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## Escape and Reconciliation of the Characters in the Short Story 'Tenggelam' by Neneng Fatimah: A Psychological Analysis

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### Abstract

This research analyses the escape and reconciliation of the main character in the short story 'Tenggelam' by Neneng Fatimah using Rollo May's existentialist psychology approach and Sigmund Freud's literary psychology. The method used is qualitative with a descriptive approach. Researchers repeatedly read the story to identify mental and emotional dynamics and self-defense mechanisms and resolve the main character's inner conflict. The results showed that the main character's escape involved anxiety, guilt, and a form of love. This escape is realized through self-isolation and rejection of interaction with the surrounding environment, reflecting the character's efforts to deal with inner conflict and search for the meaning of his life. Reconciliation begins to appear when the main character faces the reality of his life with courage and accepts his condition. This reconciliation becomes the peak of emotional transformation, shown through accepting reality and building better relationships with people around her. This research is expected to contribute to the study of literary psychology by highlighting how characters' inner conflicts can be analyzed through a psychological perspective and the relevance of the theme of escape and reconciliation in the context of human life in general. The findings enrich the understanding of the relationship between literature and individual psychological dynamics.

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## INTRODUCTION

In human life, individuals often encounter circumstances that challenge the boundaries of their emotional state, rational abilities, and overall existence. Literature, which reflects human life, summarizes and brings these complex dynamics to life through profound narratives (Akhter Khan, 2021; Miftah, 2013). Historically, literature has been a fertile medium for investigating the multifaceted nature of human life, especially in the context of emotional turmoil, personal strife, and the search for existential significance (Abubakar, 2017; Miftah, 2013). Many literary compositions explain themes of escapism, domestic strife, and the pressures of life as manifestations of existential concerns that encompass the human experience. This phenomenon illustrates how individuals often pursue escape routes to avoid suffering for a moment when faced with the stresses of a frightening life.

The pressures inherent in life often push individuals to important points that affect different dimensions of existence, which include the psychological and sociocultural spheres. In such circumstances, individuals typically use survival strategies, including temporary forms of escape and the pursuit of profound existential significance. The short story 'Sinking' by Neneng Fatimah summarizes internal strife through the wanderings of a man grappling with emotional turmoil. Conflicts are triggered by unemployment and family disputes. This odyssey, characterized by an effort of diversion and deep self-reflection, exemplifies complex psychological processes, thus making it an interesting subject to examine from a psychological and literary point of view. The short story 'Sinking' depicts the psychological struggles of individuals facing the pressures of life. This narrative encourages the reader to reflect on how humans seek peace amid inner conflict. The fear of "drowning" is a metaphor for the psychological burden borne by the main character.

The study of literary psychology has addressed the inner dynamic of character through various approaches, including existential psychology and the theory of self-defense mechanisms, freedom, and individual responsibility. This approach explores how a person deals with the ambiguity of life and feelings of alienation. In literary studies, this perspective understands the internal journey of the characters and the philosophical values they face

On the other hand, the theory of self-defense mechanisms and stress-coping strategies examines the psychological response of individuals to emotional distress. This approach examines the different ways individuals consciously and

subconsciously face challenges. This strategy includes mechanisms such as escape, rejection, and emotional reconciliation. Combining the two approaches makes the analysis more thorough, covering the characters' philosophical aspects and practical psychological responses.

Many studies have been conducted to analyze existentialist psychology and self-defense mechanisms in literature, especially in examining novelistic literary works that investigate themes of anxiety, fear, and the search for courage. Miftah (2013) writes down the findings of various psychological problems faced by the main character, Bowo, focusing on existential themes. The three main themes identified are togetherness, love, and conflict, in which Bowo's relationship is characterized by a lack of authenticity that leads to deep conflict; loneliness, alienation, and anxiety, which are characterized by a sense of emptiness and isolation due to their inability to deal with inner turmoil; and death, which became a significant emotional challenge in his life. Research shows that Bowo's struggles with these issues are closely related to his inner conflict and sense of alienation from those around him. Pratiwi and Anas Ahmadi (2022) examine existential psychology in the novel "Quieter than Whispers" by Andina Dwifatma, focusing on three main themes: anxiety, guilt, and love experienced by the main character, Amara. Amara's anxiety is divided into normal anxiety, which arises in response to life's challenges, and neurotic anxiety, which reflects internal conflicts regarding her role as mother and wife. Khoirunnisa and Nugroho (2023) Analyze nine anthology short stories to explore the main characters' defense mechanisms and coping strategies. Identified defense mechanisms include repression, in which unacceptable thoughts are repressed into the subconscious; rationalization, to justify an action or feeling; the formation of reactions, by expressing the opposite of true feelings; and a rejection of reality. The coping strategies include self-control in response to stress and escape avoidance to avoid stressors. This research highlights the relevance of themes in Chudori's work to contemporary social issues, showing that the psychological struggles of the characters remain significant. These findings enrich our understanding of literary psychology, particularly about how characters manage internal conflicts through psychological mechanisms and complex coping strategies.

