

## **Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner***

**Bintang Alam Mahardhika\*, Dias Andris Susanto, Siti Nur'Aini**

*Postgraduate Program, Master of English Education, Universitas PGRI Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia*

**\*Corresponding Author**

Email: [skieslarc@gmail.com](mailto:skieslarc@gmail.com)

Received:  
17 June 2022

Revised:  
05 January 2023

Accepted:  
19 February 2023

Published:  
27 February 2023

### **Abstract**

*This study discusses the bereavement of Amir, the main character of *The Kite Runner*, and analyzes the defense mechanisms projected toward the bereavement. This study uses a psychological approach to identify and analyze Amir's bereavement and defense mechanisms. The qualitative descriptive nature of this study allows data to be presented in the form of texts or descriptions. Data were mined from the novel through the character's feelings, thoughts, and dialogues. This analysis shows that Amir experiences five stages of bereavement: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. To cope with the bereavements, he performs several defense mechanisms; displacement, rationalization, projection, repression, regression, undoing, and denial. This study is conducted upon the elements within the novel through a psychological perspective to better understand the story as well as to provide multi-dimension literature understanding.*

**Keywords:** *literature; psychoanalysis; defense mechanism; bereavement*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The Kite Runner* is a heartbreaking story of an Afghan boy who tries to seek redemption for the sin he has committed against his brother. It tells a bittersweet relationship between two boys who come from divergent social statuses, a servant and his master. Additionally, the difference in light of ethnicity between these boys contributes to their relationship rift, both culturally and politically. However, they have an intricate bond that leads the master to perpetual guilt toward his servant knowing that their relationship is way more profound and painful than the master can imagine. This portrayal of Afghan society is evidently stirring its readers' emotions.

There was a strange and vivid impression in reading *The Kite Runner* as if being warped and destined for Afghanistan. The researcher unveiled the curtain on the journey and discovered a sociocultural view of Afghan people that had never been imagined before. Furthermore, the characterization of Amir, the main character as well as the pivot of the story, as a sensitive person and sometimes inclined to be overthinking provides detailed information about what he feels, perceives, and sees. Just like reading a history book, this *New York*

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

*Times* bestseller (2012) portrays a vivid picture of the social life of the Afghan people during certain periods.

Hosseini's first novel is rich in inspiring values of life and it is worth exploring. It portrays the struggle of the minority in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it inspires people to be optimistic and grateful despite being treated unkindly. It also depicts a captivating story that illustrates a friendship between two brothers, a delicate relationship between a father and his son, man and his God, and man and his homeland, with modest yet mesmerizing narratives.

Despite the fiction, a reader can still experience the dramatic turbulence and relate to their own experience in real life. As stated by Greil and Sollor, cited by Larasati (2022), that literary is not only about what is explicated but also what is implicated and invented in whatever form. It is not only what the eyes can read but also what the feeling can sense, not only visible but also sensible. It is normal if the readers are immersed in the story although they are aware that it is merely fiction. However, each reader will have a different response to certain literature based on one's personal experiences (Rosenblatt, 1938). Because it is particularly created to play on our emotions, it will trigger responses based on the readers' problems and life experiences (Beattie, 2017). It is, therefore, not only the researcher who feels sorry about the son's suffering but also those who have losing-their-loved-ones-experience will likely relate to this emotion. That is why the researcher considered this field interesting and worth exploring from a psychological point of view.

The study was conducted as an attempt to provide an understanding of the psychological dimension through; (1) Amir's bereavement and (2) his defense mechanisms toward his bereavement. This study is considered necessary as there has none of any other study that, especially from a psychological perspective, has discussed bereavement as well as the defense mechanisms in the novel. This is also important to better understand the story and provide multi-dimensional literature understanding.

**Bereavement**

Bereavement is a condition in which a person has lately suffered the death of a close person which leads to emotional responses (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987, p. 7). Stroebe adds that the condition may lead the bereaved person to grieve and mourn. Grief itself is the reaction by which the bereaved person copes with the loss emotionally. Meanwhile, mourning is the way the bereaved person expresses his grief such as by crying, sobbing, or lamenting. However, Durkheim (1976) stated that mourning is not necessarily a natural feeling, instead, it is an obligation that prevailed in society. Whether it is a big or a small loss, everybody must have experienced bereavement.

While bereavement is generally related to death, it is also an actual or potential condition that an individual can experience when parting with something that previously existed, either partly or wholly, or a change in the individual's life that makes the person suffers the bereavement (Wilson, et al., 2017). It is, therefore, a psychological condition in which someone senses a feeling of missing something precious in his life that he cannot or takes a long time to deal with it. It happens because he cannot forget the memories and move

on to something new that can replace the qualities or values of the lost thing. Bereavement can take the form of material such as money, a phone, or a car, and immaterial such as love, relationship, and desire.

### ***Stages of grief towards bereavement***

Grief, an individual's response to bereavement, can go through stages such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014, p. 1)

#### ***Denial***

The first reaction of an individual who experiences bereavement is shocking, doubting, and denying the truth that the reality occurs in such a way, by saying "I don't believe it's true" or "It can't be happening". "Denial may look like disbelief" however it is "more symbolic than literal" (2014, p. 1). It means that it will likely to take form in thoughts or actions rather than verbal. For individual or family member that is diagnosed with a severe disease, the sufferer, for example, will look for information desperately.

