

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This first chapter presented topics such as the background of the research, questions, objectives of the research, scope and limitations of the research, significance of the research, and definitions of key terms related to the research topic.

A. Background of the Research

People are often trapped in a complex and confusing emotional whirlpool. Sometimes, we doubt whether the feelings we experience reflect the real situation around us or just a reflection of hidden inner fears that we never realized before. It is like walking through an endless maze, where every turn generates more questions than answers. This highlights that human beings have complicated lives when exploring their existence and seeking a deeper understanding of the complexity of their feelings. Frequently, during this process, we need time and deep self-reflection to perceive the meaning of each emotion that arises.

When considering the complexity of human life, literary works have constructed a window that invites exploration into the various realms of human psychology. The issues of human life, such as love, loss, personal growth, and interpersonal conflicts, are often at the core of a work of literature. Through characters and storylines, literature depicts the challenges and emotional journeys that people go through in their daily lives. The

journey shows how individuals respond to pressures and conflicts often associated with psychological defense, known as defense mechanisms. Eventually, these defenses are used as protection from psychological pressure, internal conflict, or anxiety that can interfere with an individual's psychological well-being.

Before explaining defense mechanisms, the writer would like to talk about the fundamentals of human psychology. Freud (1923), in his book "The Ego and The Id", explained the three personality structures of humans - Id, Ego, and Superego. These can be considered as the essential components of a human's thoughts. The id is the nature that drives human wants and needs in fulfilling their desires without regard to moral values or consequences. The super-ego serves to guide humans to always act in a morally or socially appropriate manner. Finally, the ego, which connected the two as a middle ground to make decisions, or choices in behavior.

As time passes, humans face various internal conflicts, such as the imbalance between the id and superego. Thus, the ego becomes the mediator between these two. When the ego is no longer able to resolve their differences, then there will be a sense of unsafe feelings. Therefore, the ego uses one or more defenses as a way to reduce anxiety by hiding internal urges or feelings that threaten to lower self-esteem. In the context of psychoanalytic theory, the use of defense mechanisms can be a way for individuals to reduce feelings of depression, anxiety, stress, or conflict, allowing them to deal with unconscious threats (as cited in Minderop 2010, pp. 20-22).

Anna Freud developed her father's (Sigmund Freud) theory of psychoanalysis, focusing on the discussion of defense mechanisms. In her book 'The Ego and The Mechanisms of Defense' in 1936, she identified ten types of defense mechanisms, including; denial, projection, repression, sublimation, regression, rationalization, intellectualization, reaction formation, displacement, and fantasy. Each one of these mechanisms is used to hide or alter realities to prevent feelings of anxiety and unacceptable desires. This way, it helps to maintain the individual's sense of self or self-esteem.

By dealing with and understanding our emotions, we can develop better ways to deal with and express what resides in the subconscious. We also discover and overcome ineffective defenses and replace them with more balanced and efficient ways to deal with our lives and relationships. Although defense mechanisms are needed and useful in overcoming stress or difficult feelings, if humans rely too much on defense mechanisms, it can have a negative impact as well. For example, if an individual suppresses their emotions for a long time and consistently does not deal with them, then this can lead to a significant buildup of stress. If this situation is not addressed, it can eventually lead to serious mental health issues. Therefore, it is very important to stay in touch with those emotions and handle the situation healthily and adaptively.

Defense mechanisms, as explained previously, are not only found in real life but can also be seen in literary works, such as drama, which often

explore themes of human life or even moral dilemmas. In addition, these characters are portrayed as having complex personalities that will develop throughout the story. The writer wanted to find the relevance and understanding of defense mechanisms by digging deeper into the psychological aspects reflected in these characters. The drama that the writer analyzed was *'Mourning Becomes Electra'*.

Mourning Becomes Electra was an inventive work by Eugene O'Neill that was published in 1931. This drama adapted the classic tragedy "Oresteia" by Aeschylus, incorporating ancient Greek myths into the modern era of the United States during the Civil War (Ubeid, 2020). The story highlights how the honorable Mannon family is caught in a chain of revenge. It all started with the discovery of the affair of Ezra Mannon's wife, Christine Mannon, by her daughter, Lavinia Mannon. Knowing the fact that her mother had an affair made Lavinia's hatred grow. The dispute between the two continued until the return of Ezra Mannon, a great general who had done the state's honor from the war. Christine feels worried about her husband's homecoming, but Christine and her secret lover, Adam Brant, plot to murder Ezra by exchanging his medicine for poison. Lavinia who saw the death of her beloved father made herself sad and betrayed by her mother. She was determined to avenge her father's honor. Ultimately, Lavinia managed to manipulate and work with her brother, Orin Mannon, who was her mother's favorite son. They carefully made Adam Brant's murder look like a shipboard robbery. After Christine found out that her beloved lover had died, she felt a

deep sorrow. Without thinking, Christine decides to end her life too. Lavinia considered her mother's death a form of justice that should be obtained.

Upon observing several points of view on the portrayal of female characters in this drama, the writer noticed several factors that influenced their attitudes and behavior. Like what is seen in Lavinia, she was deeply traumatized after the death of her father. As a result, Lavinia received a shock that made her feel betrayed by Christine. On the other hand, Christine has been under emotional pressure since marrying Ezra Mannon, and she has to fulfill the demands of being Mannon's wife. She also felt a deep loneliness after being left behind by Ezra while away at war. Her desire to be happy in her marital relationship slowly faded. Finally, she regained her happiness and freedom by loving Adam Brant. Despite this, Christine felt responsible for maintaining her honor and wanted to fulfill her desires. Therefore, both characters tried to preserve or take control of their family situation. Regarding character complexity, they have experienced a lot of emotional conflict both before the revenge and afterward. So unconsciously, they always tried to protect their misery by using defense mechanisms.

