



Rachel Gerhardt's anxiety and defense mechanism portrayed in Ruth Ware's The Turn of The Key

BILLY IKHLAS MULIA

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: billymulia44@gmail.com

TRI PRAMESTI

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: triprimesti@untag-sby.ac.id

Abstract. This study aims to examine the anxiety and defense mechanisms of Rachel Gerhardt in Ruth Ware's *The Turn of the Key*. The purpose of this study is to analyze Rachel Gerhardt's types of anxiety and then establish which defense mechanism Rachel Gerhardt uses. This research is performed because anxiety always occurs in everyday life and subconsciously employs defense mechanisms to overcome the anxiety. The data source of this study is the novel *The Turn of The Key* by Ruth Ware. The method applies in this research is the descriptive qualitative method. This study uses the theory of psychoanalysis and defense mechanisms by Sigmund Freud. This study uses a psychological approach because it applies psychoanalytical theory and aims to reveal how the subconscious expression works, especially the defense mechanism. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Rachel experiences three types of anxiety: realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. Rachel uses eight defense mechanisms, such as rationalization, sublimation, reaction formation, regression, displacement, projection, introjection, and fixation, to relieve the anxiety that Rachel experience.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Anxiety, Defense Mechanism

INTRODUCTION

People subconsciously defend themselves against situations that threaten security and cause discomfort such as acting differently to hide from worry, fear, and all kinds of negative thoughts. Situations that threaten security and cause discomfort to a person are called anxiety. Anxiety is a common and normal human experience. It is a normal reaction to very stressful situations in one's life. According to Freud, Anxiety protects the ego by alerting it to probable danger or confrontation (Freud, 1949:91). Anxiety provides understanding of the emotional state characterized by an unpleasant feeling of tension and something bad is about to happen and can be useful by helping us stay alert, focused, and ready for potential challenges.

To relieve the anxiety experienced by a person, a defense mechanism is needed. Defense mechanisms protect the ego by warding off anxiety and feelings of guilt. When the ego can anticipate the possibility of releasing instinctual impulses, judgments of danger (panic experiences) are expressed in the form of anxiety signals. And if this ego fails to be

controlled, anxiety becomes excessive and a panic reaction ensues. The defense mechanisms used by children are based on their understanding, the more they understand about defense the less they will use these defense mechanisms (Crammer and Brilliant, 2001:300).

Defense mechanism is a strategy used by a person to protect himself from the pressure or threat experienced until someone feels comfortable again. Defense mechanisms are often carried out by many people, but many people do not realize that the process of defense mechanisms occurs by itself. According to McLeod, Defense mechanisms operate beneath the subconscious and helps in the elimination of negative thoughts (McLeod, 2020). Defense mechanisms operate subconsciously and can be the reason why a person may not be aware of the reasons behind their behavior or emotional reactions.

Anxiety and defense mechanisms can be seen in the literature and in real life. *The Turn of the Key* by Ruth Ware is an example of a literary work in which Rachel is described as a person who suffers from anxiety and uses defense mechanisms to protect herself from stressful and threatening situations. The research problem of this study is, first, to find out the types of Rachel Gerhardt's Anxiety in Ruth Ware's *The Turn of The Key*. Then, find out how the defense mechanism used to overcome the anxiety felt by Rachel Gerhardt in *The Turn of The Key*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychoanalysis

According to Minderop (2011:11), psychoanalysis is a science that was started around the 1900s by Sigmund Freud. In his theory, Freud divided the personality structure into 3 structures, namely the id, ego, and superego. Psychoanalysis is the process of using what we know about these three parts of a person's personality to analyze how that person behaves. The id is an instinctive human personality that is driven by the principle of pleasure where the id only seeks pleasure where all desires and needs must be fulfilled immediately. To realize the desires of the id, the ego arises so that do not conflict with the superego (Hall, C.S., Gardner, L., & John, 1997:33). The conflict between the three personality structures will cause anxiety. Anxiety creates pain, a feeling of discomfort that people prefer not to endure.

