



## The characterization of inner conflict through Do Ra-mi in the drama *Can This Love Be Translated?* : A literary psychological analysis

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### ABSTRACT

The drama “*Can This Love Be Translated?*” portrays the psychological conflict of its main character through the presence of Do Ra-mi as a trauma projection that significantly influences Cha Mu-hee’s life. This study aims to analyze Do Ra-mi as a form of trauma projection in the main character’s character formation and to identify the psychological aspects underlying its emergence. This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method using a literary psychology framework based on Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, encompassing the personality structures of id, ego, and superego, as well as the defense mechanisms of repression and projection. Data consist of dialogues, scenes, and visual elements from the drama, collected through observation and note-taking techniques. The findings reveal that Do Ra-mi is formed through a destructive superego and prolonged repression, functioning as a trauma projection that embodies Cha Mu-hee’s suppressed emotions and inner conflicts. Do Ra-mi not only serves as a protector enabling Cha Mu-hee to cope with her trauma but also reinforces her negative self-beliefs. As the story progresses, Cha Mu-hee gradually confronts her trauma and accepts Do Ra-mi as part of herself, leading to more mature character formation. This study offers a new perspective suggesting that the emergence of Do Ra-mi should not merely be interpreted as evidence of dissociative identity disorder or a split personality, but rather understood as both a trauma projection and a psychological defense mechanism that emerges in response to unresolved traumatic experiences.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Shim (2006) and Kim (2013) argue that the Hallyu (Korean Wave) is not merely an entertainment product, but also a medium for representing the social, cultural, and psychological values of contemporary Korean society. K-dramas have become one of its most influential forms due to their ability to address issues of identity, family relationships, and characters' inner conflicts through narrative. Ministry of Health and Welfare (2024), based on a national survey released by the Korean government, recorded that 73.6% of respondents experienced at least one mental health problem in the past year, up from 63.9% in 2022. Kang et al. (2017) further demonstrate that childhood trauma in Korean society, particularly violence, contributes significantly to depression and anxiety in adulthood. This social condition shapes the way K-dramas foreground psychological issues as central narrative elements.

Manalo (2024) shows that K-dramas tend to represent characters with mental health challenges through specific visual stereotypes, such as destructive behavior, childhood trauma, and emotional dependency on romantic relationships as a form of healing. This theme is present in dramas such as *Daily Dose of Sunshine* (2023), which explores depression and schizophrenia; *It's Okay to Not Be Okay* (2020), which addresses childhood trauma; *Kill Me, Heal Me* (2015), which portrays dissociative identity disorder; and *It's Okay, That's Love* (2014), which concerns schizophrenia. These representations affirm that K-dramas do not merely present psychological issues as entertainment, but also as symbolic constructions related to trauma, identity, and recovery.

One particularly compelling form of this representation appears in the drama "Can This Love Be Translated?." The drama follows the encounter between Joo Ho-jin, a multilingual translator, and Cha Mu-hee (hereafter Mu-hee), a Hallyu actress who carries childhood trauma stemming from an attempted murder by her own mother. This trauma manifests as inner conflict embodied in a trauma projection named Do Ra-mi, which emerges especially after Mu-hee experiences a tragic accident. Do Ra-mi's presence is understood not merely as a representation of psychological symptoms, but as a symbolic embodiment of repressed trauma and unresolved inner conflict. This projection develops into a medium that helps the protagonist confront her fears, express suppressed emotions, and ultimately drives her process of self-integration throughout the story.

This psychological dynamic can be examined using a literary psychology approach with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as the analytical framework. Endraswara (2021) explains that literary psychology is an approach that examines the relationship between literary works and the psychological phenomena of characters embedded in the overall narrative structure. Minderop (2010) adds that literary psychology analysis is conducted through the interpretation of dialogues, behaviors, and conflict situations experienced by characters as entry points for understanding psychological dynamics that are not always visible on the surface.

A literary psychology approach grounded in Freudian psychoanalysis has been widely applied in character analysis. Nuraini and Zaini (2026), in their study titled "Perkembangan Karakter Oh Yi Young dalam Drama Resident Playbook: Perspektif Psikologi Sastra," demonstrate that character transformation can be systematically mapped from the dominance of the impulsive id toward the maturation of the superego driven by professional commitment in the character Oh Yi-young. In a related vein, Resmiliana (2024), in a thesis titled "Perkembangan Moralitas Tokoh Shuhei dalam Film Mother (2020)," emphasizes that a dysfunctional family environment and a toxic mother-child relationship can inhibit moral development due to the dominance of a deviant id impulse.

Abror (2016), in a thesis titled "Amanat Pengarang Drama Korea Kill Me, Heal Me dan Hubungannya dengan Kekerasan terhadap Anak: Kajian Psikoanalisis Sastra," analyzes a drama featuring the character Cha Do-hyun with seven different identities as a representation of childhood violence trauma. The study focuses on the author's message and social issues, positioning alternative identities as psychopathological symptoms that protect the character from traumatic memories. This relates to the findings of Park (2018) in the article "Storytelling of Choice

in TV Dramas: focus on Character of Multiple Personality,” which views the emergence of alternative identities as an ‘inner strategy’ for self-protection and the separation of traumatic past memories. Kang (2020), in a study titled “A Study on Psychopathological Motif seen in TV Drama <Kill me, Heal me>,” further adds that psychopathological symptoms in the same character also represent symbolic resistance against social structural pressures that force individuals to suppress their true selves to meet environmental expectations.

