SULLIVAN HARDING'S DENIAL ON THE AFTERLIFE AS SEEN IN MITCH ALBOM'S *THE FIRST PHONE CALL FROM HEAVEN*

AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

Presented as Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of *Sarjana Sastra* in English Letters

By

ELVIERA MARGIE ANTI

Student Number: 114214002

ENGLISH LETTERS STUDY PROGRAMS
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LETTERS
FACULTY OF LETTERS
SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY
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January 13th, 2017
A Sarjana Sastra Undergraduate Thesis

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Defended before the Board of Examiners on January 24th 2017 and declared Acceptable

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Elviera Margie Anti
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Pada tanggal 12 Januari 2017

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Elviera Margie Anti
The secret of happiness is to live moment by moment and to thank God for all that He, in His goodness, sends to us day after day

— St. Gianna Molla
This thesis is dedicated for
Ibu Maryati Harianja,
Bapak Alexius Wirotanoyo,
Nico Cassey,
Brownie, Wonka,
and every single story happened in Yogyakarta.
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ABSTRACT

Anti, Elviera Margie. Sullivan Harding’s Denial on the Afterlife as Seen in Mitch Albom’s The First Phone Call From Heaven. Yogyakarta: Department of English Letters, Faculty of Letters, Sanata Dharma University, 2017.

The First Phone Call From Heaven is one of Mitch Albom’s novels which portrays people’s belief on the afterlife. Afterlife is seen as the life that exists after someone’s bodily death. In this novel, its existence is illustrated by the ability of dead people to make a phone call to their relatives who are alive. The phone calls appear in Coldwater to eight people of the residents. The phone calls talk about the description of afterlife and the message of what the receivers should do as they are chosen to spread the news. Sullivan Harding is one of the residents who gets the phone calls but denies the existence of afterlife. His denial leads him to find the logical explanation beyond the phone calls.

There are three problem formulations discussed in this study. The first problem analyzes Sullivan Harding’s characteristics, the second problem analyzes the reason Sullivan Harding denies the afterlife, and the third problem analyzes the result of Sullivan Harding’s denial.

The writer applies library research in this study which uses both printed and online materials. Sullivan Harding’s characteristics are analyzed through the theory of character and characterization and his denial is analyzed through the psychoanalytic criticism on the theory of defense mechanism.

The result of the study shows the characteristics of Sullivan Harding who is responsible, reasonable, and affectionate. Sullivan Harding stands as the only person who does not believe on the phone calls from heaven and tries to find the truth. His denial on the afterlife is seen as the defense mechanism he applies as he experiences the anxiety. It happens on the zones of mental processes; id, ego, and superego. Through the phone calls, his id demands him to believe on its existence in order to fulfil his pleasure, whereas his superego demands him to consider the logical explanation. When his ego is trapped between different demands, Sullivan becomes anxious and unconsciously uses denial as his defense mechanism. It leads him into finding the truth and reasonable explanation of the phone calls from heaven.
ABSTRAK

Anti, Elviara Margie. Sullivan Harding’s Denial on the Afterlife as Seen in Mitch Albom’s The First Phone Call From Heaven. Yogyakarta: Department of English Letters, Faculty of Letters, Sanata Dharma University, 2017.

The First Phone Call From Heaven adalah salah satu novel karya Mitch Albom yang menggambarkan kepercayaan terhadap kehidupan setelah kematian. Di dalam novel ini, kehidupan setelah kematian digambarkan oleh kemampuan seseorang yang sudah meninggal untuk berkomunikasi dengan kerabatnya yang masih hidup. Terdapat delapan orang yang tinggal di Coldwater yang mendapatkan telepon dari surga. Telepon tersebut berbicara tentang deskripsi surga dan pesan bagi para penerima telepon untuk menyebarkan berita tersebut. Sullivan Harding merupakan salah satu penduduk Coldwater yang menerima telepon tersebut namun menyangkal adanya kehidupan setelah kematian. Penyangkalan tersebut menuntunnya untuk menemukan penjelasan logis dari telepon tersebut.

Terdapat tiga permasalahan yang akan dibahas. Permasalahan pertama menganalisa karakteristik Sullivan Harding, permasalahan kedua menganalisa alasan Sullivan Harding menyangkal adanya kehidupan setelah kematian, dan permasalahan ketiga menganalisa hasil dari penyangkalan Sullivan Harding.


CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

People as human beings are the closest part to literature. The existence of human beings can be the idea of literary works which is related to the concept of works. The idea of literary works can be explained as the origin of it. “Literature is the expression of life through the medium of language. It can be regarded as something essential since it contains about real life, people, thought, and their feeling about life” (Hudson, 1960:10). Moreover, the meaning or message in literary works can also be taken from people’s experience which is given to entertain or educate the readers.

Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us, it is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language (Hudson, 1960:10).

Authors are also the part of literature. As the ones who create literary works, authors have the biggest influence toward their works. The background and standpoint of authors can also be seen in the work. It is possible that the works also contain some of the message that they want the readers to know or believe. Authors can use their own experience or others’ to be written in many forms of literature. According to Hudson, literature can be the self-expression which are written from the personal point of view. Literature can also be written in accordance to the world of external human life and activity instead
of be based from the author himself. Furthermore, literature can also be in the form of description which is associated with the interest of self-expression or narrative (1960:13).

Literary works can be in the form of poetry, drama, essay, and novel. Gill says that novels have been specially crafted and constructed. “Any novel, therefore, can be described as a world specially made in words by an author. Any novel exists in the way it does because the author has chosen to put it together in the particular way” (1995:105). After reading a literary work, we might try to question the work which brings us to analyze it in order to get the meaning or message.

the great impulses behind literature may be grouped as 1) our desire for self-expression; 2) our interest in people and their doings; 3) our interest in the world of reality in which we live, and in the world of imagination which we conjure into existence; and 4) our love of form as form (Hudson, 1960:11).

In analyzing literary works, some literary approaches can be applied. One of them is the psychoanalytic criticism, a study of the mind and behavior. In the part of psychology, psychoanalytic criticism can be used to understand the literary works. “Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature”. Moreover, Barry states that basically “psychoanalysis is used to cure mental disorders by trying to get into both conscious and unconscious mind of someone” (Barry, 2009:92). In the analysis chapter, psychoanalytic approach is applied to analyze the character’s background that could affect his or her life which lies on the unconscious area.
The novel by Mitch Albom, *The First Phone Call From Heaven* (2013) talks about a phenomenon which happens in a small town, Coldwater. Eight people in town get the phone calls from their relatives who are already dead. The phone calls talk about what heaven looks like. Interestingly, Mitch Albom tries to show two different responses from two different characters. Katherine Yellin, a woman who has an older sister who died of *aneurysm*, and Sullivan Harding, a navy flier, whose wife died from a catastrophic accident. Katherine Yellin’s response represents most of the citizen as the believers. The story started when Katherine got phone calls from her dead sister on every Friday. She tries to tell the whole world about the miracles she experienced as her sister’s wish. On the opposite, Sullivan does not believe that his wife, Gissele, is able to contact him as she already dead. Sullivan tries to reveal the truth beyond the phone calls as he denies the existence of afterlife.

Afterlife becomes one of the discussion in the past 80 years or so. It has the cross line between the belief in religion which brings the idea of afterlife’s existence and the scientific explanation about this phenomenon (Rowe, 1989:476). The discussion also brings the idea of the communications that happen in the afterlife which is relevant to the philosophy of religion. Furthermore, it also involves the explanation from the psychology which area talks about the different attitudes that people show towards a phenomenon. In the novel by Mitch Albom, there are different attitudes showed by the people towards the phenomenon of afterlife.
In this study, the writer tries to analyze the reason beyond the denial of the existence of afterlife which is showed by Sullivan Harding. The denial can be analyzed as one of the self-defense mechanism. Self-defense mechanisms are used to oppose the anxiety. Barry says that “defense mechanism is a psychic procedures for avoiding painful admissions or recognitions” (2009:94). It will be applied to see the background of Sullivan Harding which brings him to think that death is something painful he wants to refuse. Moreover, he also refuses the existence of afterlife which his surroundings believe.

