

Alice's Anxieties and Defense Mechanisms in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*

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ABSTRACT

There are negative assumptions on fantasy that it is unrealistic and considered as immature and unacceptable. However, there are times when fantasy is the only way to cope the problems in the real life. In this study, I am going to analyze *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) movie in order to find out why Alice creates a fantasy of Wonderland. Using the theory of Freudian Psychology, I find that the causes of Alice creating Wonderland are three anxieties which are anxiety on tradition, love, and loss. These anxieties lead Alice to use two defense mechanisms, which are blocking her desire and creating Wonderland. Here, Alice's Wonderland serves to solve her problem in the real life and satisfy her desires or 'id'. In conclusion, fantasy is not always negative, but it can be positive.

Keywords: Anxieties, Defense Mechanism, Fantasy

'Alice in Wonderland', screened in 2010, is one of the classical children literatures' adaptations, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* written by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson or known as Lewis Carroll. It is directed by Tim Burton and the genre is fantasy, since it adheres to the characteristics of its genre. The genre of fantasy contains elements that are not realistic, such as talking animals, magical powers, often set in a medieval universe, and possibly involving mythical beings (*Genre Characteristics*, 2006, p. 1). Indeed, this movie contains some unrealistic elements, including talking animals and involving mythical beings such as Jabberwocky and Bandersnatch.

I prefer to analyze this movie rather than the other versions for some reasons. Firstly, this movie is the newest one with the newest technology in animation and CGI (computer-generated-imagery), so it is relatively more entertaining than the old versions. An education programmer at Australian Centre for the Movie Image even gives compliment to Burton for producing an extraordinary visual imagination to this movie (Bye, n.d.). Secondly, I consider this movie as a good movie, since it is done by good and talented people, such as Tim Burton as the director, Linda Woolverton as scriptwriter, and Johnny Depp, Anne Hathaway, Helena Bonham Carter as famous actors or actresses. In addition, I consider this movie as a good movie, since this movie receives some recognitions. It receives three nominations which are art direction, costume design, and visual effects (*Academy Awards*, n.d.). Lastly, this movie reflects the life of people in general which are both children and adults who often use fantasy as a way to escape from the reality and find specific conflict's resolution.

The adventure of Alice in Wonderland as seen in *Alice in Wonderland* is the significant point that makes this movie distinctly unique and attractive to be watched from time to time. The fact that Alice undergoes many weird experiences that apparently change her life in reality makes me certain that this story is not a mere fantasy story or daydream. Thus, I am curious to analyze the factors that trigger or lead Alice to create a Wonderland. Besides, I am also interested in knowing Alice's purposes behind her decision to create Wonderland as one of her defense mechanisms.

In order to find the causes and purpose of Alice creating Wonderland, I use the theory of psychology from Sigmund Freud, which are the three agents, anxiety, and defense mechanism. Firstly, the three agents which influence human's behavior are 'id', 'ego', and 'superego'. Freud called 'id' as the pleasure principle (Hall, 1954). 'Id' is known as desire or instinct which always asked to be satisfied. Meanwhile, the 'ego' precedes everything based on the reality. Calvin (1954)

mentions that “the ego is the executive of the personality, controlling, and governing the id and the superego and maintaining the commerce with the external world” (p. 28). Then, ‘superego’ is the moral or judicial branch of personality and represents the ideal or perfection rather than for reality or pleasure (Hall, 1954). Indeed, it always follows its moral code.

Those three psychoanalytical aspects are interconnected and can’t be separated. Thus, when there is a clash between them, it may results in tension and leads to anxiety. Calvin (1954) defines anxiety as “a painful emotional experience produced by excitations in the internal organs of the body” (p. 62). There are three kinds of anxiety, such as reality or objective anxiety, neurotic, and moral anxiety. Firstly, reality anxiety is an anxiety which appears from the reality or experience and or happened in the past. Secondly, moral anxiety appears because the dangers come from the superego. Then, the neurotic anxiety appears from people’s instinct and since it appears from instinct which is not in accordance with the reality, it might be irrational.

