ANXIETY AND DEFENCE MECHANISM REFLECTED IN THE POETRY ANTHOLOGY BY ADI K

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Abstract

This study investigates how anxiety and defense mechanisms are reflected in Being Unhappy Is a Choice, a poetry anthology by Adi K, using Freud's psychoanalytic theory as the analytical framework. The research applies a qualitative descriptive method to identify and interpret psychological aspects represented in selected poems. The analysis reveals that the anthology portrays three types of anxiety: reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. These anxieties are expressed through themes of fear, inner conflict, guilt, and self-doubt. In response to these anxieties, the poems demonstrate the use of defense mechanisms such as rationalization, sublimation, reaction formation, and introjection. The findings suggest that Adi K's poetry not only conveys individual struggles but also illustrates how hidden fears and emotional pain can be transformed into creative expression. By combining literary and psychological perspectives, this research highlights how poetry serves as both an outlet for unconscious conflict and a medium for readers to reflect on their own emotional experiences. The study contributes to the field of literary psychology by expanding psychoanalytic analysis into contemporary Indonesian poetry, offering new insights into the intersection of literature, mental health, and human resilience.
Keywords: Adi K, Anxiety, Defense Mechanisms, Indonesian Literature, Psychoanalysis

INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis, founded by Sigmund Freud, is simultaneously a form of treatment, a theory, and an investigative tool (Lothane, 2006). At its core, it emphasizes unconscious processes, instinctual drives, and inner conflicts that shape human behavior (Freud, 1917). One of Freud's key contributions was his challenge to the prevailing belief that human beings are rational creations of God. Instead, he argued that humans are fundamentally driven by instincts, especially aggressive and sexual impulses often repressed due to social or moral restrictions.

Psychology comes from the Greek "psyche" which means soul, and "logos" which means science. Psychology, while a complex term to define, can be understood as "the science that systematically studies and tries to explain the observable behavior of individuals and its connection to the unseen mental processes occurring within the organism, as well as to the external events happening in the environment" (Kagan & Havemann, 1976). (Cuddon & Preston, 1999) points out Freud's psychoanalytical criticism, delves into the exploration and discovery of connections between the artists (creators, artificers) themselves and what they

create, whether it be novels, poetry, paintings, sculptures, buildings, music, or other forms of expression. When it comes to literature, this approach focuses on analyzing the characters that authors 'invent,' the language they use, and what is referred to as 'Freudian imagery.' A literary character is analyzed using the Freudian method as though they were a real, breathing person (Cuddon & Preston, 1999).

According to Wellek and Warren (1956), psychoanalytical criticism centers on the characters, who serve as exemplary figures who disclose more profound truths about life and frequently represent the world and the meaning of existence. Because each character expresses their distinct personality and emphasizes individual differences, examining the characters and their actions offers a psychological exploration in this way. When it comes to characterization in literature, it's clear that "The creation of characters may be supposed to blend, in varying degrees, inherited literary types, persons observed, and the self. Characters in plays and book are judged by us to be 'psychologically' true. Situations are praised and plots accepted because of this same quality. Sometimes a psychological theory, held either consciously or dimly by an author, seems to fit a figure or a situation" (Wellek & Warren, 1956).

Anxiety plays a central role in psychoanalytic theory. For Freud, anxiety functions as a warning signal from the ego, alerting individuals to potential danger or unresolved conflict (Freud, 1915). To cope, the ego employs defense mechanisms, unconscious strategies that distort reality to reduce distress (Walker & McCabe, 2021). These concepts remain influential not only in psychology but also in the analysis of literature, where characters, narrators, or poetic voices embody unconscious struggles through symbolic language, imagery, and metaphor.

