



Unraveling Reaction Formation in “*The Haunting of Hill House*” by Shirley Jackson

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Abstract

This research aims to find out defense mechanism of Eleanor character in the novel *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson. The primary issue raised is how Eleanor character employs defense mechanisms, especially reaction formation to cope with her past traumas. This research focuses on identifying events from Eleanor’s past that contribute and trigger reaction formation in Hill House, a house where the characters attended as respondent. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. The data consist of excerpts from the novel *The Haunting of Hill House*. The results reveal the forms of reaction formation shown by the character. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the connection between trauma and defense mechanisms in the characters. For example, Eleanor character manipulated her behavior while staying at Hill House, revealing a different side of herself to the other characters. This aligns with Freud’s theory of reaction formation. Eleanor character tried to hide her true feelings so that the other characters would not isolate her. This situation shows how people can use reaction formation as a defense mechanism to cope with their trauma or her psychological conflicts.

Keywords: *defense mechanism, Sigmund Freud, reaction formation*

Introduction

Literary works reflects everyday reality. Literary works are forms of art that express ideas, feelings, and creative thoughts about cultural elements through language (Sukirman, 2021). Literary works typically contain problems that complement human life. These issues may arise internally. Thus, literary works have their own world, which is the result of the writer’s observation of created life itself in the form of novels, poems, and dramas that are useful to be enjoyed and utilized by society. One type of literary work is the novel. According to Zaidan in (Poerwadi et al., 2022) a novel is a type of prose that contains elements of character, plot, and fictional setting that depict human life based on the author’s point of view, and

contains the value of life that is processed with storytelling and reenactment techniques that are the basis of writing conventions. The development of knowledge about literature is not limited to the elements contained in literary works, but literary works can also be studied in relation to factors outside the literary work itself.

Literature is becoming more and more developed because the object of study extends to aspects that come from outside literature. Literary psychology is one of the external factors that influence literary work. In this case, the presence of psychological research in the study of literary works enables us to discover the psychological problems encountered by the characters in a literary work, such as a novel. The psychological scenario involves a person's behavior to alleviate tension, as well as their thoughts and plans for resolving the stimulus.

Psychology plays an important role in analyzing a literary work by looking at it from a psychological point of view, whether from the author, the characters, or the work itself (Tumampas, Sigarlaki, & Manus, 2021). Siswantoro in (Setianingrum, 2008) suggests that literary psychology studies certain psychological phenomena experienced by the main characters in literary works when responding or reacting to themselves and their environment, thus psychological symptoms can be revealed through the behavior of characters in a literary work. Psychology and literature have a functional relationship, and both are useful for researching the psychological states of others.

The distinction is that psychological symptoms in literary works are those of imaginary humans, whereas in psychology they are those of actual humans. However, both can help each other gain a better understanding of the human psyche because what the author observes may not be observed by the psychologist, and vice versa. Literary psychology is the study of literature while considering the importance and function of psychology. This means that psychology also plays an important role in understanding a work of literature by approaching it from the psychological perspective of the author, characters, and readers.

The word of novel is derived from the language *novellas*, which later developed in England and America. A novel is a long prose literary work that contains a series of stories about a person's life and the people around them based on the author's point of view, as well as life values. A novel can express itself freely, present more information in greater detail, and address more complex issues. A novel is the culmination of an artistic work.

The definition of artistic is that it depicts real-life characters, movements, and scenes in a plot or situation that is somewhat chaotic or tangled, and can even provide an experience similar to the author's real life. A novel is one type of literary work that expresses inspiration or a journey through life by presenting life problems and a picture of reality. In novels, events are shown or experienced by the characters who play an important role in the story.

Novels, as literary works, have unique characteristics that set them apart from other works. Novels are thought to be capable of accommodating the story of life, allowing it to explain in detail each event that happens in the story. Novels are imaginative works that depict the problematic aspects of the lives of one or more characters (Sari, 2023). As a widely appreciated form of literature, novels not only entertain but also serve as a learning tool for readers, offering conflicts and functional, dramatic, and interesting problems, along with life values that can be taken as lessons. Consequently, a novel is a type of fiction written in words and features intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Readers can be entertained and learn life lessons from literary works because they contain moral, social, and cultural messages raised by writers from their society (Nurgiyantoro & Pabur 2017). A novel explores the issue of inner conflict in people's personalities.