B. Problem Formulation

In order to understand the paper, the writer provides three problem formulations which are arranged to be answered in the analysis part. The problem formulations cover the discussion of this paper.

1. How is Sullivan Harding characterized in Mitch Albom’s The First Phone Call from Heaven?

2. Why does Sullivan Harding deny the afterlife in Mitch Albom’s The First Phone Call from Heaven?

3. What is the result of Sullivan Harding’s denial in Mitch Albom’s The First Phone Call from Heaven?
C. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to show the way Sullivan Harding deals with the phenomenon he experienced about the phone calls from heaven. To discuss that, this study has 3 objectives. The first objective is to find out the characteristics of Sullivan Harding. The characteristics take an important role to show his action towards the things he does not believe. The second objective is to find out the reasons Sullivan Harding denies the existence of afterlife by using the defense mechanism. The third objective is to explain Sullivan Harding’s way to reveal his denial.

D. Definition of Terms

Some terms are used in this study. In order to avoid misunderstanding, the writer provides some explanation of the terms which are not familiar.

Afterlife

The life after death comes as a discussion amongst the physical researcher, who also called it as survival, on the apparitional phenomena and the communication experience. Thus, the survival later is discussed as the continued existence of human personality after bodily death, and the other world in which surviving personalities are alleged to live (Price in Rowe, 1989:476).
Denial

Denial is described as “our need to be innocent of a troubling recognition. Our reluctance to face up to disturbing facts and realities” (Cohen, 2008:48). In addition, in the journal of nursing, King states “from time to time we all refuse to face facts. We ignore; we unwittingly cope with difficulties by not recognizing their existence. The unconscious denial of reality reduces conflict” (King 1966:1010).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Review of Related Studies

In order to support this study, the writer provides some other studies related to the topic. An undergraduate thesis done by Putri Apriliana (2014), entitled “Different Self-Defense Mechanisms in Major Characters in Alice Walker’s Everyday Use: A Psychoanalytic Reading” is the first related study. The undergraduate thesis talks about the major characters; Mama, Maggie, and Dee who have their own core issues which brings them into different self-defense mechanisms they reflected. The main characters are characterized then the core issues from each characters are defined using the theory of Lois Tyson. Core issue is explained as the main cause of recurring self-destructive behavior (Apriliana, 2014:6). The study concludes that Mama and Maggie have a low-esteem and avoidance as their defense mechanism, while Dee is insecure and has the fear of abandonment which brings her to use avoidance, displacement, and fear of intimacy.

The study conducted by Putri Apriliana has the similarities in discussing the defense mechanism one could use. It discusses the self-destructive behavior from someone which determines the defense mechanism he uses, whereas in this study, the defense mechanism that the character uses is used to find the reasons for using it.
The second study was conducted by Barata Azeem Garay (2015) entitled “Gayle’s Defense Mechanism in Gayle Sander’s Mummy Witness”. Garay analyzes the characterization of Gayle Sanders and the conflicts she faces in her life which brings her into using some defense mechanisms. By applying the defense mechanism theory by Sigmund Freud, the conflict is provided as the reason of the defense mechanism. As the result, Gayle is characterized as fearful, sorrowful, disturbed, obedient, suicidal, and brave.

From the study mentioned above, it discusses the characterization, the conflict and the defense mechanism which are similar to this study. The difference lies in the defense mechanism being discussed.

Joan M. King’s paper (1966) entitled “Denial” is the third study. The paper discusses the denial that patients in a hospital may experience and how a nurse treats them in an appropriate way. It discusses what denial is and how it works on the patient who has health problem.

From time to time we all refuse to face facts. We ignore; we deny; we unwittingly cope with difficulties by not recognizing their existence. This unconscious denial of reality reduces conflict. It serves to delay decision making, to evade accepting something we fear may be unpleasant (1996:110).

The paper is used for the nurse to understand the type of the patients and the reason those patients using denial as the defense mechanism. It helps the nurse to be able to communicate effectively with the patients. The conclusion is that denial may occur to patients with some health problems, and the nurse’s job is to accommodate it so the patients will accept the therapy.
The fourth study is conducted by Robert L.Menz. The paper entitled “The Denial of Death and The Out-Of-Body Experience” from Journal of Religion and Health. The study discusses about the pharmalogical, neurological, spiritual, and psychological explanation towards the out-of-body experience (OBE). The psychological explanation is highlighted as the denial in defense mechanisms is one of the reason. It explains that the OBEs is happened to fulfill ones’ need of love and peace since those who are near death mostly are lonely and isolated. Moreover, everyone has the tendency to deny their own death because people has survival as the basic need. Becker suggests that the subject of death has been and still is avoided in almost all facets of our existence. In both conscious and mainly subconscious ways, we silence, camouflage, isolate, ignore, avoid, and deny death (in Menz 1984:317).

The paper concludes that denial as one of the self-defense mechanism is able to bring the Out-of-the-Body-Experience (OBE) to a person. It works to accommodate a person’s denial towards death. One might have fear and loneliness when he is near death, therefore the OBE appears to give a peacefulness so that the person will accept that. It also might be interpreted as a hallucinatory fulfillment towards the need of happiness or acceptance.

The difference of the papers mentioned can be seen from the way denial is defined. This undergraduate thesis discusses denial as it is seen in the character’s personality. The first thesis sees denial as the effect of the core issue that a character has. Whereas, the other undergraduate thesis, the writer
explains that the conflict one has can lead him into using some defense mechanism in accordance with the conflict. The third paper reviews the denial at the first hand and followed by the communication ways to face a person with the denial. The fourth paper discusses the denial as the reason of someone's experience on the Out-of-Body-Experience. So, the differences lies in how the writers explain denial in the relation with other points: core issues which leads to denial, conflict which leads to denial, denial which leads to communication ways, and fear of death which leads to denial.

B. Review of Related Theories

1. Theory of Characterization

William Harmon in *A Handbook to Literature* stated that characters can be presented differently in the lyric, essay, autobiography, biography, history, and fiction. In fiction, the author reveals the character of imaginary persons. Further, the characterization is defined as the creation of those imaginary persons so that the readers will see them exist as lifelike. According to him, there are three fundamental methods of characterization in fiction:

a) the explicit presentation by the author of the character through direct exposition, either in an introductory block or more often piecemeal throughout the work, illustrated by action;

b) the presentation of the character in action, with little or no explicit comment by the author, in the expectation that the reader will be able to deduce the attributes of the actor from the actions;
c) the representation from within a character, without comment on the character by the author, of the impact of actions and emotions on the character inner’s self, with the expectation that the reader will come to a clear understanding of the attributes of the character (1986:81).

The author as the one who creates characters has the chance to describe them to the readers in which he “attempts to make the characters come alive for the readers and understandable” for them. Murphy added that there are some method that a writer could use; through personal description, character as seen by another, speech, past life, conversation of others, reactions, direct comment, thoughts, and mannerisms. Those methods will be used altogether by generally blend them to come to the purpose as to give the information to the readers about the characters and personalities from the book (Murphy, 1972:161).

