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An Analysis of the Main Characters' Conflicts in The Movie *Memoir of a Snail*

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ABSTRAK

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis konflik yang dialami oleh karakter utama dalam film *Memoir of a Snail* dan menganalisis kebutuhan yang tidak terpenuhi yang menyebabkan konflik-konflik tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif. Subjek penelitian adalah karakter utama, Grace dan Gilbert; sumber data utama adalah *film Memoir of a Snail* dan transkripnya. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan metode dokumentasi dengan menonton film secara berulang dan menyoroti dialog dan adegan yang relevan. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teori Kenney (1966) untuk mengklasifikasikan konflik dan hierarki kebutuhan Maslow (1970) untuk memahami kebutuhan mereka. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa karakter utama menghadapi konflik internal (kesepian, trauma, kecemasan, dan keinginan akan kebebasan) serta konflik eksternal (*Man vs Man* dan *Man vs Environment*). Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa konflik-konflik tersebut terjadi sebagai akibat langsung dari kebutuhan yang tidak terpenuhi dari karakter utama. Ketidakterpenuhinya kebutuhan akan keamanan, cinta dan rasa memiliki, penghargaan, dan aktualisasi diri menciptakan ketegangan emosional dan sosial yang signifikan, yang memicu konflik internal dan eksternal mereka. Analisis ini memberikan gambaran tentang kebutuhan spesifik yang tidak terpenuhi yang menjadi penyebab utama konflik dalam film. Disarankan agar peneliti selanjutnya mengeksplorasi film ini menggunakan teori-teori yang berbeda untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif.

Abstract: *This study aims to identify the types of conflicts experienced by the main characters in the movie Memoir of a Snail and to analyze the unfulfilled needs that cause these conflicts. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. The subjects studied were the main characters, Grace and Gilbert; the primary data source was the movie Memoir of a Snail and its transcript. Data was collected using the documentation method by repeatedly watching the movie and highlighting relevant dialogues and scenes. The data was then analyzed using Kenney's (1966) theory to classify conflicts and Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs to understand their needs. The findings reveal that the main characters face both internal conflicts (loneliness, trauma, anxiety, and the desire for freedom) and external conflicts (Man vs Man and Man vs Environment). This study concludes that these conflicts occur as a direct result of the main characters' unfulfilled needs. The absence of safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs creates significant emotional and social tension, which triggers their internal and external conflicts. This analysis provides insight into what specific unfulfilled needs serve as the primary cause of conflicts within the movie. It is suggested that future researchers explore this movie using different theories to gain a more comprehensive understanding.*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Movies are often seen merely as a form of entertainment, but in reality, they function as a powerful medium for communication, education, and self-reflection (Yanti & Skolastika, 2024: 73). Through visual storytelling and sound, movies present narratives that highlight real-life problems and allow audiences to connect with deeper emotional and social issues. In the academic context, movies are considered a part of literature because they originate from human creativity and are valued as art (Nuriadi, 2016: 8). Literature itself serves multiple functions; it is not only a source of entertainment but also a means of gaining knowledge and wider perspectives (Adiyat et al., 2023: 38). Furthermore, Ramdhani et al. (2024: 33) emphasize literature as a medium of communication, where authors express emotions and social realities.

As a modern form of literature, movies share many narrative dimensions with traditional forms like novels and drama. However, movies possess unique characteristics; unlike stage drama, which varies with each performance, a movie is recorded and can be replayed in the same form across different times (Klarer, 1999: 55). Movies extend beyond drama by manipulating time and space to deliver strong visual and emotional experiences (Boggs & Petrie, 2008: 3-4). Consequently, movies are rich artistic media that can be analyzed in depth through a literary approach (Utami, 2024: 2). They function as cultural texts that reflect human struggles, psychological conflicts, and philosophical ideas (Barsam & Monahan, 2016: 2).

A fundamental element that drives the narrative in both literature and movies is conflict. Stanton (1965: 16) emphasizes that conflict is found in every work of fiction, keeping the narrative alive. It is considered the "heartbeat" of writing because nothing exists without struggle (Egri, 1946: 178). Conflict is not just a plot device; it reflects the struggles inherent in human existence, whether internal or external (Chan & Abigail, 2014: 3). In this study, the focus is on the conflicts experienced by the main characters in the movie *Memoir of a Snail*.

Memoir of a Snail, directed by Adam Elliot, is a stop-motion animated movie set in 1970s Australia. It tells the poignant story of Grace Pudel and her twin brother, Gilbert, who are separated by the foster system after their father's death. Grace faces loneliness and trauma in Canberra, while Gilbert endures a strict religious environment in Perth. The movie creates a unique space to explore universal themes of grief, identity, and the search for belonging.