In previous research, several researchers have used *'Mourning Becomes Electra'* as an ideal object for studies that combine literary, historical, psychological, and cultural aspects. The story provides a wide range of research materials for various analytical approaches. For example, in the research of 'Morbid Psychology Under the "Mask"' by Yijin (2017), the researcher revealed how O'Neill deeply portrayed psychological and

emotional tensions in his characters. Another research by Nazemi & Mariscal (2022) focuses on the theme 'From Hatred to Love'. They connected the complexity between love and hatred, it was also used as a motif that often appears in classical literary works. Furthermore, research on 'Oedipus Complex and Electra Complex' by Meldy et al. (2020). They analyzed the lives of the characters in this story who suffered from the Oedipus and Electra Complex, which eventually led to a tragedy that ended in a tragic death.

Aside from the different topics or research backgrounds in the examples above. The writer discovered a new perspective in exploring the characters in O'Neill's play, especially the female characters who play an important part in the storyline. Therefore, the innovation related to this research could contribute significantly to the psychological understanding of the characters represented, which was still relevant to the present conditions.

Based on the explanation given above, the writer aimed to determine how the female characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* applied defense mechanisms as their response to psychological pressure in the storyline. In addition, the writer also intended to identify the different defense mechanisms found as an insight into the depth of the characters' behavior.

B. Questions and Scopes of the Research

To analyze the defense mechanisms in the play '*Mourning Becomes Electra*', the writer needed to read and investigate every dialogue between characters and setting descriptions, related to the female characters' actions.

Regarding the research focus above, the writer arranged this research through several questions as follow:

1. Questions of the Research

- a. What type of defense mechanisms are used by the female characters in '*Mourning Becomes Electra*' play by Eugene O'Neill?
- b. How is the application of defense mechanisms shown in '*Mourning Becomes Electra*' the play by Eugene O'Neill?

2. Scopes of the Research

This research focused on analyzing the defense mechanisms portrayed in the female characters of the play '*Mourning Becomes Electra*' by Eugene O'Neill. The main focus of this research was to identify the different types of defense mechanisms used by these characters, and also discover how defense mechanisms are applied specifically in certain contexts or situations to deal with conflicts throughout the story. The writer used Anna Freud's (1993) theory of defense mechanisms.

C. Objective and Significance of the Research

Following the research questions, the writer had several objectives in this research, which are as below:

1. Objective of the Research

- a. To identify the types of defense mechanisms used by female characters in the '*Mourning Becomes Electra*' by Eugene O'Neill.

- b. To find out the portrayal of the defense mechanisms used by female characters in the '*Mourning Becomes Electra*' by Eugene O'Neill.

2. Significance of the Research

There were several expectations from the writer of this research:

a. Theoretically

1) For readers

This research can help readers expand their understanding of drama in literary works. Apart from that, it will help readers to understand about the psychoanalytic study, as well as knowing the forms of defense mechanisms found in the characters of the play '*Mourning Becomes Electra*' by Eugene O'Neill.

2) For researchers

With the clarity gained from this research, hopefully it will serve as a valuable reference for students and lecturers at the School of Foreign Languages - JIA along with other researchers who are interested in this topic to carry out further studies.

b. Practically

1) For readers

This research will help readers in gaining a more profound insight into the defense mechanisms used by female characters in '*Mourning Becomes Electra*'. Especially, for developing empathy and awareness towards the struggles faced by female characters in this literary work.

2) For researchers

The outcomes of this research were anticipated to encourage researchers to delve deeper into the convergence of psychoanalytic theory and literary analysis, especially concerning the depiction of female characters. Additionally, it offers valuable insights for other researchers by implementing Freud's (1993) theory on defense mechanisms in their research.

D. Operational Definition

To avoid confusion and misunderstanding in terms used in this research, The definitions are provided below:

1. Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanisms are a psychological strategy that is used by individuals to protect themselves from anxiety-inducing emotional conflict or stress.

2. Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a theoretical approach that seeks to explore the unconscious mind, discover hidden motivations, and comprehend the complexities of human behaviors, thoughts, and emotions.

3. Play

Play is a concrete form of the genre that exists in drama, it refers to a script specific to the particular genre.

4. Character

Character is an element of literary work, a fictional individual shown in a story who has a trait, personality, and influence on the story's progress.

E. Systematization of the Research

In this research, the writing is organized systematically to make it easy to read and understand by the readers. This research consists of five parts. The details of each part are explained in the following points:

Chapter I consists Introduction that outlines Background of the research, Questions of the research, Scope of the research, Objectives of the research, Significance of the research, Operational definitions, and Systematization of the research.

Chapter II includes a Theoretical Description that explains about Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Defense Mechanisms, Drama, and Relevant Research.

Chapter III consists Methodology of the Research that describes the Method of the Research, Procedure of the Research, Technique of Data Collection, Technique of Data Analysis, and Data Source.

Chapter IV includes Data Analysis discusses Data Description, Data Analysis, and Interpretation of the Research Findings.

Chapter V consists of Conclusion and Suggestion.