#### ***Anger***

This stage is marked by the arising awareness of the reality of bereavement. The sufferer shows the increasing intensity of anger that is projected onto people around him/her, his/her own self, or God since it has no limit (2014, p. 3). Sometimes He/she shows aggressiveness, profanity, rejects medication, or accuses the doctor/nurse incompetent.

#### ***Bargaining***

The sufferer has managed to express his anger intensively; therefore he will proceed to the stage of bargaining. "Guilt is often bargaining's companion" (2014, p. 5). The sufferer begs for God's mercy to make amendments to the sin or mistake he/she has made. This response is often expressed as "If it can be undone, I will be more religious". If it happens to the family member, the response is likely "I'm willing to replace my child".

#### ***Depression***

In this stage, the sufferer often shows a withdrawal attitude, sometimes he becomes extremely obedient, silent, desperate, feeling worthless, contemplating suicide, and so on. The physical reactions that often show are losing appetite, insomniac, and losing desire.

#### ***Acceptance***

This stage is where the sufferer is likely to put him/herself together. The thought of bereavement is gradually decreasing. The sufferer has accepted reality. The sufferer starts to move on with the new object and forget about the bereavement. This stage is likely to be expressed as "I have lost my money but I think I will earn it more" or "I will find someone better than him/her".

If the sufferer can go through this stage and accept it with peace of mind, he will be able to overcome his bereavement. But if he cannot make it to this stage, it will affect his ability to overcome the oncoming bereavement.

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

**Defense Mechanism**

Every person must have experienced an unpleasant event in this life. This unpleasant experience comes to exist because sometimes the reality does not meet their expectations. In accordance with the psychological process, every person has a way to mentally cope with it so that the pain will subside (Cramer, 1987). One of the reasons why a person projects defense mechanisms is to mentally cope with bereavement.

Freud (1894), stated that if a person cannot satisfy his need, he will defend himself. The act of defense here refers to psychological defense, which he called the Defense Mechanism. It is a cognitive operation to avoid an individual from receiving "disruptive effects of excessive anxiety" (Cramer, 1987). It enhances and improves the ego structure in a favorable way (Schafer, 1968). It also protects the person from external threats or impulses which are triggered by the anxiety.

Freud described in Vaillant (1992), that defense mechanisms can be projected in several forms. They are believed to be adaptive in some situations regarding to the level of discomfort and the person's nature.

**Repression**

This is the most basic defense mechanism, and it involves pushing thoughts, feelings, or memories into the unconscious mind to avoid dealing with them consciously. When someone has gone through a very traumatic experience that is too difficult for them to think about, their mind puts it away and doesn't let them remember it.

**Denial**

It involves refusing to accept the reality of a situation, especially when it is too threatening or anxiety-provoking, even when there is clear evidence to the contrary. When someone refuses to accept that difficult reality, like an addiction or a personal problem, they enable themselves to minimize its existence or blame others for it. This allows them to avoid the uncomfortable truth and continue the harmful behavior.

**Rationalization**

Rationalization involves coming up with a socially acceptable explanation for an otherwise unacceptable behaviour, so as to justify or excuse it. It is particularly when someone makes up logical reasons for their behavior or events that are uncomfortable or threatening to them. For instance, someone in debt might say they "deserve" to buy nice things or that they will pay off the debt later. This helps them avoid guilt or shame. However, it can prevent them from taking responsibility and making positive changes.

### **Displacement**

It involves directing one's unacceptable feelings or impulses towards a less threatening target. For instance, if someone is frustrated with their boss, they might go home and yell at their family instead of confronting the boss directly. Displacement can harm personal relationships and lead to feelings of guilt.

### **Regression**

Regression involves reverting to a childlike state, in which one feels more secure and protected, in response to stressful situations. For instance, an adult might throw temper tantrums, whine, or seek attention in a childlike way. Regression can provide comfort in familiar behaviors.

### **Undoing**

Undoing involves engaging in a behavior or action that is intended to "undo" or "make up for" a previous action or behavior that is seen as unacceptable or immoral. This can involve acts of kindness or generosity, or performing some ritual or symbolic act to try to make amend for a past wrong (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 1923).

## **METHOD**

This research was designed to gather the data which were in form of words, phrases, sentences, statements, and dialogues. Therefore, qualitative approach was employed in attempt to conduct the analysis comprehensively. Besides, qualitative research is a suitable method to describe and analyze phenomena, event, social activity, behavior, perception, individual or communal thoughts (Sukmadinata, 2009). This design is a handful to describe and analyze the data because in qualitative research the focus is on analyzing the texts or words rather than statistics.

Moleong (2004) mentions that data collection in qualitative research requires three main methods and one of them is documentation. Documentation can be called content analysis because data is collected from the contents of the literature. This method was best applied in this analysis because the data of this analysis are from literature and in textual forms.

In analyzing the protagonist's bereavement and defense mechanism, this study used the psychological approach. It focused on discussing the character's psychological changes towards events that occur in his life. Every aspect pertinent to the psychological characterization of the main character was analyzed and scrutinized based on the relevant theories. In this matter, Kübler-Ross's *Stages of Loss* (2014) and Stroebe's *Bereavement and Health* (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987) were referred to identify and classify the psychological phenomena into more specific aspects which were bereavement. Meanwhile, Freud's *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense* (1894) was referred to identify and classify the defense mechanisms projected by the main character. The researcher used the documentation technique of literature to collect the data.

