

PUSS' ANXIETY AND DEFENSE MECHANISM IN THE PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH MOVIE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways of anxiety and defense mechanisms work on the character Puss in the Puss in Boots: The Last Wish (2022) movie through the theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms by Freud. By employing a descriptive qualitative approach and the theory of literary psychology, this study aims to understand how to read and interpret a literary work from a psychological perspective. The data used are the scenes and dialogues of Puss from the film. The results show that Puss experienced three types of anxieties which are realistic, moral and neurotic anxieties, and five types of defense mechanisms namely, denial, displacement, rationalization, reaction formation, and repression.

Keywords: Anxiety, Defense Mechanism, Impulse, Freudian Theory

INTRODUCTION

Every person must deal with the inevitable impulse of anxiety. Anyone in a position of a higher power will eventually feel anxious. Although it is a natural impulse, it will become abnormal if people's anxiety replaces other worries in their lives. The formation of anxiety can be triggered by a variety of factors, including deprivation and feeling inferior. People look for enjoyment, serenity, and self-satisfaction, such as material prosperity and power, to deal with their anxieties. Ironically, people may get more anxious as their influence increase.

Anxiety affects how someone acts and behaves. The failure feeling to control this symptom can disrupt a person's life or, in the worst-case scenario, lead to an anxiety disorder. Based on Freudian theory, there are three types of anxiety which are neurotic anxiety, moral anxiety, and realistic anxiety (Feist, 2020, p. 38). Furthermore, it will have an impact on other people's lives in addition to the power holder's own. Unconsciously, people develop their own defense systems to combat their anxiety. People need the defense mechanism to shield themselves from anxiety so they can lead balanced lives. Unsuitable defense mechanisms, however, might cause people to become aberrant and develop new diseases.

Unconsciously, people develop defense mechanisms to help them deal with their anxieties. Ego according to Arifonang & Heriyati (2022, pp. 18–19) is a system of personality that serves to direct individuals to objects of reality and performs its functions based on the principle of reality. All forms of defense are the ego's defense mechanisms, which block impulses and distort them into forms that are more palatable and less dangerous. There are several types of defense mechanism based of the Freudian theory

such as denial, projection, displacement, rationalization, reaction formation, repression, and sublimation. Although each type of defense mechanism has a unique way of working, they all serve the same purpose, preventing an individual from feeling excessive anxiety and preserving one's self-worth. To disguise their excessive anxiety, some people, however, go beyond the bounds of reasonable defense mechanisms. When it happens, one's personality will become out of balance.

In previous research by Sukma Eka Satya Ginalih & Nungki Heriyati entitled "Boromir's Defense Mechanism in Lord of The Rings: Fellowship of The Ring" found that even fictional characters can help us identify psychological aspects of a person such as how to identify their defense mechanisms (Ginalih & Heriyati, 2020, pp. 31–32), another similar research conducted by (Sitanggang, 2018) entitled "DEFENSE MECHANISM IN RAMBO: THE FIRST BLOOD FILM IN REFERENCE TO SEMIOTIC" said that an individual use defense mechanisms to overcome or avoid something unwanted that threatens their sanity or is unacceptable to them and often triggered by trauma, fear, or negative perceptions of the individual or group. Another previous research by Nofia Ulfa & Diyah Fitri Wulandari entitled "Analysis of Anxiety and Defense Mechanism on the Main Character Reflected in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) Novel by Lewis Carroll" said that anxiety can make one feel discomfort and guilt due to over-imagination and high expectations (Ulfa & Wulandari, 2019, p. 744). Researchers make sure the current study differs from prior ones. The distinction is the subject of the research.

Puss, or Puss in Boots, is a main protagonist in *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* (2022) movie produced by DreamWorks Animation and distributed by Universal Pictures has problems with anxiety. Due to Puss' inability to manage his anxiety, he run from his own reality which affect his own personality and his daily life. The discussion will specifically use the psychoanalysis theory based on the Freudian theory upon anxiety and defense mechanisms.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach and literary psychology theory to better understand how to read and interpret a literary work from a psychological point of view, as well as the psychological characteristics of the characters in the literary work. One way to understand these psychological aspects is to use the theory of anxiety and defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud. The data of the analysis were taken from *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* movie. The analysis will be focused on the two findings which are the analysis of the cause and the anxiety experienced by Puss and the analysis of defense mechanisms applied by Puss in dealing with his anxiety in the movie. The data is in the form of the screencap images and words from the movie related to Puss' anxiety and defense mechanism.

