



## The Personality Dynamics of the Main Characters in the Novel *Kereta Semar Lembu*: A Psychoanalytic Study by Sigmund Freud

Novi Imroatul Awaliyah<sup>1</sup>, Moh. Ahsan Shohifur Rizal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

\*E-mail: [novi.22104@mhs.unesa.ac.id](mailto:novi.22104@mhs.unesa.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the personality dynamics of the main character in the novel through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. The research focuses on the structure of the main character's personality and how the interaction between these elements gives rise to personality dynamics in the form of instincts (life and death) and anxiety (realistic, neurotic, and moral). Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study analyzes the narrative text and dialogue in the novel *Kereta Semar Lembu* through reading and note-taking techniques and content analysis techniques. The results show that the main character has a dominant id, driving the fulfillment of the pleasure principle and sexual needs. The ego mediates between the id and social reality and the demands of the superego through rational decisions and acceptance of consequences. The superego represents moral values by bringing up social and moral norms, guilt due to moral violations, and anxiety due to moral inconsistencies. The interaction of these three aspects forms the dynamics of personality, namely the instinct to live, which is seen through the desire for exploration and self-growth, as well as adaptation to reality. The death instinct manifests itself in destructive impulses and the desire to end one's life. Realistic anxiety is evident in the fear of facing reality and damnation, while moral anxiety is reflected in feelings of guilt, sinfulness, and fear of social and religious punishment. These findings confirm that childhood experiences and social environment greatly contribute to shaping the main character's personality.

*Keywords: personality dynamics, main character, novel, psychoanalytic study*

## Dinamika Kepribadian Tokoh Utama dalam Novel *Kereta Semar Lembu*: Kajian Psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dinamika kepribadian tokoh utama dalam novel tersebut melalui kajian psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud. Permasalahan penelitian difokuskan pada bagaimana struktur kepribadian tokoh utama, serta bagaimana interaksi antarunsur tersebut memunculkan dinamika kepribadian yang berupa naluri (hidup dan mati), serta kecemasan (realistis, neurotik, dan moral). Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, penelitian ini menganalisis teks narasi dan dialog dalam novel *Kereta Semar Lembu* melalui teknik baca catat dan teknik analisis isi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh utama memiliki id yang dominan, mendorong pemenuhan prinsip kesenangan dan kebutuhan seksual. Ego sebagai penengah antara id dengan realitas sosial serta tuntutan superego melalui keputusan rasional, dan penerimaan konsekuensi. Superego merepresentasikan nilai moral dengan memunculkan tuntutan norma sosial dan kesusilaan, rasa bersalah akibat pelanggaran nilai moral, serta kecemasan akibat ketidaksesuaian dengan harapan moral. Interaksi ketiga aspek ini membentuk dinamika kepribadian yakni naluri hidup yang tampak melalui Hasrat eksplorasi dan pertumbuhan diri, serta adaptasi terhadap realitas. Naluri kematian muncul dalam dorongan destruktif dan keinginan mengakhiri hidup. Kecemasan realistis terlihat pada rasa takut menghadapi realitas dan kutukan, kecemasan moral tercermin dari perasaan bersalah, berdosa, dan takut akan hukuman sosial maupun religius. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pengalaman masa kecil dan lingkungan sosial berkontribusi besar dalam membentuk kepribadian tokoh utama.

*Kata kunci: dinamika kepribadian, tokoh utama, novel, kajian psikoanalisis*

Submitted  
23/10/2025

Accepted  
28/10/2025

Published  
30/10/2025

Citation	Awaliyah, N. I., & Rizal, M. A. S. (2025). The Personality Dynamics of the Main Characters in the Novel <i>Kereta Semar Lembu</i> : A Psychoanalytic Study by Sigmund Freud. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra, Volume 4, Nomor 5, September 2025, 1249-1260</i> . DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v4i5.808">https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v4i5.808</a>
----------	--

Publisher  
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of deviant behavior among adolescents, such as bullying, drug abuse, promiscuity, and drug use, has become a widespread social issue. Many literary works are currently being created to raise adolescent awareness (Junadi et al., 2025). This statement implies that through literature, adolescents are encouraged to recognize life values, understand themselves, and develop sensitivity to their social and cultural environment. One work that highlights this issue is Zaky Yamani's novel *Kereta Semar Lembu*, which depicts the life journey of the main character, Lembu, who faces various moral and psychological conflicts. Lembu is depicted as experiencing deviant behavior due to childhood trauma, having frequently witnessed the immoral behavior of his mother, a prostitute. This situation demonstrates the significant influence of environment and past experiences on the formation of an individual's personality, making it relevant to analyze it using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach.

