



## TRAUMA AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN THE FORMATION OF LETITIA HELLION'S VILLAINY IN *THE GIRL WHO COULD FLY*

<sup>1\*</sup>Fantasma Surya Azzura, <sup>2</sup>Thohiriyah

<sup>1,2</sup>Universitas Negeri Semarang

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[fantasmaazzura@students.unnes.ac.id](mailto:fantasmaazzura@students.unnes.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[thohiriyah@mail.unnes.ac.id](mailto:thohiriyah@mail.unnes.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

Accepted :

5 July 2026

Published :

20 July 2026

Corresponding Author:

Fantasma Surya Azzura

Email Corresponding :

[fantasmaazzura@students.unnes.ac.id](mailto:fantasmaazzura@students.unnes.ac.id)

This study aims to examine the formation of Letitia Hellion's character as a villain in Victoria Forester's *The Girl Who Could Fly* (2008). Positioning Letitia as a nuanced villain viewed through a psychological lens to uncover motivations behind her villainous actions and decisions. Grounded in a descriptive qualitative method with textual analysis focusing on dialogue, narration, and character interactions from the novel, integrated with Freudian psychoanalytic literary criticism. The findings reveal that trauma and defense mechanisms play a central role in explaining Letitia's villain formation, following a sequential psychological process: Sarah's death functions as the central traumatic event, giving rise to distorted perceptions and fears of repetition. These cumulative psychological impacts appear to evoke the defense mechanism of reaction formation, which justifies her villainous behavior internally and manifests externally through institutional oppression and obsessive control over individuals with superability. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these findings demonstrate a broader understanding of literary villains by illustrating villainy not as an expression of innate evil, but as the product of complex psychological processes. Offering insights into the psychological complexity of fictional villains while providing a conceptual lens for understanding how similarly complex patterns of behavior may emerge in real-world individuals.

**Keywords:** *Freudian psychoanalysis, Reaction Formation, Traumatic loss, Villain formation, Psychoanalytic literary criticism.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Core elements in literary narratives typically include the hero, the villain, and various supporting characters, each of whom contributes a distinct function to the development of the plot (Ashirova, 2024). The villain, in particular, serves a critical narrative role, creating conflict, challenging moral values, and driving the story's development. Without a villain, a narrative risks losing a significant source of tension and character growth, making the story feel less engaging and dynamic for the audience. In traditional storytelling, narratives tended to construct

villains as inherently cruel, offering no deeper explanation for their evil beyond the role they were assigned to play. From the scheming witches of fairy tales to the cartoonish villains of early children's fiction, literary villains tended to be defined by what they did, not by why they did it. They were often represented as symbols of danger, greed, betrayal, or destruction, with little psychological depth (Millán Scheiding, 2021; Barbour, 2020). In recent decades, however, narratives have begun to transform this traditional archetype by humanizing villain characters in ways that earlier storytelling rarely attempted (Ferrari & Soraci, 2022). Such humanization does not

seek to excuse a villain's actions, but rather to understand the psychological conditions that produced them. Eventually, a shift occurred in which villains were no longer designed merely to challenge the hero or reinforce moral lessons about good and evil (Piluso, 2023). Instead, they came to be crafted as psychologically complex figures with deeper motivations and emotional struggles.

From a psychoanalytic perspective trauma is often viewed as a significant element in the psychological profiling of villains within modern storytelling. Recent studies by Sami (2023) and Jorgensen (2021) argue that trauma contributes significantly to the construction of villain characters, shaping their personalities, motivations, and destructive actions within the story. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), for instance, the villain can be interpreted as not inherently evil; rather, his path toward violence appears to be influenced by the trauma of abandonment and constant societal rejection. A similar pattern appears in Karki and Paudel's (2025) analysis of Shakuni from *The Mahabharata*, which indicates that his vengeful scheming stems from the trauma of losing loved ones. Furthermore, Ernawati and Nabila (2025) demonstrate that Lotso's villainy in *Toy Story 3* develops not from innate malice but from unresolved trauma and a disorganized attachment style. Collectively, these studies suggest that trauma may function not merely as a backstory detail but as a structural force that actively drives a villain's motivations.

