good" and "right" person according to social expectations. Nora repeatedly blames herself for disappointing others, disappointing herself, and failing to become a happier or better person. This condition is also influenced by Nora's life in Bedford, in the novel is described as a small town with an ordinary and stagnant life. Such an environment tends to uphold more conservative social values, where people place a high value on morality and a virtuous way of life. In such an environment, Nora increasingly feels that her life does not match the ideal life that society expects.

Nora's rejection of the metanarrative of morality can be seen through her experience as a glaciologist in the Arctic. As discussed in the previous section, Nora once viewed this life as meaningful because it allowed her to contribute to the environment and serve a greater social purpose. However, when she finally experiences this life, her perspective begins to change. Faced

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with a life-threatening situation, Nora realizes that the morally admirable life she once desired is not necessarily the life she truly wants:

> 'The banging wasn't working. The bear was close. She wondered if she could reach the rifle, lying on the ice, just slightly too far away. She could see the bear's vast pawed feet, armed with claws, pressing into the snow-dusted rock. Its head was low and its black eyes were looking directly at her.
> 'LIBRARY!' Nora screamed. 'MRS ELM! PLEASE SEND ME BACK! THIS IS THE WRONG LIFE! IT IS REALLY, REALLY, REALLY WRONG! TAKE ME BACK! I DON'T WANT ADVENTURE! WHERE'S THE LIBRARY?! I WANT THE LIBRARY!'
> There was no hatred in the polar bear's stare. Nora was just food. Meat. And that was a humbling kind of terror. Her heart pounded like a drummer reaching the crescendo. The end of the song. And it became astoundingly clear to her, finally, in that moment:
> She didn't want to die' (Haig, 2020, p. 122-123).

The quotation illustrates Nora's rejection of the metanarrative of morality. This life initially appears meaningful and valuable because Nora works as a glaciologist whose research contributes to the understanding of climate change. However, this perception begins to change when she is confronted with a polar bear and repeatedly screams, "THIS IS THE WRONG LIFE!" and "I DON'T WANT ADVENTURE!" These statements reveal that Nora no longer sees this life as desirable despite its moral value. Instead of embracing the opportunity to contribute to a greater cause, her immediate reaction is to escape from the situation. This moment suggests that a life considered admirable by society is not necessarily the life she truly wants.

Nora's realization becomes even clearer when the narration states that "She didn't want to die". This sentence marks a turning point in her understanding of what truly matters to her. Faced with the immediate threat of death, Nora becomes aware of her fundamental desire to continue living. The statement is significant because it emerges while she is experiencing the very life she once imagined as meaningful and worthwhile. However, rather than feeling fulfilled by that life, Nora's attention is directed toward her own survival. This experience supports Airaksinen's (2022) argument that a good life must genuinely belong to the individual rather than merely fulfill socially valued ideals. It also reflects Vanello's (2025) view that moral values often shape how individuals evaluate themselves and their life choices. Although Nora's life as a glaciologist appears morally meaningful according to social standards, it fails to provide the personal fulfillment she expected.

Nora's experience demonstrates how the metanarrative of morality begins to lose its legitimacy. The morally admirable life that she once desired fails to provide the fulfillment she expected. Instead, her encounter with the polar bear exposes the gap between the idealized image of a morally meaningful existence and her own personal desires. Rather than finding satisfaction in contributing to a greater cause, Nora becomes aware of her fundamental desire to continue living. Therefore, this moment marks an important stage in her rejection of the metanarrative of morality, as she comes to realize that a life considered morally meaningful is not necessarily the life she truly wants. After rejecting the metanarratives of success, romance, and morality, Nora arrives at a broader realization that no life can ever be completely perfect.