Abrams explains the difference between character and characterization. According to him, character is the name of a literary genre. Whereas, characters are the persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with moral, dispositional, and emotional qualities that are expressed (1993:23). In her book entitled The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers, Kate Greenville defined the idea of character and characterization,

characters are not people, but they are like people in being, finally, mysterious. Their delicate mechanisms can’t be summed up neatly in formulas or rules. Characterization is all the things writers do to build up the characters they want. Characterization is the process that transforms real-life people into characters in fiction (1990:36).
According to Murphy, there are nine ways to describe the characters:

a) personal description
the character is described through the appearance and clothes. The author uses the description of what the characters are look like to give a description for the readers,

b) character as seen by another
the author uses the eyes and opinions of others to see a character’s description,

c) speech
through the conversation with others and his/her opinion, the description of a character can be seen,

d) past life
a character’s past life will help the readers to shape his/her characterization. The past life can be described through the author’s direct comment, a character’s thought, or his/her conversation,

e) conversation of others
a character can be described through the conversation of others about the character,

f) reactions
by a character’s reaction towards an event or situation, the readers can get the description of the character,
g) direct comment

the author can give the description of a character towards his/her direct explanation or comment,

h) thoughts

the readers can get the description of a character through the way of his/her thinking.

i) mannerisms

a character’s mannerisms, habits, or idiosyncrasies can be used to get the description of his/her (1972:161).

2. Theory of Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanism is used to protect our self-system. It is used at the unconscious level to prevent the ego from anxiety. According to Freud, there are several defense mechanism people have.

This study focusses on the specific defense mechanism the character uses. Sullivan Harding shows himself as the one who does not believe that the phone calls from heaven are exist. He denies the existence of afterlife. Here, the study will discuss more about the denial itself.

In addition to the defense mechanism theory, the writer provides the theory from Don E. Hamachek. In *Encounters With The Self*, Hamachek states some defense mechanism that people probably use: Compensation (Making up for Perceived Deficiencies), Denial (Ignoring the Unpleasant), Displacement (Shifting Negative Feelings to Someone Safer), Emotional Insulation (Putting
up a Wall of Armor), Fantasy (Imagining Something Better), Introjection (Appeasing the Other Person), Projection (Blaming the Other Person), Rationalization (Inventing Excuses), Reaction Formation (Feeling One Way but Behaving in Another), Regression (Returning to Younger Behaviors), Repression (Forgetting the Unpleasant), and Sublimation (Substituting One Goal for Another) (1987: 49-58).

Defense mechanism is used when the anxiety appears and the individual has to “protect the self and self-esteem”. The individual may be clueless about it functions because it works in unconscious level and classifies the defense mechanism into denial, projection, and identification (Cramer, 2009:1-2). Denial as one of the defense mechanism is mentioned as the “least complex” compares to the other two. It uses the negative marker to a perception or feeling which are upsetting and tries to ignore it. “Projection functions by removing disturbing thoughts or feelings from the person and placing, or attributing them to someone or something else”, whereas the identification is defined as the change on someone as the defense (Cramer, 2009:3).

3. Theory of Denial

There is another theory about defense mechanism specifically in the discussion about denial. From the book The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis by Otto Fenichel, Anna Freud stated that denial is a “refusal to acknowledge displeasure in general pre-stages of defense” (Fenichel,
1964:129). In addition, he stated that someone may use the denial in their unconscious whenever they experienced the event that resemble the painful experience they had before.

Denial can occur when individual fails to perceive the reality. It can be used when someone does not want to admit the existence of something happened. Cramer described denial using the utterance “Just ignore it and it will go away” and “It didn’t happen that way”.

denial refers to a mental operation in which attention is withdrawn from external stimuli, that if recognized, would cause psychological pain or upset. The focus here is on a defense mechanism that functions to ward off external reality. It was this external focus that characterized the early descriptions of denial (2006:44).

Someone might ignore the reality as it contains a painful situation. Moreover, the enacted daydreams also can be used as the expression to replace the disappointments of someone towards the reality (Cramer 2006:45). In The Concept of Defense Mechanisms in Contemporary Psychology specifically in the article entitled Percept-Genetic Methodology, Henstchel stated that denial is one of the ten main categories of defense mechanism, along with repression, isolation, reaction-formation, identification, turning against the self, introjection of the opposite sex, introjection of another object, projection, and regression. Further, he defined denial as the defense mechanism given on the basis of reports that deny or diminish the threat (1993:107).

Furthermore, the denial appears when subject denies existence of threatening perception or action concerning impulse with regard to self or to external object. It is also explained that denial occurs when the individual is
aware of emotional significance of denied impulse. The individual, then, denies the existence of threatening perception coming toward the individual himself or the object. (Henstchel, 1993:258).

4. Theory of Anxiety

   Robert J. Wicks stated in Helping Others; Ways of Listening, Sharing, and Counseling

   anxiety due to fear of retaliation occurs when we do something which makes us feel guilty. Though most of us feel guilty sometimes about some of the things we do, occasionally the guilt becomes exaggerated and we feel very uncomfortable. Thus kind of guilt can paralyze us for a period of time and waste valuable energy (Wicks, 1994:124).

   Anxiety is defined as the unpleasant feeling “accompanied by a physical sensation that warns a person against impending danger” (Feist 2006:33). Ego can detect anxiety, whereas each of the id, superego, and external world is only involved in one of three types of anxiety.

   Freud explains the three kinds of anxiety. Neurotic anxiety happens when the “unknown danger” is approaching. It comes from the experience of “hostility feeling” which also involves the “fear of punishment”. Moralistic anxiety comes from the “conflict between ego and superego”. It happens when someone’s behavior is limited by moral value. Realistic anxiety happens when ego is dependent on the external world. Realistic anxiety is defined as the unpleasant feeling towards the possible danger that might happen. Anxiety works as the “ego guard mechanism” because it gives the sign that the particular danger might be approaching. Anxiety becomes the self-control
mechanism because it brings up the repression to reduce the pain as the result of the anxiety itself. Defensive behavior functions to “protect the ego from the pain as the effect of anxiety” (Feist, 2006:34).

Too much anxiety can usually be attributed to something real or imagined which stirs up fears of loss of control, retaliation, physical injury or separation. A person who fears losing control is afraid that “letting go” will result in aggressive or antisocial behavior. Anxiety due to fear of retaliation occurs when we do something which makes us feel guilty. Though most of us feel guilty sometimes about some of the things we do, occasionally the guilt becomes exaggerated and we feel very uncomfortable. This kind of guilt can paralyze us for a period of time and waste valuable energy.

When anxiety about physical harm is not present at all, or is subject to massive denial, people take unwarranted and dangerous risk in life. When this fear is too great, people become so conservative that they take no chances at all. Such people avoid moves of any sort, even the smallest in nature. They avoid change and revel in the status quo (Wicks, 1994:124).

5. Theory of Zones of Psyche

In A Primer of Freudian Psychology, Calvin Hall explains Freud’s theory of personality organization consists of id, ego, and superego. They work to get the “satisfying transactions” which main purpose is to fulfill the “basic needs and desires” of an individual (Hall, 1999:22).
a) Id is defined as the “primary source of psychic energy” which functions to fulfill the pleasure principle. Id uses the primary sources to get what it demands, which is creating the image of the object that one needs to “reduce the tension”. Since it works under “one consideration”, the id has no relation with the logic, values, or morality. Freud mentioned id as having the characteristics of “demanding, impulsive, irrational, asocial, selfish, and pleasure-loving” (Hall, 1999:26-27).

b) Ego is “the formation between the person and the world to the transactions”. It uses the secondary process which works to create a reality as the result of the thinking process. Works under the reality principle, ego is able to postpone the id’s pressure until “the actual objects are produced” (Hall, 1999: 28-30).

c) Freud defined superego as the “moral or judicial branch of personality”. It has two subsystems: the ego-ideal, which tells an individual to “be morally good”, and the conscience which shows the things that are “morally bad”. The superego’s function is to “obey the reality principle” when fulfilling the needs and consider the law so an individual will not “endanger the stability of society” (Hall, 1999:31-34).

