

## Defense Mechanisms of Light Yagami in Death Note Manga

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**Abstract.** Human life is never free from conflict, whether internal or external. Likewise, the way individuals respond to and deal with conflicts varies. The same applies to characters in literary works. Death Note is a literary work by Tsugumi Ohba. This study aims to analyze the psychological aspects of the main character in the context of defense mechanisms in dealing with conflict. The research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The researcher repeatedly read the manga and mapped the findings regarding the main character's defense mechanisms. The analysis focuses solely on Volume 1 of the manga, without examining other volumes. The findings reveal that the defense mechanisms identified in this manga include repression, rationalization, denial, and reaction formation. The theoretical significance of this study is expected to contribute new references in the field of literature and provide insights into defense mechanisms. The research results indicate that Light Yagami employs defense mechanisms such as rationalization, denial, and reaction formation. Rationalization is evident when Light justifies his actions as an effort to uphold justice. Denial is observed when he refuses to acknowledge that his actions are wrong. Meanwhile, reaction formation is apparent in his seemingly calm demeanor, which actually conceals underlying anxiety.

**Keywords:** Defense mechanisms, Death note, Literary psychology.

### 1. Introduction

Literary works are a reflection of human life's reality. Various problems within the plot of a literary work emerge due to the influence of ongoing social dynamics. As a product of an author's creativity, literary works do not arise from a void detached from the dimensions of life [1]. Literature is considered a social (cultural) document that portrays life [2].

Comics or manga are a form of Geiterature that depicts the psychological aspects of the characters within the story. A comic is an artistic medium in the form of static images arranged in a structured manner, accompanied by text intended to convey information to the reader. Comics always utilize the use of visual space and layout. Thus, images serve as a means of storytelling expressed through forms and symbols, making comics a part of literature known as graphic literature [3].

The manga Death Note by Tsugumi Ohba tells the story of a character named Light Yagami, who discovers a mysterious notebook with supernatural powers that can kill people simply by writing their names in it. Feeling dissatisfied with the world's state due to the presence of many evil individuals, Light Yagami becomes ambitious to eliminate all criminals using the notebook, aiming to create a new world free from crime. Throughout the story, Light faces numerous conflicts, both internal and external, involving other characters. To cope with these conflicts, Light frequently employs defense mechanisms.

This study aims to analyze the various forms of defense mechanisms used by Light Yagami in the Death Note manga. Defense mechanisms are ways in which individuals engage in activities to protect themselves from situations that emotionally impact them. Defense mechanisms are also techniques employed by the ego to reduce anxiety by consciously or unconsciously altering reality. Defense mechanisms are categorized into eight types: repression, rationalization, displacement, sublimation, projection, reaction formation, denial, and regression [4].

"Konflik Batin Tokoh Utama Anime Death Note Karya Tsugumi Ohba" analyzes Light Yagami's inner conflict but does not discuss the defense mechanisms he employs. "Analisis Perkembangan Karakter Yagami Light Dalam Serial Anime Death Note Karya Tsugumi Ohba" examines the development of Light Yagami's character but does not focus on his defense mechanisms [5, 6].

Several other studies have discussed defense mechanisms in various literary works but with different objects of analysis. Khoirunnisa & Nugroho (2023) examined the defense mechanisms of the main character in the short story Malam Terakhir by Leila S. Chudori. Wilda Srihastuty Handayani Piliang (2018) analyzed the defense mechanisms of the central character in the short story Cerita Pendek Tentang Cerita Cinta Pendek by Djenar Maesa Ayu. Defense mechanisms of the character Zee in the novel Insecure by Seplia.

This study differs from previous research as it focuses on Light Yagami's defense mechanisms in the Death Note manga, volume 1.

This study aims to analyze the defense mechanisms employed by Light Yagami in the first volume of the Death Note manga using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. A qualitative approach is applied, utilizing literary psychology analysis to examine Light Yagami's defense mechanisms.

## **2. Literature Review**

Defense mechanisms are unconscious processes that emerge to reduce anxiety caused by undesirable situations or potential threats [4].

