

Annisa Aulia Rahmah

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Fantasy As A Coping Strategy: A Psychoanalytic Analysis Of The Main Character In The Lost City (2022)

Annisa Aulia Rahmah^{1*}, Sri Arfani²

^{1,2}University Bina Sarana Informatika, Indonesia

Alamat: Jl. Kramat Raya No.98, RT 002/009, Kwitang, Kec. Senen, Kota Jakarta Pusat

annisa.ar0412@gmail.com¹, sri.saf@bsi.ac.id²

Abstract This research analyzes fantasy as a coping strategy experienced by Loretta Sage, the main character in *The Lost City* (2022), using a psychoanalytic approach. The objectives of this research are to identify the types of defense mechanisms underlying Loretta's use of fictional narratives, to examine the psychological implications of repression and emotional withdrawal, and to analyze how the kidnapping as a plot catalyst transforms her fantasybased coping mechanism into real-world agency. This research applies Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, particularly ego defense mechanisms, Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, Syd Field's Dramatic Structure Theory, Fantasy Theory, and Character Theory. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method with data collected from scenes, dialogues, and character behaviors in the film. The findings reveal that Loretta employs several defense mechanisms, including repression, sublimation, fantasy, and emotional withdrawal, to cope with grief and loneliness after losing her husband. Fantasy functions as an emotion-focused coping strategy that provides temporary emotional comfort through fictional narratives. Furthermore, the kidnapping event becomes a catalyst that challenges Loretta's dependence on fantasy and encourages her psychological transformation. This research concludes that fantasy serves not only as an escape mechanism but also as a process of emotional adaptation and personal growth.

Keywords: Fantasy, Coping Strategy, Psychoanalysis, Defense Mechanism, Character Transformation

Abstrak. Penelitian ini menganalisis fantasi sebagai strategi coping yang dialami oleh Loretta Sage, tokoh utama dalam film *The Lost City* (2022), menggunakan pendekatan psikoanalisis. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi jenis mekanisme pertahanan yang mendasari penggunaan narasi fiksi Loretta, menganalisis implikasi psikologis dari represi dan keterasingan emosional, serta menjelaskan bagaimana penculikan sebagai katalis plot mengubah mekanisme coping berbasis fantasi menjadi kemampuan menghadapi dunia nyata. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud, khususnya mekanisme pertahanan ego, Teori Stress dan Coping Lazarus dan Folkman, Teori Struktur Drama Syd Field, Teori Fantasi, serta Teori Karakter. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan data berupa adegan, dialog, dan perilaku tokoh dalam film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Loretta menggunakan beberapa mekanisme pertahanan, seperti represi, sublimasi, fantasi, dan penarikan diri secara emosional untuk menghadapi kesedihan dan kesepian setelah kehilangan suaminya. Fantasi berfungsi sebagai strategi coping yang berfokus pada emosi karena memberikan kenyamanan sementara melalui cerita fiksi. Selain itu, peristiwa penculikan menjadi katalis yang mendorong perubahan psikologis Loretta dari ketergantungan terhadap fantasi menuju keberanian menghadapi realitas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa fantasi tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai pelarian, tetapi juga sebagai proses adaptasi emosional dan perkembangan diri.

Kata Kunci: Fantasi, Strategi Coping, Psikoanalisis, Mekanisme Pertahanan, Transformasi Karakter

1. INTRODUCTION

Films provide a medium for representing complex psychological experiences, including grief, trauma, emotional withdrawal, and the search for personal recovery. Through characters and narratives, films can portray how individuals respond to painful experiences and develop strategies to manage emotional distress. One psychological strategy frequently represented in literary and cinematic narratives is fantasy. Fantasy may function as a temporary escape from reality, but it can also reflect deeper psychological processes related to desire, repression, anxiety, and emotional conflict.

