

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Research**

Literature refers to anything related to written works that are considered to have artistic or intellectual value. It is a broad term that covers various forms of literary work including novels, poetry, essays, and more. Literature frequently reflects human experience and the essential aspects of culture or society. Literary works are based not only on imagination but also on a blend of reality and fantasy. Besides that, Wellek and Warren (1954) describe imaginative or fictional works that use exquisite language as a creative expression referred to as literature. The prose is one sort of literary work and is classified into various types, one of which is the novel.

Novels are prose works with fully developed tale components that address societal issues. In the novel, the author creates a new world with the lives of the characters by combining their imagination with depictions of life around them. It also expresses the view in a way with the expectation that what happened may not occur subsequently. In line with that, Ahyar (2019) explained that the authors usually try to direct their readers to hidden messages in a novel. Moreover, novels are presented in a complex conflict with a complete story element such as intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

According to the explanation above, there is one of the novels that the researcher wants to analyze entitled “Anxious People” written by Fredrik Backman and it has interesting psychological phenomena. The Swedish version of the novel was published in 2019 and the English version was published universally in 2021. The novel successfully sold 4,168 copies and was adapted into a television series on Netflix in December 2021 with the same title. Moreover, New York Times selected this novel as one of the best books of the year in 2020. “Anxious People” is about the enduring strength of friendship, forgiveness, and hope the things that keep us alive even in the most trying of circumstances. The story begins with eight strangers becoming unlikely friends because of a hostage situation a careless bank thief set up. Lastly, Fredrik Backman emphasizes how willing people are to discuss their mental health openly and seek treatment for it.

Fredrik Backman is a Swedish writer who was born on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1981 in Stockholm, Sweden. He was known for his emotionally resonant and thought-provoking novels. He initially worked as a columnist and blogger before gaining widespread recognition as a novelist. There are some notable of his works such as “A Man Called Ove” (2012), “My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She’s Sorry” (2013), “Britt-Marie Was Here” (2016), “Beartown” (2017), and “Anxious People”(2019). Fredrik Backman has a long life story and it took several years to become the successful writer he is today. He was a college dropout who studied religion in Sweden. He continued his life as a freelance writer for Moore Magazine and Swedish newspaper Helsingborgs Dagblad.

One of the aspects influencing Fredrick's works is the aspect of psychology. Psychology is the study of the human mind and behavior. It investigates human cognition, emotion, and behavior in addition to the fundamental mechanisms that give rise to these states of being. Therefore, the psychology approach is suitable for use in this research by Sigmund Freud. S. Freud (1989) stated that the human personality is divided into the id, ego, and superego. The id is a bad desire of humans without regard to morality. The ego is the rational mind of humans that developed to mediate between the demands of the id and the constraints of reality. The superego is a part of the human mind that represents society's moral standards and values. An imbalance of these three components will cause psychological issues.

Psychological issues are issues that affect the way humans think, feel, and behave. Psychological issues are complicated and frequently caused by various factors. It can involve emotions such as melancholy, anxiety, and trouble concentrating. There are some serious cases of psychological issues such as mental illness, panic attacks, trauma, and depression. As experienced by an American actress named Constance Wu, who tried to commit suicide due to negative comments. This was revealed in the news dated July 15, 2022, on the news platform The Jakarta Post. She experienced excessive stress and depression due to negative comments typed by netizens on social media, which could be called cyberbullying.

"I started feeling like **I didn't even deserve to live anymore**. That I was a disgrace to AsAms, **and they'd be better off without me.**" Wu said in a statement posted on Twitter. (The Jakarta Post, 2022)

The quotation above occurred to US actress Constance Wu attempted suicide in 2019. She came under fire for comments she made on Twitter about the sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*, in which she had starred. Wu decided to end her own life after receiving online criticism from users who deemed the comments offensive. People who experience cyberbullying are frequently not happy and they try to vent their rage on trivial things. The conflicts from the id, ego, and superego in the context of suicide occur when the basic urges or bad desire (id) tried to end suffering conflict with moral judgments (superego) and the external reality faced (ego). The conflict can lead to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and the inability to find a suitable solution, which can ultimately make an individual want to suicide. Wu put her career on hold and quit social media to concentrate on her mental health after surviving the suicide attempt.

