

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORY AND METHOD**

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

##### **2.1.1 Related Narrative Element Theories**

The section shows how character and characterization, setting, and conflict are key in determining the development of the narrative and thematic components of *The Midnight Library*.

##### **2.1.1.1 Character and Characterization**

Character in literature is the figure through which narrative becomes visible, representing the features, feelings, and decisions that reflect the main themes and ideas of a story. Through characters, readers are able to understand the conflicts, emotions, and development that occur throughout the narrative. Characters can be classified into flat and round characters. Flat characters illustrate only one dimension that is less complex in some aspects, while round characters are illustrated with the complexity of real human life (Taylor, 1981, p. 65). Therefore, round characters are important in literary analysis because their complexity allows readers to understand the psychological and emotional development presented in the story.

Characterization, on the other hand, is how the author illustrates and develops the character throughout the story. As Taylor (1981) states, characterization is distinguished between direct and indirect characterization. Direct characterization occurs when the author explicitly describes the character's

characteristics, or “what the character says and does or what others say about him” (p. 63). Meanwhile, indirect characterization occurs through the character’s actions, thoughts, speech, and interactions with other characters, allowing readers to presume the character’s personality. Therefore, characterization becomes important in literary analysis because it helps reveal the psychological condition and personality development of a character throughout the story.

#### **2.1.1.2 Setting**

Setting is a major factor in shaping the subject matter and has a direct influence on the expression of the theme. Characters and actions in a literary work must be situated within a particular place and time (Taylor, 1981, p. 69). The setting of place refers to the physical location, whether in a specific and recognizable place or in an unspecified and unfamiliar region, depending on the author’s purpose. Meanwhile, the setting of time refers to the period, moment, or historical background in which the events occur. Some stories may require a clear geographical and historical background, while others may take place in a vague or undefined time to create a sense of timelessness and universality. Therefore, the setting of place and time not only functions as the background of the story but also contributes to the mood, theme, and psychological condition of the characters.

#### **2.1.1.3 Conflict**

Conflict is the dramatic drive of a story and the force that sustains its movement. According to Taylor (2008), conflict is the generation of “life-giving tensions” created by “conscious antagonism of dissimilar characteristics, motives or even modes of expression” (pp. 6-7). Taylor distinguishes between internal and

external conflict. Internal conflicts occur in the psychological or moral conditions of a character. While external conflicts happen when a character faces an external force. Hence, conflict becomes the main element that will help to organize the storyline, express their transformation, and maintain the character's traits. With conflict, a literary work is able to raise the emotion of the reader and convey deeper meanings.

### **2.1.2 Related Extrinsic Element Theories**

This section presents the extrinsic theoretical framework used to analyze *The Midnight Library*. This section discusses relevant extrinsic element theories applied in this study, focusing on Anna Freud's theory of defense mechanisms, particularly the concept of denial.

#### **2.1.2.1 Anna Freud's Theory of Defense Mechanisms**

Expanding upon her father, Sigmund Freud's, foundational concept of defense mechanisms, Anna Freud offered a more developmental understanding of how the ego protects itself from anxiety and internal conflict. It is important to note that while Sigmund Freud was the first to present defense mechanisms, Anna Freud improved the role of defense mechanisms in supporting ego functions. She broke down defense mechanisms into eight main categories: repression, denial, reaction formation, projection, regression, rationalization, displacement, and sublimation. Each one, according to Anna Freud (1966), arises from the repression of specific instinctual impulses and corresponds to particular stages of childhood development (p. 51). Thus, making the formation of defenses related to the growth of affective and psychological spheres.

### **2.1.2.2 Denial**

Denial is one of the core defense mechanisms featured in the psychoanalytic theory. Even though Sigmund Freud did not initially name the condition "denial," he still acknowledged the concept in his description of a defense mechanism. In his first pieces of work, Sigmund Freud (as mentioned in Vaillant, 1992, p. 9) depicted a very clear case of psychotic denial, showing how people, in a defensive way, might change reality so that they will not be overwhelmed by the unbearable emotional tension that can be experienced with hallucinations or delusional beliefs. Anna Freud (1966) took her father's ideas further and more organized, formally defining denial as a defense mechanism formed by the ego in response to external dangers. Freud showed that the purpose of denial is to prevent psychological discomfort when the ego does not accept threatening realities (p. 109). By means of denial, the individual is allowed to avoid the anxiety caused by the conflict.

#### **2.1.2.2.1 Characteristics of Denial**

According to Anna Freud (1966), denial is recognized by the presence of several characteristics indicating that the ego is trying to protect itself from suffering. It operates by changing, rejecting, or converting overwhelming realities into less painful ones.

##### **2.1.2.2.1.1 Refusal to Recognize Painful Realities**

Refusal to recognize painful realities, according to Freud (1966), is a form of denial where the ego refuses to become aware of an unpleasant reality (p. 79). In this mechanism, individuals unconsciously reject facts or situations that are considered too painful or threatening for them to accept emotionally. Therefore, the

ego chooses to reverse or reject the facts through imagination. This process helps prevent the anxiety of confronting one's own personal failure. It ultimately limits an individual's ability to face reality and develop emotionally because the painful truth continues to remain unresolved.