Although many studies have addressed existential psychology and self-defense mechanisms in literary works, the exploration of short stories is still limited. In addition, the combination of existential psychology with the analysis of stress-coping mechanisms is still an area

that has not been explored much in literary studies. Most studies tend to separate these two approaches, thus providing a partial understanding of the character dynamics. The short story 'Sinking' offers an opportunity to explore the combination of these approaches, mainly since the story depicts the main character's attempt to escape reality while facing an existential crisis that involves the search for meaning in life. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a new integrative perspective in the analysis of literary psychology.

The investigation that this research tries to address includes two main questions: (1) How can the existential crisis faced by the main character in the short story 'Sinking' be analyzed through the perspective of existential psychology? (2) How do the main character's self-defense and stress management strategies manifest in his behavior? The objectives of this study are to (1) Analyze the existential crisis experienced by the main character through the framework of existential psychology, (2) Identify the self-defense mechanism and overcome stress used by the main character in response to his psychological pressure.

This research is expected to contribute to the study of literary psychology, especially in connecting existential aspects with psychological responses in short stories. The findings of this study can also enrich the understanding of the relationship between psychology and literature in describing the psychological dynamics of individuals who face existential challenges.

## RESEARCH METHODS

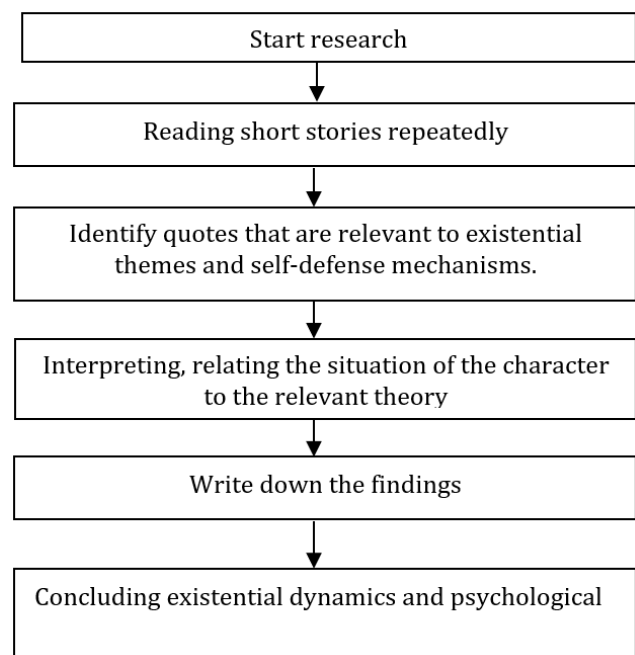
This study uses a qualitative method to understand human phenomena holistically through descriptive analysis. This research is a content analysis research. This approach allows the identification of existential themes and coping mechanisms that emerge in the main character's behavior, dialogue, and narrative description. This study uses the text of a short story titled 'Sinking' by Neneng Fatimah, published in detik.com on October 12, 2024, as the primary data.

Researchers used Rollo May's existential psychoanalysis approach to analyze existential themes such as anxiety, guilt, and struggle with the meaning of life. Meanwhile, the psychology of self-defense mechanisms and stress coping by Sigmund Freud is used to identify how the protagonist responds to stress and emotional distress through defense mechanisms (repression, rationalization, etc.) and coping strategies (avoidance, self-control, etc.). This interdisciplinary approach yields deep insights into the emotional trajectories and decisions taken by the main characters. It highlights how the short story 'Sinking' articulates the

universality of humanity's struggle to find serenity and significance in their lives. By synthesizing these two analytical approaches, this research aspires to provide a new and more holistic perspective on meaningful literary works that are complicated.

The following are the steps of the researcher's research: The first step is to read the short story 'Sinking' repeatedly. Excerpts in short stories related to existential and self-defense mechanisms and coping stress are recorded in the data. Second, the researcher interprets the relationship between the character's situation and existentialist theories, self-defense mechanisms, and coping stress. The three researchers wrote the findings and interpretation of the data in this research article by strengthening it with other relevant literature. Fourth, the researcher concluded that texts reflect existential and psychological dynamics relevant to human life in general. The research steps are described in the following flow.

**Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram**



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Anxiety, Guilt, and Forms of Love Anxiety

The central theme in Neneng Fatimah's short story Sinking is the inner battle of individuals in facing life pressures, domestic conflicts, and the search for meaning in life amid isolation. The short story tells the story of a husband who is afraid of water and is afraid of 'drowning' literally. However, now he is immersed in the busyness to distract from his life's problems.