“Anxious People” is a novel that explores how each character’s anxiety and past trauma shape their decisions. It emphasizes how willing people are to discuss their mental health openly and seek treatment for it. Therefore, the novel raises a lot of psychological issues, especially in defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are one of the phenomena that reveal a character’s psychology. In other words, some people act in different ways to hide from their fears, anxieties, and negative thoughts. Unconsciously, people would defend themselves against the undesirable emotions. Many factors cause humans to choose to activate defense mechanisms within themselves as a strategy to survive pain. The pain or anxiety experienced can be from personal factors, family factors, environmental factors, and others.

One type of defense mechanism is seen in Jim's character, as a husband and father who loves his family. Until one day, he sat with Jack in the hospital that night, Jim felt the silence and despair come over him like a frozen abyss. Full of anger, Jim expressed his disbelief at what they had experienced to Jack. His wife's death made Jim angry with God. Jim believes his wife has become a good person by serving God as a priest. Jim's anger can be seen in the quote below.

**“Jim aged badly after she died, became a lesser man, never quite able to breathe back in all the air that had gone out of him. When he sat in the hospital that night, life felt like an icy crevice, and when he lost his grip on the edge and slipped down into the darkness inside him, he whispered angrily to Jack: “I’ve tried talking to God, I really have tried, but what sort of God makes a priest this sick? She’s never done anything but good for other people, so what sort of God gives an illness like this to her?!”**(Backman, 2021,p.201)

From the quotation above, Jim's actions demonstrate the existence of a defense mechanism called displacement. In line with that, Freud (1989) revealed that displacement is one defense mechanism involves transferring id impulses from threatening or unavailable objects to available objects. This becomes clear when Jim expresses his anger to Jack about the perceived injustice by saying **“I’ve tried talking to God, I really have tried, but what kind of God would make a priest this sick?”**. Jim turns his frustration and helplessness over his wife's death onto a more abstract and easier to blame entity, namely God. Apart from that, Jim felt helpless in facing the reality of losing his wife which caused him to fall into the darkness of his own emotions. When his life felt like **“an icy crevice,”** and when he **“slipped down into the darkness inside him”** it showed the depth of the pain and loss he experienced. Therefore, displacement becomes a defense mechanism that allows Jim to vent his emotions.

Numerous researchers have explored the defense mechanism in the novel. The researchers used two previous studies of defense mechanisms with different data sources. The first article was written by Febriana and Darma (2022) which aims to identify the type of anxiety and the defense mechanism that Jacob Barber encounters in William Landay's novel *Defending Jacob*. The methodology used in this study is qualitative. The theories of Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud were applied. According to the study's findings, Jacob Barber deals with three different kinds of anxiety. It indicates realistic, moral, and neurotic anxiety. He also employs five different types of defense mechanisms to deal with his anxiety: denial, projection, displacement, rationalization, and reaction formation.

The second article was written by Daulay and Qurani (2022). The researchers discussed Sumarni's ego defense mechanisms in the novel "The Years of the Voiceless" by Okky Madasari. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis was one of the main theories in this study. The data are provided in descriptively, therefore this study is categorized as qualitative research. The researchers read the book numerous times to gather data and look for supporting evidence before taking notes. The findings of this study demonstrated that Sumarni engages in six defense mechanisms to deal with the demands of reality and the tension that exists between the desires of the id and the opposition of the super ego. There are sublimation, rationalization, projection, repression, apathy, and aggression.