Anxiety

Anxiety is mostly produced by conflicts between personal beliefs and societal standards and creates pain, a feeling of discomfort for a person. Anxiety, according to Freud is a condition that is believed to be emotional, unpleasant, and accompanied by physical sensations that warn a person of approaching danger. Anxiety is usually accompanied by quite definite physical sensations which can be referred to certain organs of the body, the most obvious and most frequent of which are those related to the respiratory organs and the heart (Freud, 1949:97). There are three types of anxiety, namely: neurotic anxiety, moral anxiety, and realistic anxiety.

Realistic anxiety comes from fear of threatening dangers in the real world. This anxiety comes from the existence of a real threat in one's life environment, this realistic anxiety is characterized as being unhappy and worried about possible dangers. Fear of unknown danger is known as neurotic anxiety. Moral anxiety can be seen in a person's emotions of guilt, or shame. Moral anxiety stems from the conflict between the ego and superego.

This is based on worrying about something that comes from an inner voice (Freud, 1949: 91).

Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanisms are psychological methods that are used unconsciously to protect a person from anxiety caused by unpleasant thoughts or feelings. As anxiety takes over, the ego must protect itself in order to maintain its relationship with reality, the id, and the superego. It will instinctively defend itself by suppressing all of those desires and transforming them into something more acceptable and less harmful. The first defense mechanism Freud generated was repression. Freud contended that anxiety causes repression (Freud, 1949:91).

Repression

Repression is the most basic defense mechanism, because they are involved with each other. Whenever the ego is threatened by unwanted id impulses, it protects itself by suppressing these impulses; that is, forcing threatening feelings into the subconscious. The goal of repression is to push unwanted id impulses out of consciousness and back into the subconscious (Freud, 1949:91).

Reaction Formation

Reaction formation is a defense mechanism that has the opposite effect of a favorable reaction. Repression is a way for a repressed impulse to become conscious by hides itself in an opposite of its original form (Feist, 2008:35).

Displacement

Displacement is accomplished by redirecting to a different target. According to (Feist 2008: 36), Displacement is limited to one object, and people can divert their unwanted wants to different persons or objects, masking or hiding the initial need.

Regression

Regression is a defense mechanism that is used when a person returns to a lower and less mature level of adaptation or returns to an earlier stage of life during time of stress and anxiety (Feist, 2008: 36).

Projection

Projection is an attempt to blame others for their failures, difficulties or bad intentions. Everyone often faces situations or things that are unwanted and unacceptable, and they make other reasons (Feist, 2008: 37).

Denial

Denial is the refusal to acknowledge truth or facts, acting as if the painful event, idea, or sensation never happened (McLeod 2023). Many people use denial in their daily lives to avoid confronting uncomfortable emotions or parts of their lives that they do not want to accept to themselves.

Introjection

Introjection is a defense mechanism when someone refers to the process in which individuals internalize or take the characteristics, attitudes, or values of other people found in society into themselves as a way to reduce anxiety (Feist 2008: 43).

Sublimation

Sublimation is a self-defense mechanism that releases anxiety or anger to create positive things or activities that are beneficial to individuals and socially acceptable (Feist, 2008:44).

Rationalization

Rationalization is the creation of reasons as an effort to justify unacceptable behavior. Rationalization is the provision of logical explanations for behavior that is actually driven by unconscious motives within (Friedman & Schustack, 2008: 98).

Fixation

Fixation is when the possibility of taking the next step will cause anxiety (Feist, 2008: 36). Someone fears taking the next step, so the ego uses a strategy to survive and not move or not take a step in the current situation because it is considered more comfortable.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method in the form of descriptive analysis. Each data collected is processed and analyzed clearly. Qualitative research is applied to the primary purpose of research, which aims to collect data, then analyze it to describe the events that exist (Heigham, 2009:4). Based on this explanation, this study uses a qualitative method because the writer will describe the data taken from the novel by Ruth Warre's, *The Turn of The Key*. The data will consist of all words, phrases, and sentences related to anxiety and defense mechanisms.