#### **2.1.2.2.1.2 Denial Enacted through Words and Acts**

Denial may also manifest through speech and physical behavior rather than solely within thought. Anna Freud (1966) argues that people frequently stage their refusal of reality in a very loud manner or a type of theater that is not in line with the facts (p.83). Their projection is a kind of signal that the negation of reality is not something happening only inside, but it is a process that determines the way people express and perform their emotions. It becomes a visible projection of the ego's inner struggle to maintain its defense against emotional pain. Therefore, denial enacted through words and acts demonstrates how psychological defense mechanisms can influence not only inner thoughts but also outward behavior and emotional expression.

#### **2.1.2.2.2 Causes of Denial**

Denial is a defensive reaction that comes about when the ego faces a psychological tension that puts its balance in danger. Freud (1966) describes denial as a defense mechanism occurring when the ego is confronted with mental pressure stemming from the inside impulses and the external situations (pp. 102-103).

#### **2.1.2.2.1 Internal Instinctual Pressure**

Denial may arise from internal instinctual anxiety when the ego is overwhelmed by the strength of its own impulses or emotions. Freud (1966) explains that the ego's fear of being overtaken by instinctual forces leads to denial (p. 59). In such cases, denial helps the ego block awareness of threatening inner drives, maintaining psychological control and a sense of inner safety. This mechanism usually appears when individuals experience intense feelings such as fear, guilt, anxiety, or emotional pressure that are too difficult to confront directly. As a result, the ego unconsciously rejects these emotions to reduce psychological tension and preserve emotional stability.

#### **2.1.2.2.2 External Overwhelming Reality**

Denial is also caused by the ego from external overwhelming reality, which the ego can not easily bear. Freud (1966) stresses that the ego does not only feel disgust with itself, but also with the outside world, which, in certain situations, becomes unbearable (p. 70). In order to handle such a tremendously difficult situation, denial excludes the most painful realities from conscious awareness. This mechanism allows individuals to temporarily avoid emotional suffering caused by loss, trauma, disappointment, or other distressing experiences that are too difficult to accept directly.

#### **2.1.2.2.3 Impacts of Denial**

Denial, although it is a short-lived defense, has both positive and negative impacts on the ego. Most of the time, it is a saving grace that helps people by pushing away anxiety and uneasiness. Nevertheless, an overuse of denial may

change one's outlook and slow down the development of their emotions. Freud (1996) explains that frequent use of denial leaves deep scars on the ego itself, producing strange or rigid ways of thinking or behaving which are hard to overcome once the need for denial has disappeared (p. 92).

#### **2.1.2.2.3.1 Temporary Relief from Anxiety and Unpleasure**

Initially, denial works as a defense that shields the ego from hurtful feelings by changing reality through fantasy. According to Freud (1966), if the change is successful, the ego becomes indifferent to the painful situation, thus it saves itself from anxiety without involving other defenses (p. 80). The comfort, although short-lived, gives the individual a feeling of security and inner peace. However, because the anxiety is not resolved but merely avoided, the relief remains temporary. In the long run, denial postpones emotional adjustment and prevents the individual from achieving genuine insight.

#### **2.1.2.2.3.2 Distortion of Reality**

In the course of time, continuous resort to denial brings distortion of reality. Freud (1966) points out that to escape pain, the ego limits anxiety but, as a result, changes its own way of functioning (p. 103). The chaos that happens in the ego will be visible as individuals have irrational behaviors and unrealistic views of the world because their reality is distorted. Therefore, the ego becomes less adaptable because it is trapped in defensive illusions, which prevent the development of psychological maturity.

### **2.1.2.2.3.3 Potential for Transformation through Insight**

Denial, though it has a negative side to it, can be changed if it is dealt with properly. In the course of psychoanalytic analysis, Freud (1966) explains that repressed impulses are made conscious, and then the ego and superego can resolve them in a more acceptable way (p. 63). To recognizing overcome their denial, individuals can understand themselves more and become emotionally balanced. Thus, something that was once denied from the psyche can gradually be integrated into conscious awareness, which leads to developmental growth in the ego and will broaden their psychological maturity. In this sense, denial holds the potential for transformation through insight.

## **2.2 Research Method**

This section explains the research method employed in this thesis, including the research approach and the method of data collection used to analyze the data.

### **2.2.1 Research Approach**

This research is an interdisciplinary study of literature and psychology that aims to find out how logical thinking in psychology can be used in literary analysis. This thesis employs a qualitative library research approach to examine characteristics, causes, and impacts of Nora Seed's denial in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020). Referring to Mary W. George's *The Element of Library Research* (2008), this study focuses on building an informed argument based on various scholarly sources. Supported by literary criticism and character theory, this

method allows the writer to analyze how denial functions both as a psychological mechanism and as a narrative element within the story.

### **2.2.2 Method of Data Collection**

This research applies library research as the methodological basis for gathering and analyzing textual materials relevant to the topic. George (2008) states that library research is a form of structured inquiry with specific tools, rules, and techniques (p. 1). It is an important thing of inquiry in any field, allowing researchers to determine what related work has already been done and how experts have assessed it. Here, library research serves as the method through which the writer examines critical works that explain the novel's psychological and thematic aspects.

The data for this research consists of primary and secondary sources. As George (2008) states, "a primary source is something written at the time [of the event I am studying], and a secondary source is a later comment about it by someone else," (p. 56). The primary source of this research is directly from Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020), which presents the main text for examining its analysis, while secondary sources are from reference articles, journals, and so on. By combining primary sources from the novel and secondary sources from scholarly works, this research uses a comprehensive approach that combines literary analysis with psychological insights.