

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORY AND METHOD**

#### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework comprises the theories relevant to the intrinsic and external aspects of the novel. Intrinsic elements theories include character and characterization theory, and the theory of conflict. Meanwhile, the theory of external element is Otto Kernberg's pathological narcissism theory.

##### **2.1.1. Intrinsic Elements**

The fundamental basis of a novel is the intrinsic aspect. This thesis delves into the analysis of certain intrinsic elements, namely character and characterization, as well as conflict.

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

In literature, the term character describes the whole identity, including their perception of life and abilities of the individual in the story. The character is shown not only as a person but also as an animal or a physical object considered like a human. Examining characters' driving forces is essential for unravel the plot of the story. The protagonist, often called the hero or heroine, is the main character in a story and the object of the audience's attention. Meanwhile, when the central character of a narrative confronts a substantial opponent, that person is referred to as the antagonist (Abrams, 2009:265).

Forster, as cited in Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (2009:43), explained that characters in literature can be classified into two categories: flat characters and round characters. Flat characters are simple, built around a single idea or quality, and can be described briefly. Meanwhile, Round characters are complex, with detailed personalities and motivations, making them difficult to summarize and capable of surprising the audience, much like real people (2009:43). Forster's distinction between flat and round characters underscores how flat characters are simple and one-dimensional, while round characters are complex, possessing intricate personalities and motivations that mirror the depth of real individuals.

Also, there are type of static and dynamic character. Static characters are those who do not embrace opportunities for positive change and typically remain unchanged throughout the story (Soles, 2010:65). Meanwhile, dynamic characters undergo significant changes in values, attitudes, and ideals due to their experiences in the story, allowing the audience to see their development (Soles, 2010:65). In literature, static characters maintain their unchanged nature, while dynamic characters evolve significantly through their experiences, revealing profound personal growth and transformation.

Moreover, besides character there is also the term characterization which means the method to describe character's feature or value. According to Abrams, there is occasionally a broad differentiation between two alternative methods used to establish the distinctive traits of the characters in a story: showing and telling. In

showing, the author portrays the characters engaging in dialogue and actions, leaving the reader solely responsible for deducing the underlying motives and attitudes that drive their words and behaviors. The author may show not only what a character says and does but also what they think and feel and how they react to things that happen. Meanwhile, in telling, the author steps in with control to explain the motivations and personality traits of the characters. This form of characterization employs a direct method to construct the character, either through descriptive portrayal or direct commentary by the author (2009:43). In summary, Abrams distinguishes between showing and telling as two contrasting methods in character portrayal: showing relies on actions and dialogue to allow readers to infer motives and attitudes, while telling involves direct authorial explanation to construct characters through description or commentary.

#### **2.1.1.2. Conflict**

Conflicts can be described as the tension between characters or the actual opposition of characters. Categories of conflicts according to Kenney are internal conflict and external conflict. Internal conflict encompasses the inner struggles a character faces, which may manifest due to ambition or obligation. Internal conflicts aid in the growth and complexity of a character. Meanwhile, external conflict refers to the impediments or problems from outside influence that the characters have to deal with, such as an occurrence of nature, societal pressure, or a physical threat (1966:19). Both internal and external conflicts contribute to the overarching narrative by testing characters' resolve and revealing deeper layers of their personalities and motivations.

### **2.1.1.3. Setting**

Setting is one of the most important elements in literature. In a story, setting encompasses the physical or spiritual environment where events occur, and it includes three types: place, time, and social environment. The setting of place involves the geographic location, topography, scenery, and physical arrangements, which can depict either a real or fictional world. The setting of time specifies the period or era of the events, characterized by natural phenomena, clothing, trends, and tools unique to that time. The setting of the social environment describes the broader context of the characters' lives, including religious, social, emotional, mental, and moral conditions (Holmes, 1992:453). The various setting elements in a narrative work together to form a rich and detailed environment that influences the plot and enhances the reader's comprehension of the story's complexities.

### **2.1.2. Theory of Pathological Narcissism**

Extrinsic elements of literature encompass external factors which influence the interpretation and understanding of a literary work. This thesis delves into the analysis of certain extrinsic elements using the theory of pathological narcissism by Otto Kernberg. The theory of pathological narcissism coined by Otto Kernberg in his book entitled *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*

According to APA dictionary of psychology, pathology refers to extreme, excessive, or abnormal behavior or conditions that are indicative of a mentally disturbed or unhealthy state (2015:769). Meanwhile, narcissism is the ability of maintaining a positive identity through self-affect and regulatory processes,

controlling individual validation and affirmation while striving for self-improvement exposure in their social environment (Pincus *et al.*, 2009:365). As a rule, according to Kernberg pathological narcissism means a destructive manifestation of narcissistic traits. The development of healthy narcissism is rooted in the formation of early self and object representations, whereas pathological narcissism shifts from this normative trajectory. The condition is distinguished by an exaggerated sense of self-importance and an absence in empathy, frequently accompanied by challenges of harmonizing self-perceptions derived from desires and aggressive tendencies into a unified self-image (1985:283). This evolution underscores the critical importance of early experiences in shaping both adaptive and maladaptive narcissistic tendencies.