Previous studies have established trauma as an important factor in villain formation (Sami, 2023; Jorgensen, 2021; Ernawati & Nabila, 2025; Karki & Paudel, 2025), yet they tend to explain villainy through direct causal relationships between adverse experiences and destructive behavior. Consequently, limited attention has been given to the internal psychological processes through which trauma is transformed into observable villainous actions, particularly the interaction between traumatic experiences, internal psychological impacts, defense mechanisms, and behavioral manifestations (Davidson et al., 2004). To address this gap, this research examines villain formation through an integrated psychoanalytic framework that conceptualizes it as a sequential psychological process linking trauma, internal psychological impacts, defense mechanisms, and behavioral manifestations.

Within this framework, Freudian psychoanalysis is applied to examine the unconscious influences on characters in narrative. These influences are often rooted in trauma, an experience that overwhelms the mind's ability to process and manage distressing events effectively (Larik et al., 2025). Trauma may subsequently generate psychological impacts that manifest in a character's altered perception of self and reality, revealing how unresolved psychological wounds continue to shape a character's actions, relationships, and worldview throughout the narrative. Building upon this, Freud's (1961) structural model of the psyche proposes that the ego tries to balance inner stability with external reality by using a set of unconscious protective strategies known as defense mechanisms (Larik et al., 2025; Kadhim & Alsaadi, 2025; Tenrisanna, 2018). These mechanisms work by protecting and separating the mind from unpleasant events, actions, or thoughts (Thobaben, 2005). They fall into two categories, adaptive and maladaptive; however, this research focuses solely on the maladaptive mechanism of reaction formation, which is tied to Letitia's inner psychology. While this type of defense mechanism may offer temporary relief, its prolonged use is often destructive, as it may lead to strained relationships and hinder personal development (Maisyarah & Alamsyah, 2024). This is seen in the character's inability to engage meaningfully with her environment, a pattern that may later manifest through her external behavior. In this regard, psychoanalytic theory in literature can be used to uncover the hidden psychological aspects within a text, particularly the fragmentation of characters reflected through emotional conflict, inner struggle, and complex behavioral changes throughout the narrative (Iqbal et al., 2025; Fitri, 2018).

Applying this framework, this study investigates the villain formation of Letitia Hellion in *The Girl Who Could Fly* (2008). The novel provides an intriguing case for psychoanalytic analysis, as Letitia's subconscious motivations appear to gradually transform her internal struggles into observable acts of cruelty. The novel is set in a unique contemporary setting, where individuals with and without superability coexist. In this world, Letitia Hellion runs an organization called I.N.S.A.N.E., which aims to strip individuals

with superability of their powers. Although these actions appear villainous, they are driven by a conflicted struggle between her true thoughts and her outward actions. This struggle forces her to convince herself that the institutional goal she pursues is actually a noble mission to save these individuals from the danger of their own superability and to prevent harm to individuals without superability. This inner conflict appears to stem from childhood trauma. A tragic personal loss seems to leave her with deep guilt and a hidden hatred toward her own superability, as well as toward that of others. Through this internal struggle experienced by Letitia, this study offers a new perspective on the idea that villains are not merely one-dimensional figures deserving instant condemnation, but rather complex characters capable of eliciting reader empathy through the psychological and narrative techniques used to portray them (Hillebrandt, 2023). In doing so, the study aims to illustrate that the psychological processes shaping fictional villains can also provide insight into the complexities of human behavior in real life.

## **2. METHODS**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design based on textual analysis (Mustafa et al., 2023), integrated with psychoanalytic literary criticism, to examine the psychological depth of Letitia Hellion's villainy. As noted by Larik et al. (2025), psychoanalytic criticism provides a framework for revealing the unconscious motivations of literary characters by examining their behaviors, emotions, and conflicts. The analysis primarily draws on Sigmund Freud's framework of trauma and defense mechanisms. Trauma is understood as an overwhelming emotional experience that disrupts psychological stability and shapes subsequent perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, while defense mechanisms refer to the unconscious strategies employed by the psyche to manage the resulting anxiety. Together, these concepts provide the analytical framework for understanding Letitia's villain formation as a psychological response to internal struggles.

The primary data are drawn from Victoria Forester's novel *The Girl Who Could Fly* (2008), which provides the core textual units related to the villain's psychological

development, including dialogues, narrations, and character interactions. Secondary data include peer-reviewed journals and contemporary studies on trauma, grief, defense mechanisms, and character psychology. Data collection was conducted through repeated close readings of the novel to identify textual evidence relevant to the research objectives, particularly the psychological elements represented in Letitia's characterization that contribute to the formation of her villainous identity.