Adi K is a talented Indonesian artist best known for her writing and photography. Born in Jakarta, since 1997, he has authored over 80 books. These books cover a lot of topics, such as poetry, short stories, novels, and self-improvement (LinkedIn, 2025). The Adi K Indonesian author Adi K. is best known for his poetry that deals with deep emotional topics like happiness, sadness, healing, and the human condition. He has written a number of poetry books in both Indonesian and English. He has written a number of English poetry books, such as *Love Letters for My Future Self, Being Unhappy Is a Choice, You Never Existed,* and *A Poem in My Mind.* Some of his best-known Indonesian novels are *Sesunyi Cahaya* and *Membaca Kepedihan.* Adi K has written more than just poems. He has also written novels and short stories, like *Cermin Dua Arah, Renjana Dyana, Kinky Revenge,* and *Kinky Rain*, a collection of short stories about love, darkness, and sex. He has also written motivational and self-help books including *Affirm Believe Claim* and *the To Heal series*, which shows how wide-ranging his writing career is.

His poetry, notably the A Poem series, is known for its mix of old and new genres. It

talks about love in a dark, edgy, and romantic way a lot. For example, A Poem in My Mind is a collection of poems and quotes that look at the different sides of love and relationships. They make readers feel a lot of different things and think about them. His writing is clear and expressive, and he often adds pictures that make his work even stronger. The name "adimodel" belongs to Adi K, a professional photographer. Since 2003, he has worked as a professional photographer for beauty, fashion, and glamour. A lot of ads and magazines in Indonesia have used his work, which shows how well-known he is in the visual arts world. In addition to being a photographer, Adi K is also a teacher and a translator. This shows how adaptable he is as both an artist and a teacher.

Adi K is active on Instagram (@adimodel_), where he posts pictures and talks about his books. He talks to a group of fans on this site who are interested in his art and other creative work. To sum up, Adi K is a very creative Indonesian writer who has written a lot of books and taken a lot of pictures. Because of his unique voice in poetry and fiction and his success as a professional photographer, he is well-known in Indonesia's literary and artistic circles.

Many of previous study has looked at anxiety and defense mechanisms as strong signs of mental health problems. Shrivastwa (2023) talks about research on defense mechanisms in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*, with a focus on Tom. Employing Cramer's framework like denial, suppression, and reaction formation, the study illustrates how Tom manages anxiety and guilt stemming from immoral actions such as murder and infidelity. The strength of this work is that it uses Freudian psychoanalytic theory in a detailed way to show how defense mechanisms show up in behavior and how people see themselves. By combining psychological theory with text analysis, it does a great job of showing Tom's mental health problems and wrong beliefs. However, its narrow focus on one character limits exploration of the novel's broader themes. The results show that Tom has a split personality and uses defense mechanisms without realizing it to calm his nerves and protect his self-image. The study is important for both literary and psychological research because it shows how literature can help us understand behavior, coping, and trauma by showing how the mind works.

Similarly, Faiz & Khalili (2023) use Freud's theory of defense mechanisms to examine the psychological dynamics in O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night. This qualitative study examines how the four principal characters navigate internal conflicts and anxiety via denial, projection, repression, reaction formation, displacement, isolation, undoing, and sublimation. One of its main strengths is how it uses Freudian ideas to show how defense mechanisms change behavior and how family relationships get worse. Reading closely and analyzing the text also help you understand why the characters do what they do. The study's limitation lies in its failure to examine alternative literary or psychological frameworks beyond Freudian

analysis. The conclusions indicate that the continual use of defense mechanisms results in a fragmented reality, impaired communication, and halted emotional development. The implications extend to literary and psychological discourse, highlighting the importance of understanding defense mechanisms for analyzing character behavior and fostering emotional intelligence and self-awareness in real-world interactions.

This article explores how Freud's ideas of anxiety and defense mechanisms are reflected in the contemporary Indonesian poet Adi K's anthology Being Unhappy Is a Choice (2022). Adi K, known for his psychological depth and emotionally honest writing, addresses themes of trauma, inner conflict, and healing. By applying psychoanalytic theory, this study highlights how his poetry gives voice to repressed emotions and reveals the strategies by which individuals navigate their anxieties.