Although the studies above have examined personality structures, trauma, and alternative identities in depth, there remains a gap in the literature that has not been adequately addressed. Studies focusing on K-dramas consistently position alternative identities as representations of dissociation that must ultimately be relinquished. In other words, existing literature has not analyzed trauma projections as active objects that are ultimately accepted as part of the character’s identity rather than discarded or treated merely as symptoms to be cured.

The novelty of this research lies in its analysis of Do Ra-mi as a symbolic instrument that plays an active role in Mu-hee’s character formation and psychic integration, a perspective that directly responds to the limitations of psychopathological readings in prior studies. Based on the limitations of previous studies, this study aims to analyze the representation of trauma projection through the character of Do Ra-mi in “Can This Love Be Translated?” using Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. It also aims to examine how this representation contributes to Mu-hee’s character development throughout the narrative.

### 1.1. Character and Characterization

Nurgiyantoro (2018), drawing on Forster’s (1927) *Aspects of the Novel*, distinguishes two main types of character. A flat character is built around a single dominant trait, remains largely static, and behaves in predictable ways because they do not change significantly over the course of the story. A round character, by contrast, has complex traits, is capable of surprising the reader, and develops as they face conflict. This development affects both their behaviour and the way they see themselves and the world around them. Forster’s distinction describes what kind of character a figure is. To explain how that character is built and what role they play in the story, however, it must be complemented by theories of characterization and of character function.

Characterization refers to the means by which a narrative presents a character’s traits to its audience. Pickering and Hoeper (1981) distinguish two basic methods: telling, in which the narrator or another character states a character’s traits directly, and showing, in which those traits are left for the audience to infer from what the character says and does. Rimmon-Kenan (2002) develops this distinction into a more detailed framework. Direct definition names a trait explicitly. Indirect presentation conveys traits through the character’s actions, speech, external appearance, and environment. Nurgiyantoro (2018) proposes a comparable division between expository (*ekspositori*) and dramatic (*dramatik*) techniques. In audiovisual narratives such as television drama, indirect presentation is especially important, because traits are conveyed less through narration than through dialogue, performed action, costume, and appearance (Eder, Jannidis, & Schneider, 2010). These categories therefore provide the analytical basis for examining how Do Ra-mi is constructed through her dialogue, actions, behaviour, and appearance.

A character’s significance also lies in the function they perform in relation to other characters. Rimmon-Kenan (2002) notes that characters can be illuminated by analogy, when the contrast or similarity between two characters reveals traits that neither would show on their own. One established form of this relation is the foil, a character whose qualities contrast with those of another and thereby make the latter’s traits more visible (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Viewed through this lens, Do Ra-mi can be analysed not only as a character in her own right but also as a device that externalizes Cha Mu-hee’s inner conflict. Her presence brings to the surface feelings and tensions that Cha Mu-hee cannot express directly, and it marks the stages of Cha Mu-hee’s development as a round character. Together, Forster’s typology, the methods of characterization, and the concept of character function allow this study to explain what kind of characters Do Ra-mi and Cha Mu-hee are, how they are constructed, and how one illuminates the other.

## 1.2. Psychoanalytic Theory of Sigmund Freud

Freud (1960), in *The Ego and the Id*, explains that human personality consists of three main structures: the id, ego, and superego. These three structures operate dynamically and mutually influence one another in shaping individual behavior, emotions, and thinking.

The id (das Es) is the personality structure present from birth. Freud (1960) explains that the id contains biological drives and basic instincts that operate entirely on the pleasure principle, the drive to obtain instant gratification without regard for reality or social norms. The id is irrational and serves as the source of psychic energy that continually pushes the individual to fulfill needs and desires.

The ego (das Ich) develops from the individual's interaction with the external world. Freud (1960) notes that the ego operates on the reality principle, that is, the ability to defer gratification until a socially acceptable means is found. It functions as a mediator between the demands of the id and external reality.

The superego (das Über-Ich) is formed through the internalization of moral values and social norms from the environment, especially parents. Freud (1960) explains that the superego operates through two main mechanisms: the conscience, which produces guilt when the individual violates internalized moral standards, and the ego ideal, which drives the individual toward a perfect self-image.

## 1.3. Defense Mechanism: Repression and Projection

When conflict among the id, ego, and superego produces anxiety, the individual unconsciously forms defense mechanisms to protect against psychological pressure. Repression is the most fundamental defense mechanism in Freud's psychoanalytic framework. Freud (1957) defines repression as the ego's defensive effort to expel drives or anxiety from the individual's consciousness. This aligns with Minderop (2010), who, drawing on Freud's theory, notes that repressed unconscious desires are always active and never die. Thus, repression demonstrates that inner conflict or suppressed drives are not truly eliminated but instead manifest in other forms and continue to affect the individual's psychological state.

Another relevant defense mechanism is projection. Freud (1937) explains that projection is a defense mechanism in which the individual attributes unacceptable drives or feelings to another person. Minderop (2010) adds that projection involves the displacement of drives or attitudes that generate anxiety onto another person. In the context of literary works, this concept manifests when a character diverts their inner conflict by perceiving another entity or character as the source of a problem that actually originates from within themselves.

