



REDISCOVERING SELF THROUGH LANGUAGE IN WONDERLAND: ALICE'S DEFENSE MECHANISMS

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ABSTRACT

Guided by a psychological-literary perspective, this study examines Alice in Wonderland as a primary text to uncover how the protagonist navigates her inner conflicts through defense mechanisms. The film portrays Alice's imaginative immersion in Wonderland as both a linguistic and symbolic escape from the rigid confines of her reality, with the fantastical realm serving as an externalization of her psychological unrest. Originating in dreams that have accompanied her since childhood and intensifying on the brink of her arranged engagement to Hamish, Alice's fantasy world embodies a cumulative manifestation of unconscious impulses. At the heart of her journey lies a profound tension between individual desire and the constrictive social codes that govern her existence a tension that gives rise to the deployment of various defense mechanisms. Drawing on Freud's theoretical framework, the analysis reveals her reliance on fantasy, displacement, projection, and aggression, with fantasy functioning as the most generative form of self-preservation. Crucially, the Wonderland experience mediated through the language, symbols, and interactions within this dreamscape enables Alice to reconstruct her sense of self. Returning to the real world, she emerges with renewed agency, rejecting the imposed marriage and embracing her own vision for the future by pursuing her family's business ventures.

Keywords: *Alice in Wonderland, Defense Mechanisms, Psychological-Literary Analysis, Fantasy as Self-Preservation, Self-Discovery.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Alice in Wonderland narrates the life of Alice Kingsleigh, a 19-year-old woman of intelligence, courage, and insatiable curiosity. Born into an English noble family, she enjoys a life of privilege, bound by the social conventions of her class. One day, her family hosts an elaborate gathering whose purpose remains unclear to her until she discovers that it is, in fact, her engagement party to Hamish, the son of another aristocratic family. Confronted with this unexpected revelation, Alice endures mounting pressure from her

mother and sister, who urge her to accept Hamish's proposal. Yet her attention is abruptly diverted by the sight of a waistcoat-wearing white rabbit. Pursuing it, she tumbles down a deep hole into the fantastical realm of Wonderland. There, she is greeted by inhabitants who seem to recognize her: Nivens McTwisp, the white rabbit; the twins Tweedledum and Tweedledee; Mallymkun, a diminutive mouse; and Absolem, a sagacious caterpillar. They reveal that she alone is destined to slay the Jabberwocky, a dragon-like creature serving the despotic Red Queen.

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Though initially uncertain, Alice resolves to help, aided by allies such as the Mad Hatter, the Cheshire Cat, and the White Queen, in her quest to end the Red Queen's reign.

On the basis of this synopsis, the film is best situated within the fantasy genre. Fantasy, however, is not merely the product of unbounded imagination or a narrative divorced from reality. As Puspitoningrum et al. (2022) notes, fantasy often carries symbolic depth, embedding the author's thematic concerns within its characters, settings, and temporalities. Polsom (2021) similarly asserts that fantasy functions as a vehicle for "escapism," enabling both creators and audiences to temporarily transcend the constraints of lived reality. In *Alice in Wonderland*, this escapism can be read as Alice's defense mechanism her retreat into an imaginative realm that externalizes her unconscious aspirations and inner conflicts (Dogan, 2023; Gruner, 2022).

Alice's sudden immersion into *Wonderland* exposes her to surreal events that destabilize her identity and disrupt her grasp of reality. She encounters bizarre creatures, mutable rules, and volatile circumstances, compelling her to continuously adapt, interpret, and assert herself. These experiences symbolically parallel a psychological odyssey toward self-discovery, as she negotiates the tensions between her own desires and the rigid structures of her social world (Wan, 2025; Syaifullah & Perrodin, 2023).

Viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis, Alice's *Wonderland* journey can be understood as an enactment of the conflict between unconscious drives and external pressures. Freud's (1936/1966) theory of defense mechanisms later expanded by Anna Freud identifies strategies such as repression, projection, displacement, and rationalization as means by which the ego shields itself from anxiety. In this framework, Alice's responses to *Wonderland*'s challenges represent tangible expressions of such mechanisms.

