

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter contains five subchapters. It includes the background of the study, the study questions, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, and finally, the scope and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Throughout the course of human existence, trauma has been recognized as an inevitable and transformative phenomenon that profoundly influences cognitive structures, emotional regulation, and behavioral patterns. It often originates from experiences of extreme distress that exceed an individual's capacity for comprehension or adaptation. These experiences leave enduring psychological imprints that shape how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to their environment. According to Freud (1920), when individuals encounter pain that surpasses their threshold of endurance, the mind activates defensive mechanisms by repressing such intolerable experiences into the unconscious. However, repression is not absolute. Although these memories are removed from conscious awareness, their psychological residues continue to manifest through emotions, dreams, and interpersonal relationships, subtly influencing thought and behavior. Consequently, trauma cannot be understood merely as a historical wound; rather, it constitutes an ongoing interaction between memory and survival, representing a continuous negotiation between the conscious self and the hidden dimensions of the unconscious mind.

Within the field of literature, trauma functions as a narrative medium through which writers examine the complexities of the human condition in both its vulnerability and resilience. Through literary narratives, readers are invited to engage with the intimate struggles of characters who experience grief, loss, and psychological fragmentation. Representations of trauma in literature provide insight into the intricate processes by which individuals confront emotional suffering, search for meaning, and pursue healing. These depictions emphasize

that within pain lies the potential for transformation, and that the act of confronting suffering with sincerity and self awareness can lead to empathy and renewal. In this context, literature does not merely reflect trauma, it reconstructs suffering into meaning, offering both characters and readers a symbolic space for recognition, reflection, and emotional restoration.

In numerous literary works, trauma signifies the beginning of an introspective journey. Characters who endure profound suffering often engage in a process of self-examination through which they learn to recognize their wounds and reconstruct their sense of identity. This process resonates with Freud's (1926) notion of the ego's defense mechanisms, which refer to the unconscious strategies employed by the mind to shield itself from overwhelming emotions and internal conflict. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the study of trauma provides a deeper understanding of the underlying structures of human emotion, enabling readers and scholars to trace the influence of unarticulated fears and repressed desires in shaping identity and moral consciousness. It suggests that the past, regardless of how deeply it is concealed, continues to exert influence on the present, subtly guiding an individual's decisions, relationships, and comprehension of the self.

The writer chooses to explore the theme of trauma because it embodies a universal psychological phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of culture, historical period, and social class. Every individual carries traces of emotional suffering, whether derived from personal loss, social marginalization, or collective catastrophe. Trauma not only disrupts emotional stability but also transforms one's moral, spiritual, and existential orientation by questioning the meaning of identity, belonging, and love. The study of trauma through literature provides an important avenue for examining the intersection between imagination and psychology, revealing how artistic expression can illuminate the complexities of human experience. Fictional characters, though products of creative invention, frequently reflect authentic human realities, particularly the struggle to endure pain, to recover a sense of wholeness, and to construct meaning from adversity. For the writer, this topic holds both intellectual and personal significance, as it articulates humanity's enduring effort to transform pain into understanding and

resilience into hope. Within contemporary scholarship, trauma studies serve as an essential bridge between psychology and literary criticism, demonstrating that narrative can function simultaneously as a mode of reflection and as a form of therapeutic engagement with individual and collective suffering.

To realize this inquiry, the writer chooses Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* as the primary literary text. Miller's reinterpretation of the ancient Greek myth distinguishes itself through its profound psychological depth and emotional authenticity. While Homer's *Iliad* emphasizes external heroism and the valor of warfare, Miller's novel redirects the focus inward, examining the inner lives of Achilles and Patroclus, two characters bound by love, destiny, and mortality. Through Miller's evocative prose, readers are invited to perceive not only the grandeur of myth but also the intimate dimensions of human suffering that arise from devotion, loss, and the inevitability of fate. In this narrative, trauma is depicted not merely as a reaction to violence but as a spiritual and emotional condition that profoundly shapes identity, desire, and human relationships. Miller reimagines her heroes as deeply human figures, revealing their vulnerability, compassion, and search for meaning within a world marked by transience and sorrow. The novel thus becomes a meditation on the coexistence of love and pain, illustrating that within the depths of tragedy lies a fragile beauty born of empathy and sacrifice.

Although *The Song of Achilles* has attracted considerable scholarly attention, most previous studies tend to focus on themes such as romance, heroism, masculinity, queer representation, and mythological reinterpretation. Several studies also discuss trauma in contemporary novels or modern characters using psychoanalytic perspectives. However, limited attention has been given to a systematic psychoanalytic analysis of trauma in mythological characters, particularly in examining how traumatic experiences shape psychological development and how defense mechanisms operate in response to trauma in *The Song of Achilles*. Moreover, existing studies rarely explore the dynamic relationship between trauma, unconscious defense strategies, and identity formation in the characters of Achilles and Patroclus. Therefore, this study seeks

to fill this gap by applying Freud's theory of defense mechanisms to analyze the forms of trauma experienced by the two protagonists and their psychological responses toward suffering, loss, and existential conflict.

To examine these dynamics, this study adopts Freud's theory of defense mechanisms (1926) as its primary analytical framework. Freud's model elucidates how the human mind unconsciously transforms intolerable emotions into psychologically manageable forms through mechanisms such as repression, denial, displacement, and projection. These defense processes, while serving as protective strategies, also reveal the intricate ways in which individuals internalize and respond to trauma. By employing this theoretical perspective, the study seeks to explore how Achilles and Patroclus articulate, conceal, and negotiate their emotional suffering, and how their restraint and self-sacrifice illustrate the inherent tension between trauma and the instinct for self-preservation. The analysis ultimately demonstrates that their responses are not solely expressions of heroism but also profound representations of human vulnerability, reflecting the universal struggle to derive meaning and maintain dignity in the face of pain. Ultimately, this study underscores that literature serves as a medium for understanding how individuals endure psychological pain and strive to restore emotional balance after trauma.

1.2 Research Questions

There are two study questions in this study, as follow:

1. What do traumatic experiences shape the psychological development of Achilles and Patroclus in Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*?
2. How do Achilles and Patroclus respond to the trauma in the novel?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the traumatic experiences that shape the psychological development of Achilles and Patroclus in Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*.
2. To analyze how Achilles and Patroclus respond to the trauma.

1.4 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to add more knowledge about the use of psychoanalytic theory in literature. It can give a better understanding of how trauma is shown in the characters of Achilles and Patroclus.

2. Practical Significance

The results of this study can help students and other writers who want to study similar topics. It can also be used as a reference to see how psychological theories can be applied to literary works and how trauma can affect people in real life.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study will look at the novel *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller, paying attention to the characters Achilles and Patroclus. The study will mainly use psychoanalytic theory to look at the themes of trauma in these two characters. This study will focus only on the feelings and thoughts of Achilles and Patroclus, even though there are other characters in the novel. This study might not look at every possible meaning of the novel, but it will focus on the psychological sides of the two main characters.