1.1 Anxiety

Oxford Dictionary Press (2025) says that anxiety is a state of concern or apprehension, generally about something that is about to happen or something that could have bad effects. Besides that, Freud stated that anxiety is "an objectless fear," meaning a worry without an obvious reason (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). At first, Freud defined anxiety as the transformation of tension (Freud, 1959). He also said it stemmed from a libidinal impulse. Freud further developed his theory, defining anxiety as

"a reaction to a traumatic situation" (Freud, 1959).

Because of this, anxiety can be described as a vague, unpleasant state that includes physical awareness and prompts a person to become alert to upcoming danger (Freud, 1959). The ego is the only part that can generate anxiety, though the "id, superego, and external world" also play a role (2018). There are three types of anxiety in Freudian psychoanalysis (Hall, 1954; Schultz & Schultz, 2017), as outlined below:

1. Reality Anxiety

In reality anxiety, the ego responds to the outer world. This type of anxiety is an unclear, uncomfortable feeling triggered by a possible threat. (Feist et al., 2018). Given that the threat originates from the outside world, it is quite similar to "real fear" (Hall, 1954). People are born with reality anxiety, which is based on perception. That means people naturally fear certain things from the beginning. Another reason could be painful events that happened in the past that make people afraid of going through them again. For example, someone can be afraid to drive in an area they don't know well because they think something bad might happen.

2. Neurotic Anxiety

This form of anxiety arises within the ego but comes from the id. It's a fear related to

"hostility and punishment". The danger here originates from the id's pleasure-seeking impulses (Hall, 1954). The ego steps in to safeguard the self because it is afraid of losing control. This anxiety generally comes from childhood and is an unconscious fear of being punished. It can feel worse than true anxiety since it doesn't go away over time; it stays in the back of your mind. For instance, a person may be afraid of authority persons like teachers because they didn't get enough love from their parents when they were young.

3. Moral Anxiety

Moral anxiety arises from a conflict between the id and the superego (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). In this case, the source of anxiety is the moral sense rooted in the superego (Hall, 1954). The superego usually starts developing around the age of 5 or 6. Around that time, children begin to experience conflict between reality and the expectations of their superego. This kind of anxiety often comes from failing to meet those expectations, resulting in guilt and shame. For instance, a person might believe that ignoring their aging parents is morally wrong. (Feist et al., 2018). As a result, they behave in a more morally acceptable way to ease the inner conflict.

Even though these types of anxiety are distinct, they're sometimes hard to separate and can overlap. Anxiety serves as an "ego-preserving mechanism" because it warns a person of danger. It's also "self-regulating," using repression to ease the pain anxiety causes. Without repression, anxiety might become overwhelming. That's why defense mechanisms are essential, they help people deal with anxiety effectively.

1.2 Defense Mechanism

Freud described defense mechanisms as strategies used by the ego to protect against anxiety (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). Freud (1959), along with his daughter Anna Freud (2018), developed the idea of universal defense mechanisms, those that appear especially when anxiety becomes "compulsive, repetitive, and neurotic". Here are the types of defense mechanisms according to Freud (Hall, 1954; Schultz & Schultz, 2017):

1. Repression

People think that repression is the most basic way to protect yourself. It works by stopping memories or ideas that could make you anxious (Hall, 1954). The ego protects itself against the id's threats by pushing down the id's urges. Repression can endure for a lifetime, although it may diminish if the source of the threat is removed (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). For instance, a child might suppress their anger for a younger brother since they know it could make them anxious. Also, displaying strong or uncontrollable emotions is looked upon from society.

2. Denial

Denial and repression are closely related. It happens when someone denies the existence of a traumatic incident or danger (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). For instance, a person who is grieving the loss of a parent may not accept their absence and instead think they are still present in the home.

