CHAPTER II
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2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study examines Coraline, a fictional character from Neil Gaiman's novel, by analyzing her character development and her transformation from insecurity to courage. The analysis uses Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology, which outlines the progression from feelings of inferiority to compensation, striving for superiority, private logic, and social interest. Additionally, the study highlights how Coraline's development is shaped by both internal and external struggles by applying characterization theory and conflict theory to identify her as a dynamic character. This method aids in comprehending Coraline's psychological development as well as the universal human desire for meaning, control, and acceptance.

2.1.1 Characterization

Characterization, the art of developing characters that provide true life to a story, is essential for the novel to demonstrate life. Characterization, as M. H. Abrams describes the revelation of personality through "appearance, actions, thoughts, and dialogue" p. 34, (Abrams, 1999), and it is the process through which characters engage and evoke emotions in readers, from people readers mourn, to

characters whose life is celebrated or, whose likeness readers see to help them understand themselves. Characters have the potential to be either static, as markers of stability or stall points, or dynamic, as indications of human possibility to change. Dynamic characters, as noted by Laurence Perrine that experience "meaningful, permanent changes in personality or outlook" p. 45, (Perrine, 2002), from conflict, the furnace for narrative tension. Characterization refers to a technique used by authors to present and develop characters in a work of fiction. Meyer Howard Abrams defines characterization as "the procedure by which a writer creates a character" p. 33, (Abrams, 1999). Characterization is often a technique that includes revealing a character's attributes and philosophies and collecting them through the character's appearance, behavior, thoughts, and speech. For the reader to truly understand a character's motives, not only must they observe how a character acts within a narrative, but they must also appreciate the nature of who that character truly is in their psychology. In essence, characterization is a technique which the author can use to constitute an imaginary world, while also establishing realism, since it brings characters to life for a reader.

Characterization can be made in two ways: direct characterization, where a character is described directly by the narrator or another character (e.g. "She was brave and kind"), or indirect characterization, where a character's personality is shown indirectly through actions, spoken

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dialogue, and/or internal monologue. Both forms of characterization work together to make characters better, more interesting, and sometimes more relatable. One of the major distinctions in character development is between static and dynamic characters. These terms refer to the extent to which a character changes (or doesn't change) throughout the story. A static character has a consistent personality, beliefs, and inner qualities from start to finish. Static characters can experience a series of events that have no real effect on whom they are. Static characters are often used to illustrate the changes of others. They can definitely act as foils to active characters and show off the main character's change. Static characters can be well-drawn and key to the plot but lack in development characteristics.

By contrast, a dynamic character experiences some level of change during the narrative. Notably, the change is deep and real rather than temporary and surface level. In the book Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense, Laurence Perrine states that a dynamic character undergoes a "fundamental and lasting change in some aspect of character, personality, or outlook" p. 45, (Perrine, 2002). This often occurs via the character's reaction to internal conflicts in their lives, emotional disturbances, or significant life events. This transformation allows the character to grow, learn something meaningful about themselves or the world around them, or to confront an essential weakness or limitation. Dynamic character development is vital in many types of works since

it reflects the reality about our human experiences. Life has the power to transform us. We are confronted with problems and triumphs, trauma and transformation—and characters that exist in that reality are more realistic and effective. According to Clarence Hugh Holman, dynamic characters "have the ability to adjust to circumstances, evolve emotionally, and change their responses" p. 49, (Holman C. H., 1986). Many characters experience these transformations, particularly in coming-of-age stories, psychological dramas, and character-driven stories.

Dynamic characters often embody the narrative's major topic or message. It can reflect a moral lesson (for example, excessive pride leads to failure), a psychological fact (for example, humans must confront fear and anxiety in order to grow), or a philosophical principle (for example, identity emerges through struggle). As Ruth K. J. Lukens argues, "character is the essential core of fiction," serving not just to populate the story, but to carry the weight of meaning and theme p. 54, (Lukens, 2007). Likewise, if a novel's thematic components revolve around tragedy, self-discovery, or inner conflict, the protagonist's psychological metamorphosis becomes the central theme of the entire work. In addition, according to Gustav Freytag, character arcs mirror dramatic structure, where character transformation aligns with "exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution" in order to produce narrative unity p. 115, (Freytag, 1863). The dynamic character's progress is often organized around

a character arc, which consists of exposition (the traits and flaws of the character are established), rising action (the conflict tests the character's viewpoints), climax (the character must have an epiphany that leads to realization or change), and resolution (the identifiable new version of the character). A character arc allows the viewer to follow in a logical and emotionally satisfying process the character's progression.