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive-analytical method. The descriptive-analytical method is applied to systematically describe, interpret, and analyze the psychological dynamics of characters as represented in the drama. This study situates itself within the framework of literary psychology, an approach that, according to Endraswara (2021), examines the relationship between literary works and the psychological phenomena of characters embedded within the overall narrative structure.

The research object of this study is the Korean drama "Can This Love Be Translated?," directed by Choi Jeonggyu and released on Netflix (Choi, 2026). The data consist of dialogues, scenes, and visual elements that directly reflect Mu-hee's psychological dynamics, including moments of inner conflict, the emergence and behavior of Do Ra-mi, and shifts in Mu-hee's behavioral patterns throughout the narrative. Data were collected through a systematic observation and note-taking technique (*teknik simak-catat*). The researcher watched all twelve episodes of the drama in their entirety, then identified and recorded all scenes relevant to the research questions. Relevant scenes were defined as those depicting: (a) inner conflict or emotional distress experienced by Mu-hee; (b) the emergence or behavior of Do Ra-mi; (c) relational dynamics

between Mu-hee and other characters, particularly Joo Ho-jin; and (d) moments of character change or self-awareness. All dialogue and translations refer to the official Netflix transcription to ensure consistency and accessibility of the data source.

The data analysis was carried out systematically in four stages. First, identification: all scenes related to Mu-hee's traumatic experiences and their psychological consequences were identified and categorized. Second, classification: the identified data were classified according to Freud's personality structure, distinguishing between manifestations of the id, ego, and superego. Third, analysis of defense mechanisms: the data were examined for evidence of repression and projection as they operate in Mu-hee's psychological dynamics and in the construction of Do Ra-mi as a projective figure. Fourth, interpretation: the cumulative findings were interpreted in relation to the process of self-integration and character development.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the analysis in four sequential stages: (1) characterization analysis of Mu-hee and Do Ra-mi; (2) the roots of trauma and the formation of a punishing superego; (3) repression as an active survival strategy; (4) the birth of Do Ra-mi as a trauma projection and defense mechanism; and (5) confrontation, integration, and character development.

#### 3.1. Characterization Analysis

Mu-hee is the main character who undergoes significant character development in the drama “Can This Love Be Translated?”. Based on Nurgiyantoro's (2018) classification, Mu-hee can be categorized as a round character because she demonstrates dynamic psychological change throughout the narrative. She is not portrayed as a static figure, but as an individual who continually grapples with inner conflict, fear, and the process of self-acceptance.

At the beginning of the story, Mu-hee experiences an existential crisis, believing herself to be unworthy of love. This belief is an internalization of unresolved childhood trauma. In this condition, Do Ra-mi emerges not as a foreign entity, but as both a defense mechanism and a representation of Mu-hee's repressed self. The contrast between the two aspects of Mu-hee's personality is summarized in Table 1, which demonstrates the depth of the character split experienced by the protagonist.

**Table 1.**

Differences between Mu-hee and Do Ra-mi

| Aspect                     | Mu-hee                                   | Do Ra-mi                           |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Appearance                 | Natural makeup, calm/reserved impression | Bold makeup, expressive impression |
| Speech style               | Careful, indirect, often ambiguous       | Blunt, unfiltered, direct          |
| Emotional response         | Restrained, tends to avoid               | Expressive, impulsive              |
| Attitude toward Joo Ho-jin | Afraid of closeness, tends to push away  | Open, willing to show feelings     |
| Psychic function           | Suppresses drives for self-preservation  | Releases repressed desires         |

#### 3.2. The Roots of Trauma: Formation of a Punishing Superego

Within Mu-hee, the superego does not develop as a guiding moral voice, but rather as an internal voice that continually punishes and rejects her existence. Childhood experiences filled with rejection caused the moral standards internalized within her to form through fear, guilt, and the belief that she is unworthy of love. As a result, every emotional relationship Mu-hee engages in is always overshadowed by anxiety about rejection and unhappiness.

##### 3.2.1. Internalization of Her Mother's Words as an Internal Voice

The following statement by Mu-hee's mother is not merely a hurtful remark, but the initial foundation for the formation of a punishing superego within Mu-hee. In the psychoanalytic perspective, words from an authority figure during childhood can be internalized into an inner voice that continuously shapes how an individual perceives themselves.



**Figure 1.** Mu-hee's mother persuades Mu-hee to commit suicide

- (a) 무희 엄마: 너만 혼자 남으려고? 왜? 이 세상엔 아무도 널 사랑해 줄 사람이 없을 텐데? 절대로 행복해질 수 없어.

*mu-hui eomma: neoman honja nameuryeogo? wae? i sesang-en amudo neol saranghae jul sarami eopseul tende? jeoldae-ro haengbokhaejil su eopseo.*

**Meaning:**

Mu-hee's mom: You want to live alone? Why? In this world, no one will ever love you. You can never be happy.

(Episode 12; 32:50–33:05)

The power of this statement lies in its absolute nature. Declarations such as “no one will ever love you” and “you can never be happy” leave Mu-hee no room to construct a more positive identity. The superego formed from this experience ultimately develops into an internal voice that continually judges and convinces Mu-hee that she is indeed unworthy of love or happiness.

