



The Dimensions of Erich Fromm's Concept of Love in Andrea Hirata's Novel Father

Sri Yustina^{a*}, Herlandri Eka Jayaputri^b, Muhammad Fahrudin Aziz^c

^aUniversitas Alkhairaat Palu, Indonesia

^{b,c}Institut Cinta Tanah Air Biak, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the representation of five types of love objects as conceptualised in Erich Fromm's theory—love for others, maternal love, erotic love, self-love, and love for God—in Andrea Hirata's novel "Ayah". Employing a qualitative literary psychology approach with content analysis techniques, the study identified and analysed 38 instances that illustrate various forms of love. The findings reveal the predominance of love for others and erotic love in shaping character dynamics and driving the narrative. The character Sabari emerges as a symbol of transcendental love characterised by sacrifice and sincerity. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the values of love depicted in the novel reflect the complexity of Indonesian emotional and cultural expressions. Theoretically, this study contributes by broadening the understanding of the concept of love in Indonesian literature through Fromm's framework, whilst reinforcing the pertinence of literary psychology in the analysis of local fiction.

KEYWORDS

Literary Psychology;
Theory of Love;
Father;
Transcendental Love.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi lima jenis objek cinta menurut teori Erich Fromm—cinta sesama, cinta ibu, cinta erotis, cinta diri, dan cinta kepada Tuhan—dalam novel "Ayah" karya Andrea Hirata. Melalui pendekatan psikologi sastra kualitatif dengan teknik analisis isi, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis 38 data yang mencerminkan berbagai bentuk cinta. Hasilnya menunjukkan dominasi cinta sesama dan cinta erotis dalam membentuk dinamika tokoh serta penggerak alur cerita. Tokoh Sabari menjadi simbol cinta transenden yang penuh pengorbanan dan ketulusan. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa nilai-nilai cinta dalam novel merefleksikan kompleksitas emosi dan budaya kemanusiaan Indonesia. Kontribusi teoritik penelitian ini terletak pada perluasan horizon pemaknaan cinta dalam sastra Indonesia melalui perspektif Fromm, sekaligus memperkuat relevansi pendekatan psikologi sastra dalam menganalisis karya fiksi lokal.

KATAKUNCI

Psikologi Sastra;
Teori Cinta;
Ayah;
Cinta Transenden.

Contact

Sri Yustina

✉ sriyustina03@gmail.com

🏠 Universitas Alkhairaat Palu, Indonesia

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1. Introduction

Literature serves as a mirror of the intricate nature of human life, imbued with emotion, values, and meaning. Within the literary domain, works such as novels function not only as sources of entertainment but also as profound expressions of the human condition. As Mar et al. (2009) suggest, novels embody the author's thoughts and emotions in response to the realities they inhabit. Accordingly, novels play a vital role in representing the psychological dynamics of human experience, particularly in relation to universal themes such as love.

Love, as portrayed in literature, extends beyond romantic relationships between individuals. It encompasses a wide spectrum of affective bonds, including familial love, friendship, self-love, and spiritual devotion. As a psychological and social phenomenon, love can be explored more thoroughly through a literary psychology lens—one of which is Erich Fromm's theory of love objects. Fromm (2006) conceptualizes love as an active force that connects individuals with others and with the world. His five distinct forms of love—brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love of God—offer a rich theoretical framework for analyzing the emotional landscapes of literary characters.

In this context, Andrea Hirata's novel *Ayah* intricately portrays the complexities of love through its characters. The protagonist, Sabari, exemplifies a form of love characterized by sacrifice and sincerity, even in the absence of reciprocity. The novel interweaves various expressions of love—romantic, platonic, familial, and spiritual—positioning it as a significant subject for contemporary Indonesian literary studies.

Although Fromm's theory has been applied in several literary analyses, prior research has primarily focused on other popular novels, such as *Then & Now* by Arleen Amidjaja Bouti & Ahmadi (2022), *A Heartbreaking Story for Those of Us Who Doubt* by Boy Candra Putri & Indarti (2023), *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* by Paulo Coelho Sebo & Nursi (2024), and *Fi Qalbi Untsa 'Ibriyyah* by Panji Ramdana Wicaksono (2021). In contrast, Andrea Hirata's *Ayah* remains underexplored through the lens of Fromm's love-object theory, revealing a significant research gap.

Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to analyze the representation of Erich Fromm's five love objects in *Ayah* by Andrea Hirata. This inquiry aims to reveal how the narrative constructs and conveys the values of love, and how the characters perceive and enact love in its diverse forms. Ultimately, this study contributes to the advancement of literary psychology and enriches the discourse on humanism within the framework of contemporary Indonesian literature.

