Applying Minderop's Fictional Characterization to Imaginary Friends in the IF (2024) Movie

Farhadia Syawala Fitri [1]
farhadiiasyawala@email.com
English Literature Department. Faculty of Tourism and Language, Universitas Pertiwi

Sahril Mujani
sahril.mujani@pertiwi.ac.id
English Literature Department. Faculty of Tourism and Language, Universitas Pertiwi

Mashuri
mashuri@pertiwi.ac.id
English Literature Department. Faculty of Tourism and Language, Universitas Pertiwi

Abstract: Imagination plays a crucial role in childhood development, often represented through imaginary friends as emotional and cognitive companions. The movie IF (2024) presents a unique narrative that visualizes children's imaginary friends and their deeper meanings. This research aims to analyze the characterization of imaginary friends. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research applies Albertine Minderop's fictional characterization theory to examine how each imaginary friend is portrayed through name and dialogue. Data is collected through observation of the movie's scenes, character interactions, and dialogues. The findings reveal that imaginary friends are not merely fictional entities but serve as emotional representation of unspoken feelings such as grief, loneliness, and inner strength. This research concludes that IF (2024) offers a profound representation of how imaginary friends can accompany a child's psychological journey, bridging creativity, emotional growth, and the struggle of letting go.

Keywords: *Imaginary friends, Fictional characterization, Emotional growth, Creativity*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are many cases of character crisis experienced by children. This is due to the lack of curiosity or self-exploration that should be done by children during their growth period (Rohmah, 2018). Therefore, it is very necessary to have a supporting role around children to help foster creative thinking skills in children, strengthen children's curiosity, and perfect emotional growth (Trisnawati et al, 2021).

The environment around children plays a very important role in the growth and development of children. Nabilla & Desmon (2022) highlights the same statement in their research, they noted that, From environmental or social influences, children will get enough opportunities to develop in learning, and children will get enough opportunities to integrate the declarative knowledge they learn with procedural knowledge so that it can be used to do tasks and solve problems.

According to Nabilla & Desmon (2022), the presence of supportive environments, such as family, teachers, and even imaginative companions like imaginary friends, becomes crucial in this developmental stage. Without adequate stimulation and guidance, children may struggle to build a strong sense of identity, empathy, and resilience needed to face real-life challenges. Encouraging exploration through imagination and creativity enables children to better understand themselves and their emotions, laying a strong foundation for mental

---

[1] Corresponding author

health and cognitive maturity (Heldanita, 2018). Thus, nurturing children's character development through active engagement and emotional support is not only important but urgent, especially in an era where digital distractions often replace meaningful personal interactions. The role of imaginative elements, as depicted through various media including movies, highlights how imagination can serve as a bridge between internal growth and external understanding of the world.

As written in Current Approaches in Psychiatry (2021), imaginary friends are characters that are sometimes invisible, but sometimes become real in the form of animals, objects or dolls, which the child describes and behaves as if they are alive. Described in The Australian Parenting Website (2024), imaginary friends are real for children and true. Maybe for some people, imaginary friends may be considered taboo and irrational. However, not for young children as they are in the process of developing their minds. Although not all children have imaginary friends, there are many children who have imaginary friends during their formative years.

Having imaginary friends is considered a normal and healthy part of a child's social and cognitive development. This is because imaginary friends can help children develop social skills, creativity, emotion management, and situational awareness (Sari, et al, 2020). However, although normal, there are some signs to watch out for such as if the child has no friends in the real world, feels afraid of their imaginary friends, or blames their imaginary friends for their behavior (Armah & Potts, 2021).

According to research summarized in Oxford University Press (2024), as many as 65% of children up to the age of 7 have imaginary friends. Then found that 28% of children aged 5 to 12 also have imaginary friends. Meanwhile, 37% of children over the age of 7 also reported having imaginary friends. As stated by Akpakir (2021), generally, these imaginary friends "appear" when the child turns 2,5 years old and persist until 3 to 7 years old. Imaginary friends can appear through a child's imagination because at this age, children are having fun playing and interacting socially. However, they don't always have someone to talk to, which leads to imaginary friends.