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The Lost City (2022), directed by Adam Nee and Aaron Nee, presents this psychological issue through Loretta Sage, a romance-adventure novelist who struggles to move forward after the death of her husband. Loretta withdraws from her social environment and remains emotionally attached to the fictional world she creates through her novels. Her imaginative narratives provide a space in which she can escape from grief and emotional discomfort. However, this dependence on fantasy also limits her ability to confront her loss and reconnect with reality. This condition makes Loretta Sage an interesting character for psychoanalytic analysis.

Psychoanalytic theory provides a relevant framework for examining the relationship between unconscious conflict, emotional distress, and defense mechanisms. Freud emphasizes that human behavior is influenced by unconscious desires and conflicts that may produce anxiety. To manage this anxiety, the ego employs various defense mechanisms. Fantasy can function as one of these psychological responses by allowing an individual to imagine alternative situations that provide emotional satisfaction or temporary relief from reality. Freud also connects fantasy with wish fulfillment, in which imagination becomes a space for expressing desires and emotional needs that cannot easily be fulfilled in real life. Anna Freud further develops the discussion of defense mechanisms by explaining how the ego attempts to protect itself from anxiety and psychological conflict.

In *The Lost City*, Loretta's fantasy does not exist only through imagination. It is also represented through her profession as a novelist. The fictional adventures she writes contrast with her real condition as a grieving and emotionally withdrawn individual. This contrast creates a clear psychological tension between fantasy and reality. Loretta initially uses fictional narratives as a form of emotional protection. However, the plot changes when she is kidnapped and forced into an actual adventure that resembles the stories she previously created. The kidnapping becomes an important narrative catalyst because it disrupts the psychological distance between Loretta's fictional world and real life.

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The transformation experienced by Loretta can also be understood through the concept of coping. Lazarus and Folkman explain coping as cognitive and behavioral efforts used by individuals to manage demands that are perceived as stressful. In this context, Loretta initially demonstrates an avoidance-oriented response by withdrawing from reality and relying on her fictional world. As the story develops, she gradually confronts unfamiliar situations, interacts with others, and becomes actively involved in solving the problems she faces. Her psychological development suggests a shift from emotional withdrawal and fantasy-based escape toward more direct engagement with reality.

Previous discussions of psychoanalysis in literary and film studies have examined unconscious processes, repression, defense mechanisms, trauma, and character development. Psychoanalytic criticism provides a useful approach for investigating how psychological conflicts are represented through narrative, dialogue, characterization, and symbolic events. However, *The Lost City* has received limited scholarly attention from a psychoanalytic perspective. The film is generally recognized as a romantic comedy and adventure film, while the psychological dimension of Loretta Sage's grief, emotional withdrawal, and dependence on fantasy remains less explored. This gap provides an opportunity to examine the film beyond its comedic and adventurous elements.

The present study therefore focuses on fantasy as a psychological coping mechanism in Loretta Sage's character development. The study examines several psychological mechanisms, including repression, projection, sublimation, fantasy, emotional withdrawal, displacement, and coping strategies. Particular attention is given to the way Loretta uses fictional narratives to manage grief and emotional distress. The study also analyzes how the kidnapping functions as a narrative catalyst that challenges her existing coping mechanism and encourages her to engage directly with reality.

Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study analyzes selected scenes, dialogues, actions, and narrative contexts in *The Lost City* (2022). The analysis applies psychoanalytic concepts, particularly those related to defense mechanisms and fantasy, alongside the concept of coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman. Through this approach, the study aims to identify the psychological mechanisms underlying Loretta's use of fantasy, examine the implications of her repression and emotional detachment, and analyze how her experiences during the kidnapping contribute to her transformation from fantasy-based withdrawal toward real-world agency.

This study is expected to contribute to psychoanalytic film criticism by demonstrating that fantasy can function in a complex way within character development. Fantasy may serve as emotional protection, but it may also become part of a process that enables individuals to confront difficult experiences. By examining Loretta Sage's psychological transformation, this study offers an alternative perspective on *The Lost City* (2022) and contributes to the broader discussion of defense mechanisms, coping strategies, trauma, and character development in film studies.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the use of fantasy as a coping strategy in the main character, Loretta Sage, in *The Lost City* (2022). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting meanings, psychological responses, character behavior, and narrative events rather than measuring numerical variables. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research is used to explore and interpret meanings associated with human experiences and social phenomena. In this study, the psychological experiences of the main character were represented through dialogues, actions, facial expressions, interactions, and narrative events in the film.