C. Theoretical Framework

The related studies and related theories mentioned before will be used to answer the questions in this study. The review of related studies functioned as the comparison and the development for this study. The review of related
theories will be applied in this study to answer the questions. The theory of character and characterization will be used to analyze the characteristics of Sullivan Harding which appears in the literary work. The denial that Sullivan Harding uses towards the phenomenon of phone calls from heaven will be analyzed using the theory of defense mechanism, theory of denial, theory of anxiety, and theory of zones of psyche. The experience Sullivan Harding have will be mentioned as the proof of his disbelief on the afterlife.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A. Object of the Study

The study is conducted by choosing a novel by Mitch Albom, entitled *The First Phone Call from Heaven*, published in 2013 by Harper Collins. The novel consists of 323 pages and divided into 26 chapters. This novel won the #1 New York Times Bestsellers.

*The First Phone Call from Heaven* is a novel which takes place in a small town, named Coldwater, a few miles from Lake Michigan, Canada. The people in Coldwater start receiving the phone calls from their relatives who already passed away. Altogether, there are eight people in that town who received the phone calls, from wife, children, sister, or even ex co-workers. Sullivan Harding, one of the person who receives the phone call from his wife, does not believe in this phenomenon. He believes that his wife is dead and has no ability to have contact with him and his family. Sullivan does not believe in the afterlife. Later on, he tries to figures out the truth beyond this phenomenon.

B. Approach of the Study

To analyze this study, the writer uses psychoanalytic criticism. Psychoanalytic criticism is used to analyze the unconscious part of the character and see the possible cause and the result of the action. In Mitch
Albom’s *The First Phone Call from Heaven*, Sullivan Harding uses the defense mechanism, denial. His defense mechanism is analyzed as the result of the anxiety that appears to him. Further, his anxiety comes when there are different demands from his parts of psyche; id, ego, and superego.

In *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Peter Barry stated that psychoanalytic criticism is used to analyze the character background that could affect his or her life but lies on the unconscious area.

Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders ‘by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind’ (Barry, 2002:96).

Defense mechanism works beyond the conscious level, therefore psychoanalytic criticism can be applied to analyze the reason. Further, it also talks about the dreams, neurotic symptoms, and wishes fulfillment.

the forbidden, mainly sexual (libidinal) wishes come into conflict with, and are repressed by, the censor into the unconscious realm of the artist’s mind, but are permitted by the censor to achieve a fantasied satisfaction in distorted forms which serve to disguise their real motives and objects from the conscious mind (Abrams, 1988:264).

C. Method of the Study

This study is conducted by the library research. It means that the materials and references used in this study are taken from both printed and online materials. The primary data is the novel itself, *The First Phone Call from Heaven* by Mitch Albom. The theory of character and characterization by M.J. Murphy, William Harmon, M.H. Abrams, and Kate Greenville, also the
theory of defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud, and Phebe Cramer, Uwe Hentschel, and Robert J. Wicks are used as the secondary sources in this study. In addition, the writer also gains the data taken from books, journal, encyclopedia, and other undergraduate thesis.

To analyze this study, there were several steps that the writer applied. The first was reading the literary work carefully in order to get better understanding on it. The second was making the problem formulation to understand what is being questioned in the literary work and followed by choosing the most appropriate topic to analyze. The third step was gathered the theories, references, review on the literary works, and all the data used in this study. The fourth step was analyzing the literary work, *The First Phone Call from Heaven* and answering the problem formulations. The first problem in this study was discussing the characteristics. The theory of character and characterization will be applied to reveal how Sullivan Harding is characterized in this novel. The second problem was answered by showing the reason of Sullivan Harding’s denial towards the afterlife using the theory of defense mechanism. It was used to analyze the act Sullivan Harding takes to prove that the phone calls from heaven are not real. The theory of defense mechanism discusses the way people use it in their lives in order to protect themselves, and denial as one of the defense mechanism is used to avoid the unpleasant feeling that existed. The last step in this study was drawing the conclusion on the result of his denial.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

In this part, the writer uses the theories mentioned in previous chapter to answer the three problems formulation. This chapter is divided into three parts; the first is the characteristics of Sullivan Harding which answers the first question. The second part discusses about the reasons Sullivan Harding denies the afterlife, and the third part answer the third question about the result of Sullivan Harding’s denial.

A. The Characteristics of Sullivan Harding

Characters are the most important point in a literary work. There are several characters in The First Phone Call from Heaven novel, one of them is Sullivan Harding. According to Murphy, there are nine ways to describe the characteristics of a character: personal description, character as seen by another, speech, past life, conversation of others, reactions, direct comment, thoughts, and mannerisms. Sullivan Harding is one of the eight people who received the heaven’s call. The characteristics of Sullivan Harding can be seen through direct comment, thoughts, conversation of others, speech, and reactions. The characteristics are explained as follows:
1. Responsible

The characteristics of Sullivan Harding as a responsible person can be seen from the direct comment and the conversation from others. By using direct comment, the author can directly describes a character (Murphy, 1972:169). As seen in the novel, Sullivan is captured looking for a job for weeks. “He’d spent the last three days looking for work. Nothing. Next week he’d try the nearby towns” (Albom, 2013:29). “He had spent another week searching for work in the nearby towns of Moss Hill and Dunmore. People were not encouraging. Bad economy, they said” (Albom, 2013: 35). “Jennings looked hard at Sully, and Sully hated what he must have looked like; a man loathing the job he was about to ask for. What choice did he have? He needed work. There was nothing else out there” (Albom, 2013:74). From the author’s direct comment, Sullivan Harding is seen continuously looking for a job for his child living.

Sullivan Harding worked as a navy flier. One day he got an accident involving another plane when he was flying the F/A 18 aircraft. As he is proved as guilty, he was imprisoned for 10 months. After being released, Sullivan starts to look for a job. At first, he insist that he would not take the job that he does not want, a newspaper agency. When a friend offers him to contact a person who might has a job for him, Sully refuses it after he knows that the job is a newspapers’ salesman.

“I’m not a salesman.”
“It’s easy. All you do is sign customers back up, collect a check, and get a commission.”
“What kind of business?”
"Newspaper."
Sully blinked. "You’re kidding, right?" He thought about all the newspapers that had written about his "incident". He'd hated the news ever since.
"It lets you stay around here," Mark said.
"Give me his number, I’ll call him," Sully said, knowing full well he never would (Albom, 2013: 16-17).

Sully realizes that his criminal records will affect the way people see him, especially when he is looking for a job. "He’d been eleven years in the navy, one year in the reserves, and ten months in prison. Every job application had a question about criminal convictions" (Albom, 2013: 35). Though he knows the job offered might accept him with his criminal background, he still refuses to take it. Sullivan has not got the job he needs, so finally he decided to apply for the newspaper.

"Anyhow, this isn’t that big of a job—"
"It’s fine."
"It’s doesn’t pay a who!—"
"It’s OK, really."
The two men looked at each other uncomfortably.
"I need work," Sully said. "I have a son, you know?"
He tried to think of something else to say. Giselle’s face came to his mind.
"I have a son," he repeated (Albom, 2013: 76).

The only reason he takes the job he does not want is that he is a father. His son only has him to depend his life on. He could send his son to his parents and live for himself, but he re-considers it when he is thinking about Giselle. "They’d talked about having more kids. Instead, here he was, a single father of a single child, having just accepted a job he didn’t want" (Albom, 2013: 76). Sully lives near his parents and it makes him and Jules visit his parents often. "It was Thursday night. Dinner with his parents. They invited
him often, trying to save him money. He still hadn’t found a job” (Albom, 2013: 54). Sullivan has the choice to send his son to his parents but he chooses to do a job he does not really interested in as his responsibility as a father.

His being responsible can also be seen from the conversation from others. The author can give the description of a character through the conversation of other characters towards him/her. In this novel, the characteristics of Sullivan Harding can be seen from his father’s saying towards Elwood Jupes, a senior reporter, about the plane accident that might happened because of Sullivan’s fault.