A novel can be analyzed in a variety of ways, including psychological aspects that help readers understand characters, motivations, and interactions in the context of a complex narrative. Sigmund Freud created psychoanalysis as a philosophy to study human psychology (Apriansyah & Khairussibyan 2022). Psychoanalysis theory is a hypothesis that attempts to explain the nature and development of personality. In this case, motivation, emotions, and other internal factors take precedence. According to this case, the personality emerges when there is a conflict between various psychological elements, which often appears in children or at a young age. One of Freud's theories is defense mechanism.

Defense mechanisms are the ego's techniques for reducing anxiety by unconsciously changing reality. A self-perception crisis can occur when an external or internal event contradicts one's preferred self-image. In such cases, an individual must have some mechanism or process in place to defend itself against the potentially dangerous consequences of the event (Baumeister et al., 1998). According to Sigmund Freud, self-defense mechanisms are divided into eight different types: repression, rationalization, diversion, sublimation, projection, reaction formation, denial, and regression.

Freud defined the defense mechanism as the ability to control impulses and prevent anxiety caused by conscious recognition. A defense mechanism is a subconscious mental mechanism that responds to external and internal pressures, particularly those that threaten self-esteem or structure. Using defense mechanisms can help people protect themselves from psychological disorder. Freud state that defense mechanism helps individuals cope with anxiety and prevents the ego from feeling overwhelmed. In psychology, every human being has its own self-control mechanism that serves as a form of defense against pressure.

As a result, it requires a self-defense mechanism to manage the anxiety or tension caused by the encouragement it receives. This study focuses on the defense mechanism, particularly reaction formation experienced by the main character in *The Haunting of Hill House*. The concept of reaction formation involves converting a socially unacceptable impulse into its opposite. Applied to self-esteem protection, this means that individuals may react to the suggestion that they possess an

undesirable trait by exhibiting behavior that shows the opposite trait (Baumeister et al., 1998). In this article, the author employs the theory of reaction formation because the main character in the novel experiences a significant psychological conflict that causes her to exhibit behavior and attitudes that are the opposite of her true feelings and desires in order to cope with her past trauma.

A frequent phenomenon regarding self-defense mechanisms is people's reactions to trauma. After experiencing trauma, a person may use defense mechanisms or repression, where they bury painful feelings or memories as a way to protect themselves from the pain associated with the experience. Another example is conflict between individuals. In July 2022, the public was shocked by the death of an Indonesian police officer with the rank of Brigadier in the official residence of an officer who at the time served as the Head of Propam of the National Police, Ferdy Sambo, who was also the officer's superior.

According to republika.co.id, the chronology of Brigadier J's death began on Friday, July 8, 2022 when Sambo, who was still serving as the Police Propam Cadre, reported the incident to the South Jakarta Metro Police and the Police Propam Division. Sambo reported the shooting incident between Bharada Richard Eliezer and Brigadier J as a result of Brigadier J's sexual harassment of Putri Chandrawati. Ferdy Sambo filed two reports with the South Jakarta Police regarding the alleged attempted murder of Bharada Richard Eliezer and the alleged case of sexual harassment and threats of violence against Putri Chandrawati, Sambo's wife (Anom & Yuniati, 2023).

Ferdy Sambo allegedly used a self-defense mechanism in the form of reaction formation because he blamed Bharada Richard Eliezer for Brigadier J's death. A reaction formation is a defense mechanism in which a person covers up unacceptable feelings or impulses by engaging the opposite behavior. Ferdy Sambo invented a story in which Eliezer was the perpetrator to cover his own involvement. In addition, he cooperated and created scenarios with his wife, Putri Chandrawati to ensure that he was not named as a suspect. These actions demonstrate a conscious effort to divert attention from himself and protect himself from legal consequences.

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson follows Eleanor Vance (Nell), a 30-year-old woman who is dissatisfied with her mundane lifestyle. She spent over a decade taking care of her disabled mother who just passed away. Eleanor feels both free and lost after that her mother has passed away, and she is unsure what she is going to do with the rest of her life. Doctor John Montague, one of the characters in the novel, is an investigator of the supernatural who is determined to scientifically prove the existence of ghosts.

To fulfil his mission, Doctor Montague rents Hill House, a notoriously haunted mansion, and invites several individuals with past experiences of the paranormal to join him in his study. Doctor Montague invites her to participate in his experimental research on ghost's phenomenon at Hill House, an isolated mansion with a bad reputation. Eleanor is one of the participants of Doctor Montague's experiment.