Data analysis was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, textual evidence was selected through close reading based on four inclusion criteria: (1) excerpts describing events or circumstances experienced by Letitia that could function as psychological stressors; (2) excerpts revealing her emotional or cognitive responses to these experiences; (3) excerpts depicting recurring behaviors, decisions, or actions attributable to Letitia; and (4) excerpts in which Letitia served as the primary subject or focal point rather than a peripheral character. Dialogues and narrations involving other characters were included only when they directly illuminated Letitia's internal state or psychological development, while setting descriptions and unrelated subplots were excluded. Data collection was concluded once sufficient textual evidence had been gathered to address the research objectives and support the four analytical categories.

In the second stage, initial coding was conducted for each selected excerpt according to its dominant psychological indicator. Excerpts were then grouped into four analytical categories derived from Freudian psychoanalytic theory: (1) traumatic source, the specific event or experience that triggers psychological distress; (2) internal psychological impact, the cognitive response to the trauma; (3) defense mechanism, an unconscious strategy for managing the anxiety caused by trauma; and (4) behavioral manifestation, a character's overt actions resulting from the defense mechanism. This categorization allowed for the systematic identification of patterns across the narrative. In the final stage, the relationships among these categories were interpreted, and the sequential process underlying Letitia's villain formation was reconstructed.

This study adopted Lincoln and Guba's criteria of trustworthiness, namely credibility,

dependability, and confirmability (Kyngäs et al., 2020). Credibility was maintained through prolonged engagement with the primary text, achieved through repeated close readings and continuous comparison of interpretations with textual evidence, ensuring that Freudian psychoanalytic claims remained grounded in the narrative context. Dependability was strengthened through periodic review by the research supervisor to verify the consistency of coding and category assignment, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and re-examination of the relevant textual evidence.

Finally, confirmability was strengthened by ensuring that analytical conclusions were derived from direct quotations and textual references rather than personal assumptions, so that the findings reflected both the narrative data and the psychoanalytic framework employed in this study. These steps were undertaken to ensure analytical rigor and interpretive consistency.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### ***External Source of Trauma***

Begins with psychological trauma that contributes to Letitia Hellion's transformation into a villain started with the external source of trauma: the loss of her younger sister, Sarah, with whom she shared a close and formative bond. Their relationship is depicted as Letitia recalls: "*Sarah was my younger sister... She couldn't fly, but she used to love watching me*" (Forester, 2008, p. 303). The sentence "Sarah was my younger sister" not only provides information about her family relationships but also may suggest that Sarah is an important part of Letitia's personal identity. Furthermore, their close bond is expressed through shared experience and quiet admiration, as in "*she used to love watching me.*" suggesting that Sarah accepted and admired Letitia's abilities. However, the phrase "used to" simultaneously frames this relationship as irretrievably belonging to the past, reinforcing the sense of absence that characterizes traumatic loss.

The traumatic experience began when Letitia decided to take Sarah flying using her abilities, under the condition that both of them had acted against parental authority: "*My parents told me not to, but Sarah and I didn't listen*" (Forester, 2008, p. 304). This statement appears to introduce an element of

disobedience that later becomes psychologically significant, as the event is intertwined not only with grief but also with personal responsibility and guilt. Another statement also seems to show that Letitia was unprepared and lacked the experience to carry Sarah while flying "*I hadn't ever carried anyone, and Sarah was heavier than I thought*" (Forester, 2008, p. 304). Following this, the outing turned fatal upon the arrival of an extreme storm. This moment is depicted through Letitia's fragmented first-person account: "*The rain was so heavy. And I was so high off the ground. Sarah started to slip and I grabbed her tightly. She was screaming. She was so scared-we both were. I tried to fly down as fast as I could, and I was holding her tightly. Really tightly.*" (Forester, 2008, p. 304). The short, repetitive sentences and accumulation of physical and emotional detail appear to reflect a memory encoded under extreme distress. The overlap of severe weather conditions, helplessness, and acute fear constitutes the conditions for traumatic memory formation. According to Brewin (2016), traumatic memories are often stored in fragmented forms, which may explain why Letitia's recollections appear disjointed.

