

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The study of psychology is essentially the scientific examination of the human mind and the mental processes. This subject explores how individuals observe their surroundings, process emotional stress, and respond to both internal and external factors that trigger stress. In everyday human behavior, people often experience severe hesitation in confronting or openly discussing psychological vulnerabilities. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this hesitation can be understood as an unconscious function of the mind that seeks to maintain emotional stability. When individuals are confronted with emotional stress or trauma, the psychic mechanism automatically triggers protective psychological strategies or defenses. These internal functions operate outside of consciousness to filter, conceal or alter distressing material, thus protecting the conscious mind from becoming completely overwhelmed and helping the individual to maintain psychological stability.

The behaviors that arise from this internal psychic energy are significantly reflected in the study of creative writing through a literary psychology approach.

Literature here serves as a medium for expressing ideas and artworks that can reflect the complexity of the human condition, realistic mental conflicts, emotional struggles, and behavioural adaptations. The contrast between psychology and literature lies in the shift from an analytical focus on the isolated mental state of an author to the dynamic relationship between a character's thoughts and the external reality. Within this framework, a narrative is constructed by analyzing specific texts that illustrate how psychological tension arises. The novel, with long narrative structures, immersive settings, and detailed character development over time, provides an ideal medium for this analysis. It allows readers to observe both a character's internal monologue and their external conflicts, revealing clear parallels between internal psychological conflict and external survival strategies.

These complex movements of psychic energy find a profound reflection in the field of literary studies through the psychological approach to literature. Literature serves as a creative canvas on which complex human conditions, mental conflicts, and behavioral responses are represented artistically. A psychological approach to literature bridges the gap between clinical psychoanalytic theory and narrative representation, shifting the analytical focus from the author's isolated mental processes to the dynamic relationship between a character's ego and the external world. Within this framework, a narrative can be carefully deconstructed by linking the flow of psychic energy directly to language play, dialogue, and character interactions. By evaluating literary texts through the specific lens of ego psychology, researchers can isolate unique

narrative units that depict psychological tension, thereby revealing the subtle ways in which characters employ psychological defense mechanisms to survive in hostile situations.

Among the concepts found in psychoanalytic literature, the study of defense mechanisms, first proposed by Sigmund Freud and further developed by Anna Freud. This concept serves to understand character behaviour. These strategies include internal processes such as repression, reaction formation, projection and sublimation, as well as primitive external defense mechanisms such as denial. One prominent contemporary novel that captures this psychological complexity is *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008), it is a science fiction and juvenile fiction novel by British American author Patrick Ness. First published by Walker Books on May 5, 2008, *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is the first book of a trilogy in the Chaos Walking series, the other two books being *The Ask and the Answer* and *Monsters of Men*.

The book *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) is set within dystopian world. It is set in a chaotic environment known as the New World, focusing on the rough and brutal conditions of an all-male settlement called Prentisstown. The most striking and traumatic aspect of this dystopian society is 'Noise', a condition or germ that causes the thoughts of every living being to be broadcast unfiltered and continuously, completely destroying any sense of privacy or personal isolation. This unique environmental setting becomes a major issue that has a significant impact on Todd Hewitt's defense mechanisms. This research aims to

explore questions about Todd Hewitt's use of psychological pressure within the story.

This abusive environment becomes the primary source of psychological pressure for the novel's protagonist and narrator, Todd Hewitt. Todd is an innocent boy facing a severe identity crisis in the days leading up to his 13th birthday, which marks the legal transition to manhood under Prentisstown's rigid laws. His psychological distress is further compounded by the town's ruthless doctrine, which forces young boys to commit acts of violence and kill in order to earn their status as men. Todd's fragile psychological defense mechanisms are triggered when he encounters a 'hole in the Noise' that suddenly appears in the swamp, discovering a mysterious, silent girl named Viola, and realizing that his entire life has been built upon a foundation of deliberate lies. Forced to flee amidst the chaos, his ego unconsciously activated various defense mechanisms, denying the bitter reality to maintain his stability, suppressing the secrets behind the even louder 'Noise', adopting a mask of aggressive behavior to conceal his fears, and projecting his inner guilt onto others before finally achieving a state of sublimation, in which he successfully channelled his desperate survival instinct into a protective duty to protect Viola.