1.1. Literary Psychology

The study of literary psychology, as an interdisciplinary approach, has become an essential method for comprehensively analyzing literary texts. By integrating the fields of literature and psychology, this approach explores how psychological phenomena are embedded within narratives. Over time, literary psychology has expanded its focus beyond merely examining characters' psychological states to include the author's psychological background and the reader's emotional and cognitive responses. This broader scope enables a deeper interpretation of motives, inner conflicts, and emotional transformations woven into literary narratives.

From this perspective, literary works are seen as mirrors of both individual and collective psychological experiences. Characters often serve as representations of complex human emotions and mental states—such as trauma, love, anxiety, and the existential quest for meaning (Paris, 1974). Likewise, plot development and setting can symbolically express conscious or unconscious psychological conditions. Accordingly, literary psychological analysis uncovers a wide array of human concerns embedded in texts, offering insights into how individuals process and articulate their lived experiences through the medium of literature.

More than a tool for character analysis, literary psychology seeks to explore the fundamental human values conveyed in literature (Hallman, 2011). These may include existential struggles, hope, love, and fear—universal elements of the human condition (Çakırtaş, 2024). As such, the approach plays a crucial role in fostering empathy and enhancing interpersonal understanding. Literature thus becomes a powerful medium through which readers can access and engage with the inner lives of others, even those from vastly different cultural or experiential backgrounds.

One prominent and frequently applied framework within literary psychology is Erich Fromm's theory of love. Fromm conceptualizes love not as a mere spontaneous emotion but as an art that demands knowledge, effort, and responsibility. In *The Art of Loving*, Fromm (2006) asserts that authentic love reflects emotional and spiritual maturity. Consequently, love in literature should be examined as a multifaceted expression of human experience, rather than a simplistic or superficial romantic motif.

Fromm's theory provides a humanistic lens through which to understand character development and interpersonal relationships in literature. He emphasizes that love is integral to self-actualization—a process involving self-awareness, altruism, and the cultivation of respectful and meaningful connections. When employed in literary analysis, Fromm's theory facilitates a more nuanced reading of how characters perceive, pursue, and embody love. Ultimately, a literary psychological analysis grounded in Fromm's perspective offers a richer interpretation of literary texts and deepens our appreciation for the human values they seek to communicate.

1.2. Erich Fromm's Objects of Love

Fromm (2006), a prominent humanist philosopher and psychoanalyst, categorizes love into five fundamental forms: brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love of God. Each type of love reflects a core dimension of human existence, encompassing both social and spiritual relationships. Brotherly love embodies solidarity, empathy, and concern for others, while motherly love represents unconditional care, protection, and nurturing generosity.

These five forms of love, according to Fromm, are not isolated or compartmentalized experiences; rather, they are interconnected and together constitute an integrated aspect of an individual's psychological framework. An imbalance in one form may indicate deeper issues in personality development or social interaction. For instance, erotic love without the presence of self-love or brotherly love may devolve into possessiveness or emotional dependency. Hence, the harmonious integration of all five forms of love is essential to fostering psychologically healthy and ethically sound relationships, both on a personal and communal level.

Fromm (2006) further emphasizes that love is not merely a passive feeling or spontaneous emotion, but an active capacity, a character orientation, and a moral commitment toward others. In this view, to love is to understand, to care, and to act responsibly for the benefit of another. Love, as Fromm posits, is a skill that must be cultivated through continuous effort and self-awareness. This conceptualization positions love as a fundamental ethical principle in human life, extending beyond romantic attachments to include love for all people—and indeed, for life itself.

Applied to literary analysis, Fromm's theory of love offers a robust framework for examining the emotional and relational dynamics between characters. By tracing the presence—or absence—of these various forms of love, readers can uncover deeper layers of character development, internal conflict, and narrative progression. For example, a character's disproportionate emphasis on erotic love at the expense of self-love might result in emotional turmoil, failed relationships, or moral decline. Conversely, balanced and reciprocal expressions of love may serve as symbols of hope, resilience, and shared humanity within the text, particularly in contexts marked by social adversity.

Thus, employing Fromm's love-object theory in literary criticism not only enhances interpretations of character and conflict but also reveals the broader human values embedded in literary texts. Literature, as a reflection of the human condition, becomes a fertile ground for exploring how love is pursued, misinterpreted, or sacrificed. This approach underscores that love in literature transcends the romantic; it functions as a philosophical and ethical construct that illuminates the complexities of human interaction, self-understanding, and the pursuit of meaningful connection.