Characters can also be described as signs that carry deep emotional and psychological meanings. According to Fadzilah et al (2017), in an article said that, "In semiotics perspective, characterization relates with the use of signs or symbols to describe the characters based on character traits. There are behaviors called characterization which relate to psyche and psychological experience or problem felt by human in real life. Analysis concerning those aspects can be more thoroughly elaborated by semiotics. Semiotics is the study the meaning of the sign..."

According to Chaturvedi and Verma (2022), in cinematic and literary studies, especially those that aim to portray children, characters are often presented not just as roles in a narrative, but they are also presented as symbols that describe thoughts, struggles, desires, or even fears. In the context of imaginary friends, they take on a central role in the internal worlds that children create, allowing them to externalize emotions. Through symbolic characterization, imaginary friends can represent comfort, protection, resilience, or perhaps unresolved trauma.

The importance of character development during the childhood growth process makes the character of the people around them must be positively involved in its formation. Thus, in the future the characterization that will be formed into the child will also be a positive character in social life. This is one of the reasons why this research was conducted. This research will raise the issue of how the characterization of imaginary friends, as friends in childhood, helps the process of character formation and development in the children they accompany.

Therefore, this research uses a movie as the object of this characterization research. By focusing on analyzing the characterization of characters, the research plays an important role in the environment around children, such as imaginary friends, the most suitable title is the movie IF (2024) by John Krasinki. This research only examines the influence of characterization of Imaginary friends as a child's environment for the child's growth process, the results may be different if using other objects as a child's environment.

IF (2024) movie is about on the role of imaginary friends in children's growth. Bringing the theme of how cognitive development, creative thinking framework, and identity growth in children are displayed, this movie is the most suitable option according to the writer to be used as the object of research at

this time. Apart from that, the characterization of each imaginary friend in the movie's narrative is also depicted in a different way and is unique to each other, adjusting the imagination made by each child. So the research on the characterization of imaginary friends in this movie will be very varied and will provide new insights.

As explained before, this research focuses on the movie IF (2024), a fantasy comedy-drama that explores themes of imagination, childhood, and emotional healing. The movie follows a young girl named Bea, who discovers that she has the ability to see forgotten imaginary friends (IFs) that were once cherished by children but have since been abandoned. With the help of her neighbor Cal, Bea embarks on a journey to reconnect these IFs with new companions, highlighting the power of belief and the importance of maintaining a sense of wonder. IF had its world premiere in 2024 and has been praised for its heartfelt storytelling and creative world-building. This research will examine how IF portrays the role of imagination in coping with change and emotional challenges, as well as its broader implications on childhood development and nostalgia. Through its narrative, the movie raises important questions about memory, growing up, and the significance of holding onto creativity in an ever-changing world.

Previous research has applied Minderop's theory to explore character traits in movies, such as the work of Ramadhan (2023), whose objective focuses on the how traits and behaviors influence new things done by the main character as a result of his creative thinking process in the movie Free Guy. Then, there is Prasetyo (2023), whose objective focuses on the growth of moral character in Pinocchio movie. In addition, there is also research from Elva & Saptanto (2023), in their research only focused on analyzing the modified characters in the Little Women movie adaptation made in 2019 by comparing the original depiction in the original novel by Louisa May Alcott. These studies effectively show how Minderop's theory of fictional characterization can be used to analyze characters but they focus on broader narrative themes such as creative thought processes, moral development, also adaptation and transformation rather than emphasizing character construction itself as the main objective. However, this research has a gap that

lies in the objective of focusing the analysis specifically on characterizations of characters who become positive influences for their surroundings, which here means children.

Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap by concentrating on how the characters of imaginary friends in the movie IF (2024) use the Minderop method, focusing on what their characters are like so that it can be said to be a good environment for the growth process and creativity of children in the narrative.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach in its work because this research aims to analyze and interpret the characterization of each IF in IF (2024) movie. The use of a descriptive qualitative method is very suitable for this research because the writer uses the depiction of various IF characters by analyzing their traits, behaviors, and roles in the narrative of this IF movie.