*"Aku takut air. Takut tenggelam. Namun sekarang aku sibuk menenggelamkan diri*

*dalam lautan. Lautan yang kumaksud itu begini. Duduk sendirian di pinggir jalan, mencekik plastik es sirup yang embunnya menetes ke sepatu sambil menatap manusia berseliweran. Kadang tenggelam dalam lembaran-lembaran buku dan muncul lagi ke permukaan saat leher terasa pegal. Memang bukan tenggelam secara harfiah, tapi aku tak menemukan istilah yang lebih tepat untuk menggambarkan situasi ini" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"I am afraid of water, fear of drowning. However, now I was busy drowning myself in the ocean. The ocean I am referring to is like this. Sitting alone on the side of the road, suffocating the plastic ice syrup dripping onto the shoes while staring at people looking around. Sometimes, it sinks into the pages of books and resurfaces when the neck aches. It is not drowning, but I cannot find a more appropriate term to describe this situation" (Fatimah, 2024).

This quote illustrates the duality between the fear of literally "drowning" and the main character's attempt to "immerse himself" in a diversionary activity. In the perspective of Rollo May's existential psychology, the statement "I am afraid of water, afraid of drowning" can be seen as a symbol of the existential anxiety experienced by the character. The fear of water is not just a physical fear but a metaphor for the inability to face the depths and complexities of life, including responsibility and meaning. The process of "immersing oneself" in activities such as sitting alone, observing people, or reading a book reflects an attempt to avoid the painful reality while also demonstrating a crisis of the meaning of life. The character seeks an escape to escape the inner chaos that haunts him.

After months of unemployment, his domestic relationship with his wife worsens. At its peak, his wife gets angry and leaves him, triggering the husband to leave as well.

*"Istriku hanya mendelik sebelum berlalu. Terdengar pintu dibanting. Tanpa pikir panjang aku bergegas ke kamar, mengemas asal beberapa helai baju dan satu jilid buku ke dalam ransel, lalu menukar sarung dan singlet yang kupakai dengan celana panjang dan kaus. Kembali ke dapur, kucomot tempe goreng yang sudah kehilangan pesonanya. Dingin dan lemas. Rasanya tekanan darahku menanjak karena entah berapa hari*

*berturut-turut makan tempe yang kelebihan vetsin.*

*Dengan tempe tergantung di bibir, aku mengencangkan tali sepatu, mengunci pintu, menyelipkan kunci di bawah pot tanaman bunga nusa indah yang tidak pernah berbunga, kemudian pergi meninggalkan kontrakan tiga petak yang tak seberapa luas itu" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"My wife just looked at me before it passed. The door was slammed. Without thinking, I rushed to my room, packed some clothes and a book into my backpack, and exchanged the sarongs and singlets I wore for trousers and a T-shirt. Back in the kitchen, I picked up fried tempeh that had lost its charm. Cold and limp. It felt like my blood pressure was going up because I did not know how many days in a row I had eaten tempeh that had an excess version. With tempeh hanging from my lips, I tightened my shoelaces, locked the door, slipped the key under the pot of Nusa Indah flower plants that never flowered, then left the three-plot lease that was not very spacious" (Fatimah, 2024).

In Rollo May's existential psychology perspective, the conflict between freedom and responsibility is often a source of existential anxiety (Zaki Ilman Nasution et al., 2024). Freedom, in this case, refers to the ability of the individual to make choices in his or her life, while responsibility is the moral and emotional consequences that accompany those choices (SAÇAR, 2022; Zaki Ilman Nasution et al., 2024). The quote above explains that the moment of the character's escape represents the character's genuine effort to make choices in his life. Leaving the house is a choice to avoid emotional turmoil and increasing domestic disputes. From the point of view of Rollo May's existential psychology, the character's decision to vacate the family residence symbolizes her inability to face the reality of full interpersonal relationships. The sound of "the door slamming" emerged as a powerful symbol of rejection and cessation of communication, exacerbating the alienation experienced by the individuals involved. The choice to leave without a well-thought-out strategy, armed solely with "a few pieces of clothing and a volume of books," signifies the loss of a deep existential orientation and inherent uncertainty regarding the direction of his life. This scenario describes real existential anxiety: the individual is caught between facing a challenging reality or constantly pursuing an escape that does not result in a final

resolution. The anxiety and responsibility chosen by the character are also seen in the following data.

*"Mungkin karena seluruh fokus tercurah tanpa memikirkan apa-apa. Masjid, taman kota, perpustakaan, warteg, pinggir jalanan, dan bus Transjakarta menjadi tempatku membaca. Diselingi minum es atau kopi keliling, sambil berbincang sepatah dua patah dengan penjualnya, begitulah caraku menghadapi kenyataan. Aku tidak lari. Lari adalah tergoepoh dari satu titik ke titik lain" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"Maybe because the whole focus is poured out without thinking about anything. Mosques, city parks, libraries, warthogs, roadsides, and Transjakarta buses are places where I read. Interspersed with drinking ice or coffee around while having a word or two with the seller, that is how I faced reality. I did not run. Running is getting from one point to another" (Fatimah, 2024).