### 3.2.2. Family Rejection as External Reinforcement

Mu-hee's mother constituted the first layer in the formation of her superego, while rejection from her extended family became the second layer that confirmed and reinforced this belief externally. Repeated experiences of rejection led Mu-hee to increasingly believe that she was fundamentally different and unacceptable to others. Under these circumstances, her family's responses not only inflicted emotional wounds but also strengthened the punitive inner voice that had already developed within her.

- (b) 큰어머니: 무서웠다. 네가 너무 무서웠어.

*keuneomeoni: museowotda. nega neomu museowosseo*

**Meaning:**

Aunt: We were afraid. We were so afraid of you.

(Episode 12; 30:44–30:48)

Mu-hee's aunt's words show that she was viewed as frightening not because of anything she did, but because of her identity and family background. This reinforced her belief that she was dangerous, different, and unworthy of acceptance in any social or emotional relationship. Based on both scenes, the superego in Mu-hee develops into a repressive and punishing internal voice, producing excessive guilt, anxiety in interpersonal relationships, and a tendency toward self-sabotage, ultimately driving the mechanism of repression.

Based on these two scenes, Mu-hee's superego develops into a repressive and punitive internal voice. This psychological pressure gives rise to excessive guilt, anxiety in interpersonal relationships, and a tendency toward self-sabotage. Unable to confront these emotional wounds directly, Mu-hee represses her traumatic experiences into the unconscious. At this stage, repression begins to function as a defense mechanism against the psychological distress that she is unable to confront consciously.

### 3.3. Repression: Trauma Locked Away, Not Forgotten

For Mu-hee, childhood trauma is not truly gone but suppressed so deeply that it cannot be consciously accessed. Repression allows Mu-hee to maintain distance from her traumatic memories so that she can continue living without being destroyed by fear. Nevertheless, these repressed memories remain active in the unconscious and gradually emerge as representations of unresolved inner conflict.

#### 3.3.1. Inability to Consciously Access Memories

Mu-hee's repression is evident not only in what she conceals but also in the way she interprets her traumatic experiences. When recounting her past, she employs seemingly ordinary expressions that fail to reflect the true emotional weight of those experiences. This indicates that her conscious mind has created psychological distance from the traumatic memories, allowing them to remain psychologically tolerable.

- (c) 무희 : 일곱살 때 줌에도 큰 사고를 당한 적이 있었는데 그때 기억이 없어요. 사고로 부모님이 돌아가셨는데 전 기억이 안나요.

*mu-hui: ilgopsal ttae jjeum-edo keun sagoreul danghan jeogi isseonneunde geuttae gieogi eopseoyo. sagoro bumonimi doragashyeonneunde jeon gieogi annayo.*

**Meaning:**

Mu-hee: Around the age of seven, I was involved in a serious accident. I can't remember anything from that time. My parents died in the accident, but I can't recall it.

(Episode 2; 14:15–15:00)

In this scene, Mu-hee refers to the attempted murder by her mother as a “serious accident” and “my parents died,” two phrases that indirectly normalize and distance the event from the reality of what actually happened. The ego has learned to reconstruct the narrative of her past so that it can be tolerated by her consciousness. According to Boag (2006), repressed psychic material is not truly gone but remains active in the unconscious even when it cannot be directly accessed. This explains why Mu-hee not only avoids her past but genuinely believes that she has no memory of the traumatic event.

#### 3.3.2. Repression as an Active Survival Strategy

For Mu-hee, repression functions not only to eliminate emotional pain but also as a means of preserving her emotional relationships with others. This is evident through the emergence of Do Ra-mi, who can be understood as the voice of Mu-hee's unconscious mind. Do Ra-mi directly accuses Mu-hee of pretending to have forgotten everything and deceiving the people around her.

- (d) 도라미: 아무것도 기억 아 나는 철 다 속이더니 이제야 들킬까 봐 무서운구나? 불안했지? 너 따위가 사랑 받게 돼서. 못 믿겠지? 계속 사랑해 줄 거라는 거.

*do ra-mi: amugeotdo gieok an naneun cheok da sogideoni ije-ya deulkilkka bwa museopguna? buranhaetji? neo ttawiga sarang batge dwaeseo. mot mitgetji? gyesok saranghae jul georaneun geo*

**Meaning:**

Do Ra-mi: You've been pretending not to remember anything, deceiving everyone. Now you're scared of being found out? Were you anxious? That someone like you could be loved. Don't believe it? That they will keep loving you.

(Episode 7; 56:55–58:35)

Do Ra-mi's statement reveals that on some unconscious level, Mu-hee still harbors memories and awareness of her trauma. She suppresses this truth because she believes that if others knew her past, they would abandon her. Repression in Mu-hee is thus not merely passive forgetting but an active psychological strategy to maintain acceptance and affection from others.

#### 3.3.3. The Manifestation of Repression in Interpersonal Relationship Patterns

Unresolved repression eventually manifests itself in Mu-hee's interpersonal relationships. The trauma she has repressed makes it difficult for her to cope with emotional intimacy because closeness is consistently associated with the possibility of loss and rejection. Consequently, whenever this fear emerges, Mu-hee tends to withdraw as a form of psychological self-protection.

The re-encounter with her uncle and aunt triggers the re-emergence of childhood trauma that Mu-hee had repressed. Before this meeting, her relationship with Joo Ho-jin had improved after a conflict in Canada. However, the sudden appearance of her uncle and aunt triggered anxiety and emotional wounds related to her past, causing Mu-hee to avoid Joo Ho-jin and refuse communication, creating misunderstandings in their relationship.