Accordingly, this study seeks to identify and analyze the defense mechanisms employed by Alice throughout her time in *Wonderland*, as well as to assess how these mechanisms contribute to the reconstruction of her identity. Employing a Freudian psychoanalytic approach, it interrogates not only Alice's psychological strategies but also the ways in which *Wonderland*, through its language, symbolism, and narrative logic, operates as a metaphorical stage upon which the processes of self-rediscovery are enacted (Tyson, 2023; Slovic, 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW***2.1 Defense Mechanism***

Defense mechanisms are unconscious or subconscious behaviors that make individuals feel they are getting something they need, even though it does not exist in reality (Rohmawati et al., 2019). Another meaning of defense mechanisms is a person's desire to reject something they do not want, even though it exists in reality. In certain conditions, defense mechanisms are something that is often overlooked in a person. Additionally, defense mechanisms are naturally present from an early stage in life (Mengistu, 2020).

Defense mechanisms arise when individuals are confronted with circumstances that provoke anxiety, prompting them to conceal aspects of themselves perceived as negative. While such strategies may offer short-term psychological relief, they are generally counterproductive to healthy personality development. Freud's theory conceptualizes defense mechanisms as unconscious processes employed by the ego to manage the demands of reality and mitigate internal conflict. Among the primary forms are repression, projection, displacement, rationalization, regression, aggression or apathy, and fantasy or stereotype (Mihalits & Codenotti, 2023; Silverman & Aafjes-van Doorn, 2023).

Repression involves the unconscious effort to suppress thoughts, emotions, or memories associated with frustration, internal

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conflict, or anxiety, thereby preventing them from entering conscious awareness (Raina, 2017; Towner & Wall, 2019; Umisara et al., 2021). Projection, a particularly common mechanism, entails attributing one's own unacceptable feelings, impulses, or motives to external sources. As Hall (2019) notes, projection often begins early in life, as individuals are encouraged to locate the causes of their actions in the external world rather than critically examine their own motives; in some cases, projection expands personal feelings to encompass the entire environment. Displacement occurs when negative emotions are redirected from their original source to a safer or more acceptable target such as venting frustration on someone uninvolved in the original conflict (Minderop, 2018).

Rationalization serves two primary purposes: to diminish disappointment after failure and to construct an acceptable justification for one's behavior. Listyani (2019) identifies several rationalization patterns, including framing preferences as logical reasons, blaming others or external circumstances, and masking self-interest as altruism. Regression refers to a return to earlier behavioral patterns under stress. This can take the form of retrogressive behaviors, such as childish crying or dependency to elicit comfort and attention, or primitivization, where adults lose self-control and engage in uncivilized, uninhibited actions.

Aggression, closely linked to tension and anxiety, may manifest as direct or indirect attacks, with verbal aggression more common among adults. Apathy, in contrast, reflects a withdrawal from engagement, marked by resignation and emotional detachment (Delaney, 2021; Makransky & Lau, 2018; Jaya et al., 2025). Finally, fantasy provides an escape from overwhelming problems by retreating into imagined scenarios rather than confronting reality. In extreme cases, individuals may persist in these imagined worlds, similar to how a hungry person might dwell on vivid images of food. Stereotyping, often linked with fantasy, involves

compulsively repeating unproductive behaviors that appear irrational or peculiar (Minderop, 2018).

2.2 Previous Research

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been the subject of study in various disciplines and theoretical approaches, ranging from structuralism, linguistics, to psychoanalysis. Most of these studies still focus on the original novel as the main object, while studies on its film adaptation are still relatively limited. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the defense mechanisms of the character Alice in the film version, as well as how these mechanisms become part of the process of rediscovering one's identity.

The study titled "*Kemenangan Kelas Menengah: Kajian Strukturalisme Genetik terhadap novel Alice's Adventure in Wonderland karya Lewis Carroll*" is one of the studies that uses a genetic structuralism approach to reveal the representation of social class in the novel (Bowo, 2018). The analysis results show that the story structure and characters in the novel reflect the triumph of middle-class values in Victorian English society. Although this research does not discuss the psychological aspects of the character Alice, the social context analyzed provides an important backdrop for understanding the dynamics of the character, both in the novel and in its film adaptation. In the film version, these class values and social pressures remain present as a symbolic backdrop that influences how Alice interacts with the world of Wonderland and shapes her psychological responses.