“I know my son,” Fred Harding has said. “He’s a damn good flier. Somebody in that tower messed up, and I hope they get to the bottom of it.”
No one ever did (Albom, 2013: 217).

2. Reasonable

Sullivan Harding was born in a military family. His way of thinking is trained to be logical and reasonable. He believes that there is a reason beyond something that happened. He argues that someone who is dead will die in every way and there is no afterlife in his belief.

“What’s going on?” Sully yelled
“Hello, brother,” the main said.
“This is a holy place. God is speaking to his children here.”
Sully fumed at the world children.
“Who told you that?”
The man took the measure of Sully’s expression, then grinned. “We can feel it. Would you like to pray with us, brother? You might feel it too.”
“I actually live here. And you’re wrong. Nobody is speaking to anyone.”
The man put his hands together, as if in prayer, and smiled again.
“Jesus,” Sully mumbled.
“Now you’re talking, brother,” the main said.
Sully hit the accelerator and screeched away. He wanted to yell at every one of those foolish believers, the pit diggers, the guitar player, Jules’ schoolteacher, the phone customers. *Wake up!* he wanted to say. *The living can’t speak to the dead!* (Albom, 2013: 95).

Murphy stated that the characteristics of a character can also be seen from the reactions, thoughts, and speech. A character’s reaction through an event can give the readers information about his/her characteristics (Murphy, 1972:168). Sullivan’s reaction shows his belief that afterlife does not exist. His being reasonable can be seen when he states his thinking that the dead will not able to communicate because that is what the living do.

In the story, he tries to figure out the logical reason behind the phone calls. Despite the fact that he does not believe in afterlife, Sully wants to get the explanation of the phenomenon. “As he had done in military days, he collected information and analyzed it for a pattern. Be methodical and systematic, the navy had taught him” (Albom, 2013:118). Another way to describe the characteristic is by the speech. When a character says something or gives the opinion, it is possible for the readers to see the characteristics (Murphy, 1972:164). When his neighborhood started to get the phone calls from dead relatives, Sullivan tries to show his denial, but his son believes the idea that his mom will call and ask for the confirmation to Sullivan. He tries to find Elias Rowe, a construction business’ owner, who testifies the phone calls and asks him to deny it. He knows that he should not believe the things he is not sure about.

“My son, he’s still dealing with it. But this stuff about phone calls from heaven. You’re one of those… you say you got a call?” Elias bit his lip. “I don’t know what I got.”
“See? That’s the thing. You don’t know! But come on! You have to believe it wasn’t someone calling from the dead, right?” (Albom, 2013:60).

His son, Jules, who also feels the sorrow of losing his mother, starts to talk about hoping to receive the heaven’s call. Sullivan chooses not to discuss this thing with his son, and he prefers to keep it for himself and let his son figures it out with people surround him. His logic finds some possibilities to clarify the real mystery, of course, remained the voices themselves. Every person contacted swore those voices were real. It couldn’t be an impersonator. No one could pull that off. Was there a machine that could change the tonality of a voice? Something someone could speak through and sound like someone else? (Albom, 2013:170).

His way of thinking influences his reaction towards something. Sully does not take something casually. Though almost all of the residents in Coldwater believe the heaven calls, Sully stands alone to find the possible answer beyond it.

3. Affectionate

Sullivan always thinks about his family on his every flight. On his last flight, he decides to stop by and come to see Giselle, his wife. “It would break up his two weeks of reserve duty. And the unexpected family visit would make the long hours of flying worthwhile” (Albom, 2013:23). On his duty, he is offered by his senior to take the fly out of his schedule. He accepts that as it gives him a chance to meet his family. “Would Sully cover? He could stop in Ohio if he wanted, see Giselle for a few hours-she and Jules were there
visiting her parents- then continue on. Sully quickly agreed” (Albom, 2013:23). Sully takes the chance to meet his wife and son as it is the way he expresses his affection

“You can be here today?” Giselle said sleepily when he’d called her with the news.
“Yeah. In, like, four hours.”
“You really want to?”
“Of course. I want to see you.” (Albom, 2013:23).

Unfortunately for him, the meeting is never happened. An accident occurs and takes Sullivan Harding to prison and Giselle to the hospital. On his last flight, Sullivan muttered about meeting Giselle. On his imprisoned time, Sullivan puts Giselle as his spirit. Unfortunately, life took Giselle before Sullivan was set free. The love he has to Giselle can be felt through his character in this novel.

Sully never stop trying. Even in prison, he would sit alone, eyes closed, reciting memories as if his thoughts could somehow fly to her hospital bed. From the day of the crash until the day she died, all he really wanted was to hear her voice. It never happened (Albom, 2013:99).

It shows that Sully has the strong feeling towards his wife. The fact that his plan to see Giselle brings her to a long coma, makes him loves his wife even more. The characteristics of Sullivan Harding as being affectionate can be seen through the direct comment from the author, where he/she explains it directly (Murphy, 1972:169).

His affection also appears towards Jules, his son. One of the reason he puts an effort to bring the truth of the phone calls is because he does not want Jules to believe on something unreal.
Sully gulped his coffee, extra strong, trying to rally some energy. He couldn’t remember when he’d felt so tired. He’d chased his theory; his theory was wrong. He felt like a fool. An exhausted fool. Had it not been for Jules, he’d have slept all day (Albom, 2013:253).

Sullivan Harding plays his role as a parent when giving his affection. Not only by showing his love, Sullivan also teaches his son about life lesson. His characteristics is seen through his speech. The speech from a character can show how he/she is described. It gives the explanation about a character’s way of thinking or opinion towards something when having a conversation with other characters (Murphy, 1972:164). Sullivan sends his affection to Jules by giving him lesson on their dinner.

“Can I have more?” Jules asked.
“That’s plenty,” Sully said.
“Sully, let him have more—”
“Mom.”
“What?”
“He can’t waste food. I’m trying to teach him.”
“We can afford it.”
“Well, not everyone can.” (Albom, 2013:54).

B. The Reason Sullivan Harding Denies the Afterlife

H.H. Price in Rowe’s Philosophy of Religion defines afterlife as the continued existence of human personality after bodily death (1989:476). Moreover, the existence of afterlife can be seen from the interaction through communication.

“Coldwater is a small town geographically north of certain parts of Canada and just a few miles from Lake Michigan”(Albom, 2013:6). Started on September, several residents in Coldwater get unusual phone calls; they said
the phone calls are made from heaven. The receivers got the phone calls from their families or relatives who are dead. The callers talk about heaven and their lives there.

When the phone calls occur in Coldwater, Sullivan Harding shows a different reaction. On his job as a navy flyer, he is once asked to fly out of his schedule. Sully agrees as he tries to meet Giselle when he arrives.

Sullivan Harding doubts the truth of the phone calls from heaven, he constantly denies it. His denial comes as his defense mechanism to protect him from the anxiety which comes as the result of the unbalanced id, ego, and superego demands. Sigmund Freud stated that the mental processes is divided into three zones; the id, the ego, and the superego. They work in both unconscious and conscious mind. They have different roles and demands.

The analysis on Sullivan Harding’s denial will be discussed in three parts; the three zones of psyche, the anxiety, and the denial.

1. **Sullivan Harding’s Three Zones of Psyche**

The id, ego, and superego have different roles and principles. When they ask for different demands to be fulfilled, the anxiety will appear. The differences between the three zones can be seen through the characteristics Freud has classified:
a) Id

In *Theories of Personality*, Freud stated that the id is the physical area which is totally unconscious. It works to reduce the tension through the basic desires which serves the pleasure (Feist 2008:27). As it is oriented to the pleasure principle, id works unrealistically and illogically. Further, Freud describes id as “primitive, amoral, and unorganized”. Here, the id can be seen as the first area which works to fulfill someone’s need. Since it has no ability to differentiate the good or bad in its work, id has to work with the ego to decide the action.