Static characters, whether or not they demonstrate an inherent change, are ageless and powerful. They can be constants—characters who contribute to the consistency of a chaotic plot-line—or they may represent values or ideas that remain fixed against the change of others. As Edward Morgan Forster posits, static characters "embody fixed ideas or traditions" and act as the moral or societal boundary that dynamic character struggle against p. 75, (Forster, 1927). Their "unchangeableness" creates the tension and contrast for dynamic evolution to be given substance. In conclusion, the interaction between static and dynamic characters allows literature to reflect the experience of humanness, including growth, resistance, glory, and even despair. Regardless of whether the interaction with the reader is static character demonstrating stubborn rigidity or the dynamic character revealing the changes of their heart, both provide rich characterizations for literary representations to thrive.

2.1.2   Conflict Theory

Conflict, as the essential element of fiction, pushes characters offers beyond their limits, always pushing them to tackle their fears, desires, and social limitations. It is especially vital in stories of psychological in a way of character development in narrative fiction, where both internal and external conflicts work in tandem to shape identity. Edward H. Kenney understood conflict as "a force in opposition" p. 12, (Kenney, 1966), while Edward Morgan Forster described intrinsic conflict "the inner man of the character against the outer man of social pressure" as the foundation of psychological depth p. 89, (Forster, 1927). This dual perspective recognizes that narrative tension can come from within the self or from pressures surrounding the self. Conflict is one of the key elements of narrative writing. It is the engine that drives the plot, reveals character, and engages readers emotionally. Without conflict, a story would have no momentum, no direction, and no reason for existing. As Kenney emphasizes, "Conflict is the opposition between two characters (or forces), which is the basis of the plot in a dramatic or narrative work" p. 12, (Kenney, 1966). In fiction, internal conflict and external conflict are the two primary forms of conflict. For the story to have depth and tension, both are necessary p. 61, (Stanton, 1965); p. 95, (Holman C. H., 1986).

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A character is confronted with external conflict when they are kept from their stated motives, dreams, or desires by some outside force or resistance. This could have to do with fate, nature, other characters, or societal demands. While oppressions, arguments, and survival are all classic examples of external conflict, they are often manifestations or struggles that derive from other, more fundamental emotional or moral struggles. M. H. Abrams defines external conflict as a dramatic struggle between a character and an opposing force, which can create the plot, the conflict can also test the character's value p. 159, (Abrams, 1999). When the character's conflict, external conflict, puts the character's strength, weaknesses and development into temporary opposition. A protagonist might challenge a peaceful society and deal with family trauma or piup a symbolic opponent; the protagonist's beliefs and resolve are put into question by these external events. As Laurence Perrine states "external conflict not only reveals what a character encounters, but how a character is constituted by the conflict they choose to endure" p. 51, (Perrine, 2002). It is the outside expression of the evolution.

On the other side, internal conflict is a mental or emotional struggle occurring in the character's head. It expresses the character's struggles, guilt, denial of desire, apprehension, or lost self. Edgar V. Roberts states "internal conflict takes place when a character struggles against his/her own emotions, desires, or fears" p. 88, (Roberts E.

V., 2007). Moreover, John Forrester expands on this notion: "conflict in the psyche exemplifies the complexities of both identity and consciousness" p. 138, (Forrester, 1990). The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida. This kind of conflict layers the narrative creating a stronger sense of the character's vulnerabilities; it makes the growth of the protagonist believable, personal, and emotionally powerful. Robert Stanton offers, "internal conflict allows the reader to empathise with the character's process of development and its emotional consequences" p. 56, (Stanton, 1965). In this manner, the reader is not simply observing a plot; the reader is observing an internal process that reflects the depth of human psychological experience.

Internal conflict is engaging, not only because it is relatable, but it is also transformative. E. M. Forster suggests that internal conflict "tests the character's convictions, motives, and desires" p. 89, (Forster, 1927). Tension that tests internal struggle introduces change: the character can no longer be who they were. Tension is important for developing dynamic characters, i.e., characters who develop through internal pain of doubt, regret, epiphany, and recognizing responsibility p. 46, (Perrine, 2002); p. 94 (Holman C. H., 1986). Internal conflict can also occur in the face of conflict between duty and desire, between right and wrong, or between public persona and private truth. Such complex battles are especially fruitful in exploratory or philosophical literature.

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As Jonathan Culler states, "Literature of the inner life presents conflict as identity, uncertainty and contradiction, rather than an action or event" p. 37, (Culler, 1997). Generally, in literature of the inner complexity, the emotional content—the character's thinking and feeling is the action that moves the story.

