



An analysis of consciousness in male lead's behaviors from a short story: *Midnight by Rainbow Rowell*

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ABSTRACT

Background: Short story has been a popular literary work although it is not as complicated as other literary works. Short story is usually centered only in one single event and limited in scope, but it is written with much greater precision than a novel. This research is intended to analyze certain behaviors of one character from a short story.

Purpose: The aim of this research is to find out what kind of Freud's concept of consciousness appeared in this short story, and how is the concept of consciousness represented in the story.

Design and methods: This research is a qualitative research using semiotics and Freud's Concept of Consciousness as tools of analysis.

Results: The result of this research revealed that all the three conscious concepts by Freud appeared in the story. The total data found are 19 data, with 8 data that belong to the conscious, 4 data belong to the preconscious, and 7 data belong to the unconscious. Based on the data found, it is concluded that the male-lead's behavior represents the conscious concept of human's mind by Freud. This research also revealed that the Freud's concept of consciousness in the story is displayed predominantly through narration which consist of 15 data, while through dialogue are 3 data, and the through monologue only consists of 1 datum. This result indicated that the signification characters of the story tends to be enclosed.

Keywords: unconscious, preconscious, conscious, behaviors, short story

Introduction

Short story has been a popular literary works since a long time ago. As one of so many literary works, short story is clearly not as long and as complicated as poem, drama, and novel. It is usually centered on one single event and limited in scope. Even though most short stories are simple, they are still interesting and full of details, it is because short story is written with much greater precision than a novel.

A book entitled *Almost Midnight* by Rainbow Rowell is a modern fictional short story that consists of two short stories. The first story entitled "Midnight" and the second one entitled "Kindred Spirits". The book was published in November 2017 in Kindle Edition, and it has received so many positive feedbacks. The book is rated 4.2/5 in Goodreads, and 4/5 in Waterstones in December 2017. *Midnight* tells a story about two best friends, Mags and Noel who are in love with each other. Both of them are close because they have been friends since High School. The interesting part of the story is that the male-lead, Noel, seems to be very clueless about his feelings towards female-lead, Mags. Different from Mags, who is aware of her feelings towards Noel and try to suppress it, Noel on the other sides seems to be oblivious about it. Noel always says that Mags is important to him, and shows several signs of his behaviors that indicate he is also in love with Mags, but he doesn't seem to realize he is in love with Mags.

The phenomena about Noel's obliviousness might relate to unconscious mind that introduced by Freud. In 1912, in "A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-analysis", Freud had

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used the perception–consciousness system to indicate consciousness, in order to underline the fact that we are conscious only of those presentations of which we have perceptions (Mancia, 2006).

This research’s objective is to find out what kind of conscious concepts showed male-lead’s behaviors and how is Freud’s concept of consciousness represented in male-lead’s behaviors in short story entitled *Midnight* by Rainbow Rowell.

Method

The object of this research is a short story entitled “Midnight” from a book by Rainbow Rowell: *Almost Midnight*, published in November 2nd 2017. This research is a qualitative research using semiotics and Freud’s Concept of Consciousness as the tools of analysis. The primary data are obtained from the object of the research; *Midnight* short story, and the secondary data are obtained from books, journals, articles, and internet that are related to the topic of the research. There are 19 primary data found by using documentation technique.

Findings & Discussion

This research found that there are 19 data representing behaviors of the male-lead according to Freud’s Concept of Consciousness with the following details:

Table 1. Concept of consciousness data findings

Consciousness Concept	Amount
Conscious	8
Preconscious	4
Unconscious	7

The findings of the consciousness concept are displayed in the story through several forms of significance, namely dialogue, monologue, and narration. The findings also showed that most of the consciousness concept are conveyed in narrative form which consist of 15 data, followed by dialogue form which consist of 3 data, and monologue form which consists only of 1 datum.

Table 2. Concept of consciousness representation data findings

Consciousness concept	Dialog	Monolog	Narration
Conscious	0	1	6
Preconscious	2	0	3
Unconscious	1	0	6

In this research, the discussion starts with Rainbow Rowell’s recent work *Almost Midnight* which was published in November 2nd 2017 in kindle edition. The first story entitled *Midnight* is about two best friends, Mags and Noel, that later decided to end their relationship as best friend and become a couple instead. The writers suspect that the male-lead of the story, Noel, might have been in love with female-lead, Mags from the very beginning but he was oblivious about his own feelings. Noel’s behaviors from the beginning until the moment he admitted his love to Mags can relate to Freud’s Theory of Consciousness.

