

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Research

Literature encompasses both fictional and nonfictional works and is often seen as a reflection of human experiences. In academic contexts, literature, such as novels, poetry, and drama, is analyzed for its artistic value and its ability to express complex human emotions and psychological states. Literary works can be manifestations of the human subconscious and serve as a medium for authors to articulate trauma, conflict, and personal struggles. These themes are frequently analyzed from a psychological standpoint, exploring how characters' challenges, anxieties, and conflicts are represented within the narrative (Silalahi & Saragih, 2021).

One significant aspect of literature is its capacity to serve as an outlet for processing trauma. In memoirs like Stephanie Foo's *What My Bones Know*, writing becomes a way to express and distance oneself from traumatic memories. This form of literary creation offers an alternative to direct verbal expression, enabling authors to articulate and process feelings of crisis and trauma. Literature, therefore, plays a crucial role in the act of emotional distancing, allowing for self-exploration and healing (Nugroho, 2022).

The concept of "trauma" is increasingly prevalent in modern discourse. Trauma refers to emotional or psychological wounds from past experiences that continue to affect an individual in the present. Trauma can be triggered by various events, such as sexual abuse, loss, natural disasters, or accidents, and often leads to persistent emotional struggles like fear and depression. The healing process from trauma is lengthy and challenging, requiring individuals to confront painful memories and emotions (Christianson, 2014).

Anxiety, a common response to trauma, often manifests as a heightened state of worry, fear, or unease. For individuals suffering from trauma, these feelings can be persistent and debilitating, leading to avoidance behaviors or emotional numbness. The process of trauma recovery necessitates the use of coping mechanisms that allow individuals to manage and eventually heal from their experiences.

In psychological terms, defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies employed to protect the individual from feelings of anxiety, guilt, or emotional pain. Sigmund Freud, who first introduced the concept of defense mechanisms, described them as mental processes that

distort reality to reduce emotional discomfort. According to Freud, common defense mechanisms include repression (burying painful memories), denial (refusing to accept reality), and displacement (shifting emotions onto a safer target). Albertine Minderop further elaborates on these defense mechanisms in the context of trauma and anxiety, proposing that these mechanisms help individuals cope with psychological distress, though they may also hinder healing if used excessively.

In this context, the study of Stephanie Foo's memoir becomes particularly relevant. The novel not only explores themes of trauma and anxiety but also provides insight into the defense mechanisms that the protagonist employs to cope with her experiences. Foo's narrative highlights how trauma, particularly within the context of familial and cultural dynamics, contributes to the development of anxiety and the subsequent use of defense mechanisms. Foo's exploration of her mental health journey shows how, despite the challenges of Complex PTSD (Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), she eventually learns to manage her condition and find agency in embracing her trauma as part of her identity. The novel ultimately tells a hopeful story of resilience, as Foo transforms her trauma from something debilitating into a defining, manageable aspect of her identity. This transformation provides a powerful narrative of human agency, demonstrating the ways in which defense mechanisms can both help and hinder the process of healing.

This study aims to explore how trauma and anxiety are linked to the defense mechanisms described in Freud and Minderop's theories. By analyzing Foo's use of defense mechanisms within the narrative structure of *What My Bones Know*, the research will examine how these psychological concepts manifest in the character's journey toward healing and self-acceptance. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the interdisciplinary field of literature and psychology, shedding light on the role of literature in representing complex psychological processes and promoting a deeper understanding of mental health issues.

In this study, the author is interested in describing the trauma and anxiety because the themes of trauma and anxiety are highly relevant in the context of modern life. Many people face various forms of mental distress, and literature such as this novel provides deep insight into the defense mechanisms that individuals use to survive and recover from emotional wounds. The novel also has a unique narrative structure or writing style that makes it interesting to analyse and Stephanie Foo uses a very in-depth perspective in describing trauma, and this gave me room to explore the psychology of the characters in more detail.