**Figure 2.** Joo Ho-jin tries to contact Mu-hee but is rejected (Episode 7; 49:46–50:43)

Within the psychoanalytic framework, the tendency to withdraw represents a manifestation of unresolved repression. When traumatic memories remain unprocessed, they are transformed into automatic responses to situations perceived as threatening. Emotional intimacy, which Mu-hee consistently associates with the possibility of rejection, unconsciously activates a defensive mechanism in the form of avoidance. Mu-hee's behavior should not be interpreted as a lack of concern. On the contrary, she distances herself precisely because of her deep emotional involvement. Caring for someone creates the possibility of vulnerability, and such vulnerability is perceived as a risk of being hurt once again.

Based on these three scenes, repression in Mu-hee develops as a response to trauma that is too painful to confront consciously. Rather than disappearing, the trauma resurfaces through recurring patterns of interpersonal relationships, emotional anxiety, and persistent inner conflict. Mu-hee's inability to express these emotional wounds directly ultimately gives rise to Do Ra-mi as a representation of trauma projection, embodying the emotions and memories that have long been repressed.

### **3.4. The Emergence of Do Ra-mi as a Representation of Trauma Projection**

Do Ra-mi emerges when the psychological distress that Mu-hee has long repressed can no longer be contained through repression alone. She becomes a space in which the emotions, impulses, and psychological needs that Mu-hee cannot express directly are manifested because they are continuously constrained by her punitive superego. Consequently, various desires, anger, and the need to be loved are displaced onto the figure of Do Ra-mi as a psychological defense against inner conflicts that are too painful to acknowledge consciously.

The emergence of Do Ra-mi is not sudden but rather the result of the accumulation of trauma that has been continuously repressed since childhood. Mu-hee is unable to express her anger, fear, and need to be loved because she remains overshadowed by her punitive superego. When these emotions can no longer be contained through repression, the ego redirects them onto the figure of Do Ra-mi, who can therefore be understood as a representation of trauma projection. In this way, Do Ra-mi becomes the medium through which Mu-hee is able to express emotions and psychological needs that she has long been unable to acknowledge consciously.

### 3.4.1. Do Ra-mi as Externalization of the Repressed Id

Within Mu-hee, the emotional impulses that have long been repressed do not emerge through conscious behavior but are instead manifested through Do Ra-mi. This projection serves as a vessel for spontaneous desires that Mu-hee does not dare to express directly. Unlike Mu-hee, Do Ra-mi is not burdened by the same fear and guilt, allowing her to express her emotional needs more openly and impulsively.

(e) 도라미: 그럼 테스트 통과했으니까 상 줘.

*do ra-mi: geureom teseuteu tonggwahaesseunikka sang jwo.*

**Meaning:**

*Do Ra-mi: I passed the test. Give me a reward.*

(Episode 9; 26:32–26:41)

Her request for a kiss as a "reward" illustrates how the id operates directly without restraint. Fundamentally, Mu-hee desires emotional closeness with Joo Ho-jin and longs both to love and to be loved. However, her punitive superego makes these desires feel too dangerous to acknowledge directly. Through Do Ra-mi, her need to love and be loved can finally be expressed without requiring her to confront her fear of rejection. Thus, Do Ra-mi expresses not only aggression but also the affective desires that Mu-hee does not dare to recognize as her own.



**Figure 3.** Do Ra-mi bites Joo Ho-jin after receiving a compliment (Episode 9; 29:52–29:59)

(f) 도라미: 다정하면 죽여 버리고 싶댕잖아!

*do ra-mi: dajeonghamyeon jugyeo beorigo sipdaetjanha!*

**Meaning:**

*Do Ra-mi: If you act kindly, I want to kill you!*

(Episode 9; 29:52–29:59)

Do Ra-mi's aggressive response to Joo Ho-jin's kindness reveals something more complex than the impulsivity of the id alone. Kindness is not perceived as a source of safety but rather as a threat capable of provoking emotional vulnerability. Within the psychoanalytic framework, this response reflects the emotional distortion commonly observed in individuals who have experienced profound relational trauma. Under such circumstances, aggression functions as a means of maintaining emotional distance while simultaneously protecting oneself from the possibility of being hurt again.

Based on these two scenes, Do Ra-mi represents not only impulsivity and aggression but also the manifestation of emotional drives that have long been repressed by Mu-hee. From Freud's psychoanalytic perspective, the emergence of this projection demonstrates that affective needs which cannot be accepted by the ego are ultimately externalized through another figure as a form of projection. Accordingly, Do Ra-mi becomes a representational reflection of Mu-hee's desire to be loved, accepted, and to feel safe—needs that she has never been able to fully acknowledge as integral parts of herself.

### 3.4.2. The Dual Function of Do Ra-mi: Protector and Obstacle

The presence of Do Ra-mi cannot be understood merely as a destructive symptom. According to Minderop (2010), defense mechanisms operate in the unconscious to protect individuals from anxiety by modifying or distorting reality. This process gives rise to a dual function: on the one hand, it successfully serves as a protective shield against unbearable anxiety; on the other hand, this distortion of reality ultimately prevents individuals from resolving the underlying source of their conflict. This duality is clearly reflected in the function of Do Ra-mi.