3. Displacement

As the name implies, displacement is the act of moving feelings from their source to a new target (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). By focusing rage or frustration on something else—typically another person, thing, or even an animal—this helps prevent anxiety. For example, when a mother is upset with her kids, she may vent her frustration on her husband rather than correcting them.

4. Projection

Projection is similar to displacement; in that it involves redirecting emotions (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). However, in projection, people attribute their unacceptable feelings to someone else. They believe that the other person, not themselves, has the negative emotions. Projection can help manage both neurotic and moral anxiety. For example, someone who hates another person might insist that it's the other person who hates them.

5. Rationalization

Rationalization is somewhat like denial, but with a twist, it also tries to justify actions or feelings in a logical or socially acceptable way. People convince themselves there's a rational reason behind something that causes anxiety. For instance, a person who gets fired might say they never liked the job anyway (Schultz & Schultz, 2017).

6. Reaction-Formation

In this case, the person displays behaviors that are the exact opposite of their true impulses. The ego transforms unacceptable desires into their opposite. For instance, a person who harbours intense resentment towards their mother may deliberately exhibit affection, not out of genuine sentiment, but due to moral or societal obligations (Schultz & Schultz, 2017).

7. Sublimation

Sublimation changes id impulses into acts that are socially acceptable, while displacement only moves emotions around. For example, a person might use sexual energy to be creative or do well in school (Schultz & Schultz, 2017).

8. Fixation

Fixation is a frequent defense strategy that happens when someone is stopped and doesn't want to move forward, usually because they're afraid of pain or failure in the future (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). They don't feel safe in new places and would rather stay in a

safe, familiar place.

9. Regression

Where fixation stops progress, regression takes a person backward. People return to earlier stages of life where things felt simpler and safer (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). Adults often deal with stress by doing things like eating too much, daydreaming, disobeying the rules, or acting like a child (Hall, 1954). For example, someone might become more "childish and dependent" under stress.

10. Introjection

When someone introjects, they take on traits or qualities of someone else, usually someone they look up to or respect (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). To lower anxiety and increase self-worth, they adopt the "values, beliefs, and mannerisms" of others (Feist et al., 2018). For example, someone might copy the good behavior of a public figure as a way to feel more secure and confident.

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Afifuddin and Jwalita (2023) argue that qualitative descriptive includes the interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of literary works. This study specifically focuses on examining the relationship between aspects within the literary work and psychoanalysis theory. The case being studied involves an analyze of the lines of the character's used in the literary work. This research design uses a qualitative research method that analyzes a collection of poetry anthology entitled "Being Unhappy is a Choice" by Adi K. which focuses on the theme of anxiety and defense mechanisms contained in each work, which depicts how a writer struggles to deal with a period of anxiety.

3.2. Data and Source of Data

a. Preliminary Data

The primary data were collected following table categorizes instances of analyze the anxiety and defense mechanisms in selected poems from Adi K's poetry anthology book according to these types:

Table 3.1: Preliminary Data

No	Citation Data
1	*"I hate this world. But I never say it loud. I am afraid the world will hate me too."* (Pages 14)

In this part, the ego quickly turns to its defense mechanisms. Freud called these "unconscious strategies used to resolve internal conflict and protect one's sense of self." The speaker's choice

to stay quiet suggests repression: a quiet hiding of thoughts or feelings that are upsetting but hard to notice. Another example of projection is the fear that "the world will hate me too." This is when someone projects their own negative feelings like self-directed hatred onto other people, thinking that everyone else feels the same way.

3.3. Technique of Collecting Data

Data collection will be carried out through on poetry anthology book. The data will be in the form of screenshots of the posts. To collect data, the author will implement several steps in this research:

1. Reading and re-reading the book.

2. Highlight and take notes on all selected poem lines 160 pages of the poetry anthology Being Unhappy Is a Choice by Adi K that are relevant to and reflect Freud's psychoanalytic aspects, to be used as data in this research.