The data mostly were taken from the main character's perspectives, dialogues, feelings, and behaviors. The subject of the research was the main character himself, Amir. He was the figure of interest in this analysis who

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

delivered the story from his perspective. On the other hand, his sense of bereavement and kinds of defense mechanisms projected to deal with the feeling were the object of the research.

The analysis was conducted in several phases. Following the steps based on Chamamah-Soeratno's theory (1994), the researcher carefully and repeatedly read the novel. Afterward, some notes were made to determine the variables, including the subject and the object of this research. Secondly, the researcher identified the variables and left marks on the sheets on which the variables were found. Thirdly, the researcher conducted library research. This research used a qualitative descriptive approach. The data were served in form of words, phrases, and sentences followed by a descriptive explanation.

The researcher conducted content analysis and descriptive analysis after the data collection. By conducting the content analysis, the researcher attempted to focus on searching the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences from the data pool. Afterward, the researcher conducted descriptive analysis by describing the data as they were followed by supporting theories in order to induce clarity and became more fathomable by the reader.

The analysis was validated by rereading the novel to combine the data finding and trailed by note taking. The novel was read repeatedly especially on the scenes showing the indentifiable bereavement symptoms and defense mechanisms. Then, the researcher did the double check to make sure whether the data finding answered the research questions or otherwise. The results of this research were discussed and consulted by the researcher under the guidance from the advisor.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Character development is one of the prominent elements in this novel. The reader will behold the journey of the protagonist's life from childhood to adulthood. It is an inseparable element in understanding the story. From the very beginning, the protagonist's character development came across the researcher's thoughts. Numerous factors influence the character's document and one of which is bereavement. To better understand, the table below is provided to identify the characters.

Table 1. The Kite Runner characters list

| Name of Character | Type of Character                       | Descriptions   |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Amir              | The main character, the Protagonist     | The narrator of the story. The whole story is told from his point of view.                                       |
| Hassan            | The secondary character                 | The son of Amir's servant. Later in the story is known as Amir's half-brother. The key to Amir's inner conflict. |
| Assef             | The secondary character, the Antagonist | Amir's opposition force. The key to Amir's conflicts.  |

---

|            |                          |   |
|------------|--------------------------|---|
| Baba       | The Supporting character | Amir's father. Constructing Amir's psychological characterization development.                    |
| Ali        | The supporting character | Hassan's father. Baba's servant.  |
| Sohrab     | The supporting character | Hassan's son as well as Amir's nephew. The key to Amir's resolution.                              |
| Rahim Khan | The supporting character | Baba and Amir's friend. Amir's salvation. Influencing Amir's psychological character development. |

---

As the protagonist in the story, Amir is the most described character, both physically and mentally. However, since Amir is the narrator of the story, the description is told from his perspective. It is called direct characterization or, in another way, readers' information is restricted by Amir's point of view (Meyer, 2011).

The story takes place in Afghanistan and the United States between the 1960s and early 2000s. That long-time concatenation explains the protagonist's character development from childhood to adulthood. The setting of time is divided into three phases: the protagonist's childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Analysis was undertaken through Amir's dialogue, behavior, and thoughts and feelings divided by Amir's ages (young Amir, adolescent Amir, and grown-up Amir).

### ***Young Amir's characterization***

Amir is an intelligent kid who is profoundly interested in books and literature. He is always curious about something new and would not hesitate to ask the adults if he can't come to understand a thing. Young Amir is a reflection of the kids that experience the crisis of their parents' affection, support, and acknowledgment. They grow between the lines; being an idealist and being obedient. Even though they are aware that they cannot be both at the same time, they hope their parents would understand them.

### ***Adolescent Amir's characterization***

Adolescent Amir's period takes place in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and America between 1981 and 1989. He is eighteen when he and his father escape Afghanistan. Even though time has passed, there is something adhered in Amir; his car sickness.

At this stage of life, Amir experiences the change of attitude. His nature becomes calmer and steadier than his previous period. His father has begun to acknowledge Amir's desire. He lets Amir decides to be whatever he wants. The setting of place here also plays an important role in Amir's character development. Man becoming a writer is considered a disgrace in Afghanistan.

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

But in America, his father supports Amir's passion in literature so that he can achieve his dream. It also influences Amir's characterization because, previously, his father doubts that Amir can make a living by becoming a writer. But Amir insists that he will become a successful writer. He is finally able to stand up for himself.

***Grown-up Amir's characterization***

Grown-up Amir's period takes place in America and Afghanistan in 2001. 38 years old Amir is described as a promising writer. Besides, he has found his comfortable life in America. The condition makes him indecisive when Khan asks him to find Sohrab in Kabul. He does not want to risk himself as he proposes to pay someone to do the work. But, then, he knows that it is not about the money. "There is a way to be good again," as Khan says. Amir understands that Khan knows everything that has happened between him and Hassan. But it is not enough to make him move. This shows that in the early phase of his grown-up period he still has not become selfless.