#### **2.1.2.1. Symptoms of Pathological Narcissism**

Kernberg revealed the symptoms of pathological narcissism, including:

intense ambitiousness, grandiose fantasies, feelings of inferiority and overdependence on external admiration and acclaim, chronic feelings of boredom and emptiness, strivings for brilliance, wealth, power, and beauty, struggle to love and care for others, lack of capacity for empathetic understanding of others, chronic uncertainty and dissatisfaction with their life, conscious or unconscious exploitative, ruthlessness towards others, and intense envy with defenses against such envy (1985:264).

Those symptoms are classified into four categories, namely insatiable ambition and greed, grandiosity, life dissatisfaction, and empathy deficit. Each aspect discussed in the following paragraphs:

#### **2.1.2.1.1. Insatiable Ambition and Greed.**

The terms “insatiable,” “ambition,” and “greed” all denote intense desires or cravings that can be excessive and challenging to satisfy. Specifically, “insatiable” signifies a desire or need that is exceedingly great and cannot be fulfilled. “Ambition,” on the other hand, denotes a strong desire for personal advancement or success, which, while often commendable, can also be excessively driven. In contrast, according to Cambridge Dictionary, “greed” is characterized by a selfish and excessive craving for more of something, such as wealth or possessions, beyond what is necessary or rational. These concepts illuminate the complexities of human desires and underscore their potential to become overwhelming or detrimental if not properly managed.

Insatiable ambition and greed are related to the two symptoms of pathological narcissism, namely intense ambitiousness and striving for brilliance, wealth and power. To begin with, narcissistic people are driven by a constant need to excel, which is demonstrated by their readiness to take on leadership responsibilities, their dreams of power, and their determination to establish extremely high standards (Krizan & Herlache, 2017:12). Those responsibilities, dreams, and determination are related to their intense ambitiousness. The need to be admired and validated by others combined with the sense of self-importance fuels narcissistic individuals to have insatiable ambition (Kernberg, 1985:229). Ambitions are advantageous when they are adaptive. Nevertheless, those who are entangled in the pathological manifestations of ambition may suffer negative

consequences (Yager & Kay, 2023:257). Ultimately, striking a balance between ambition and well-being is crucial for sustainable personal growth and fulfillment.

Moreover, despite projecting an image of independence, narcissists are fundamentally empty and deprived of something. In an effort to manage these emotions, narcissists fixate on attaining recognition for their own sufficiency, power, appeal, authority, prestige, and superiority (Kets De Vries & Miller, 1985: 588). Thus, narcissistic individuals often divide the world into two categories: those they consider to be great, prosperous, and unique, and others they consider to be repulsive and unworthy. The second group is deeply feared since, in their minds, those people are not only ordinary but intrinsically useless and hated (Kernberg, 1985:234). This viewpoint is motivated by an ingrained rejection of the long-term truth, most noticeable in the strong, frequently unconscious conviction that they will always be young, beautiful, powerful, and have endless opportunities for affirmation, adulation, and safety (Kernberg, 1985:311). Consequently, in order to gain the validation of others, individuals with narcissistic tendencies may exert efforts to acquire power, aim to influence others, and partake in innovative or hazardous events with the aim of achieving success (Braun, 2021:5). In summarize, narcissistic individuals categorize the world into those they perceive as exceptional and those they view as worthless, driven by an unshakeable belief in their perpetual youth, beauty, and power, motivating them to seek validation through power and influence.

#### **2.1.2.1.2. Grandiosity**

In psychology, understanding human thought processes involves grasping diverse perceptions and behaviors. Grandiosity, a notable phenomenon, significantly influences how individuals perceive themselves and behave. The concept of grandiosity, characterized by an inflated sense of one's own significance or accomplishments, can manifest as a pervasive and debilitating psychological trait, often leading to a delusion of grandeur when taken to an extreme, as described by the American Psychological Association (2015:468). According to Kernberg, the main characteristics of narcissistic personalities are grandiosity, including having "grandiose fantasies, and feelings of inferiority and overdependence on external admiration and acclaim" (Kernberg, 1985:228). These traits reflect a complex interplay of self-perception and external validation that define narcissistic behavior.