The descriptive qualitative design allowed the researcher to identify, classify, describe, and interpret psychological phenomena related to Loretta Sage's behavior. The analysis focused on how Loretta responds to grief, emotional distress, and stressful situations through several psychological mechanisms. These mechanisms include repression, projection, sublimation, and fantasy. The study also examined how fantasy functions as a coping strategy and how this strategy changes after Loretta experiences the kidnapping that becomes a major turning point in the narrative.

The study applied three main theoretical perspectives. First, psychoanalytic theory was used to examine Loretta's psychological conflicts and ego defense mechanisms. The analysis particularly focused on repression, projection, sublimation, and fantasy. Second, the stress and coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) was used to examine how Loretta manages emotional pressure and stressful situations. Fantasy was interpreted as a form of emotionfocused coping when it functioned to regulate emotional discomfort and create psychological distance from painful experiences. Third, Syd Field's dramatic structure was used to examine the kidnapping as a narrative catalyst that changes Loretta's circumstances and contributes to her psychological and behavioral transformation.

Through the combination of these theoretical perspectives, the study examined the relationship between psychological defense, coping strategy, and character development. Psychoanalytic theory explained the internal psychological processes underlying Loretta's behavior. Coping theory explained how she managed emotional and situational demands. Dramatic structure explained how the kidnapping disrupted her previous condition and forced her to respond to reality more directly.

2.2. Object and Data Sources

2 The object of this study was Loretta Sage, the main character in *The Lost City* (2022), directed by Adam Nee and Aaron Nee. Loretta was selected because her character demonstrates psychological changes related to grief, emotional withdrawal, fantasy, and adaptation to stressful circumstances. As a romance-adventure novelist, Loretta has a strong connection with the fictional world she creates. Her writing and imagination become important elements in understanding her psychological condition and her response to emotional difficulties.

The primary data were obtained from *The Lost City* (2022). The data consisted of selected dialogues, scenes, character actions, facial expressions, interactions, and narrative events related to the research focus. Particular attention was given to scenes that indicate psychological defense mechanisms, emotional withdrawal, fantasy, coping responses, and character transformation.

The secondary data consisted of books, journal articles, and other academic sources related to psychoanalysis, ego defense mechanisms, fantasy, coping strategies, character development, and film narrative. These sources were used to establish the theoretical framework and support the interpretation of the primary data.

The selected data were limited to events directly related to Loretta Sage's psychological condition and development. Therefore, not every scene in the film was analyzed. The researcher selected scenes and dialogues that provided relevant evidence for answering the research questions.

2.3. Data Collection Technique

This study used documentation as the data collection technique because the primary source was an audiovisual text. The researcher collected data through systematic observation of *The Lost City* (2022). The film was watched repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, character development, psychological conflicts, and narrative context.

3 The data collection process consisted of several stages. First, the researcher watched the film repeatedly to understand the general narrative and identify Loretta Sage's psychological condition before and after the kidnapping. Second, relevant scenes, dialogues, actions, and expressions were identified and recorded. Third, selected dialogues were transcribed and matched with the available subtitles to maintain the accuracy of the verbal data. Fourth, the selected data were organized according to their relevance to the research questions and theoretical categories.

The data were then recorded in a data sheet containing the scene or dialogue, contextual information, psychological indicators, and relevant theoretical categories. The primary categories included repression, projection, sublimation, fantasy, and coping strategies. The kidnapping was also identified as a major narrative event and analyzed as a catalyst for changes in Loretta's psychological responses and behavior.

2.4. Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The analysis was conducted through four main stages: data identification, data classification, theoretical interpretation, and conclusion drawing.

