

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher explains the background and the main points that guide the research. It includes the identification and limitation of the problem, the formulation and objective of the research, and the significance of the research. This chapter also gives the definition of key terms that are used in the analysis. All of these parts are meant to give a clear starting point and to show why the research on anxiety and defense mechanisms in “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides is important. The details are explained in the following sections.

1.1 Background of the Research

Literature has always been a fascinating subject of discussion, and as long as people appreciate literary works, conversation about it will continue. These works can be defined as written pieces or creative expression born from human imagination. The main purpose of literature is to describe and understand human life, which is always changing (Kasmawati et al., 2023). Because of this, literature is closely connected to everyday experiences including the emotions and challenges people face. Through various themes and characters, literature often explores how individuals handle their struggles, make difficult choices and cope with emotional difficulties. Many stories show characters dealing with these problems much like people do in real life.

In daily life, everyone hopes to be happy and free from fear, but it is impossible to avoid feelings of anxiety and worry. Stress and emotional struggles are a natural part of human life, and different people react to them in different ways

(Puspito & Widyaningrum, 2020). Some people openly express their emotions, while others may try to hide or ignore their feelings. One example of anxiety that people experience in everyday life can be seen in the article from the National Alliance on Mental Illness titled “My Journey with Anxiety and Panic Disorder” by Duckworth (2023). In the article, one patient shared her experience with anxiety and panic disorder. She remembered shaking on a small boat travelling from island to island, convinced it would sink and they would drown. She felt a constant fear, and as a result, she could not sleep well, ate little, and felt psychically shaken during the trip. From this it is clear that her anxiety led to panic disorder. It all started with her fear of drowning while on the boat. As her anxiety grew, she began having trouble breathing and her heart raced. When these symptoms became too difficult to manage, she decided to get help and eventually found support through the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Another example comes from a study by Sano Nakao & Reinders (2022), which looked at Japanese high school named Taiga, who felt extreme anxiety whenever he had to speak English in front of his class. To deal with this fear, Taiga often blamed external factors, like the difficulty of English or his teacher’s high expectations, instead of addressing his own anxiety. In another case, during the global health crisis, a consultant psychiatrist exhibited denial by refusing to accept the reality of the virus’s threat. Despite increasing reports of the virus spreading globally, he dismissed the advised colleagues against implementing safety measures. This behavior exemplifies and distressing feelings. Such denial can offer temporary relief but may hinder appropriate responses to real threats (Walker &

McCabe, 2021). These examples show how people use defense mechanism, like denial and rationalization, to cope with anxiety and emotional distress.

Literature often explores these defense mechanisms by showing how characters deal with their problems. Many stories focus on how people react to fear, sadness, or anxiety, revealing the ways they try to protect themselves emotionally. By reading literary works, people can better understand how these defense mechanisms work in real life. Literature not only entertains but also helps readers reflect on their own emotions and behaviors, making it a valuable tool for learning about human psychology. Literature itself consists of various forms, including novels, poetry, drama, and short stories each offering unique ways to express human emotions and experiences. In this research, the focus was on the novel as a literary form.

One novel that deeply examines psychological struggles is *The Silent Patient*. *The Silent Patient* is a novel written by Alex Michaelides, an author from Britain with Cypriot background. Since it was published in 2019, the novel has become very popular and reached best seller status in many countries. It received a lot of attention because of its interesting story and surprising ending. The novel is mostly set in London and has been praised for its portrayal of psychological problems. Because of its success and strong focus on human behavior, *The Silent Patient* is often discussed in both literary and psychological studies. This novel follows Alicia Berenson, a famous painter who suddenly stops speaking after being accused of murdering her husband. Her silence becomes the central mystery, drawing the attention of Theo Faber, a psychotherapist determined to uncover the

truth behind her trauma. The story thoroughly explores themes of anxiety and various defense mechanisms, making it a suitable subject for psychological analysis. In this research, *The Silent Patient* was analyzed to explore the types of anxiety rooted in trauma, fear, and emotional insecurity as reflected through the characters' behaviors, as well as the defense mechanisms employed by the characters as psychological responses to anxiety and emotional conflicts in "*The Silent Patient*" novel by Alex Michaelides. This analysis provided a deeper understanding of the psychological struggles experienced by the characters and the ways in which they attempted to cope with anxiety. In *The Silent Patient*, the protagonist Theo is portrayed as dealing with neurotic anxiety, which manifests as a deep sense of fear and unease that has been present since childhood. His anxiety is not connected to a specific event but instead arises from an internalized sense of insecurity, making him feel anxious even without an immediate threat. This illustrates how neurotic anxiety can shape a person's emotions and thoughts over time. To manage this condition, Theo channels his inner conflict into a constructive outlet by pursuing a career in psychotherapy. Rather than allowing his distress to control him, he transforms it into motivation to understand the human mind and to help others. This process reflects the defense mechanism of sublimation, where negative emotions or impulses are redirected into meaningful and socially acceptable activities. In Theo's case, his personal struggles become the driving force behind his professional path, showing how sublimation can serve as an effective way to cope with anxiety while also benefiting others.