Doctor Montague, and two other guests, Theodora and Luke spent the summer at Hill House, proving that there is indeed supernatural activity. The main character experiences pressure in the form of anxiety, thus making the main character carries out defense mechanisms to eliminate or reduce the pressure. In accordance with the theory described by Freud, there are several forms of defense mechanisms that can be carried out from the novel.

Several studies have analyzed "*The Haunting of Hill House*" novel by Shirley Jackson. First, a study conducted by (Spedito, 2023). This study entitled *The Haunted Minds of Women, A Feminist Analysis of Shirley Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House*. This article examines how Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) depicts women's mental illnesses and their causes. Shirley Jackson's works frequently feature female characters who conform to gender roles and expectations in their society and attempt to rebel against them in order to discover their identity.

Another article conducted by (Vinci, 2019), entitled *Shirley Jackson's Posthumanist Ghosts: Revisiting Spectrality and Trauma in The Haunting of Hill House*. The researcher believe that Shirley Jackson depicts Eleanor's consciousness a progressively expansive and multivalent in the chapters preceding this this unsettling interrogation, unmoored from the founded coordinate values of the traditional humanist subject. Nell slips in around through her body, through the boards of Hill House and through the surrounding terrain, rather than a unitary mind bound by a presumably human body which together denote a comprehensive identity. Third article conducted by (Al-Thalab, 2015), entitled *A Socio-Stylistic Study of American Female Gothic Novel: Haunting of Hill House*. This paper explains how Shirley Jackson uses stylistic elements throughout the *Haunting of Hill House* and how these elements are integrated throughout the entire work. Jackson emphasizes the dominant role of female characters in the novel through their use of language.

Next article conducted by (Ali, 2022) entitled *The Haunting versus Reality: The Uncanny in Shirley Jackson The Haunting of Hill House*. This study aims to illustrate the reality of haunting by studying various kinds of doubling and applying Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny 'unheimlich' to the novel. Last article conducted by (Vega, 2021), entitled *The Perfectly Evil Home: The House As A Living Character In Shirley Jackson's The Haunting Of Hill House*. This article examines how the Hill House house in Shirley Jackson's novel "The Haunting of Hill House" is personified and treated as a living being. The first section examines the disturbing physical characteristics of the Hill House and how they are personified. The second section focuses on the psychological aspect and the mother-daughter relationship between the house and the main character, Eleanor.

Based on the explanation above, the author will focus on Eleanor past trauma that triggered the reaction formation as a defense mechanism in *The Haunting of Hill House*. First, this study will examine what events in Eleanor past trauma contribute to the development of reaction formation as a defense mechanism. Finally. The author explains Eleanor's use of reaction formation for dealing with her past in *The Haunting of Hill House*.

To be more specific, this study focuses on the defense mechanism used by the main character in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory, the author hopes to look deeper into how the main character uses of defense mechanism to cope with fear and trauma. Past trauma is frequently relevant to reaction formation in psychological contexts because traumatic experiences can influence how people perceive and respond to current situations. It is expected that this research will provide readers with valuable insights into the psychology of characters in literary works, as well as a more specific understanding of the characters in the novel. The author hopes that this research will be useful for the readers in understanding the complexities of defense mechanism, especially reaction formation.

Method

In this study, the researcher employs a qualitative descriptive method to investigate defense mechanisms, particularly formation reactions, encountered by the main character in the novel "*The Haunting of Hill House*". The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because it allows the author to delve into the subjective experience of the main character, Eleanor Vance. I Made Winarta in (Margareth, 2023) stated that descriptive qualitative method is a method that contains the process of analyzing, describing, and summarizing various types of data.

This study aims to describe and analyze Eleanor's psychological experiences in greater detail and depth. Using a qualitative approach allows the author to investigate various emotional and psychological aspects that quantitative methods may not detect. This method also helps the author understand the context and background that influenced Eleanor's actions and reactions. Data was gathered by analysing the novel's text and identifying key moments when the formation's reactions were apparent. The author examined Eleanor's dialogue and actions to identify patterns that suggest the presence of defense mechanisms. This research used a psychoanalysis theory, specifically Freud's theory about defense mechanism. This theory is important because it is related with the main character's problems. The use of the theory is expected to be useful to the analysis of the main character, Eleanor Vance. Moreover, the researcher hope that this theory can be understandable to the readers.

In this section, the researcher categorizes the study's object into material and formal objects. The material object is the supernatural horror novel "*The Haunting of Hill House*" by Shirley Jackson. The formal object examines the main character's reaction formation and the causes of her issues using Freud's psychoanalysis, specifically defense mechanism theory. There are several steps that the researcher uses for this research. These include reading, identifying, classifying, and analyzing. After the researcher read the novel entitled *The Haunting of Hill House*, the researcher identifies the types described in the novel. The researcher then classifies the novel's data findings while also taking notes for the results of the discussions and

quoting sentences.

