

Victor's Denial as a Part of Defense Mechanism in the Frankenweenie (2012) Movie

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses a defense mechanism contained in a movie titled *Frankenweenie* (2012). Defense mechanisms are the development of psychoanalysis based on Sigmund Freud's theory. The purpose of this research is to reveal the types of denial present in the character named Victor Frankenstein. The method used in this research is qualitative methods. The data used in this research are conversations and scenes from the movie *Frankenweenie* (2012). The results of this research are the types of defense mechanisms, namely denial, experienced by Victor Frankenstein regarding the situation and reality that his dog, Sparky, is dead. The researcher found several types of denial experienced by Victor Frankenstein, including denial of death, when Victor being denial that Sparky is dead, denial of dangerous consequences, when Victor denial of doing something dangerous, and denial of altered nature, when Victor being denial that Sparky is no longer a living dog.

Keywords: *defense mechanisms, psychoanalysis, denial*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a board, dynamic, and highly subjective corpus of written, spoken, or digital works including fiction, poetry, drama, and essays that go beyond information sharing to provide creative, aesthetic, and intellectual value. It reflects, interprets, and maintains human experiences, emotions, and cultural values, frequently using language in novel or common ways to stimulate thought, elicit emotion, and provide entertainment. The term literature, derived from the Latin *litteratura* ("writting formed with letters"), typically refers to the complete body of written works, including but not limited to novels, poetry, drama, and essays.

By enabling authors to convey their own and other people's experiences, emotions, and ideas, literature serves as a mirror of human life. It examines deep, universal issues of the human condition, including identity, conflict, love, and loss. Literature is frequently categorized according to its genre (such as romance, thriller, or fantasy) and form (such as poetry, prose, or theater). These forms are distinguished from ordinary language by certain structure, rules, and procedures that are frequently referred to as "making language strange" in order to compel a more profound, introspective observation. Other media contains visual, writing, or sound are also works of literature, such as music and film.

Film is commonly seen as a "literary work" in and of itself when analyzed in literary contexts, particularly when analyzed through the terms "screened literature" or adaptation. It serves as a link between written language and visual perception. In literature, film is a frequently cooperative art medium that tells stories through visual "language",

frequently modifying literary aspects to produce an emotionally charged and socially engaging experience. In a film, it is not only about presenting the visual and language contained in the work, but also how each character conveys emotions through the visuals and spoken words.

As in the film *Frankenweenie* (2012), researcher discovered several emotions displayed by one of the characters in the film. This character is named Victor Frankenstein, a scientist who is saddened by the loss of his dog, Sparky. His sadness is evident in his decision to conduct a dangerous experiment to bring Sparky back to life, which ultimately leads Victor to deny Sparky's death. Victor's denial is shown in several dialogues and scenes in this film, which show that he is in denial about Sparky's death; he cannot accept the reality of Sparky's death. Victor's denial is a part of his defense mechanism to prevent him from feeling sad about losing Sparky. This can be proven by Sigmund Freud's theory, which discusses denial as defense mechanism

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychoanalysis is a theory proposed by Sigmund Freud in the 1900s, which focuses on revealing unconscious conflicts, repressed desires, and childhood trauma that shape current behavior and emotions. This approach interprets dreams and free associations to bring unconscious material to consciousness, in order to overcome anxiety and mental problems. Defense mechanisms are a part of the studies of psychoanalysis, a theory discovered by Sigmund Freud in the 19th century. According to Shelah & Marsih (2022), defense mechanisms are unconscious measures used to prevent anxiety caused by unwanted ideas or feelings. This theory is a comprehensive theory of human psychology and therapeutic methods designed to reveal thoughts, feelings, and past experiences or unconscious memories. This theory reveals how hidden conflicts affect a person's behavior.

Freud provided a great illustration of the protective use of psychotic denial in 1894, and how understanding this strategy makes some psychotic episodes understandable. Despite using the word "denial", Freud explained how the process of denial contributes to hallucinations (Vaillant, G. E. Chapter 1, 1992). Denial is defined as an unconscious defense mechanism in which individuals refuse to acknowledge painful, stressful, or threatening realities or facts in order to protect themselves from excessive anxiety. This concept is rooted in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and was later developed by Anna Freud as one of the ego's strategies for maintaining mental balance. Denial ranges from total rejection of reality to minimizing the impact of the situation.

The methodology of psychoanalytic literary criticism introduced by Freud and adopted by most psychoanalysts and non-analysts through the greater part of the 20th century is founded on the idea that writers create stories and characters that reflect their own unconscious psychology (Ogden, 2013). According to Freud, several types of defense mechanisms are denial, repression, projection, displacement, sublimation, rationalization, and regression.

