

A Defense Mechanism of the Characters in Stephen King's Book "Bazaar of Bad Dreams"

Sitti Safirah Mardhatillah Pakaya¹, Rusni Podungge², Farid Muhamad³

^{1,2,3}*Universitas Negeri Gorontalo*

Safirahpakaya3rdacc@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the use of ego defense mechanisms by characters in three short stories by Stephen King in the book "Bazaar of Bad Dreams", namely Premium Harmony, A Death, and Bad Little Kid, using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory that focuses on ego defense mechanisms. The study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a psychoanalytic approach. Data were collected through short story selection, reading and recording, and coding, then were analyzed through data classification, data analysis, description of analysis results, conclusions of analysis results, and reporting of research results. The results show that the characters in the three short stories display various ego defense mechanisms in dealing with conflict and stress, including denial, reaction formation, projection, displacement, rationalization, and repression. The analysis reveals the complex psychological dynamics of each character and how internal and external factors influence their ego defense mechanisms. It also compares their applications in the context of Indonesian society. Ego dominance is seen in the character's attempts to balance id drives, superego demands, and reality through different ego defense mechanisms.

Keywords: Ego defense mechanisms, psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, Stephen King, short story

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INTRODUCTION

A literary work results from the author's creativity in expressing imaginative ideas that emerge from their mind into a beautifully written work. Therefore, authors find their imaginations limitless in their capacity to inspire, allowing them to explore diverse aspects of humanity, reflect the realities of life, and convey profound ideas to their readers. Therefore, short stories are a type of literary work that utilizes the author's imagination. A short story is a literary form of a brief fictional prose narrative shorter than a novel and typically focuses on a small number of characters (Sinthya Dewi et al., 2023). Additionally, the limited number of characters allows the author to

evoke emotions, convey messages, and explore different aspects of the human experience to readers in a shorter amount of time. In literary works, especially short stories, there are two elements, namely intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements.

Characters constitute the primary topics of the plot, whereas characterization constitutes the portrayal of a character's traits, personality, and other defining attributes. As stated by Griffith in Rizki Ananda (2023), characters are individuals within the stories, and characterization refers to the author's portrayal and character development. Therefore, good character development enables readers to comprehend the characters' motivations, internal conflicts, and character development throughout the story. Furthermore, to comprehend the development of characters in short stories, researchers used psychoanalytic methods to analyse the psychological evolution of the characters in more detail.

According to Bagtayan & Lantowa (2022, p. 221), the difference between literature and psychology is that they are two branches of science that study the human soul. Psychology is the study of human behavior and its causes, while through fiction, literature portrays human behavior. Furthermore, psychoanalysis is related to literature, especially short stories, where psychoanalysis examines characters' development while literature uncovers concealed messages, as stated by J & Amalaveenus (2022), psychoanalysis is an approach that involves exploring the most profound thoughts and emotions of an individual; whereas literature endeavours to reveal the untainted truths that exist within the lives of individuals. Apart from that, psychoanalysis itself is divided into three, namely the id, ego, and superego.

According Freud in Schultz & Schultz (2017), Freud's psychoanalytic theory posits three fundamental components of personality: the id, ego, and superego. The id, operating on the pleasure principle, is the primal source of psychic energy, relentlessly seeking immediate gratification for basic biological urges, often exhibiting selfish and amoral tendencies through reflex actions and primary-process thinking. In contrast, the ego serves as the rational manager, mediating between the id's demands and external reality. It functions based on the reality principle, aiming to fulfill desires in socially acceptable ways and preventing the id from dominating. To protect itself from overwhelming impulses from the id, the ego employs unconscious defense mechanisms. Complementing these is the superego, which represents the moral compass of personality, internalized during childhood from parental and societal standards. The superego strives for moral perfection, often inhibiting the id's impulses related to pleasure, sex, and aggression. This particular research specifically focuses on these ego defense mechanisms.