Meanwhile, a linguistic study titled "*Productivity in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*" examines morphological productivity in the novel, particularly in word formation. Although not directly related to psychological aspects, this study highlights how Lewis Carroll creatively uses language to construct a world filled with absurdity. In the film, this absurdity is

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conveyed through visuals, symbols, and illogical dialogue, which ultimately create the psychological tension experienced by Alice and prompt the emergence of various forms of self-defense (Adelman, 2019).

Research by Andalas (2019) entitled “*Escapism from Reality in the Dual Worlds of Alice analyzed the film Alice in Wonderland using Todorov's theory of the fantastic and Freud's psychoanalysis*”. The results show that this movie belongs to the uncanny fantastic sub-genre, where strange events are explained logically. Alice is depicted as escaping from reality by re-imagining real characters as fantasy characters. Through these dreams, she develops coping mechanisms to deal with inner conflict and social pressure. In contrast to this study which highlights defense mechanisms in the process of self-discovery, Andalas' study focuses more on escape as a response to a stressful reality.

The most directly relevant study is “*Analysis of Anxiety and Defense Mechanism on the Main Character Reflected in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*”, which uses Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyze Alice's anxiety and defense mechanisms in the novel. This study found that Alice experiences reality anxiety, moral anxiety, and neurotic anxiety, and uses various mechanisms such as repression, regression, displacement, and reaction formation. Although it is highly supportive from a theoretical perspective, this study focuses solely on the novel as a narrative text, not as a visual text. It also does not address how these defense mechanisms develop into a process of self-discovery, or how the visual context in the film reinforces the psychological representation of the character (Ulfa & Wulandari, 2019).

Unlike previous studies, this study chooses film adaptations as its main object because films have visual and symbolic power that clarifies the psychological processes of characters. In the film version, Alice's journey in Wonderland not only depicts her defense against pressure and disorientation, but also becomes an inner journey that reshapes Alice's

understanding of herself. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory and a literary psychology approach, this study seeks to explain how the process of surviving and adapting in an illogical world actually drives Alice to discover and redefine her identity.

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach utilizing a descriptive-analytical method, aligned with the stated research objectives. According to Daflizar (2021), research methods can be divided into data collection and data analysis techniques. Data collection techniques serve as extensions of human senses, designed to gather empirical evidence systematically and inductively, focusing on facts relevant to the research problem. Following data collection, data analysis methods are applied to interpret and evaluate the findings systematically (Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024; Susanto et al., 2023; Herdayati & Syahrial, 2019).

The primary data source for this study is the film *Alice in Wonderland*, supplemented by secondary sources, including books and articles discussing Freud's concept of defense mechanisms. The techniques for data collection include extracting specific excerpts from the film, paraphrasing relevant sections, and categorizing the information according to predefined data categories (Sugiyono, 2021).

The descriptive analysis technique employed follows the model proposed by (Miles & Huberman, 2019). This process began with repeated viewings of *Alice in Wonderland* to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its narrative. Subsequently, Freud's concept of defense mechanisms was applied to describe and analyze relevant scenes from the film. The final stage involved synthesizing findings to address the research questions, culminating in the study's conclusions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis conducted, the defense mechanisms experienced by Alice in

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Alice in Wonderland are caused by conflicts, anxiety, and social pressure from the aristocratic environment, such as dress codes and unwanted matchmaking. Alice employs several forms of defense mechanisms, namely fantasy, projection, displacement, and aggression, to cope with these discomforts.

4.1 Factors Contributing to Defense Mechanisms

Conflict is the primary factor leading to the use of defense mechanisms. Conflict, as an integral part of a story, originates from real-life experiences. This aspect engages readers emotionally with the events of the narrative. According to Barchiya et al. (2024), conflict is inherently dramatic, referring to a struggle between two opposing forces, implying action and counteraction. Conflict also arises when there is a lack of agreement between one ego and another.

Another contributing factor to the need for defense mechanisms is anxiety. When anxiety becomes overwhelming, the ego must employ defense mechanisms to protect the individual. Feelings of guilt and shame often accompany anxiety, which manifests as heightened physical and mental tension. Such feelings drive individuals to act defensively against perceived threats. Defense mechanisms are employed either by redirecting impulses into socially acceptable forms or by unconsciously inhibiting those impulses.