Freud used the term defense mechanism to explain an individual's subconscious process in protecting themselves from anxiety. This mechanism shields a person from external threats or internal anxiety-induced impulses by distorting reality in various ways.

For instance, when the ego suppresses the id's desire for pleasure, it creates anxiety. This results in discomfort because the ego cannot fulfill the id's demands, which may interfere with an individual's activities. Anxiety serves as a warning for the ego to resolve internal conflicts through defense mechanisms, protecting the ego while reducing the anxiety that arises from these conflicts [7].

A person's dominant character traits are linked to defense mechanisms within personality theory. These mechanisms not only reflect an individual's overall personality but also influence personality development [3]. Ego defense is a normal behavior that allows

individuals to adapt to certain values—it does not mean avoiding reality. The defense mechanisms a person employs depend on their level of development and the intensity of their anxiety. Defense mechanisms are categorized into eight types: repression, rationalization, displacement, sublimation, projection, reaction formation, denial, and regression [4, 7].

### 3. Method

This study employs a qualitative research method with a literary psychology approach based on Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanisms. This method is suitable because it enables an in-depth analysis of Light Yagami's psychological defense mechanisms as depicted in the first volume of the Death Note manga. By applying this approach, the research can systematically examine how the character's actions and thoughts reflect various defense mechanisms.

The method used in this research is descriptive analysis with a literary psychology approach. Descriptive analysis is a method used to describe facts and then analyze them. However, beyond merely presenting facts, it also provides explanations and a comprehensive understanding.

The primary data consists of five illustrated images from Death Note manga, Volume 1. The secondary data sources include reference books, journals, and previous research relevant to the study's topic.

Primary data collection was conducted using the observation and note-taking techniques, while secondary data were gathered through literature study to enrich the understanding of various concepts that serve as the foundation or guideline for the research process. The analysis of primary data follows the descriptive analysis method, which involves describing the research findings in terms of defense mechanism concepts based on relevant theories. Once the data are thoroughly described, both explicitly and implicitly, they are then analyzed and conclusions are drawn.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The research findings on the forms of defense mechanisms employed by the character Light Yagami in the Death Note manga are as follows:

Data 1 shows in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Death Note Chapter 1, pages 18-19

夜神 月 : うわっ...Light Yagami : Ahhh!!!

- リューク : 何故そんなに驚くデスノートの落とし主死神のリュークだ
- Ryuk : Why are you so surprised? I am Ryuk, the shinigami, the owner of that *Death Note*.
- リューク : さっきの様子だともうそれが普通のノートじゃないってわかってるんだろ?
- Ryuk : From your reaction earlier, it seems like you've already realized that it's not an ordinary notebook, right?
- 夜神 月 : し・・・死神
- Light Yagami : Shi-shinigami?
- 夜神 月 : 死神か・・・
- Light Yagami : Shinigami huh...
- 夜神 月 : 驚いてないよリューク。
- Light Yagami : I'm not surprised, Ryuk.

#### 4.2. Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism in psychoanalytic theory, an individual refuses to acknowledge a painful or threatening reality, either consciously or unconsciously, to protect themselves from psychological distress [8]. From the image and excerpt above, it is evident that Light Yagami was initially shocked and fearful. However, when Ryuk asked why he was surprised, Light lied by claiming that he was not. In this scene, Light engages in the defense mechanism of denial, where he rejects the fact that he was actually shocked and afraid. Light employs this defense mechanism to minimize the fear he is experiencing.

The article's main findings highlight that Glinda's speech reflects her social goals and identity. Glinda often corrects pronunciation to demonstrate her social standing, indicating a keen understanding of language as a sign of sophistication. Her expressive facial gestures and sarcastic comments make her a powerful social figure, allowing her to navigate social circles with a sense of wit and superiority. As the story goes on, Glinda's speaking patterns change a lot.

#### 4.3. Reaction Formation

Reaction formation is a defense mechanism introduced by Sigmund Freud (1923) in his psychoanalytic theory, occurring when an individual expresses the opposite of their true feelings or desires to reduce anxiety or internal conflict [9]. This mechanism involves replacing anxiety-inducing emotions with their opposite or a contrasting conscious feeling. In this scene, Light Yagami also employs the reaction formation defense mechanism. From the image and excerpt, it is evident that Light appears calm and composed, even though he is actually shocked and afraid. Light uses this defense mechanism to suppress and eliminate his fear.