To conduct the analysis, this research applies Structuralism as the main approach by applying Albertine Minderop's theory of fictional characterization to explore how the personalities and traits of each IF are constructed in the narrative. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how imaginary friends (IFs) contribute to the broader themes of imagination, emotional growth, and the waning of childhood creativity in a movie.

The primary data in this research is taken from the movie IF (2024), which focuses on the characterization of each IF character that has a positive influence on the process of child development. This main data analysis is done through scenes, dialogs, quotes and also figures in the movie . As for the secondary data of this research including books, journals, articles, and verified sites on the internet related to this research.

Beginning with formulating an issue, the writer starts to find a movie that has a related issue in its narration to become a main source of this research. After that, the writer watches the movie and takes a note repeatedly to analyze and select scenes related to the problem to be used as valid data in the research. Ended by making conclusions from the analysis of the problems that have been researched in a concise and clear manner.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The writer includes findings and discussions to analyze and interpret the characterization of each IF in IF (2024) movie. The following are the findings of the characterization of imaginary friends who play a crucial role in the growth process of children in the movie IF (2024).

Direct method: Characterization through Name

Scene 1: Blue introduces his name to Bea. (00:24:23 - 00:24:38) Dialogue:

> Bea : *"Who are you?"*
> Blue : *"What do you mean? I'm.. I'm Blue."*
> Bea : *"But you're purple."*
> Blue : *"Owh, yeah.. He's colorblind, so.."*
> Bea : *"Who was?"*
> Blue : *"My kid! Remember?"*

Figure 1: Blue introduces his name to Bea.

In this scene, Bea asks who's the name of this purple monster. Then she gets confused when he introduces himself as "Blue", while he had purple fur on his whole body. Then, Blue mentioned that his name "Blue" was given from his former child. Even though he has purple fluffy fur, his kid still named him "Blue" because of the kid's colorblindness.

Scene 2: Blossom introducing herself in front of Bea. (00:25:06 - 00:25:21)

Figure 2: Blossom introducing herself in front of Bea.

In this scene, Blossom officially introduces herself to Bea. And from her name, it's easy to know what kind of traits she has. The name "Blossom" already gives signals to her traits. Blossom usually means elegant, gentle, and purity, or we can say it like flower blooms. Blossom has a personality like a gentle flower that gives warmth to another, even before she speaks or acts. Her name also signaling the awakening of childhood memories and happiness.

Scene 3: Ally introduces her name while interviewed by Cal, Bea, and Lewis. (00:54:28 - 00:57:18)

Figure 3: Ally introduces her name while interviewed by Cal, Bea, and Lewis.

In this scene, The name "Ally" was given to this pink IF character because of her depiction as an Alligator plush character. Then the child who created her gave her the name "Ally". Her name also gives a meaning as a "partner", with her vision always to protect her girl, her name made her such a good match to a great partner.

Scene 4: Pop gives an introduction of himself while interview. (00:54:35 - 000:54:46) Dialogue:

> Bea : *"So, what's your name?"*
> Pop : *"Pop. Because, when sometimes, when I get nervous, I.. Oh goodness."* (popping)

Figure 4: Pop gives an introduction of himself while interview.

In the scene above, the name "Pop" for this bubble-shaped IF character was given from his habit of popping whenever he felt nervous.

Scene 5: Uni introduces herself in front of Bea, Cal, and Lewis. (00:54:16 - 00:55:01) Dialogue:

> Uni : *"My little girl's name was Tabitha. She named me Uni, because.. because I'm a unicorn! Hahaha. Sorry, I'm so nervous."*

Figure 5: Uni introduces herself in front of Bea, Cal, and Lewis.

In the sequence above, "Uni" as this pink unicorn name is obviously a very clear characterization because she is a unicorn, and the name "Uni" is taken from the first three letters of "Unicorn". As Uni said in the dialogue above. She said that her little girl used to name her Uni because she is a unicorn.

