

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Literary work is a reflection of human life, which often portrays human complexity through the characters. The characters also become a way to illustrate how psychology works in humans. According to Bennett and Royle (2004:67), real and fictional characters are very difficult to distinguish. In reading a character, it is similar to when creating or imagining a character as an individual in our mind, because it involves understanding that there are always complexity, ambiguity, and unconsciousness. It also affects a reader's position in the story, which in turn affects our sympathy for the character. So identifying with a character is the same as identifying with oneself, forming an identity through the fiction.

The portrayal of character psychology in stories can also represent the individual traits in handling the conflicts they face. One of them is the psychological concept of Defense Mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are a concept introduced by Sigmund Freud, which discusses the strategies used by the ego to protect itself from anxiety caused by conflict (Schultz, 2009:61). In works of fiction, characters are often depicted in the face of conflict and pressure, trying to protect themselves from difficult or painful feelings. Their actions can be considered as self-defense mechanisms, even if they are not

directly mentioned. This is also reflected in the novel *The Maidens* by Alex Michaelides.

The Maidens is a novel written by Alex Michaelides that was released in 2021. This novel tells the story of Mariana, a psychotherapist who grieves the death of her husband, is informed by her niece Zoe about a serial murder case that occurred at Cambridge University. As Zoe's only family and guardian, Mariana decides to investigate to find the murderer, but it turns out that she has been betrayed by the people she loves. This story focuses on Mariana as the protagonist, and the story is based on Mariana's point of view, so this novel will be interesting to see from a psychological perspective.

This research will focus on the Defense Mechanism analysis of Mariana Andros, the main character who plays an important role in the story. This analysis will explore psychoanalysis that is concerned with psychological conflicts that have an impact on Mariana's decision-making. Mariana uses Defense mechanisms to overcome the conflicts she faces, especially the ones involving trauma, frustration, and disenchantment. So, this research can provide an overview of the use of defense mechanisms by a person who is influenced by psychological conflicts and certain conditions.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the problems related to the research, the writer formulates a problem statement as follows:

1. How is the personality structure of Mariana in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*?
2. What is Mariana's Anxiety in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*?
3. What are Mariana's psychological conflicts in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*?
4. How is Mariana's defense mechanism in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*?

1.3. Research Purposes

There are several purposes to obtain the results of the research, as follows:

1. To analyse Mariana's personality structure in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*
2. To analyse Mariana's anxiety in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*
3. To analyse Mariana's psychological conflicts in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*
4. To analyse Mariana's defense mechanism in Alex Michaelides' *The Maidens*

1.4. Previous Research

The writer found several review articles and academic articles regarding Alex Michaelides' novel *The Maidens* as the object of these studies. For review articles of the novel, the writer found that they mostly discuss summaries, themes, writing styles, and critiques of the novel.

The first, in an article posted by Abdo's Book entitled "*The Maidens*" *A Novel By Alex Michaelides Book Summary* on Medium. The article focuses on several aspects of the novel, namely plot summary, characters, and critical analysis of the theme and writing style of the novel's author. Abdo praises the psychological depth and considers the novel to be strong in its depiction of character development, combination of Greek mythology, and exploration of human psychology.

The second, an article entitled *The Misrepresentation of Mental Illness: The Maidens by Alex Michaelides*, written by Ella Kirshbaum on Berkeley Fiction Review, which criticizes the novel in its depiction of mental illness and trauma. *The Maidens* novel depicts trauma as a motive for murder, which requires a more careful and serious approach to the issue.

The third, an article review of *The Maidens* written by Brittany Shields on the Shelf Reflection website, discusses how this novel provides tension with mythological and psychological elements. The reviewer also provides criticism of elements in the storyline, characterization, and predictable twists.

The fourth, an article entitled *Review: The Maidens by Alex Michaelides by Down the Rabbit Hole*, in this article, tells a brief story about the storyline of *The Maidens* and gives a review about the weaknesses of this novel. The writer also mentioned flaws in the execution of the story, the portrayal and relationships between characters, and the forced plot. However, this article added that the novel is still interesting to read.

The fifth, an article by Rachel Corbin on The Crooked Pen website titled *Thoughts on 'The Maidens' by Alex Michaelides* reveals the novel's weaknesses in terms of character development, narrative logic, and consistency in the mystery plot. Corbin argues that the lack of coherence in the mystery's development is due to unconvincing dialogue, characters' motivations and behaviour, resulting in a weak whodunnit element in *The Maidens* and in consistent characterization.

The sixth is an article entitled *Book Review: The Maidens by Alex Michaelides* by Samantha Kilford on her website, which provides a brief review of the story of *The Maidens* and gives an assessment of the plot, especially the ending. Kilford criticizes the plot twist at the end, which she considers poorly executed despite a strong and interesting beginning.

The seventh is the article *The Maidens by Alex Michaelides—ATLP Book Review* by the website Afterthelastpage, which considers that *The Maidens* highlights deep themes and a smooth writing style by combining murder mystery with dark academia themes and references to classical literature, such as Tennyson and Shakespeare in explaining Mariana's emotional state.

For academic articles, there are two articles discussing *The Maidens*. The first article, entitled *Grief Morphs into Fear: The Role of Greek Mythology in Alex Michaelides "The Maidens"* by Roy and Binu in 2025. This article focuses on how Greek mythology is used to depict Mariana's psychology and how her grief turns into fear, paranoia, and obsession.

Next, there is an article written by Kaloi and Magsi in 2023 entitled *Representation of Criminal Practices in "The Maidens" Novel by Alex Michaelides*. This article focuses on Zoe's criminal behaviour, which is influenced by her relationship with Sebastian, including her way of thinking, killing techniques, and strategies to distract attention. All of these she learned from him.

From the previous studies, the issue of defense mechanisms has not been extensively explored. This study aims to enrich the understanding of the psychological complexity of the characters in the novel *The Maidens*.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study focuses on analysing the intrinsic elements and the psychoanalytic approach in Alex Michaelides's novel *The Maidens*. The intrinsic elements presented in the study include characterization and setting. While the Psychoanalytic approach focuses on the defense mechanisms carried out by Mariana, the main character in the story, *The Maidens*. This research discusses how characterization and conflicts experienced by the character affect the decision to act on defense mechanisms.

1.6. Organization of the Study

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of six sub-chapters, namely the Background of the Study, Research Questions, Research Purposes, Previous Research, and Scope of the Study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND METHOD

In this chapter, the writer er explains the theories and concepts based on the intrinsic and psychoanalytic approach.

CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION

This chapter analyses the intrinsic aspects and the psychoanalytic approach using the theories mentioned in a previous chapter.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

This chapter contains a summary of the analysis from a previous chapter.

REFERENCES