The aim of the pleasure principle is to rid the person of tension, or, if this is impossible-as it usually is- to reduce the amount of tension to a low level and to keep it as constant as possible. Tension is experienced as pain or discomfort, while relief from tension is experienced as pleasure or satisfaction (Hall 1999:22).

Sullivan Harding once is asked to take the flying schedule as a substitution of his coworkers’. At that time Sully does not have any responsibility to fly, but he chooses to take it so he has time to meet Giselle and Jules in the city. Sullivan shows his id dominance by this decision. His id brings him to find the pleasure of meeting his family. He does not even aware of the rules he has to obey. In *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Freud stated that id might leads someone to “destruction”,

Unchecked, it would lead us to any lengths-to destruction and even self-destruction-to satisfy its impulses for pleasure. Safety for the self and for others does not lie within the province of the id: its concern is purely for instinctual gratification, heedless of consequence (Guerin, 2005:157).
The id is seen as the dominant part when Sullivan Harding takes the chance to feel the pleasure without considering the other things. His id takes a role to lead him to find his wife whenever he has the chance. His id wants to fulfil the pleasure of meeting his wife and Sully lets the id leads him by asking Giselle to see him. The pleasure principle works as it brings Sullivan Harding to meet his family. Freud stated that “the id is functioned to gratify our instinct for pleasure without regard for social conventions, legal ethics, or moral restraint” (Guerin, 2005:157).

Freud in Guerin’s A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature stated that the id could bring someone into self-destructive behavior if the id works without any control from both ego and superego (2005:157). Sully gives his time of reserve duty to fly to the West Coast and make a stop in Ohio to meet his family for few hours before continue the flight. He believes that it would be worthwhile to get the chance to do family visit (Albom, 2013:23). Here, his id controls his action and decision.

The decision Sullivan Harding made is dominated by his id because he directly chooses the one which offers him the chance to meet his family without any further consideration. Freud stated that the id is powerful, it can lead an individual to comply its demand. Seeking only the pleasures of the moment, it demands its satisfactions insistently but blindly (Heidbreder, 1970:398). Sully ignores the rules he needs to obey before
flying. His only desire makes him only thinks about how to find the pleasure by meeting his wife and family.

b) Ego

Freud in Guerin defines ego as "the rational governing agent of the psyche". It works to help the id to be released in nondestructive behavior. To do so, "the ego stands as the intermediary between the world within and the world without" (2005:157). Ego is based on the reality principle. It is trusted to be the decision maker because it is able to work both in conscious and unconscious area. It works to "reconciliate the irrational claim (id) and the realistic demand from eksternal world (superego)".

In the well-adjusted person, the ego is the executive of the personality, controlling, and governing the id and the superego and maintaining commerce with the external world in the interest of total personality and its far-flung needs (Hall 1999:28).

When ego is trapped between 3 different concerns, it will "react in the predictable way", which is becomes anxious. Furthermore, it will use self-defense mechanism to defend itself from the anxiety (Feist, 2006:27).

When Sullivan Harding wants to fulfill his id to see Giselle, his ego leads him to do it by arranging a meeting with his wife. Ego works to make a realization of id’s need of finding the pleasure. Sullivan Harding’s ego is seen when he makes an agreement with his co-workers to take the schedule. “The ego stands for reason and good sense while the id stands for the untamed passion” (Guerin, 2005:157). It keeps individual to be healthy human beings by maintaining a balance between these two
opposing forces. This ego helps Sullivan Harding to find the solution of the id demands, in which meeting Giselle and his family.

The ego dominance in Sullivan Harding is also seen when he was imprisoned as he is sentenced for 10 months. Sullivan Harding’s id wants to meet Giselle when she was in a hospital. It is possible that Sully tries to find the way to meet her by asking the permission from the authority. Rather than doing that and risking himself into another penalty, Sully waits for his release time.

When using the cognitive and intellectual functions, ego needs to consider the demands from id and superego which are not coincide with one another and unrealistic at the same time. Besides considering those two, ego also needs to serve the third party-the external world (Feist, 2006:27).

The reality principle that makes the ego works shows its portion to protect the id’s need of doing the things that might destroy the individuals. In his book, Seven Psychologies, Heidbreder stated that the ego has the contact with the external world, the thing that the id does not have. It makes the ego has the ability to mediate the id’s demands and the external reality (1970:398).

c) Superego

Freud stated that “superego is the moral censoring agency, the repository of conscience and pride” (Guerin, 2005:205). He also stated that superego will be the angels that protect individuals to behave as the devils, following the id’s only demand. When Giselle died, Sully forces himself to
believe and accept that. When the heaven phone calls-phenomenon appears in his neighborhood, he stands as the one who does not believe that. His superego tries to tell him that it is not real. Though he wants that to happen, his superego leads him to think realistically. Freud stated that “the superego is the moral or judicial branch of personality”. In fulfilling the demands, superego “represents the ideal rather than the real, and it strives for perfection rather than for reality or pleasure” (Hall 1999:31).

According to Sullivan Harding, who is a reasonable person, there should be explanation behind the phone calls as the navy teaches him to think reasonable and realistic. Freud stated “superego is leaded by moralistic and idealistic principle” (Feist, 2006:28). Here the superego dominance can be seen through the action Sullivan Harding takes.

Superego struggles unrealistically towards perfection. It is unrealistic in a way that it does not consider the difficulty the ego might face to fulfill its order. Along with id, superego does not care about the possibility of its demands. In some people, superego will be dominant which will bring up the guilt and inferiority (Feist, 2006:28).

According to Freud, guilt comes from the conscious whereas inferiority comes from ideal-ego. Guilt is the result of ego’s action which opposes the superego’s moral standard, and the inferiority comes when the ego is not able to fulfil the standard of superego’s perfection. The conscious is produced from the experiences of punishment as the result of inappropriate behavior. It teaches us about the things we should not do. The ideal-ego develops from the experience of reward for doing the
appropriate behavior and tells us about the things we should do (Feist, 2006:28). Here, the role of superego leads Sullivan not to believe because it does not the thing his society consider as good. Sullivan Harding grows in a military family and continues his study and his job in military area. It gives the idea for him to decide the good and the bad.

The id, ego, and superego of Sullivan Harding have different roles on him which affects his action towards what happens in his life and his neighborhood. The accident happens to him has influenced him for the following days. The loss of his wife is one of the reason of his behavior. When he has to deal with the existence of phone calls from heaven, his id and superego claims different demands which result on his anxiety. As he feels the anxiety, he unconsciously uses the defense mechanism to protect himself. Here he uses the denial to respond to this huge news in Coldwater.

2. Sullivan Harding’s Anxiety

Anxiety comes as the effect from the unbalanced id, ego, and superego. Sullivan Harding’s anxiety can be seen through his reaction towards the phone calls from heaven. Anxiety is the unpleasant condition, emotional, and strong followed by physical sensation used to warn someone about the danger approaching (Freud Feist, 2006:28). Sullivan Harding feels the anxiety when he faces the phone calls claimed as coming from heaven. The phone calls
comes from the dead relatives to show the existence of afterlife. Here, Sullivan Harding starts to feel anxious.

In *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Sigmund Freud stated that the development of anxiety is the result of the ego’s reaction towards danger and the sign of it to escape (2002:430).

The anxiety Sullivan Harding experience is the result of the awareness of the danger that might happen to him. His id wants to believe that Giselle is still alive in the afterlife so that they are able to communicate. His superego tries to tell him not to believe. Sullivan believes in God but he does not believe on the afterlife. The knowledge he got since he was young told him that Giselle is dead and there is no way she can contact him. He believes that there is no afterlife. Here, the id and superego have come to a disagreement.