The conflicts and anxiety experienced in Alice's life are as follows:

A. Dress Code Regulations

Alice, an English noblewoman, lives in a world of luxury and privilege, adhering to the norms of aristocratic life at the time. This is evident from the opening scene of the film, where Alice and her mother are traveling in a carriage. Alice's attire does not conform to the strict dress codes of the nobility.

Alice's mother: Where's your corset? And you don't wear stockings either? You don't dress properly. (Alice in Wonderland, 2010, 00:03:18–00:03:28)

From the conversation above, Alice's mother criticizes her for not wearing a corset and stockings, deeming her attire inappropriate. These rigid dress codes cause Alice considerable discomfort, as she struggles to conform to the expectations of her aristocratic family. When her mother calls her appearance improper, Alice questions the authority behind this judgment, remarking that her father would find the situation amusing. Despite her defiance, seeing her mother upset fills Alice with guilt.

Her mother pleads with her to comply with the dress code just for the day, as they are attending an important social event. In response, Alice apologizes for raising her voice, explaining that she is exhausted and had the same recurring dream from her childhood the previous night. Alice's dream reflects an accumulation of unconscious impulses and serves as a manifestation of her inner conflicts. Her imaginary world becomes a means of escape, allowing her to cope with the realities of her life.



Figure 1. Alice in Reality



Figure 2. Alice in Wonderland

As shown in the image above, it is evident that in the real world, Alice is compelled to follow the strict dress codes imposed by the

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nobility. However, in Wonderland, she gains the freedom to dictate and change what she wears without restriction. For instance, in the scene where Alice grows into a giant upon meeting the Red Queen, she is given a random piece of fabric hastily sewn into a dress. Later, when she shrinks, she is only wrapped in a handkerchief. This freedom reflects an accumulation of her experiences and knowledge from the real world, which she could neither express, confront, nor reject. By escaping to her imaginary world, Alice can create, control, and shape her life's narrative, including the freedom to alter her clothing as she pleases.

B. Arranged Marriage

In the opening scene of *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice is seen riding in a carriage with her mother on their way to a nobleman's party. Unbeknownst to Alice, the event is her engagement party. While enjoying the festivities, two twins reveal the secret, surprising Alice with the unexpected news. Instead of feeling happy about being proposed to by a nobleman, Alice feels anxious. To make matters worse, the engagement has already been approved by her mother and older sister, leaving Alice utterly shocked. Both her mother and sister urge her not to refuse the prince's proposal, further adding to her distress.

Margaret: Hamish will propose to you in the gazebo, when you say yes...

Alice: But I don't know if I want to marry Hamish.

Margaret: Then with whom? You won't find anyone better than royalty, you'll soon be 20 years old, Alice that pretty face won't last forever, don't you want to be a burden to mother?

Alice: No

Margaret: So, you have to marry Hamish, you will be as happy as I am with Lowell and your life will be perfect. It's already decided (Alice in Wonderland, 2010).

The conversation between Alice and her sister reveals that her sister strongly supports Alice's marriage to the nobleman, as the

arrangement had been decided long ago. However, Alice had no knowledge of this plan, leaving her confused about what to do. When Hamish proposes to her, Alice is deeply torn. On one hand, she does not feel ready for marriage, but on the other, she does not want to disappoint her mother. This inner conflict drives Alice to follow a white rabbit that had intrigued her from the start, ultimately leading her to fall down a hole and enter Wonderland.

4.2 Forms of Defense Mechanisms**A. Fantasy**

Fantasy refers to an abstract thought or imagination about desired scenarios that may not align with reality. It often occurs when someone experiences stress and seeks an alternative escape from their current situation. In literature, fantasy reflects the character's dreams and abstract thoughts that symbolize their aspirations.

Alice's defense mechanism is triggered by the pressures and anxieties she faces, including the numerous societal rules imposed in the real world and the arranged marriage planned by her parents. This mechanism arises from an emotional urge to find a substitute for her distressing reality. Parhana and Hidayatullah (2023) describes defense mechanisms as efforts to shield oneself from feelings that could cause pain or discomfort, akin to a reflex reaction to painful stimuli.

