

## Conference Paper

# Psychological Problems in Nassim Nicholas Taleb's Novel *The Black Swan*

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the psychological problems of the protagonist named Nina. The method used is qualitative research supported by library research as proposed by Currie (2007) stating that library research is used to collect ideas, theories, and reported empirical data within the context of scholarship from library. Since the paper deals with psychological problems, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory of anxiety and hallucination was applied to analyze the data. The research result showed that Nina experienced behavioral changes due to the influence of other characters around her. She encountered psychological problems due to her conflicts with other characters. Her psychological problems were mainly triggered by the pressures from other characters, and those problems make her anxious and always went hallucinated. The pressures encountered by her went deeper as she could not show her best performance at the time when she must dance black swan role.

**Keywords:** psychology, conflict, anxiety, hallucination

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## 1. Introduction

Literary work is a work that is formed from an author's imagination. It is also an expression of the images and events of daily activity directly or indirectly. Literary works have function to entertain or teach something to the readers. The function can be found in any kind of literary work. In the novel *Black Swan* by [8], the moral teachings are concerned with Psychological Analysis.

Hall (2001) in his book entitled *A Premier of Freudian Psychology* states that anxiety is a painful emotional experience which is produced by excitations in the internal organs of the body. These excitations are the result from internal or external stimulation and are governed by the autonomic nervous system. For example, when a person encounters a dangerous situation, his heart beats faster, he breathes more rapidly, his mouth becomes dry, and the palms of his hands sweat.

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Nina, the protagonist of the novel has psychological problem. She feels really worried if someone replaces her role as a swan lake and this makes her more emotional. Then, she starts feeling something absurd in her daily life, like seeing someone exactly looks like her, getting rash on her body, and suddenly feeling more worried about something. This gives a picture Nina suffers from psychological problems.

## 2. Literature Review

The first point of discussion is anxiety. Anxiety is a feeling of impending danger. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) considered three types. *Objective anxiety* results from a real threat in the physical world to one's well-being, as when a ferocious-looking dog appears from around the corner. The other two types are derived from objective anxiety. *Neurotic anxiety* results from the ego feeling overwhelmed by the id, which threatens to express its irrationality in thoughts and behavior. There is a fear of external punishment for such expression.

*Moral anxiety* is based on a feeling that one's internalized values are about to be compromised. There is a fear of self-punishment (e.g., guilt) for acting contrary to one's values. Moral anxiety is a function of the development of the superego. Whatever the anxiety, the ego seeks to reduce it. Operating at the unconscious level, it employs defense mechanisms to distort or deny reality [4]. Based on the Freudian theory, anxiety is at the core of the psychoanalytic theory of affects, and from the beginning of psychoanalytic thought has been recognized as central to an understanding of mental conflict for it is through bad feelings that conflicts are felt and known.

The next point of discussion is tied to hallucination. Hallucination is the experience of perceiving objects or events that do not have an external source, such as hearing one's name called by a voice that no one else seems to hear. A hallucination is distinguished from an illusion, which is a misinterpretation of an actual stimulus.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) characterizes hallucinations as follows. Perhaps it may be a general characteristic of hallucinations to which sufficient attention has not hitherto been paid that in them something that has been experienced in infancy and then forgotten re-emerges - something that the child has seen or heard at a time when he could still hardly speak and that now forces its way into consciousness, probably distorted and displaced owing to the operation of forces that are opposed to its re-emergence [4].

### 3. Research Method

The research was conducted by means of descriptive qualitative research. Sugiyono (2013) states that Qualitative research is the method of skin research based on purposively philosophy, used to examine the condition of natural objects, (as opposed to experiments) in which the researches are as key instruments, and the sampling of data sources is done purposively.

The source of the data in this research consists of two types, primary data and secondary data. Khotari (1985) states "Primary data is original information collected for the first time. In the research, the primary data are the novel *The Black Swan* written by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007). The secondary data are documents, and other relevant sources related to the discussion.

### 4. Discussion

According to Freud (2002), psychological approach is an approach which is based upon the assumption that literature is always talking about human life that always exhibits diverse behaviors. The extrinsic aspect contains the analysis of anxiety and hallucination of Nina's personality.

### 5. Anxiety

The main character is a character that often appears in a story or the most dominant character. In the whole story the focus discussed is Nina Sayers. Nina Sayers is a kind and tolerant young woman. This is evident when Nina got the role of queen swan. Her mother came home and brought a vanilla cake with strawberries but Nina refused to eat it. But she did not want to upset her mother and so she ate the cake.