Too much anxiety can usually be attributed to something real or imagined which stirs up fears of loss of control, retaliation, physical injury or separation. A person who fears losing control is afraid that “letting go” will result in aggressive or antisocial behavior. Anxiety due to fear of retaliation occurs when we do something which makes us feel guilty. Though most of us feel guilty sometimes about some of the things we do, occasionally the guilt becomes exaggerated and we feel very uncomfortable. This kind of guilt can paralyze us for a period of time and waste valuable energy (Wicks, 1994:124).

Sullivan Harding is afraid of the fact that his wife died when he was in prison. He takes the accident as his mistake that takes his wife’s life. He was not there to accompany his wife when it was the last thing he wants to do; to see Giselle and to be there for her.

“It’s different.”

“Why?”

“Because I didn’t die.”
“Maybe Mommy didn’t either.”
“She did, Jules. We don’t like it, but she did.”
“How do you know?”
“What do you mean, how do I know?”
“You weren’t there.”

Sully swallowed. He rubbed a palm over his face. He kept his gaze straight ahead because it was suddenly too hard to look at his child, who with three simple words had repeated the torture Sully put himself through every day (Albom, 2013:137).

To overcome his anxiety, Sullivan Harding uses the defense mechanism. He denies that the afterlife is exist and could help him communicate with his wife. Giselle died in an accident. Her car slipped away during a thunderstorm on the first day of summer. When Giselle died, Sully was in prison, getting a sentence for the thing he did not do. He was blamed for the plane’s accident he flies. The rules did not let him out for Giselle’s funeral.

The anxiety shows the result of Sullivan Harding unconscious mind. The demands from each id, ego, and superego are different which leads the ego to give the sign.

3. **Sullivan Harding’s Denial**

Sullivan Harding uses denial as his defense mechanism towards the issue on the existence of afterlife. The defense mechanism is used to protect him from the anxiety that appears which is explained as follows.

Sullivan Harding has to face the fact that his son, Jules, has been affected by the news of getting the phone calls from heaven. This phenomenon gives him a knowledge that his mother has the ability to call him. It makes him
ask for the phone for several times. He wants to make himself ready to get the
call. As a father, Sullivan does not want Jules to take this news. He believes
that his wife, Giselle, will not call them. He shows his denial on the afterlife to
his son and leads him out from the phenomenon.

“What did your teacher tell you?”
“She said I could talk to Mommy if I wanted to.”
“How?”
“I can close my eyes and use the phone.”
“And?”
“And maybe Mommy will call me like those other people.”
Sully was stunned. Why would a teacher say that? Bad enough the boy
was grieving. To fill him with false hope? (Albom, 2013:93)

Sullivan Harding comes to the conclusion that he has to wake everyone
up. He tries to prove that there is someone beyond all these phone calls.
Followed by his anxiety, Sullivan uses his defense mechanism to protect
himself, he uses denial. He denies the existence of afterlife.

Wake up! he wanted to say. The living can’t speak to the dead! If they
could, don’t you think I would? Wouldn’t I trade my next hundred
breaths for one word from my wife? It’s not possible. There is no God
who does such things. There is no miracle in Coldwater. It’s a trick of
some kind, a con, a deceit, a massive hoax! (Albom, 2013:95)

On her paper entitled “Seven Pillars of Defense Mechanism Theory”,
Phebe Cramer stated that defense mechanisms might vary and have different
functions, but they have the same purpose. Defense mechanism is used when
the anxiety appears and the individual has to protect the self and self-esteem.
The individual may be clueless about it functions because it works in
unconscious level (Cramer, 2009:1). In addition, defense mechanism can also
be defined as an “automatic psychological processes that protect the individual
against anxiety and from the awareness of internal or external dangers or stressors” (Bond, 2004:263).

Denial towards the afterlife is one of the defense mechanism that Sullivan Harding uses. Afterlife becomes the recent discussion in Coldwater and it also gets Sullivan’s concern. He is aware of people’s belief on the existence of afterlife while he does not believe in that. Sullivan has a story related to the dead relatives which also has a connection to the afterlife. Sullivan lost his wife in an accident happened when they both planned to meet. Sullivan Harding was involved in a plane collision when he is supposed to land a plane. He maintained the communication with the air traffic controller, Elliot Gray. Unfortunately, technical mistake appears and he has to evacuate himself from the plane. Giselle’s car, who is in the way to pick him up, crash on to Elliot Gray’s car who tries to escape. Elliot died in an instant and it puts Giselle on a long coma before she dies. Sullivan, then, is sentenced to ten months in prison and his wife die when he is about nine weeks from release.

The main reason Sullivan feels the anxiety and uses the defense mechanism is that the presence of contradict demands from his id and superego. The phone calls from heaven has influenced him. His id, as the pleasure principle seeker, asks him to believe that the phone calls are made by the dead relatives from the afterlife. In contrary, his superego leads him not to believe that because his background refuses the existence of afterlife. “Do you believe in heaven, Mr. Harding?” Sully looked at the floor. The answer was
no. He blinked and looked back at Elwood” (Albom, 2013:216). Here, his ego is trapped between that and it has to find a way to accommodate them. The anxious starts to approach Sullivan Harding. This anxiety leads him to unconsciously uses the denial to defense and protect himself. “We can’t talk to her. I wish we could but we can’t. That’s what happens when someone dies. They go away” (Albom, 2013:137).

C. The Result of Sullivan Harding’s Denial

Sullivan Harding is one of the residents in Coldwater who denies the existence of afterlife. He does not believe the phone calls come from heaven. The denial is functioned as his defense mechanism to protect himself from the anxiety. Different from the others who do not believe and not really care, Sully stands for the truth because those phone calls also affect his son and make him waiting for his mother’s calls. “I don’t like it. Jules carries a phone. He lives in a fantasy. Someone has to expose this” (Albom, 2013:160).

Sullivan Harding knows he has to find the one who works beyond the phone calls. He denies the existence of afterlife and his denial leads him to look for the explanation. The other residents choose to believe the phone calls come from heaven. It makes them follow the story and do what the caller ask them to do, which is to spread the news about afterlife. Sullivan looks for the evidence by doing some research. He gathers the data and makes the analysis.
To deal with the recent phenomenon from Coldwater, the residents decide to make a gathering. Sullivan Harding is one of the attendance. Instead of giving a confession, Sully refuses the fact that he also gets the phone calls. He tries to gather the data to prove that these are deceitful. He does a research from the internet, the local newspaper, and local library. “He was heading to the Coldwater Public Library... this was his best and only option for doing research; a place where he once wrote grade-school book reports” (Albom, 2013:107). Seems not enough, Sully continues his research to the funeral home, Davidson & Sons. He tries to find the information from the obituaries writer, Maria, because she is the one who knows everyone in the city.

Maria either knew you or knew someone who did. Thus, when grieving families met with her at the funeral home, they were not reluctant to talk about their departed loved ones... They trusted Maria to write the obituary (Albom, 2013:162-163).

As someone who works in military, Sully knows that there is a reason beyond something. Sully is not a person with a specific religion. He once believes in God but nothing comes after that.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean anything. I just told him whatever he believed he could believe.”
She began to cry.
“I’m a churchgoing person,” she said.
“Well, I’m not,” Sully said. “That’s still allowed in this town, isn’t it?”... Sully wished he believed in God again, just to ask Him how He could be so cruel (Albom, 2013:136).

Sullivan still holds his belief that none of them are real. To prove that, he has to get the equipment for making those calls or find the one who operates it. Sully keeps telling himself that this was all a hoax and he has to bring out the truth. "I think someone is manipulating these calls. Someone
who knows a lot about the dead… or it’s someone with access to a lot of information” (Albom, 2013:237). Following the clues, Sullivan comes to a name, Horace Belfin, an owner of the funeral home. He finds Maria to get the information.