***Amir's bereavement***

Amir experiences several bereavements in his life that, either physically or mentally, give impacts to the changes of his personality, perception, and behavior. They also have varied in terms of form. There are bereavement for the death of family and bereavement for the loss of friendship.

***Amir's bereavement of losing his father***

Amir experiences several stages of bereavement following the loss of his father, Baba. Here are some of the stages:

***Denial***

When General Taheri, Amir's father in offers his condolences, Amir's immediate physical response indicates that he is struggling to accept the reality of his father's death. The lump in his throat and tears in his eyes show that he is feeling overwhelmed with emotion, but he still tries to deny what has happened by attempting to leave the room.

"Nay thank you, General Sahib. I'm ..." A lump shot up in my throat and my eyes teared over. I bolted out of the room. (p.160).

This response is common in the denial stage of bereavement, in which a person may struggle to accept the reality of the loss and may try to avoid thinking or talking about it. Amir's immediate physical reaction suggests that he is trying to push away the reality of his father's death and avoid facing the pain and grief that it brings.

Amir is not yet ready to confront the emotional impact of his father's death. By bolting out of the room, he is avoiding the need to confront the reality of his loss, which is a common symptom of the denial stage of bereavement.

***Anger***

Amir is frustrated with the medical system he must navigate to receive medical treatment for his father illness. He takes matters into his own hands by raising hell and bargaining for a shorter waiting period.

I raised hell and bargained the three weeks down to one for the CAT scan, two to see the doctor. (p.155).

This anger is likely a manifestation of his deeper feelings of loss and helplessness in the face of his father's death. By focusing on a tangible problem that he can solve, such as reducing the waiting time for his medical treatment, Amir may be trying to regain a sense of control in his life

"I almost screamed with frustration." (p.155).

Baba is refusing to take his medication prescribed by a Russian doctor, and Amir is frustrated with his father's stubbornness. Amir's anger stems from his concern for his father's well-being and his desire to help him, but Baba's refusal to listen to him leaves Amir feeling helpless and frustrated. This situation highlights how anger is a common emotion in the bereavement process, as individuals may feel angry at the situation or circumstances that led to their loss, or even at loved ones who they feel are not doing enough to help or cope.

### ***Bargaining***

He attempts to negotiate with a higher power to alleviate his pain and provide comfort during his grief by reciting Koran. Amir is bargaining with God, hoping that his prayers will be heard and his father will recover.

I recited half-forgotten verses from the Koran – verses the mullah had made us commit to memory in Kabul – and asked for kindness from a God I wasn't sure existed." (p.154).

The fact that Amir recites half-forgotten verses shows how desperate he is to find some solace in his religion during this difficult time. It also highlights his struggle with his faith and the uncertainty he feels about his religious beliefs. By bargaining with God, Amir is trying to regain a sense of control over the situation, hoping that his actions will have an effect on the outcome. This is a common characteristic of the bargaining stage of grief, as individuals attempt to make deals with a higher power or fate in order to alter the course of events.

### ***Depression***

Amir expresses frustration and perhaps even hopelessness at his inability to convince his father to continue treatment. This suggests that he may be feeling helpless and overwhelmed by the situation.

"But Baba—" (p.156).

Amir is not only concerned about his father's health, but also struggling with his own emotions and perhaps feeling abandoned or neglected.

"What about me, Baba? What am I supposed to do?" I said my eyes welling up. (p.156).

The fact that his eyes are "welling up" suggests that he is deeply sad and on the verge of tears. These passages show that Amir is going through a difficult time and is struggling to cope with his father's illness and refusal to continue treatment.

### **How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

"I felt a wetness on my knees." (p.159).

Amir feels a wetness on his knees and weeps in the hallway, showing his intense feelings of sadness and sorrow in the aftermath of his father's death.

"I wept in the hallway, by the viewing box where, the night before, I'd seen the killer's face." (p.160).

The fact that he's weeping alone suggests a sense of isolation, which is common in the depression stage.

"I wanted to find comfort in her arms." (p.160).

He seeks comfort in the arms of someone else, also speaks to his feelings of emotional pain and longing for support.

"Dutifully, I shook their hands. Many of them I barely knew. I smiled politely, thanked them for their wishes, listened to whatever they had to say about Baba." (p.174).

Amir shakes the hands of mourners and listens to them talk about his father, suggests that he is going through the motions of social etiquette without feeling any real connection to the people around him. This detachment is a common symptom of depression.

"I watched them toss the first shovelful of dirt into the grave. Then I left. Walked to the other side of the cemetery. Sat in the shade of a red maple." (p.175).

Amir watches the burial from a distance and then sits alone in the shade, further emphasizes his feelings of isolation and detachment from the world around him. These actions also suggest a withdrawal from social interactions and a retreat into his own thoughts and emotions, which are common coping mechanisms during the depression stage of bereavement.

### **Acceptance**

Amir is moving towards acceptance of his father's impending death.

"I thought of all the empty spaces Baba would leave behind when he was gone, and I made myself think of something else. He wasn't gone. Not yet. And this was a day for good thoughts." (p.162).

Although he acknowledges the emptiness that will be left behind after his father's passing, he consciously tries to shift his focus to positive thoughts.