Defense mechanisms occur or are used when a person is in a state of anxiety, which arises from various factors and contexts. Therefore, to avoid exacerbating or resolving a problem through defense mechanisms, it is important to address the issue directly to prevent anxiety caused by the problem. Minderop (2018) states that the term "defense mechanism" was chosen by Freud to refer to the subconscious mind's defense against excessive tension. This mechanism protects the individual from external threats caused by impulses. Alice resolves her anxiety in her dreams. The fantasy events that occur in Wonderland are experienced by Alice while she is asleep and dreaming. She repeatedly

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experiences the same dream, which often includes conversations with her mother, where she complains that she only has one dream, while others seem to have various dreams every day. This is reflected in the following quote.

Alice's mother: You had another bad dream?

Alice: Only once the dream is always the same. Even from the first time I remember it. Do you think it's natural? Don't most people dream differently? (Alice in Wonderland, 2010)

The dreams or fantasies experienced by Alice in Wonderland occur while she is either asleep or unconscious. Therefore, the events in Wonderland represent a dream or fantasy that Alice experiences while unconscious after falling down the rabbit hole. The dreams Alice has, from her childhood to adulthood, culminating in her engagement to Hamish, are an accumulation of meanings related to the unconscious impulses within her. The transformation of Alice's reality, with the characters from her life turned into fantasy figures in Wonderland, represents the work of dreams, which Freud calls the function of transformation. This is the process of converting memories stored in the unconscious into visual representations. Certain elements that appear in dreams, which are not recognizable in the conscious state, are part of an individual's knowledge and experiences (Puspitasari & Ricahyono, 2019; Khusniyah, 2025; Joesoef & Adralissman, 2023).

B. Projection

Projection is a defense mechanism in which an individual unconsciously attributes their own undesirable thoughts, feelings, or motivations to another person as a way of coping with internal conflict or discomfort (Minderop, 2018). This mechanism can be observed in the behavior of Alice when she returns from her journey in Wonderland. After experiencing a transformative adventure in her fantasy world where she gains courage, self-

awareness, and independence Alice returns to reality with a new outlook. She becomes more assertive and willing to oppose societal expectations, particularly when it comes to the arranged marriage with Hamish.

When Hamish proposes to her, Alice rejects him directly by saying:

"Sorry Hamish, I can't marry you. You are not the right person for me. You will always have a problem with your digestion" (Alice in Wonderland, 2010)

On the surface, this statement appears to be a simple, even humorous, rejection. However, from a psychological perspective, Alice's use of Hamish's physical flaw his digestive issues as a reason for her refusal reflects the defense mechanism of projection. According to Minderop (2018), projection involves covering up one's own inner conflicts or problems by attributing them to someone else. In Alice's case, the core issue is not Hamish's digestive condition, but rather her own inner resistance to the rigid expectations imposed on her life. Deep down, Alice feels discomfort with the idea of living a life that is not her own one dictated by her family, society, and tradition. However, instead of directly confronting the complexity of these internal struggles in front of others, she channels that tension outward by focusing on Hamish's imperfection. This serves as a socially acceptable reason for rejection, allowing her to maintain emotional distance and protect herself from the guilt or anxiety that might arise from openly challenging her family's expectations. By emphasizing Hamish's flaw, Alice reduces the psychological tension she feels. She projects her own fear of being trapped in an unhappy, inauthentic life onto Hamish by framing the rejection around his perceived inadequacy. In doing so, she shifts the blame away from herself and toward him, making the rejection seem more rational and less rebellious. This mechanism helps her to cope with the discomfort of standing against a deeply ingrained societal norm arranged marriage and affirms her decision to reclaim control over her own future.

Furthermore, this moment marks a symbolic act of liberation. The projection is

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not just about Hamish's digestive issues; it is a way for Alice to assert that she no longer accepts a life that does not align with her true self. Through this defense mechanism, she reinforces her transformation from a passive young woman to an empowered individual who prioritizes authenticity over compliance. It also protects her from potential backlash, as her rejection seems based on Hamish's unfitness rather than her own refusal to follow tradition.

C. Displacement

Displacement is a defense mechanism that redirects unpleasant feelings about one subject to another, more acceptable target (Minderop, 2018). This mechanism arises from inappropriate or suppressed impulses within an individual. For example, feelings of anger toward a person may be expressed by directing the frustration toward inanimate objects, such as a doll, or even a pet. Consequently, the anger is shifted to a different object, mitigating the risk of harming others. This phenomenon can be observed in Alice's reality when she feels anger and a sense of dilemma over her obligation to marry Hamish. This internal conflict is symbolically represented in her dream, where she faces a similar dilemma: deciding whether to help the White Queen kill the Jabberwocky.