Indirect method: Characterization through Dialogue

Scene 1: Lewis, Calvin, and Bea have a conversation in Coney Island. (00:45:02 - 00:45:56). Dialogue:

> Lewis: *"You know? If he's not gonna ask you to look around, why don't you give it to him?"*
> Calvin: *"Sorry, what?"*
> Lewis: *"This place can be anything you wanted to be. All you need is a little imaginary."* Bea: (smiling)
> Lewis: *"Show us how it looks in your imagination."*

The dialogue above takes place at Coney Island, the place where the IFs live and gather. Lewis tells Bea that this place can be whatever she wants it to be, according to her imagination. In context, because Bea is a child figure, and the place is indeed made based on the imagination made by children.

In this scene's dialogue, it can be concluded that Lewis' character has a supportive and warm personality. We can conclude from Lewis' line, it emphasizes imagination, openness, and emotional safety. He tells Bea that she can develop her imagination in that place. He also said it with a delicate and gentle intonation like a parent to his child.

Scene 2: Ally tells Calvin, Bea, and Lewis about the children's fear of the darkness. (00:57:05 - 00:57:19). Dialogue:

> Ally: *"Okay. Let me tell you something about the dark. All kids are scared of the dark. All of them. Even if they don't admit it. And why? Because the stayed light doesn't do anything. That's why!"*

In the dialogue above, Ally tells Cal, Bea, and Lewis the fact that all children must be afraid of the dark. In the line, "All kids are scared of the dark. All of them. Even if they don't admit it," shows empathy, as she normalizes this fear, it's just that children are sometimes embarrassed to admit it. Then she says again "Because the stayed light doesn't do anything. That's why!", Ally seems to be saying that just having a light on isn't enough to chase away fear, what really helps is feeling understood, safe, and supported.

Through this dialog, Ally shows a perceptive and protective personality. She not only understands children's fears but also expresses them in a way that validates and empowers.

Scene 3: Cosmo both confidently flexing his ability to others and being mysterious. (00:57:53 - 00:58:08). Dialogue:

> Cosmo: *"I can find anyone. Anywhere!"*
> Cal: *"No, no. Okay, okay, okay!"*
> Bea: *"But where are you from?"* Cosmo: *"I will never tell you that."*

The dialogue above takes place when Cosmo is conducting interviews with Cal, Bea, and Lewis. Described as a detective character, when he says "I can find anyone. Anywhere!", shows that he is ambitious and confident. Furthermore, when Bea curiously asks, "But where are you from?" and Cosmo replies, "I will never tell you that," it adds to his sense of mystery.

Overall, this scene highlights Cosmo as an elusive, confident, and mysterious character who may be a little mischievous.

Scene 4: Blue tells others about his memories with his former boy. (00:59:07 - 00:59:35) Dialogue:

> Blue: *"His favorite snack was croissant. Which was kind of cheating. Because his parents are in the bakery right downstairs. So that was convenient. We ate lot of croissants, and bread, carbs, lot of carbs, no pasta, which is interesting. But everything else they did make has a delicious smell."*

In this dialog, Blue is conducting an interview with Cal, Bea, and Lewis. Instead of explaining about himself like the other IFs, Blue prefers to tell about his former boy, from this it can be said that he is the type of character who likes reminisce. Blue also tells all the little details about his memories with his former son, by slipping in some small jokes of humor, and compliments for him, showing that Blue is also a warm but humorous figure.

Altogether, we can conclude that Blue reveals a warm, nostalgic, and humorous personality.

Scene 5: Lewis and Bea have a conversation about Bea's worries through IFs. (01:00:45 - 01:02:37). Dialogue:

> Bea: "But they forgot 'em."
> Lewis: "Nothing that you loved can ever be forgotten. You can always come back." Bea: "How?"
> Lewis: "Memories. They lived forever, right there in your heart. Sometimes you just need to find a way to invite them out. For me it is the smell of the sea breeze or the sound of footsteps tapping on the woodwalk. And after that, just close your eyes, and all memories will come back."

The dialogue above takes place when Lewis is talking with Bea under the twilight sky. Lewis helps Bea with his words to fight her worries. We can conclude from the dialogue above based on every word Lewis said to Bea, Lewis is a warm and caring person, apart from that he is also fairly wise.

