
**DISAPPOINTMENT AND REGRETTING REPRESENTATIONS
IN *DUNKIRK* AND *1917* MOVIES****Dedi Sulaeman,* Anisa Hanifah**English Literature, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati
Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: dedi4548@uinsgd.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to compare two movies that contain similar perceptions of psychological impact on war, disappointment and regret, from *Dunkirk* and *1917* movies. Disappointment and regretting arise between British soldiers in movies that were directed by Christopher Nolan and Sam Mendes, which coincidentally both of these films raised the setting in World War I and II. Therefore, this research uses literary criticism and comparative literature methods in examining *Dunkirk* (2017) and *1917* (2019), to produce both similarities and differences in the psychological and emotional impact on British soldiers. In addition, this research uses a descriptive method with a qualitative approach using Peirce's sign semiotic analysis. The result of this research is that readers will be able to recognize the differences between the two movies from literary perspective and psychological review from the failures of war in *Dunkirk* (2017) and *1917* (2019). These two films ultimately interpret disappointment in almost the same way and regret in the form of the loss of a loved one. The behavior of people who experienced both psychological impacts also indicates similarities, sadness, annoyed, and angry.

Keywords: disappointment, index, regretting, representations**INTRODUCTION**

This research raises the representation of psychological aftermath of British soldiers who had to retreat and give up from World War I and II. Short (2007, p. 29) stated that representation is to place before, that is, to place something before someone or something –hence, to present it. Both the *Dunkirk* (2017) and *1917* (2019) movies, both have a similar plot, they are the evacuation and cessation of attack that taken by the British soldiers, thus presenting two similar perceptions of psychological impact, disappointment and regret. Freud (1918), explained that the war in which we did not want to believe broke out and brought disappointment. Disappointment comes from war itself physically and psychologically on the survivors. For the soldiers who involved felt a deeper psychological disappointment, they experienced

firefights and occasionally defeated. In these two movies, the disappointment is present when the British soldiers feel they have failed in fighting for their country in the World Wars.

Dunkirk and *1917* movies will be discussed by researchers, they showed plots where the world war situation on the British side failed, more precisely the soldiers were required to retreat, avoiding the attack that was more dominant from the east, which at that time was Germany. These movies are very interesting research attention, with the interpretation of the point of view of the characters who experienced the failure of the war. And incredibly, these movies use narrative discourse that directly involves the mood of the audience along with the setting. In *Dunkirk* (2017), the emotional outburst of the soldiers who scrambled for ships to return to their land managed to hypnotize the audience's attention. Also the same with *1917* (2019), the struggle of two corporals conveyed a major message to stop the attack, until one of the two falls, this incident steals the emotions of the audience. Those two failures triggered a deep sense of disappointment and regret for British soldiers, especially for some of the characters who were directly involved.

From the plot and narrative performances presented by *Dunkirk* (2017) and *1917* (2019), researchers found the same psychological impact of events that are packaged in the setting of World War I and II. This research uses two disciplines in solving the above problems, psychoanalysis and literary analysis. The end of this research will be to produce a similar psychological impact representations between the two masterpieces from Christopher Nolan and Sam Mendes. According to Lauretis (2008, p. 21) the term psychoanalysis object also refers to the 'mental representation' of an individual or object itself, as well as an object or individual out of it.

Disappointment and regret are generic self awareness, cognitive-based, distasteful experiences arising when the existing situation of undertakings is worse than initially presumed (Zalla et al., 2014, p. 2). There are few studies that analyze the representation of feeling, behavior, and social-cultural as researcher's reviews in writing this research. First, Akbar and Sakinah's (2020) research which uses Pierce's semiotic theory analysis on *My Name is Khan* movie which examines Islam's racism. Second, a research on moral values in the film *Hafalan Shalat Delisa* which uses a literary sociology approach where the research object is similar to this study (Sarah & Nurholis, 2022). Third, in the comparative literature technique, the researcher found Rizka et al's (2015) research which analyzes the comparison of intrinsic elements between the film and the novel *Paper Towns*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The failure of a person or group of people to do something often brings feelings of disappointment and regret. Especially in the movies that we are currently researching, the conflicts that occur in each film's narrative cause feelings of disappointment and regret of its own. Therefore, the researcher will briefly explain important theoretical review about the two psychological impacts that were present in *Dunkirk* (2017) and *1917* (2019).