"I thought of the old story of Baba wrestling a black bear in Baluchistan. Baba had wrestled bears his whole life. Losing his young wife. Raising a son by himself. Leaving his beloved homeland, his *watan*. Poverty. Indignity. In the end, a bear had come that he couldn't best. But even then, he had lost on his own terms." (p.174).

Amir recalls an old story of Baba wrestling a black bear in Baluchistan, which is a metaphor for the struggles Baba faced throughout his life. Amir acknowledges that Baba had to overcome many obstacles in his life.

Amir is accepting his father's death by focusing on his father's strengths and accomplishments. This helps Amir find comfort in his father's legacy and come to terms with the loss.

“Listening to them, I realized how much of who I was, what I was, had been defined by Baba and the marks he had left on people’s lives. My whole life, I had been ‘Baba’s son.’ Now he was gone. Baba couldn’t show me the way anymore; I’d have to find it on my own.” (p.174).

“I’m going to miss him.” (p.176).

Amir has accepted his father's death and is ready to move forward with his life. This is a major change from the earlier stages of anger, bargaining, and depression that he experienced. By acknowledging his feelings of loss, Amir is showing a willingness to face his grief and find comfort in the memories of his father. It also highlights the positive aspects of their relationship and the impact that his father had on his life.

Those passages show that Amir has made significant progress in his journey of bereavement and has reached a stage of acceptance, which is crucial for healing.

### ***Amir’s bereavement after Hassan’s death***

Amir experiences significant grief and bereavement following the death of Hassan. He struggles with intense feelings of guilt, remorse, and shame over his past actions, which contributed to Hassan's tragic fate.

### ***Denial***

When Amir visits Rahim Khan in Pakistan, Khan tells him about the condition of Kabul, Afghanistan, and Hassan’s family. He tells him that Hassan has died. The Taliban have shot Hassan and his wife to death for protecting Amir’s home. The Taliban accuse them for disobedience. Their son, Sohrab, is taken to an orphanage in Kabul.

The news strikes Amir so hard that he does not want to accept the truth. He denies reality. He is in the stage of denial. Amir says:

“”No,” “No. God, no.” “No.” “No.” But all I could manage was to whisper ‘No. No. No.’ over and over again.” (p.219).

Amir finds it difficult deal with the fact that Hassan is no longer alive.

“I didn’t want to understand that comment, but I did. I understood it all too well. (p.221).

I was still searching for the right words, and I was the writer in the room. Finally, I settled for this: “Maybe Baba was right.” (p.221).

I toyed with my wedding ring. “You’ve always thought too highly of me, Rahim Khan.”” (p.221).

Despite understanding what Rahim Khan means when he asks Amir to rescue Sohrab, Amir tries to avoid the reality of the situation by pretending not to understand or by deflecting the conversation. For example, Amir's comment about Baba is a way to distance himself from the situation and avoid taking on

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

the burden of responsibility. His comment about Rahim Khan's high opinion of him is another way of avoiding the reality of the situation and denying that he is capable of taking on such a task.

These responses suggest that Amir is not yet ready to face the full impact of Hassan's death and the challenges that lie ahead, which is a characteristic of the denial stage of bereavement

“Please, Rahim Khan—“ (p.222).

I began to see where he was going. But I didn't want to hear the rest of it. I had a good life in California ... (p.222).

“No he wasn't. He and Sanaubar had Hassan, didn't they?” (p.222).

“Yes they did!” (p.222).

Amir initially begs Rahim Khan not to continue speaking, indicating his reluctance to face the reality of the situation. As Rahim Khan continues to explain, Amir's resistance grows stronger, and he expresses a desire to return to his comfortable life in California. He even denies the truth of Rahim Khan's revelation, insisting that Hassan was not his half-brother.

**Anger**

Amir is clearly experiencing the anger stage of bereavement after hearing the truth about his half-brother Hassan and the deception that surrounded his identity.

““You bastard!” “You goddamn bastards!” “All of you bunch of lying goddamn bastards!” “...I've just found out my whole life is one big fucking lie!” (p.222-223).

And with that, I stormed out of the apartment. (p.223).

How could he have lied to me all those years? To Hassan?” (p.225).

His use of profanity and insults toward Rahim and Baba indicates a sense of betrayal and rage. Amir feels that his whole life has been a lie, and this realization is overwhelming and infuriating. His abrupt departure from the apartment also demonstrates his inability to fully process his emotions and the need to distance himself from the situation.

These passages show how Amir is struggling to cope with the revelation about his past and is reacting with intense anger, which is a common response in the anger stage of bereavement.

“And now, fifteen years after I'd buried him, I was learning that Baba had been a thief. And a thief of the worst kind, because the things he'd stolen had been sacred: from me the right to know I had brother, from Hassan his identity, and from Ali his honor. His *nang*. His *namoos*.” (p.225).

Amir describes the theft as being of the "worst kind" since it had caused irreparable harm to those involved. Amir's anger is fueled by the betrayal he feels from Baba, who he had always regarded as an honorable and respectable man. The fact that the theft had resulted in him being denied the knowledge of

having a brother and Hassan being deprived of his identity further aggravates Amir's feelings of anger.

### **Bargaining**

Amir is bargaining with himself, trying to negotiate with his sense of reality and avoid the pain of his loss. He is asking himself how he could have missed the signs that were there all along, trying to rationalize his previous behavior.