The relationship between internal and external conflicts gives readers the dual experience of simultaneously witnessing the character's external change and internal change. The outer conflict, represented by the external force, can sometimes lead to internal conflict; but, ultimately the heart of the story comes down to whether the character can internalize the outer conflict, through the acceptance, change, or even collapse of the internal conflict. Forster explained it clearly; "the real conflict is not over until the character resolves or accepts something internally" p. 91, (Forster, 1927). Regardless of whether the internal resolution leads to peace or suffering, it ultimately shapes the emotional resolution. As well, Paul Ricoeur identifies conflict as a narrative condition, not just a literary device, states that "Narrative identity is forged in struggle, contradiction, and change. The capacity for narrative is the capacity for alteration" p. 75, (Ricoeur, 1984). Conflict is what allows characters, as well as human beings, to emerge from crises with new meaning, and is the ontological condition of becoming.

2.1.3 Adler's Individual Psychology

This study relies on Adler's Individual Psychology Theory which was developed by Alfred Adler, a former student of Freud, who then developed his own theory based on the individual's drive to develop, communicate, and find their own meaning. Adler argued that individuals are substantially motivated by social situations and the desire to reach goals; especially the ultimate goal of striving for superiority or competence, in contrast to Freud's emphasis on the motivation of unconscious sexual or instinctual drives p. 13, (Adler, Understanding human nature, 1927). This striving is an important inward expression of competence, wholeness, and establishing one's own sense of meaning and accomplishment than physically dominate behavior over others. Adler emphasizes that "every individual represents a unity of personality," meaning that all actions, thoughts, and motivations are part of a consistent striving toward self-defined goals p. 17, (Adler, The science of living, 1930).

According to Adler's theory, all individuals start life with a sense of inferiority due to the physical limitations, helplessness, and dependence they experience in early infancy. These feelings of inferiority are normal and even necessary, because they stimulate the will to grow and improve. However, sometimes these feelings can become excessive, or can be addressed in a non-constructive fashion, and if this happens, they may develop into an inferiority complex, wherein the person feels dependency and

inadequacy all of the time p. 96, (Ansbacher, 1956). Adler regarded these feelings as a "spur to great achievement or a threat to emotional defeat," depending on the coping strategies the person develops p. 74, (Adler, Understanding human nature, 1927). These unresolved feelings can color the individual's perception of life and trigger psychological distress, isolation, or overcompensation, especially when not mediated by strong familial or social bonds.

The first phase of Adler's psychological development is this recognition of inferiority. It sets the emotional and cognitive groundwork for how the individual will perceive self-worth. Argyle contends, "To be a human being is to feel oneself inferior" p. 96, (Ansbacher, 1956). The book Adlerian Counseling: A Practitioner's Approach explains that "an inferiority complex results in a person becoming stuck in feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness" p. 38, (Milliren, 2007). These negative self-beliefs can shape the individual's private logic and distort their perception of personal ability.

To deal with these feelings of inferiority, individuals have a natural need to compensate. This is the means by which one copes with weakness in either a realistic manner or in an imagined manner. Adler describes this as "an attempt to overcome real or perceived deficiencies" p. 32, (Adler, The science of living, 1930). The second phase in Adler's progression, compensation, is demonstrated as creating specific talents, exploration, or fantasizing about being

powerful and important. These coping mechanisms help the individual return to a state of equilibrium and help initiate development, although some compensatory means may become maladaptive. Duane Schultz states, "Compensation emerges as a creative response to life's challenges and the psychological heartbreak one feels based on their childhood" p. 137, (Schultz, 2016). It is during this stage that identity begins to form—not from satisfaction, but from resistance, as individuals try to define themselves against perceived lack. When properly directed, compensation can be a healthy step toward self-esteem vision.

The third phase in Adler's process is Striving for Superiority. Building off of compensation, although shifting the focus from reaction to directed purpose, Adler believed that striving for superiority is the central motivating force of human behavior. It is not a basic drive to dominate other people, rather a generalized drive in many activities to fulfill one's potential. "The striving for perfection is the striving for completion, for wholeness" p. 43, (Adler, What life should mean to you, 1931). Striving in healthy amounts leads people to overcome their internal limitations and create a constructive lifestyle. Gerald Corey states, "All behavior is purposeful and goal directed—stemming from our innate striving for significance and competence" p. 110, (Corey, 2013). This striving marks a transition from inner healing to outer intention, where one no longer compensates for inferiority but pursues meaning, ethical goals, and creative

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self-realization. At this point, the individual becomes more future-focused, driven by imagined goals that serve as guiding stars, a notion closely tied to Adler's concept of fictive finalism.

Throughout this process, every individual is also developing a Style of Life or what Adler calls private logic. The fourth phase of Adler's theory refers to this unique organization of beliefs, attitude, and behaviors that impact a person's interpretation of experience and goals. "Every person adopts a plan of life and a personal logic, once adopted, will affect all the future choices and behavior" p.56, (Adler, Understanding human nature, 1927). Private logic can reflect reality and social interest or can be distorted through early fears and misperceptions. Jess Feist and Gregory J. Feist explain, "The style of life, established in early childhood, is relatively fixed by the time the child is five years old, and it reflects the individual's reactions to their inferiority and family experiences" p. 145, (Feist, 2017). A distorted private logic, formed through trauma or neglect, can produce rigid behaviors or fictional beliefs about one's role in society. On the other hand, healthy style of life incorporates flexibility, empathy, and proactive problem solving—fostering adaptability throughout life.