First, the researcher identified scenes, dialogues, actions, and expressions that reflected Loretta Sage's psychological condition. The identification focused on evidence related to emotional distress, avoidance, internal conflict, imaginative activity, defense mechanisms, and coping responses.

Second, the identified data were classified according to the theoretical framework. The categories of analysis included repression, projection, sublimation, and fantasy as psychological defense mechanisms. The data were also classified according to coping responses, particularly emotion-focused coping and direct engagement with stressful situations. In addition, scenes involving the kidnapping were analyzed to identify how the event changed the direction of the narrative and Loretta's psychological responses.

Third, each selected datum was interpreted using the relevant theories. Psychoanalytic concepts were used to explain the psychological function of Loretta's behavior. The coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) was used to analyze how fantasy helped Loretta regulate emotional distress and how her coping responses changed when she encountered real and immediate threats. Syd Field's concept of dramatic structure was used to explain the kidnapping as a catalyst that moved Loretta from her previous psychological condition into a new situation requiring action and adaptation.

Finally, the researcher compared the findings across the selected scenes to identify patterns in Loretta's psychological development. The analysis examined her movement from emotional withdrawal and reliance on fictional narratives toward more active engagement with reality. The conclusions were then drawn based on the relationship between the research questions, the selected data, and the theoretical framework.

2.5. Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria were used to maintain a systematic and evidence-based interpretation of the film.

Credibility was established through repeated viewing of the film and careful examination of dialogues, actions, expressions, and narrative contexts. Each interpretation was supported by specific evidence from the film and connected to the relevant theoretical concepts. The researcher also compared the selected dialogues with subtitles to improve the accuracy of the data.

Transferability was supported by providing a clear description of the research object, data sources, theoretical framework, and analytical procedures. The detailed explanation enables future researchers to understand the context of the study and consider its relevance to similar studies involving psychoanalysis, coping strategies, or character analysis in films and other narrative texts.

Dependability was maintained through systematic research procedures. The researcher followed consistent stages, including data collection, identification, classification, analysis, and interpretation. Each selected datum was examined using the same theoretical framework to maintain consistency throughout the analysis.

Confirmability was achieved by ensuring that the findings were based on observable evidence from the film rather than personal assumptions. Every interpretation was supported by relevant scenes, dialogues, character actions, and theoretical references. The researcher also maintained a clear analytical record showing the relationship between the data, theoretical categories, interpretation, and research findings.

Through these procedures, the study provides a systematic qualitative analysis of how fantasy functions as a psychological coping strategy in Loretta Sage's character development. The method also enables the study to examine how the kidnapping disrupts her reliance on fantasy and contributes to her transition toward more direct engagement with reality.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The analysis of *The Lost City* (2022) identified 54 occurrences of psychological and dramatic indicators associated with the psychological development of Loretta Sage and several supporting characters. The analysis was based primarily on Sigmund Freud's concept

of defense mechanisms, Lazarus and Folkman's theory of stress and coping strategies, and Syd Field's concept of dramatic structure, particularly the catalyst. The analysis also considered fantasy and sublimation as supporting psychological concepts relevant to Loretta's characterization.

The 54 occurrences do not represent 54 completely different scenes. One scene or sequence may contain more than one relevant indicator. To avoid double counting, each occurrence was assigned a primary mechanism code representing the dominant indicator and, when necessary, a secondary mechanism code representing another relevant indicator.

Table 3.1 Distribution of Psychological and Dramatic Indicators

No.	Indicator	Code	Frequency	Percentage
1	Defense Mechanism	DEF	12	22.22%
2	Repression	REP	10	18.52%
3	Coping	COP	14	25.93%
4	Sublimation	SUB	4	7.41%
5	Fantasy	FAN	7	12.96%
6	Projection	PRO	3	5.56%
7	Catalyst	CAT	4	7.41%
Total			54	100%

Note: Percentages are calculated based on 54 total occurrences. Secondary mechanism codes are not counted as separate occurrences.