Results

This section provides a detailed analysis focusing on the concept of reaction formation as depicted in Shirley Jackson's novel *"The Haunting of Hill House"*. This novel follows a group investigating paranormal activity at Hill House. Among these characters, Eleanor Vance stands out for her complexity and psychological intrigue. Her history of caregiving and emotional isolation makes her particularly vulnerable to the house's sinister forces.

The analyses are divided into two-sub chapters based on the research questions. The first sub-chapter delves into specific events from Eleanor's past that have contributed to the development of reaction formation as a defense mechanism. It examines how these traumatic events have shaped her psychological responses and behaviors. The second sub-chapter focuses on how Eleanor employs reaction formation as a coping mechanism while at Hill House. This section explores the different ways of Eleanor's behaviors.

Discussion

1. Character's Past Trauma

The author will show events in Eleanor past trauma that contribute to the development of reaction formation as a defense mechanism. The author found Eleanor's trauma that made her develop a defense mechanism in the form of reaction formation. The author's findings focused on one of the most prominent reasons in the novel, which is the relationship between Eleanor and her family. Eleanor did not have a good relationship with her mother and her sister. In addition, Eleanor also hated her brother-in-law and her niece as can be seen in the novel.

"The only person in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister. She disliked her brother-in-law and her five-year-old niece." (Jackson, 1959, p.36)

Eleanor's relationship with her family was strained, as evidenced by the quote above. The internal factors that caused Eleanor to have a reaction formation was her environment, as well as her relationship with her family. As a result, Eleanor struggled to socialized. Eleanor has no friends as a result of her limited life experiences. She also spent her entire life caring for her mother, so she had no time to interact with the outside world. Eleanor has experienced an unpleasant past. During her lifetime, she has felt as if she has not truly lived because her existence has been consumed by the responsibility of caring for her mother.

This can be seen in the quote "She could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life;" (Jackson, 1959, p.36). This duty has overshadowed her personal goals and desires, leaving her feeling trapped and unfulfilled. Even at the age of 32, Eleanor lacks someone special in her life to be loved by, amplifying her feelings of

isolation and loneliness. She realizes that she cannot recall a single moment of genuine happiness. In this case, Eleanor develops a reaction formation as a defense mechanism during her time at Hill House. Eleanor's experiences and life prior to arriving at Hill House were a key factor in the development of her psychological defense mechanisms. She was trying to protect herself in order to feel secure within the unfamiliar environment of Hill House.

Throughout her life, Eleanor felt that there was no place that would accept her. Eleanor was isolated within the prison created by her mother. When she received the invitation from Dr. Montague, she was elated. Eleanor repeatedly said that she had been waiting for something like this her whole life. On the day when she departed for Hill House, she said that it was the first time she had experienced a summer day like the one described in the quote below:

“It was the first genuinely shining day of summer, a time of year which brought Eleanor always to aching memories of her early childhood, when it had seemed to be summer all the time;” (Jackson, 1959, p.46).

Shirley Jackson suggests that Eleanor's painful memories of her bleak childhood, when it felt like perpetual summer with no real freedom, stand in stark contrast to the genuine, liberating summer day she experiences on her way to Hill House. This is a new beginning for Eleanor, an opportunity to escape the “prison” her controlling mother has created and finally embrace the freedom she has long desired. The quote “it was the first genuinely shining day of summer” expresses Eleanor's excitement and hope to begin a new chapter, free of the darkness of her past. Jackson implies that Eleanor was denied a true childhood, full of summer joys, making her journey to Hill House all the more meaningful and significant as an opportunity for her to reclaim the freedom she was denied. Overall, the passage demonstrates how Eleanor's repressed past fuels her desire for the new beginning that Hill House represents.

The next quote supports the quote above, where Eleanor smiles as the sunlight slants along the street: “she smiled out the sunlight slanting along the street and thought, **I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step.**” (Jackson, 1959, p. 47). Eleanor's first real experience of joy and freedom is symbolized by her smile at the slanting sunlight on the street. The sunlight itself can be interpreted as a metaphor for enlightenment and new beginnings, emphasizing her journey from a life of darkness and oppression to one of possibility and hope. The repeated affirmation “I am going, I am going” reinforces her determination and excitement to move forward, breaking free from the emotional and psychological chains that have bound her.

