

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Every living creature, especially us as human beings, might have experienced such traumatic event once in our life. A traumatic event is an “incident that causes physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological harm. The person experiencing the distressing event may feel threatened, anxious, or frightened as a result” (Healthline 2017). Tyson (2006) explains that one might experience the trauma of sudden death, being separated from the loved ones, losing sibling or family, and later after the event occurs, the person that face the trauma will experience the trauma or crisis of being flooded by all the guilt, denial and conflict that the person has been repressed concerning with that event (21).

A traumatic event and the after effect of the experience itself are also found in *The Book Thief*, a novel written by Markus Zusak. As Burakova (2012) says that after a closer reading, this book could not only be classified as a young adult’ fiction, but it is more like a textbook example of a trauma narrative. This novel sets in Germany during the world war. Unlike his other novels which are inspired by his own life and experience, *The Book Thief* is drawn from the experience of Zusak’s parents who are growing up in Germany and Austria during the war.

Liesel Meminger, the main character in *The Book Thief*, sees her little brother dies before her eyes on her way to meet her foster parents, Liesel is also separated

from her biological mother and never meet her father since she was little and no one tells her the reason until later, she figures it out herself. Liesel always has nightmare since the very first day she lives with her foster parents, she seems to live a normal life for the girl at her age, but whenever she is upset or anxious, she always have the urge to conduct a book thievery. This strange impulse of stealing book begins in her brother's funeral after she has done it once and after that, whenever she gets caught in an unpleasant moment, she will steal the book.

The writer is interested in exploring the motives behind Liesel Meminger's action to steal multiple books. The writer assumes that it has something to do with the emptiness she feels after the loss of her beloved ones, the writer believes that the book itself is used as her object to fulfill what she might think has lost from her whether she realizes it or not. Hence, the writer will conduct a research under the title of: *The Main Character's Loss, Emptiness and Object of Desire in Markus Zusak's The Book Thief*.

1.2 Identification of Problem

Since she was adopted, Liesel Meminger always has nightmares about the death of her brother and wet the bed. During her life with a foster family, Liesel then figure out the reason her biological mother leaves her and another events that make her struggling and feel anxious. Those unpleasant moments Liesel has experienced always end up with stealing a book, seems like she get nothing but the book to console her, she always uses the book to escape. Becoming the book thief every time she feels anxious, make the writer believes that the act of stealing bookstakes an

important role in helping Liesel deals with her anxiety and physical condition after the great loss she has experienced.

1.3 Scope of the Research

This thesis is an intrinsic research which focuses on Liesel Meminger's anxiety, particularly the causes and symptoms that can be found in her, and also the books and the act of stealing books as her object of desire.

1.4 The Research Questions

It is assumed that Liesel's action of stealing books is her way to fill herself from the emptiness after the loss she has experienced and has also caused her to suffer from anxiety. Thus, this research focuses on answering these following questions:

1. What are the symptoms shown in the novel which proves Liesel Meminger's anxiety?
2. How do the books and the action of stealing books become her object of desire to fulfill herself?

1.5 Objectives of the Research

Generally, this research is aimed to enrich the analysis of *The Book Thief* novel in the studies of literary work in the field of psychological criticism and specifically, this research is aimed to analyze the main character of the novel, Liesel Meminger from psychological perspectives. This research is going to explain the causes of Liesel's anxiety and trauma and the act of stealing books and the book itself becomes her object of desire.

1.6 Review of Related Studies

The first study that the writer found is an article written by Zuzana Burakova entitled: “Haunted by Humans: Traumatic reading of *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak” (2012). In this article, Burakova says that even if *The Book Thief* is classified as children’s book or young adults’ fiction, but after the close reading it could also be taken as the example of a trauma narrative. She explains about the possibilities of trauma that might be suffered not only by the victims, but also the perpetrators. Since the novel takes time during the World War II in Germany and Zusak’s parents are the survivor, the trauma might have been inherited to him through the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma. In the novel, the trauma that is suffered by the perpetrators could also be seen through the Germany who are not stand for the Nazi at all but could not do anything about it. Despite the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, Burakova also mention the other traumas that might be suffered by the character in the novel, they are Postmemory, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), PITS (Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Disorder), Instances of Individual and Collective Trauma, etc. As for Liesel, Burakova assumes that Liesel Meminger might have the signs of PTSD and heal herself through reading (2012).

The second study is written by Grace Lee entitled “Literacy in *The Book Thief*: Complicated Matters of People, Witnessing, Death” (2015). This study examines the power of literacy to both Liesel Meminger and Max Vandernburg’s lives. Literacy’s power is shown by the way it affects Liesel’s perspective on place, coping with her emotional trauma, and defying the Nazi culture during her short period in Molching.