To examine comprehensively Todd Hewitt's psychological process of defense, this thesis is systematically structured to explain the analysis of the defense mechanisms at work in Todd Hewitt. It outlines the intrinsic literary elements (such as characterization, setting, and conflict) and links them to the psychoanalytic definitions, causes, and effects of Anna Freud's defense

mechanisms. Furthermore, it presents an in-depth discussion of how Todd's defensive choices affect his perception of reality, shape his interpersonal relationships, and ultimately facilitate his transition from a state of psychological distortion toward moral resilience, allowing him to navigate ongoing trauma in a world full of chaos.

1.2 Research Question

1. What forms of the defense mechanism does Todd Hewitt uses in Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go*?
2. What hidden psychological conflicts and anxieties that activate Todd Hewitt's defense mechanisms in Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go*?
3. How do Todd Hewitt's defense mechanisms shape his psychological, interpersonal, and moral development in Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go*?

1.3 Purpose of the Research

1. To identify the forms of defense mechanisms employed by Todd Hewitt in Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go*.
2. To explore the hidden psychological conflicts and anxieties that activate Todd Hewitt's defense mechanisms in Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go*.
3. To examine how Todd Hewitt's defense mechanisms shape his psychological, interpersonal, and moral development in Patrick Ness's *The Knife of Never Letting Go*.

1.4 Scope of the Research

This research focuses on how the character Todd Hewitt from Patrick Ness' novel *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) uses Anna Freud's defense mechanisms to cope with his psychological trauma. This research will explore how these mechanisms affect Todd's view of reality and how they influence his emotional growth and interpersonal relationships in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008). This research will actively examine how these defense mechanisms reflect the dystopian conditions depicted in the novel. An intrinsic analysis will be conducted to examine Todd's psychological development and to explore how his struggles with fear and anxiety dictate his actions and beliefs. However, the discussion will situate Todd's psychological coping mechanisms within the wider social structures of the novel and will focus on how the collective trauma and repressive conditions of the world he inhabits are characterized by the Noise and the constant presence of unfiltered thoughts and these factors worsen the need for these defense mechanisms.

1.5 Previous Study

Several previous studies have explored the thematic, structural, and psychological dimensions of dystopian literature and psychoanalytic theory, providing a foundational context for this research. In the realm of dystopian and linguistic analysis, a journal article titled "*The Feminist Quest: Reimagining the Relationship between Language, Gender, and Identity in The Knife of Never Letting Go (2008) by Patrick Ness*" (2023) argues that the novel functions as a subversive space for questioning dominant gender norms. Using feminist

poststructuralist and Bakhtinian theories, it examines how the quest motif connects language, gender, and identity to critique patriarchal. By uncovering these underlying power structures, that study illustrates how young adult fantasy can provide a critical medium for reimagining traditional gendered systems.

Expanding upon this focus on dystopian control, the study “*Promulgating the Dystopian Blueprint: Control, Language, and Espionage in Dystopian Societies*” is a thematic analysis that investigates the novel alongside *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. It aims to understand how the dystopian genre as a whole critiques contemporary societal fears related to control and language. To achieve this, the authors trace how authors use speculative settings to reflect real-world political anxieties. Consequently, this comparative approach establishes a broader genre perspective regarding the systemic manipulation of human thought and communication.

Moving the analytical focus from broad genre critiques to specific institutional frameworks, a thesis by Kamal and Sulistyorini (2019) titled “*Prentisstown’s Institution Life Described in Patrick Ness’s Novel ‘The Knife of Never Letting Go’*” (2019). Kamal uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the institutional life of Prentisstown. It focuses on the town's setting and the conflicts experienced by Todd Hewitt, noting both his internal struggles, such as anxiety and confusion, and his external conflicts.