Rejection of the Metanarrative of Perfect Life

After experiencing various alternative lives, Nora gradually realizes that no life can guarantee complete happiness. The different lives she once considered ideal still contain sadness, disappointment, and dissatisfaction. As a result, she begins to question the belief that a perfect life exists somewhere and can provide lasting fulfillment. This realization marks an important stage in her rejection of the metanarrative of a perfect life, as she comes to understand that

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happiness and suffering are inseparable parts of human existence. In this sense, Nora's rejection of the metanarrative of a perfect life emerges from her rejection of the metanarratives of success, romance, and morality, as well as the assumption that these ideals can ultimately produce a flawless and permanently fulfilling life. This realization becomes evident when she reflects:

> 'There are patterns to life . . . Rhythms. It is so easy, while trapped in just the one life, to imagine that times of sadness or tragedy or failure or fear are a result of that particular existence. That it is a by-product of living a certain way, rather than simply living. I mean, it would have made things a lot easier if we understood there was no way of living that can immunise you against sadness. And that sadness is intrinsically part of the fabric of happiness. You can't have one without the other. Of course, they come in different degrees and quantities. But there is no life where you can be in a state of sheer happiness for ever. And imagining there is just breeds more unhappiness in the life you're in' (Haig, 2020, p. 166).

When Nora states that "sadness is intrinsically part of the fabric of happiness" and that "you can't have one without the other", she begins to understand that pure, permanent happiness does not exist. She realizes that happiness and sadness always exist alongside each other. This understanding aligns with Ashrafi (2023), who explains that happiness and sadness are inherently interconnected, with each giving meaning to the other. Nora finally realizes that lasting happiness cannot exist without moments of sadness, which leads her to question the idea of perfect happiness.

When Nora states that imagining such a life "just breeds more unhappiness", she reveals how the constant pursuit of perfection only leads to dissatisfaction. This aligns with Ashrafi (2023), who explains that emotional experiences are heavily shaped by individual expectations. In this sense, Nora realizes that the root of her misery is not her actual life, but her rigid belief that a flawless alternative must exist. By accepting this, Nora delegitimizes the grand narrative of a "perfect life", finally freeing herself from that impossible standard.

After realizing that happiness and sadness always go together, Nora finally reaches a firm conclusion about a perfect life. She no longer believes that a flawless life exists somewhere else. This major shift in her thinking is clear in the narrator's description of her thoughts:

> "Maybe there was no perfect life for her, but somewhere, surely, there was a life worth living. And if she was to find a life truly worth living, she realised she would have to cast a wider net" (Haig, 2020, p. 180).

The statement "there was no perfect life for her" shows that Nora finally stops looking for a perfect life. She realizes that a life without problems is impossible. This aligns with Lyotard's (1984) idea that the grand story of life has lost its hero, its journey, and its ultimate goal, meaning the fairy-tale promise of a perfect, happy ending is just an illusion. By realizing this, Nora completely rejects the false standard that a "perfect life" is something anyone can achieve.

At the same time, Nora does not lose hope. Instead, she shifts her focus to finding "a life worth living" rather than a perfect one. This shift aligns perfectly with Cranford (2021), who explains the concept of wabi-sabi, a Japanese philosophy that talks about finding beauty in the imperfect, incomplete, and impermanent. This concept emphasizes the acceptance of natural imperfections rather than the constant pursuit of impossible standards. By deciding to "cast a wider net", Nora opens herself up to new possibilities. She is no longer looking for a perfect life, but a life that she could truly live. Ultimately, Nora's goal changes from chasing an unrealistic ideal to accepting a more realistic, imperfect, and meaningful life.

The findings reflect Jean-François Lyotard's concept of delegitimization, which refers to the process by which a grand narrative loses its authority and is no longer accepted as a universal

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truth. In *The Midnight Library*, Nora's response to the metanarrative of the "perfect life" shows this process clearly. At the beginning of her journey, Nora still believed that there was an ideal life that could guarantee happiness and satisfaction. However, after experiencing various perfect lives that she regrets because she can not do, she finally realizes that they still contain disappointment, sadness, emptiness, and a lack of authenticity. These experiences cause the metanarrative of the "perfect life" to lose its credibility in Nora's perspective. Therefore, Nora's response describes a process of delegitimization, as personal experience challenges and weakens the authority of metanarratives.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis that has been carried out in this study on the rejection of metanarratives in *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig. This novel depicts the pressures of the social metanarrative that define the standard of "perfect life". While, the narrative around success, romance, and moral hope serves as an absolute truth that promises happiness. Nora Seed's journey through various lives that she previously wanted shows a clear process of delegitimization. At first, she had high hopes and regrets for not being able to live the life that she once regretted, then Nora questioned and rejected the metanarrative after realizing that absolute perfection is an illusion, because happiness and sadness are inherently interconnected. In the end, she stopped chasing impossible societal standards and chose a life worth living. Nora finally accepted herself.

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