Table 3.1 shows that **coping (COP)** is the most frequently identified indicator, with 14 occurrences (25.93%). It is followed by **defense mechanisms (DEF)** with 12 occurrences (22.22%) and **repression (REP)** with 10 occurrences (18.52%). Fantasy appears in 7 occurrences (12.96%), while sublimation and catalyst each occur 4 times (7.41%). Projection is the least frequent indicator, with 3 occurrences (5.56%).

The relatively high frequency of coping indicates that the film emphasizes Loretta's psychological development through her responses to stressful situations. Although Loretta initially demonstrates avoidance, isolation, and emotional resistance, she gradually develops more active responses to stress. The frequency of defense mechanisms and repression also demonstrates that her behavior is strongly influenced by unresolved emotional experiences associated with John's death.

Table 3.2 Primary and Secondary Mechanism Codes

Data	Primary Code	Secondary Code	Main Psychological/Dramatic Interpretation
1	DEF	REP	Avoidance protects Loretta from unresolved grief
4	COP	FAN	Writing functions as a coping strategy through fiction
5	REP	FAN	Emotional fear is expressed indirectly through fiction
7	COP	DEF	Loretta manages public anxiety while protecting herself emotionally
9	PRO	REP	Insecurity is externalized while deeper emotional pain remains unexpressed
13	PRO	DEF	Fear of humiliation is directed toward Alan and produces avoidance
16	SUB	FAN	Emotional experience is redirected into creative writing
19	REP	FAN	Personal loss is represented through fictional death
22	REP	DEF	Denial protects Loretta from painful emotional recognition
23	DEF	REP	Rationalization supports emotional withdrawal
24	DEF	REP	Isolation is justified to avoid emotional vulnerability
28	COP	DEF	Withdrawal reduces immediate emotional pressure
29	DEF	COP	Distrust functions as protection in an unfamiliar situation
30	FAN	COP	Fictional references help Loretta manage fear
35	SUB	REP	Intellectual activity provides constructive expression but remains connected to John
36	REP	DEF	Abandoning research helps Loretta avoid painful memories
37	CAT	COP	Abigail's request creates a situation requiring Loretta to act
38	CAT	REP	Abigail's statement activates Loretta's painful past
39	DEF	REP	Refusal maintains psychological distance
47	COP	SUB	Alan channels emotional concerns into constructive rescue action
48	PRO	COP	Guilt leads to recognition and corrective behavior
50	DEF	COP	Humor reduces emotional discomfort
52	FAN	COP	Adventure framing helps reduce fear
53	SUB	COP	Emotional motivation is transformed into constructive action
54	FAN	COP	Fiction becomes a framework for understanding reality

Table 3.2 demonstrates that several occurrences contain more than one psychological dimension. For example, Data 1 is coded **DEF/REP**, indicating that Loretta's avoidance is the dominant observable behavior, while repression provides the psychological background for that avoidance. Similarly, Data 4 is coded **COP/FAN**, because writing functions as a coping strategy while simultaneously relying on the fictional world.

The secondary code is therefore used to capture psychological complexity without increasing the total number of occurrences. Consequently, DEF/REP represents one occurrence rather than two separate findings.

Table 3.3 Psychological Dimensions of Loretta Sage

Psychological Dimension	Evidence in the Film	Interpretation
Grief	John's death and Loretta's subsequent withdrawal	Loretta continues to experience emotional pain associated with the loss
Anxiety	Book tour, public appearances, and unfamiliar situations	Loretta fears social exposure, judgment, and uncertainty
Emotional avoidance	Staying at home and rejecting invitations	Isolation provides temporary psychological safety
Repression	Avoidance of discussions concerning John and the past	Painful memories and feelings are not directly confronted
Projection	Fear of humiliation directed toward Alan	Loretta externalizes her insecurity toward another person
Fantasy	Dash, Lovemore, fictional adventures, and narrative references	Fiction provides psychological distance from painful reality
Sublimation	Writing, research, and professional activities	Emotional energy is redirected into creative and constructive activities
Coping	Social support, communication, problem solving, and action	Loretta gradually develops more adaptive responses to stress
Transformation	Exposure to the real-world adventure	Fantasy gradually becomes a resource for real-world agency

The results indicate that Loretta's psychological condition cannot be understood through one mechanism alone. Her behavior is the result of an interaction between grief, repression, defense mechanisms, fantasy, and coping. The findings also demonstrate a developmental pattern in which defensive responses are increasingly accompanied by more adaptive coping behaviors.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 Repression and Unresolved Grief

Repression is one of the central psychological indicators identified in Loretta's characterization. Ten occurrences (18.52%) are primarily coded as repression. These occurrences show that Loretta's grief following John's death remains psychologically significant even though she rarely expresses the grief directly.