Psychoanalysis is a theory pioneered by Sigmund Freud (1865–1939) that emphasizes the role of the subconscious, childhood experiences, and internal conflicts in shaping personality. Psychoanalysis shows that the various symptoms of personality disorders do not appear randomly, but rather contain specific meanings closely related to an individual's life experiences (Freud, 2025: 269). Freud divided the personality structure into three main elements: the id (pleasure and survival instincts), the ego (mediator between id drives and the demands of reality), and the superego (moral values and social norms) (Ahmadi, 2020). These three elements interact dynamically, shaping personality dynamics. According to Freud, personality dynamics are divided into three aspects: the life instinct (Eros), which is the drive for self-preservation and sexuality; the death instinct (Thanatos), which is the drive for destruction; and anxiety, which is the response to internal and external threats arising from conflicts

between personality structures (Rahayu et al., 2024).

This research has strong relevance to a number of previous studies that examine personality dynamics in literary works through Freud's psychoanalytic approach. Several supporting studies, such as the study by Erfinda Violita & Redyanto Noor (2023), entitled "Personality Dynamics and Mental Disorders of Azura in Fakhrisina's Novel *Persona*," found that personality dynamics include the id seeking comfort and affection, the ego channeling conflict through self-harm, and the superego leading to self-acceptance. Furthermore, the study identified complex anxiety and mood disorders. However, this study focused on behavioral symptoms without unraveling the roots of psychological conflict, which involves the relationship between instinct and anxiety, as proposed by Freud (Violita & Noor, 2023). Rahmawati & Wicaksono's (2023) study, entitled "Portrait of Power Hegemony in the Novel *Kereta Semar Lembu*" by Zaky Yamani, highlighted the forms of power dominance and the influence of ideology on social structures in the novel. This study provides an understanding of the socio-political background that accompanies the story, but does not yet address the psychological aspects of the main character, particularly in terms of motivation, inner conflict, and the personality dynamics underlying the character's actions (Rahmawati & Wicaksono, 2023).

In addition to filling the research gap, the urgency of this research also lies in its effort to uncover the relationship between parenting patterns, social environment, and the formation of individual personality as depicted in the KSL novel. By understanding the dynamics of personality through the analysis of the main characters in the KSL novel, this research can provide a concrete picture of how external factors shape a person's behavior and personality. The results of the research are expected to not only enrich the study of literary psychology, but also



provide practical insights for the community, especially teenagers, to be more aware of the influence of the environment in the formation of a healthy and positive personality.

From the gap and urgency above, this research certainly offers novelty, namely in the following aspects. (1) Deepening the Aspects of Instinct and Anxiety in Personality Dynamics: Different from previous research which tends to be descriptive, this research examines in more depth the relationship between instinct (Eros and Thanatos) with the types of anxiety (realistic, neurotic, and moral). This analysis enriches the understanding of how psychic conflict is formed from the interaction of the id, ego, and superego elements. (2) Integration between Personality Structure and Social Context: This research not only describes the intrapsychic dynamics of the characters, but also links them to social pressures and external situations as depicted in *Kereta Semar Lembu*. Thus, the internal conflict of the main character is understood as a response that is closely related to the oppressive social environment. (3) Exclusive Focus on the Main Character: Different from previous research which examined more than one character or social aspects broadly, this research specifically examines the main character as the center of psychic dynamics. This single focus allows for a deeper exploration of the character's motivations, anxieties, and subconscious drives. (4) Theoretical and Applied Integration of Freud's Psychoanalytic Approach: This study systematically integrates Freud's theories of personality structure and personality dynamics into the analysis of literary texts, so that the results not only describe the characters' behavior but also reveal the psychological mechanisms underlying their actions and inner conflicts.

Based on this background, the research problem is formulated as follows: What are the personality dynamics of the main character in Zaky Yamani's novel *Kereta Semar Lembu*? The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the personality dynamics of the main character in Zaky Yamani's novel *Kereta Semar Lembu* using

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach. Through this research, it is hoped that a deeper understanding will be gained regarding the interaction between the personality structures of the Id, Ego, and Superego that shape the instincts and anxieties of the main character.

Scientifically, this study expands the study of literary psychology by emphasizing that the personality dynamics of the main character can be understood not only through the interaction of Freud's personality structures but also through the influence of childhood experiences and psychological trauma that shape deviant behavioral patterns. The theoretical implications of this study enrich the approach to literary psychology by expanding the application of Freud's theory in the context of Indonesian literature, particularly in understanding the relationship between personality dynamics and character formation. Meanwhile, its practical implications contribute to the fields of character education and cultural psychology by providing educators, parents, and counselors with an understanding of how childhood trauma and inner conflict influence adolescent behavior, enabling the development of more empathetic and contextual guidance strategies to foster healthy personalities. Further research is recommended to explore the role of the social environment and interactions between other characters in the KSL novel, as well as to examine the relationship between internal conflict and identity development, thus fostering a more holistic and contextual understanding of literary psychology.

Therefore, this study will present a discussion of the interaction between the Id, Ego, and Superego in shaping instinctive drives and anxieties, examining the personality dynamics of the main character in Zaky Yamani's novel *Kereta Semar Lembu* from the perspective of Sigmund Freud.

## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach because it aligns with the characteristics of literary studies that emphasize the interpretation

of meaning, narrative, and psychological phenomena. The research data consists of textual excerpts from the novel *Kereta Semar Lembu*, totaling 319 pages and divided into 21 subchapters. Data collection was carried out using a reading and note-taking technique: in-depth reading of the novel, followed by marking and noting parts of the text relevant to personality structure (id, ego, superego), instincts (life and death), and anxieties (realistic, neurotic, moral). Data analysis was carried out using the content analysis method with six stages of qualitative analysis according to Ahmadi (Ahmadi, 2020), as well as one phase of the six thematic analyses of Braun and Clarke, namely the data codification technique as adapted by Hill et al. (Hill et al., 2023). The analysis process begins by identifying relevant excerpts, grouping, and coding the data according to psychoanalytic concepts. The collected data are then interpreted to uncover patterns in the main characters' behavior, motivation, and psychological conflicts. Next, data reduction was performed to select the most representative quotations, which were then presented in corpus tables and analytical descriptions. The final stage of the research was to formulate conclusions explaining the main character's personality structure and to reveal his personality dynamics, namely, his instincts and anxiety.

The validity of the research data was ensured through a credibility test using triangulation techniques (Husnullail et al., 2024). Source triangulation was conducted using various forms of quotation in Zaky Yamani's novel *Kereta Semar Lembu* — narratives, monologues, and dialogues — and then compared to ensure consistency in the main character's personality dynamics. Meanwhile, inter-researcher triangulation was conducted through discussions with colleagues to test data interpretation and classification, ensuring consistency with the psychoanalytic framework and avoiding subjective bias. Thus, the research results are credible and academically accountable. of student experiences. This method was chosen to provide a comprehensive and contextual

understanding of the learning process and its impact on students' academic reading skills.

## RESULT

In Zaky Yamani's novel *Kereta Semar Lembu*, the main character's personality structure is depicted as complex through the struggle between instinctive drives, defense mechanisms, and moral demands originating from the social environment. The main character stands out as a figure at the crossroads between instinctive needs and the demands of reality: the dominance of basic drives (Id) is seen in the habit of escaping into an imaginary world, the search for pleasure and fulfillment of physiological needs, and sexual behavior that often compensates for loneliness and alienation. On the other hand, the Ego tries to mediate these impulses by choosing strategies that reduce social risks, namely by diverting drives to productive activities, refraining from dangerous actions, or making compromises that allow the character to survive in extreme conditions.

Meanwhile, the moral voice and internalized norms (Superego) emerge through shame, regret, and moral anxiety when the character's actions conflict with social norms; social punishment and feelings of guilt become mechanisms that slowly shape inner control and self-reflection. The dynamics of the life instinct (eros) and the death instinct (thanatos) are mutually attractive, namely the desire for exploration and the effort to maintain existence drive the character to seek meaning and mobility, while the destructive urge and desire to end life reveal the peak of despair due to physical and psychological pressure. The clash between personal desires and family responsibilities amplifies moral anxiety, so that the character's decisions are often a compromise between fulfilling self-needs and maintaining social obligations.

Overall, the main character is not simply a collection of impulsive or pathological behaviors; he is a reflection of intrapsychic conflicts triggered and reinforced by the social context that social structures and cultural sanctions can exacerbate



personality imbalances and influence the way instincts and anxieties are manifested. With a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, this novel reflects a psychological reality that is not static, the main character's actions are the result of continuous negotiations between the Id, Ego, and Superego in a harsh social field, so that this work also presents a critique of the social conditions that create and maintain individual inner wounds.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. The Main Character's Life Instinct

#### 1.1. The Desire for Exploration and Self-Growth

The main character's life instinct (eros) is reflected in a strong drive to explore the world and to seek meaning in life. This instinct serves as a fundamental force that guides individuals to maintain their existence and grow through new experiences. The quote "I always enjoy going to faraway places" (Yamani, 2022) demonstrates the id's drive to express its desire for freedom and to transcend the limits of oppressive reality. The act of exploration symbolizes the main character's attempt to escape inner stagnation into a space of possibility that provides a new sense of life and meaning.

This exploratory drive is further strengthened in the statement "I must feel every path, wherever it leads" (Yamani, 2022), which indicates an instinctive need to continue moving and experiencing. Within Freud's psychoanalytic framework, this is a manifestation of eros, the life force that drives humans toward creativity, expansion, and the continuity of existence. The main character's physical journey is not only literal but also symbolic, depicting his search for identity and his efforts to unite the fragments of his personality, shattered by life's pressures. "At the same time, the role of the ego is evident in the quote, "As soon as the opportunity arose to continue my journey from Bandung Station, I did not hesitate to go to Cianjur, Cibeber, Sukabumi, Cicurug, Buitenzorg, and finally to Batavia" (Yamani, 2022). The main character's decision to

continue his journey based on the available opportunity demonstrates the ego's ability to channel the id's impulses realistically. Thus, eros within the character does not exist as a mere blind drive, but rather as a life energy regulated by rational consciousness to remain in line with real conditions. This demonstrates the harmonious dynamics between the id and ego in directing the life instinct toward growth and self-realization.