Many other researchers have also studied anxiety and defense mechanism in various novels. This research used several journal articles as research references and comparison materials. The first research was by Supiansyah et al. (2023) entitled “The Anxiety and Defense Mechanism on Claireece Precious Jones’ Character in Precious Film (2009)”. The purpose of this research was to identify the types of anxiety experienced by Claireece Precious Jones in the Precious film and to explain how she responded to her anxiety using defense mechanisms. The data were analyzed using Sigmund Freud’s theory of anxiety and defense mechanism. This research used a qualitative method, the data came from dialogues in the film script. The findings revealed that Claireece experienced three types of anxiety. First, she suffered from neurotic anxiety, which was shown through hallucinations. This anxiety occurred when she had flashbacks of being beaten and scolded by her mother at home. Second, she felt moral anxiety, which was indicated by feelings of guilt and failure to act according to moral standards. Third, she experienced realistic anxiety, which was evident when she avoided her teacher because she was afraid of being beaten and scolded by her mother if she went out to meet her. To cope with her anxiety, Claireece used five defense mechanisms: repression, denial, projection, reaction formation, and displacement.

Another research conducted by Siregar et al. (2022) entitled “The Anxiety and Defense Mechanism of Gilmore in Happy Gilmore Movie”. The main purpose of this research was to identify the types of anxiety experienced by Gilmore in the 1997 movie Happy Gilmore. Additionally, the study aimed to determine the defense mechanisms he used to cope with his anxiety. This research followed a qualitative

approach as it focused on analyzing the psychological aspects of a movie character. Therefore, a psychological approach was used. Freud's theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms served as the foundation for this study. The findings showed that Gilmore experienced neurotic anxiety, moral anxiety, and realistic anxiety. To manage his anxiety, he used various defense mechanisms, including sublimation, displacement, projection, rationalization, reaction formation, regression, denial, and compensation.

Relating to the similarity, the present and previous research used the same theory proposed by Sigmund Freud. For the difference, this research utilized a new data source by analyzing “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides, which had not been previously examined in term of anxiety and defense mechanisms. While both the present and previous research applied Freud’s theory, this research referenced the most recent editions of Theories of Personality by G. J. Feist et al. (2021) for the three types of anxiety and Theory of Personality by Schultz & Schultz (2017) for the eight types of defense mechanism, ensuring a more updated and comprehensive analysis. This novel was selected because it deeply explores psychological struggles, particularly how trauma, fear, and emotional insecurity shape the characters’ anxiety and defense mechanism they employed in responses to anxiety and emotional conflicts. Based on these considerations, this research is conducted under the title Anxiety and Defense Mechanism in “The Silent Patient” Novel by Alex Michaelides: A Psychological Approach.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the background of the research, this research identified four key problems that needed to be addressed. The following points outlined the specific issues explored in this research:

1. The influence of childhood trauma on anxiety experienced by the characters in “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides.
2. The impact of betrayal on defense mechanisms used by the characters in “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides.
3. The types of anxiety rooted in trauma, fear, and emotional insecurity as reflected through the characters’ behaviors in “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides.
4. The defense mechanisms employed by the characters as psychological responses to anxiety and emotional conflicts in “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

Based on the problems identified in the problem identification section, this research was limited to:

1. The types of anxiety rooted in trauma, fear, and emotional insecurity as reflected through the characters’ behaviors in “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides.
2. The defense mechanisms employed by the characters as psychological responses to anxiety and emotional conflicts in “The Silent Patient” novel by Alex Michaelides.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Regarding the problems that had been limited, this research formulated the following questions:

1. What types of anxiety rooted in trauma, fear, and emotional insecurity are reflected through the characters' behaviors in "The Silent Patient" novel by Alex Michaelides?
2. What defense mechanisms are employed by the characters as psychological responses to anxiety and emotional conflicts in "The Silent Patient" novel by Alex Michaelides?

1.5 Objective of the Research

This research was conducted to achieve the following two main objectives, which served as the foundation for the analysis and discussion presented in this research:

1. To analyze what types of anxiety rooted in trauma, fear, and emotional insecurity are reflected through the characters' behaviors in "The Silent Patient" novel by Alex Michaelides?
2. To analyze what defense mechanisms are employed by the characters as psychological responses to anxiety and emotional conflicts in "The Silent Patient" novel by Alex Michaelides?

1.6 Significance of the Research

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this research has a lot of goals in order to make a greater contribution to science in the future, especially in this study's field of literature. This

research will also contribute knowledge and some theories regarding anxiety and defense mechanism. Finally, this research might be used in the future as a comparison and reference.

2. Practical Significance

In terms of practice, this research is expected to be beneficial for the readers to gain the findings about anxiety and defense mechanisms that readers may apply in daily lives in order to avoid mistaken decisions when facing the anxious. This research also provides references for researchers in solving problems related to literary psychology.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Psychological Approach : A perspective in psychology that examines how the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious mind influence human thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. These levels of the mind interact to shape personality and decision-making. The psychological approach is widely used in literary analysis to understand the mental and emotional struggles of characters, particularly how past experiences and unconscious desire influence their actions.

Anxiety : A warning signal that alerts the ego to a potential threat, leading individuals to take

action to neutralize or avoid distress.

Anxiety arises when the mind perceives a situation as dangerous, causing emotional and psychological discomfort. It plays a crucial role in influencing human behavior, affecting make a decision and coping strategies in response to stressful or challenging situations.

Defense Mechanism : Psychological strategies that ego unconsciously uses to protect itself from anxiety and emotional distress caused by daily conflicts. Defense mechanisms function by alerting or distorting reality to reduce psychological discomfort. These mechanisms help individuals manage stress and maintain emotional stability, allowing them to cope with difficulties in a way that feels more manageable.