The weight of traumatic experience was further intensified in the moment depicted when Letitia loses her grip on Sarah. "*She was gone in an instant. Gone. She just slipped away.*" *Dr. Hellion's hands clenched shut, empty* (Forester, 2008, p. 305). The passage is likely to reflect a moment of Sarah's sudden and irreversible loss. The statement "*She was gone in an instant*" in particular suggests how life can quickly change. The repetition of "Gone" and the fragmented sentence structure can be interpreted as Letitia's mind struggling to process what has happened, revealing her helplessness in the face of tragedy. Lastly, the image of "*hands clenched shut, empty*" is particularly significant. Clenched hands may be seen as an attempt to protect or retain someone, while their emptiness symbolizes failure to do so. This image may represent the moment in which Letitia's sense of competence and safety collapses, leaving behind unresolved grief and guilt that later shape her internal psychological processes, particularly responses toward individuals with superability through distorted perception and persistent fear of repetition.

### **Internal Psychological Impact Distorted Perception**

Distorted perception appears to be one of the internal psychological impacts that leads Letitia to perceive superability through a simplified, rigid binary framework, reflected in distinctions such as normality versus abnormality. This pattern is illustrated in the statement, *"This pivotal decision became a simple equation to live by: normal=good and abnormal=bad; ergo"* (Forester, 2008, p. 252). The phrase "a simple equation to live by" may be interpreted as suggesting that this belief has developed beyond a temporary emotional response into a guiding principle. The reduction of complex human differences into a simplified moral formula may indicate an increasing intolerance for ambiguity.

This rigid framework is reinforced when Letitia states, *"Flying is wrong. Abnormal. Humans can't fly,"* (Forester, 2008, p. 305). The three short declarative sentences are presented without qualification or explanation, creating the impression of unquestionable fact rather than personal opinion. Significantly, the progression from "wrong" to "abnormal" and finally to "Humans can't fly" demonstrates a movement from moral judgment to biological impossibility, suggesting that Letitia no longer regards flying merely as risky behavior but as a violation of what humans are naturally meant to be. Such absolutist language may reflect a distorted cognitive framework in which exceptions and alternative interpretations are no longer psychologically tolerable.

### **Distorted Perception**

This negative perception of superability is further reflected in the statements, *"Many of them are dangerous and most of them are being carefully studied."* (Forester, 2008, p. 83), *"Some of them said that they didn't want someone flying around them that it was dangerous and a threat to their safety."* (Forester, 2008, p. 86). Letitia refers to individuals with superability collectively as "many of them" or "someone flying around them," which may suggest an overgeneralization of her traumatic experience into a broader perception of threat. By invoking the views of unnamed others, she also appears to externalize and socially validate her fears, framing personal anxieties as objective social concerns.

### **Fear of Repetition**

Alongside this rigid perception of normality and abnormality, another internal psychological impact observed is fear of repetition. This is reflected in Letitia's repeated attempts to convince individuals with superability that their powers carry the potential to harm their loved ones, as seen in statements such as *"When you fly, people get hurt. Your flying causes pain, and it hurts everyone you love"* (Forester, 2008, p. 228), and *"Flying is a nasty habit. It hurts people. It hurts you"* (Forester, 2008, p. 233). This pattern extends further when Letitia directs similar concern toward her younger brother, stating: *"Then one day I realized that if Johnny didn't get help his specialness was going to hurt someone. Like Sarah had been hurt"* (Forester, 2008, p. 288). The persistent repetition of this attempt to convince others suggests that Letitia is seeking to avoid an overwhelming fear of experiencing devastating loss again.

The repetition of the phrase "It hurts" shifts attention from superability itself to its perceived consequences. Letitia appears to frame harm not as a possibility but as an inevitability through categorical expressions such as "people get hurt" and "everyone you love." The absence of uncertainty markers such as "may", "can", or "might" suggest that she experiences the connection between flying and suffering as an unquestionable truth rather than a potential risk, indicating that a singular tragedy has been generalized into a broader expectation.