The main character's drive to explore and move from one place to another reflects Freud's concept of eros, or the life instinct, which drives individuals to maintain their existence through growth, experience, and relationships with the outside world (Hall, 2019). His penchant for exploring every train track and enjoying the journey is not merely a means of fulfilling physical needs or seeking instant gratification, but also a way for him to grow and face life's harsh challenges. Within the Indonesian socio-cultural context, this exploratory behavior demonstrates how individuals balance personal desires with social norms, such as maintaining personal safety and respecting prevailing societal rules.

This finding aligns with previous research by Permadi et al. (2024), which highlighted the Id's dominance in driving spontaneous behavior and fulfilling Restu's basic needs (Permadi et al., 2024). However, previous research emphasized the fulfillment of instinctual needs. At the same time, this study broadens understanding by demonstrating that the main character's life instinct not only satisfies biological needs but also encourages exploration, self-growth, and adaptation to new experiences. Theoretically, this enriches Freud's concept by emphasizing Eros's positive function in supporting individual psychological development, rather than simply fulfilling needs. Practically, the main character's exploration serves as a strategy for coping with the harsh realities of life, demonstrating that the life instinct can be an adaptive and creative tool in the Indonesian socio-cultural context.

## 1.2 Adaptation to Reality and the Environment

The main character's life instinct (Eros) manifests not only in the drive to explore and grow but also through the ability to adapt to reality and the social environment. This instinct serves to maintain survival by adapting to external pressures. The quote "One day I felt so lonely, and I imagined Mbok Min, who used to devour me with her crotch. So, I masturbated in the gutter" (Yamani, 2022) demonstrates how the Id drives the main character to seek instinctual gratification as a form of release from the inner tension caused by loneliness. This action is a primitive psychic recovery mechanism—a spontaneous way to balance emotional stress by satisfying biological needs.

However, this behavior does not stand alone, as it directly conflicts with the social norms represented by the Superego. This is evident in the quote "People were shouting and laughing as they approached me, then they caught me, slapped me, and dipped my head in the gutter water. They said I should be ashamed to masturbate in the open" (Yamani 2022). Societal reactions represent the external Superego, which enforces moral and ethical boundaries through social sanctions. The Superego works by inducing feelings of shame and guilt, prompting the character to realize that instinctive urges cannot be acted on without considering prevailing social values.

In these stressful situations, the ego plays a role in channeling the energy of the id in a more constructive direction, as illustrated in the quote "So my days are filled with busy activities helping people, cleaning the train cars, cleaning the station, feeding the pigeons" (Yamani, 2022). These positive activities reflect the ego's efforts to balance the id's urges and the superego's pressures by channeling the life instinct into socially acceptable behaviors. The dynamics between these three personality structures demonstrate that Eros operates adaptively, meaning that instinctual drives are not completely suppressed but instead are processed into productive actions that strengthen self-existence. Thus, the main character's ability to adapt and survive amidst social rejection

confirms the function of the life instinct as a psychological force that maintains personality balance and the continuity of life. "The main character's efforts to adapt to reality and the environment are a concrete manifestation of the life instinct (Eros). Freud explained that the life instinct drives individuals to form relationships with the outside world to maintain their survival (Hall, 2019, p. 106). In the main character, although he initially channeled his loneliness through sexual acts that resulted in social punishment, he eventually chose more adaptive behaviors, such as helping clean the train cars, tidying the station, and feeding the birds. This transformation demonstrates Eros's ability to channel psychic energy into constructive and productive behavior.

## 2. The Main Character's Death Instinct

### 2.1 Destructive Drive

The death instinct (thanatos) in the main character is reflected through destructive drives that have the potential to harm oneself and others. This instinct is the opposite of eros, or the life instinct, because it contains aggressive impulses, a tendency to harm, and a subconscious desire for destruction. Meneer Jansen's quote, "I am satisfied with my educational progress. In return, he wants me to satisfy him with the small children I bring to his office every night" (Yamani, 2022), demonstrates how the main character engages in morally and socially destructive actions. In this situation, the Id plays a dominant role, ignoring human values to gain satisfaction and recognition from authority. This action reflects the Id's tendency to act without considering norms or the impact on others.

Feelings of discomfort with his actions begin to emerge in the quote, "After a while, I was fed up, because many of the children began to cry in pain" (Yamani, 2022). This emotional reaction demonstrates the Superego's intervention, which awakens moral awareness and guilt over actions that harm others. The main character begins to exhibit inner conflict due to the conflict between



the Id's destructive urges and the Superego's moral judgment.