Lee argues that through literacy, Liesel, who are not Jew by ethnicity, nor by experiencing what the Jews go through, becomes a rhetorical Jew for as it gives her a way to stand up for herself when she is powerless and suppressed, especially when we see her circumstances in parallel with Max's circumstances. Max and Liesel have literacy and are able to cope with their emotional stress. Liesel, like Max, is able to resist the culture of Nazi Germany by continuing the traces of Jewish existence through literacy. The power of literacy, as Lee states, could also goes beyond death, or a complete end, and continues to keep memories and stories alive as the written word endures for the witnessing to be passed on (2015).

The last article the writer has read entitled "Words from the Basement: Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*" written by Susan Koprince (2011). This article explains the changing of archetypal image of the basement. Instead of embodies the humanity deepest' fear and in some cases, "buried madness, walled-in tragedy". The basement in *The Book Thief* is pictured as a shelter, a home and a setting in which words can provide salvation. Koprince also states that Liesel's passion in reading which she also learned in basement, leads her to steal the book from Nazi-book burning and the library of the major's wife. For Liesel, the basement is not only a sanctuary for words but also a place which save her life. Not only for Liesel, the basement also become a shelter for Max Vandernburg. The image of the basement as a refuge and a sanctuary for words in reinforced later in the novel through the portrait of the air-raid shelter in Liesel's neighborhood. The fear in the basement dissipates, however, when Liesel begins reading aloud to the gathering. Her story distracts the adults, and the children

are calmed by the sound of Liesel's voice. From then on, Liesel reads to her neighbors during every bombing raid, the words (2011).

Reviews of the studies above mostly discussed about the power of literacy and words. Indeed they state that the words could help Liesel copes with her trauma by reading, but the act of stealing and the book itself, the writer believes could also take the part in helping her to deal with her psychological wound and fulfill her emptiness.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Theory of Literature: Objective Criticism

Abrams says that objective criticism deals with a work of literature as "something which stands free from what is often called "extrinsic" relation to the poet, audience, or to the environing world" (1999:52). Instead it describes the literary product as autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end, and to be analyzed and judged solely by "intrinsic" criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity and the interrelation of its component elements.

Psychology of Character in Fiction

Fictional characters, as Paris (1997) says are not "simply functions in a text or encoded message from the author but imagined human being whose thoughts, feelings and actions made sense in motivational terms". Paris also states that indeed it is not taught that literature is about human being, human relationship or experience, but a great literature always portrays the characters who seem to be as the same nature as ourselves.

Paris believes that psychoanalytic theory has much to contribute to the understanding of literature and that it permits a conceptual clarity that cannot be derived from literature alone. “Theory provides categories of understanding that help us to recover the intuitions of the great writers about the working of the human psyche.” (1997: 6).

Psychoanalytic theory gives us formulation about human behavior, whereas literature gives us truth to experience. Because of its concrete, dramatic quality, literature enables us not only to observe people other than ourselves, “but also to enter into their mental universe, to discover what it feels like to be these people and to confront their life situations” (1997: 6).

The Concept of Anxiety by Freud

In his early work, Freud considers anxiety to be a “toxic transformation” of undischarged libido. This failure of discharge could either be physiological or other incomplete or unsatisfactory sexual practices, resulting in “actual neuroses” or “anxiety neuroses”; or it could arise from repression (or its failure), as a symptom of the continued pressure of unacceptable desires, which led to the “psychoneuroses”—hysterias and obsessions.

In 1926 Freud radically revises his ideas about anxiety, abandoning the distinction between neurotic and realistic anxiety, and the claim that repression caused anxiety. In this new theory, Freud distinguished two types of anxiety, a traumatic, reality-oriented “automatic” anxiety in which the system is overwhelmed,

and a secondary, “neurotic” anxiety in which reprisals of these situations are anticipated, thus setting in motion defensive processes.

“Automatic anxiety” is an affective reaction to the helplessness experienced during a traumatic experience. The second form of anxiety originated within the psychological system and is mediated by the ego. This “signal anxiety” presages the emergence of a new “danger situation” that would be a repetition of one of several earlier, “traumatic states.” These moments—*loss of the object, loss of the object’s love, the threat of castration, and the fear of punishment by the internalized objects of the superego*—which are experienced serially during the developmental process, could reemerge at any time in a person’s subsequent adult life, typically brought on by some conflation of reality and intrapsychic conflict, as a new edition of anxiety.

Lacan’s Theory of Three Registers.

Jacque Lacan is the most influential French thinkers of the 20th century. In the 1950s, he interpreted Freud’s ideas and put forward his own theory of psychoanalysis on the basis of structural linguistics and anthropology. His psychoanalysis doctrine and philosophy ideas have affected the entire Western academics.

Lacan’s one main contribution to psychoanalytic thought lies in his theory of three registers. He analyzes the psychological development of from infant to adult and presents three concepts: need, demand and desire that roughly correspond to 3 phases of development, or 3 fields in which humans develop; the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic.

1. The Real.

The Real, as the phase of need, lasts from birth till somewhere between 6 and 18 months. In this phase the infant is something inseparable from its mother. Driven by need, it needs food, comfort/safety, or to be changed, etc., all of which can be satisfied by an object. The real is the state of “nature,” which has to be broken up in order for culture to be formed.