This pattern becomes more explicit when Letitia extends the same concern to her younger brother, stating, "Then one day I realized that if Johnny didn't get help his specialness was going to hurt someone. Like Sarah had been hurt" (Forester, 2008, p. 288). The comparison "Like Sarah had been hurt" directly links her present fears to the original traumatic event, suggesting that Sarah's death continues to shape how she interprets manifestations of superability. Rather than being perceived as unique or accidental, the event appears to have become a model for anticipating future outcomes. From this perspective, Letitia's repeated warnings may be interpreted as attempts to prevent the repetition

**Vol 9, No 2 (2026): ESTEEM**

of an earlier trauma and to avoid another irreversible loss.

These psychological consequences, such as persistent cognitive distortions and anticipatory fears, appear to generate emotional conflict and anxiety, encouraging Letitia to adopt defense mechanisms to manage these distressing emotions.

**B. Defense Mechanism**  
**Internal Defense Mechanism**  
**Reaction-formation**

This section identifies the defense mechanism that develops through cumulative impact of trauma and acts as a temporary means of anxiety reduction. The prominent mechanism observed is reaction formation, a defense mechanism in which an individual expresses attitudes or behaviors that are opposite to the impulses or emotions they are attempting to suppress (Sijabat & Heriyati, 2025). This mechanism appears to happen repeatedly in Letitia's interactions with individuals possessing superability. Inwardly, Letitia seems to harbor a sense of disgust, fear, and threat toward them; however, outwardly, she persistently positions herself as their protector and rescuer.

This tendency is reflected in statements such as: *"Piper, I am here to help you. We are all here to help you and the rules we have created are for precisely that purpose. They ensure your safety, protection and growth"* (Forester, 2008, p. 132), and *"I will save you, Piper McCloud, if it's the last thing I do"* (Forester, 2008, p. 298). The repeated use of terms such as "help," "safety," "protection," "growth," and "save" suggests that Letitia consistently frames her actions within the language of care. Particularly significant is her characterization of institutional rules as mechanisms for "safety, protection and growth," which she appears to define as forms of support. Similarly, her claim that the M.O.L.D will 'help' Piper become 'normal' frames Letitia's treatment of individuals with superability as a device within her institution intended for improvement and recovery, beneficial to its recipient.

However, these claims stand in sharp contrast to Letitia's own admission that she experienced *"The Letitia Hellion who once upon a time had felt waves of panic, nausea,*

*and revulsion whenever she encountered anything abnormal or unusual, and who was a much, much better place with out such things"* (Forester, 2008, p. 252). This contradiction suggests that the discourse of care may function defensively, allowing Letitia to reinterpret her actions as benevolent interventions.

**External Behavioral Manifestations**  
**Institutional Oppression**

While reaction formation operates internally by framing Letitia's actions as protection, the influence of this defensive process becomes even more observable through institutional policies and authoritarian practices, ultimately shaping Letitia's actions and decisions as a villain. This can be seen in her institution's policies, which seek to dominate certain groups. First, the institution's objectives are described as *"a perfectly constructed, faultlessly operated facility with only one purpose to make everything and anything that passes through its doors normal"* (Forester, 2008, p. 181). The wording implies that normality is not merely preferred but treated as the only legitimate state of existence, positioning superability as a defect to be eliminated rather than a characteristic to be understood or accommodated. Another piece of evidence depicts the oppressive conditions within Letitia's institution as applied to a group of superability beings, as in *"This laboratory was nothing short of a torture chamber."* (Forester, 2008, p. 162) and the oppressive procedure captured in *"I have compiled a list of specimens that must be collected and terminated. Let's begin with specimen four-two-alpha"* (Forester, 2008, p. 168).

The language of "compiled", "collected," and "terminated" may function to normalize violence by embedding it within the discourse of efficiency, order, and institutional necessity as such terms replace personal identity with technical and bureaucratic terminology. Individuals are no longer addressed as people but are reclassified as objects of management and disposal. This transformation of individuals into categories and procedures may reflect the external manifestation of Letitia's internal defensive processes. By reducing superability to a problem requiring regulation and elimination, Letitia appears able to distance herself from

the emotional and moral implications of her actions, while preserving the belief that she is acting in the interests of protection and social order.

### **Control over Superabilities**

Authoritarian practices appear to be observable in the way Letitia exerts control over other characters' superability, manifesting in various forms of repeated confinement and restraint. In the description, "*A purple swan swam in a pool of bleach, an eight-armed monkey had all but two of his arms in a straightjacket, and a walking daffodil was leashed to a stake*" (Forester, 2008, pp. 162–163), each figure is represented through a different form of physical restriction. The "pool of bleach," "straightjacket," and "leashed to a stake" all function as mechanisms of containment that limit mobility and autonomy.