Heidarizadeha (2014, p. 789) believed that trauma or traumatize signifies a traumatic occurrence which encompasses a single occurrence or experience; it encompasses the feelings and emotions, in order to interlocks serious long-term negative concerns, psychoanalysis trauma utilized in this case. But before the researcher said further about psychology things, nowadays, films not rarely discussed as research material. One thing that is up for conversation is the films itself are often questioned whether they belong to literature or not. Whereas according to Braudy and Cohen (2009, p.381), film is an arrangement of actual acclimatization of literature which is narrated in play and theatre. Film is a remake of literary works as a modern novel that we can see through our eyes and hear through our ears. Basically, films are not included in literary works based on their authenticity, but films contained narratives and delivered them with play make films have literary elements. So the researchers used the comparative literature method in dissecting the two films.

According to Craib (2003), he defines disappointment as what occurs, what we feel, when something we assume, aim, or look forward to or desire did not materialise. It means that when reality was not in line with expectations, they will bring disappointment, which is shown by behavior and feelings of sadness, for instance. In line with him, Hassler (2014), believed that disappointment may eliminate us from our base quite immediately if our expectations have gotten a bit too self-attentive and out of touch with corporeality. It also means that the presence of disappointment lies in someone's irrational expectations to the reality he/she lives in. So we can conclude that disappointment brings a contradictory between expectations and realities.

In psychology way, regret has meaning as submitted sorrow for the loss or lack of something or someone of inordinate worth (Gotlib, 2020). It means that regret is caused by the diminishing presence that makes someone experiencing deep grief. Loss that a person feels sadness that lingers, even to the point of causing madness. Different with Price (2017), he explained that regret is a drawback of gratitude as it transpires in relation to disputed wills, which cannot be transmitted-which have failed to convey and now endure in a state of implicit willing that only appears blank, in and as silence. Price straightforwardly stated that emptiness of the soul due to unfulfilled desires. A hidden feeling, which cannot be expressed, because they are too empty to simply communicate it. So basically regret is a result of the absence of something or someone that causes an empty mind and soul, so he/she constantly lamenting sorrow and lost from obstinacy.

METHOD

This research uses literary criticism as the core design, as Abrams and Harpham (2013, p. 49) said that criticism, or more explicitly literary criticism, is the inclusive term for studies related to defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of literature. The researcher use this method in the context of defining and interpreting several crucial theories about the object of psychology from the movies.

In addition, this research also uses comparative literature to compare both *Dunkirk* (2017) and *1917* (2019), thus producing a similar psychological impact on British soldiers when they experienced the act of retreating from world wars. Comparative literature is concerned with texts analysis of all cultures that are interdisciplinary and relate to correlative patterns of literature across time and space (Bassnett, 1993, p. 1). It means that comparative literature includes two or more works across cultures to compare similarities in literary works. In line with Cao (2013), he argued that the aim of comparative literature is to encounter the dissimilarities out of resemblances and the resemblances out of the dissimilarities of numerous literatures. This can be concluded that comparative literature examines the similarities or differences between two or more literary works, even other disciplines outside of literature.

This research data was collected with documentation technique by cutting several scenes from *Dunkirk* and *1917* movies which show dialogues with disappointment and regretting representations. Comparative literature method is used to analyze literary devices and then the literary criticism to analyze the representations from the characters which are presented that produce two psychological interpretations of warfare. According to Remak (1979, in Domínguez et al., 2015, p. 5), he added that comparative literature is a literary study that on the one hand examines two or more specific countries, which is then connected to other fields of understanding and scientific disciplines, such as natural sciences, social knowledges, philosophy, art, history, and religious conviction on the other hand.

Furthermore, this research also uses a descriptive method with a qualitative approach using the semiotic analysis of Peirce's sign. According to Suparman (2020, p. 3), data analysis in qualitative research is carried out through logical and systematic data arrangement, and data analysis is carried out from the beginning of the researcher entering the research location until the end of the study (data collection). In this qualitative method, the researcher uses the Peirce's sign semiotic theory in describing the data. The main principles embodied in Peirce's theory are the powers of the human brain, the limits of signs, and the contingencies associated with his three typologies or classifications of signs: icon, index, and symbol. (Yakin & Totu, 2014, p. 6).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study discovered several findings. These are findings from the research results of disappointment and regret in *Dunkirk* (2017) and *1917* (2019) movies.

Disappointment and regret in Dunkirk (2017)

Dunkirk is a documentary film directed by Christopher Nolan, released in 2017 and won three nominations in Oscar for Best Sound Mixing, Best Sound Editing, and Best Film Editing in 2018. Those gains were because Nolan has linear narrative concept, which concerns on the reliability of the story, the lucidity of time, and the interconnection of the plot. This narrative concept encompasses beliefs and requirements for world order and certainty in a way

that is consistent with the storytelling logic of reality (Xu, 2022, p. 81). Moreover, this movie was based on real events during World War II. The occurrence recognized as "Dunkirk" appropriated date between May 26th and June 4th, 1940, when approximately 336,000 British, French and Belgian troops were cleared from Dunkirk, Northern France by a collaborative endeavor of seafaring and noncombatant parties, this occurrence termed as "Operation Dynamo" (Summerfield, 2010, p.788).