The data shows that the main character is free to choose how he will deal with his problems. Not running away from trouble is the path he chooses. However, he did not want to get caught up in negative thoughts. The main character actively looks for ways to overcome the difficult situation he is facing constructively. This shows that this figure has a sense of freedom and responsibility.

## Guilt

According to Rollo May, three forms of guilt are explained in existential psychology, all three of which are interrelated. The three forms of guilt are *umwelt*, *mitwelt*, and *eigenwelt* (Carni et al., 2013). In the short story *Sinking* by Neneng Fatimah, a form of guilt is found in the following data.

*"Hari pertama meninggalkan rumah, kepala masih berputar kencang memikirkan solusi atas kericuhan unit terkecil suatu negara yakni keluarga. Sebetulnya bukan tak ada jalan, tapi lamaran kerja yang kusebar ke berbagai penjuru belum jua mendapatkan respons. Aku termasuk golongan yang skeptis bahwa Tuhan akan mengabulkan doa umat manusia tanpa kecuali. Sekarang mendengar langsung suara Tuhan di langit rasanya jauh lebih realistis ketimbang menanti jawaban dari orang-orang di dalam gedung perkantoran itu" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"On the first day, I left home, my head was still spinning, thinking about the solution to the chaos of the smallest unit of a country, namely the family. It is not that there is no way, but the job applications I have spread to various corners have not yet received a response. I am one of the skeptics that God will grant the prayers of humanity without exception. Now hearing God's voice directly in the sky feels much more realistic than waiting for an answer from the people in the office building" (Fatimah, 2024).

In the above quotation, there is no clear form of guilt, but the individual's anxiety about an unfruitful job application implicitly reflects the sentiment of helplessness about fate. The character understands that their success depends entirely on external forces beyond their control, so this can lead to *umwelt* guilt. The guilt arises from the individual's inability to adjust to an environment full of uncertainty. This emotional event comes as a feeling of alienation and lack of control over the reality around them. In addition, the statement "I am among the skeptics that God will grant the prayers of mankind without exception" is interpreted as a form of guilt to God. Despite doubts, the character still expects God's intervention in his life. This doubt becomes a source of guilt (*umwelt*) because it resists a higher power. The *eigenwelt* form of guilt also appears in the above quote. Guilt is due to the character's failure to fulfill his responsibilities as a breadwinner. This failure gives rise to a sense of guilt towards oneself due to inadequacies. Other forms are found in the following data.

*"Kuniatkan pulang pada hari keempat. Rute yang dilewati kali ini adalah yang paling sederhana. Kebalikannya dari rute berangkat. Tidak mampir ke mana-mana. Jika segala tetek bengek dalam empat hari ini adalah batu pemberat yang menenggelamkan diriku, maka jepit rambut dalam ranselku itu umpama kail pancing yang menarikku ke daratan.*

*Ojek yang kutumpangi berhenti di mulut gang. Urung masuk sampai depan rumah karena ada moci beraneka warna yang menarik perhatian. Berpupur putih, manis, dan tentu saja bulat. Persis muka istriku. Kubeli sepasang. Setidaknya ada sesuatu yang bisa dimakan kalau-kalau jepit pemberianku nanti dilempar" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"I went home on the fourth day. The route passed this time was the simplest. The opposite of the departing route. Did not stop by anywhere. If all the swollen tits in these four days were the ballasting stones that drowned me, then the hairpin in my backpack was like a fishing hook that pulled me ashore.

The motorcycle taxi I was riding stopped at the mouth of the alley. Do not enter until the front of the house because colorful moci attract attention. White, sweet, and, of course, round. Exactly my wife's face. I buy a pair. At least there is something to eat in case the tongs I gave you are thrown later" (Fatimah, 2024).

In the short story quoted above, the author describes a scene showing the character's reflection on a decision or action he regrets. The main character feels guilty for not meeting his wife's needs (*mitwelt*). His form of regret was seen when he saw the pins and moci that reminded him of his wife's figure. When the main character intends to go home, he brings a souvenir for his wife as a sign of apology and an attempt to repair the relationship. This action shows an awareness of his mistakes and a desire to repair the relationship.

### Shape of Love

In May's existential psychology, love is a form of transcendence that allows individuals to overcome their existential limitations (Ratner, 2019). Love is about emotions or romantic relationships and the ability to connect with others deeply and authentically (Schneider et al., 2009). In the short story *Sinking*, the form of love is found in the following data.

*"Tidak seperti waktu pergi, sekarang langkahku lebih santai. Bunyi panci semakin samar dan akhirnya berhenti sama sekali begitu tiba di depan rumah. Pintu depan terbuka sebagian. Aku masuk. Istriku sedang menonton televisi. Kuletakkan moci dan jepit di hadapannya. Dia bergeming. Kulihat istriku sedang menata meja makan tepat ketika aku selesai mandi. "Makan," ujarinya singkat dengan nada yang sulit disimpulkan apakah itu ajakan makan atau hanya deklarasi datar"* (Fatimah, 2024).