Ego defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that the ego uses to resolve internal conflicts brought about by conflicting demands of the id, the superego, and external reality. As stated by Waqas et al (2015), ego defense mechanisms are psychological tactics to defend themselves from worry or tension caused by internal or external conflict. Then, ego defense mechanisms are divided into several types, such as denial, displacement, et al., which are crucial in forming and expressing someone's character. Therefore, the researcher chose to research ego defense mechanisms in short stories because ego defense mechanisms emerge as crucial in imparting authenticity and profundity to the characters in short stories.

Prior research has particularly examined this phenomenon across diverse contexts. For instance, the study by Tenrisanna (2018) entitled *Defense Mechanisms in E. A. Poe's Selected Short Stories The Black Cat & The Tell-Tale Heart*, arguing that only literary works rich in psychological elements are suitable for psychoanalytic examination. This study highlighted how the characters in these two tales, which share similar themes and plots of assassination with

unreliable narrators, mirror aspects of Poe's own life. Employing a descriptive qualitative methodology, the research concluded that the characters predominantly utilized defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, reaction formation, rationalization, and displacement, demonstrating various defensive strategies to cope with conflict.

Additionally, the study by Zahrah & Melky Ayu Wijayanti (2023) entitled Self-defense mechanism of the main characters in the novel *Pünktchen und Anton* (A study of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory), investigated the diverse self-defense strategies individuals employ based on their personality types, aiming to comprehensively understand how two central characters in the novel *Pünktchen und Anton* manage anxiety. Utilizing qualitative and content analysis methodologies, their study identified 31 instances of self-defense mechanisms within the narrative. *Pünktchen*'s dominant mechanisms included reaction formation (6 instances), repression (3), and single occurrences of rationalization, displacement, fixation, and disclaimer. *Anton*'s coping strategies featured repression (4 instances), reaction formation (6), displacement (3), sublimation (2), and rationalization (3). Analysis of the characters' personality structures revealed that *Pünktchen*'s id and superego were more influential, while *Anton* exhibited a balanced and healthy personality, largely guided by his ego.

This research aims to describe the use of ego defense mechanisms by the characters in three short stories by Stephen King using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to explore the complex psychological dynamics underlying their behaviors and motivations. So that, the researcher is interested in researching the short stories chosen by the researcher in the book *Bazaar of Bad Dreams*, entitled 1) *Premium Harmony*, 2) *Bad Little Kid*, and 3) *A Death*.

The reasons of researcher chose this research because: 1) The selection of psychoanalysis research on short stories was based on its capacity to unveil concealed meanings, contained values, and general truths concerning the human condition; 2) In Stephen King's short stories, there are opportunities for psychoanalysis research, especially research into ego defense mechanisms; 3) The three short stories chosen by the researcher contain the same ego defense mechanisms, namely denial and reaction formation.

METHOD

This research produces descriptive data from the written text of observed behavior using psychoanalytic approach. By employing a psychoanalytic approach to examine the ego defense mechanisms exhibited by the characters in short stories, one can gain a more profound comprehension of the psychological dimensions of literary pieces and a more profound understanding of how ego defense mechanisms impact the development of characters in the story. The source of data in this research is Stephen King's short stories in his book entitled *Bazaar Of Bad Dream* (2015), which was read online via Google Books. The researcher chose three short stories entitled 1) *Premium Harmony*, 2) *Bad Little Kid*, and 3) *A Death*.

A qualitative descriptive method was used to describe the ego defense mechanism of the characters. The characters' ego defense mechanism will be investigated using Freud's psychoanalytic theory. This study employs non-interactive techniques to objectively examine short stories without direct involvement with the participants or the environment under study. Researchers use non-interactive techniques to acquire data from outside sources such as short stories, books, journals, or related notes. Researchers can gain more objective insight into short stories by adopting non-interactive techniques that do not require direct influence or engagement

from participants. Non-interactive techniques enable researchers to concentrate on analyzing and interpreting short stories based on data acquired independently. The steps used to collect research data are:

1. Short Stories Selection: Selecting a Stephen King's short story to analyze and the characters must be sufficiently complex for psychoanalysis.
2. Reading and Taking Notes: Carefully reading the story and taking notes on the characters' behavior, interior conflicts, motivations, and other psychological aspects. Reading and taking notes is the beginning of the data collection process.
3. Coding: creating codes based on the notes and analysis of the researcher. Coding will facilitate data organization and make subsequent analysis simpler.