One important example appears in Data 22, when Loretta rejects the suggestion that Dash means something significant to her. Her statement creates emotional distance between herself and the fictional character. However, Dash is associated with the earlier period of Loretta's life and with themes of love, adventure, and loss. Therefore, the denial can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid recognizing the emotional significance of the character. A similar pattern appears in Data 26, when Loretta states that ancient Greece is in the past, just like Dash. The statement demonstrates her attempt to classify Dash and the associated

memories as belonging to the past. This psychological distancing is important because the past is closely connected to her former life with John.

The findings therefore suggest that repression functions as a psychological barrier. Loretta does not completely eliminate her painful memories; instead, the emotions continue to influence her behavior indirectly through withdrawal, denial, avoidance, and fictional expression.

3.2.2 Defense Mechanisms and Emotional Isolation

Defense mechanisms constitute the second most frequent primary indicator, with 12 occurrences (22.22%). The most visible defensive pattern is avoidance. Loretta repeatedly attempts to remain within familiar and emotionally controlled environments.

At the beginning of the film, Beth observes that Loretta does not want to leave her house. Loretta's isolated lifestyle provides temporary protection from social interaction and emotional vulnerability. Her statement that she can be left alone and that everyone will be happier reflects rationalization because she presents isolation as a reasonable and beneficial choice.

Defense mechanisms therefore have a dual function. On one hand, they protect Loretta from immediate anxiety and emotional discomfort. On the other hand, they prevent her from confronting the underlying grief and reconnecting with other people.

The findings show that Loretta's defensive behavior is strongest when she faces situations that may expose her emotionally. Public events, discussions about Dash, new relationships, and opportunities for adventure all challenge the psychological safety that she has constructed.

3.2.3 Projection and Interpersonal Conflict

Projection occurs in three primary occurrences (5.56%). Although it is less frequent than coping, defense mechanisms, and repression, projection is important for understanding Loretta's interpersonal behavior.

Data 13 provides a clear example when Loretta assumes that Alan will humiliate her. The fear of embarrassment originates from Loretta's own insecurity and anxiety about public judgment, but the anticipated threat is attributed to Alan. As a result, Alan becomes the external target of an internal fear.

Projection contributes to interpersonal conflict because Loretta's interpretation of other people's intentions is influenced by her emotional condition. Rather than viewing the situation objectively, she anticipates negative outcomes based on her own insecurity.

This mechanism is particularly significant because it shows how Loretta's internal psychological condition affects her relationships. Her emotional difficulties are not confined to her private experience; they also influence how she responds to people around her.

3.2.4 Fantasy as Psychological Protection

Fantasy occurs in seven primary occurrences (12.96%). The findings demonstrate that fantasy has an important psychological function in the film.

Loretta is a romance novelist whose fictional world contains adventure, romance, danger, and emotional relationships. This fictional environment provides psychological distance from the difficulties of her real life. Through Dash and Lovemore, Loretta can represent themes of love and loss without necessarily confronting those experiences directly.

Data 19 is particularly relevant because the fictional death of Dash can be interpreted in relation to Loretta's personal experience of loss. The fictional narrative allows the theme of death to appear indirectly, creating a distance between Loretta and her own painful emotional experience.

However, fantasy should not be interpreted exclusively as an unhealthy escape. Later in the film, fictional narratives become useful for understanding real circumstances. This indicates a transformation in the function of fantasy.