Figure 2. Death Note Chapter 1 pages 42-43.

- 夜神 月 : ふ…二人殺した…  
 人を…二人殺した  
 僕が…どうする…?  
 こ…こんな恐ろしいノート…
- Light Yagami : I... I have killed two people...  
 People... I have killed two people.  
 What should I do?
- 夜神 月 : いや…  
 殺したって構わない奴じゃないか…  
 しかし二人目はどうだ?  
 死刑になるほどの悪人じゃないぞ…  
 …  
 ちがう…いつも思ってた事じゃないか  
 世の中腐ってる  
 腐ってる奴は死んだ方がいい
- Light Yagami : No...  
 Who cares if he was killed...  
 But what about the second one?  
 He wasn't evil enough to deserve death...  
 No...  
 Isn't this what I've always thought?



This world is rotten.

Rotten people should die.

#### 4.4. Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism in psychoanalytic theory, in which an individual refuses to acknowledge a painful or threatening reality, either consciously or unconsciously, to protect themselves from psychological distress [9]. From the image and excerpt, it is evident that Light is experiencing inner conflict, commonly referred to as internal conflict. After killing two people, Light feels guilty, fearful, anxious, and uncertain about what to do. However, he denies the reality of his actions by justifying that evil people deserve to die. In this scene, Light once again employs the denial defense mechanism, refusing to acknowledge that his actions were wrong.

#### 4.5. Rationalization

Rationalization is a type of defense mechanism in which a person justifies something that is actually wrong. It is a way of managing emotions by creating socially acceptable logical reasoning or justifications for unconscious emotional actions [10]. In this scene, Light also employs the rationalization defense mechanism. After feeling guilty for killing others, he creates a logical justification—"evil people deserve to die"—to validate his wrongful actions. Light uses this defense mechanism to eliminate his feelings of guilt.



Figure 3. Figure 2. Death Note Chapter 1 pages 42-43.

- L : キラ おまえがどのような考えで このような事をしているの  
うそう大体想像はつく  
しかし おまえのしている事は・・・  
悪だ!!
- L : Kira, I can imagine your reasoning and way of thinking behind why  
you're doing this.  
But what you are doing...  
is evil!!
- 夜神 月 : 僕が悪だと・・・

僕は正義だ!!

悪に怯える弱い者を救い誰もが理想とする

新世界の神となる男だ

そしてその神に逆らう者!

それこそが悪だ!!!

Light Yagami

: I am evil...?

I am justice!!

I save the weak from evil people, and I will become the god of a new world—an ideal world for everyone.

And those who oppose that god...

They are the true evil!!!

#### 4.6. Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism introduced in psychoanalytic theory, in which an individual refuses to acknowledge a painful or threatening reality, either consciously or unconsciously, to protect themselves from psychological distress [4, 9]. From the image and excerpt, it is evident that Light employs the denial defense mechanism. When L states that killing others is an act of evil, Light denies it by claiming that he is justice, saving the weak from harm. Light uses this defense mechanism to protect himself from legal consequences and feelings of guilt.

The analysis found that in Death Note manga volume 1, Light Yagami employs three types of defense mechanisms—denial, reaction formation, and rationalization—with the aim of reducing anxiety, fear, and guilt.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter regarding the forms of defense mechanisms employed by Light Yagami in the Death Note manga, the researcher concludes that in Death Note Volume 1, Light Yagami utilizes three types of defense mechanisms: denial, reaction formation, and rationalization. The most frequently used defense mechanism by Light Yagami is denial, which he employs three times. The purpose of these defense mechanisms is to reduce and eliminate uncomfortable emotions such as guilt, fear, and anxiety that he experiences. This study focuses solely on the forms of defense mechanisms employed by Light Yagami in the Death Note manga. Future researchers are encouraged to analyze other elements within Death Note that have not yet been explored. Additionally, they may also examine defense mechanisms in other literary works.

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