When one of those anxieties appears, the ‘ego’ will defend it by using specific defense mechanism. According to Calvin (1954), “The ego may try to master danger by adopting realistic problem – solving methods, or attempt to alleviate anxiety by using methods that deny, falsify, or distort reality and that impede the development of personality which called as defense mechanism” (p. 85). In simple terms, it can be defined as ways or mechanisms used by the ‘ego’ to defense and or protect the self from the anxiety or danger. Indeed, there are some kinds of defense mechanisms that people use to cope with the problems, such as repression, fantasy, projection, acting out, intellectualization, reaction – formation, rationalization, displacement, etc.

Indeed, Alice uses two different defense mechanisms, which are repression and fantasy. These defense mechanisms are used by Alice in order to resolve her problems and find the gratification. Later, in the analysis section, I will apply this theory and explain the process and the specific cause of Alice in using these defense mechanisms.

ALICE’S ANXIETIES AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN TIM BURTON’S *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*

Alice, a 19th years old girl who lived in the Victorian age is proposed by a man named Hamish Ascot. As she confuses making decision for accepting the proposal, she sees a talking white rabbit in a waistcoat who is running after something. Alice follows him until she falls into a dark hole which leads her to Wonderland. I think she creates her own ‘Wonderland’ because of some causes, which are pressure and fear or called as her unfulfilled expectations (anxiety). At the moment anxiety appears, the ‘ego’ as a controller will find a proper way or a solution in order to erase or ease the anxiety. The solution or a specific way used by the ‘ego’ is called a defense mechanism.

This chapter will be divided into two sub chapters, including Alice’s anxieties and Alice’s escape. In the first subchapter, I will mention the anxieties with the symptoms, reveal and elaborate the causes, and categorize them in specific types of anxiety. Then, in the second subchapter, I will discuss more the repercussions of those anxieties along with the kinds of defense mechanism that Alice uses to cope with her anxieties.

Alice’s Anxieties

Anxiety refers to the feeling of worry and fear that everybody goes through which can occur at any time. There are so many factors that influence the emergence of anxieties. Calvin Hall (62) mentions that anxiety is a painful emotional experience which is produced by excitations in the internal organs of the body (p. 62.). The internal organs of the body refer to the three agents or psychoanalytical aspects which are interconnected and cannot be separated. When the ‘ego’ cannot satisfy either the ‘id’ or the ‘superego’, it may give a bad impact which results in a tension and leads to an anxiety. Basically, Alice’s anxiety emerges when either her ‘id’ or ‘superego’ is endangered or not matched. In this first subchapter, Alice’s anxieties will be divided into two sections, which consist of tradition and love. In each section, I will discuss Alice’s anxieties through its symptoms with the causes and categorize those into specific types of anxiety, which are moral and reality. The symptoms can be seen through someone’s speech, facial expression, and actions.

Alice's Anxieties on Tradition

First of all, Alice's anxieties can be categorized as moral anxiety. These anxieties are related to the tradition at that time, the Victorian age. As a matter of fact, the first tradition for all women in that Victorian age was wearing clothes for women, including stockings and corset, so they will be considered as civilized and or proper. Alice's first desire on clothing is related to body comfort, since she does not feel comfortable at all when wearing stocking and corset which symptoms are:

Helen Kingsley: (CONT'D): 'Where's your corset?'

She pulls back her dress to see bare legs.

Helen Kingsley: (CONT'D): 'And no stockings!'

Alice: 'I'm against them.'

Helen Kingsley: 'But you're not properly dressed.'

[...]

Alice: 'To me a corset is like a codfish.'

Frustrated, Alice looks out the window and mutters.

[...]

She sees the hurt on her mother's face and instantly regrets her words.