“How could I have been so blind? The signs had been there for me to see all along ... (p.224).

I wish I could fix my own life as easily.” (p.225).

Amir wishes that he could have a simple solution to his problems, like fixing his own life.

“But I kept seeing Baba on the night of my graduation, sitting in the Ford he'd just given me, smelling of beer and saying, *I wish Hassan had been with us today.*” (p.225).

Amir is haunted by his father's regret about Hassan, and he wishes he could change the past to make things right.

“I wished Rahim Khan hadn't called me. I wished he had let me live on my oblivion.” (p.226).

Amir wishes he could have remained ignorant of the truth about Hassan's identity and Baba's relationship. He is struggling to deal with the truth and trying to negotiate with his emotions.

This stage is evident as his attempts to rationalize his previous behavior and find a way to make sense of the situation. He is trying to find a way to make amends for his mistakes. These emotions are a reflection of the impact that the loss of his friendship with Hassan has had on him and his journey to the truth.

### **Depression**

Amir expresses feelings of fatigue and exhaustion, which are common symptoms of depression.

““What did they do with Sohrab?” I asked. I felt tired, drained.” (p.220).

He is emotionally drained and exhausted from the situation he is facing, and he is struggling to find a way to cope with the loss of his friend Hassan.

“I felt like a man sliding down a steep cliff, clutching at shrubs and tangles of brambles and coming up empty-handed. The room was swooping up and down, swaying side to side.” (p.222).

Amir feels like he is losing his grip on reality, and he is struggling to stay upright. These are common symptoms of depression, and they reflect Amir's emotional turmoil.

“Was it too far-fetched to imagine that things might have turned out differently if I hadn't? Maybe Baba would have brought them along to America.” (p.226).

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

Amir struggles with the idea that he is responsible for the situation he is in and that he could have done something to change the outcome. These feelings of helplessness and self-blame are common symptoms of depression.

**Acceptance**

Amir eventually reaches a point where he accepts the reality of Hassan's death and the mistakes he made in their relationship. He learns to forgive himself and find peace in his memories of Hassan.

“But how could I pack up and go back home when my actions may have cost Hassan a chance at those very same things? (p.226).

I remembered Baba saying that my problem was that someone had always done my fighting for me. I was thirty-eight now. ... I was older now, but maybe not yet too old to start doing my own fighting. (p.227).

I looked at the round face in the polaroid again ... My brother's face. Hassan had loved me once, loved me in a way that no one ever had or ever would again. He was gone now, but a little part of him lived on. (p.227).

Then I told him I was going to Kabul.” (p.227).

Amir has come to accept Hassan's death and has found a way to live with the guilt he felt over their relationship. He recognizes the impact that Hassan had on his life and acknowledges that a part of him still lives on. This shows that Amir has found a way to keep Hassan's memory alive and find peace in their relationship. By accepting what happened and finding a way to honor Hassan's memory, Amir has found a way to forgive himself and move forward. This is a sign of acceptance and a key to step over the grieving process.

**Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon the bereavement**

If Anna in *Anna and the King* projects her defense mechanisms to resist from the overwhelming tensions or anxieties (Nurtjahyo, 2016), Amir projects some defense mechanisms to reduce the pain caused by the bereavement. It is analyzed through Amir's dialogue, behavior, and thoughts and feelings.

**Repression**

Amir tries to repress his feelings of guilt and shame over betraying Hassan. He pushes these feelings into his subconscious, avoiding them so that he does not have to confront them.

“I opened my mouth, almost said something. Almost. The rest of my life might have turned out differently if I had. But I didn't. I just watched. Paralyzed.” (p.73).

Amir is repressing his guilt over not standing up for Hassan and protecting him from Assef's harassment. Amir admits that his life might have turned out differently if he had spoken up, indicating that his failure to act has had a significant impact on his life. By not speaking up, Amir is trying to repress the feelings of guilt and shame that he would experience if he acknowledged his failure to act, and this defense mechanism persists throughout the novel, influencing his actions and relationships.

### **Projection**

Amir projects his own feelings of guilt and shame onto others, particularly Hassan. He convinces himself that Hassan is a reminder of his own flaws and mistakes, which makes it easier for him to distance himself from his former friend.

““But he's not my friend!" I almost blurted. He's my servant!... He's not my friend, I almost said again. But he was.” (p.41).

Amir tries to distance himself from Hassan by emphasizing the differences in their social status and by claiming that Hassan is merely his servant. This is a way for Amir to avoid confronting the reality of his own complicity in Hassan's rape, and to shift blame onto Hassan. By projecting his own feelings of guilt and shame onto Hassan, Amir makes it easier for himself to rationalize his mistreatment to Hassan.

“I lifted Hassan's mattress and planted my new watch and a handful of Afghani bills under it.” (p.104).

Amir begins to project his own feelings of guilt onto Hassan, the victim of his own cowardice. This leads to Amir planting his birthday money and new watch under Hassan's mattress and accusing him of theft, essentially using Hassan as a scapegoat for his own mistakes. He takes out his anger and frustration on Hassan, who is innocent of any wrongdoing.

### **Displacement**

Amir displaces his feelings of anger and frustration towards his father and his guilt onto Hassan. He resents Hassan for being the object of his father's affection and for being a better person than he is.