In this study, the authors uses a psychological approach beacause it applies psychoanalytic theory. The psychoanalytic method employs a psychological viewpoint. It aims to reveal how the human mind works, especially the subconscious expression. Freud's theory of defense mechanisms is used to reveals Rachel Gerhardt's defense mechanisms.

The data source in this research is the novel *The Turn of the Key*. This novel was published in 2019 and consists of 377 pages. Then, the data taken in this study are quotations, phrases, sentences, and groups of sentences in the cases related to the anxiety and defense mechanism of the main character Rachel Gerhardt.

In this study, researchers collected data in the following ways: first, the researcher carefully read the novel, paying attention to Rachel Gerhardt's character, relationships, thoughts, and behavior related to anxiety and defense mechanisms. Second, find and highlight words or sentences that indicate Rachel's character's anxiety or defense mechanism. Third, review and write down which parts of the data is in accordance with the problem.

The first data analysis technique employed by the researcher in this study is categorizing data from novels based on anxiety and defense mechanisms. Secondly, Analyzing and interpreting data is categorized as anxiety and a defense mechanism in Rachel's character. Third, collect all data as the final result of interpretation, then finally, Make conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Rachel Gerhardt's Anxiety

The Researcher found that Rachel experienced all three types of anxiety proposed by Freud. The following is Rachel's anxiety:

1. Realistic or Objective Anxiety

Realistic anxiety comes from fear of threatening dangers in the real world. This anxiety comes from the existence of a real threat in one's living environment, and this realistic anxiety is defined as feeling unhappy and anxious about the dangers that will occur. Rachel has a realistic anxiety that she feels because of the threats posed to her, and it makes her feel very uncomfortable and threatened, which causes anxiety in Rachel. This threat is evidenced in the statement below:

“The whole house is wired up,” Sandra said casually, dropping the iPad back onto the counter. “It’s very handy, especially in a place with several floors. It means I don’t have to always be running up and down to check on the girls.”

“Very handy,” I echoed faintly, suppressing my unease. The whole house? What did that mean? The children’s rooms, clearly. But the reception rooms? The bedrooms? The bathrooms? (Ware, 2019:62)

The quote above shows Rachel's realistic anxiety. Rachel feels she is in a threatening situation. In the scene above, Sandra is taking Rachel around to explain everything about this house, and Sandra tells Rachel that this whole house is wired up and can monitor only by an app. This statement from Sandra made Rachel feel realistic anxiety because the presence of cameras in the bathroom and the bedroom could threaten someone's privacy.

2. Moral Anxiety

According to Freud, moral anxiety is manifested in the form of feelings of guilt or shame (Freud, 1949: 91). Someone who experiences this anxiety fears being punished by the sociological aspects of his personality or conscience. People or individuals with relatively developed consciences tend to make it easy or feel guilty if something happens when they do something contrary to their moral code. Rachel experienced Moral anxiety because she felt guilty and ashamed for what she had done before. Rachel's moral anxiety can be seen in the evidence below

Though, of course . . . she still could, if she was watching over the cameras. In spite of myself, my eyes flicked up to the ceiling, and sure enough there was one of those little white egg-shaped domes in the far corner of the room. I felt my face flush and looked away hastily, imagining Sandra seeing my guilty reaction. (Ware, 2019:90)

The quotation above shows Rachel experiencing moral anxiety because the quote above shows that Rachel seems to feel guilty because of her negligent which made Petra almost fall off the chair. Rachel's superego makes Rachel feel guilty for her negligent behavior. the anxiety Rachel experiences in this condition manifests itself in feelings of guilt because she had neglected Petra and nearly fell, which resulted in Rachel feeling shame.

3. Neurotic Anxiety

According to Freud, Neurotic anxiety is afraid of unknown dangers (Freud, 1949: 159). Neurotic anxiety arises from fear of what will happen when the Id's or desire is satisfied.

This anxiety lies in the ego, whose source comes from the Id. Rachel experiences neurosis anxiety if she satisfies her Id or desire.

