

# Christa Wolf's Defence Mechanism of Conflict in *Unter den Linden*

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**Abstract.** Everyone has defense mechanisms that protect them from external threats. Sigmund Freud considered that the defense mechanism refers to a person's subconscious process that persists in anxiety. *Unter den Linden* is a short story about a woman who walks in her dream and was written in 1969 by Christa Wolf. She is a novelist with her work which discusses a lot of social critics. The social criticism presented in *Unter den Linden* is also about gender equality, she opposes *GDR* ideology which is very patriarchal and demeans women through *Unter den Linden*. These papers' goals are to analyze the bridge between literature and psychology in the field of conflict and defense mechanisms. This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. The source of conflict that will be analyzed in this paper is how defense mechanisms affect Christa Wolf's state of mind. Instead of doing bad things, she prefers to channel her emotions through work. This is called the sublimation self-defense mechanism. It is shown by how she wrote the story to criticize the *GDR* government who ruled East German. The result of the analysis shows that psychology and literature are two things that cannot be separated and both affect the writer's life and social life

**Keywords:** Defence Mechanism, Christa Wolf, Literature, Unter Den Linden, Sigmund Freud

## 1 Introduction

Sigmund Freud used the defense mechanism to explain that there is a way to show an unconscious process that persists in a person's anxiety by turning back to reality. It is to change people's mindsets and perspectives to think about a problem that occurs. Self-defense mechanisms are suitable for manipulating how we feel about something and are also part of problem-solving. Freud's Study "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" (1894) and several of his following works such as "The Aetiology of Hysteria", describe the ego's struggle against painful or unendurable ideas or effects. Sources of defense can be problem-solving skills, social support, and cultural beliefs. For example, people get rid of traumatic events or

experiences and can positively shape their minds, but it also could go wrong when people use this thinking for a long time.

Psychology and literature have a close relationship, and the concept of psychology affects many literary works and vice versa. Paraiso (in Çakırtaş [1]) states that "among all different schools of modern psychology, the most significant concerning literature seems to be psychoanalysis, as Freud's legacy respects a whole literary theory".

The transition to adulthood from youth can be associated with defense mechanisms. Sigmund Freud explained several defense mechanism systems, some of which are the development of another psychoanalytic analysis. Defense mechanisms are classified into either primitive or mature defenses (Winarto, 2008.) [2] A mature defense mechanism benefits each individual and is acceptable to society because they are harmless. In this case, the method's mature defense mechanism implies sublimation. Sigmund Freud explains that sublimation transforms repressed motives or emotions into more acceptable forms in social terms. On the other hand Freud (in Zulfaisya [3]) stated that person does not repress desires, so she releases them by providing acceptable forms and having social value. Freud also believed that sublimation was a sign of maturity and allows people to function normally in socially acceptable ways[4].

Unter den linden is one of Germany's author Christa Wolf's works. It tells us about a woman who walks through a Linden Tree in Berlin in a conscious dream, and it was written in 1969 and published in 1974. She makes short stories that cannot be filmed and retold. "Prose must be made so that it cannot be made into a film," says Christa Wolf in her essay 'Lesen und Schreiben' [5]. Even Katharina von Ankum agrees that making a synopsis of the short story Unter den Linden is difficult. It is also the reason why this short story has received so little attention. The attention of researchers and readers until now.

Based on the explanation above, it is necessary to conduct research that focuses on the socio-psychological aspect of Christa Wolf's phase and thoughts during the writing and what he wrote in the short story "Unter den Linden." The important of knowing what is Christa Wolf

## **2 Theoretical Approach and Research Method**

Literature has been so long related to psychology. Peter Brook says in his work Psychology and Storytelling (1951)[6] that the critic's job was to describe and evaluate literary objects implying the relevance for criticism of the model of scientific objectivity." Thrilling (in Çakırtaş [1]) claims that Sigmund Freud has affected literature; likewise, literature affected Freud. Some critics believe it is only possible to know or understand literature by looking at psychological aspects.

This study uses one defense mechanism to analyze Christa Wolf's criticism through her work Unter den Linden. This study uses a descriptive analysis method, which describes the data

through a summary of the contents of this story. This study aims to describe the defense mechanism of the characters in the short story, which is the author herself. The data collection technique begins with observation through reading and recording essential data related to research. The data analysis technique in this study used Sigmund Freud's literary psychology (self-defense mechanism). This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach.

Anna Freud also explains that a defense mechanism emerges to protect the ego from many anxieties. Without it, anxiety can be so harmful to the mental health condition of a human being. A defense mechanism is also a great strategy to hide or block out the anxiety. There are several defense mechanisms that Anna Freud described as the ego. However, the approach writers use here is sublimation. Sublimation is one defense mechanism that permits us to act on unacceptable impulses by transferring behaviors into an acceptable form. Anna Freud was concerned that sublimation was a sign of maturity that allowed people to function normally in a social situation.

### **3 Results and Discussion**

Bellak & Abrams (in Purwanto (2022) [7]) stated that humans have thoughts, feelings, impulses, and memories that are difficult to deal with. Individuals use defense mechanisms to deal with feelings of fear, anxiety, and insecurity. Without us realizing it, our psychological response activates the self-defense mechanism. Sigmund Freud often uses the term defense mechanism in psychoanalytic theory. For example, a defense mechanism is a person's mind trying to prevent inappropriate or unwanted things from entering our consciousness. This form can be referred to as self-deception.