Hatter: however just start the moment. You only must focus to kill jabberwocky.

Red queen: where's your champion?

Alice: here (Alice in Wonderland, 2010)

Alice's resolute response signifies that she has discovered the courage within herself to confront her fears. This battle is not merely a physical confrontation but serves as a symbolic representation of Alice's struggle against her inner conflicts. The Jabberwocky itself embodies the significant dilemmas Alice faces in the real world, such as the societal pressure to meet others' expectations, including the unwelcome decision to marry Hamish. In her reality, Alice is trapped in circumstances that leave her feeling powerless and burdened. The

Jabberwocky symbolizes all her fears, doubts, and the questions that haunt her.

In her fantasy world, Alice is confronted with a choice: whether to fight the Jabberwocky symbolizing her courage to face life's challenges or to succumb to the fears that have long held her captive. Her decision to confront and ultimately defeat the Jabberwocky represents a symbolic victory over the dilemmas that have haunted her. This battle signifies Alice's transformation into a stronger and braver individual. She no longer lives to please others, as reflected in the White Queen's statement: *"You cannot live your life pleasing others. This choice you must make yourself."*

By confronting the Jabberwocky, Alice realizes that the key to resolving her problems lies in addressing their root causes directly, rather than avoiding them or displacing her emotions. The events in her fantasy world mirror Alice's newfound courage to take full control of her life in the real world. This journey serves as a symbol of her maturity and decisiveness in shaping her own path. Ultimately, this realization prompts Alice to return to reality. When the Hatter asks her to stay in Wonderland, Alice firmly replies, *"But I can't. There are questions I need to answer, there are things I need to do."* Alice's response reflects her rejection of the arranged marriage with Hamish, signifying her determination to follow her own desires and make choices that align with her true self.

D. Aggression

Aggression is a form of anger closely related to anxiety and tension, referring to attack and rebellion, as described by (Minderop, 2018). Aggression can be categorized into different forms. First, direct aggression is when anger is expressed directly toward the source of disappointment. In adults, this form of aggression is typically expressed verbally, rather than physically. This can be seen when Alice argues with her mother about the rules regarding clothing. Frustrated, Alice begins to shout at her mother simply because

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she is not wearing clothes according to the fashion standards of that time.

Alice's mother: Where's your corset? And you don't wear stockings either? Alice: I don't want to wear stockings

Alice's mother: but you don't dress properly.

Alice: who said it was appropriate? How can that be justified properly like wearing a fishing net on your head. Would you like to use a fishing net?

Alice's mother: Alice

Alice: to me the corset is like a fishing net. (Alice in Wonderland, 2010)

Second, displaced aggression is a form of frustration experienced by someone who cannot fully direct their anger toward the source of their frustration. This occurs when the source of the frustration is unclear. A person who feels disappointed doesn't know where to direct their feelings of frustration. This can be seen when Alice is in a situation where she wants to reject Hamish's proposal while in the gazebo, surrounded by many people. Alice feels extremely upset because she doesn't have the strength to say no, as her parents strongly approve of her marriage to Hamish. Eventually, because she cannot release her frustration, she chooses to leave and ends up falling into a hole leading to Wonderland.

Hamish: will you be my wife?

Alice: well, everyone who expects me. And you are royalty. My

beauty won't last and I won't end up like..... but it's so fast I... I think

I need some time (Alice in Wonderland, 2010).

Based on the conversation above, Alice repeats what she discussed with her sister, who said that Alice should accept Hamish's proposal because he is a nobleman. However, Alice feels uncertain and frustrated because she doesn't have the strength to refuse, so she leaves, saying she needs time, and ends up falling into a hole that leads her to Wonderland.

4.3 The Impact of Defense Mechanisms

The psychological defense mechanisms Alice employed during her fantasy world profoundly influenced her changes in attitude and personality upon her return to the real world. In psychology, a defense mechanism is an unconscious strategy used by a person to protect themselves from anxiety, inner conflict, or difficult-to-understand external pressures. For Alice, the fantasy world served as a safe space where she could escape the stifling social demands and expectations of her family. This fantasy was not simply an escape from a restrictive reality, but also an arena in which she could explore and express her suppressed identity and desires (Lenge et al., 2023).