Zakheim (2022, p. 45) argued that Operation Dynamo, or a British rescue intended to rescue the British from a German outbreak on an attentiveness of forces was unescapable. The War Cabinet and concomitant military leaders be acquainted that allied armed forces were abstemiously restrained from outbreak. Winston Churchill ordered the evacuation of his 30,000 soldiers, but unfortunately the actual number of Dunkirk coast he had was closer to 400,000. But in the end, with the help of citizen merchant ships, the four-hundred thousand British troops were able to return safely to their homes.

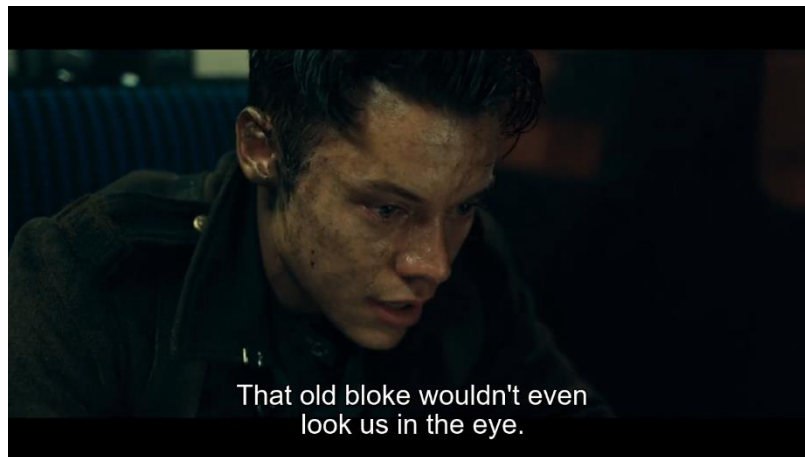


Figure 1. Screenshot from Dunkirk, min 01:33:17
Alex: "That old bloke wouldn't even look us in the eye."

From the data above, there is a disappointment found since the scene where an elderly man greets and gives bread to soldiers who have just come to Britain (Figure 1). As Alex sitting on the train, he realized that the old man was holding back his sadness, he couldn't bear to look the soldiers in the eye. He knew that the old man was disappointed with the return of the soldiers did not bring victory. The facial expression shown by Alex in the data above shows his anxiety to face the people's response to his absence in the course of the war. As Hossain (2017, p. 45) stated that Alex's circumstance was interconnected to soul's psychodynamics, the soul's core and interpersonal divergences, and cracks to find different personalities to deal with it and accomplish soul liberation. Accordance with Greenberg (2015, p. 1218), when a man hits a boundaries at work, when he undergoes disappointment, it feels like a repulsive shock. Disappointment can cause feelings of unwillingness and disdain for something or someone we let go. Feelings of disappointment give rise to guilt and shame, as Van Kleef et al. (2006, in Johnson & Connelly, 2014, p. 1268) stated that disappointment expressions can construct interpersonal

impacts such as helping deeds or indulgences that have been perceived with other distress-related emotions which possibly owing to the emotional reaction of guilt to an expression of disappointment.

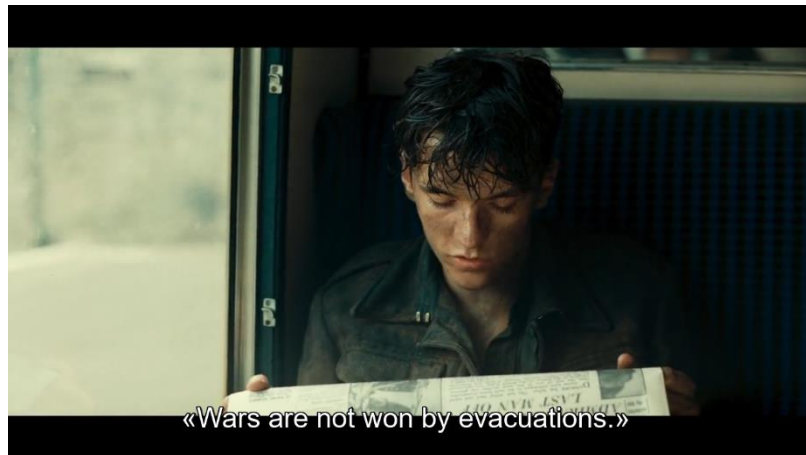


Figure 2. Screenshot from Dunkirk, min 01:36:29

Tommy: "Wars are not won by evacuations."
Alex: "I can't look,"