This topic also makes a useful contribution to the interdisciplinary study between literature and psychology. I wanted to show how literary works can be a reflection of psychological concepts and help readers understand mental health issues.

1.2. Identification of The Problem

Based on the background of the problem that has been previously described, it is known that the main character in this novel, namely Stephanie Foo herself, has problems with her childhood. Where the problem is rooted in her family, with a father who was a Vietnamese immigrant carrying the wounds of war and a mother who was an adopted child by Malaysian family with a history of abuse. The parenting, full of pressure and emotional violence from both of her parents, created an unsafe environment for Stephanie, triggering the development of C-PTSD (Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Her father was often harsh and unable to express his emotions in a healthy way, while her emotionally unstable mother also provided little emotional support. As a result, Stephanie experienced deep anxiety, fear, depression, and a sense of isolation, eventually being diagnosed with C-PTSD (Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Although the trauma continued to haunt her, Stephanie underwent a long healing process, where she learned to accept herself, face the trauma, and integrate it as part of her identity, which she can now manage more effectively.

I assume that the theme in this novel is trauma and anxiety leads to defense mechanism in the main character Stephanie which can be observed through literary elements and psychology of personality.

1.3. Limitation of The Problem

Based on the identification of the problem above, I limit the problem of the research on analysing the main character, Stephanie Foo in *What My Bones Know* novel by using trauma, anxiety, and defense mechanisms which is the psychology of personality theory by Sigmund Freud as an extrinsic approach. Additionally, using the Pickering and Hooper theory for the characterization, plot, and setting as an intrinsic approach.

1.4. Formulation of Problem

Based on the limitation problem that has been previously stated, the formulation of the problem in this study are as follows:

1. How are trauma and anxiety portrayed in the characterization, plot and setting in the novel “What My Bones Know”?
2. How is defense mechanisms portrayed in the characterization, plot and setting in the novel “What My Bones Know”?

1.5. Objective of The Research

Based on the formulation of the problem above, the objectives of the problems are:

1. To explain how trauma and anxiety portrayed in the characterization, plot, and setting in the novel “What My Bones Know”
2. To explain how defense mechanisms portrayed in the characterization, plot and setting in the novel “What My Bones Know”

1.6. Benefit of The Research

This research aims to assist those interested in expanding their understanding of the related topic. It is also valuable for individuals engaged in literary analysis through the concepts discussed. The study is beneficial because it presents insights from various perspectives using a qualitative approach.

This research is also anticipated to be valuable for readers interested in understanding perceptions of mental illness resulting from childhood abuse. It aims to be useful by introducing new ideas and perspectives through the application of personality psychology concepts. Additionally, the research hopes to contribute new insights for future studies and be comprehensible to readers.

1.7. Systematic Organization of The Research

In accordance to the title of the research above, the order of the presentation is written as follows:

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the Background of the Problems, Identification of The Problem, the Limitation of the Problems, the Formulation of the problems, the Objectives of the Research, the Methods of the Research, Benefit of the Research, the Systematic Organization of the Research.

CHAPTER 2 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theories from experts that I employ in relation to the research title and for analyzing the research data. These theories include “Characterization,” “Plot,” “Setting,” “Psychology of Literature,” “Trauma,” “Anxiety,” and “Defense Mechanisms.”

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter outlines the research methodologies, including study approaches, time and location, data sources, and techniques for data analysis.

CHAPTER 4 TRAUMA AND ANXIETY LEADS TO DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN THE MAIN CHARACTER OF STEPHANIE FOO’S NOVEL *WHAT MY BONES KNOW*

This chapter is the foundation of the entire research. It features an analysis of the research subject, focusing on how *Trauma and Anxiety Leads to Defense Mechanisms on the Main Character in Stephanie Foo's Novel "What My Bones Know."*

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This chapter includes an assessment of the previous chapters and the implications of the findings. Following these chapters are references, a research scheme, a research poster, a curriculum vitae, and any other necessary attachments.