Data are collected using the following steps:

1. Watch the film and read the transcript of Puss in Boots: The Last Wish movie.
2. Classify the results of the required data such as conversations, scenes, and other evidence based on the theory of anxiety and defense mechanism.
3. Determine which data should be presented and analyzed, and make decisions that confirm findings.
4. Conclude the research.

RESULTS

The results of this study found that there are three types of anxiety and five types of defense mechanism experienced by Puss in Boots based on Sigmund Freud's theory of anxiety and defense mechanism. The three types of anxiety that Puss has experienced are realistic anxiety which appeared four times, moral anxiety which only appeared once, and neurotic anxiety which appeared twice. Furthermore, the five defense mechanisms Puss has done are denial which appeared twice, displacement which only appeared once, rationalization which only appeared once, reaction formation which appeared twice, and repression which only appeared once.

DISCUSSION

The categories of anxiety and defense mechanisms experienced by Puss in the Puss in Boots: The Last Wish (2022) movie are listed below.

Puss' Anxiety

1) Realistic Anxiety

Realistic anxiety is when someone drops you into a pit of poisonous snakes or falls off a cliff while driving. Realistic anxiety is defined as an unpleasant feeling and can involve the possibility of danger (Feist, 2020, pp. 38–39). According to Cahyani (2018, p. 7), this fear of external danger in anxiety can threaten one's existence.



Figure 1. Puss' anxious face

The confrontation with Death made Puss in Boots questioning his own immortality. The physical wounds inflicted by Death's sickles on his forehead serves as a reminder of Puss's mortality. In figure 1, Puss with dilated pupil and gaping mouth indicating a respond to fight or flight situation. The rapid, shallow breathing implied by his gaping mouth is a sign of his anxiety. Puss in Boots encounter with Death transforming him from a brave adventurer to a person terrified of his own mortality. The idea of realistic anxiety that once never happened to Puss becomes a real and deep experience, forever changing his perspective completely.

2) Moral Anxiety

The second one is moral anxiety, moral anxiety is described as the fear of consciousness, and those who experience moral anxiety are said to have a well-developed superego. According to Putra (2023, p. 98), when people feel morally anxious, they worry about being punished by their superego. In addition, a person suffering from moral anxiety cannot avoid feelings of guilt by running away.



Figure 2. Puss giving his wishing star to his friend

PUSS: The wish is yours.

PUSS: You deserve someone you can trust.

Figure 2 showed Puss giving his wishing star to Kitty. Puss would feel guilty if he did not share his wishing star with his friend. He could have consciously not given his wish star to his friend, but people with moral anxiety cannot escape the feeling of guilt by escaping from their anxiety. In Puss' utterance "The wish is yours. You deserve someone you can trust." Showed that his superego is well-developed, he is aware that he cannot escape from his feelings of guilt. Puss with his morals becomes depressed if he does not behave what is considered good by his friends, moral anxiety forces him to do good things, so the way he releases his moral pressure is by sharing his wish star with his friend.

3) Neurotic Anxiety

The third one is neurotic anxiety; neurotic anxiety is described as the fear of an unknown threat. This sensation exists within the ego, but comes from the drive of the id. People may experience neurotic anxiety in the presence of teachers, bosses or other authoritative people if they have previously unconsciously held negative thoughts towards one or both parents. During childhood, angry impulses are often accompanied by a fear of punishment, which develops into unconscious neurotic anxiety (Feist, 2020, p. 38). Neurotic anxiety occurs due to being overwhelmed by urges from the id, such as someone losing control of themselves, losing their patience, or losing their rationality (Boeree, 2006, p. 7).



Figure 3. Puss' imagination of a tree branch that resembles Death's face

Puss has a disruptive idea about Death, which is an indication of his anxiety. Unwanted or disruptive ideas can appear in our mind at any time and without notice. They may be disruptive because they are usually repetitive and involve the same idea. In figure 3, from

Puss' point of view shows that he is not thinking correctly; he is imagining what should not exist, such as Death's face, which is actually just a tree trunk, which is why he has experienced a panic attack and stimulated his neurotic anxiety. This neurotic anxiety caused by intrusive thoughts, made Puss's suffering more severe. Puss' distorted perspective on reality reflects the unreasonable fear of losing control, which is the defining characteristic of neurotic anxiety. A tree branch turns into a terrifying appearance of Death, which represents his mind's attempt to deal with extreme fear. This distorted vision, along with Puss' intrusive thoughts, results in a vicious loop of anxiety and panic. Puss' mind becomes a constant struggle of reason against fear, trapping him in a state of high anxiety.