For a minute I couldn't speak, couldn't say anything, and then, before I had time to think what I was doing, my hand shot out to slap her face. Her eyes met mine, and she began to laugh, totally without mirth, a kind of joyless, cackling glee that made me want to shake her.

My whole body was shuddering with adrenaline, and I knew how close I had come to really letting go—slapping the smirk off her knowing little face. If she had been my own child I would have done it, no questions. My rage had been white-hot and absolute. But I had stopped myself. I had stopped. Was that what it would look like on the monitor, though, if Sandra had been watching? (Ware, 2019:155).

Based on the quotation above, Rachel experiences neurotic anxiety when Rachel confronts Maddie. Maddie makes Rachel so angry that Rachel wants to slap Maddie on the cheek. Rachel had an Id or desire to slap Maddie, but Rachel's ego had consequences Rachel didn't want, her behavior can be seen by Sandra on camera. The conflict between Id and Ego makes Rachel feel Neurotic anxiety.

B. Rachel Gerhardt's Defense Mechanism

Rachel uses a defense mechanism as her protection to reduce her Anxiety. Anxiety about the threat she is experiencing and the danger that will happen to the children she cares for makes Rachel use a defense mechanism. There are eight kinds of defense mechanisms exposed by Rachel in *The Turn of The Key*, Rationalization, sublimation, reaction formation, aggression, regression, displacement, projection, and introjection

1. Rationalization

Rachel uses Rationalization by making excuses to protect her Ego from feeling anxiety and guilt. Researcher found evidence that Rachel using a defense mechanism of Rationalization. The following are excerpts and explanations below.

But no. That would be more than creepy. That would be illegal surveillance. I was an employee—and I had a reasonable expectation of privacy, or whatever the legal terminology was (Ware, 2019:84).

From the quote above, Rachel rationalizes that Sandra can't install a camera in Rachel's room. Rachel gave the excuse that it was illegal because an employee has his privacy. Rachel is worried because she sees an object in the ceiling that looks like a camera. Rachel used a defense mechanism by rationalizing herself into thinking it wasn't a camera and it was illegal to have a camera in your employee bedrooms. It reduces Rachel's anxiety when she worries her privacy is threatened.

2. Sublimation

Bill's abusive treatment of Rachel made Rachel feel anxious. To relieve her anxiety, Rachel releases her anger through positive activities. Rachel demonstrated this defense mechanism by studying the control panel. This can be seen below quotation,

The intricacies of the control panels were a welcome distraction from having to think about that part of things, and by the time I'd wrested control of the temperature down to something more reasonable and remembered how to work the shower, my heart was thumping less and I was talking myself round into an acceptance of the situation. (Ware, 2019:83)

The quotation above shows that Rachel is studying the Control panel. He studied the workings of controlling the settings for how the shower works in the bathroom. It could be seen that Rachel felt her anxiety had reduced after studying the control panel. In this situation, Rachel uses sublimation to vent her anger by studying the control panel to understand how it works.

3. Reaction formation

Reaction formation is the replacement of the opposite attitude and behaviour. Rachel performed a defense mechanism reaction formation as well while experiencing anxiety when she found the head of the doll she saw on the attic. Rachel was so scared that she couldn't touch him, but she had to do otherwise to lessen her anxiety. This can be seen in the following quotation,

I had to get rid of it, but somehow I could not bring myself to touch it, and in the end I went through to the utility room and got a plastic bin liner. I slid it over my hand, inside out, like a makeshift glove, and then knelt, and reached under the sofa. (Ware, 2019:204)

Based on the quotation above, Rachel was so scared that she couldn't touch the object because it threatened Rachel's comfort. Rachel used a defense mechanism reaction formation where previously she was so frightened that she couldn't even touch the doll's head until she did the opposite with her thoughts. Rachel performed a defense mechanism reaction formation to reduce her anxiety.