During her time in her fantasy world, Alice used mechanisms such as fantasy, projection, displacement and aggression to process her feelings. She projected her courage and desire for freedom into the characters and situations in her fantasy, where she could take bold action and overcome obstacles without fear of social consequences. These defense mechanisms helped her build the mental and emotional strength she lacked in real life due to the social pressures and strict rules of her young nobleman. When Alice finally returned to reality, the strength she gained from the fantasy world did not immediately disappear. Instead, she brought with her a newfound sense of confidence and courage, which led her to significantly change her attitude and behavior. A clear example of this change is her courage to reject Hamish's arranged commitment, which was considered socially and family the right and honorable step. This refusal was not a simple act, but a symbol of resistance against the norms and pressures that had been holding her down. Furthermore, Alice began to speak openly with her mother, whose relationship had previously been dominated by undiscussed commitments. She expressed her feelings and opinions, even if it meant defying her parents' authority.

Furthermore, Alice demonstrated subtle yet clear rebellion through actions that violated the social norms of her time. For example, she deliberately forgoes stockings, considered an

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essential part of aristocratic etiquette, and dances in front of guests with moves she learned from her fantasy world actions considered impolite and inappropriate. This demonstrates that Alice has not only changed mentally but also boldly expressed these changes physically and socially. This transformation reflects a significant process of maturation and increased independence. As a young aristocrat, Alice's life had been heavily regulated and controlled by her parents, from her social choices and future to her dress and actions. With Alice's return from the fantasy world, she begins to take control of her own life. She learns to recognize what she truly wants and to have the courage to reject anything that doesn't align with her desires, even if it goes against social expectations (Kaforina et al., 2023).

Psychologically, this is a fascinating example of how defense mechanisms can function not only as a shield against pressure but also as a bridge to positive growth and change. The fantasy world, initially a place of escape, becomes an arena for the formation of identity and courage, enabling Alice to face the real world with more authenticity and courage. This transformation demonstrates the importance of imagination and freedom of expression in a person's psychological development, especially when facing intense social pressure (Morisson, 2019; Buell, 2019).

A. Rejecting the Marriage Proposal

At the beginning of the film, Alice's family has already set a plan to marry her off to a nobleman named Hamish, considering that she is already 20 years old, an age considered crucial for a noblewoman to get married. This reflects the strong social and cultural pressures of the time, where marriage was not just about love or personal desire, but a social obligation and family strategy to maintain status and wealth. In the film, Alice's sister even reminds her that if she does not marry Hamish soon, she will end up as an unmarried old woman and may lose her sanity, referring to another character in the story who went mad due to

loneliness and social rejection. This statement illustrates how stigma and social fear overshadowed women's life choices at that time.

At first, Alice had no idea about this engagement plan. When the engagement party was suddenly held, she was very surprised, even confused by the fact that there was a man who wanted to propose to her. The family pressure intensified when her mother and sister urged her not to refuse the proposal. They emphasized the importance of following rules and traditions to maintain the family's honor and Alice's future. This situation caused inner conflict for Alice because her personal desires had never been considered before. This wedding plan became the starting point that led Alice into the fantasy world of Wonderland. When Hamish proposed in the gazebo, Alice's confusion and uncertainty were evident she was not ready to accept or reject the proposal outright. In her distress, she saw a white rabbit that had previously appeared at the party and unconsciously chased after it. This chase ends with Alice falling into a hole that takes her to a magical world, a symbol of her mental and emotional escape from the pressures of real life filled with rules and limitations.

After undergoing a journey in Wonderland filled with adventures and self-discovery, Alice finally awakens with a new awareness. She becomes braver and more independent, able to refuse the proposal she once considered inevitable. In her straightforward and courageous dialogue, Alice says:

Alice: I'm sorry Hamish, I can't marry you.

You are not right men for me, and you have digestive problems. I love you Margaret, but this is my life, I decide.

Don't worry mom, I will do something useful in my life ((Alice in Wonderland, 2010).

This statement shows how Alice has found her own voice and identity. Her rejection is not merely a rejection of Hamish as an individual, but also a rejection of the social system and expectations that have limited her freedom. By humorously pointing out Hamish's shortcomings, Alice affirms the personal and

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logical reasons behind her choice, while also showing a more open and realistic attitude toward relationships.