(g) 도라미: 그 애가 하고 싶어도 하지 못하는 일을 내가 대신 한다고 했지.

*do ra-mi: geu aega hago sipeodo haji mothaneun ireul naega daesin handago haetji.*

**Meaning:**

*Do Ra-mi: I said I do the things she wants to do but cannot.*

(Episode 9; 55:25–55:59)

This statement demonstrates that Do Ra-mi functions as a substitute for the emotional functions that Mu-hee is unable to perform. This projection assumes responsibility for expressing anger, seeking attention, and conveying affection that Mu-hee has long repressed. In other words, Do Ra-mi becomes the medium through which desires and emotions that cannot emerge directly into Mu-hee's conscious awareness are expressed.

(h) 도라미: ... 네가 이 모양이라 내가 나온 거야. 나만 믿어. 도라미는 다들 사랑하니까.

*do ra-mi: ... nega i moyang-ira naega naon geoya. naman mideo. do ra-mineun dadeul saranghanikka.*

**Meaning:**

*Do Ra-mi: ... You're like this, that's why I appeared. Just trust me. Everyone loves Do Ra-mi.*

(Episode 7; 56:55–58:35)

This utterance reveals Do Ra-mi's destructive side: her presence continuously affirms that Mu-hee is weak and incapable of facing the world as herself. The claim that "everyone loves Do Ra-mi" shows that this projection develops into a version of self deemed more worthy of love than the real Mu-hee. Consequently, the more dominant Do Ra-mi becomes, the greater Mu-hee's distrust of herself.

### 3.4.3. The Ego as a Struggling Mediator

Amid the dynamic tension between Do Ra-mi's impulsive drives and the demands of Mu-hee's punitive superego, her ego continuously strives to maintain psychological balance. This is reflected in her efforts to regulate her emotions, preserve her social relationships, and continue functioning in everyday life despite the intense inner turmoil she experiences. Mu-hee's ego does not fail completely; rather, it continues to operate in order to prevent these internal conflicts from destroying her life.

(i) 무희: 방금 도라미가 내 손에 돌을 쿡여 쥐거든요? 화내라고. 근데 내가 지금 여기서 그 사람 뒤통수를 후려치면 전부 망하는 거니까 참았어요.

*mu-hui: banggeum do ra-miga nae sone doreul jwuiyeo jwotgeodeunyo? hwanaerago. geunde naega jigeum yeogiseo geu saram dwitongsureul huryeochimyeon jeonbu manghaneun geonikka chamasseoyo.*

**Meaning:**

*Mu-hee: Just now, Do Ra-mi put a stone in my hand. Telling me to get angry. But if I hit that person on the head right now, everything falls apart. So I held back.*

(Episode 4; 43:33–45:59)

This statement shows that Mu-hee is aware of the aggressive impulse within her, yet is still able to consider its consequences before acting impulsively. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this demonstrates that the ego is still performing its reality function by restraining drives that could

harm herself or her social relationships. Mu-hee's various activities, including working, photoshoots, Pilates, and psychiatric consultations, are also forms of coping mechanisms that allow her to continue functioning despite unresolved inner conflict.

### 3.5. Confrontation and Integration: Mu-hee's Character Development

The psychological dynamics described in the previous stages include the formation of a punitive superego, the repression of trauma, and the emergence of Do Ra-mi as a representation of trauma projection. Together, these dynamics ultimately lead to the process of confronting Mu-hee's past wounds. At this stage, Mu-hee no longer merely struggles to survive by avoiding or repressing her traumatic memories but begins to confront these experiences consciously. This process of confrontation and integration becomes a pivotal point in Mu-hee's character development toward greater self-awareness and psychological maturity.

#### 3.5.1. Moment of Confrontation: Mu-hee Faces Do Ra-mi

This scene marks the most decisive turning point in Mu-hee's character development. Mu-hee returns to the place where her trauma originated, a place that represents everything she has long avoided. For the first time, she does not run away. Instead, she remains there and confronts Do Ra-mi directly.



**Figure 4.** Mu-hee recognizes the origin of her trauma and begins to recall Do Ra-mi's memories (Episode 10; 1:02:54–1:04:29)

- (j) 도라미 : 너의 모든 불안의 시작이 여기니까... 어릴 때 기억도 도라미의 기억도 도망쳐 온 이 방에 낙겨 두고 담아 버리자. 그렇게 여기서 걸어 나가서 행복해져 봐. 무희: 이대로 두고 가도 될까?

*do ra-mi: neoui modeun buran-ui sijagi yeoginikka... eoril ttae gieokdo dorami-ui gieokdo domangchyeo on i bang-e namgyeo dugo dama beorija. geureoke yeogiseo georeo nagaseo haengbokhaejeyo bwa.*

*mu-hui: idaero dugo gado doelkka?*

**Meaning:**

*Do Ra-mi: Because all your anxiety began here... Your childhood memories and Do Ra-mi's memories, leave them in this room you fled to and lock them away. Then walk out and be happy. Mu-hee: Can I just leave them like this?* (Episode 10; 1:02:54–1:04:29)

The aspect that deserves particular attention here is Do Ra-mi's proposal. On the surface, it appears rational and even compassionate, encouraging Mu-hee to leave behind all painful memories and move forward toward happiness. However, within the psychoanalytic framework, this proposal represents the continuation of repression in a more deliberate and comprehensive form. Do Ra-mi does not offer recovery but rather forgetting disguised as liberation.