3. Identifying and categorized data

4. Reduce and refuse the data.

3.4. Technique of Analyzing Data

In analyzing the data, the researcher has followed several steps:

1. After collecting the data, the researcher compiles it into one.

2. With the categories within, the researcher classifies the evidences of anxiety and defense mechanism into a variety of types.

3. Analyzes and examines the evidences into the discussion, and

4. Draw a conclusion towards the character based on the findings and discussion.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of anxiety experienced by the character in the poetry anthology Being Unhappy Is a Choice by Adi K, along with the strategies they overcome to cope with them. The analysis shows that the character experiences three kinds of anxiety, worry about losing control (neurotic anxiety), fear of real-world dangers (realistic anxiety), and inner conflict about right and wrong (moral anxiety). In response to these anxieties, the characters employed several psychological defense mechanisms, including repression, denial, projection, displacement, rationalization, reaction formation, sublimation, fixation, regression, and introjection. The details of these findings are presented as follows:

4.1. The anxiety factors contribute significantly to the psychological problems experienced by the character.

4.1.1 Reality Anxiety

Table 4.1: Reality Anxiety

No	Citation Data
1	*People do not really care about you. They only care about themselves.* *So don't think that your tears, your misery, and your unhappiness will attract sympathy from others.* *They only attract fake attention* (Page 59).

Based on the data, this can be categorized as reality anxiety because these lines reflect a defensive worldview shaped by distrust of others, where the speaker anticipates emotional harm or disappointment from social interaction. The belief that "people don't really care" and that emotional vulnerability only creates false concerns that indicate a fear of being hurt, rejected, or manipulated by others, all of which are based on interpersonal risks present in the world today. which are based on interpersonal risks present in the world today. According to Freud, true dangers or words spoken in the outside world can make people anxious. As a result, the speaker's viewpoint appears to be a coping strategy based on past experiences of emotional abandonment, neglect, or disclosure. "If I open up, I will only get false concerns, not real support." This is not a sign of conflict. a sign of internal discord or conflict.

4.1.2. Neurotic Anxiety

Table 4.2: Neurotic Anxiety

No	Citation Data
1	*Every day, I am having a quiet, almost silent, conversation…* *… with myself* (Page 10).

Based on the data, this can be categorized as neurotic anxiety because these lines reflect internal conflict and psychological tension, the kind that isn't triggered by the external world or moral values, but by something deeper and unconscious within the self. That "quiet, almost silent conversation" the speaker is having with themselves feels like a sign of overthinking maybe even self-doubt or some kind of inner unease. It is like there's something bothering them deep down, but they are not ready or maybe not able to say it out loud. According to Freud, this kind of anxiety, called neurotic anxiety, shows up when someone feels like they might lose control of their emotions or impulses, even if nothing's

actually wrong on the outside.

4.1.3. Moral Anxiety

Table 4.3: Moral Anxiety

No	Citation Data
1	*I once rejected everything.* *Rejected help, rejected attention, rejected love.* *I even rejected happiness* (Page 12).

Based on the data, this can be categorized as moral anxiety. The speaker sounds like they are struggling with a severe inner conflict, something that is written off as guilt, shame, or feeling like they have violated their own personal code. They admit to rejecting love, support, even happiness, things that most people crave. This kind of sabotage suggests that they may feel worthless, as if they are punishing themselves. Freud said that moral anxiety occurs when a person feels torn between what they want and what they think they should do. This is usually caused by their own values or society's expectations of them. In this case, it seems that the speaker's guilt or past experiences are so strong that they cannot allow themselves to feel good things. It's not just sadness, it's a deep conviction that they are unworthy of the promise, and that's what causes this moral anxiety.

4.2. The defense mechanism that affects characters with underlying anxiety issues.

4.2.1. Rationalization

Table 4.4: Rationalization

No	Citation Data
1	*I am very picky.* *But I wonder why I always make wrong choices.* *Well, I guess the wrong choice could be the right one* *in different situations* (Pages 43).