Sigmund Freud believed that when a person tries to avoid his anxiety, defense mechanisms will help to protect the ego from the conflict created by the id, superego, and reality. Freud also argued that anxiety is an inner feeling that makes people uncomfortable. This anxiety will signal to the ego that something unpleasant has happened. So finally, the ego releases defense mechanisms to help reduce these feelings of anxiety (Waqas et al., 2015)[8]

Harmful and destructive things from bad emotions will have a detrimental impact on many parties. The negative and destructive of bad emotions will produce harmful effects. This way can harm ourselves and others around us. To divert the negative impact, it is necessary to do something else for distraction. Everyone can do positive activities as a diversion of emotions. This method, called sublimation, transfers negative energy into more positive activities. It happens subconsciously, which drives us to avoid destructive things.

Self-defense mechanisms, especially sublimation, are common in most individuals, including Christa Wolf, who lived during World War II and divided Germany. At that time, he wrote a short story entitled "Unter den Linden" which was also a conveyor of social criticism, especially about gender equality. This story was written in 1969 and published in 1974. It tells of a journey in a dream through the boulevard of East Berlin and the other magnificent surrounding buildings.

Freud's idea of sublimation originated when he read a story about a man who abused animals as a child and later became a surgeon. Freud believed that the same energy that once fueled child sadism eventually turned into positive and socially acceptable actions that benefit others. Sublimation is positive because the person who performs this mechanism chooses to express feelings or emotions in safe and appropriate activities. According to Freud (Feist & Feist, 2017)[9], sublimation is a defense mechanism acceptable to both individuals and social groups. This method works by diverting negative things and replacing them with something better and positive, usually culturally creative such as art, writing, music, painting, and literature. Many musicians create songs with good lyrics and tones to be famous in the community. It turned out that the song was made when he was in a heartache phase which was not okay.

*"I always love going to Unter den Linden. Alone is better, you know. "* [10]

These two sentences spoken by Christa Wolf also support why the woman in the story walks down the Linden tree. Then the dream in the short story *Unter den Linden* indicates an unexpected memory and encounter, such as an old friend, a deceased person, and the goldfish who accompanied her. The essential thing in this story is when she wakes up and realizes that it was all a dream that had happened in her life. It turned out that she was going through the thoughts and memories she had in his past. The stories of a broken friendship, the career of a young lecturer who adapts and bends at work, and the love story of a young girl who is unhappy because the lecturer she likes is married. The stories she can use as lessons in her life, let alone the contents, are full of reflections on life. Wolf also coined the phrase "I cannot stand love," which she came up with after seeing the stories in her dreams.

Initially lost in the dream, the woman was finally able to find herself again and free herself from the misfortune that had occurred. Christa Wolf makes things happen by internalizing the social imperative of social behavior. In the course of her dream, the woman realizes that the obligations and regulations that apply in Germany are against society's goals in pursuing human self-realization, so self-alienation is widening. The explanation of sublimation is so connected with the Christa Wolf,

*"There's a lot of work, since when do you cross the street on red in Central Europe, my lady? I'm the lady, and a traffic cop is now giving me a special reward, culminating in the statement that it doesn't matter whether the crossing is clear or not. Red is red, and that is a question of principle. It's red again now."* [10]

These sentences show how Christa Wolf rebels against communism. It also implies social criticism about how gender equality is lessened in this short story. However, the most apparent theme in this short story is about self-realization to acknowledge and realize the bitterest secrets in our lives that can be used as lessons in the future. Sublimation is a defense mechanism, an unconscious psychological defense that reduces anxiety resulting from unacceptable urges or harmful stimuli (Hockenbury, 2002) [11]. From this, it already appears that Christa Wolf uses sublimation as a defense mechanism to overcome the worries in her mind, where she releases suppressed emotions through her story. According to Freudian theory, defense mechanisms distort reality in several ways so that humans can better cope with situations and conditions. In the 1970s, the political situation in GDR became more of a concern for Christa Wolf, and his writing style shows how vocals he is for feminism.

## 4 Conclusion

As human beings, everyone has experienced anger, anxiety, disappointment, and sadness. Defense mechanisms will preserve these emotions so that individuals can avoid negative emotions and things they do not want to think about or deal with. The human subconscious, which is called the psychological response, will activate the defense mechanism. Christa Wolf, who is also an ordinary writer, relies on defense mechanisms in doing her work. The way he did it was by using the sublimation defense mechanism. Safe and acceptable to society. The nostalgia and introspection he shared in the story were his feelings while writing. Wolf uses an unnamed female character to walk in a dream and finally realizes that it was all his way of thinking. Instead of doing bad things, Wolf prefers to make short stories to channel his emotions. Unconsciously, her writings show that psychology and literature are two things that cannot be separated.

The result and discussion shows how Christa Wolf use sublimation theory to criticize the government in a acceptable ways toward the society, she doesn't depict how the situation in that moment exact, but the messages delivered smoothly even though readers have to reread the short story of *Unter den Linden*. Wolf also show her feminism style of writing in this story.

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