The fifth and final phase in Adler's model is Social Interest (Gemeinschaftsgefühl)—the individual's connection to others and strength in improving the social world. "Social feeling is the true and inevitable compensation for all the

natural weaknesses of individual human beings" p. 112, (Adler, Social interest: A challenge to mankind, 1933). A person who strengthens their social interest and feels belonging will act upon their feelings for social interest and act towards the uplift of themselves and the community. Richard J. Watts states, "Social interest is the barometer of mental health, showing a sense of cooperation, empathy and common humanity" p.78, (Watts, 2003). The development of social interest transforms private growth into public contribution. It signifies emotional maturity, psychological health, and the completion of Adler's developmental vision. Social interest reflects the ability to balance personal striving with communal empathy, achieving Adler's ideal of a fully functioning individual.

Adler's theory provides literary analysts an extensive framework for examining character growth. In particular, it allows analysts to explore how early emotional trauma—particularly in the form of development-arresting inferiority or negligence—is taken in, and ultimately synthesized, as psychological drive. When a character grows—the character struggles internally and learns to grow through adversity, struggle, and the quest for one's own meaning—the character is compelling. This Adlerian route to personal meaning is reflected in characters who conquer internal conflict, inferiority, or identity concerns p. 122, (Corey, 2013); p. 150, (Feist, 2017). Characters who complete all five stages of Adler's progression often reflect a humanizing and hopeful

narrative arc—one that moves from fragility to resilience, and from self-doubt to social connectedness.

Thus, a character who defines themselves not only outside of their inferiority complex and who ultimately uses their own growth and ability to generate social significance would be an example of not just personal growth but also a form of psychological health characterized by empathy and social contribution. The following key concepts of one of the central ideas in Adler's theory as outlined by Heinz L. Ansbacher p. 151, (Ansbacher, 1956), illustrates this progression:

1. Individuals are driven by their objectives.
2. The actions are coordinated and intentional.
3. The social environment shapes personality.
4. Individuals look for importance and a sense of belonging.

These propositions establish the close connection between behavior, motivation, and one's social reality. According to Adler, the healthy individual who encounters suffering mitigtates their pain and utilizes it as a resource for healthy social connections and alternative forms of responsible behaviour. These statements are beneficial when examining how a character matures and changes in literary sources of pictorial representation, particularly when the protagonist develops from an emotionally impaired being to developing into a resilient and self-reliant individual. The full

trajectory of psychological development is present throughout this trajectory, including a transition from a negatively constructed self-image, to intentional striving, to social contribution. Besides demonstrating a form of internal resilience, characters who exhibit what has been identified as Adler's five stages, also have a potential to actively and meaningfully influence their outside world in connected ways.

2.2   Previous Research

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* has been studied in previous research using a range of academic approaches, from feminist criticism to gothic horror, and Freudian psychoanalysis. (Sabri, 2021), for example, used Freud's psychoanalytic concepts in Mother-Child Attachment: An Exploration of Freudian Denial and Aggression in *Coraline* to explain Coraline's emotional responses to her unnatural Other Mother, as well as her emotional connection with her real parents. The study focused on the denial of Coraline's need for maternal love, and on issues of unconscious impulses. Sabri's study, while acknowledging psychical issues, is primarily based on Freud's reliance on repression and oral development. A related project that explored Coraline's independence from male-centered standards of femininity is Exploring Feminine Identity in *Coraline*: A Feminist Literary Analysis (Putri, 2020) Although the project does examine the identity formations, on the whole, it focuses primarily on gender discourses, instead of

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psychological motivations. In a similar context, (Naraswari, 2022) analyzed Coraline through Existential Literary Theory, venturing into aspects of translation, creating meaning, dread, and freedom from affect. The project mainly emphasized Coraline's sense of existential dread and the self-realization she discovers through absurdity; it did not include inferiority complex, compensation, or developmental psychology.

While these previous works have contributed to understanding Coraline from a variety of angles, none have yet applied Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology to examine her psychological development. In particular, themes such as inferiority feelings, compensatory behavior, striving for superiority, lifestyle (private logic), and the emergence of social interest remain unexplored. This gap allows this study the chance to provide a new and unique psychological perspective by aligning Adlerian principles of the five stages development in Coraline's development. In this way, Coraline is more than an adventurous child on a gothic experience, but a psychologically rich character who engages with the notion of inferiority, self-assertion, and the beginning of social awareness.