In a previous study conducted by (Setyo & Nugrogo, 2024) on defense mechanisms in characters, which found several defense mechanisms in the main character such as denial, projection, sublimation, displacement, and etc. There is also previous study, particularly conducted by (Dewi, 2024), The researcher conducted a study focusing on denial in the main character in the movie *Frankenweenie* (2012).

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, which relies on a research approach that focuses on detailed, systematic, and factual descriptions of human phenomena, behaviors, or practices. Qualitative methods were applied to analyze the dialogues, sentences, and paragraphs in the story that became the object of research. (Febriana, 2022). Descriptive qualitative is also a research method that attempts to describe the object being studied subjectively with the aim of formulating characteristic facts systematically and frequently (Dewi, 2025).

In this research, the researcher analyzes the denial behavior exhibited by the main character in the movie *Frankenweenie* (2012). Denial is a broad term that encompasses a variety of coping mechanisms people use to protect themselves from a wide range of perceived and real threats (Yamamiartha, 2023). Individuals who engage in acts of denial can deceive themselves and use this deception as an excuse for their behaviours (Dewi, 2024). The analysis of *Frankenweenie* (2012) relies on textual and contextual interpretation. Textual analysis interprets a document by focusing on its internal content language and structure to reveal its literal and intended meanings. Contextual analysis

examines the external factors, such as the social and cultural environment that influenced the text's creation and reception. The aim of textual interpretation is to understand how the text conveys meaning through its internal structure. Textual interpretation focusing on the text itself, including word choice, tone, and organization. Contextual interpretation focusing on the surroundings of the text. such as the situation of the main character and the cultural context. The aim of contextual interpretation is to understand why the text was created and how it reflects its environment.

DISCUSSION

Researcher found several pieces of evidence of Victor Frankenstein's denial of his dog's death using Sigmund Freud's defense mechanism theory. Some of these types include denial of death, denial of dangerous consequences, and denial of altered nature. Victor Frankenstein's reasons show several types of denial he experienced and defence mechanisms as a response to the death of his beloved dog, Sparky.

Denial of Death

Denial of Death is when someone refuses to accept that a person or thing, such as a pet, has died. In this film, Victor denies Sparky's death. He wanted Sparky to stay by his side even though Sparky was already dead. This is done to reject the sadness due to loss.

Data 1



Figure 1. When Victor feels sad about losing his dog.

Source: Scene (16.39-16.42)

Victor: "I don't want him in my heart. I want him here with me."

The context of this scene is that Victor has just lost his dog, Sparky. Feeling sad, he refuses to accept that Sparky is dead and believes that Sparky is still with him. Victor is in denial about Sparky's death and believes that Sparky is still here.

Data 2



Figure 2. Victor digging

Source: Scene (23.18)

the grave of Sparky

The context of this scene is when Victor digging up Sparky's grave to retrieve his body. This action shows deep denial. Victor acts as if Sparky is only "asleep" or can be repaired. In fact, if a living creature has died and been buried, it means that creature has lost its life and cannot be brought back to life no matter what.

Data 3

Figure 3. Victor doing the dangerous experiment to bring Sparky back to live.

Source: Scene (23.18)

The context of this scene is after Victor dug up Sparky's grave and brought his body back, he conducted a dangerous scientific experiment with the aim of bringing Sparky back to life. Instead of going through a normal grieving process, Victor tried to revive Sparky in an unnatural way. This was a form of denial, where he refused to let death be the end for Sparky.

Denial of Dangerous Consequences

Denial of Dangerous Consequence is a psychological condition in which a person refuses to acknowledge, accept, or understand the existence of real risk, dangers, or threats in certain situations. It is a defense mechanism whereby the brain attempts to protect itself from fear, anxiety, or emotional pain by ignoring reality.

Data 1



Figure 1. Victor's dangerous experiment

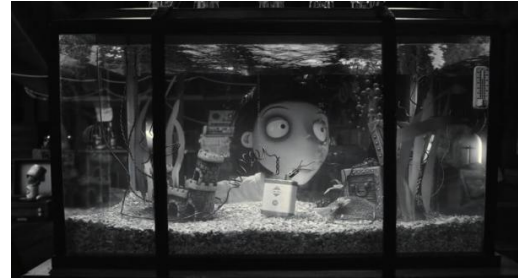


Figure 2. Victor's dangerous experiment

Source: Scene (22.44-26.11)

In this scene, Victor conducted dangerous experiments on Sparky. He did not think twice about the dangers of these experiments, but he did them anyway in order to bring Sparky back to life. Even though these experiments were dangerous, Victor did them without hesitation because he studied science and considered himself as a scientist. He did this without considering any risks, and did not think that what he was doing was very dangerous, because the most important thing was his hope that Sparky could come back to life by conducting this experiment.