3.2.5 Sublimation Through Writing and Intellectual Activity

Sublimation is identified in four occurrences (7.41%). Loretta's writing and academic interests demonstrate how emotional energy can be redirected into constructive activities.

Her career as a writer allows her to transform personal experiences and emotional concerns into fictional narratives. Writing provides a productive activity through which she remains connected to creativity even when she withdraws from other aspects of life.

The same pattern can be observed in her earlier academic relationship with John. Her interest in archaeology and the search for Kalaman's tomb represents intellectual engagement and meaningful activity. However, the later abandonment of this research indicates that the activity also became associated with painful memories.

Therefore, sublimation in Loretta's characterization is not presented as a complete solution to her psychological difficulties. Instead, it functions as a constructive channel that allows her to continue functioning while unresolved emotional issues remain present.

3.2.6 Coping and Psychological Development

Coping is the most frequently identified indicator, with 14 occurrences (25.93%). This finding is significant because it demonstrates that the film emphasizes not only Loretta's psychological difficulties but also her capacity to respond to stress.

The coping strategies develop throughout the narrative. At the beginning, Loretta relies heavily on withdrawal and avoidance. She becomes anxious about the book tour and seeks support from Beth. Later, she communicates her feelings more directly and becomes increasingly involved in solving practical problems.

The progression can be represented as follows:

Avoidance → Social Support → Assertive Communication → Problem Solving → Active Engagement

Social support is visible when Beth encourages Loretta before the book tour. Assertive communication appears when Loretta states that she does not feel listened to. Problem-focused coping becomes increasingly visible when the characters attempt to locate Loretta and organize a rescue.

These changes indicate that coping is not static. Loretta gradually moves from responses that primarily reduce immediate emotional discomfort toward responses that actively address external problems.

3.2.7 The Kidnapping as a Dramatic and Psychological Catalyst

The catalyst occurs in four primary occurrences (7.41%). Based on Syd Field's concept of dramatic structure, a catalyst is an event that changes the direction of the story and creates circumstances that require action.

The kidnapping is the most significant catalyst because it fundamentally changes Loretta's situation. Before the kidnapping, Loretta can maintain her isolated lifestyle. After the kidnapping, she is physically removed from her familiar environment and placed in circumstances that require active participation.

The kidnapping therefore has two functions. Narratively, it initiates the central adventure and creates the primary external conflict. Psychologically, it disrupts Loretta's avoidance pattern.

Other catalyst-related events, such as Abigail's request for Loretta's assistance and the increasing volcanic danger, further increase the pressure for action. These events reduce the possibility of remaining passive and require the characters to use problem-focused coping.

Thus, the catalyst connects dramatic structure with psychological development. The external events of the story create conditions in which Loretta's psychological defenses are challenged.

3.2.8 Transformation from Fantasy to Real-World Agency

The most important overall finding is the transformation of Loretta's relationship with fantasy. At the beginning of the film, fantasy primarily functions as a psychological distance from reality. Loretta can control her fictional characters and narratives, while her real life remains emotionally difficult.

After she is forced into the real-world adventure, however, the distinction between fiction and reality becomes less rigid. The skills associated with her identity as a writer—creativity, imagination, knowledge, and narrative thinking—become useful in dealing with real situations.

This transformation can be summarized as:

Fantasy → External Catalyst → Real-World Experience → Coping → Agency

The pattern demonstrates that fantasy is not simply an escape mechanism. It can also become a psychological and cognitive resource. Loretta's fictional experience prepares her, indirectly, to interpret and respond to the real-world adventure.

Therefore, the psychological development of Loretta is characterized not by the complete elimination of defense mechanisms, but by a gradual change in how she responds to emotional and external challenges.

3.2.9 Integrated Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Loretta's psychological development involves an interaction among repression, defense mechanisms, fantasy, sublimation, projection, and coping.

The early part of the film is dominated by **repression and defensive avoidance**. Loretta isolates herself, rejects new experiences, and distances herself from emotionally meaningful subjects. Fantasy and writing provide safer spaces in which difficult emotions can be expressed indirectly.