Furthermore, Alice not only rejects the proposal, but also reassures her mother and sister by assuring them that she will live a meaningful life according to her own choices. This shows emotional maturity and responsibility for herself, while also reducing her family's concerns about losing control over Alice's future. This attitude is clear evidence of Alice's transformation from a passive and confined figure into a woman with the courage and self-confidence to determine her own path in life. Overall, this scene reflects the film's major themes of liberation from social pressures, self-discovery, and the courage to reject norms that do not align with one's heart's desires. Alice's journey in Wonderland serves as a metaphor for the process of searching for identity and independence, which ultimately transforms her into a stronger and more authentic person.

B. Continuing Her Parents' Business

Alice's return to the real world had a positive impact on her. She even became brave enough to take the risk of continuing her father's business.

Alice: we must discuss business

Hamish's father: can we talk in the study

Alice: my father said he wanted to expand trade routes to Sumatra and Kalimantan.

But I don't think he saw far enough. Why don't we expand to China? China is vast, culturally rich, and we have our headquarters in Hong Kong. Being the first to trade with China, can you imagine?

Hamish's father : you know, if someone told me this, I would say you're out of your mind. But I have seen, it was seen before. Since you're not my daughter-in-law, maybe you can do an internship at the company ((Alice in Wonderland, 2010).

Based on the conversation between Hamish's father and Alice above, Alice has gained more confidence in expanding the business to China. This is a positive outcome in Alice's life, which impresses Hamish's father with her ideas. Changing one's personality makes a person feel satisfied with what they

have achieved. Feelings of joy, happiness, and love are forms of self-experience in the effort to develop oneself (Minderop, 2018). These feelings arise from deep within, based on love, passion, loyalty, and the good habits of the people around them, which Alice experienced in Wonderland. She was surrounded by people who always supported her. The effort to shape one's personality is not only about making oneself happier but also about showing positive traits to others. The positive qualities that others recognize will generate confidence in oneself.

Trust indicates that a person can be relied upon, especially in the role of a leader. This can be recognized in individuals who exhibit discipline and responsibility. Discipline stems from habits such as punctuality, keeping promises, and adhering to scheduled activities. Responsibility, on the other hand, involves the willingness to face all consequences both good and bad resulting from one's actions (Jarvie et al., 2019). Humans live within environments filled with various interactions, making it essential to position oneself appropriately.

In literary works, a character's self-improvement often leads to a sense of happiness. Support from the surrounding environment also influences the character's emotions, shaping a better attitude. This demonstrates that, beyond becoming a better person, there is an effort to appear good in the eyes of other characters. Such attitudes are rooted in habits of discipline and responsibility. Interactions grounded in positive behavior foster trust among individuals.

5. CONCLUSION

Conflict functions as the central catalyst for the emergence of defense mechanisms, serving both as a vital narrative driver and a mirror of lived human experience. In Alice's case, the pressures of rigid social norms and an imposed engagement act as triggers for her psychological defenses, which manifest most vividly through her imaginative immersion in Wonderland. This fantastical realm operates as a symbolic expression of her unconscious

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strategies for managing internal tension, transforming real-world anxieties into a dreamscape populated by reimagined figures from her life. The process illustrates how personal experiences are reshaped into symbolic narratives that serve a protective psychological function.

Throughout her journey, Alice engages several defense mechanisms such as projection, displacement, and aggression each aiding her in navigating emotional strain. Most significantly, her reliance on fantasy proves to be both adaptive and transformative, fostering resilience and personal empowerment. The lessons learned in Wonderland fortify her upon her return to reality, enabling her to reject the arranged marriage, assert her independence by managing her family's business, and communicate more openly within her familial relationships. These actions demonstrate a marked evolution in her self-awareness, autonomy, and capacity to handle conflict constructively.

The findings underscore the potential for fantasy-based coping mechanisms to act as catalysts for personal growth when they are integrated with self-reflection and decisive action in reality. This insight opens avenues for future research to examine how imaginative narratives whether in literature, film, or other media can serve as therapeutic tools for fostering resilience and identity reconstruction. Further studies might explore comparative cases across different cultural contexts or investigate how linguistic elements within fantastical storytelling contribute to the articulation and resolution of psychological conflict.

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