““Like I said, how should I know what's wrong with him?” “Maybe he's sick. People get sick all the time, Ali. Now, am I going to freeze to death, or are you planning on lighting the stove today?”” (p.81).

Amir channels his failure on someone else to protect his ego. As the quotations show, Amir throws his anger at Ali for asking about Hassan. He reacts to Ali's question curtly and cynically.

““Hit me back!” “Get up! Hit me!” “Hit me back!” “Hit me back, goddamn you!” “You're a coward!” “Nothing but a goddamn coward!” I hurled the pomegranate at him. I hit him with another pomegranate, in the shoulder this time.” (p.92).

Amir is grappling with intense feelings of guilt and shame stemming from his earlier mistreatment of Hassan. However, rather than confront and process these emotions directly, he projects them onto Hassan through physical violence. By goading Hassan to hit him back and calling him a coward, Amir is attempting to transfer his own feelings of inadequacy and weakness onto Hassan.

### **Rationalization**

Amir rationalizes his betrayal of Hassan as a necessary act to win his father's love and approval. He tells himself that he had no other choice, and that Hassan would have done the same in his position.

### **How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

“I ran because I was a coward...Assef was right: nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba... (p.77)

I want you to stop harassing me. I want you to go away.” (p.88).

Amir ponders a reasonable explanation to make his behavior seem logical. He thinks that he has a reason to sacrifice Hassan. He agrees with Assef that nothing is free in this world. He considers Hassan as the price to win his father's affection. To comfort himself, he assures himself by saying:

“He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?” (p.77)

### ***Amir's defense mechanism towards dying Sohrab***

Amir initially employs denial as a defense mechanism. He avoids facing the reality of Sohrab's condition and the likelihood that he will not survive. Instead, he tries to convince himself that Sohrab will recover and even makes plans for his future with him.

Later, when the reality of Sohrab's condition becomes impossible to ignore, Amir starts to use displacement as a defense mechanism. He becomes angry and blames others, including himself, for Sohrab's suffering. This allows him to avoid facing the pain and grief of losing Sohrab and instead focuses his emotions on external factors.

### ***Denial***

Amir also denies the reality that he found Sohrab attempting suicide as at the same time he had great news for Sohrab. His wish to “tear myself from this place, from this reality” indicates that he is trying to distance himself from the situation and the emotions elicits. The use of imagery, such as wanting to “rise up like a cloud and float away,” (p.345) suggests that Amir wants to escape from the pain and suffering he is experiencing, and that he does not want to confront the harsh reality of what is happening.

Amir's desire to “melt into this humid summer night and dissolve somewhere far, over the hills” further emphasizes his desire to escape. This imagery implies that Amir wants to disappear and become a part of the natural world, which suggests that he is having difficulty accepting the reality of what is happening to Sohrab. He uses denial as a way to cope with the overwhelming emotions he experiences, which allows him to distance himself from the situation and avoid confronting the painful truth.

“I want to tear myself from this place, from this reality, rise up like a cloud and float away, melt into this humid summer night and dissolve somewhere far, over the hills.” (p.345)

### ***Displacement***

Amir loses Sohrab's trust because he infringes his promise to Sohrab. He promises Sohrab to not send him to the orphanage yet, unfortunately, he has to do so in order to grant Sohrab a visa. He performs displacement. He turns his pain into a scream as he thinks:

---

“I want to scream again, and I remember the last time I felt this way...”  
(p.345).

### **Repression**

Then he performs repression, he avoids looking at the bathtub which will remind him of Sohrab’s suicide attempt. He thinks that:

“when I wake up, maybe I will discover that everything I saw in the hotel bathroom was part of a dream...” (p.347).

He suppresses his urge to not look into the bathroom. Or is it simply an act of rationalization in which Amir makes himself believe that he just has a bad dream.

### **Rationalization**

Amir realizes that he has not prayed for over fifteen years and has forgotten the words, but he decides to recite the few words he still remembers.

“Then I remember I haven’t prayed for over fifteen years. I have long forgotten the words. But it doesn’t matter, I will utter those few words I still remember: La illaha il Allah, Muhammad u rasul ullah. There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. I see now that Baba was wrong, there is a God, there always had been.” (p.346).

This can be seen as an example of rationalization, a defense mechanism in which a person attempts to justify their behavior by creating logical reasons for it.

Amir rationalizes his lack of prayer and forgetfulness by acknowledging that he is still able to remember the basic creed of Islam, "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger." He justifies his behavior by saying that it doesn't matter that he hasn't prayed in a long time and has forgotten the words, because he can still recite this basic tenet.

This defense mechanism allows Amir to avoid confronting the deeper issues of his relationship with God and his own guilt and shame. By rationalizing his behavior, he can convince himself that he is not really at fault for neglecting his faith, and that he can still be a good Muslim by reciting the basic creed.

Amir also uses this moment to reflect on his relationship with his father and how he has come to see his father's mistakes. He realizes that his father was wrong in his beliefs and behaviors, and this realization may also serve as a way of rationalizing his own behavior and choices.

### **Regression**

He also performs regression in which Amir retreats to his childhood behavior, a grown-up man running a kite.