The middle part of the narrative introduces **external disruption through the catalyst**. Abigail's request and Loretta's kidnapping challenge the stability of her isolated lifestyle. As the external pressure increases, Loretta must develop more active coping responses.

The later development is characterized by **greater engagement and agency**. The real-world adventure forces Loretta to use her knowledge, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Consequently, the same imaginative capacity that initially functions as psychological protection becomes a resource for action.

The overall psychological progression can therefore be represented as:

Unresolved Grief → Repression → Avoidance and Defense → External Catalyst → Coping → Real-World Engagement → Agency

This progression demonstrates that the film portrays psychological development as a gradual process rather than an immediate transformation. Loretta continues to experience fear and emotional vulnerability, but she becomes increasingly capable of confronting situations that previously would have triggered avoidance.

3.3 Summary of Results and Discussion

The analysis identified 54 occurrences of psychological and dramatic indicators in *The Lost City* (2022). Coping was the most dominant indicator with 14 occurrences (25.93%), followed by defense mechanisms with 12 occurrences (22.22%) and repression with 10 occurrences (18.52%). Fantasy occurred 7 times (12.96%), while sublimation and catalyst each occurred 4 times (7.41%), and projection occurred 3 times (5.56%).

The findings demonstrate that Loretta's psychological condition is strongly associated with unresolved grief following John's death. Repression and defense mechanisms allow her to distance herself from painful memories, while fantasy and sublimation provide alternative ways of managing emotional experiences.

At the same time, coping becomes increasingly important as the narrative develops. Loretta gradually moves from avoidance and withdrawal toward social support, assertive communication, problem solving, and active engagement. The kidnapping functions as the major catalyst that disrupts her established psychological pattern and forces her to confront reality.

The most significant finding is therefore the transformation of fantasy from a psychological refuge into a source of real-world agency. The film presents Loretta's development as a movement from emotional avoidance toward greater engagement with reality, demonstrating that psychological growth can occur when defensive patterns are challenged by external circumstances and replaced, gradually, by more adaptive forms of coping.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the psychological characterization of Loretta Sage in *The Lost City* (2022), with particular attention to fantasy as a defense mechanism and coping strategy. The analysis identified 54 occurrences of psychological indicators, including defense mechanisms, repression, sublimation, projection, fantasy, coping, and narrative catalysts. The occurrences represent psychological indicators identified throughout the film, and more than one indicator may appear within the same scene.

The findings show that coping was the most frequently identified indicator, with 14 occurrences, followed by defense mechanisms with 12 occurrences, repression with 10 occurrences, fantasy with 7 occurrences, sublimation and catalyst with 4 occurrences each, and projection with 3 occurrences. These findings indicate that Loretta's psychological development is strongly connected to her efforts to manage grief, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional vulnerability following the death of her husband.

At the beginning of the film, Loretta tends to respond to emotional difficulties through withdrawal, avoidance, defensiveness, and repression. Her fictional writing and imaginative world provide a psychological space that allows her to distance herself from painful emotional experiences. In this context, fantasy functions not merely as escapism but also as a form of emotion-focused coping. At the same time, her creative writing can be understood as a form of sublimation because emotional experiences are redirected into productive fictional narratives.

The kidnapping becomes a significant catalyst in Loretta's psychological development. This event disrupts her previous reliance on emotional withdrawal and fantasy by placing her in a situation that requires direct action, adaptation, and interaction with others. As the narrative progresses, Loretta develops more active coping responses and gradually becomes more willing to confront external challenges and her emotional experiences.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Loretta Sage's character development represents a movement from grief, avoidance, and emotional withdrawal toward active coping, confrontation, and greater engagement with reality. The findings also suggest that fantasy has a dual psychological function. It initially provides protection from emotional distress, while the experiences that follow the disruption of this coping mechanism contribute to Loretta's personal development. Therefore, *The Lost City* (2022) illustrates how defense mechanisms, fantasy, coping strategies, and narrative events interact in shaping the psychological development of a fictional character.

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