Puss' Defense Mechanism

1) Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism which involves blocking external events from awareness. If a situation is too much to manage, the person will refuse to experience it (Boeree, 2006, pp. 7–8). Denial is a type of defense mechanism that explicitly denies external dangers and assumes that they do not exist. The person deliberately denies that the terrible event or reality is socially undesirable. The facts may be too severe. As a result, a person tries to deny the truth. A person may deny that something bad has happened and brainwash to forget about it. He may do this deliberately, but he may also do it unconsciously from time to time (Rezeki & Setyowati, 2023, p. 930).



Figure 4. Puss talking to the doctor

DOCTOR: Puss in Boots, how do I say this?
DOCTOR: You died.
PUSS: Doctor, please. Relax! I am Puss in Boots.
PUSS: I laugh at death. You see?
PUSS: And anyway, I am a cat. I have nine lives.
DOCTOR: You are down to your last life.
DOCTOR: My prescription: No more adventures
for you. You need to retire.
PUSS: Me? Retire?
PUSS: Are you the village comedian as well?

In figure 4, Puss is talking to the doctor and knowing the fact that he only has one life left, Puss denies it with his utterance “Me? Retire?” with a cynical facial expression, this is done by Puss as his defense mechanism in order to avoid the reality that he only has one life left. When faced with the life-changing reality of her own mortality, Puss

immediately turns to denial as a defense mechanism. His belief in his own immortality, along with his cynical ignorance of the doctor's advice, shows an underlying refusal to accept reality. Figure 4 shows Puss in a state of denial, Puss' expression is one of disbelief as he holds on his own belief in which he is an immortal being cannot be harmed by anything. This denial acts as a defense mechanism, protecting Puss from the intense fear of facing his own mortality.

2) Displacement

Displacement is the shifting of ideas, feelings, and impulses directed at one person or thing to another. People often use displacement when they are uncertain about communicating their emotions to others. Displacement occurs when a person is unable to release emotions such as anger and depression (Rezeki & Setyowati, 2023, p. 929). This defense mechanism develops and ends up targeting other people, animals or objects unrelated to the incident. In this stage, after Puss buried his own uniform which symbolized him as a hero, abandoning his old life. He became sad and depressed and then he poised and sang a song as in the figure below.



Figure 5. Puss poems and sing a song

As shown in the figure 5, Puss performed his defense mechanism by transferring his sad and depressed emotions into a poem and a song. According to Boeree (2006), a displacement is the redirection of an impulse to a substitute target, one may transfer the impulse to someone or something that can act as a symbolic substitute, in this case, Puss' poem and song is his symbolic substitute for his sadness and depression. Puss was able to momentarily ease his sadness by displacing his bad feelings through emotional creation. Puss' poems and singing help him express his feelings in a safe environment.

3) Rationalization

Rationalization is the cognitive manipulation of facts to make an action or urge appear less frightening. When we make excuses for ourselves, we do so frequently and consciously. But for many people who have sensitive egos, making excuses is so natural that they never realize it. In other words, many of us are big believers in our own falseness (Boeree, 2006, p. 11). Puss lost his sword after his first encounter with Death and instead, his sword was replaced by a wooden stick given to him by Perrito as shown in figure 6 below.



Figure 6. Puss showing his stick-sword

KITTY: A stick? What happened to your sword?

PUSS: Got rid of it, you know?

PUSS: Made things too easy.

PUSS: I needed a challenge.

In figure 6, Puss shows his wooden sword to Kitty and when Kitty asks Puss “A stick? What happened to your sword?”, Puss replied with “Got rid of it, you know? Made things too easy.” which he lied to her, Puss did not throw away his original sword, but lost it during his first fight against Death. Puss is using his rationalization as his defense mechanism, where Puss attempts to put things into a different perspective or offer a different explanation for one's perception or behavior in the face of a changing reality by lying to Kitty about the truth while at the same time covering up his anxiety. According to Rezeki (2023, p. 933), rationalization gives an alternative explanation to one's views or actions in the face of quickly shifting situations. Puss maintains control by making up a story about losing his sword to make things more difficult. This helps him to maintain his ego while avoiding the anxiety that comes with admitting his failure. However, this defense mechanism is ultimately counterproductive as it stops Puss from learning from his mistakes.