1.3. Applying Fromm's Theory of Love in Andrea Hirata's *Ayah*

Numerous prior studies have applied Erich Fromm's theory of love to analyze literary works, particularly popular novels. For instance, Bouti & Ahmadi (2022) examined *Then & Now* by Arleen Amidjaja and found that the protagonist demonstrates strong manifestations of mutual love and self-love in response to past trauma. Similarly, Putri & Indarti (2023), in their study of Boy Candra's *Kisah yang Pilu untuk Kita yang Ragu*, concluded that erotic love and mutual love are the most dominant love objects shaping the characters' psychological development. These findings underscore the utility of Fromm's five love objects as an effective conceptual framework for understanding character formation and emotional conflict in literature. Wicaksono (2021) expanded this perspective by exploring interfaith tensions in *Fi Qalbi Untsa 'Ibriyyah*, illustrating how love that transcends religious boundaries creates a conflict between personal desire and communal norms. This work reaffirms Fromm's assertion that love functions not only as interpersonal affection but also as a transformative social and spiritual force.

On a more theoretical level, Erina (2023) conducted a comparative study of love as conceptualized by Fromm and Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, emphasizing love's foundational role in shaping spiritual and communal bonds. Arini (2023) further highlighted the importance of understanding Fromm's conception of love to foster healthy, egalitarian romantic relationships. Meanwhile, Sebo & Nursi (2024), in their analysis of Paulo Coelho's *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, demonstrated that the protagonist's inner turmoil stems from a tension between erotic love and divine love. Collectively, these studies validate Fromm's relevance in interpreting emotional complexity and psychological resolution in literary narratives.

Despite these scholarly developments, there remains a notable lack of research applying Fromm's love-object theory to Andrea Hirata's novel *Ayah*. Existing studies on *Ayah* have primarily focused on stylistic analysis (Adawiyah et al., 2013; Lande et al., 2018; Ramadhayanti et al., 2021), educational values (Ellawati et al., 2023; Jayanti et al., 2023; Sari, 2020; Sulyanah, 2017), and the portrayal of exemplary character traits (Dewi & Subandiyah, 2024; Hasanuddin, 2019; Hasniyati, 2018; Kusuma et al., 2023), with little attention given to the novel's representation of love through the lens of Fromm's psychological framework.

This research gap signals the need for a more nuanced literary psychological analysis of *Ayah* using Fromm's theory of love. The novel presents a rich exploration of love in its diverse forms—ranging from a father's devotion to his child, unconditional romantic love, to acts of sacrifice and loyalty within social relationships—all of which align closely with Fromm's five love objects. The protagonist, Sabari, embodies complex emotional struggles and illustrates the profound human endeavor to express love with sincerity, devotion, and transcendence.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, employing a literary psychology framework as its primary analytical foundation. This methodology was selected to enable an in-depth and systematic examination of the psychological dynamics of literary characters, with particular focus on the expression of love as a multifaceted humanistic value. As Paris (1974) explains, literary psychology is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates psychological theory and literary analysis to uncover the internal structures and emotional conflicts of characters within narrative texts. Within this framework, Erich Fromm's theory of love is utilized as a conceptual lens to explore the manifestations of love in Andrea Hirata's novel *Ayah*, focusing specifically on the protagonist, Sabari, who demonstrates diverse and profound expressions of love.

The material object of this research is Hirata's *Ayah* (2015), a novel that thematically captures the complexity of emotional relationships among characters. The formal object is the representation of Erich Fromm's five forms of love: brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love of God. The primary data source comprises the novel's narrative elements—including narration, dialogue, and descriptive passages—that convey the psychological dimensions and values of love. Data were collected through intensive close reading, aiming to identify narrative segments that reflect psychological meaning and expressions of love. These segments were then classified according to Fromm's typology and analyzed in relation to character interactions, situational contexts, and their impact on Sabari's psychological development.