However, this inner struggle does not result in behavioral change, as the destructive urges again seek rational justification, as evident in the statement, "But part of me says it's normal, because haven't I been so used to lust issues since childhood?" (Yamani, 2022). This quote demonstrates the Ego's function in calming the psychic tension caused by guilt. The main character attempts to normalize his destructive behavior as part of past experiences, thus delaying moral adjustment. "However, the Superego reaffirms moral boundaries in the statement, "Part of me says, little children should not be treated like that" (Yamani, 2022). This inner voice indicates the remaining moral values alive within the character, while also reinforcing the intrapsychic conflict between the Id and Superego.

This overall dynamic demonstrates that the death instinct drives the main character to destructive behavior. However, the accompanying moral conflict indicates that the main character's personality is still struggling to find balance. The impulsive id leads to destructive actions. The superego functions as a moral controller, generating feelings of guilt, while the ego attempts to mediate through logical justification. Thus, the death instinct becomes a source of inner conflict, revealing the psychological complexity of the main character as he faces his own moral and human destruction.

The main character's involvement in actions that harm himself and others reflects the dominance of Thanatos, or the death instinct, according to Freud (Hall, 2019). Thanatos is a destructive drive that leads to chaos and death, both physical and moral. In the context of Indonesian culture, particularly Javanese social norms, behavior that harms others or violates moral rules evokes shame and intense mental distress. The excerpt about taking children to Meneer Jansen shows that although the character's actions harm the victims, his social superego, influenced by

communal moral norms, provides an internal warning through feelings of disgust when the children cry in pain.

## 2.2 Desire to End Life

The death instinct (thanatos) in the main character reaches its extreme form through the urge to end his own life. This drive emerges as a manifestation of psychological and physical exhaustion resulting from the constant suffering he experiences. Freud viewed thanatos as a tendency to return to a lifeless state, a destructive impulse oriented toward death and self-destruction.

The quote "Every moment spent hoeing, hauling rails and sleepers, hauling stones and sand, and receiving lashes that made me feel like dying" (Yamani, 2022) illustrates the emergence of an internal destructive drive due to intense external pressure. Physical and psychological suffering trigger the id to seek total release through death as a final form of tension relief. The resulting sense of despair indicates that the main character is no longer able to channel his life instincts constructively.

The peak of despair is depicted in the statement, "I cried and cried. I wanted to die and was willing to be a ghost" (Yamani, 2022). This statement demonstrates the complete dominance of the death instinct, which overrides the rationality of the Ego and the moral values of the Superego. Death is no longer perceived as something frightening, but rather as a form of freedom from suffering. This indicates a regression to an impulsive phase, with subconscious drives completely taking over the protagonist's consciousness.

Furthermore, the quote, "I deliberately committed mistake after mistake in order to die. And I was indeed tortured to the point of near death" (Yamani, 2022), indicates that the death drive is no longer passive. The protagonist consciously actualizes this destructive drive through actions that risk death. At this stage, the Ego functions not to restrain the Id's impulses, but

rather as a mediator, enabling these destructive desires to be realized.

Thus, the protagonist's personality dynamics at this stage demonstrate the total dominance of the death instinct over other personality structures. The Id drives the desire to die as a means of escape from suffering. The Ego accommodates this urge through action, while the Superego appears weakened and fails to control these destructive impulses. This imbalance between structures leads to psychological destruction and exemplifies the culmination of the main character's existential tragedy, as he loses the meaning of his life.

The main character's desire to end his life due to physical and psychological suffering is a concrete manifestation of Thanatos, or the death instinct, according to Freud. Freud explained that the death instinct is not only manifested in aggression toward others but can also turn against oneself as a form of self-destruction (Hall, 2019). In the novel, the forced labor that triggers the death wish and the character's deliberate actions to commit mistakes to be tortured to the point of near death illustrate a condition where the life drive (Eros) weakens and is replaced by a destructive drive. However, amidst these extreme conditions, guilt and fear of sin persist as residual moral forces within him. This demonstrates the tug-of-war between the urge to surrender and the moral awareness that persists in his subconscious.

### 3. The Main Character's Realistic Anxiety

#### 3.1 Anxiety Over the Pressure of Reality

Realistic anxiety in the main character arises in response to a real threat from the external environment, which creates fear and a desire to escape. According to Freud, this type of anxiety arises when the ego recognizes a danger in the outside world, prompting the individual to seek rational ways to avoid it.

The quote "I want to die, but not by being attacked by a mob" (Yamani, 2022) demonstrates the fear of imminent physical violence. This fear stems from external reality, not internal conflict. The id displays a desire to die, but the ego

recognizes a concrete threat from the outside world that makes the character feel fearful. Thus, realistic anxiety becomes a natural defense mechanism that helps the individual avoid a direct physical threat.

Furthermore, the statement "At times like these, I want to escape from reality again. I want to die peacefully in my hometown" (Yamani, 2022) demonstrates the character's desire to escape the harsh reality he faces. The urge to "escape reality" indicates psychological distress resulting from traumatic experiences. The desire to die "peacefully" in one's hometown represents a symbolic hope for a return to safety and security.