"Unlike when I left, now my steps are more relaxed. The sound of the pot was getting fainter and fainter, and it finally stopped altogether as soon as I arrived in front of the house. The front door is partially open. I

walked in. My wife was watching television; I put the most tongs before her. He was unmoved. I saw my wife setting up the dining table just as I finished showering. "Eat," she said briefly in a tone that is difficult to conclude whether it is an invitation to eat or just a flat declaration" (Fatimah, 2024).

The data above describes the relationship between my character and his wife, who are experiencing dynamics. The figures make reconciliation efforts, but there are still remnants of tension. From the reflection of the situation, it appears that the form of love in the form of *eros* that my character (husband) shows to his wife is the desire to unite. Bringing souvenirs such as moci and tongs is an effort to get closer and build intimacy. However, the wife's cold response implies that *eros* in this relationship is still fragile and needs time to recover.

In addition to *eros*, the form of *philia* love is implied in the quote above. The character's actions to go home and try to repair the relationship show a sense of connection and a desire to maintain the relationship. However, just like *eros*, this form of *philia* love is still fragile and vulnerable.

*"Kami duduk berhadapan. Sepiring nasi dan sepiring tempe goreng tersaji di tengah-tengah. Di tangannya tergenggam sebiji moci yang sudah digigit. Kupandang wajahnya lekat-lekat. Sisa kesal masih ada di sana. Mungkin juga putus asa. Namun anak rambutnya tak lagi berantakan seperti terakhir bertemu. Sepasang jepit menahannya dengan anggun. Tetap berjatuhan tapi rapi dan manis"* (Fatimah, 2024).

"We sat facing each other. A plate of rice and fried tempeh are served in the middle. In his hand was holding a moci that had been bitten; I looked at his face sticking. The rest of the annoyance is still there. Maybe also desperate. However, her hair was no longer as messy as when she met; a pair of tongs held her gracefully. Still falling but neat and sweet" (Fatimah, 2024).

The form of *gap* love is also found in the short story *Drowning* by Neneng Fatimah, which is evidenced in the data above. Although it is not explicitly written, the form of *unconditional love* is shown through the husband's actions as the main character in the short story to return Home and repair the relationship with his wife. He tried to

forget the actions taken by his wife and forgive her. The wife also shows the wife a form of agape love for the main character, namely her husband. The wife showed unconditional love when she saw her husband returning home. Without instructions, the wife voluntarily carries out her custom of preparing food as a sign of her welcome and devotion to her husband. It also hints that all the frustration felt a few days ago had disappeared.

### Coping Stress

The coping mechanism of character stress, according to Cooper & Quick (2017), is influenced by personal and social circumstances—the mechanism contains three main elements, namely emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. The stress coping carried out by the main character is a reflection that is, of course influenced by the social context in the literary work in the form of the short story itself. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), there are two strategies for coping with stress, namely those that focus on problems (planful problem solving, confrontative coping, and seeking social support) and strategies that focus on emotions (positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility, self-controlling, distancing, and escape avoidance).

Problem-focused stress coping strategies are active efforts to change or address stressful situations. Individuals who use this strategy tend to seek solutions, take action, and try to change unpleasant situations. Usually, there are three things that the figure does in this strategy, namely planful problem solving, confrontational coping, and seeking social support. An emotion-focused coping strategy is a way for a character to manage stress by controlling or reducing the emotional impact of stressful situations instead of the source of the problem. The goal is to calm down negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, or sadness. Five things that are usually done in this strategy are positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility, self-controlling, distancing, and escape avoidance.

In the short story 'Sinking,' the main character uses more stress coping strategies that focus on emotions rather than problems. The character's behavior when facing conflict reflects a combination of several mechanisms. He tends to avoid problems, stay away physically, and control himself so that there is no more significant conflict. The strategy carried out by this figure can be seen in the following data.

*"Takut air, takut tenggelam, itu dulu. Sekarang malah ngeri pada permukaan. Jadilah aku sering sengaja tenggelam agar tidak melihat apa yang di depan mata, agar*

*tidak berjumpa dengan apa yang menunggu di depan sana. Aku memilih masuk ke kedalaman dan memandang permukaan jauh dari bawah sana yang tampak seperti titik kecil. Seperti itulah cara membereskan masalah-masalahku. Menjauhinya hingga berjarak dan terlihat mengecil. Makin dalam tenggelam makin megap-megap. Kalau sudah begini biasanya aku kembali ke permukaan lantas mencari tempat tenggelam baru" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"Afraid of water, afraid of drowning, that was the past. Now, I am even horrified on the surface. So I often deliberately drown so as not to see what is in front of me, so as not to meet what awaits me there. I chose to go into the depths and look at the surface far down there, which looked like a small dot. That is how I solved my problems. Please stay away from it until it is distant and looks smaller. The deeper it sinks, the more it gasps. If this is the case, I usually return to the surface and look for a new sinking place" (Fatimah, 2024).