The topic of character conflict has been widely explored in previous studies. Fahmi and Yuliasari (2023) analyzed the internal and external conflicts in Inside Out using Kenney's (1966) theory and psychological analysis. Similarly, Bramaditha and Qomariana (2020) examined the conflicts of a character in I Am Sam using Kenney's (1966) theory. In terms of social conflict, Lubis and Suhendi (2023) explored the struggles in Knives Out using a sociological approach, while Swijana and Permana (2024) focused on external conflicts in Don't Look Up. Additionally, Ramdani et al. (2023) analyzed the conflicts and impacts of the conflict in the Whiplash movie.

However, although previous studies have effectively applied Kenney's (1966) theory of conflict, few have combined conflict analysis with Abraham Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, especially in the context of Memoir of a Snail. According to Maslow (1970), human behavior is motivated by unmet needs, from basic physical needs to self-actualization. When these needs are not fulfilled, they can create psychological tension and lead to conflict.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by identifying the types of conflicts experienced by the main characters, Grace and Gilbert, and analyzing what types of unfulfilled needs trigger these conflicts. By combining Kenney's (1966) theory of conflict with Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of what types of human needs drive the main characters' struggles in *Memoir of a Snail*.

B. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. This method aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009: 3-4). Qualitative research focuses on providing a rich, in-depth understanding of human behavior, emotions, and interactions as they occur in natural contexts. This approach is appropriate for analyzing the conflicts experienced by the main characters in the movie Memoir of a Snail because it allows for a rich interpretation of non-numerical data, such as dialogues and scenes.

The primary source of data consists of the dialogues, words, phrases, and scenes from the movie Memoir of a Snail. Additionally, the secondary data is gathered from written sources such as books, journal articles, and previous studies that support the analysis.

To collect the data, this study applies the documentation method. According to Creswell (2007: 38), qualitative research generally relies on various forms of data, including documents and visual materials. In this process, the researcher watches the movie repeatedly to gain a deeper understanding of the story, examines the transcript, and systematically categorizes dialogues and scenes that illustrate the characters' conflicts and needs.

After the data are collected, they are analyzed using a content analysis technique. This method is appropriate for examining various forms of media, including films, to obtain deeper insights (Harwood, 2003: 480). The analysis begins by classifying selected scenes and dialogues based on Kenney's (1966) theory to identify internal and external conflicts, and Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs to explain their underlying causes. Finally, the findings are interpreted to conclude what types of unfulfilled needs of the main characters cause the conflicts they experience in the movie.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main characters' conflicts and their unfulfilled needs. By applying Kenney's (1966) theory of conflict and Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, this study shows that the conflicts experienced by Grace and Gilbert are caused by their unfulfilled needs.

1. The Main Characters' Conflicts

Based on the analysis, the main characters experience both internal and external conflicts.

a. Internal Conflict

Internal conflict refers to a struggle that takes place within a character's thoughts and emotions. Kenney (1966: 19) explains that this conflict arises when a character faces opposing feelings, beliefs, or desires within themselves. It is often marked by intense emotional tension, such as fear, guilt, anxiety, grief, insecurity, or emotional trauma.

1) Grace vs herself

Loneliness



Figure 1 Scene 01:17:11

Grace: "Potatoes? Potatoes? Sylvia, ugh. Maybe that's what she wanted her last meal to be? Ugh! Goddamn life! Such a… such a stupid, stupid puzzle! Damn it! I'm so alone. So... so alone."

This dialogue shows Grace's deep struggle with loneliness. She tries to make sense of Pinky's final words, "The potatoes!" but fails to find any meaning. Her frustration and sadness grow stronger until she breaks down and cries out, "I'm so alone. So.. so alone," which reveals how lost she feels after reflecting that she has no one by her side anymore. Moreover, her loneliness drives her to a suicide attempt, where she tries to consume snail poison.

Trauma and Anxiety



Figure 2 Scene 00:25:46

Grace: "I suppose 'settled' is the wrong word. 'Traumatized' was more accurate. Loss, grief, and the separation from Gilbert made me anxious."

The dialogue takes place after Grace is separated from her twin brother, Gilbert, and moves to Canberra to live with her foster parents. In this unfamiliar place, she reflects on her emotional condition and clearly states that she does not feel "settled," indicating a lack of safety and comfort. Instead, she describes herself as "traumatized," directly connecting her anxiety to the painful separation from Gilbert.

2) Gilbert vs himself

Desire for freedom



Figure 3 Scene 00:51:14

Gilbert: "She punished me, but it didn't bother me. I'm fine. Anyway, I'd better go. I'm saving my money, and I'll be escaping soon and crossing that desert to come and get to you."