The analytical procedure employed thematic content analysis, conducted in four stages: (1) data reduction, (2) categorization based on Fromm's five love objects, (3) interpretation of character actions and conflicts, and (4) conclusion-drawing regarding the narrative function of love values within the novel. The validity of the data was ensured through theoretical triangulation, by comparing interpretations derived from Fromm's framework with alternative perspectives from other literary psychology theories. Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted to minimize subjectivity and enhance analytical reliability. Through this approach, the study aims to contribute to the development of literary psychology, particularly in deepening our understanding of how love, as both a psychological construct and an ethical value, is represented in contemporary Indonesian literature.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Representation of Erich Fromm's Five Forms of Love in Andrea Hirata's Novel *Ayah*

This study seeks to identify and describe the representation of the five types of love objects as conceptualized in Erich Fromm's theory—brotherly love, motherly love, erotic

love, self-love, and love of God—as portrayed in Andrea Hirata’s novel *Ayah*. Through intensive textual analysis and close reading of the narrative, a total of 38 instances reflecting various forms of love were identified. These instances are categorized as follows: brotherly love (15 items), motherly love (1 item), erotic love (13 items), self-love (8 items), and love of God (1 item).

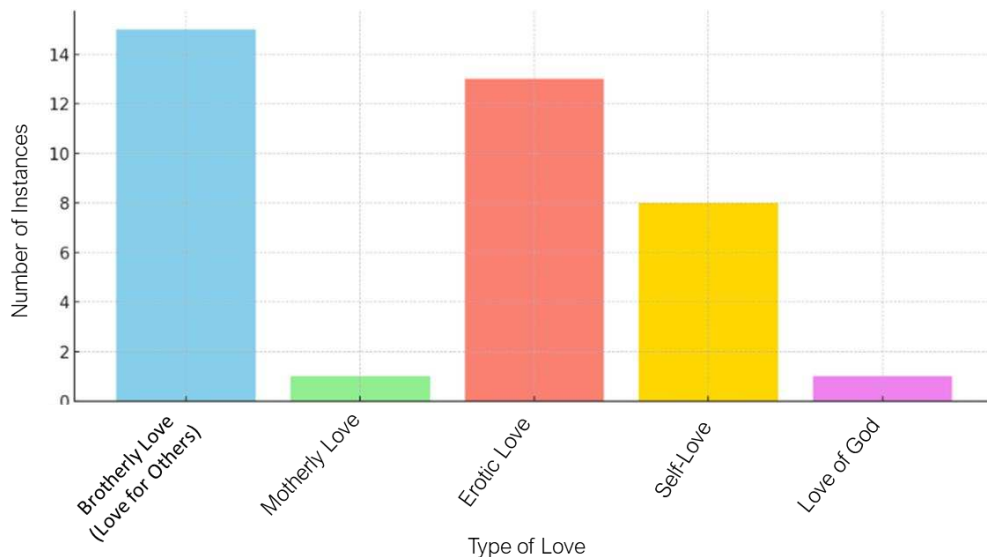


Figure 1. Distribution of Erich Fromm's Five Forms of Love in Andrea Hirata's Novel *Ayah* (Father)

3.1.1. Representation of Brotherly Love

Brotherly love emerges as the most prominently represented form of love in *Ayah*, with 15 identified instances. This type of love is expressed through acts of care, solidarity, and empathy among the characters in their everyday social interactions. For example, in the passage:

“Because there are so many schoolchildren, the government must build schools, and building schools certainly requires concrete blocks, according to the genius Markoni”

(p. 26)

Markoni expresses concern for the community’s educational needs, demonstrating social responsibility and a collective sense of care. Another instance of brotherly love is reflected in the line:

“Later, let’s invite our neighbor, Miru, to listen to the radio at our house...”

(p. 45)

which illustrates a simple yet meaningful gesture of sharing joy and inclusivity. Characters such as *Tamat*, *Ukun*, and *Toharum* also embody this form of love through their consistent concern for Sabari, particularly in response to the emotional pain he endures due to his unrequited love for Lena. These acts of empathy and moral support

serve as clear manifestations of brotherly love, reinforcing the communal and altruistic values embedded in the narrative.

3.1.2. Representation of Motherly Love

Motherly love in *Ayah* is expressed through a tender and emotionally significant relationship between a child and his mother, though it is depicted only once in the narrative. This is illustrated in the following passage:

“When the situation was worrying, Amiru lay beside his mother, kissing her hand and praying for her speedy recovery”

(p. 14)

This scene exemplifies the compassionate, nurturing, and sacrificial qualities that define motherly love in Fromm's theory. Although the expression of love is shown from the child to the mother, it still embodies the essence of warmth and unconditional care. Despite appearing only once, this portrayal of motherly love serves a powerful symbolic function. Amiru's gentle gestures, heartfelt prayers, and emotional concern reflect a deeply affectionate bond, aligned with Fromm's conception of motherly love as protective, giving, and unwavering.