4. Regression

Rachel used Regression as a form of defense mechanism to relieve the anxiety in her mind by returning to her previous state. Rachel resembles a child like crying with the aim of getting a sense of security and attention from others. This can be seen in the following quote,

"Oh—oh my God," I found I couldn't catch my breath. The ringing in my ears intensified. Was I having some kind of panic attack? I groped for something to hold on to, and my fingers crunched against dead insects, and I let out a strangled sob (Ware, 2019:192).

Based on the quotation above, Rachel experiences anxiety after knowing what's inside the locked door of her room. There is writing on the wall that ghosts don't like when Rachel is here. Rachel returned to the initial stage, which was when she was little. When a child is scared, or something happens that he doesn't want, she expresses it by crying. Rachel uses the defense mechanism of Regression to get her to overcome her fears and anxiety.

5. Displacement

Rachel used displacement when Rachel was feeling anxious to explain the situation at home and to herself to Sandra. Rachel releases her anger or anxiety on objects that have nothing to do with the cause of Rachel's anxiety. Below the quotation,

But as I pulled the tablet towards myself, I realized I couldn't really email. That was the coward's way out. I owed her a call—to explain myself, if not face-to-face, then at least in person. But what the hell could I say?

Shit.

The bottle of wine was there on the kitchen counter, like an invitation, and I poured out a glass, trying to steady my nerves, and then another, this time with a glance at the camera squatting in the corner. But I no longer cared. The shit was about to hit the fan, and soon whatever footage Sandra and Bill had on me would be the least of my worries.

It was deliberate self-sabotage, I knew that really, in my heart of hearts, as I filled the glass for the third time. By the time there was only one glass left in the bottle I knew the truth—I was too drunk to call Sandra now, too drunk to do anything sensible at all, except go to bed. (Ware, 2019:224)

Based on the quotation above, Rachel is confused about what email message to write to Sandra to explain what happened at home, and this causes anxiety in Rachel. Rachel overcomes this incident by releasing her anxiety by drinking a bottle of wine. This shows that Rachel uses a defense mechanism displacement to release her anxiety, namely releasing anxiety on people or objects that have nothing to do with the causes of Rachel's anxiety.

6. Projection

Rachel's behaviour of not allowing Ellie to take the doll until physical contact with Ellie made Rachel realize that what she was doing was wrong. Rachel's awareness of her behaviour made Rachel feel guilty, and she carried out a defense mechanism in the form of projection. That is, defending yourself from feelings that are difficult for you to accept and assuming they come from others. This can be seen in the following quotation,

Shit. She had come to me last night for reassurance—and for a moment there I had thought we were making a breakthrough. And now I had screwed it up. Again. And it was all because of that vile little doll's head (Ware, 2019:204).

Based on the quotation above, Rachel feels that what she is doing is not her fault, but it is because of the doll's head. This shows that Rachel carried out a defense mechanism in the form of projection, assuming that Rachel's actions against Ellie resulted from the doll's head. Rachel regretted what she had done to Ellie because she had damaged Ellie's trust in Rachel, which they had just built. It triggers Rachel to use projection and think all her actions are the fault of the doll's head. This reduces Rachel's guilt for what Rachel has done to Ellie.

7. Introjection

Rachel takes advice from Jack as Rachel gets worried when she fears something dangerous might happen to Rhiannon, who goes out with someone Rachel doesn't know.

Taking the behaviour, traits, or words of others to instil in oneself is a form of defense mechanism, a form of introjection. This can be seen in the following quotation,

“She’s gone. She’s gone out by herself—with some awful unsuitable friend. I told her not to, but she went anyway, and I don’t know what to do— what to tell Sandra.”

“Look, don’t worry about Rhiannon. She’s a canny wee thing, pretty independent, and I highly doubt she’ll come to any harm, much as Sandra and Bill might disapprove.”

“But what if she does? What if something happens to her and it’s on my watch?”

“You’re a nanny, not a jailer. What were you supposed to do—chain her to her bed?”