The main character's efforts to overcome this realistic anxiety are evident in the quote "So I met Soedarno and conveyed my wish" (Yamani, 2022). This action demonstrates the Ego's adaptive function, which seeks real solutions to external threats. To minimize the urge to give in to fear, the character attempts to channel this anxiety into rational action, namely, communicating and seeking a way out of the stressful situation. In Freud's theory, this behavior reflects the Ego's operation under the reality principle, namely the ability to delay gratification of desires until a safer, more realistic way is found (Anisa & Munir, 2022). Overall, this dynamic demonstrates that realistic anxiety is an indicator of the Ego's defense function, which remains adaptive. Although the Id displays destructive urges in the form of a desire for death, the Ego still attempts to navigate external threats with self-preservation in mind. Thus, the main character's realistic anxiety reveals the interaction among the Id's destructive impulses, the Ego's rational considerations, and the social pressures that fuel his fear. The main character's fear of facing a real threat from his environment is a form of realistic anxiety, as explained by Freud. This anxiety arises from external danger or a real threat from the outside world (Hall, 2019). The quote about his fear of being mobbed illustrates that harsh social realities create a constant sense of insecurity and psychological tension. However, the character's desire to die peacefully in his hometown and his efforts to meet Soedarno to



convey his wishes indicate that realistic anxiety is not merely passive but also drives him to seek a rational solution. Within Freud's framework, this behavior indicates that the Ego actively adapts to external reality to maintain its existence.

### 3.2 Fear of Curses

The main character's realistic anxiety is not only caused by physical threats, but also by fear of threats believed to be psychologically and culturally real, namely, curses. Within Freud's psychoanalytic framework, realistic anxiety arises when the Ego perceives an external danger that is perceived as threatening the individual's existence. In this context, the curse is perceived by the main character as a real external threat, albeit rooted in mystical beliefs. "Quote: "I shiver with fear at the thought of my own death." "I am terrified of how death will occur and what will happen afterward" (Yamani, 2022) depicts an existential fear of death believed to be the result of a curse. This fear gives rise to anxiety because death is seen as unavoidable, inevitable, and mysterious. At this stage, the Id displays a primitive urge to avoid pain and uncertainty, while the Ego confronts a reality that contains spiritual and emotional threats.

To relieve the resulting inner tension, the main character tries to find a form of psychic support, as illustrated in the quote, "My hand nervously picks up the rattle around my neck. I have to call Grandpa Petruk. At least I can tell him my fears" (Yamani, 2022). This action demonstrates the Ego's defense mechanism, which seeks to calm the self by seeking a protective figure. The main character projects a sense of security in Grandpa Petruk as a symbol of an external force capable of neutralizing threats. In this case, the Ego plays an active role in managing anxiety by channeling fear into actions deemed rational within the context of his beliefs.

Overall, this dynamic demonstrates that the protagonist's realistic anxiety stems from a perception of external danger that is mystical but believed to be real. The fear of the curse demonstrates that the protagonist remains under

the control of the Ego, which seeks to maintain a balance between the Id's drive to avoid danger and the external reality filled with symbolic threats. Thus, realistic anxiety in this context reflects the Ego's reaction to existential threats stemming from cultural beliefs, not merely from physical reality.

In addition to experiencing physical threats, the main character also faces real anxieties related to curses and death. Freud explained that anxiety can arise from the perception of threats, both concrete and projected through certain beliefs (Hall, 2019). The character's fear of death and its subsequent spiritual consequences demonstrate that the perceived threat originates not only from the social environment but also from local belief systems that believe in retribution for moral transgressions. The character's attempt to summon Mbah Petruk with a jingle as psychic support demonstrates the ego's defense mechanism, seeking a sense of security. Theoretically, this expands Freud's understanding of realistic anxiety, which typically stems from external threats, by adding a spiritual dimension unique to Javanese culture.

Compared with Erfinda Violita and Redyanto Noor's (2023) study on "Personality Dynamics and Mental Disorders of Azura in the Novel Persona," that study highlights anxiety disorders as psychological symptoms without considering their cultural roots or underlying beliefs (Violita & Noor, 2023). Conversely, the findings of this study suggest that in the context of Indonesian culture, particularly Javanese, realistic anxiety can be rooted in spiritual beliefs and mystical symbols that function as psychic defense mechanisms. Thus, this study confirms that the interpretation of Freud's theory can be extended to the socio-cultural realm, where local belief systems contribute to shaping the dynamics of individual personalities.