The form of self-defense and coping stress mechanisms carried out by the main character that stands out from the data above is the form of avoidance. Escape-avoidance is evident in his attempt to distance himself from problems by "sinking" into activities that are not directly related to stressors. The process of "moving away from each other and looking smaller" shows a rationalization mechanism, where the character tries to justify his strategy to manage the problem. However, the cycle of "sinking deeper and more gasping" reflects the ineffectiveness of this strategy, which brings the character back to the surface, only to repeat the same pattern in a new place. This indicates the dynamics of frustration and the failure of coping mechanisms to provide long-term solutions.

The quote reveals the destructive cycle experienced by the character: fear of reality (surface) forces him to choose escape (drown), but this escape does not provide calm, only magnifies his sense of alienation. This cycle depicts the helplessness of the character in facing the crisis of his life a very existential theme as well as reflecting the trap in the unproductive self-defense mechanism. This multidisciplinary approach shows how the symbol of "sinking" represents an unsolvable inner conflict, both in the existential and psychological realms.

In addition to carrying out an avoidance coping strategy, the main character also

emphasized that it is a distancing strategy (distancing) from the source of the problem. This distancing strategy can be seen in the following quote.

*"Dengan tempe tergantung di bibir, aku mengencangkan tali sepatu, mengunci pintu, menyelipkan kunci di bawah pot tanaman bunga nusa indah yang tidak pernah berbunga, kemudian pergi meninggalkan kontrakan tiga petak yang tak seberapa luas itu" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"With tempeh hanging from my lips, I tightened my shoelaces, locked the door, slipped the key under the pot of Nusa Indah flower plants that never flowered, then left the rented three-plot plot that was not very spacious" (Fatimah, 2024).

In the data, the main character uses a stress-coping strategy by staying away from conflicts in his household. He chose to leave the situation that caused him stress, namely the conflict with his wife at home. By physically distancing, the protagonist tries to reduce the intensity of his negative emotions.

Self-controlling strategies are the ability of individuals to limit responses so that they do not overdo it in supporting the goals of a conflict (Milyavskaya et al., 2019). My character uses this strategy to avoid overflowing his emotions with his wife and avoid a more significant quarrel. The following data is apparent.

*"Aku menggigit pelan sepotong tempe goreng, mengunyahnya tanpa nasi, memikirkan reaksi yang tepat agar kekesalan istriku reda" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"I took a small bite of a piece of fried tempeh, chewed it without rice, and thought of the right reaction so that my wife's annoyance subsided" (Fatimah, 2024).

In the data above, it is clear that the character prefers to control his emotions by focusing on food and thinking about how to calm his wife. Based on Rollo May's existential psychological perspective, the main character in this novel seems to be looking for the meaning of life through his efforts to keep the relationship from worsening. The main character's attitude of restraint and not taking any action was done so that his wife's anger would immediately subside. His desire to defuse conflicts for peace in his home shows his search for

deeper meaning in his life. However, his exaggerated fear of his wife's reaction, which may have been unexpected, reflects deep existential anxiety.

From Sigmund Freud's point of view, the primary character often uses a self-defense mechanism in the form of sublimation, which is to divert his negative emotions into more positive actions (Siljak, 2018). The character took the positive action affects the wife's emotions. This indicates an inner conflict between the desire feelings and the fear that will trigger a greater tension that is not resolved.

## Reconciliation

The view that solutions come precisely when we accept the situation and do nothing about the conflict is an interesting perspective. This view can be associated with several concepts in existential psychology, especially in the context of acceptance, surrender, and being (Pospisil, 2019). In the study of this story, here are some points that can be raised to solve the conflict that occurred in the short story. Solutions are found in the following data.

*"Ponselku berbunyi. Satu surel masuk. Panggilan interview untuk lusa. Cepat-cepat kutandakan isi piring sebelum bergegas ke teras" (Fatimah, 2024).*

"My cell phone rang. One email comes in. Interview call for the day after tomorrow. I quickly emphasize the contents of the dishes before rushing to the terrace" (Fatimah, 2024).

From the data above, several points can be discussed, including acceptance as an existential process. In existential psychology, accepting the situation does not mean giving up passively but acknowledging reality as it is, without resistance or avoidance (Biricheva, 2019). After trying various ways to overcome the conflict (moving mosques, giving money, looking for a job), the character finally stops actively fighting and accepts his situation. At this point, he decided to return home with a lighter burden. Rollo May emphasized the courage to accept our existence as the first step towards true freedom and authenticity. When a person accepts the reality of his life, he can face the world without illusions. Accepting this state of affairs can be seen as an existential moment in which the figure achieves peace with himself, opening the space for solutions (interview calls) to emerge.