To analyse data, a content analysis research method by analyzing the frequency of appearance of the most dominant ego defense mechanisms in the story and then explaining each category was used.

FINDINGS

Ego defense mechanisms of the main characters in premium harmony

Ray's ego defense mechanisms

Denial

"Well, sir, I'm sorry to say that she's dead."

"Oh," ray stands up. His knees crack.

"They told me she was, but I wasn't sure."

Ray refuses to fully accept his wife's sudden death, especially because they had been arguing an hour prior. This denial is evident in his uncertainty despite the EMT's confirmation of her death, and his rejection of further medical procedures. Ray's inability to accept the loss leads him to neglect practical matters like funeral arrangements. This denial stems from shock and guilt over their earlier argument.

Reaction Formation

"They're only ninety-nine cents," she says. "don't be such a pinchpenny."

Don't be so pound foolish, he thinks, but what he says is, "buy me a pack of smokes while you're in there. I'm out."

"if you quit, we'd have an extra forty dollars a week."

Ray conceals his feelings of wanting to retaliate against his wife's insults by acting in the opposite manner. Another instance of reaction formation occurs when his wife tells him to quit smoking, while she herself is addicted to Little Debbies.

Projection

“Well, you ought to quit,” Mary says.

“And you ought to quit those Little Debbies.” He says. He doesn’t want to say this, he knows how sensitive she is about her weight, but out it comes. He can’t hold it back. It’s a mystery.

Ray projects his bad habits onto his wife, possibly to avoid feeling insecure about being pressured to quit smoking. By shifting the focus to her flaws, Ray avoids introspection.

Displacement

“where you snooping?” she cries. {...]

“I was looking for the bottle opener,” he says. “I had a bottle of cream soda. The kind with the old-fashioned cap.”

“looking for a bottle opener on the top shelf of the goddam cupboard!”

“Go in and get the ball,” he says. “And get me some smokes. Be a sport.”

“Can’t you wait until we get home? Can’t you even wait that long?”

“you can get the cheap ones,” he says. “that off-brand. Premium Harmony, they’re called.” They taste like old stale cowshit, but all right. If she’ll only shut up about it. It’s too hot to argue.

Ray displaces his guilt related to their main argument onto an unrelated request, asking his wife to buy him cigarettes. Ray shifts the focus of their argument to avoid conflict and lessen emotional tension.

Rationalization

“I used to smoke two packs a day,” he says. “Now I smoke less than half a pack.” Actually, most days he smokes more. She knows it, and Ray knows she knows it.

Ray redirects his grief over the deaths of his wife and dog by focusing on the perceived advantages, like being able to smoke anywhere. This serves as a self-comforting mechanism in the face of sadness and regret. Ray also rationalizes his continued smoking by claiming to have reduced the amount to save money, a justification that contradicts reality.

Mary's ego defense mechanisms

Denial

“Well, you ought to quit,” Mary says.

“And you ought to quit those Little Debbies.” He says. [...]

“I ain’t had one in a year,” she says.

Mary refuses to acknowledge her own bad habits, insisting that she has quit. Mary attempts to maintain her image as someone disciplined in managing finances.

Rationalization

"They have balls at Walmart," Ray says, "and everything's cheaper at Wally World."

"The ones at Quik-Pik are purple. Purple is her favorite color. I can't be sure there'll be purple at Walmart."

"If there aren't, we'll stop at the Quik-Pik on the way back."

He feels like a great weight is pressing down on his head. She'll get her way. She always does on things like this. Marriage is like a football game and he's quarterbacking the underdog team. He has to pick his spots. Make short passes.