## 4. Moral Anxiety of the Main Character

### 4.1 Anxiety Due to Sexuality and Sexual Violence

The main character's moral anxiety arises as a result of an inner conflict between sexual urges

(Id) and moral control (Superego), which is rooted in social norms. In Freudian psychoanalysis, moral anxiety arises when an individual feels guilty or fears punishment for violating internalized moral values. In the main character, this conflict is manifested through the tension between strong sexual desires and an awareness of moral boundaries. "Quote: "One day I felt so lonely, and I imagined Mbok Min, who used to devour me with her crotch." "So, I masturbated in the gutter" (Yamani, 2022) demonstrates the manifestation of Id impulses that drive the main character to seek instant gratification without considering social norms. This action not only reflects physiological needs but also an escape from loneliness and emotional distress. However, because the action was carried out in an open space and contrary to values of decency, inner tension arises that becomes the starting point for moral anxiety. "In another quote, "So, I masturbated on the edge of the gutter beside the train tracks to kill the loneliness" (Yamani, 2022), it appears that the Ego attempts to mediate Id impulses by choosing a method of release that is considered socially "safer," by doing it in a hidden place. However, this choice still fails to erase guilt because the action remains outside moral boundaries. The Ego, in this case, works through compromise, namely reducing Id tension without completely rejecting Superego norms.

The conflict culminates in social punishment, as depicted in the quote, "People were shouting and laughing as they approached me... they grabbed me, slapped me, and dunked my head in the gutter" (Yamani, 2022). This collective societal action is a concrete manifestation of the external Superego function, namely moral pressure emanating from the social environment. This punishment confirms that the character's behavior has violated moral boundaries, thus generating anxiety and guilt.

This overall data indicates that the main character's moral anxiety stems from the clash between uncontrolled sexual urges and strict social norms. The Id encourages impulsive gratification of desires, the Ego seeks a compromise, but the

Superego imposes internal sanctions through guilt and moral anxiety. Thus, this dynamic demonstrates that the main character lives in a psychological tension between biological needs and the demands of social morality, which is a dominant aspect in shaping his personality conflict.

The main character's moral anxiety arises when his sexual urges clash with social norms and moral values. Freud explained that moral anxiety results from tension between the Id and the Superego when instinctual desires conflict with internalized values (Hall, 2019). The character's act of masturbation demonstrates the dominance of the Id, but simultaneously evokes feelings of guilt and shame because it is considered morally deviant. Social punishment in the form of ridicule, slaps, and immersion in the sewer is a manifestation of the external Superego's voice — societal pressure that reinforces the main character's guilt. Thus, moral anxiety here stems not only from the intrapsychic clash between the Id and the Superego but is also reinforced by social pressure that functions as a collective moral control mechanism.

#### **4.2 Anxiety Due to Personal Desires and Family Responsibilities**

The main character's moral anxiety in this context arises from an inner conflict between the Id's drive to fulfill personal desires and the Superego's demand for moral responsibility towards the family. In Freudian psychoanalysis, moral anxiety arises when an individual faces pressure from internal moral values that conflict with instinctive desires, resulting in guilt, dilemmas, and psychological distress.

The quote, "Meanwhile, I immediately fell in love with that woman" (Yamani, 2022), demonstrates the Id's spontaneous, impulsive drive to fulfill emotional and physical desires without considering the social situation and responsibilities he carries, namely as a life partner and a father. The following phrase, "My heart is in bloom. I am as if drunk or perhaps bewitched" (Yamani, 2022), indicates that the character is under the control of



the Id, which is entirely dominated by momentary pleasure (pleasure principle). This intense personal desire demonstrates the main character's tendency to indulge in desires of love and attraction without considering the consequences. "However, these Id impulses soon clash with the voice of the Superego, which represents moral values and social responsibility. In the quote "Min pasti tak akan rela, Lembu" (Yamani, 2022 p. 138), the main character's mother's voice serves as an external manifestation of the Superego, reminding him of the norms of loyalty and obligation to family. The mother's presence here serves as a representation of moral values ??instilled since childhood, which become a source of inner pressure when the character tries to follow his own desires.

The quote "Half of me feels intense pain seeing Mbok Min and my children. But I can't fight this extraordinary magic" (Yamani, 2022) demonstrates the internal conflict between the Id and the Superego, mediated by the Ego. The character experiences psychological suffering due to the tug-of-war between personal desires and guilt towards the family. The Ego attempts to find a middle ground so that these two opposing drives can coexist without posing a fatal risk to the main character. "Ultimately, the main character attempts to achieve balance through a compromise, as reflected in the quote: "So, out of respect for Mbok Min and my children, I decided to return to my path... and take Uma with me" (Yamani, 2022). This decision demonstrates the Ego's adaptive function, attempting to alleviate moral anxiety by allowing space for the fulfillment of personal desires while still respecting social and emotional responsibilities to the family.

Thus, the moral anxiety in this section emphasizes the complex dynamics between the Id, Ego, and Superego, which interact within the main character. The Id encourages the desire for love and personal freedom, the Superego suppresses moral values and family responsibilities, while the Ego mediates between the two by seeking a compromise that allows the character to continue living without completely abandoning the morality

he believes in. This moral anxiety demonstrates the main character's struggle to find a balance between self-needs and binding social demands.

