

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the trauma experiences faced by Sylvia Plath in her works entitled “*Daddy*” and “*Lady Lazarus*”. In the introduction, the writer explains the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study and scope and limitation of the study. All the subchapters of the introduction chapter are necessary for the basis of the study conducted.

1.1 Background of the Study

Trauma is a psychological and emotional reaction to very upsetting events, and it’s now an important topic in literary studies. In literature, trauma often shows up not as a straightforward story, but through broken , symbolic, and emotional language. Caruth (1996) says that trauma can’t be shown in a simple way. Instead, it appears in disconnected pieces, which shows how hard it is to deal with or understand the traumatic event. Because of this, literature-especially poetry-is a strong way to show and work through trauma. Sylvia Plath’s poetry is a good example of this, as it gives very personal and close-up views of mental suffering.

Plath’s poems “*Daddy*” and “*Lady Lazarus*” are well-known as personal works that come from her own life. Many experts say that these poems are based on her real-life pain, especially the death of her father, Otto Plath, her difficult marriage to Ted Hughes, and her ongoing battle with depression. Alruwaily (2025) says that “*Daddy*” shows the hidden emotional issues Plath had with her father, influenced by an Electra Complex. Fatah (2020) also points out that the poem uses symbols to show how she felt trapped by powerful men, representing both her father and her husband. In “*Lady Lazarus*,” the speaker tells about going through death and coming back to life, which mirrors Plath’s own attempts to kill herself. Cordova and Young (2004) believe that the poem is a clear look into Plath’s suicidal feelings,

changing her personal pain into a performance, symbol, and a way to express herself.

If we look closely at these poems, we can see how much they relate to Plath's own life. "*Daddy*" was written soon after Plath and Hughes separated, and just a few months before she died, when she was feeling very emotional. The images of Nazis and the Holocaust aren't meant to be taken literally, but instead represent control and being trapped, which reflected what Plath was going through emotionally. Plath doesn't describe her pain directly; instead, she uses strong symbols and long metaphors to hide it. This is similar to Freud's idea of repetition compulsion, where someone repeats their emotional hurts instead of just talking about them. Plath uses metaphors to make the unseen visible, turning her inner turmoil and hidden sadness into something that can be understood, even if not completely fixed, through her poetry.

Like "*Lady Lazarus*," this poem uses dramatic performance and disturbing images of coming back to life to show the pain of mental suffering. The speaker says death is "*as an art*," which means she sees trauma as something to watch and a way to stay alive. The writer thinks this poem is a way for the speaker to deal with her problems because she takes control of her pain by showing it to an imaginative audience. This is like Freud's idea of sublimation, where hidden energy is turned into something acceptable to society. Plath changes her thoughts of suicide into artistic power. The speaker is hurt but also in charge, and she takes control by recreating her experience in a poem.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, these poems are not just simple admissions of feelings. Instead, they are complicated interactions between the unconscious and the way art is consciously shaped. In Plath's work trauma is not just described, but it is acted out and put into the structure, symbols, word choice, and metaphors. Turning inner pain into poetry becomes both a way to face the pain and a way to survive it. Therefore, this study will look at the traumatic events in "*Daddy*" and "*Lady Lazarus*." It will also explore the psychological mechanisms Plath uses to deal with these events. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this study

aims to help us better understand how confessional poetry expresses, performs, and deals with trauma.

There are six studies by six writers related to the data and theories in this study. The first previous study is by Jihad Jaafar Waham (2023). The title is “*The Intersection of Mental Illness and Creativity in the Works of Sylvia Plath, Including ‘The Bell Jar’*”. “The previous study discusses how Sylvia Plath’s personal struggles with mental illness-including depression and bipolar disorder-influenced her creative process and literary works, particularly her novel *The Bell Jar* and her poetry. The theory of psychoanalytic by Sigmund Freud and Creativity theory and the concept of hypergraphia by Albert Rothenberg is used in this previous study. The second previous study is by Dr. Ahmed Taher Abdu Nagi (2023). The title is “*Depression in Sylvia Plath’s and Abu Alqasem Al-Shabbi’s Selected Poems: A Comparative Study*.” The previous study discusses the theme of depression in the selected poems of Sylvia Plath (Daddy, Lady Lazarus) and Abu Alqasem Al Shabbi (Tears, The Nameless Depression). The theory of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud, comparative literary language, romantic literary theory is used in this previous study. The third previous study is by Anisya Zahra Nabila, Erik Chandra Pertala, and Siska Hestiana (2023). The title is “*Interpretation and Connotation in the Poems ‘Daddy’ and ‘Tulips’ by Sylvia Plath*.” The previous study discusses the interpretation and connotative meanings found in Sylvia Plath’s poems “Daddy” and “Tulips”. The theory of interpretation theory by Edmund Husserl, Connotation theory by Kridalaksana, and Poetry theory by Sayuti is used in this previous study. The fourth previous study is by S.Z. Abbas (2019). The title is “*Sylvia Plath, the Well-Bred Malaise, and its Confession in ‘Daddy’*.” The previous study discusses the probable link between creativity and mental illness in Sylvia Plath, examining whether her poetry led to her depression and psychopathology inspired her poetry. The theory of Mad-Genius Paradox by Dean Keith Simonton and Freudian Psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud is used in this previous study. The fifth previous study is Phillip Potamites, Paul Juinn Bing Tan, Hui-mei Yao (2014). The title is “*Freudian Repetition and Restoration in Sylvia Plath’s Life, Art, and Death*.” The previous study discusses Sylvia Plath’s obsession with death as reflected in her life