Gilbert faces an internal conflict between his desire for freedom and his powerlessness. He hates his life with his foster family because he is forced to follow the strict rules of the Appleby family. This situation causes Gilbert to have the desire to escape from the house. However, he does not have any other choice but to stay because he does not have enough money to leave.

b. External Conflict

External conflict refers to a struggle between a character and something outside of themselves. According to Kenney (1966: 19), this may include conflicts with another person (Man vs Man) or their environment (Man vs Environment). This kind of conflict usually can be seen through the character's actions, dialogue, physical reactions, or the challenges they face in the story.

1) Man vs Man

Grace vs Ken



Figure 4 Scene 01:09:43

Grace: "It seemed Ken's onion did have layers. He didn't love ME. He loved my FAT! He had some sort of fetish."

The external conflict between Grace and Ken begins when Grace finds Ken's hidden scrapbook, which exposes his fetish for overweight women. The scrapbook contains a chart tracking Grace's weight, photos of her gradual weight gain, and weight gain recipes. The heart of this conflict lies in Ken's deception and manipulation. He secretly makes Grace gain weight for his own pleasure. It turns out that Ken does not love Grace as she is, but he just loves her fat. Feeling betrayed, Grace confronts and forces him to leave her house.

Gilbert vs Foster mother (Ruth)



Figure 5 Scene 00:50:21

Gilbert: "I hate it here. And I hate her."

The dialogue above clearly shows the conflict between Gilbert and Ruth, as Gilbert openly expresses his hatred toward her. The conflict begins when Gilbert secretly spies on his foster father, Owen, and discovers that he has been using the money meant for the church to buy whiskey, which he drinks secretly behind the church. Outraged by the family's hypocrisy, Gilbert releases the family's pigs and later Ruth's beloved budgies, as in **Figure 5**. In response, Ruth takes revenge by burning Gilbert's mother's music box, an object that holds deep emotional value for him.

2) Man vs Environment

Grace vs Societal Rules



Figure 6 Scene 01:23:39

Judge: "Miss Pudel, your crime is serious. Theft is theft, whether it be a diamond or a cucumber. And if you forgive the fox for stealing your chickens, well then, he'll steal your sheep."

As Grace's boredom gets worse, she starts to develop new urges. She admits that

she adds kleptomania to her list of hobbies, finding a strange excitement in it. This action becomes her way to escape from the emptiness of her life. However, she gets caught by a security guard when she tries to steal a snail-shaped pencil sharpener. Grace eventually has to face the consequences of her actions in court.

Gilbert vs Religious Environment



Figure 7 Scene 01:02:27

Ruth: "...We could not just pray the gay away. So, the only solution was a dual expulsion to cast the demons out, eject the devil from their souls, and correct their auras."

The dialogue above shows the conflict between Gilbert and the religious environment of his foster family. This conflict arises when Ruth, Gilbert's foster mother, secretly watches Gilbert and Ben kissing behind the church. She reckons Gilbert's action as a sickness that needs to be purged. The family's response is driven by their religious views, which leads to a horrific purge ceremony in their barn at night. In **Figure 7**, Gilbert and Ben are tied to a pole, and the family uses a car battery and magnets to electrocute them, believing it will "eject the devil from their souls." The foster family's action presents a direct and violent attack against Gilbert's identity. This creates a serious external conflict because Gilbert is against the oppressive religious environment of the Appleby family.

2. The Main Characters' Unfulfilled Needs

a. Safety Needs

According to Maslow (1970: 39), safety needs involve personal security, protection from danger, stability, good health, and freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos.



Figure 8 Scene 00:25:46

Grace: "I suppose 'settled' is the wrong word. 'Traumatized' was more accurate. Loss, grief, and the separation from Gilbert made me anxious."

Grace explicitly states feeling "traumatized" and "anxious" following the separation from Gilbert, indicating her fundamental need for emotional safety is unfulfilled. This aligns with Maslow's (1970: 66) ideas that unfulfilled safety needs may cause fear, anxiety, and nervousness.

Driven by her unfulfilled safety needs, Grace seeks comfort through collecting snails, which then turns into hoarding and eventually kleptomania. As a result, this behavior directly leads to an external conflict, Man vs. Environment, where Grace stands against societal rules, as she is caught by a security guard when trying to steal a snail-shaped pencil sharpener and brought to court.

b. Love and Belonging Needs

Love and belonging needs involve connections with family, friends, romantic partners, and the wider community. Maslow (1970: 43) highlights that humans are inherently social and have a strong need for affection and acceptance. He further explains that when love and belonging needs are not fulfilled, individuals may experience feelings of loneliness, rejection, isolation, and a lack of connection (Maslow, 1970: 43).