Alice (CONT'D): 'I'm sorry. I'm tired. I didn't sleep well last night.'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 3)

Alice's 'id' or desire can be seen as she blatantly against the tradition for wearing corsets and stockings. Later, she shows her remorse or regret for her words by saying sorry to her mother as a representative of her 'superego'. Since her desire is not in accordance with the tradition at that time and her 'superego' against it, it produces the anxiety which is shown as she sees the hurt on her mother's face and instantly regrets her words.

Then, Alice's anxiety on tradition is related to the party, the Quadrille dance. The tradition in the Victorian age is when people get invited to the party, they have to come. The symptom is:

Alice: 'Must we go? I doubt they'll notice if we never arrive.'

(CONTINUED)

Helen Kingsley: 'They will notice.'

(2 – 3)

Alice: [...]

EXT. THE ASCOT ESTATE - THE GARDENS - DAY 6

The garden party is in full swing. Everyone has turned out in their summer finery. Guests play croquet on the great lawn. Skiffs drift lazily on a meandering river. Alice approaches LORD and LADY ASCOT with a fixed unnatural smile.

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 4)

Thus, this Alice's desire or 'id' on tradition is closely related on freedom of choice, since it gives satisfaction and it is a basic need of human beings. She has a desire for not coming or joining the party which seen as she asks her mother wither she has to go or not. However, her 'superego' provides a wrong judgment that not coming to the party is inappropriate. Thereupon, it produces a fear and guilty feeling for hurting or making her mother disappointed by her deeds, and putting the shame to her mother and herself in public. Indeed, the clash between the 'id' and 'superego' may result in the emergence of anxiety which seen through her facial expression, a fixed unnatural smile (Woolverton, 2008). She shows it in order to hide her desire for having no intention to come to the party.

All of those anxieties on tradition are categorized as moral anxiety, since the threat is the conscience of the superego system aroused by a perception of danger from the conscience (Hall, 1954, p. 68). Thus, it can be categorized as a fear of superego (Hall, 1954, p. 62). Indeed, Alice's conscience or superego is endangered. Firstly, her 'superego' is endangered by feeling fear of the punishments from the society for being disobedient to the rule at that time, since she prioritizes her body comfort for wearing clothes improperly. Also, she fears of the punishment for prioritizing her freedom of making choice for coming to the party. Then, Alice also reveals guilty feeling for making her mother disappointed.

Alice's Anxieties on Love

Secondly, Alice's anxieties can be categorized as reality anxiety. Those are related to love which is her future spouse or husband. Alice's first anxiety on love is closely related to freedom of choice which appears as she is proposed by the son of Lord Ascot, Hamish Ascot. The anxiety's symptom is in the dialogues below:

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

Margaret: 'Who then? You won't do better than a Lord.'

She looks at Hamish who blows his nose, studies the contents of his kerchief, then folds it and puts it in his pocket.

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 7 – 8)

Alice's 'id' lets her desires out that she does not want to accept Hamish's proposal, since she feels no love and she is not suitable for Hamish Ascot. It is showed through Alice's statement that she does not know if she wants to marry Hamish. However, the society is against her desire and this force her to accept the arranged marriage. The society is represented by her sister's saying that there will be no one better than Lord. Since, Alice's 'id' or desire is clashed with the society, she becomes anxious which is shown as she stares at Hamish who blows his nose and does several things.

Also, her anxiety on love is closely linked to not being alone and lonely which symptoms are:

Margaret: 'You'll soon be twenty, Alice. That pretty face won't last forever. You don't want to end up like Aunt Imogene.'

They look at their middle-aged AUNT IMOGENE with over-rouged cheeks and a yellowing white dress that's too young for her.

Margaret: 'And you don't want to be a burden on mother, do you?'

Alice: 'No.'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 7)

Imogene: 'I can't be bothered with your fancy rabbit now. I'm waiting for my fiancé.'

Alice: 'You have a fiancé?'

The White Rabbit darts by.