Mu-hee's response, "Can I really leave them behind just like that?", marks the moment when her ego truly begins to function. This question demonstrates that Mu-hee does not immediately accept Do Ra-mi's proposal. Instead, she hesitates, and this hesitation becomes the first opening through which genuine self-awareness begins to emerge. Mu-hee starts to consider that forgetting may not be the only path forward.



**Figure 5.** Mu-hee weeps after recalling Do Ra-mi's memories that contain Joo Ho-jin  
(Episode 10; 1:08:26)

Ultimately, Mu-hee chooses not to discard those memories. Instead, she decides to remember all the experiences that had long been concealed behind the trauma projection of Do Ra-mi, including her emotional moments with Joo Ho-jin. This decision marks the beginning of integration, as Mu-hee starts to accept that both the pain and the memories remain integral parts of herself.

Mu-hee's process of integration does not occur in isolation but is also influenced by her relationship with Joo Ho-jin. At the beginning of the story, Joo Ho-jin exhibits a tendency similar to Mu-hee's, avoiding emotional intimacy due to unresolved wounds from his past. His parents' divorce and his prolonged conflict with his mother lead him to distance himself from relationships that might reopen those emotional wounds. It is this shared experience of trauma that enables Joo Ho-jin to understand Mu-hee's condition more deeply.

As the story progresses, Joo Ho-jin not only accepts Mu-hee for who she is but also encourages her to exist as her authentic self without relying on Do Ra-mi. His support becomes one of the factors that helps Mu-hee confront the traumatic memories she has long repressed. Thus, their relationship functions not only as a romantic relationship but also as a space that facilitates a healthier process of healing and self-acceptance.

### 3.5.2. Do Ra-mi as an Integrated Part of Self

The resolution of Mu-hee's character differs from conventional narratives of trauma recovery, which generally emphasize forgetting the past. Rather than eliminating Do Ra-mi's existence, Mu-hee chooses to accept this projection as an inseparable part of herself. This acceptance reflects her realization that Do Ra-mi emerged from a long history of traumatic experiences rather than as a foreign entity that must be abandoned.

- (k) 무희 : 나 다 기억났거든요. ‘자기야’ .  
 주호진 : 그대로 기억은 사라질 거라고 했는데.  
 무희 : 사라지게 두지 못했어요. 그 기억 속에 당신이 있었으니까.  
*mu-hui: na da gieongnatgeodeunyo. ‘jagiya’.*  
*hojin: geudaero gieogeun sarajil georago haenneunde.*  
*mu-hui: sarajige duji mothaesseoyo. geu gieok soge dangsini isseonneunikka.*  
**Meaning:**  
 Mu-hee: I remember everything, Darling.  
 Joo Ho-jin: They said those memories would fade.  
 Mu-hee: I couldn't let them fade. Because you were in those memories.  
 (Episode 10; 1:11:24–1:11:52)

Mu-hee's active choice to retain her memories marks the fact that Do Ra-mi no longer functions as a separate projective object, but has become an acknowledged and owned part of her. This finding differs from Park (2018), who positions alternative identity solely as a protector

ultimately abandoned. In Mu-hee's case, Do Ra-mi is not abandoned but accepted as part of a more complete process of self-formation.

### 3.5.3. Acknowledgment of Truth: Awareness of the Source of Trauma

Mu-hee's character development reaches a crucial turning point when she begins to consciously understand the source of the fear and anxiety that have controlled her life. After accepting Do Ra-mi as part of herself, Mu-hee realizes that this projection has long appeared in the image of her mother. At this stage, she no longer perceives Do Ra-mi as an entity separate from her past but as the manifestation of the wounds and words of her mother that have continued to haunt her into adulthood. This realization indicates that the traumatic experiences she had long repressed are finally being confronted consciously rather than denied.

- (1) 무희 : 그날 나는 엄마로부터 완벽하게 도망치지 못했다. 절대로 행복해질 수 없다는 말은... 평생 계속 나를 쫓아다녀오니깐.

도라미 : 제발 꼭 빠지게 애써 봐. 나 좀 꺼질 수 있게.

*mu-hui: geunal naneun eommarobuteo wanbyeokhage domangchiji mothaetda. jeoldae-ro haengbokhaejil su eopdaneun mareun... pyeongsaeng gyesok nareul jjochadanyeosseunikka. do ra-mi: jebal ttong ppajige aesseo bwa. na jom kkeojil su itge.*

**Meaning:**

Mu-hee: That day, I couldn't completely escape from my mother. Her words that I could never be happy... kept chasing me my whole life.

Do Ra-mi: Please try your hardest so I can disappear.

(Episode 12; 33:41–34:20)

The statement “I could never completely escape from my mother” marks the conscious collapse of repression. Mu-hee no longer refers to her past as an “accident” or “something I can't remember,” but acknowledges that her mother's words were a delusion that pursued her throughout her life. Do Ra-mi's response shows a shift in the projection's function: if before Do Ra-mi appeared as a defense mechanism, now she pushes Mu-hee to stop depending on her and begin facing life consciously.