The next data shows disappointment that results in shame and worry (Figure 2). In that scene, Alex thought that he will be ashamed of the nothingness he brought to his homeland. As Bronstein (2015, p. 1173) argued that disappointment comes when our desires and aspirations are met regularly with nonfulfillment. Nonfulfillment in *Dunkirk's* narration is described as the result of a war that should have brought victory, instead returning home without joy. Alex was afraid that he will be spat on by the residents when he returns home because he felt he has become a coward who has run away from war. Once the troops arrived at Woking Station, Alex feel embarrassed and hid from the eyes of the residents who were chasing the train windows.



Figure 3. Screenshot from Dunkirk, min 01:20:55

Alex: "He's dead, mate."
Peter: "So be bloody careful with him!"

As explained by Gotlib (2020), that regret will arise due to the loss or absence of something or someone. But Bernard (in Wojtowicz, 2021, p. 2), has a different meaning of regret, he argued that on occasion, without deteriorating ourselves, humans trigger off an occurrence they could regret. Not only do they regret what occurred, but they regret what has ended. From the data above, there is regret from a father who lost his youngest son during the Dunkirk rescue mission (Figure 3). Regret was also present on the brother, after his young brother fell and hit his head, he is desperate and wanted to return to England instead of Dunkirk, the feeling of regret is getting worse when his brother is dead.

Disappointment and regret in 1917 (2019)

Sam Mendes, the director and producer of the British film *1917* in 2019. As shown in the post-credits, the film is a true story told by the director's grandfather, Alfred H. Mendes. As well as *Dunkirk*, *1917* also won three Oscar nominations for Best Sound Mixing, Best Cinematography, and Best Visual Effects. This film tells about two best friends of British soldiers who are tasked with stopping another British company from attacking a German position. Blake and Schofield must pass through the enemy lines, through crumbling cities, and through woodlands in limited time, a multi-mile mission (Matthews, 2020, p. 2).



Figure 4. Screenshot from 1917, min 31:32

Schofield: "Why in God's name did you have to choose me?"

From the data above, there is disappointment from Corporal Schofield who does not want this dangerous mission (Figure 4). Disappointment here arises because of the perceived loss, in the context of the scene above, Schofield suffered a loss from being stabbed by a wire in his hand and buried under the ruins of a cave. Schofield in this scene experiences a physical trauma, then that trauma causes a feeling of disappointment in his psyche. Accordance to Laub's argument (2015, p. 433), they believed that the experience of immense psychic trauma has never terminated to pose an impressive challenge to psychoanalytic conjecturing. Schofield feels wronged after agreeing to Blake's invitation for the dangerous mission. Loss is often considered a misfortune. can also be named as misfortune. As LaFarge (2015, p. 1226), believes that disappointment has definition as the concept of a feature that unrolls over time in a calamitous way.



Figure 5. Screenshot from 1917, min 49:28

Blake: "It'll be dark by then."

Schofield: "That won't bother me... I'll find the 2nd, I'll give them the message, and then I'll find your brother. Just like you, a little older..."

The data above shows disappointment and regret in one scene. The death of Corporal Blake, Schofield's mission partner, left him disappointed because he couldn't complete the mission and meet his brother (Figure 5). But regret is more prominent and dominates the mood of the audience. Schofield's loss of his closest friend left a huge wound in his heart. Regret was subordinate with fiercer emotional encouragement, as indexed by skin conductance retorts, than disappointment (Bault et al., 2016, p. 194).



Figure 6. Screenshot from 1917, min 01:40:13

Colonel MacKenzie: "I hoped today might be a good day. Hope is a dangerous thing."

This data is the last form of disappointment in the 1917 movie. Disappointment is dissatisfaction with reality which is contrary to expectations (Figure 6). Colonel MacKenzie disappointed with the reality that forced him to retreat and surrender from fighting the German troops. As explained by Greenberg (2015, p. 1221), human was not reckoned to undergo authorization, so they are charged to refrain from disappointment as well. Disappointment can consequently be surprising and demoralize their diagnostic mindset.

CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the representations of psychological impacts on war, disappointment and regret, are shown by the facial, body, actions, and speech gestures of the *Dunkirk* and *1917* movies characters. The storylines of defeat and/or failure in *Dunkirk* and *1917* movies convey that life cannot be separated from disappointment and regret. Various causes and consequences of disappointment are presented in these movies. Their aspirations, their faith, and their self-esteem, are crushed by a reality that is out of balance with expectations. From *Dunkirk*, disappointment begets sadness and shame. Whereas *1917*, disillusionment has been expressed with anger and irritation. Likewise with regret, the loss of someone we love makes us fall, weak, and almost give up. From both movies, *Dunkirk* and *1917*, regret came with the loss of those closest to them, as sons, brothers and friends. Various indications of feelings present from the two psychological impacts, this research needs to be analyzed further with psychoanalysis. Expectantly, the researcher can continue this research with another discipline of literary analysis, especially a film analysis.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2013). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning.
- Akbar, R. S., & Sakinah, R. M. N. (2020). Islam's Racism and Discrimination in "My Name is Khan" Movie. *Textura*, 1(1), 63–71.
- Bassnett, S. (1993). *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bault, N., Wydoodt, P., & Coricelli, G. (2016). Different Attentional Patterns for Regret and Disappointment: An Eye-tracking Study. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 29(2–3). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.1938>
- Brody, L., & Cohen, M. (2009). *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (Seventh). Oxford University Press.
- Bronstein, C. (2015). The Analysts Disappointment: An Everyday Struggle. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 63(6).
- Cao, S. (2013). *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature*. Springer Berlin.
- Craib, I. (2003). *The Importance of Disappointment*. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Domínguez, C., Saussy, H., & Villanueva, D. (2015). *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications*. Routledge.
- Freud, S. (1918). *Reflections on War and Death*. Rosings Digital Publications.
- Gotlib, A. (2020). *The Moral Psychology of Regret*. Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd.
- Greenberg, J. (2015). Disappointment: Something in the Nature of Analysis. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 63(6).
- Hassler, C. (2014). *Expectation Hangover: Overcoming Disappointment in Work, Love, and Life*. New World Library.
- Heidarizadeh, N. (2014). The Significant Role of Trauma in Literature and

- Psychoanalysis. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192(2015), 788–795. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.093>
- Hossain, M. M. (2017). Psychoanalytic theory used in English literature: A descriptive study. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Linguistics & Education*, 17(1), 41–46.
- Johnson, G., & Connelly, S. (2014). Negative emotions in informal feedback: The benefits of disappointment and drawbacks of anger. *Human Relations*, 67(10), 1265–1290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726714532856>
- LaFarge, L. (2015). The Fog of Disappointment, the Cliffs of Disillusionment, the Abyss of Despair. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 63(6). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065115618202>
- Laub, D., & Lee, S. (2015). Thanatos and Massive Psychic Trauma: The Impact of the Death Instinct on Knowing, Remembering, and Forgetting. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 51(2).
- Lauretis, T. de. (2008). *Freud's Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Film* (S. Heath, C. M. Riley, & Denise (eds.)). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Matthews, J. (2020). *Movie Review: 1917*. Digital Collection of DORDT University. https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/1150
- Price, B. (2017). *A Theory of Regret*. Duke University Press.
- Rizka, A., Sakinah, R. M. N., & English, A. L. (2015). The Comparison of Characters, Setting and Characterization Analysis Between Novel and Film of Paper Towns (A Study of Comparative Literature). *The Gist*, 17–18.
- Sarah, R., & Nurholis. (2022). An Analysis of Moral Values in the Film Hafalan Shalat Delisa: Sociology of Literature Approach. *The Gist*, 5(1), 84–93.
- Short, T. L. (2007). *Peirce's Theory of Signs*. Cambridge University Press.
- Summerfield, P. (2010). Dunkirk and the Popular Memory of Britain at War, 1940–58. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45(4).
- Suparman, U. (2020). *Bagaimana Menganalisis Data Kualitatif?*
- Wojtowicz, J. (2021). The Purity of Agent-Regret. In *Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819121000309>
- Xu, L. (2022). Analysis on Christopher Nolan's Film Style. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 4(4), 80–82. <https://doi.org/10.25236/far.2022.040415>
- Yakin, H. S. M., & Totu, A. (2014). The Semiotic Perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A Brief Comparative Study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 155(October), 4–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.247>
- Zakheim, M. (2022). *"The Sights I Would Have Preferred to Have Left Behind in Dunkirk": A Comparative Study of Wartime British Memorialization of Operation Dynamo*. Columbia University.
- Zalla, T., Sirigu, A., Robic, S., Chaste, P., Leboyer, M., & Coricelli, G. (2014). Feelings of regret and disappointment in adults with high-functioning autism. *Cortex*, 58(June), 112–122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2014.05.008>