“You’re right,” I said at last. “I know you’re right, it’s just— Oh God,” the words burst out of me of their own accord. “I’m so tired, Jack. I can’t think, and it doesn’t help that my hand hurts like a bastard every time I touch anything.” (Ware, 2019:226)

Based on the quotation above, Rachel took Jack's words when Rachel was worried when Rhiannon left. Rachel feels that Rhiannon is in danger because Rachel lets Rhiannon go with the unsuitable Friend, and what if something terrible happens to Rhiannon while in Rachel's supervision. This made Rachel do a defense mechanism of Introjection by taking words from Jack that Rachel was a nanny, not a jailer, who had to supervise children strictly.

8. Fixation

The disturbed Footsteps sound at night make Rachel feel anxious. This situation made Rachel not take the next step, to go back to sleep. This can be seen in the quotation below,

There was nothing I could do. I could go and sleep in the living room, but if the noises started down there as well, I thought I might lose it completely, and there was something almost worse about the idea of those sounds continuing up in the attic while I, ignorant, slept down below. At least if I was here, watching, listening, whatever was up there could not . . .

I swallowed in the darkness, my throat dry. My palms were sweating, and I could not finish the thought.

I would not sleep again tonight, I knew that now.

Instead, I wrapped myself in the duvet, shivering hard, turned on the light, and sat, with my phone still in my hand, listening to the steady, rhythmic sound of the feet pacing above me. (Ware, 2019:171)

The above quotation shows Rachel did not take the next step. Rachel could have taken the next step to continue sleeping in the living room, but she decided not to take the next step to stay in her room and not go back to sleep. It shows that Rachel used Fixation's defense mechanism to refuse to take the next step and decided to stay where Rachel is. Rachel felt that she would be fine not taking the next step.

CONCLUSION

Based on the researcher's research on the analysis of anxiety and defense mechanisms in the character Rachel Gerhardt in *The Turn of the Key*, the Researcher concludes that Rachel experiences three types of anxiety based on the theory used. Rachel experienced Realistic anxiety, moral anxiety, and neurotic anxiety. Realistic anxiety type was found more in Rachel's character in this novel than moral anxiety and neurotic anxiety. This third anxiety comes from external problems such as the environment, threats, and conflicts.

Rachel uses eight types of defense mechanisms to reduce the anxiety she experiences. For the defense mechanism, Rachel uses rationalization, sublimation, reaction formation, regression, displacement, projection, and introjection.

Rachel uses the rationalization of defense mechanisms to think of herself better, making logical justifications for her anxiety. Sublimation kept herself busy with valuable things after her trauma returned. Reaction formation that is opposite to her true feelings is a way to relieve her anxiety. Regression helps her reduce her tension by returning to her life's earlier stages. Displacement to vent her anxiety on another object, is like alcohol. Projection to maintain her ego from unwanted thoughts by blaming it on others, Introjection is used to feel better by taking someone else's advice or internalizing external beliefs to reduce anxiety, and the final defense mechanism is fixation, which is refuses to take the next step because she feels comfortable with the current situation.

REFERENCES

- Crammer, P., & Brilliant M, A. (2001). *Defense use and defense understanding in children, journal of personality*. 69(2) 297-322.
- Feist, Jess and Gregory Jess Feist. (2008). *Theories Personality*. USA: McGraw-Hill, 36-37.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1949). *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 91-159.
- Friedman, Howard S., Benedictine, Widyasinta., Wibi, Hardani. (2008). *Personality: classic theories and modern research*. Jakarta. Erlangga.
- Hall, C. S., Gardner, L., & John, B. C. (1997). *Theories of personality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons
- Heigham, J., & Crocker, R.A. (2009). *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: a practical introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mcleod, S. A. (2023). *Defense Mechanisms in Psychology Explained*. Retrieved May 03, 2023, from, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/defense-mechanisms.html>
- Mcleod, S. A. (2020). 10 Defense Mechanisms: What are They and How They Help Us Cope. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/psyche.html>
- Mindreop, Albertine. (2011). *Psikologi Sastra*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- Ware, Ruth. (2019). *The Turn of The Key*. Scott press. Scotland.