### 3.5.4. Changes in Mu-hee's Character: Before and After

Confronting her trauma brings about a significant transformation in Mu-hee's character development. At the beginning of the story, she tends to avoid emotional intimacy, repress her feelings, and flee from situations that trigger her trauma. However, after undergoing the process of integration, Mu-hee begins to demonstrate the courage to confront her fears directly.

- (m) 큰어머니 : 네 엄마를 만나게? 무희 : 내 눈으로 살아 있는 걸 봐야 완전히 벗어날 수 있을 거 같아요.

*keuneomeoni: ne eommareul manage?*

*mu-hui: nae nuneuro sara inneun geol bwaya wanjeonhi beoseonal su isseul geot gataseoyo.*

**Meaning:**

Aunt: You want to meet your mother?

Mu-hee: I think I need to see with my own eyes that she is still alive to fully break free from her.

(Episode 12; 43:46–44:35)

Unlike her old pattern, Mu-hee now goes directly to her uncle and aunt to confront her past. The statement “I need to see with my own eyes that she is still alive to fully break free” marks a fundamental shift in how Mu-hee views her recovery. She no longer waits for the trauma to fade on its own or depends on Do Ra-mi to face difficult situations. Instead, Mu-hee begins to take an active role in confronting those experiences consciously. This attitude reflects the essence of her character development toward greater psychological independence.



**Figure 6.** Mu-hee and Joo Ho-jin part on good terms (Episode 12; 46:47)

They part ways not because Mu-hee runs away or pushes Joo Ho-jin away, as she had done in the past, but because she realizes that she must first complete her own journey before she can be fully present for someone else. This decision is not an act of self-sabotage but rather an expression of greater self-awareness and emotional maturity. Her choice demonstrates both courage and confidence that the process she is undergoing will ultimately lead her toward a more stable psychological state.

The transformation from avoidance to the courage to confront trauma reflects the strengthening of Mu-hee's ego. A healthy ego does not imply the absence of vulnerability but rather the capacity to face reality with greater honesty. By the end of the story, Mu-hee has not fully recovered; however, she has developed into an individual who is more self-aware and more capable of determining the direction of her own life.

### 3.6. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Do Ra-mi should be understood not merely as an alternative identity but as a psychologically grounded representation of trauma projection rooted in the formation of Mu-hee's punitive superego. This finding is consistent with [S. Freud's \(1957\)](#) psychoanalytic theory, in which repressed conflicts continue to operate in the unconscious and may be expressed through defense mechanisms such as projection when direct confrontation becomes psychologically intolerable. Unlike [Park \(2018\)](#), who interprets the alternative identity as a temporary protector eventually abandoned during recovery, and [Kang \(2020\)](#), who views it as a symbolic form of resistance to social pressure, the present study demonstrates that Do Ra-mi occupies a more complex position. She simultaneously functions as a protector that enables Mu-hee's psychological survival and as an obstacle that reinforces her belief that she is undeserving of love.

This dual function aligns with [Minderop's \(2010\)](#) explanation that defense mechanisms protect the individual from anxiety by modifying reality, yet this distortion simultaneously prevents resolution of the true underlying conflict. The significance of this finding lies in its departure from a purely psychopathological reading: Do Ra-mi is not portrayed as a psychological phenomenon that must ultimately disappear; rather, she functions as a symbolic representation of trauma projection that becomes integrated into Mu-hee's reconstructed sense of self.

This perspective offers a contribution to the field of literary psychology: representations of trauma in K-drama need not be read solely through the lens of clinical diagnosis. Instead, they can be understood through the dynamics of active and complex defense mechanisms that ultimately drive character development toward a more integrated self. This aligns with Mu-hee's character development, in which accepting rather than rejecting Do Ra-mi represents a process of psychological integration that has rarely been emphasized in previous studies of Korean dramas.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that Do Ra-mi is a representation of trauma projection formed from Cha Mu-hee's traumatic childhood experiences. The trauma resulting from her mother's abusive treatment and her family's rejection generated internal conflicts that remained repressed

into adulthood. The emotions, needs, and impulses that Mu-hee was unable to express directly were subsequently projected onto the figure of Do Ra-mi. Consequently, Do Ra-mi emerges as a figure who embodies the courage, anger, and freedom that Mu-hee is unable to express in her daily life. The findings of this study suggest that the emergence of a figure such as Do Ra-mi should not be understood solely as an indication of identity disorder or split personality. Instead, Do Ra-mi can be understood as both a representation of trauma and a psychological defense mechanism that emerges from unresolved psychological conflicts. Therefore, this study offers a perspective that traumatized characters in television dramas do not necessarily have to be interpreted through a psychopathological approach but can also be understood through more complex psychological dynamics. This perspective contributes to the field of literary psychology, particularly in understanding the representation of trauma, defense mechanisms, and character development in Korean dramas.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses solely on a single character, resulting in an incomplete portrayal of the relational dimension, particularly the role of Joo Ho-jin in facilitating Mu-hee's process of self-integration, which is only implicitly represented. Second, although the fact that Do Ra-mi appears in the physical form of Mu-hee's mother is identified as the strongest evidence of projection, its implications have not been explored in greater depth, particularly regarding how this appearance influences the dynamics of Mu-hee's relationship with Joo Ho-jin, who directly witnesses it. Therefore, it is expected that this study may serve as a reference for future research in literary psychology, particularly studies concerning the representation of trauma, psychological defense mechanisms, and character development in literary works.

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