Alice (CONT'D): 'There! Did you see it?'

Imogene: 'He's a prince. But, alas he cannot marry me unless he renounces his throne. Isn't it tragic?'

Alice: 'Very.'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 10)

Alice's 'id' or desire reveals as her sister saying that Alice does not want to end up like Aunt Imogene. Thus, her desire is she does not want to become an awkward and old spinster, like Aunt Imogene. Meanwhile, Alice's 'superego' reveals a guilty feeling that she will become a burden for her mom if she refuses the proposal. Basically, this dialogue shows two Alice's anxieties. First, she is very anxious, since her 'id' is disturbed. Alice is afraid of becoming like Aunt Imogene, which is against her desire. It is shown as Alice looks at Aunt Imogene in over-red cheeks who wear yellow white dress which too young for her (Woolverton, 2008). Thus, she imagines herself as Aunt Imogene and becomes anxious. Then, the second anxiety appears since her 'superego' is clashed with her first 'id' or desire. Alice's 'superego' judges or considers her 'id' or desire related to the refusal of the proposal as imperfect or inappropriate. It reveals a guilty feeling for being a burden on her mother for not marrying.

Then, her other anxiety emerges as she has a desire for a happy marriage which is not satisfied as she sees that every word her sister says is not right at all. Here are the symptoms.

Margaret: 'So you will marry Hamish. You will be as happy as I am with Lowell and your life will be perfect. It's already decided.'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 8)

She backs away and runs into her sister's husband, LOWELL, kissing a strange woman. The woman runs off.

Alice: 'Lowell?'

Lowell: 'Alice. We were...Hattie is an old friend.'

Alice: 'I can see you're very close.'

Lowell is bright red and highly flustered.

Lowell: 'You won't mention this to your sister, will you?'

Alice: 'I don't know. I'm confused. I need time to think.'

Lowell: 'Think of Margaret. She would never trust me again. You don't want to ruin her marriage, do you?'

Alice: 'Me? I'm not the one...'s

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 11)

Alice has a desire for having marriage as Margaret saying that Alice will be happy and has a perfect life as herself and Lowell (Woolverton, 2008). Nevertheless, Alice's anxiety arises as she experiences something that is against her desire. She sees Lowell not in the way she is told by her sister. Thus, she is anxious because she is afraid of the bad things she will get as a result of the arranged marriage which is seen through her shocked expression and tone in calling Lowell. Moreover, she also has a desire to tell the truth to her sister, Margaret, as she says that she is confused and need time to think to Lowell (Woolverton, 2008). However, her 'superego' lets out the fear and guilty feeling for ruining her sister's marriage, which produces anxiety.

All of those anxieties on love are categorized as reality anxiety, since it fulfills the definition and characteristics of reality anxiety. Previously, Calvin (1954) mentions that:

reality anxiety is a painful emotional experience resulting from a perception of danger in the external world. A danger is any condition of the environment which threatens to harm the person (p. 63). To put it briefly, it can be considered as a fear of the external world (p. 62).

Alice's anxiety arises, since the danger comes from the external or reality or based on the experience. The first real thing or experience from the outside which endangers her 'id' is about being alone and lonely. The proof is shown as she sees her Aunt Imogene, a spinster who lives alone. As Alice sees her 'Aunt Imogene with over-red cheeks who wear a yellow white dress that's too young for her (Woolverton, 2008), her anxiety appears. Then, the other experience or the real thing which arise other anxiety reveals as Alice wishes for a happy marriage. The evidence starts as Alice sees the fact of arranged marriage is completely different than what her sister tells her. She sees that getting a treacherous husband may be an impact of an arranged marriage. Her 'id' asks her not to accept the arranged marriage, so that she will not have a deceitful and unfaithful husband. Thus, it clearly shows the reality anxiety, since Alice experiences the natural and rational or real thing. The causes come from the external world which is painful. Thus, this anxiety is caused by the discrepancy between her 'id' and the society or reality.