3.1.3. Representation of Erotic Love

Erotic love is prominently featured in the novel, with a total of 13 instances identified. The character of Sabari serves as the central figure through which this form of love is expressed, primarily through his intense, unwavering devotion to Lena. For instance:

“Sabari was once again assaulted by a charm that left him unable to control himself...”

(p. 34)

“His concept of life was that loving someone was extraordinary, even if the loved one felt insecure”

(p. 35).

These passages reveal that Sabari's erotic love transcends mere physical attraction, embodying emotional depth and existential commitment. Erotic love emerges as a dominant theme, driving the plot and underpinning Sabari's psychological struggle throughout the narrative. His experience reflects emotional ambivalence—hopeful devotion on one side, and unreciprocated longing on the other—resulting in inner turmoil and existential suffering.

Sabari's internal conflict illustrates how erotic love can become a profound psychological struggle, especially when met with imbalance and rejection. His love for Lena is portrayed as both unconditional and nearly spiritual, capturing the complexity of

human emotion within a cultural context that deeply values loyalty, endurance, and emotional sincerity.

3.1.4. Representation of Love for God

Love for God is the least frequently represented form of love in *Ayah*, appearing only once throughout the narrative. This form of love is implicitly expressed through sincere prayer and spiritual hope, as illustrated in the following passage:

“Amiru kissed his mother’s hand and prayed that she would soon recover”

(p. 14)

Although not a dominant theme, this instance reflects the character’s spiritual dimension in confronting suffering and the limitations of human existence. In this context, love for God emerges as a symbol of hope, inner strength, and acceptance of fate. While it is not overtly depicted, the presence of religious values and emotional resilience suggests an underlying spirituality consistent with the broader cultural and religious worldview of Indonesian society.

The findings of this study indicate that Andrea Hirata’s novel *Ayah* embodies a wide spectrum of love values, expressed through both social and personal relationships. The prevalence of brotherly love and erotic love reflects the narrative’s emphasis on interpersonal bonds, emotional sacrifice, and human connection. The presence of self-love highlights the importance of self-respect and individual dignity as essential foundations for forming healthy and balanced relationships. While motherly love and love for God appear less frequently, their symbolic presence reinforces the novel’s emotional depth and moral underpinnings.

This study demonstrates that the five forms of love proposed by Erich Fromm are not only identifiable in the literary text but also serve as powerful tools for interpreting the characters’ psychological complexity. Fromm’s theory proves to be a rich and relevant conceptual framework for analyzing the emotional dynamics and humanistic values embedded in contemporary Indonesian literature. This study finds that Andrea Hirata’s *Ayah* explicitly and implicitly represents the five love objects formulated by Erich Fromm: brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love for God. Of the 38 textual references identified, brotherly love is the most prevalent (15 instances), followed by erotic love (13), self-love (8), and motherly love and love for God (one each).

The predominance of love for others suggests that *Ayah* is not solely a romantic narrative but also a literary portrayal of social ethics and human solidarity. Characters such as Sabari, Tamat, Ukun, and Toharum consistently express empathy, emotional support, and communal care. Erotic love, as depicted in the emotionally charged relationship between Sabari and Lena, encompasses not only desire and longing but

also suffering, loyalty, and personal sacrifice. Self-love emerges through the characters' journeys toward self-acceptance, educational aspirations, and preservation of moral integrity despite their life challenges. Though less frequent, motherly love and love for God still play significant symbolic roles, emphasizing the spiritual and ethical foundations embedded in the cultural context.

3.2. Integration of Love Objects in Interpersonal Relationships and Cultural Narrative

The five forms of love in *Ayah* do not exist in isolation but are deeply interwoven into the emotional and relational fabric of the narrative. Sabari, as the central character, exemplifies this integration: he expresses erotic love toward Lena with sincerity and sacrifice, exhibits paternal and nurturing love for his daughter Amiru that merges elements of mutual and motherly love, and demonstrates self-love through his unwavering moral convictions and sense of identity. Meanwhile, the supporting characters' relationships reflect brotherly love through solidarity, compassion, and mutual support, particularly in times of hardship.

On a broader cultural level, Hirata's novel presents Indonesian society as a space rich in compassion, collectivism, and spirituality. The values of perseverance, devotion, and emotional resilience—embodied in the five love objects—form the ethical core of human relationships in the story. The novel portrays love not merely as an individual sentiment but as a social and transcendent force, reflecting the complexities of human connection within a culturally grounded narrative. In doing so, *Ayah* illustrates how love, in its many forms, mirrors the richness and depth of Indonesian cultural identity.