"It'll be on the wrong side coming back,"

Mary uses rationalization to justify her desire to buy items at specific stores, citing reasons like her nephew's favorite color. She also dismisses Ray's suggestions to buy things cheaper with fabricated excuses.

Projection

"Mary, the box is on the top of shelf. A twenty-four-pack. Behind the flour"

"Were you snooping?" she cries. [...]

"I was looking for the bottle opener," he says. "I had a bottle of cream soda. The kind with the old-fashioned cap."

"Looking for a bottle opener on the top shelf of the goddam cupboard!"

Mary accuses her husband of spying, a baseless accusation. She also attributes "evil" traits to Ray, despite her own passive-aggressive and manipulative behavior.

Ego defense mechanisms of the main characters in a death

Jim Trusdale's ego defense mechanisms

Rationalization

"Why are you here, Sheriff?"

"Where is your hat, Jim?"

Trusdale put the hand not holding the newspaper to his head as if to feel for his hat, which was a flat brown plainsman and not there.

"in your place, is it?" the sheriff asked. A cold breeze kicked up, blowing the horse's manes and flattening the grass in a wave that ran south.

"No," Trusdale said, "I don't believe it is."

"Then where?"

"I might have lost it."

Trusdale provides fabricated reasons to explain the loss of his hat and his involvement in the crime, aiming to avoid suspicion and punishment. He also cites financial reasons to justify the amount of alcohol he ordered.

Denial

"To see what you'd say. That hat is all settled. What I really want to know is where you put the girl's silver dollar. It's not in your house, or your pockets, or up your poop-chute. Did you get feeling guilty and throw it away?"

"I don't know about no silver dollar. Can I have my hat back?"

"No. it's evidence. Jim Trusdale, I'm arresting you for the murder of Rebecca Cline. Do you have anything you want to say to that?"

"Yes, sir. That I don't know no Rebecca Cline."

Trusdale vehemently denies any involvement in the murder, even when confronted with incriminating evidence. He refuses to acknowledge the facts of the crime and feigns ignorance of the victim.

Repression

"Now listen to me, Jim. Because this is your last chance. You were in that bar in the middle of the afternoon. Not many people in there then. Isn't that right?"

"I guess it is."

"Then who took your hat? Close your eyes. Think back. See it."

Trusdale closed his eyes. Barclay waited. At last Trusdale opened his eyes, which were red from crying. "I can't even remember was I wearing it."

"Barclay sighed. "Give me your plate, and mind that knife."

Trusdale shows an inability to recall key details of the events, indicating repression. He suppresses memories related to his crime to protect himself from the reality and guilt.

Sheriff Barclay Otis's ego defense mechanisms

Projection

The sheriff left the cell, closed the door, took a key from the wall, and locked it. The tumblers screeched as they turned. The cell mostly housed drunks and was rarely locked. He looked in at Trusdale and said "I feel sorry for you, Jim. Hell ain't too hot for a man who'd do such a thing."

"What thing?"

The sheriff clumped away without any reply.

After locking Trusdale in a cell, Sheriff Otis expresses his feelings about the murderer, whom he believes to be Trusdale, by making statements about the punishment Trusdale will receive in the afterlife.

Rationalization

"I've got your hat in my office."

"Then why did you ask about it?"

"To see what you'd say. That hat is all settled. What I really want to know is where you put the girl's silver dollar. It's not in your house, or your pockets, or up your poop-chute. Did you get feeling guilty and throw it away?"

Sheriff Otis provides seemingly logical and rational reasons for his actions, such as trying to see if Trusdale would lie or provide self-incriminating information.

Ego defense mechanisms of the main characters in *Bad Little Kid* George Hallas's ego defense mechanisms

Denial

[...]

I started for him, only it didn't feel real. It felt like it was happening in a dream. It was late afternoon and Reynolds Street was full of traffic, but I never thought of that. Vicky did, though. She caught me by the arm and pulled me back. I think I owe her my life, because a big bus went past only a second or two later, blaring its horn.

Don't she said. He's not worth it, whoever he is.