Alice's Escape

Basically, every human needs a specific way to cope with her or his problems or anxiety. This is also performed by Alice who escapes in order to ease or erase her anxieties and find the proper answer or way for problem solving. In this second subchapter, Alice's escape will be divided into two sections, which consist of blocking her desire and creating 'Wonderland'. In the first section, I will explain the very first defense mechanisms used by Alice through its symptoms and the cause of using such way and mentions the category of this defense mechanism. Then, in the second section, I will explain and elaborate the shifting of the first into the second ways or defense mechanism by Alice. Indeed, I will also provide the symptoms and the judgment of Alice's 'ego' in using such ways.

Blocking Her Desire

Of all those anxieties, Alice's 'ego' prefers to block her desire, not let it out. The evidence on Alice blocking her desire to cope with her problem is provided below.

Alice: 'To me a corset is like a codfish.'

Helen Kingsley: 'Please. Not today.'

Frustrated, Alice looks out the window and mutters.

Alice: 'Father would have laughed.'

She sees the hurt on her mother's face and instantly regrets her words.

Alice (CONT'D): 'I'm sorry. I'm tired. I didn't sleep well last night.'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 3)

This dialogue shows the situation where Alice has a desire regarding her body comfort for not wearing corsets and stockings. However, she prefers to look out the window and mutters. Basically, those are the symptoms or evidences of a blocked desire. First, as her mom tells her not to break the law, Alice suddenly stares at the window, not looking at her mother, and she only mutters rather than says directly related to her desire. She also reveals a feeling of frustration for not letting her desire out.

Then, Alice continues this attitude as she is proposed directly in front of people. The proof is provided below.

Hamish (CONT'D): 'Alice Kingsley, will you be my wife?'

The question hangs in the air. Unsure of herself, unsure of her future, unsure of her own sanity in that moment, Alice stammers.

Alice: 'I...I.....well, everyone expects me to...and you're a Lord...and my face won't last...and I don't want to end up like...but this is happening so quickly...I think...I...I.'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 12)

It blatantly shows that Alice has a desire regarding the freedom of choice for not accepting the proposal. Nevertheless, as she is proposed in front of many people, she suddenly stammers. She prefers to block or keep her desire from getting out in front of the public. Thus, it is an evidence that she wants to undo or keep her desire inside which causes her to stammer.

Basically, this way of blocking her desires is categorized as repression, since it fits the characteristic of repression itself. The characteristic is that Alice tries to hide and repress her intense or strong feeling of her desire, so that they cannot be said out loud. This defense is used, in order to avoid the punishment from the external world or reality or the society. This characteristic is in accordance with the statement of Alan A. Stone and Sue Smart Stone (1966) which is, "repression is simply to wall off intense feelings so that they cannot enter awareness" (p. 205).

Creating Wonderland

In fact, the first defense mechanism used by Alice cannot erase all of the anxieties, since the 'ego' only uses it to satisfy the 'superego'. Thus, Alice's 'ego' fails in satisfying her 'id' or desire, and it still remains as an anxiety inside Alice. Thus, in order to find the proper way or mechanism for channeling her desire appropriately, Alice's 'ego' decides to create Wonderland which symptom is:

Alice sees SOMETHING LARGE AND WHITE dart past.

Alice: 'Did you see that?'

Lady Ascot: 'See what?'

[...]

And there it is, a LARGE WHITE RABBIT in a waistcoat, standing on its hind legs and staring directly at Alice. She blinks. The White Rabbit darts behind a tree.

Alice: 'Did you see it that time?'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 9)

This scene shows the very beginning of Wonderland's creation. The proof of Wonderland being Alice's creation is the white-rabbit in a waistcoat which can only be seen by Alice, not other people. Basically, Alice's 'ego' decides not to let her desire out in the public which is shown as she stutters. It shifts to the other defense mechanism, which is creating and escaping to Wonderland.