Complementing the institutional perspective, another 2023 journal article titled “*Dystopian Society in Patrick Ness’ The Knife of Never Letting Go*” by Rantih and Sari analyzes the novel through a Foucauldian lens. This study

specifically applies Michel Foucault's critical concepts of power, the panopticon, and discourse to the narrative. Through this framework, the authors examine how pervasive themes of government control and surveillance operate within Prentisstown.

Concurrently, from the standpoint of character agency within these power structures, the article "*Futurist Resistance: Gendered Critical Literacy in the Dystopian Age*" argues that *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) and M.T. Anderson's *Feed* position critical literacy as the primary form of activist resistance. It observes that in these narratives, female characters actively guide the male protagonists toward a state of critical thinking. This intellectual awakening ultimately helps the young men break free from their rigid societal conditioning.

In contrast to the sociopolitical and linguistic scholarship mentioned above, a parallel body of literary research has explored the application of psychoanalytic frameworks. For instance, the study "Self-defense mechanism of the main characters in the novel *Pünktchen und Anton*" applies Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to a German children's novel. It explores how the main characters use defense mechanisms, such as Repression and Sublimation, to cope with anxiety and analyzes their corresponding id, ego, and superego structures.

Similarly, this psychoanalytic approach is utilized to decode genre dynamics in the article "Anxiety and Defense Mechanism as A Means of Constructing Psychological Thriller in Hawkins' 'The Girl on The Train'". The author uses Freudian psychoanalytic theory to examine how these psychological

elements are structurally deployed to build the narrative. The results ultimately show that defense mechanisms are central to creating an unreliable narrator and making the story thrilling.

Additionally, research has increasingly examined the specific psychological mechanisms involved in literary trauma by looking at character development. The study “Psychoanalytical Conflicts, Anxiety, and Ego Defense Mechanisms of The Main Character in Karin Slaughter’s *The Good Daughter*” identifies the precise factors that trigger the protagonist's use of defense mechanisms. It finds that her reliance on intellectualization, repression, denial, and other strategies is a direct response to objective and neurotic anxiety.

Most significantly regarding the author’s literary canon, an article titled “Reality denial in the novel ‘*A Monster Calls* (2011)’ by Patrick Ness” applies Freudian defense mechanisms to another prominent work by the same author. This study specifically examines how the young protagonist utilizes reality denial as a protective psychological shield. Through this mechanism, the character actively refuses the delayed impact of unpleasant family truths and personal loss.

Ultimately, a critical evaluation of the existing works reveals a clear academic gap, which directly confirms the necessity of this research. The existing literature, particularly that specifically discussing *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) almost entirely focuses on sociological, political, and linguistic themes at the macro level, including discussions of institutional surveillance, Foucauldian panopticism, feminist critiques of patriarchy, and literacy as a tool for activism. Although a 2019 thesis briefly discussed the internal conflicts and general anxiety

experienced by Todd Hewitt, it limited its discussion to a descriptive qualitative portrayal of the institutional environment without engaging any psychoanalytic or formal psychological framework to unpack these issues. Conversely, previous psychoanalytic studies utilizing Anna Freud's framework of defense mechanisms have primarily focused on different literary genres, often emphasizing localized or domestic trauma rather than systemic, dystopian oppression.

This thesis bridges that gap by directly applying Anna Freud's psychoanalytic theory to the work "The Knife of Never Letting Go." Rather than merely categorizing types of ego defenses, this study views the phenomenon of "Noise" not only as a means of social surveillance, but also as a relentless psychological catalyst. By eliminating mental privacy entirely, Noise creates a state of chronic objective anxiety, thereby forcing the protagonist's ego to adopt extreme defensive adaptations. Therefore, this study specifically examines the dynamic relationship between the absolute loss of mental privacy, the traumatic anxiety it evokes, and Todd Hewitt's evolving defense strategies as he faces the harsh and violent demands of his dystopian environment.