Therefore, the primary data of this research are analyzed using Freud’s concepts of Consciousness. The data are in the form of both dialogue and narration which show indications that there is a probability that Noel had been having unconscious behaviors from

the start. The writers will compare the primary data with Freud's concepts of consciousness in human's mind.

According to Freud, there are three different levels of consciousness, they are:

- The conscious.
- The preconscious.
- The unconscious.

The conscious deals with awareness of present perceptions, feelings, thoughts, memories, fantasies at any particular moment. Freud stated that to attain consciousness, the emotions must traverse an unalterable series of events or succession of instances, as it betrayed through their alteration by the censor, has helped us to draw a comparison from spatiality (1920: 170). Motivation, action control, emotion, learning, and development all interact with consciousness in fundamental ways.

Below are the data which show conscious symptoms in Noel's behaviors.

*Noel had never **held** Mags like this.* (p. 41)

*His arm was all the way around Mag's waist now, and their stomachs and chests were **pressed together**.* (p. 41)

*Noel **didn't loosen** his grip after Alicia's mom was past them.* (p. 41)

*His eyes had **gone all soft**, and he was raising his eyebrows.* (p. 46)

*He **kissed** her hard.* (p. 46)

*Noel pinned her to the wall from his hips to his shoulders, **kissing** her to the rhythm of whatever song was playing inside now.* (p.47)

*"I know things have to change, but... I **can't lose** you. I don't think I get another one like you."* (p. 51)

*"You can **have me**, Mags, if you **want me**."* (p.52)

Based on those findings, Noel's behaviors showed that he admitted that he had feelings for Mags. He admitted that he needed Mags more than just a friend. The words and phrases such as "held", "pressed together", "didn't loosen", "gone all soft", "kissed", "kissing", "can't lose", "have me", and "want me" become the signified with denotative meaning which is built by the signifier of Noel's behaviors. These behaviors of Noel, do match with the concept of consciousness stated by Freud. Noel showed how he felt for Mags and he did admit that he loved her though was not in a direct way, but he did admit he needed her, and he could be with her not as her best friend if Mags wanted him to. These clearly represent feelings and emotions of Noel at that time, therefore it matches with the theory that consciousness involves feelings and emotions in present.

The preconscious or subconscious is related to data that can readily be brought to consciousness. What is preconscious become conscious, as we have seen, without any activity on our part (Freud, 1949).

Below are the data which show preconscious symptoms in Noel's behaviors.

*Then he came back to Mags and pinned her against the wall, crowding her as much as **hugging** her. 'Oh, God, Mags,' he said. '**Never leave me**'.* (p. 38)

*'Never leave me you,' he **said** to the top of her head.* (p. 38)

*He **stuck** by Mag's side, like he was **glued** there.* (p. 39)

*Noel took a beer when Frankie offered him one. But when Mags rolled her eyed, he **handed it** to Ponny.* (p. 39)

Based on those findings, it shows that Noel had just realized that he needed Mags after the thought of her leaving him. It never occurred to him that Mags would leave him, but at that moment, he thought about it. Hence, he started to stick with Mags more than he used to. These signs are shown through the words and phrases such as "hugging", "never leave me",

“said” which built the idea that he was afraid of Mags leaving him. He only did that because the thoughts had just come to his mind, which means it matches with preconscious or subconscious mind. It is not always on his mind that Mags would leave him, but when he thought of that, he immediately approached Mags and said those words to Mags.

It also goes the same for second case, he was about to drink a beer, but when he looked at Mags, he changed his mind. It means that he seemed to know that Mags would not like him to drink a beer, but the thought was not always on his mind as well. That is the reason why when he looked at Mags, he remembered and decided not to drink the beer for Mags’ sake. He only decided to refuse to drink the beer after he remembered that Mags did not like it as he saw her previously how Mags were when she had witnessed him drinking a beer. Those two cases of Noel, clearly shows that he was in subconscious mind at that time, he had just realized it when the thoughts came to his mind.

The unconscious refers to data retained but not easily available to the individual's conscious awareness or scrutiny. Freud mentioned that sexual desires play in enormous part in our unconscious, a part which puritanical hypocrisy has always tried to minimize, if not to ignore entirely. While Lacan assumed that (as cited in Suharjanto) the unconscious is like a language and language is a system already complete and in existence before one enters into it. The content of the unconscious is unknown. What is unconscious can, as a result of our efforts, be made conscious, though in the process we may have an impression that we are over coming what we are often very strong resistances (Freud, 1949).

Below are the data which show unconscious symptoms in Noel’s behaviors.