Nina sees a cake with a little sparkler sitting on the table. Her mother smiles anxiously. (Erica) my daughter, the swan queen. (Nina) oh mom. (Erica) it is our favorite vanilla with strawberry filling. Erica pick up a knife and starts cutting a very large piece. I am just so proud of you. Erica grabs the whole cake and head towards the trash. (Nina) mom, don't. I am sorry. Erica hesitates, but returns. She sets the cake back down [8].

The quotation above explains the situation where Nina does not want to disappoint her mother. She loves her mother so much so she would not make her mother upset

by refusing the cake. This is triggered by her anxiety. She is anxious that her mother would be very sad if she refuses to take the cake.

Anxiety is a painful emotional experience. This is one of the most important concepts in psychoanalytic theory. Although anxiety is a negative feeling, yet everyone must feel it in life, such as someone feeling nervous or panicked on the day of the test. And this situation is felt by Nina.

Another illustration of anxiety felt by Nina was when Leroy forced her to pay attention to how to dance Lily.

(Nina) pays close attention to Lily, sizing her up. Her dancing is explosive, exudes sex. (Leroy) watch the way she moves. Leroy has snuck up behind Nina at the doorway and gets very close to her. Imprecise, but sexual. She's not faking it.

Leroy as a professional ballet seems to see Lily has the potential to become a black swan. It makes Nina worried and worried if one day Leroy will choose Lily perform the role of the black goose than himself [8].

All the time, Nina is attacked by a feeling of anxiety when performing the dance. The trainer knows for sure the potentiality of Nina, and that is the reason Nina is forced to do the dancing. Actually Nina could do the dancing, but the point lies in her anxiety. She is too nervous and she fears failure. All is triggered by her anxiety, which is beyond her control

## 6. Hallucination

Hallucinations will occur after a hostile relationship, stress, isolation, feeling useless, hopeless and helpless. Nina also experienced a hallucination disorder. She lived her life under unfriendly relations and pressure. Nina feels depressed when she cannot do the black swan's role as a white goose's role, and she controls her emotions in order not to stress. These hallucinations come to her unnoticed. It is someone who is just like her but with a different attitude. Double Nina is a reflection of the characteristics of Black Swan. She plays the role of Black Swan so well that the typical Black Swan looks like her double. She also feels hostile to Lily. Since Lily is the one who has the potential to become a Black Swan, Nina thinks that she can change it anytime.

When Nina feels worried about the Black Swan, she will see a double. In one scene in this script, there is a scene when Nina practiced the black goose coach, Leroy as a professional ballet always asks Nina that her dance is just cold. She worries and cries when she returns home.

It's pretty dark but the sound is unmistakable.

Nina tiptoes past some off stage sets and lighting equipment, and peeks around a piece of scenery catching a glimpse of Lily further backstage. She is wild, clearly enjoying it. Nina looks away, disgusted. She peeks back one more time. Lily has become the double. She meets Nina's eyes and smiles. Nina jumps back and flees [8].

Nina becomes double when she is worried about the role of the Black Swan. Lily is a double reflection of her. It makes Nina feel hostile to Lily. But the fact is, Nina does have to worry about Lily if she can look good.

This also explained beforehand, there are many specific responses about hallucinatory disorders, such as talking to oneself, fighting or other malicious responses, and listening to voices, talking and listening to others who are not talking or inanimate objects. When Nina talks to her, she is actually a double not real or it is hallucinations. That means she really speaks to herself but she still imagines that she is talking to someone who is just like her. In this conflict, she always sees her multiply as she stand in front of the mirror.

## 7. Conclusions

Nina is the main character in the Black Swan novel described through the psychology problem of Sigmund Freud's. She has indicated her anxiety and hallucination. As a ballerina, she also wants to get the swan queen's role for which she has to be able to play as white swan and black swan. She has an internal problem with herself because of her anxiety and also an external conflict with someone around her. Nina gets anxiety which is a painful emotional experience resulting from danger in the external world. It is such a fear of a real threat, and the impact of the anxiety is that she also gets physical and cognitive anxiety.

Then for the hallucination, Nina talks to herself feeling that she is not her double. When she stands in front of the mirror alone, her double will show up. She sees her hallucination in many places such as in the bathroom, backstage, at costume shop and in the principal dressing room. Nina really wants to be a black swan to see her double as the black swan's reflection in the mirror and finally Nina's died when she successfully shows the queen of swans with perfect.

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