Data 2



Figure 4. Edgar asks Victor about experiment

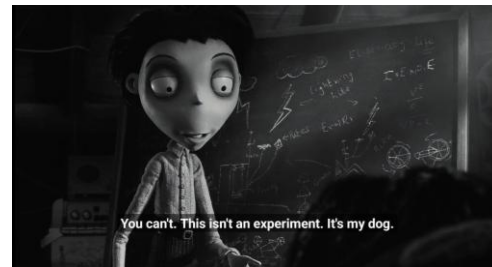


Figure 5. Victor answer
if he can't do it

Source: Scene (22.44-26.11)

Edgar: "So when can I do it?"

Victor: "You can't. This isn't an experiment. It's my dog."

The context of this scene is when Edgar, Victor's friend, wants to do the same as Victor, which is to bring dead animals back to life with Victor's experiment. Edgar asks Victor when they can do this, but Victor replies that it cannot be done because it is not an experiment, but something Victor wants to do just to bring Sparky back to life. Victor says this is not an experiment, when in fact it is a huge and dangerous experiment, but Victor denies it because he feels he is doing this only for Sparky, not for experimentation.

Data 3



Figure 6. Victor's dad told Victor if the experiment was a serious thing.



Figure 7. When Victor said if he want his dog back

Source: Scene (51.53-52.05)

Victor's dad: "What you did was a very serious thing!"

Victor's dad: "Crossing the boundary between life and death. Reanimating the corpse."

Victor: "I just wanted my dog back."

In this scene, Victor's parents discovered that Victor had brought Sparky back to life. They knew that Victor had brought Sparky back to life by conducting dangerous experiments. Victor's dad told him that it was something serious and dangerous, but Victor did it without thinking about the danger. He denied the reality that what he was doing was dangerous, because he just wanted to bring Sparky back to life.

Denial of Altered Nature

Denial of Altered Nature is the denial of nature that has changed drastically due to human actions. The context of denial of altered nature in this film is when Victor loses his dog, Sparky, and then brings Sparky back to life with a scientific experiment. Although his experiment succeeded in bringing Sparky back to life, Sparky's appearance is now different. Even though Sparky is alive again, biologically, Sparky is not a normal dog. Sparky looks strange and creepy. There are many stitches and nails embedded in Sparky's skin. Victor denies this, believing that Sparky is still his dog and biologically alive like other dogs in general.

Data 1



Figure 1. When Victor happy because Sparky back to live



Figure 2. When Victor happy and can't believe if Sparky back

Source: Scene (27.11-27.20)

Victor: “You’re alive!”

Victor: “I can’t believe it! You’re alive!”

In this context, it refers to Victor’s happiness when Sparky comes back to life. Victor refuses to accept the fact that Sparky, his reanimating dog, is now a biologically "different" or “monstrous” creature. Victor continues to treat Sparky like a normal, living dog, ignoring his stitches and bolts. To the outside world, Sparky is a monster. But to Victor, Sparky remains his friend.

Data 2



Figure 3. Victor looking at Sparky
and he ask if he’s okay



Figure 4. Victor asks Sparky
if he was hungry

Source: Scene (33.48-33.56)

Victor: "What's the matter, boy? Are you okay?"

Victor: “Are you hungry?”

In this scene, Victor saw Sparky looking weak and asked if Sparky was hungry, showing that Victor still treated Sparky as if he were a normal dog, alive like any other dog. In fact, biologically speaking, Sparky was not a normal dog, and Victor was in denial about Sparky’s true nature. According to a study by (Dewi and Bustam, 2024) denying reality—which leads to an obsession with something—can result in living a life of denial. That statement is also featured in the film, in which Victor initially just wanted Sparky to come back to life, until his grief eventually drove him to take desperate measure to bring him back, causing him to deny reality.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Denial as a part of Victor’s defense mechanism in the movie Frankenstein (2012) is shown to protect Victor psychologically from the deep pain and sadness caused by the loss of Sparky, his beloved dog who is actually dead. Victor does this in order to protect his feelings of sadness. Although society does not accept Sparky because Sparky is no longer a normal dog like other living dogs, Victor does not see Sparky as a “monster” in the form of a reanimated corpse. Instead, Victor sees Sparky as his friend.

Future researcher should explore the transition from denial to other, more mature defense mechanisms in literature and build on this work by doing a comparative investigation of defense mechanisms across different characters in the same literary work, or by investigating how developmental transitions influence the use of denial. Furthermore, researchers should use a longitudinal method to examine how the character's reliance on denial develops into other forms of protection, such as rationalization or projection.

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