As I mentioned previously, Alice creates Wonderland with two purposes, which are satisfying her 'id' or desire that can never be satisfied and solving her problems in her real life. Basically, Alice finds the solutions to her problems in her Wonderland which evidences are provided below:

All eyes turn to Alice. The feeling is not unlike the pressure of that moment under the gazebo.

White Queen: 'Alice, you cannot live your life to please others. The choice must be yours because when you step out to face that creature, you will step out alone. Overwhelmed, she runs.

[...]

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 70)

Alice (CONT'D): 'And I can slay the Jabberwocky!'

She swings the Sword and attacks with fury. The Jabberwocky is surprised by her fierceness. They do battle.

Mad Hatter: 'Behind you!'

She turns, distracted. CLAWS scrape down the back of her armor. Alice backs up toward the Hatter, fending off the Jabberwocky.

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 75)

Basically, Alice seems to find the best solution or answer as she is told by the White Queen that she cannot live her life to please others and she can always make her own choice. Then, she also has courage as she can make a choice or decision that she can slay the Jabberwocky alone. Those cases help Alice in satisfying her desire and solving her problems in reality, which evidences are:

[...]

ALICE: 'Oh, and one more thing.'

She lifts her skirt, revealing her bare legs and does a brisk Futterwacken to the shock of some and delight of others.

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 81)

Thus, the first problem solved is her anxiety on tradition regarding her body comforts which are wearing no corsets and stockings in front of the people. Indeed, as she realizes that she always has and can make a choice by herself whether she wants to reveal her desire concerning on her body comfort to wear no corsets and stockings in front of people. Indeed, it also satisfies her desire on tradition regarding her body comfort later as she lives her real life which erases her anxiety. Then, the other problem solved is her anxiety on love which evidence is:

Alice turns to Hamish. Her adventure, although unremembered, has given Alice unwavering confidence and self-awareness.

ALICE: 'I'm sorry Hamish, I can't marry you. You're not the right man for me. And there's that trouble with your digestion.'

(to her sister): 'I love you, Margaret. But this is my life. I'll decide what to do with it.'

(Woolverton, 2008, p. 80)

This problem concerning her freedom of choice is solved by not accepting the proposal from Hamish Ascot. In addition, Alice's desire on love regarding freedom of choice is also satisfied as she returns to her real life.

Beyond those evidences or proofs, I consider this way as fantasy, since it tends to resolve inner and outer conflicts and obtain the gratification (Dr Sanity par.8). Indeed, this resolves the inner conflicts, since it satisfies both of her 'id' or obtain the satisfaction and 'superego'. It satisfies her 'id' or desire, including body comfort for wearing no corset and stockings and freedom of choice for not accepting Hamish's proposal. Along with that, it also solves the outer conflicts for having the answers or solutions that she can use to face the reality.

Conclusion

In general, most people may have bad assumptions regarding fantasy, since it is not realistic and logical. Even as children, we are accustomed by our parents to neither fantasize nor daydream frequently that it leads to an idea that everything should be logical, rational, and in accordance with facts. Nevertheless, fantasy is sometimes seen as the only way to find solutions and cope with problems in real life.

Through the analysis of Alice in Wonderland, I find out that Alice uses fantasy as her way to cope with her problems in real life. That Alice fantasizes and or creates Wonderland seems like she is in the process of combining. She links and or attributes all of the pictures in her mind and her real life to produce something new. It blatantly shows that before Alice fantasizes or creates Wonderland, she always faces unsolved problems and lives in a dull life. However, as she generates or produces something new from her fantasy or her creation of Wonderland, her problems in real life are suddenly all solved, and she continues to live her life enthusiastically.

Finally, I can conclude that creating Wonderland as the representation of fantasy can bring and or give advantages or benefits, depending on each person. When people can control their own fantasy or imagination, it can bring maximum benefits to their lives as shown by Alice who uses fantasy to bring benefits to her life that they eventually help her to develop.

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