A similar pattern emerges in Letitia's command: "You will return to your room where you belong. None of you are going anywhere. Get back. Get back" (Forester, 2008, p. 297). The repeated imperative "Get back" and the declarative assertion "where you belong" establish a clear hierarchy between authority and obedience. The phrase "where you belong" is particularly significant, as it frames confinement not as punishment but as a natural and legitimate place for individuals with superabilities. This linguistic framing may serve to normalize restriction by presenting institutional control as an appropriate social order rather than coercion.

Letitia's control appears to become even more intrusive in the statement "*When I see you again, you will not only never remember the fact you flew, but you will never have the desire to do so again*" (Forester, 2008, p. 233). Unlike earlier examples that regulate movement or behavior, this intervention extends into memory and desire themselves. The paired expressions "never remember" and "never have the desire" suggest an attempt not merely to control actions but to reshape identity, cognition, and personal motivation.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

This chapter is written to answer the first and second research questions based on the data findings presented in the previous section. The discussion starts by focusing on how

psychological trauma contributes to the formation of Letitia Hellion's villainous behavior. It then continues to discuss how defense mechanisms shape Letitia Hellion's actions and decisions as a villain.

The findings of this study suggest that Sarah's death may be interpreted as the root cause of Letitia's psychological trauma, functioning by damaging Letitia's psychological foundation. This traumatic event can further be understood through three dimensions: attachment, catastrophe, and deprivation. The first dimension, attachment, refers to the close emotional bond between Letitia and Sarah. The depth of this bond is what appears to make Sarah's death so psychologically devastating. As Ratcliffe & Byrne (2022) note, the profound impact of such loss stems from the bond itself and extends beyond grief, suggesting that Letitia may have lost not simply a person but a part of her own sense of self. This observation resonates with Freud's notion of object loss, in which the lost person becomes psychologically integrated into the ego through processes of identification, rendering separation psychologically disruptive rather than merely emotionally painful (Jones, 2010). The trauma is further characterized by catastrophe (a sudden and psychologically unprepared loss) and deprivation (a permanent and irreparable loss). These two dimensions suggest that Letitia's loss goes far beyond grief in the conventional sense. This is in line with Lenferink et al.'s (2023) analysis that individuals who experience sudden and unnatural loss are at significantly greater risk of prolonged grief. According to their analysis, the abruptness of the event removes any possibility of psychological preparation, thereby deepening the psychological wound and foreclosing meaningful closure. Collectively, these three dimensions appear to transform the external loss into a concrete traumatic experience.

Moreover, because the main traumatic event occurred in relation to her flying ability, Letitia appears to interpret the tragedy as something she perceives herself as having contributed to. Consequently, superability appears to occupy a persistent place in Letitia's consciousness, becoming the focal point through which subsequent fears, anxieties, and defensive responses are organized. From a Freudian perspective, this perceived

**Vol 9, No 2 (2026): ESTEEM**

responsibility may strengthen superego pressure and intensify unconscious guilt (Hassert, 2023), causing the traumatic event to remain psychologically active rather than fully resolved (Ackerman, 2023). Similar patterns have been identified in previous psychoanalytic studies of literary villains. For instance, Boyuan (2024) argues that Lady Macbeth's perceived responsibility for Duncan's murder intensifies superego demands and ultimately contributes to her psychological breakdown. The present findings appear to confirm the role of guilt and superego pressure in shaping villainous psychology.

Building on the root cause of her trauma, Letitia subsequently experiences internal psychological impacts closely related to her superability. As Raz et al. (2024) explain, individuals who experience traumatic loss often become highly alert to situations that resemble the original trauma. These impacts are reflected in distorted perception and fear of repetition. These psychological responses are associated with destructive psychological consequences that affect Letitia's identity development, restructuring her perceptions, motivations, and behaviors throughout the narrative (Safitri & Djuharie, 2025; Putrayuda & Thohiriyah, 2024). They also shape her emotional stability and her interpretation of reality toward herself and others through persistent guilt, heightened fear, and maladaptive beliefs, potentially contributing to her villainous behavior.