and poetry. The theory of Freud's theories-specifically the death drive, sublimation, overdetermination, and transference by Sigmund Freud is used in this previous study. The last previous study is by Tavghah Ghulam Seed & Harith Ismail Turki(2019). The title is "*The Wound and the Bow Effect in Selected poems of Sylvia Plath: A Psychoanalytic Study.*" The previous study discusses the personal pain and trauma of Sylvia Plath –particularly the early death of her father and her husband's betrayal- as reflected in her poetry. The theory of The Wound and the Bow theory by Edmund Wilson is used in this previous study.

Several previous studies have examined Sylvia Plath's mental condition, creativity, and poetic themes from various perspectives. Waham (2023) and Abbas (2019) highlight the link between mental illness and creativity, Nagi (2023) conducts a comparative analysis of depression in poetry, while Nabila et al. (2023) focus on connotative meanings. Although some studies apply psychoanalytic theory (Potamites et al., 2014; Seed & Tuki, 2019), none specifically investigate how trauma is represented and processed in "*Daddy*" and "*Lady Lazarus.*" Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyse the traumatic experiences conveyed by Plath and the coping mechanisms-such as repression, sublimation, and transference-embedded in her poetry.

1.2 Research Questions

Following the detailed background of the study. The writer will create the research questions as outlined below :

1. What traumatic experiences does Sylvia Plath convey in her poems "*Daddy*" and "*Lady Lazarus*"?
2. What mechanisms are used to cope with trauma?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The research objectives of this study are :

1. To identify the traumatic experiences conveyed by Sylvia Plath in her poems "*Daddy*" and "*Lady Lazarus*".
2. To identify mechanisms used by Sylvia Plath to cope with her trauma.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of literary studies, particularly in the analysis of poetry through a psychoanalytic approach. Theoretically, it supports of how traumatic experiences can be expressed and processed through literature, especially in the genre of confessional poetry as seen in Sylvia Plath's works. By applying Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this study reveals that trauma is not only a thematic concern but also influences the structure, symbolism, and diction of the poems. This study also fills a gap left by previous study, which does not specifically examine the mechanisms of coping with trauma in "*Daddy*" and "*Lady Lazarus*".

Practically, this study provides insight for readers and literature students into the connection between psychological conditions and artistic expression. This understanding is valuable for academics, educators, and researchers in applying literary theory within psychological and cultural contexts. Moreover, the finding can serve as a reference for those interested in interdisciplinary studies between literature and psychology, and as inspiration for writers and poets to transform personal experiences into creative strength. Thus, this study not only expands academic perspectives but also opens up opportunities for practical application in education and psychological healing through art.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study focuses on analyzing the trauma experienced by Sylvia Plath in the poems "*Daddy*" and "*Lady Lazarus*," using the theory of psychoanalysis proposed by Sigmund Freud as the basis of analysis. The aim is to identify and understand the traumatic experiences described in the poems and explore how these experiences shaped Plath's identity and emotional state, while investigating the use of words as a literary tool that reflects her struggle with trauma. However, the limitations of this study include narrowing the focus to just two poems may not allow for the full range of experiences and themes in Plath's large body of works. While the psychoanalytic approach provides important insights, it may overlook other critical viewpoints, such as feminist or historical

context, that could enrich the understanding of the analysis. Thus, while this study provides significant findings regarding the relationship between trauma and creativity in Plath's poetry, it is recognized that further study that incorporates a broader selection of her work and various theoretical frameworks may provide deeper insights into her literary legacy.