The two previous studies used the same approach and one of them used the theory of Sigmund Freud regarding defense mechanisms. However, the data

sources used are different; the first research uses “William Landay’s” novel, while the second research uses “The Years of the Voiceless” novel. Both previous also have different analyses and theories. First, use the anxiety and defense mechanism theory by Sigmund and Anna Freud. Meanwhile, another study only analyzed defense mechanisms by Sigmund Freud. The present studies and previous studies used different data sources and theories to differences. The novel “Anxious People” is used as the data source for the present study. It was chosen because the novel contained numerous expressions of defense mechanisms and showed how they were performed by the characters through the bad experiences they experienced. Moreover, the novel “Anxious People” is the newest novel released in 2021 and not many people have analyzed this novel using the theory of psychology developed by S. Freud (1989) and A. Freud (1993). From the phenomena, the researcher is interested in conducting the research with the title “DEFENSE MECHANISM IN “ANXIOUS PEOPLE” NOVEL BY FREDRIK BACKMAN: A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH.”

## **1.2 Identification of the Problem**

According to the background, there are some identification of the problem:

1. Psychology issues of the major characters found in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman.
2. Excessive anxiety, fear, and threatened conditions are experienced by major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman.
3. The causes of defense mechanisms of major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman

4. The types of defense mechanisms experienced by major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman.
5. The motives of defense mechanisms performed by major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman.

### **1.3 Limitation of the Problem**

The following are the limitations of the problem:

1. The types of defense mechanisms experienced by major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman.
2. The motives of defense mechanisms are performed by major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman.

### **1.4 Formulation of the Problem**

Regarding the problem that has been limited, the researcher formulated several problems as follows:

1. What are the types of defense mechanisms experienced by major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman?
2. What are the motives of major characters performed defense mechanisms in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman?

### **1.5 Objective of the Research**

The researcher finds some objectives for why the researcher does this study.

Below are some reasons:

1. To discover the defense mechanisms experienced by major characters in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman



2. To examine the motives of major characters performed defense mechanisms in “Anxious People” novel by Fredrik Backman.

## **1.6 Significance of the Problem**

### **1. Theoretical Significance**

Theoretically, this research contributes knowledge about the psychology of literature in literary works and adds to the understanding of personality structure and self-defense mechanisms as well as the impact felt by someone who applies it in everyday life. The researcher hopes that this study will someday be compared to and referenced.

### **2. Practical Significance**

This research is an understanding of how to use it is essential for practice. The findings, in the researcher’s opinion, will benefit readers. This study provides a reference for researchers to use in solving problems related to literary psychology. This research is useful in learning literature, especially the elements of character and conflict from a psychological perspective. In real life, this research serves to help deal with various unpleasant situations and survive these situations by using defense mechanisms.

## 1.7 Definition of Key Terms

**Psychology Approach** : Psychology is the study of human behavior and mental processes, in the way hormones and psychological mechanisms interact. It includes an understanding of how people think, feel, and act, the factors that influence their behavior, and their interaction with their environment. Psychology includes research on various aspects of human life, including individual development, mental health, motivation, personality, and social interactions. The main goal is to study human behavior, their relationships with other people, and learn how they can achieve personal and social well-being.

**Personality** : Personality refers to the unique array of psychological characteristics that shape an individual's identity. It includes various aspects such as behavioral patterns, attitudes, emotional tendencies, and the way an individual interacts with the surrounding environment. Personality is formed by a

combination of genetic factors, life experiences, and environment. Personality is relatively consistent over long periods, however it can also change depending on the life experience and conditions of an individual. Thus, personality reflects the unique essence of the individual and plays a central role in shaping the way an individual understands and interacts with the environment.

**Defense Mechanisms** : Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies used by individuals to reduce anxiety, overcome internal conflicts, and protect individuals from unwanted or unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or urges. This mechanism operates unconsciously and often arises in response to psychological conflicts faced by the individual. Defense mechanisms can vary from individual to individual, depending on life experiences, psychological conditions, and chosen coping strategies. Defense mechanisms are common phenomena however, when they are overused, they can cause impulsive, and neurotic behavior.