There was a truck right behind the bus, and once they were both by us, we saw the kid running up the other side of the street with his big ass jouncing. He got the corner and turned it. But before he did, he shoved down the back of his shorts, bent over, and mooned us.

Vicky sat down on a bench and I sat down beside her. She asked me again who he was, and I said I didn't know.

Then how did he know our names? She asked.

I don't know, I repeated.

George denies responsibility for the deaths of the children linked to him, insisting on his innocence.

Rationalization

[...]

"What can I do for you, George?"

For several moments Hallas didn't answer. He studied his hands, which were small and weak-looking—not the hands of a murderer at all, you would have said. Then he looked up.

"You're a pretty good guy, Mr. Bradley."

Bradley was surprised by this, and didn't know how to reply.

Hallas nodded, as if his lawyer had tried to deny it. "Yes. You are. You kept on even after I made it clear I wanted you to stop and let the process run its course. Not many court-appointeds would do that. They'd just say yeah, whatever, and go on to the next loser some judge hands them. You didn't do that. You told me what moves you wanted to make, and when I told you not to make them, you went ahead anyway. If not for you, I would've been in the ground a year ago."

"We don't always get what we want, George."

Hallas smiled briefly. "Nobody knows that better than me. But it hasn't been all bad; I can admit that now. Mostly because of the Chicken Run. I like going out there. I like the wind on my face, even when it's a cold wind. I like the smell of the prairie grass, or seeing the day-moon in the sky when it's full. Or deer. Sometimes they jump around up there on the ridge and chase each other. I like that. Makes me laugh out loud, sometimes."

"Life can be good. It can be worth fighting for,"

"Some lives, I'm sure. Not mine. But I admire the way you've fought for it, just the same. I appreciate your dedication. So I'm going to tell you what I wouldn't say in court. And why I've refused to make any of the usual appeals... although I couldn't stop you from making them for me."

George fabricates implausible excuses for his actions, such as claiming the accidents were caused by others or circumstances beyond his control.

Leonard Bradley's ego defense mechanisms **Repression**

[...]

Something moved at the corner of his eye in the Chicken Run, where the condemned prisoner took their exercise. Except there wasn't supposed to be anyone there. Exercise periods were cancelled on days when an execution was scheduled. McGregor had told him this. And sure enough, when he turned his head, he saw the Chicken Run was empty.

Bradley thought, It comes as a child.

He laughed. He made himself laugh. It was just a well-deserved case of the whim-whams, no more than that. As if to prove it to himself, he shivered.

Father Patrick's elderly Volvo had departed. There was no car but his own in the small visitors' parking lot adjacent to Needle Manor. Bradley walked a few steps in that direction, then whirled suddenly toward the Chicken Run, the hem of his overcoat flapping around his knees. No one there. Of course not, Jesus Christ. George Hallas had been mad, and even if his bad little kid had been real, he was dead now. Six shots from a .45 pretty much guaranteed dead.

Bradley resumed walking, but when he got around the car, he once more came to a halt. an ugly scratch ran all the way from his Ford's front bumper to the rear left taillight. someone had keyed his car. in a maximum security prison where you had to pass three walls and a like number of checkpoints, someone had keyed his car.

Bradley's first thought was of the DA, who had sat there with his arms crossed over his chest, a portrait of Talmudic self-righteousness. but the idea had no logic to support it. the DA had gotten what he wanted, after all; he had watched George Hallas die.

Bradley opened the car door, which he had not bothered to lock---he was in a prison, after all---and stood stock-still for several seconds. then, as if controlled by a force outside himself, his hand rose slowly to his mouth and covered it. lying on the driver's seat was a beanie with a propeller on top. one of the two plastic blades was crooked.

At last, he bent and plucked it up, tweezing it between two fingers just as Hallas had done. Bradley turned it over. a note had been tucked inside, the letters crooked and bunched together and downslanted. a kid's printing.