Related to grandiose fantasies, narcissistic individuals utilize a coping strategy in which they integrate their true identity, external judgements, and their ideal self in order to deal with difficult interpersonal situations. They had a greater tendency towards engaging in grandiose fantasizing rather than engaging in optimistic future planning as a means to improve their emotional state (Finch & Hooley, 2023:7). To protect themselves from being dependent, they create an idealized dream world in which they are completely independent. Thinking about their idealized versions of themselves creates a false sense of independence and a confidence in excellence. This, in turn, lessens the usual conflict between their real and idealized personalities, which improves their mental picture of how important

they are (Kernberg, 1985:231). In summary, to protect themselves from dependency, narcissistic individuals create an idealized fantasy realm where they perceive themselves as entirely independent, fostering a sense of confidence and diminished conflict between their real and ideal selves.

Pathological narcissism is characterized by a complex set of symptoms that revolve around the individual's self-perception and their interactions with others. Individuals with narcissistic personalities often grapple with "feelings of inferiority," a phenomenon that typically leads to subsequent experiences of "grandiosity" and a relentless pursuit of "admiration and acclaim" (Kernberg, 1985: 229). Pincus and Ansell addressed this complex dynamic by introducing the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI), which consists of two elements related to grandiosity. The idea of "contingent self-esteem" emphasizes how much someone's self-worth depends on the validation they receive from others, indicating reliance on external sources for feeling good about oneself. Meanwhile, the "devaluing" component involves experiencing negative emotions when admiration needs are unfulfilled, as well as feeling embarrassed by relying too much on others for validation or support (Day *et al.*, 2020:2). These people generally adjust to moral standards because they fear being criticized and attacked, not because they have a strong moral commitment. They view strategic adherence to societal norms as a concession for recognition and fame (Kernberg, 1985:232). These symptoms collectively reflect a profound imbalance in the individual's self-perception and ability to form meaningful connections with others.

### **2.1.2.1.3. Life Dissatisfaction**

Many individuals experience periods of life dissatisfaction, stemming from various sources and manifesting in diverse ways. A significant contributor to this dissatisfaction is pathological narcissism, characterized by specific symptoms that profoundly affect individuals. According to Cambridge Dictionary, life can be viewed as a sequence of physical and mental experiences that define an individual's existence. Meanwhile, dissatisfaction is a state of being unsatisfied or discontent, often expressed through displeasure or lack of fulfilment. Davern and Cummins describe life dissatisfaction as involving negative emotions such as depression, boredom, loneliness, and restlessness. They investigate whether life dissatisfaction is in opposition to life satisfaction, highlighting the contrast between these two states (2006:5). The aspect of life dissatisfaction a part of the three symptoms of pathological narcissism, which are “suffering from chronic feelings of boredom and emptiness, chronic uncertainty and dissatisfaction with their life, intense envy and defenses against such envy” (Kernberg, 1985:264). Pathological narcissism, characterized by emptiness, boredom, and restlessness, develops in narcissists (Kernberg, 1985:217). Individuals with pathological narcissism frequently have unstable adult attachments, which contributes to increased depression and anxiety. They also frequently display a number of bad psychological outcomes, including “emptiness,” which is marked by a deep sense of loss and a painful awareness of reality (Zerach, 2021:370). They get most of their happiness from other people's compliments or their own ambitious goals. When outward appreciation fades, and new sources fail to boost their self-esteem, they become empty and bored

(Kernberg, 1985:228). Pathological narcissist's emotional lives are shallow, and they are not concerned about other people and fail to find much pleasure in life.

Moreover, narcissistic individuals frequently have high levels of uncertainty and dissatisfaction with themselves and their lives. Their remarkable intelligence and narcissistic inclinations cause them to hold themselves to higher standards than their accomplishments outside of themselves, which creates a perpetual state of unhappiness. This illustrates the complex relationship between intelligence, narcissism, and emotional issues (Kernberg, 1985:290-291). Additionally, researchers have found that people who are less afraid of uncertainty and often more independent have fewer post-traumatic effects. On the other hand, individuals who have a higher intolerance, which is typical of narcissism, have a more difficult time recovering from trauma and dealing with suffering (Montoro *et al.*, 2022:13). Overall, narcissistic individuals often struggle with high levels of uncertainty and dissatisfaction due to their high standards and intelligence, leading to unhappiness, while their intolerance of uncertainty can hinder their ability to recover from trauma and cope with suffering.