Scene 6: Bea looking for Cal to handle her worries about her father. (01:33:07 - 01:34:00) Dialogue:

> Bea: "I can't do it. I just can't do it." Cal: "It's okay. You're okay."
> Bea: "I need you to help me."
> Cal: "Hey, I'm right here. I'm always here."

The dialogue above is when Bea receives news about her father who is unconscious after undergoing heart surgery, Bea is afraid that her father will leave her like her mother 5 years ago. Bea was very sad and scared then she looked for Calvin, or commonly called Cal.

Cal responded to Bea by giving her full peace of mind without the slightest judgment. Cal also showed a supportive attitude towards Bea who was shaken by saying "Hey, I'm right here. I'm always here,". From the explanation, it can be said that Cal portrays a very supportive, calm, and loyal personality.

From the findings of how IF characters are portrayed in the movie, it can be said that their characters have positive traits and behaviors that can bring some good influence to the children's growth and development environment. The following is a deeper explanation of the findings above.

During the growth process of children, the environment around the child has a very important role and can even affect how the child grows and develops (Signh, 2023). The environment in question does not only mean the place, but the people around the child, such as parents, siblings, family, friends, and even imaginary friends created by the children themselves. In the context of this research, that role is occupied by imaginary friends towards children, which is one of the most important internal roles (Sen & Karagul, 2021).

For example, Blue, with its nostalgic and humorous personality, reflects a warm-hearted and imaginative child who may need reassurance or comfort. Blossom, whose name already implies softness and warmth, suggests that the child may long for kindness and emotional security. Ally, who is highly empathetic and protective, reflects a child's need for someone who understands and validates their fears-especially the fear of the dark, a common childhood anxiety.

In the same way, Pop and Uni represent innocence and simplicity in naming that often characterizes early childhood logic. Pop is named for his nervous habits and Uni for the unicorn. This simplicity of naming also highlights how children personalize their IFs based on direct observation and emotional connection.

In addition, indirect characterization through dialogue further enhances the depth of each IF's personality. Lewis consistently demonstrates wisdom, compassion, and an understanding of emotional healing. His role as a guiding figure shows how imaginary companions can also act as moral or emotional anchors, especially in times of loss or uncertainty. Cosmo's confident and mysterious behavior shows that imaginary friends can also fulfill a child's desire for adventure and control-providing a sense of freedom and excitement in a world where children often feel small.

Based on the research of IF characters in the IF movie above, it can be seen from each of these imaginary characters that none of them have negative traits. All of those IFs portray nurturing, emotionally intelligent, and relatable

figures, aligning closely with the child's experiences and emotional world. They all have positive traits that can help support character building in children in the future and as these children grow up, they are also described as having similar characterizations to their respective IFs.

CONCLUSION

From the movie IF (2024) analysis according to Minderop's Method of Fictional Characterization, it is evident that the imaginary friends' characterization is shown with depth and creativity, reflecting the emotional bonds between children and their imaginary companions. By direct methods, characterization through name, the movie expresses definite personality traits and symbolic connotations of each character, like "Blue" standing for warmth and nostalgia, or "Blossom" standing for elegance and gracefulness. In contrast, the indirect methods, characterization through dialog, disclose the inner values, feelings, and growth functions of each IF, like Lewis' caring nature, Ally's protectiveness, and Blue's nostalgic thoughts. These characters serve not only as creations of the imagination but also as a function of the psychological and emotional needs of the children who created them. The movie, therefore, utilizes fictional characterization with great success to explore themes of memory, childhood fantasy, emotional development, and the process of becoming from innocence to maturity.

For future research, the writer suggests researchers analyze the characterization of IF characters by using characterization through appearance and action. As this research only analyzes characterization through name and dialogue, there are still several ways to examine characters more deeply, but due to limited time, this research can only present research by characterization through names and dialogue.

REFERENCES

Akpakir, Z. (2021). Imaginary Companionships in Childhood and Their Impacts on Child Development. Current Approaches in Psychiatry. 13(4):820-830, DOI: 10.18863/pgy.892571.

Armah, A., & Potts, M., L. (2021). A Review of Imaginary Companions and Their Implications for Development. Sage Journals: Imagination, Cognition & Personality. Volume 41, Issue 1, https://doi.org/10.1177/0276236621999.