First, Letitia appears to experience distorted perception of reality. This distortion likely develops as a response to the trauma of a tragic experience and may be interpreted as an appraisal of reality that resists correction through contradictory evidence, as it is shaped by unresolved grief. As Hamama-Raz and Shaked (2022) note, prolonged grief may impair cognitive flexibility, making it difficult for bereaved individuals to revise entrenched negative beliefs even when contradictory evidence is available. In this state, the mind seeks cognitive certainty as a defense mechanism, constructing a simplified framework of reality that prioritizes emotional survival over factual accuracy (Sari, 2013). In Letitia's case, she can be seen engaging in the moralization of differences, which refers to the tendency to interpret differences as indicators of morality. She comes to equate "normality" with safety and "abnormality" with danger.

This cognitive pattern may result in extreme categorizations of others, in which such concepts are perceived as absolute rather than nuanced. Over time, this distorted perception may develop into a false belief system as individuals struggle to recognize the complexities of their experiences and emotions (Gartner, 2018). Consequently, these categorizations may result in villainous behavior that harms individuals belonging to the "abnormality" group, which refers to individuals with superability.

Another internal psychological impact is fear of repetition, which refers to a condition in which Letitia develops anxiety that a similar tragic event may occur again, thereby reactivating memories of the painful experience she endured (Ahmad et al., 2024). However, this fear is not confined to herself. Letitia seems to redirect her anxiety about the possibility of future tragedies toward individuals with superability, whom she likely views as inherently dangerous. As a result, she appears to develop a generalized assumption that all forms of superability have the potential to cause suffering. To avoid this feared outcome, Letitia tends to repeatedly warn superpowered individuals that their abilities are likely to harm the people they love. This indicates that Letitia's interpersonal relationships are built on expectations of danger and suffering, suggesting that her fear operates not only on an intrapsychic level but also on a relational level, as it appears to influence the way she perceives and interacts with others (Kaskita & Heriyati, 2020). Therefore, fear of repetition functions not merely as a psychological consequence of trauma, but as a motivational force that initiates Letitia's transition from protective intentions to oppressive, villainous actions.

Having explored the external origins of Letitia's trauma and its internal psychological effects, this discussion now addresses the second research question concerning how defense mechanisms shape Letitia Hellion's actions and decisions as a villain. Similar to previous psychoanalytic studies of literary characters, which found that defense mechanisms emerge as responses to unwanted emotions and internal conflict (Azahra et al., 2022), Letitia appears to employ reaction formation to manage anxiety associated with superability. The findings indicate that reaction formation is the prominent defense mechanism

employed by Letitia, operating through a contradictory process in which the ego manages unacceptable impulses or affects by replacing them with their opposite expressions (Purnomo & Safithri, 2025). In Letitia's case, these unacceptable impulses appear to originate from her traumatic experience and manifest as feelings of fear and perceived threat toward all forms of superability. Openly acknowledging such emotions may expose vulnerability and thereby threaten the ego. As a result, reaction formation appears to transform these feelings into exaggerated expressions of protection, concern, and responsibility toward the very individuals who evoke her anxiety. However, the problem with this defense mechanism is that it appears to develop into a long-term belief system through which Letitia interprets and justifies her own actions. As a result, she consistently justifies her actions as necessary, regardless of the harm they may cause, thereby contributing to her villainous behavior. These actions may be seen further outwardly in the form of institutional oppression and controlling behavior, which may be regarded as a major source of conflict within the narrative.

Letitia seems to be using her leadership position to transform the institution from a place of protection into a means of structured, systemic aggression. Through formal authority, organizational policies, and institutional legitimacy, Letitia's oppressive actions can be justified as part of the performance of her duties. In this context, Letitia's actions may reflect institutional oppression, as such actions are carried out through formal institutional mechanisms rather than solely through individual acts of violence (Marazopoulos, 2025). Accordingly, institutional oppression can be interpreted as a way for Letitia to protect herself from the threats she associates with the existence of superability, by utilizing institutional authority to maintain dominance over the group. For Letitia, the group's extraordinary abilities are portrayed as potentially disruptive to stability, undermining her authority, and endangering the security she seeks to maintain. Thus, her domination over them is interpreted as a means of maintaining her sense of security, authority, and legitimacy. By operating through institutional legitimacy, these oppressive actions appear to represent the fulfillment of professional responsibility and organizational policy, thereby shifting

attention from Letitia's personal motives to larger institutional interests (Abdelwahab, 2022).