“When did Horace start working here?”
“Oh, I remember that. It was a year ago last April. My granddaughter’s birthday.”
_A year ago last April? A month after Sully’s crash?
“Where did he come from?”
“Someplace in Virginia. He’s always been pretty quiet about it because, well… you would know.”
“Why would I know?”
“That’s how military people are, right?”
Sully bit his lip.
“And what did Horace do…in the military?”
“I’m not sure. He and Mr. Davidson talked about it. Virginia. Fort something in Virginia” (Albom, 2013:260).

When he arrives, Sullivan enters Belfin’s house and figures out the equipment he uses to make the phone calls. All the data he has gathered from the funeral home and the recording from the family. Sully got the clues about the reason Belfin is doing this, which has the connection with the accident of Giselle. At the same time, there is a show takes place in Coldwater. The show where all the people who got the phone calls gather and wait for the call. It is showed live for people around the world, and by the time Sullivan sees Belfin’s action with the phone calls, the show ends.

Sullivan Harding feels the failure on him when he is not able to stop people for believing a deceit made by Horace Belfin. When Sully heads up to his house, he figures out the clue he has and understands that a Horace Belfin is actually an Elliot Grey Sr., a father of an air traffic controller who puts him
into a tragic life by losing his wife and being imprisoned for something he did not do. He is able to prove that the phone call are made by a living person.

“What these people were claiming, he had always tried. He had called out for Giselle. Nothing came back. There was no heaven. Dead was dead. It was time for everyone accepted that” (Albom, 2013:99).

Sullivan Harding is able to prove that the phone calls do not come from heaven, but it is made by a human being by using the technology supported by the complete information. His willing to prove comes from his belief that afterlife does not exist. He uses denial to protect himself from the possibility of the heaven-calls. Further, he uses it as the base for his action which can bring the truth for everyone.

Sullivan Harding is a father of a son, Jules, who lost his wife, Giselle, in an accident. At that time, Sully was imprisoned, got the punishment for the plane crash that involves him. He does not want his son to believe that the death has the ability to communicate with them. He denies the existence of afterlife and finds the real explanation of it so that no one will be fooled.

Maybe some of this was for him, to make him feel like he was doing something with his life; maybe some of it was to make the rest of the world feel the pain that he was feeling, that dead is dead, that Giselle was never making contact again and neither were their mothers or sisters or sons (Albom, 2013:161).

The denial that Sullivan Harding applies is the defense mechanism that he uses as the result of anxiety he feels. He feels the anxiety as his neighborhood start to get the phone calls they claimed as coming from heaven. Sullivan Harding lost his wife in an accident which makes him examines the
phone calls. Facing the phone calls, Sullivan Harding’s id demands him to believe so they will have a chance to communicate and say things, as Sully always hopes. In the contrary, his superego asks him not to believe it as he is treated to think logically. His ego is trapped between those two different demands and puts him into anxiety. Through his denial, Sullivan Harding is able to prove that Horace Belfin is the one who makes the phone calls.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the character in the previous chapter, this chapter is used to give the conclusion after answering three problem formulations. The first one is the characteristics of Sullivan Harding. In the novel, *The First Phone Call from Heaven*, he is characterized as responsible, reasonable, and affectionate. The characteristics are analyzed through the direct comment from the author, characters’ thoughts, characters’ speech, characters’ reactions and conversation of others.

Sullivan Harding is a responsible man as seen when he has to live with his only child after his wife died. Sullivan lost his wife and blamed himself for the accident, but he is able to put his self-interest aside and think about his son as his responsibility as a father. Sullivan Harding is also characterized as a reasonable man. He believes that everything happens with reasons beyond it, and it leads him to think logically in facing the phenomenon that strikes his neighborhood. Further, Sullivan Harding is characterized as an affectionate person. It is seen when he takes the additional flying time only to get the chance to meet his family. His love and affection is given through the hardest time of his family.

As a phenomenon happens in his town, Sullivan Harding has different way to respond it. Some phone calls happened to some people around him.
The receivers believe that the phone calls are coming from their dead families or relatives in heaven. Sullivan Harding shows his denial towards this event. His denial comes as his defense mechanism to protect his ego from the anxiety. Sully brings Giselle, his wife, into a chance to meet each other by taking an additional flying time to stop by in the city where his wife and son stay. Sully had a plane collision before landing while Giselle also had a car crash at the same time. Sully is not able to meet Giselle on her last day because he was imprisoned for the collision.

Sullivan becomes anxious when the phone calls from heaven appear. He blames himself for making his wife involved in a car accident. His id wants to believe that there is still a chance for him to communicate with Giselle, but his superego leads him to follow his intuition as he is a reasonable person. He wants to find the logical reason behind the phone calls. Sullivan becomes anxious when his id and superego has different demands. The defense mechanism works to reduce the anxiety that appears.

The id works in the unconscious part of one’s mind and leads someone into fulfilling the pleasure need. In Sullivan Harding’s decision to take an additional flying schedule, his id is seen as the dominant part because he does not think further. He chooses to take the chance to meet his family without considering his physical condition and the rules. His id’s demand leads him into a self-destruction when it works alone.
Sullivan Harding was proved guilty and has to be imprisoned for ten months. At the same time, Giselle died of a car accident. The ego works on the reality principle and it shows its dominance on Sullivan when he chooses to obey the sentence on him and not forcing for commutation. Further, his superego is also seen when he faces the heaven phone calls phenomenon. Superego works on moralistic and idealistic principle which helps Sullivan to believe that the phone calls are not real. It also leads him to find the reasonable explanation on it.

Sullivan Harding’s denial on the existence of afterlife comes as his defense mechanism. It appears when the anxiety comes as the result of protecting the ego. The anxiety is functioned to protect the ego when it is not able to fulfill both id and superego demands. In responding the phone calls from heaven, Sullivan Harding’s id demands him to believe in that and wait for Giselle’s call so he can tell his son that his mother is still there. On the contrary, his superego leads him not to accept that as it is not what he believes as true. His ego is also being pressed by the guilty feeling of him for not being with Giselle on her last days. Here, his denial towards the afterlife works as his defense mechanism to reduce the anxiety. As the result of his denial, Sullivan Harding is the only resident in Coldwater who is able to reveal the identity of the phone-maker.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendix

A novel by Mitch Albom, *The First Phone Call from Heaven* takes place in Coldwater, a small town near Lake Michigan. Several residents get the phone calls from their families or relatives who are dead already. Those phone calls always happens on Friday. The conversation they have mostly is about what heaven look like. The caller also ask the receiver to believe on the afterlife and spread the good news about it.

One of the receiver is Sullivan Harding. Sullivan works as a navy flier and has a wife, Giselle, and a son, Jules. Sullivan Harding once is asked by his senior to take his schedule to fly because he is not in a good condition. Sullivan takes it because the flying schedule will stop in a city where Giselle and Jules are staying. Following the rules of flying and landing, Sully keeps contacting the air-traffic controller, Elliot Grey. Knowing nothing’s wrong, Sullivan Harding had difficulty when landing his plane. He was collided with another plane. Unfortunately, Elliot Grey flees the scene and takes his car into high speed. He crashed into Giselle’s car which is on the way to pick Sully up. Elliot died in an instant and Giselle was coma for a long time. Sullivan Harding is sentenced as guilty and get ten months imprisoned. Giselle died when he is about nine weeks for release.

From the accident that happened to him, Sullivan has different reaction towards the phone calls. He refuses to believe it. He consistently denies the existence of afterlife. When his son starts to ask about the possibility of his
mother’s calling, Sullivan shows his stands and tries to prove it. He does research and analyze the possibility of the one who creates the phone calls. He is able to prove that the heavenly phone calls are not real by finding Elliot Grey, Sr as the one behind this. He admits his deceit and tells Sullivan the reason for doing that.