

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH: SPECULATIVE FUTURES IN MATT HAIG'S *THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY*

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Abstract

Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* is about Nora Seed, a woman who feels that her life is meaningless and decides to end it. Instead of dying, she finds herself in the midnight library, a place between life and death where she can try out all the lives she could have lived. This paper explains how the novel fits under speculative futures using Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement. By this theory, the readers could see how the book uses imagination to help readers think about regret, choice and future.

Keywords: Alternative lives, parallel worlds, regret and redemption, liminality.

What if the speculative fiction forces the readers to consider life scenarios or worlds that are marginally different from our own. According to renowned scholar Darko Suvin, speculative fiction induces, "cognitive estrangement", which makes readers to see familiar things in a completely new light and encourages deep reflection on them. This is precisely what Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* accomplishes. Every book in the bizarre library between life and death represents a different version of Nora Seed's life. Nor and also the readers can explore what life might have been like if different decisions had been made in this magical place.

The story's central concept is the library. Nora can pick up a book there, open it, and enter a different version of herself. "There is a library between life and death, and within that library, the shelves go on forever" (11). Since it is not realistic but is conceivable in the mind, this idea is speculative. It enables readers to reflect on our own shortcomings and what our lives might have been like and how readers

made a different decision. The library turns into a risk free environment for testing our futures.

Examining different lives in addition to living in Australian, Nora has tried her hand at being a rock musician, a glaciologist and a pub owner. She learns something about herself from every life. She discovers that even the lives she believed to be ideal have issues. “you can choose choices but not outcomes” (176). This implies that he or she has some control over our decisions; they have not entirely in charge of what occurs next. The book demonstrates that envisioning better futures help them to understand what really matters while it does not guarantee that readers will find the ideal life.

Nora discovers along the way that her first life, despite its flaws, is still worthwhile. She gains the ability to see her life with hope and let go to regret. “The only way to learn is to live” (230). This demonstrates that while planning for the future is valuable, embracing the present and taking advantage of it is what counts most.

Nora revisits her days with the band The Labyrinth during her performance in São Paulo, where the crowd passionately cheers for her. On the inside, though, she feels empty. “It seemed like the applause was for someone else” (150). This scene demonstrates how inner unhappiness cannot be resolved by fame. The purpose of the speculative futures is to guide Nora toward understanding what truly matters to her, not to grant her a flawless life. Nora begins to fade from the library, no longer wishing to live, and this becomes one of the most significant moments. The building trembles, books fly off the shelves and the library begins to collapse when she makes the decision to live at this point. “I would like to survive! I would like to survive!”(235) . She makes a decision to return to her roots at this pivotal moment. These scenes teach Nora to value her own life and demonstrate that speculative futures are more than just entertaining possibilities. “The only way to learn is to live” (230), through witnessing multiple incarnations of her life. Nora discovers that regret serves no purpose and that life is meaningful when it is filled with small moments of connection, love and music.

This is a good place for Suvins concept of cognitive estrangement. Despite not being real, the library has a convincing sense of realism that prompts readers to consider what decisions they might reverse. What could I discover from them? “It is quite a revelation to discover that the place you escaped from is the same place you wanted to escape to”(215). This enables readers to realize that sometimes reader already have enough and they simply need to view life from a different perspective.

The Midnight Library is a great examples of speculative futures, as it presents multiple versions of a single life and allows the protagonist to safely explore them. Together, the scenes of Nora confronting a polar bear, managing a bar, performing live and ultimately deciding on her roots teach that while there is no ideal future, there can be one that is full of hope. “Sometimes just to say you want to live is enough” (238). The speculative futures help readers to appreciate the life

Work Cited:

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