Aslan, A. (2024). Character building in early childhood: An integrative literature review towards quality education. The International Tax Journal, 51(6), 190²196. Retrieved from https://internationaltaxjournal.online/index.php/itj/article/view/26.

Bal, M. (2009). Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative (3rd ed.). University of Toronto Press.

Barry, P. (2002). Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory (2nd ed.). New York: Manchester University Press.

Bennet, A., & Royle, N. (2023). An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory (6th ed.). London: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003255390.

Chatman, S. (1978). Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film. London: Cornell University Press.

Chaturvedi, R., & Verma. A. (2022). The Portrayal of Childhood in the Cinema. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT). Volume 10, Issue 6 June 2022, ISSN: 2320-2882. www.ijcrt.org.

Culler, J. (2002). Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Elva, K. A., & Saptanto, D. D. (2023). Ecranization of Narrative Elements: Plot and Characterization. The Virtual International Conference on Economics, Law and Humanities. Vol. 2 No. 1.

Fadzilah, M. R., Untari, L., & Purnomo, SF. L. A. (2017). A Semiotics Study of Characterization on The Movie and Visual Novel Thumbelina. Leksika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra dan Pengajarannya. Vol.11 No.2 ² Aug 2017: 34-45.

Heldanita. (2018). Pengembangan Kreativitas Melalui Eksplorasi. Golden Age: Jurnal Ilmiah Tumbuh Kembang Anak Usia Dini. Vol. 3 No. 1. Maret 2018 e-ISSN: 2502-3519.

Krasinki, J. (2024). IF. Paramount Pictures.

Minderop, A. (2019). Metode Karakterisasi Telaah Fiksi. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.

Nabilla, S., & Desmon, D. (2022). Pengaruh Lingkungan Terhadap Perkembangan Anak. Jurnal Ilmiah Zona Psikologi. Vol. 4 Nomor 3 Juni 2022 p - ISSN: 2654-8496, 66-73.

Pickering, J.H., & Hoeper, J.D. (1981). Concise Companion to Literature. New York: Macmillan.

Prasetyo, I. P. (2023). Pinocchio's Characterizations and Moral Values in Pinocchio Movie (2022) by Robert Zemeckis. Thesis. Faculty of Tourism and Culture. Jakarta: Pertiwi University.

Ramadhan, M. R. (2023). Guy's Characterization and His Creativities as an NPC Player Reflected in Free Guy Movie (2021) by Shawn Levy. Thesis. Faculty of Tourism and Culture. Jakarta: Pertiwi University.

Rohmah, U. (2018). Pengembangan Karakter Pada Anak Usia Dini (AUD). Al-Athfal Jurnal Pendidikan Anak. ISSN (p): 2477-4715; ISSN (e): 2477-4189 Vol. 4 Nomor 1, Juni 2018, Hal. 85-102, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14421/al-athfal.2018.41-06.

Rolls, E. T. (2014). Emotion and Decision-Making Explained. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Sen, E., & Karagul, S. (2021). A study of secondary school students' perceptions of fictional characters. International Journal of Educational Methodology, 7(3), 433-446. https://doi.org/10.12973/ijem.7.3.433

Singh, A. (2023). The Influences of Environmental Factors on Child Development a Comprehensive Review. Journal of Child and Adolescent Behavior, Vol. 11: 569.

Taylor, M., & Aguiar, N. R. (2024). What Is an Imaginary Friend and How Many Children Have Them?. Oxford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/9780190888916.003.0001.

Trisnawati, W., Raharjo, T. J., & Kisworo, B. (2021). Peran Pendidik dalam Mengembangkan Kreativitas Seni Anak Usia Dini di Kelompok Bermain Koronka Bawen Kabupaten Semarang. Jendela PLS: Jurnal Cendekiawan Ilmiah PLS. Vol. 6 No 1 Juni 2021 E-ISSN 2745-3944.

(2024). Imaginary Friends. Diakses pada 29 April 2025, dari https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/behaviour/friends-siblings/imaginary-friend.