2. The Imaginary.

When between 6 and 18 months old, the baby starts to be able to distinguish between its body and everything else in the world. The awareness of separation, or the fact of otherness, creates a sense of loss. The baby then demands a reunion, a return to that original sense of fullness that it had in the Real. At this point, the baby shifts from having needs to having demands, which is always for recognition or love from others. This is where Lacan’s Mirror stage happens. What the child anticipates is a sense of self as a unified separate whole. Eventually, this entity the child sees in the mirror is a whole being, which is designated by the word “I” or the subject. By doing this, according to Lacan, the baby imagines a self that has no lack, no notion of absence or incompleteness.

3. The Symbolic.

At some point that the child moves “from insufficiency to anticipation”(Lacan, 1977) in the mirror, he gets the sense of “other” and the concept of self, a concept which relies on one’s misidentification with this image of an other. The “little other” illustrates for the child the idea of lack, of loss, of absence, which form the structures of symbolic order. So, in the Symbolic, there is a structure (or structuring principle)

of Otherness, and a structuring principle of Lack, which is the gateway to the Symbolic order. In the Symbolic order, the Other (capital O) is a structural position that everyone is trying to get to, to merge with, in order to get rid of the separation between “self” and “other.” But, as the position of center, the Other can’t be merged with. So the position of the Other creates and sustains a ever-ending lack, which Lacan calls desire. By definition, desire can never be fulfilled. Lacan further gives an idea of the unconscious which is “structured like and produced by language at the point of the subject’s entry into the Symbolic Order” (Lacan, 1997) Thus, the Lacanian subject becomes a subject with two parts/aspects: consciousness/ego and the unconscious, the latter of which is “the discourse of the Other” and the home of the subject. The Symbolic realm, which is marked by the concepts of desire, is the realm we have to enter in order to become social being. This psychological transition of from the imaginary into the symbolic produces social subjects and shapes human progress.

Desire and the Object of desire by Lacan

Desire can be defined by its infantile origins as the remainder when satisfaction of physiological needs is subtracted from the child’s demands for its mother’s attention (Lacan 1958). It is what a subject seeks in love or passion beyond the possible gratification of instinctual wishes. It is therefore a fantasy, which Lacan speaks of as the cause of desire. Lacan is observing that our choices are made on the basis of highly specific unconscious fantasies, which endow our objects with unique promise. But because this promise is not attached to any clearly realizable or realistic

goal, desire, perhaps like infantile sexuality itself, cannot be fully satisfied. On the other hand, Lacan asserted, desire entails libidinal consequences, which do involve goals of sexual or symbolic gratification capable of being achieved and enjoyed. Again, the unsatisfied residue left after attainment of such pleasures represents the subject's desire, whose cause is a fantasy—the *objet petit a*.

In the Lacanian formula, desire “insists” in the signifying chain of human speech, straining toward dimly perceived goals and the deferred promise of complete satisfaction. Because achievement of this aim is impossible, we substitute fantasies of sexual, romantic, narcissistic, or material accomplishment that stitch desire to the fabric of social reality, and we convince ourselves that we will be satisfied by realizing them. Desire thus becomes “libidized” and diverted to existing symbolic objects.

For Lacan, confounded with these objects is the core fantasy of the *objet petit a*, the cause of the intense desire that endows them with their unique significance. The crucial point is whether the fantasy places it as external to the subject, and hence unattainable, or as internal, at the limit of subjective identification (where the subject has the fantasy of “rejoining” or merging with the real), in which case suicide or psychosis may impend. To put it another way, desire is accepted as a valued aspect of the human condition, provided it remains within the bounds of symbolic reality.

1.8 Method of the Research

In conducting this research, there are three steps that need to be followed. The first step is collecting the data. In collecting the data, I will use library research, there

are two kinds of data that will be used; the primary data is taken from the novel *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak itself and the secondary data is taken by collecting some information from scholarly articles or essays and theory books related to the object of this research.

The second step is analyzing the data. The method of analyzing data is descriptive analysis. Fraenkel and Wallen said that “descriptive method is a method used to explain, analyze, and classify something through various techniques...” (1993: 23). The analysis will be begun by analyzing the intrinsic element, that is the plot of the story itself and then relating the condition and situation which occur along the story plot to the main character, Liesel Meminger and then the analysis will be continued by discovering what kind of psychological problem that can be found in the character, the discovery will be led by the psychoanalytical theory itself. Then the writer will see what are the causes and symptoms of Liesel Meminger’s anxiety, the role of book thievery to her emptiness and the book itself as her object of desire.

The last step is presenting the result of the analysis. The result of the analysis will bear several points since the research itself is a qualitative research. According to Babbie (2014), qualitative research is a scientific method of observation to gather non-numeral data, this type of research refers to the meanings, concepts definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and description of things.