4) Reaction Formation

An unconscious impulse can become conscious by taking on another appearance that is completely opposite to its original state. This defense mechanism is known as reaction formation. Reactive behavior is distinguished by its excessive character and obsessive and compulsive nature (Feist, 2020, p. 40). As one example of reaction formation said by Asmillah (2021, p. 181), a person with violent tendencies develops into a pleasant and friendly personality.



Figure 7. Puss admiring his own beard

KITTY: What is this? Are you a pirate now?
KITTY: It's like a possum crawled on your face
KITTY: and died of shame.
PUSS: Please, mock me quietly.
KITTY: I hate it. It's disgusting.
PUSS: Well, I love it. It's distinguished.



Figure 8. Puss regretting his own beard

PUSS: Kitty, please! Get this itchy thing off of me!
PUSS: It's like a fever on my face.
KITTY: Hold on.
KITTY: Is the great Puss in Boots asking for help?
PUSS: Help. You were right.
PUSS: The beard is disgusting.

In figure 7 in the utterance “Well, I love it. It's distinguished.”, Puss says that the beard looks good on him, which is actually one of the defense mechanisms that has the purpose of expressing his true intention that he does not like the beard and to cover his anxiety about other people's perspectives on his beard, later in the movie and can be seen in figure 8 in the utterance “Help. You were right. The beard is disgusting.” Puss expresses his true feelings about his beard that he does not like the beard. One can clearly see the true nature of an action or feeling, but they have to deceive themselves into clinging to their reaction formation, which helps to reduce the uneasiness that they unconsciously dislike about the action or feeling (Feist, 2020, p. 40) just like Puss did with his beard. Puss can temporarily alleviate his concerns about the judgement of others by first compensating for his hatred of beards by pretending to actually like it. However, Puss’ reaction formation will eventually be becoming unreliable, as his true emotions are showing through, revealing his underlying fear and discomfort.

5) Repression

Repression is a coping mechanism used by individuals to control their anxiety and impulses to engage in pleasurable behavior. Repression seeks to eliminate the inner conflicts, difficulties, stress or nightmares that cause anxiety. The function of repression is to keep the anxieties subconscious. Repression occurs when a person prefers to think about good news rather than negative news; repression also occurs when fear does not enter the conscious mind but still affects a person's behavior (Rezeki & Setyowati, 2023, p. 929).



Figure 9. Puss eating with blank expression

Puss unconsciously represses his unacceptable feelings and thoughts, such as his fear of dying and the fact that he is not an invincible being. Puss is then driven by this repression to abandon his previous life of selfishness and egotism and become a lazy housecat as shown in the figure 9 where it eats with a blank expression and does not care about anything around it. This is in accordance with the repression defense mechanism whereby when the ego is threatened by an unwanted id impulse, it defends itself by suppressing the impulse, forcing the harmful feelings into the unconscious (Feist, 2020, p. 39). Puss avoids the fear and discomfort that arise from these feelings by burying them deep within his mind. However, this repression has consequences, as it results in a lack of purpose and a feeling of emptiness. Puss' transition into a lazy house cat reflects his repressed desires and fears, as he seeks to escape the difficulties of his previous existence where he wants to escape from the fear of mortality.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, we know Puss experienced three types of anxiety, first one is a realistic anxiety which he fears of the character named Death, next is a moral anxiety where he gave up his wishing star to his friend and the third one is a neurotic anxiety which is the Puss' fear of death or dying. The anxiety Puss experienced is caused by the constant fear and intrusive thoughts happened throughout the movie. To cope his anxiety, Puss develops several different types of defense mechanisms, there are denial where he denies the truth that he has one life left, displacement which he transfers his emotions to a poem and a song, rationalization where he lies about losing his original sword, reaction formation which he does not like his own beard, and lastly is repression which Puss represses his thought and emotions unconsciously and become a lazy house cat. By knowing our own anxiety and defense mechanisms, we can help an individual to identify their anxiety and help them to cope with their anxiety with healthy defense mechanisms. Understanding the different types of anxiety and the various Puss defense mechanism reveals important insights into the complexities of our understanding of a person's psychology. Individuals who recognize indicators of anxiety and the possible use of defense mechanisms can better understand their own coping techniques and seek appropriate solution. It is important to point out that, while certain defense mechanisms may provide brief comfort, long-term reliance on inappropriate coping techniques can prevent personal development and wellbeing.

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