Second, non-action is a path to transformation. When the protagonist decides to return home, he seems to stop going against the tide of life harshly. He no longer aggressively seeks solutions but instead flows with the situation. The decision to go home is a form of acceptance, not the result of hard work. The inactivity shown by the character can be interpreted as a willingness to stop controlling everything. In existential psychology, human efforts to always control their lives are often a source of anxiety. Giving up control paves the way for new possibilities. Non-action here is not a form of resignation but a form of courage to believe in the process of life. From an existentialist perspective, it is the moment in which the character leaves his existential anxiety behind and accepts life with all its uncertainties. According to May, true freedom lies in the courage to live amid uncertainty and not always need an instant solution to every conflict (Sazontev. V., 2023).

Third, the paradox of helplessness. This story has an interesting paradox: the solution comes when the character no longer looks for a solution in a conventional way. This suggests that the state of "doing nothing" actually allows things to happen on their own. The interview call comes after the character stops struggling and accepts his condition. This paradox illustrates that sometimes calmness and acceptance open up new opportunities rather than efforts that are too forceful. In existential psychology, humans often face limitations (finitude) (Biricheva, 2019). By accepting these limitations, the character achieves peace, which may be why he or she seems better prepared for a job interview. In May's view, our awareness of helplessness can be the starting point for transformation because man can find new forces that are not based on control but on openness.

Fourth, the moment of authenticity. The decision to stop looking and return home is a form of a moment of authenticity. The character courageously faces his reality without hiding his failures or seeking external justification. When the character decides to go home, he does so after the burden of his life feels lighter. This shows that he has made peace with himself, which makes him ready to accept new opportunities (interview calls). This action reflects the fulfillment of one of May's existential duties: accepting our existence as it is, including our imperfections and failures (Ratner, 2019).

Fifth, Solutions Through Chance or Meaning. The interview call that appears can be seen as a coincidence but also as a symbol that change occurs when a person comes to terms with himself and his world. Is the interview call the

result of fate, luck, or a moment of enlightenment? This opens up space for interpretation. From an existential perspective, this moment symbolizes that life has its way of providing solutions when one is ready to accept. In existential psychology, solutions often arise not from hard work or grand plans but from openness to life experiences. When the protagonist accepts his or her circumstances, he becomes more prepared to accept change.

## Discussion

The results of this study revealed that the short story "Sinking" by Neneng Fatimah reflects the complexity of human experience in dealing with anxiety, guilt, and the search for meaning in life. In the literary realm, these kinds of works often reflect the psychological reality experienced by the individual. Through a qualitative analysis approach, we can dive deeper into how the main characters in this story deal with deep inner conflicts. The fear of water experienced by the main character is not just a phobia but a symbol of the inability to face the more significant challenges of life. This creates a picture rich in psychological nuances that can be further analyzed.

The fear of water in the context of this short story can be analyzed through the perspective of existentialist psychologist Rollo May, who argued that anxiety is an integral part of the human experience. This anxiety is not only related to physical fear but also includes a more profound uncertainty about the meaning of life and the responsibilities we carry. In this case, the protagonist's fear can be seen as a manifestation of broader existential anxiety, in which the individual feels trapped in a situation they cannot control. For example, when the protagonist is caught up in a monotonous daily routine, his fear of water could reflect his fear of getting out of his comfort zone and facing the more complex realities of life. In addition, the character's decision to "immerse himself" in diversionary activities shows an attempt to avoid reality. In psychology, this diversion mechanism is often used to cope with stress. However, in this short story's context, the diversion creates a distance between the main character and the reality that must be faced. For example, when the main character prefers to immerse himself in a job or hobby, he or she is trying to escape from the annoying feelings of anxiety and guilt. This suggests that while diversions can provide temporary comfort, individuals ultimately must deal with underlying issues.

The guilt that arises in the context of *umwelt*, *mitwelt*, and *eigenwelt* indicates how individuals connect with the environment, others, and themselves. In the view of existentialist

psychology, guilt often arises when individuals feel incapable of living up to the expectations set by themselves or others. In this short story, the main character may feel guilty for not being able to fulfill his responsibilities as a member of society or an individual who contributes to others. This guilt can interfere with mental and emotional health, which in turn worsens the anxiety experienced.

These findings reinforce the understanding that the human experience is an interrelated and complex process, where each element contributes to the search for meaning and self-understanding. In this context, it is important to recognize that an individual's experience is inseparable from the social context and the environment in which they are located. For example, the main character may feel depressed not only because of his demands but also because of the expectations of the surrounding society. This creates a complicated dynamic in which the individual struggles with himself and the environment's expectations and pressures. One of the study's key findings is that the protagonists' coping mechanisms focus more on emotions than problems. This shows that in the face of stress, individuals often avoid problems rather than confront them head-on. In psychology, this is known as emotional coping, where individuals try to manage their emotions rather than looking for solutions to problems. For example, if the protagonist feels anxious about his future, he may prefer to indulge in a fun activity rather than face a frightening reality. This can be an effective strategy in the short term, but individuals still have to deal with the underlying problem in the long run.