*Noel fell against the wall and **slid down next to Mags, then bumped his shoulders against hers.*** (p. 15)

*He **blew a paper party horn** in her direction.* (p. 15)

*“**There’s always room for you with me, on every coffee table,**”* (p. 16)

*Noel was standing on the arm of the couch with **his hands out to Mags.*** (p. 24)

*Noel walked down the couch, stepped onto the coffee table, then **stretched one long leg out as far as he could to make it onto the love seat next to Mag.*** (p. 24)

*She held up a quiche, and Noel leaned over and **ate it out of her fingers.*** (p. 26)

They were so tight, Mags went with Noel to prom last year, even though he already had a date. (p. 29)

Based on the findings, Noel was acting overly intimate with Mags, when he was the fact only Mags’ best friend, not a romantic interest to Mags. At the first glance, it might look like Noel was just being a perfect male best friend for Mags because he showed how much he cared for Mags. But then, as the story progress, we could see how Noel’s behaviors were leading into something more than just a friendship relationship between a guy and a girl. We started to see, that for Mags and Noel being a male and a female best friend to each other, their interactions showed more than that. Noel and Mags’ friendship became questionable because they were too close to each other, especially Noel, he was being too intimate to Mags. Although Noel did kiss anyone he wanted to at New Year’s Eve, but he treated Mags so gently as if she was more than just a best friend to him, even more gently than those girls kissed before.

Noel’s behaviors towards Mags, precisely when he invited Mags to attend a prom when he already had a partner was quite suspicious and odd. For a guy, to put his best friend first beside his romantic partner is not usual, more importantly if it is a female best friend, because it can lead into misunderstanding between the female best friend and the girl whom the guy

has romantic feelings with. Any girl whose prom's partner prefers his female best friend than herself would be furious if the guy who is supposed to attend a prom with her chooses to be with his female best friend instead of her. Later in the story, it was also said that, the girl that became Noel's partner at the time Noel asked Mags to come with him, was not seen together with Noel ever since. We can assume that the girl was probably or more likely upset with Noel's decision to ask his female best friend, Mags, even though he was her prom's partner.

If we compare it to Freud's theory of unconscious, Noel might have been in love with Mags since ages ago, but he himself had no idea about his own feelings towards Mags. He kissed other girls, he invited another girl to a prom, but he kept putting Mags first before those girls. As Freud mentioned before, unconsciousness is a part which puritanical hypocrisy has always tried to minimize, Noel could have been trying to convince himself to see Mags only as his best friend, but his behaviors could not lie because his behaviors are affected by his innermost desire and real feelings. Noel probably had his own personal experience that led him into trying to avoid romantic feelings towards his Mags, but despite he really had certain reasons for doing so or not, his behaviors indicate that he had been in love with Mags. Freud also mentioned that something unconscious can be conscious if we make efforts to do so, even we may have an impression that we are facing something we have been having strong resistances with. It also matches with Noel's behavior, because he, in the end, kissed Mags and told her that he needed her more than just a friend but as a romantic partner. Noel was overcoming his denial. The fact that he was actually head over heels towards Mags and had been wanting to be more than a guy best friend to Mags. At the end of the story, Noel, the male lead, decided not to lie to himself and to Mags anymore. He decided to accept the fact that he regarded his own best friend, Mags, as more than a best friend. He finally admitted to himself and told Mags that he actually loved her. Not love as a guy best friend had for his female best friend, but love as a guy who was deeply in love with a girl.

Conclusion

The aim of this research is to find out whether the behaviors of the male-lead from a short story entitled *Midnight* by Rainbow Rowell, Noel, represent the concepts of Consciousness by Freud. The writers compared the male-lead's actions that might fit with Freud's theory of consciousness. Based on the findings that are found, there are 19 data. All of Noel's behaviors in the data fit the concept of consciousness by Freud. There are 8 data belong to the conscious, 4 data belong to the preconscious, and 7 data belong to the unconscious. Based on these data, the writers conclude that the male-lead's behavior represent the conscious theory by Freud.

The findings of this research also showed that the Freud's concept of consciousness in the story is displayed predominantly by the narrator of the story which consist of 15 data. While there are 3 data through dialogue and only 1 datum through monologue. This result indicated that the signification characters of the story tends to be enclosed. The narrator's dominance in conveying this concept of consciousness shows that the author constructs a sign of the character's personality which tends to be enclosed. The author sets a certain limit for the readers to interpret the characters of Noel and his personality.

In conclusion, all of Noel's behaviors towards Mags play a role as the signifier of the fact that he sees Mags more than just his best friend. While the signified are Noel's real feelings towards Mags which means that he actually is falling head over heels for Mags. Hence, all the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious of Noel's behaviors that are shown through the narration, dialogue, and monologue are basically the signifier of the signified which is Noel's real feelings for Mags.

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