This moment is significant because it shows Eleanor experiencing a positive shift in her mindset. She feels a sense of relief and accomplishment because for the first time, she made decision for herself. Stepping out of her family's shadow, and

embarking on a journey that is entirely her own. This step represents her initial move towards independence and self-discovery. Further discussions on how this past trauma scenes impact to the character's life which Freud propose as defense mechanism.

2. Reaction Formation in Hill House

The concept of reaction formation involves converting a socially unacceptable impulse into its opposite. Applied to self-esteem protection, this means that individuals may react to the suggestion that they possess an undesirable trait by exhibiting behavior that shows the opposite trait (Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998). In Chapter V of "The Haunting of Hill House," Eleanor reflects on her feelings by stating:

"I have been frightened half out of my foolish wits, but I have somehow earned this joy; I have been waiting it for so long. Abandoning a lifelong belief that to name happiness is to dissipate it, **she smiled at herself in the mirror and told herself silently, You are happy, Eleanor, you have finally been given a part of your measure of happiness.**" (Jackson, 1959, p. 166).

This happens on her second day at Hill House, when she convinced herself that she is truly happy, believing she has never felt so happy before and that she has earned it after waiting so long. This dialogue reveals Eleanor's attempt to affirm her right to happiness by convincing herself that she truly deserves it. This self-assurance sharply contrasts with her past, as detailed in Chapter I. Eleanor's life before hill house was devoid of true happiness. She harbored resentment towards her mother and sister and lived a constrained life, caring for her sick mother for 11 years until her death. This prolonged caregiving left Eleanor socially isolated and insecure around strangers, making it difficult for her to communicate, and she had no friends as described in the following quote:

"She could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life; her years with her mother had been built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant wariness, and unending despair." (Jackson, 1959, p.33).

The contrast between Eleanor's inner dialogue and her past emphasizes her use of reaction formation as a defense mechanism. She behaves and speaks in ways that contradict her true feelings and previous experiences in order to protect herself from the pain of her reality. Eleanor attempts to overcome her deep unhappiness and isolation by insisting that she is happy and deserves happiness. This psychological strategy allows her to cope with her situation at Hill House by creating an illusion of joy and contentment that contradicts her actual experiences.

Another scene when Eleanor experiences a reaction formation is when Theodora apologizes to Eleanor, but it is unclear whether she is truly concerned for Eleanor or simply apologizing for borrowing Eleanor's clothes. Eleanor is clearly having a very frightening experience at Hill House; her name has mysteriously appeared on the walls twice, which is terrifying. However, despite Theodora's apology, Eleanor remains hostile to her. Eleanor even wishes Theodora was dead, but she keeps these dark thoughts to herself and responds with "Don't be silly." There is a lot of tension and mistrust between Theodora and Eleanor. Eleanor appears resentful or jealous of Theodora's more confident personality, which contrasts with her own insecurities.

"Nell?" Theodora looked up at her and smiled. "I'm really sorry, you know," she said.

I would like to watch her dying, Eleanor thought, and smile back and said, "Don't be silly." (Jackson, 1959, p. 189).

Eleanor's thoughts are very different from her actions and words. This is an example of reaction formation, a defense mechanism where someone acts in a way opposite to their true feelings. Earlier in the novel, Eleanor admired Theodora and found her charming.

"All ready." Theodora came through the bathroom door into Eleanor's room; **she is lovely**, Eleanor thought, turning to look; **I wish I were lovely.**" (Jackson, 1959, p.75).

These quotes reflect Eleanor's changing feelings toward Theodora. At first, she admired her and wished to be like her. But later, she has negative thoughts about herself. This shift reflects Eleanor's internal conflict and her use of reaction formation, a concept from Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanisms. Eleanor tries to protect herself from the pain of her true emotions by acting the opposite way she feels. This behavior helps her deal with the stress and fear she feels at Hill House, giving her a sense of control in an overwhelming circumstance.

Conclusion

This study analyzes Sigmund Freud's concept of reaction formation as a defense mechanism. This study successfully reveals how reaction formation is formed and developed in the main character's dialogue, narrative, and characterization using descriptive qualitative analysis. This study provides new perspective to literary studies and literary psychology, particularly in terms of understanding the complexities of human personality as manifested in fictional texts. Furthermore, the findings of this study can contribute to a better understanding of the application of Freud's defense mechanism theory in real life. More research can

be done to investigate other manifestations of defense mechanisms in literary works, as well as the implications for our understanding of human behavior and psychology.

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