Control over superability may be seen through Letitia's tendency to become increasingly dependent on rules, procedures, routines, and order as sources of psychological stability (Becker & Sjöström, 2024). This need for control gradually intensifies and may develop into excessive or malicious control. Letitia's highly controlling and obsessive pursuit of order appears to be directed toward all individuals with superability within her institution. This tendency can be seen in an authoritarian mode of control characterized by obedience rather than cooperation (Meng, 2017). The restrictive measures seem to intensify further through forms of totalitarian control that extend beyond the regulation of physical behavior. This is illustrated through her assumption of the authority to determine the proper place of superpowered individuals within society (control over movement), to reshape how they understand themselves (control over memory), and to eliminate motivations that could generate resistance (control over desire) (Kargiotis, 2025). The repeated use of confinement, surveillance, and restriction demonstrates that control functions as Letitia's preferred defensive strategy. Rather than tolerating uncertainty, Letitia seems to move toward a villainous trajectory by adopting a strict, totalitarian approach to leadership, in which her decisions to strip others of their autonomy and memories serve as a direct external strategy to prevent any harmful repetition.

Based on these two external manifestations, the defense mechanism of reaction formation appears to operate unconsciously and function not merely as a response to trauma but also as a mechanism that perpetuates and intensifies the traumatic worldview underlying Letitia's villain formation throughout the narrative. In doing so, it plays a significant role by enabling Letitia to maintain a coherent moral self-image while simultaneously carrying out harmful actions (Hardian, 2025). Accordingly, she appears not as a self-aware villain but rather as an individual whose ego resolves psychic conflict by recasting destructive behavior as moral responsibility. Consequently, the external manifestations of her villainy, such as control over superabilities and institutional

oppression, turned out to emerge from a series of psychological processes in which trauma serves as the initial foundation, reconstructing the internal beliefs, while reaction formation appears to mediate the relationship between trauma and villainous behavior by transforming these beliefs into outwardly destructive actions as morally justified.

Collectively, these findings answer RQ1 by demonstrating that Letitia's villainy originates in unresolved traumatic loss and its destructive psychological consequences. They also answer RQ2 by showing that defense mechanism become a justification for committing acts of evil, transforming unresolved internal conflict into systematic patterns of domination and oppression.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study identifies Letitia as a villain shaped primarily by internal psychological processes. Her villainous behavior can be interpreted as a manifestation of attempts to overcome psychological trauma through defense mechanisms. Accordingly, this study expands the discussion of villain characters in literary works by presenting them as psychologically nuanced figures. Villainous behavior in narratives does not simply represent inherent evil or an innate desire to inflict suffering on others; rather, such actions more likely result from formative experiences that shape personality development early in life.

The implications of this study contribute to psychoanalytic literary criticism by enriching a framework for understanding villainy as a complex, psychologically constructed phenomenon expressed through characterization and narrative development. Pedagogically, these findings encourage more nuanced approaches to character analysis in the study of literary villainy. They demonstrate how unconscious conflicts, trauma, and defense mechanisms shape literary characters' motivations and decisions, offering clearer insight into the moral reasoning behind their actions.

Future research may extend these findings to a broader range of villain figures across narrative contexts. Further studies could also adopt interdisciplinary approaches that combine psychoanalysis with sociocultural criticism, broadening the analysis of how psychological factors such as trauma, defense

mechanisms, and social influences—interact to shape the identity and psychology of antagonists in contemporary literary works.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses sincere gratitude to God for His grace, guidance, and strength throughout this study. Heartfelt thanks are also extended to the author's parents for their unwavering support, love, and endless encouragement. The author is deeply grateful to colleagues and advisors for their valuable guidance on psychoanalytic literary analysis and their constructive feedback on this manuscript. Appreciation is also extended for access to the research databases and scholarly resources that facilitated a comprehensive textual analysis. Finally, the author wishes to acknowledge the music of Daniel Caesar and Conan Gray, whose songs provided comforting companionship and mental support, keeping the author inspired throughout the writing of this article.

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**Vol 9, No 2 (2026): ESTEEM**

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