In addition, narcissists often have a complicated connection with envy. To clarify, envy is a symptom of pathological narcissism that originates from underlying insecurities and a vulnerable sense of self-worth. This affective response, characterized by intensified adverse sentiments such as wrath, highlights the complex psychological mechanisms in operation within narcissistic people when they are exposed to the achievements or contentment of others (Day *et al.*,

2020:14). Also, they often hold others in high esteem who provide them with narcissistic supplies, while they hold those in lower esteem who do not. They may even look down on their former heroes because of this emotional cycle (Kernberg, 1985:228). In essence, narcissists have a complicated relationship with envy, rooted in insecurities and a fragile self-worth. This leads them to intensely dislike others' achievements and favor those who provide narcissistic validation, while often looking down on those who do not.

#### **2.1.2.1.4. Empathy Deficit**

Empathy is defined as an emotional state that arises from comprehending another person's emotional condition and aligning oneself with it. This can encompass mirroring their emotions and experiencing a spectrum of feelings similar to those of others (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987:91). Conversely, according to Merriam-Webster English Dictionary Online, deficit refers to a lack or impairment in a person's functional ability. Empathy deficit in empathy has been noted in various neuropsychiatric conditions, including borderline personality disorder linked with childhood trauma and concurrent posttraumatic stress disorder (Mutschler et al., 2013:2). Narcissistic individuals have a deficit of empathy which makes them experiences the struggle to love, care, and understanding of others, and act ruthless toward others. Although pathological narcissists still have some empathy, they struggle to engage in authentic spiritual partnerships because of their challenges in tolerating negative traits. It is considered pathological because they consistently harm others, and the level of harm increases with the amount of personal power they gain (Zachar, 2006:103). These dynamics highlight the

profound impact of narcissistic tendencies on interpersonal relationships and ethical conduct.

Pathological narcissism, not only affects interpersonal relationships but also influences emotional responses and perceptions. As Kernberg argues that even though narcissistic individuals appear successful in social situations, they find it difficult to establish and sustain meaningful relationships. Their connections with others are distorted because they are egocentric, have trouble empathizing, and fail to see the world through other people's eyes (Kernberg, 1985:264). Also, extreme negative emotions like pain, intolerance, and anger are common in narcissistic patients, who also tend to have a pattern of heightened sensitivity and awareness. This is accompanied by periods of ignorance or oblivion (Ronningstam, 2016:14). In short, narcissistic individuals struggle to form lasting relationships due to their self-centeredness, and lack of empathy.

Moreover, people with narcissistic personalities are emotionally shallow; they have trouble understanding and responding to the nuanced sentiments of those around them, and their own feelings are fleeting and shallow. They are fundamentally unable to experience depressive reactions because they lack real sadness and mournful desire. Because they are emotionally shallow, narcissistic people behave in ways that make relationships with other people difficult and complicated (Kernberg, 1985:228-229). Also, they often exhibited signs of emotional detachment, such as difficulty with sexual engagement, lack of warmth or empathy, and an overall sense of emotional emptiness (Day *et al.*, 2020:7) In

essence, their emotional detachment and shallow affect render genuine connections and meaningful relationships challenging for individuals with narcissistic personalities.

Furthermore, the lack emotional depth and the struggle to understand complicated emotions in others, and their own feelings are the factor that makes narcissistic individuals act ruthless toward others. Usually they act ruthless by prioritize their needs over meaningful connections with others (Kernberg, 1985: 228-229). To keep power and control, narcissistic people frequently turn to violent measures, and they put their own wants and needs first. They exhibit punitive and vengeful conduct towards others, including threatening those who cause trouble, demeaning those who disagree, and resorted to destructive actions when provoked. (Day *et al.*, 2020:8). Therefore, the destructive behavior of narcissistic individuals not only harms those around them but also perpetuates a cycle of isolation and conflict.

In addition, empathy deficit also makes narcissistic individuals gain an exploitative trait. People with pathological narcissism typically take advantage of and occasionally parasitize others in relationships, believing they have the right to dominate and possess people guilt-free. They display traits of exploitation by taking credit for others' ideas or knowledge and using other people's rights and belonging for personal gain. Despite the attractive and inviting exterior, a cold and vicious undercurrent is visible (Kernberg, 1985:228). When narcissists are in power, they abuse their followers cruelly, and when their enthusiasm wanes, they view those

followers as useless shadows (Kernberg, 1985:236). In conclusion, the interplay of empathy deficit and exploitative tendencies in narcissistic individuals underscores the complex and often harmful dynamics they bring into relationships and positions of power.