The conflict between personal desires and family obligations demonstrates another form of moral anxiety. The Id's drive to fall in love and pursue personal happiness clashes with the Superego's demands, expressed through his mother's voice and his responsibilities to his wife and children. The character's Ego attempts to mediate this conflict by seeking a compromise, choosing to honor his family while taking the woman he loves with him. Theoretically, this supports Freud's concept that the Ego is always in a position to balance the pressures of the Id and the Superego (Ahmadi, 2020).

This finding aligns with research by Maharani and Hartono (2024), who found that the ego functions as the primary controller in maintaining the balance between the id and superego drives of the main character in San Francisco (Maharani & Hartono, 2024). However, this study expands on this understanding by highlighting how the ego's decisions are also influenced by the communal moral values typical of Javanese society, which prioritize social harmony over personal interests. Thus, this research's novel contribution is to demonstrate that, in an Eastern cultural context, the ego not only delays gratification but also maintains moral and social harmony.

## CONCLUSION

The personality of the main character in Zaky Yamani's novel *Kereta Semar Lembu* is dynamically shaped by the interaction among the id, ego, and superego. The id drives the satisfaction of basic desires and needs; the ego functions as a rational mediator; and the superego presents moral values that evoke feelings of guilt and a drive for self-improvement. This dynamic is reflected in the struggle between the life instinct, which leads to efforts to maintain existence, and the death instinct, which drives the desire to end suffering. It is also reinforced by the emergence of realistic anxiety, which is seen in the main character's fear of facing

real threats and curses, and moral anxiety, which gives rise to guilt and shame when violating moral values. This study also found that the main character's childhood experiences influenced his behavior, leading him to exhibit negative behavior often and to have a fragile, unstable personality. Yet, he still tries to survive the realities of life that do not meet his expectations.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmadi, A. (2020). *Psikologi Sastra*. Semarang: Unesa University Press.
- Anisa, P., & Munir, S. (2022). Psikologi Sastra Dalam Novel Almond Karya Sohn Won Pyung. *Dikstrasia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 6(2), 267. <https://doi.org/10.25157/dikstrasia.v6i2.7862>
- Freud, S. (2025). *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (2025th ed.). Diglossia Media.
- Hall, C. S. (2019). *Psikologi Freud: Sebuah Bacaan Awal*. IRCiSoD.
- Hill, C., Sims, S., Robert, M., & Collier, S. (2023). A thematic Analysis of Staff Perspectives on the Impact of a Mental Health Nurse (RMN) in a Critical Care unit. *Journal of the Intensive Care Society*, 24(3), 292–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17511437221116474>
- Husnullail, M., Risnita, R., Jailani, M. S., & Asbui, A. (2024). Teknik Pemeriksaan Keabsahan Data dalam Riset Ilmiah. *Journal Genta Mulia*, 15(2), 70–78. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.61290/gm.v11i2>
- Junadi, S., Manshur, A., & Ma'arif, M. S. (2025). Darurat Moral dan Solusi Naratif: Analisis Deskriptif “Brianna dan Bottomwise” dalam Upaya Membangun Karakter Bangsa melalui Sastra. *PENEROKA: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 5(1), 90–99. <https://doi.org/10.30739/peneroka.v5i1.3694>
- Maharani, A., & Hartono. (2024). Dinamika Kepribadian Tokoh Utama Dalam Novel San Francisco Karya Ziggy Zezsyaxeoviennazabrizkie: Kajian Psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud. *Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 13(4), 1–15.
- Permadi, A. R. I., Reswara, P. J., & Kurniawan, E. D. (2024). Dinamika Kepribadian Menurut Teori Sigmund Freud: Analisis Psikologi Sastra pada Tokoh Restu dalam Novel “Secret Obsession” karya Anggarani. *Jurnal Sains Student Research*, 2(1), 570–577. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.61722/jssr.v2i1.787>
- Rahayu, T. P., Atikurrahman, M., & Alfin, J. (2024). Eksistensi Kematian sebagai Akhir: Thanatos dan Eros dalam Ziarah Karya Iwan Simatupang (Perspektif Psikoanalisis Freudian). *Mimesis*, 5(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.12928/mms.v5i1.7799>
- Rahmawati, P., & Wicaksono, H. (2023). Potret Hegemoni Kekuasaan dalam Novel Kereta Semar Lembu Karya Zaky Yamani. *BASINDO: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, Sastra Indonesia, dan Pembelajarannya*, 7(2), 316. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um007v7i22023p316-328>
- Violita, E., & Noor, R. (2023). Dinamika Kepribadian dan Gangguan Kejiwaan Tokoh Azura Dalam Novel Persona Karya Fakhrisina Amalia. *Fon: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 19(1), 11–27. <https://doi.org/doi:https://doi.org/10.25134/fon.v19i1.5867>
- Yamani, Z. (2022). *Kereta Semar Lembu*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.