KEEP IT, I HAVE ANOTHER ONE.

he heard a child's laughter, high and bright. he looked toward the chicken run, but it was still empty. he turned the note and saw another, even briefer communique:

SEE YOU SOON.

Leonard experiences difficulty recalling important details from his traumatic encounter with the bad little kid. He suppresses his memories to protect himself from fear and confusion.

DISCUSSION

In the Premium Harmony, Ray's active ego mediates between id impulses and reality. His denial of his wife's sudden death functions as an initial buffer against shock and guilt. He also employs reaction formation (acting opposite to inner feelings), projection (attributing his bad habits to his wife), displacement (shifting emotional discomfort), and rationalization (justifying smoking as saving money). In Indonesia, strong social support might shorten denial, while expressions of projection or reaction formation could be more subtle to maintain social harmony.

Mary's ego, on the other hand, strives to maintain a disciplined self-image. Her denial of her "Little Debbies" habit preserves her perceived control. She uses rationalization to justify preferences (e.g., specific ball color) and projection (accusing Ray of spying or being "mean" to deflect blame). Her dominant ego distorts reality to manage id demands and self-perception. In Indonesian society, maintaining "prestige" often drives similar denial, and while rationalization is used, cultural emphasis on compromise might lead to different outcomes.

Meanwhile, in the "A Death" story, Trusdale's personality is driven by a strong id, seeking to evade punishment. His ego employs rationalization (inventing explanations for his hat's loss) and persistent denial of the murder. Repression is evident in his inability to recall crucial details, protecting him from guilt. In Indonesia, while rationalization might leverage local superstitions, the legal system prioritizes evidence, and religious teachings could influence the acceptance of prolonged repression. Sheriff Otis's ego, on the other hand, aims to maintain professional composure. He uses projection (implicitly wishing punishment upon Trusdale in the afterlife) and rationalization to justify his investigative tactics. His ego manages professional demands and self-image. In a religious Indonesian society, similar expressions might occur, though law enforcement would emphasize legal processes.

The Bad Little Kid show Hallas's personality that is dominated by the id, leading to violent acts. His ego uses denial to avoid confronting the source of his anger and rationalization to justify his actions, even accepting a death sentence. He also employs sublimation to manage guilt by providing specific reasons for each violent act. Leonard Bradley's ego, furthermore, primarily uses repression to reject unexplained realities, such as mysterious occurrences in a secure prison, actively preventing threatening information from reaching consciousness to maintain mental balance.

This study consistently reinforces the applicability of Freudian psychoanalytic theory in literary analysis. The identified defense mechanisms (denial, rationalization, projection, displacement, reaction formation, repression, sublimation) align broadly with those found in previous research. For instance, Tenrisanna (2018), in "Defense Mechanisms in E. A. Poe's Selected Short Stories The Black Cat & The Tell-Tale Heart", identified repression, denial, reaction formation, rationalization, and displacement, which are also prevalent in King's

characters. Additionally, Zahrah & Wijayanti (2023) in the “Self-defense mechanism of the main characters in the novel *Pünktchen und Anton* (A study of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory)”, provided quantitative data on rationalization, displacement, repression, reaction formation, and sublimation, further corroborating the consistent manifestation of these mechanisms. The exploration of these mechanisms in an Indonesian context reveals universal psychological responses, albeit with cultural nuances in their expression and societal acceptance.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the ego defense mechanisms employed by main characters in Stephen King’s short stories *Premium Harmony*, *A Death*, and *Bad Little Kid* through a Freudian psychoanalytic lens. Each character exhibited diverse defense strategies including denial, rationalization, projection, displacement, reaction formation, repression, and sublimation - in response to internal conflicts and external pressures. The ego consistently emerged as the primary mediator between id impulses and reality, shaping characters’ behaviors and coping strategies. Furthermore, the study highlighted that their expression and societal acceptance can vary significantly within the Indonesian cultural context, influenced by prevailing social norms and values. This research underscores the relevance of psychoanalytic theory in literary analysis and offers insights into the complex interplay of personality, defense mechanisms, and cultural factors in human psychological responses.

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