Figure 9 Scene 00:46:10

Gilbert: "There's no one here to talk to. I've tried to be friendly, but their weird religion has them all brainwashed. The brothers really hate me."

The dialogue above shows that Gilbert lacks acceptance and connection in his foster family. When he says, "There's no one here to talk to… The brothers really hate me," it reflects his loneliness and sense of rejection from his foster family. He also says that he has tried to be friendly, but his efforts are unsuccessful. This situation shows that his love and belonging needs are not fulfilled. This aligns with Maslow's (1970: 43) idea that when love and belonging needs remain unfulfilled, a person may experience feelings of rejection, loneliness, and disconnection.

However, the constant rejection from his foster family leads to Gilbert's internal conflict, in which he has a strong desire to escape from his foster family to reunite with Grace, but he cannot leave because he has no money. Therefore, Gilbert's unfulfilled love and belonging needs lead to his internal conflict, his desire for freedom.

c. Esteem Needs

Maslow (1970: 45) divides esteem needs into two types. The first involves personal achievement, including competence, independence, and confidence. The second concerns recognition from others, such as respect, status, and appreciation. When these needs are met, people feel confident and valued. However, when they are not, individuals may feel weak, helpless, or inferior.



Figure 10 Scene 00:07:50

Bullies: "Rabbit face, rabbit face, rabbit face."



Figure 11 Scene 00:28:19

Grace: "My new school was predictably bad. I tried to make friends. But Gilbert wasn't there to break their fingers. So... Hmm… I absorbed the abuse…"

Grace experiences bullying because of her unique appearance. She was born with a cleft palate that makes her look like a baby rabbit. Because of this, her classmates often mock her by calling her "rabbit face." The bullying she experiences shows that Grace does not receive respect from others, as she is seen as different.

This means that Grace's esteem needs remain unfulfilled because she is not respected and is instead mocked for her appearance, which makes her feel rejected, inferior, and weak, as she says that she absorbs the abuse she gets. This corresponds with Maslow's (1970: 45) statement that when esteem needs are unfulfilled, a person may feel weak, helpless, and inferior. Therefore, Grace's unfulfilled esteem needs cause an internal conflict as she struggles with trauma and anxiety as a result of the bullying and mockery she gets.

d. Self-Actualization Needs

At the highest level of Maslow's (1970: 46) hierarchy lies self-actualization, including the need to realize one's full potential, pursue growth, and become the best version of oneself. When this need remains unfulfilled, Maslow (1967: 107) describes the result as *metapathology*, a state marked by a loss of motivation, boredom, despair, and a lack of free will feeling.



Figure 12 Scene 00:47:10

Gilbert: "She's barred me from playing with fire. She's bonkers and thinks magic is the devil's vice. And she's always trying to stick more and more magnets on me to fix my aura. But I don't care. I hide behind the church to practice my stuff with one of the brothers who seems to like me."

Gilbert's dream is to be a street performer in Paris like his father. However, after he moves to his foster family, Ruth, Gilbert's foster mother, forbids him from playing with fire or performing magic, which she considers the devil's vice.

Ruth limits Gilbert's ability to achieve his full potential as a street performer. As a result, Gilbert fails to fulfill his self-actualization needs and experiences what Maslow (1967: 107) describes as *metaphatology*, where he experiences no feeling of free will. He feels controlled and forced to follow his foster family's strict rules.

Therefore, this results in Gilbert's rebellion and conflict with his foster mother. The conflict can be seen when Gilbert releases Ruth's budgies, and Ruth responds by burning Gilbert's mother's music box. To sum up, Gilbert's unfulfilled self-actualization needs cause an external conflict, Man vs Man, where he conflicts with Ruth.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis of *Memoir of a Snail*, this study concludes that the main characters, Grace and Gilbert, experience internal and external conflicts caused by their unfulfilled needs, based on Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs. Although their basic physiological needs are fulfilled, the absence of safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs leads to the conflicts they experience. These conflicts appear internally in the form of loneliness, trauma & anxiety, and desire for freedom, and externally through their conflicts with other characters, justice systems, and social expectations. Therefore, this study concludes that the characters' unfulfilled needs play a significant role in shaping the conflicts experienced by the main characters throughout the movie.

However, this study is limited to identifying the conflicts and analyzing the unfulfilled needs that cause the conflicts of the main characters in *Memoir of a Snail*. It is expected that this study will encourage future studies on the same movie using different theories or perspectives, allowing for a broader exploration of the movie. For instance, future researchers may apply a semiotic approach to examine the symbolic elements and signs presented in the movie, thereby offering richer interpretations.

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