“...my mind flashed back to a winter day from long ago, Hassan and I sitting in the snow beneath a leafless sour cherry tree...asked him if he would chew dirt to prove his loyalty to me. Now I was the one under the

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

microscope, the one who had to prove my worthiness. I deserved this.” (p.355).

**Undoing**

Amir is trying to deal with the bereavement of Sohrab's trust by retreating to the past event. He remembers that he used to tease Hassan and question his loyalty. Now that he wants to retrieve Sohrab's trust, this time, it is Amir who has to prove his loyalty and worthiness.

“Do you want me to run that kite for you?” (p.371).

He performs the undoing defense mechanism. He tries to make amendments to an unacceptable action in his past with a second action. The action symbolizes the message of this story. Hosseini presents kite running as a purpose. It unifies Amir's conflict and resolution. Everything started and ended with the kite running. On the same page, Amir also vows his loyalty as he says “for you thousand times over.” It is Hassan's vow to Amir in the past.

**CONCLUSION**

Characters created by the author represent the personalities and qualities that exist in people in real life. The problems that arise related to psychological matters are also closely related to reality. Hence, by using the psychological framework, the researcher can identify and analyze the problems involving mental conflict. Amir's mental conflict related to the bereavement he experiences can be identified. The ways Amir responds to the bereavement have been disclosed as well.

The analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in 'The Kite Runner' reveals the complexity of the human psyche in response to trauma. Amir's defense mechanisms, such as repression, projection, and rationalization, offer a glimpse into his psychological coping mechanisms as he navigates through the guilt, shame, and grief of his past. These defense mechanisms not only serve as a means of self-preservation but also highlight the deeply ingrained societal norms and cultural expectations that shape his actions and beliefs.

The analysis underscores the importance of understanding the psychological processes involved in dealing with trauma and the ways in which defense mechanisms can both help and hinder individuals in their journey towards healing. Through this examination of Amir's character and his use of defense mechanisms, insight can be gained into one's own coping mechanisms, allowing for the recognition and overcoming of psychological barriers that may hinder emotional growth and development.

**AUTHOR STATEMENT**

**Author 1:** Conceptualization, collecting data, analyzing data, writing the manuscript, and compiling references. **Author 2:** Supervision, providing advice, and analyzing data. **Author 3:** Supervision, manuscript editing, and proofreading.

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors are greatly thankful to Master of English Education department, Universitas PGRI Semarang, for providing a sturdy boat and mentors to aid them along the way. Their support and guidance were essential in keeping the authors afloat and steering them towards the destination of completion.

## REFERENCES

- Beattie, H. J. (2017). Psychoanalysis and Literature. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 53:4, 614-620.
- Chamamah-Soeratno. (1994). *Penelitian Sastra: Tinjauan tentang Teori dan Metode Sebuah Pengantar dalam Teori Penelitian Sastra*. Yogyakarta: Masyarakat Poetika Indonesia, IKIP Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta.
- Chen, D. (2020). An Analysis of Kite's Symbolic Meaning in *The Kite Runner*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 238-242.
- Cramer, P. (1987). The Development of Defense Mechanisms. *Journal of Personality*, 55-4, 598-614.
- Durkheim, E. (1976). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Great Britain: Allen & Unwin.
- Freud, S. (1894). The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume III, 41-61.
- Freud, S. (1923). The Ego and the Id. In J. Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 19) (pp. 3-66). London: Hogarth Press.
- Hall, C. S. (1987). *Freudian Psychology and Western Literature*. Changsha: Hunan Art and Literature Press.
- Italie, H. (2012, October 10). 'Kite Runner' author to debut new novel next year. New York.
- Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2014). *On Grief & Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*. New York: Scribner - Simon and Schuster, Inc.
- Larasati, P., & Irmawati, N. D. (2022). A sociological approach of literature in Leo N. Tolstoy's short story *God Sees the Truth, But Waits*. *Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture* Vol. 7, No. 1, 137-147.
- Meyer, M. (2011). *Literature to Go*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Moloeng, L. J. (2004). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nurtjahyo, G. (2016). The Anna Leonowens' anxieties and ego defense mechanisms as found in Elizabeth Hand's *Anna and The King: a Freudian psychoanalytical approach*. *Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture* Vol. 1, No. 1, 17-27.

**How to Cite (APA Style):**

Mahardika, B. A., Susanto, D. A. & Nur'Aini, S. (2023). Analysis of Amir's defense mechanisms projected upon his bereavement in *The Kite Runner*. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 8 (1), 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30659/e.8.1.1-20>

Rosenblatt, M. L. (1938). *Literature as Exploration*. London: D. Appleton-Century company.

Schafer, R. (1968). *Aspects of internalization*. New York: International Universities Press.

Stroebe, W., & Stroebe, M. S. (1987). *Bereavement and health: The Psychological and Physical Consequences of Partner Loss*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sukmadinata, N. S. (2009). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.

Vaillant, G. E. (1992). Ego Mechanisms of Defense: A Guide for Clinicians and Researchers. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 149(2), 164-173.

Wilson, D., Dhanji, N., Playfair, R., Nayak, S., Puplampu, G., & Macleod, R. (2017). A scoping review of bereavement service outcomes. *Palliative and Supportive Care*, 15(2), 242-259.

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright © 2023 Mahardika, Susanto, and Nur'Aini. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.