Based on the data, this can be categorized as rationalization. The speaker is trying to make sense of their mistakes by giving them a logical twist, even if deep down, those reasons might not be the real truth. There is a contradiction right away, they admit to being "picky," yet still end up choosing the wrong things. Instead of sitting with the frustration or guilt that might come from that, they soften the blow by telling themselves, "Maybe the wrong choice is just the right one in a different situation." It is a way of

making peace with their decisions, even if they did not turn out well. This kind of thinking helps them avoid feeling like failures or underestimating their self-worth. It's not about-facing harsh realities, but rather about finding comfort in more subtle explanations.

4.2.2. Reaction-Formation

Table 4.5: Reaction-Formation

No	Citation Data
1	*The older I am, the less I give a damn about anything less than an actual problem* (Pages 72).

Based on the data, this can be categorized as reaction- formation. These statements explain how someone could say the opposite of what they really feel to hide it. They do this to keep from feeling uncomfortable, visible or emotionally weak. In this case, the speaker is displaying a strong and indifferent attitude ("I don't care"), which could be a way to hide hidden sensitivity, emotional exhaustion, or overthinking the past. Instead of openly showing worry or care about minor things, which might feel emotionally unsafe or exhausting the speaker asserts emotional detachment as a protective stance.

4.2.3. Sublimation

Table 4.6: Sublimation

No	Citation Data
1	*You cannot control the world, but you can control yourself* (Pages 48).

Based on the data, this can be categorized as sublimation because these lines demonstrate a defense mechanism where a person channels potentially overwhelming emotions, impulses, or frustrations into productive or self-regulated behavior. By acknowledging that the external world is beyond their control, the speaker turns their attention inward, encouraging self-improvement and personal growth. Instead of dwelling on anger, fear, or helplessness, the speaker chooses the intention to convey those emotions as empowering, responding with self-control and purpose. It is about releasing emotional energy that can cause anxiety or frustration and using it to release constructive and inspiring thoughts.

4.2.4. Introjection

Table 4.7: Introjection

No	Citation Data
1	*Don't blame yourself if the people around you are*

	unhappy. *Don't blame yourself if you can't make everyone* *happy* (Pages 40).

Based on the data, this can be categorized as introjection because these lines demonstrate a defense mechanism where the speaker had internalized the belief that they are responsible for everyone's happiness. The poem now pushes back against that belief, attempting to free the self from false responsibility and self-blame. In this moment, the speaker is learning to let go of a harmful belief, they are beginning to realize that the guilt they've been carrying doesn't actually belong to them. The simple message, "do not blame yourself," feels like a moment of clarity, a gentle reminder they have needed for a long time. It suggests that they have spent a lot of their life thinking it was their job to keep everyone happy, even at their own expense.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This study applies Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyse how anxiety and defence mechanisms are depicted in Adi K.'s poetry anthology Being Unhappy Is a Choice. The findings reveal that the character experiences three types of anxiety; reality, neurotic, and moral anxiety. To cope, the character primarily employs four defence mechanisms: rationalization, sublimation, reaction formation, and introjection. Rationalization emerges as the most common strategy, allowing the character to justify pain or mistakes with seemingly logical reasons, while sublimation channels emotional distress into creative expression. Reaction formation masks genuine feelings with exaggerated displays of strength, and introjection reflects the internalization of others' values at the expense of self-identity. Overall, the poems illustrate the tension between the Id, Ego, and Superego, highlighting how the poetic voice negotiates inner conflict and suffering through layered psychological defences, making complex struggles both relatable and artistically meaningful.

5.2. Suggestions

1. For researchers, this study is expected to serve as a reference and could be developed with more data.
2. For educators and students, the findings expected t to serve as a helpful reference for readers experiencing anxiety and defence mechanism.
3. For future researchers are encouraged to explore defence mechanisms through different

literary texts and theoretical frameworks, as various mechanisms may be analysed in relation to anxiety.

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