#### **2.1.2.2. Theory of the Causes of Pathological Narcissism**

Within the same discussions, Kernberg also explains the causes of pathological narcissism, which involves childhood experiences. Early childhood life can cause the emergence of narcissistic behavior. This includes the bad influence from their parental figures, which usually shows toxic behavior, such as neglect, abuse, unrealistic expectations, and other destructive behavior that will affect the children's mentality even until they become adults (Kernberg, 1985:332). In fact, it also connected with diverse forms of relationship trauma, spanning from overt abuse like physical, verbal, and emotionally manipulative environments, including instances of "traumatic empathic failures," contributing to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of trauma involving both explicit abuse and subtle emotional manipulations (Day *et al.*, 2020:11). Therefore, early childhood experiences, including toxic parental behavior and various forms of relationship trauma, significantly shape the development of narcissistic behaviours into adulthood.

#### **2.1.2.3. Theory of the Effects of Pathological Narcissism**

The effect of pathological narcissism shows up as a disturbance of one's identity, feelings, and social behavior in response to obstacles or unfulfilled

expectations. This suggests that people with high narcissism may become “dysregulated” in certain circumstances (Wright *et al.*, 2017:14). This dysregulation can manifest in various ways, including self-isolation.

Individuals with pathological narcissism perceive their grandiose self in isolation, relying on outward adulation for self-esteem rather than making interior relationships. An absence of significant interpersonal connections leads to a persistently void within oneself, which in turn diminishes profound emotional experiences (Kernberg, 2017:36). Also, individuals with narcissistic personality traits may first exhibit significant abilities for managing anxious circumstances and showing self-control. Closer inspection, however, exposes that they acquire their perceived anxiety tolerance by self-isolation, whether it is demonstrated socially or emotionally (Kernberg, 2017:37). When people feel anxious or ashamed of revealing their faults and needs, they may withdraw physically or emotionally from others. This withdrawal can range from literal isolation to a subtler emotional retreat. Emotional isolation often involves feelings of inadequacy, shame, and the development of a ‘false self.’ This ‘false self’ presents a distorted version of oneself, concealing true emotions and vulnerabilities. Over time, this can lead to a sense of emotional emptiness or detachment (Day *et al.*, 2020:2). Both forms of isolation, physical and emotional are interconnected. They stem from feelings of inadequacy, shame, or fear of exposure, hindering authentic interpersonal connections. These patterns can perpetuate a cycle of struggling to connect genuinely, fostering feelings of isolation and misunderstanding.

Furthermore, individuals with narcissistic traits demonstrate greater proficiency in handling social interactions and maintaining self-control, so helping them to remain involved in certain efforts to generate recognition. They may exhibit exceptional performance in intellectual disciplines. On closer inspection, however, their accomplishments are generally seen to be superficial and lacking in depth, leaving behind an empty sensation (Kernberg, 1985:229-230). In conclusion, while individuals with narcissistic traits may initially appear to excel in various areas, their achievements are often shallow and devoid of genuine substance, ultimately leaving a hollow impression on those around them.

## **2.2. Research Method**

In order to gain a deeper grasp of a subject, researchers employ a variety of methods to gather data and evidence for study. This thesis comprises two research methods, including method of data collection and the research approach.

### **2.2.1. Method of Data Collection**

In this thesis, the writer employs library research methodology. The writer is gathering reliable sources from scholarly articles, academic journals, or relevant books related to the research topic. Library research involves the process of locating and studying materials that offer verifiable knowledge or professional analysis pertaining to a specific subject of study (George, 2008:5). There are two kinds of data sources: primary and secondary. Primary data are defined as data generated about an event, individual, or phenomenon in terms of location or duration (George, 2008:188). The writer gained the primary data from the novel *Vicious* by V.E.

Schwab. Meanwhile, secondary data interprets evidence connected to the event, subject, or issue under study (George, 2008:190). The writer gained secondary data from scholarly articles, academic journals, or relevant books relevant to the research's topic.

### **2.2.2. Research Approach**

In order to uncover the pathological narcissism traits of Eli Cardale in the novel *Vicious* by V.E. Schwab, the present study employs a psychological approach. The literary psychology approach involves applying established psychological theories and principles to analyse and understand the personalities of characters portrayed in narratives. By examining how characters react to situations, interact with others, and evolve throughout a story, literary psychology aims to uncover underlying psychological dynamics that shape their identities and contribute to the overall narrative depth (Rohrberger, 1971:13). Through this analysis, a deeper understanding of Eli Cardale's character in *Vicious* emerges, revealing the intricate interplay of narcissistic traits within the framework of literary psychology.