These findings provide a new perspective on how individuals interact with stress and conflict in everyday life. In many cases, individuals may feel trapped in a cycle of avoidance, where they are constantly looking for ways to avoid emotional pain without actually solving the problem. This can be a detrimental pattern where individuals are getting further away from reality and themselves. In the short story "Sink," we can see how the main character gets caught up in this cycle, struggling to find a way out of the disturbing anxiety and guilt. In addition, the emphasis on acceptance and non-action as solutions suggests that sometimes, relinquishing control and accepting circumstances can pave the way for new opportunities. In Rollo May's view, self-acceptance is an important step in dealing with existential anxiety. When individuals can accept the reality of life, they can begin to find meaning and peace in their lives. This does not mean giving in to circumstances but acknowledging that things are beyond our control. In this short story, as the protagonist begins to accept the

uncertainty in his life, he begins to find ways to adapt and face challenges more constructively.

In line with previous research, the findings in this study show that individuals often have difficulty dealing with existential anxiety and inner conflict. For example, research by Zaki Ilman Nasution et al. (2024) emphasizes the importance of freedom and responsibility in creating existential anxiety. However, the study adds a new dimension by showing that more emotional-focused coping mechanisms can be a commonly used strategy for dealing with stress. In this context, we can see that although there are many approaches to dealing with anxiety, each individual has a unique way of coping with the problems they face. In addition, the concept of acceptance as a solution is also in line with Rollo May's view, which emphasizes the importance of courage in accepting the reality of life. In the short story 'Sinking,' we can see how the main character struggles with this acceptance. When he realizes he cannot change the situation, he finds ways to adapt and find meaning in his life. This shows that acceptance is not a sign of weakness but a bold step towards a deeper self-understanding.

The theoretical implication of this study is the affirmation that a multidisciplinary approach, which combines existential psychology and content analysis, can provide deeper insights into the human experience. By combining psychological theory with literary analysis, we can gain a richer understanding of how individuals struggle with anxiety, guilt, and the search for meaning. This shows that literature is not only a form of entertainment but also a tool for understanding the psychological complexity of human beings. This study shows that an understanding of anxiety, guilt, and coping mechanisms can be obtained through narrative analysis in literary works. In this case, the short story 'Sinking' serves as a story and a mirror of the broader human experience. When we read and analyze literary works, we can see reflections on the struggles and searches for meaning experienced by individuals in the real world.

Practically, these findings can be used to help individuals understand and manage anxiety and conflict in their lives. By recognizing that acceptance and non-action can be effective strategies, individuals can be better prepared to face life's challenges more constructively. For example, in the context of therapy, an approach that prioritizes self-acceptance can help individuals overcome the guilt and anxiety they are experiencing. In addition, the results of this study can be a reference for psychology educators and practitioners in designing interventions that support individuals in coping with stress and finding meaning in their lives. In the context of

education, understanding existential anxiety can help educators better understand the challenges their students face. Educators can help students develop better coping skills and find meaning in their learning process by providing the proper support.

Thus, the short story 'Sinking' by Neneng Fatimah is a literary work and a source of the complexity of human experience. Through in-depth analysis, we can see how everyday life's anxiety, guilt, and life's search for meaning are interconnected. This shows understanding obtained and research through literary works that reflect our psychological reality. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the human experience. By combining Rollo May's existentialist psychology and Sigmund Freud's literary analysis, we can gain deeper insights into how individuals deal with anxiety, guilt, and The search for the meaning of life—these findings not only enrich discussions about existential psychology but also provide practical guidance for individuals in facing life's challenges. Thus, the short story "Sinking" becomes more than just a story; it is a way to understand the complexity of the face of uncertainty and the search for meaning.

## CONCLUSION

The short story 'Sinking' presents an in-depth portrait of an individual struggling with existential issues. Through Rollo May's existential psychology, we can see how the protagonist seeks to overcome anxiety, search for meaning, and build more meaningful relationships. The short story "Sinking" provides a complex picture of how a person reacts to stress and conflict. Through the lens of Freud's psychoanalysis, we can see how different the protagonist uses self-defense and coping mechanisms to deal with difficult situations. The story also highlights the importance of self-awareness and willingness to change in overcoming psychological issues.

Although the story's ending gives a little hope, the main character's journey is still long and full of challenges. The solution to the conflict presented emphasizes that the "inactivity" in the protagonist is not a form of resignation but a moment of reflection and acceptance that allows transformation. This story shows how acceptance of circumstances, the courage to make peace with oneself, and calmness in facing life can pave the way for previously unseen solutions. This study can enrich the understanding of human conflicts with themselves and how resolving such conflicts does not always require active action but often requires acceptance and trust in life.

Further research can explore how psychological dynamics in other short stories with similar themes expand understanding human existential struggles. Literary and psychological approaches, as diverse as analysis from a humanistic or behavioristic perspective, can be used to provide broader insights into how fictional characters in literature overcome their internal conflicts.

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