3.3. The Meaning of Love as a Transcendent Force through Sabari and Other Characters

Sabari emerges as the central figure exemplifying love as a transcendent force—one that surpasses logic, egoism, and even physical and emotional suffering. His unwavering devotion to Lena, shown through persistent patience and sacrifice despite continual rejection, reflects a spiritual dimension of love that asks for nothing in return. Likewise, his unconditional affection for his child—despite not being recognized as the biological father—underscores the notion that genuine love is not grounded in possession, but in devotion and selfless care.

Supporting characters also reinforce this transcendent quality of love. Although minor in terms of narrative prominence, Tamat and Ukun embody loyalty and moral support that exemplify love for others. Their presence reflects communal solidarity and shared humanity within a close-knit society. Simple yet meaningful actions—such as inviting a neighbor to listen to the radio, offering comfort during sorrow, or giving gentle

reminders—are expressions of love rooted not in individualism, but in collective care and spiritual interconnectedness.

Thus, Andrea Hirata's *Ayah* illustrates that, within the Indonesian cultural context, love is not merely a personal emotion but a manifestation of life ethics, social responsibility, and spirituality. Love operates as a transcendent force that motivates characters to endure hardship, act with compassion, and live in alignment with deeply held values.

3.4. Theoretical Contribution and the Development of Local Literary Psychology

By applying Erich Fromm's theory of love, this study contributes significantly to the development of literary psychology within the field of Indonesian literary studies. While traditional approaches in literary psychology have largely drawn on Freud, Jung, or Adler—focusing on unconscious drives or archetypal structures—Fromm's framework introduces a more humanistic and ethical interpretive model. Centered on the importance of social relationships and emotional maturity, Fromm's theory is particularly compatible with the relational and spiritual values embedded in Indonesian culture.

This research expands the scope of local literary analysis by positioning love as a complex, multidimensional analytical category. Rather than treating love merely as a narrative theme, the study approaches it as a lens through which to understand character development, power dynamics, and the broader socio-cultural structures within the text. As such, Fromm's framework provides not only theoretical depth but also practical applicability for analyzing other Indonesian literary works that engage with humanistic values.

In this way, the present study not only addresses the scholarly gap in examining *Ayah* through the lens of Fromm's psychology of love but also affirms the importance of love as a critical category for interpreting Indonesian literature. It underscores how love—understood in its ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions—can enrich our understanding of human behavior and values in literary contexts.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the representation of Erich Fromm's five types of love in Andrea Hirata's novel *Ayah* (Father), exploring how these forms of love are integrated into character relationships and the broader Indonesian cultural narrative. The research also seeks to uncover the meaning of love as a transcendent force underlying acts of human sacrifice, sincerity, and devotion. In addition, it contributes theoretically to Indonesian literary studies by applying a literary psychology framework rooted in Fromm's humanistic theory of love.

The findings reveal that Fromm's five categories of love—brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love of God—are both explicitly and implicitly represented throughout the novel. Of the 38 instances identified, brotherly love is the most frequently depicted (15 instances), followed by erotic love (13), self-love (8), and motherly love and love of God with one instance each. This distribution indicates that *Ayah* is not merely a story of romantic love, but a deeply layered narrative that reflects the social, spiritual, and humanistic values embedded within Indonesian culture.

These five forms of love are intricately interwoven in the relationships among the characters. The protagonist, Sabari, serves as the central embodiment of transcendent love—his unwavering loyalty and selfless sacrifices for Lena and her child exemplify a form of love that transcends rationality and personal ego. In this context, love is not only a thematic device but also a moral and spiritual structure that unifies the narrative and shapes the characters' identities. From a theoretical perspective, the application of Fromm's psychology of love offers a novel contribution to Indonesian literary criticism by framing love as a multidimensional concept within local literary expression. The study also demonstrates the value of humanistic and socially grounded approaches for analyzing character development and relationship dynamics in contemporary Indonesian literature.

However, this study has several limitations. It focuses exclusively on a single literary text and presents limited representation of certain love types, such as motherly love and love of God. Moreover, the qualitative and interpretive nature of the analysis invites a degree of subjectivity that may vary depending on the researcher's cultural background or theoretical orientation. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to expand the scope by analyzing other Indonesian literary works across genres and settings, to assess the consistency or variability of love representations in diverse socio-cultural contexts. A cross-theoretical approach—such as combining Fromm's theory with positive psychology or the sociology of literature—may also offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding love as a literary and cultural construct.

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