

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the reasons and background for conducting this research and why this topic was chosen. The focus and objectives of the research also outline the limitations on how the research should be carried out, which are further detailed in the sub-chapter on the scope of the research. Another section discusses the significance of the research, highlighting its contributions to theory and practice.

1.1 Background of the Study

Trauma is a psychological phenomenon that arises when an individual faces overwhelming stress or dangerous situations, leading to long-lasting emotional, cognitive, and psychological effects. According to Herman (1992, p.4) trauma is a response to events that are too extreme for the individual to process at the time of occurrence, often leading to long-term psychological consequences. Herman argues that trauma is not only about the event itself, but also about the societal response to it, which may exacerbate the victim's suffering (Herman, 1992, p.5). In her view, trauma occurs when individuals are exposed to life-threatening situations, prolonged abuse, or social injustice that causes an irreparable damage to their sense of safety, self-worth, and understanding of the world (Herman, 1992, p.5).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), trauma can result from a range of adverse experiences such as violence, abuse, and neglect, leading to long-lasting psychological effects that hinder an individual's ability to thrive. While the concept of trauma has been studied extensively in fields like psychology and psychiatry, its representation in literature provides a unique lens to explore the deep psychological scars individuals may carry due to traumatic experiences.

Trauma is often caused by experiences that significantly challenge an individual's defense mechanisms, rendering them emotionally and mentally vulnerable. The causes of trauma can be external, such as war, abuse, or violence, or internal, such as guilt, loss, and identity crises. The long-term impact of these

experiences can lead to mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, which can be observed in both real-life cases and fictional narratives. Understanding trauma, particularly in a fictional, is essential because it allows us to explore how trauma manifests, how individuals react to it, and how they attempt to heal.

In literary works, trauma is often portrayed through the experiences of characters who are faced with overwhelming circumstances that disrupt their sense of stability. Ottessa Moshfegh's novel *Lapvona* (2022) offers a profound exploration of trauma and its psychological effects. The novel is set in a desolate, oppressive village ruled by Villiam, a paranoid and cruel leader who embodies the cruel power dynamics that define the community. The narrative follows Marek, a 13-year-old peasant boy, as he begins to explore his own sense of identity and purpose within the brutal and unsympathetic world he inhabits. Marek is curious about his origins, especially regarding his mother's death during childbirth, which he begins to question after hearing conflicting stories. He also struggles to reconcile the violence and death he witnesses daily with the comforting teachings of a benevolent God he was raised to believe in. Throughout the novel, Marek finds solace only in Ina, the village wet nurse, and becomes increasingly aware of the brutality surrounding him, including the corrupt and absurd actions of Villiam and his followers.

The novel introduces Marek to the oppressive and corrupt social system that dictates every aspect of life in the village, where violence and deprivation are commonplace. Villiam's rule, marked by irrational cruelty and incompetence, shapes the lives of the villagers, forcing them to live in fear and constant suffering. Marek's exposure to these harsh realities contributes to his growing sense of confusion, fear, and despair. His emotional and psychological growth is stunted as he grapples with the trauma of losing his family, experiencing violence, and being raised in an environment that is both physically and emotionally abusive.

Moshfegh's exploration of trauma in *Lapvona* is particularly focused on the cumulative nature of trauma, where each traumatic event compounds the

emotional damage, making recovery and healing increasingly difficult. Marek's experiences reflect a cycle of trauma, where each brutal encounter with violence or loss adds to his psychological burden. His ability to process and understand these events is hindered by his inability to confront the reality of his existence. Instead, Marek uses defense mechanisms to shield himself from the overwhelming emotions triggered by his trauma.

The novel portrays how trauma is not an isolated event but something that permeates the characters' lives and relationships, creating a sense of shared suffering among the villagers. It is not only Marek's personal trauma that shapes the narrative but also the systemic trauma imposed by Villiam's authoritarian rule. The social, political, and religious structures within the village serve as vehicles for further oppression and psychological harm. Villiam's cruel leadership, the exploitation of the villagers, and the general atmosphere of brutality contribute to a collective trauma that impacts everyone in the village, leaving them stuck in cycles of violence, suffering, and despair.

Throughout *Lapvona*, Marek's journey becomes a stark portrayal of how trauma affects an individual's development, worldview, and interactions with others. As Marek questions the truth of his mother's death and struggles to make sense of the violence and oppression around him, he exemplifies how trauma can distort a person's perception of reality and hinder emotional growth. The novel uses Marek's character to highlight the impact of an abusive environment on mental health, showing how an individual's understanding of the world becomes increasingly warped by the trauma they endure.

This study focuses on the causes and effects of trauma in *Lapvona*, analyzing how Marek's experiences align with Herman (1992) and how his defense mechanisms, as described by Freud, shape his psychological responses to those experiences. By examining these theories in the novel, this study aims to deepen the understanding of trauma's impact on individuals, offering a psychological reading of Marek's journey through a world marked by violence, fear, and suffering. Ultimately, this research will contribute to the broader field of

trauma studies in literature by applying established psychological theories to a contemporary novel that explores the human condition in extreme circumstances.

The novel *Lapvona* provides a powerful narrative for understanding the intersection of trauma and defense mechanisms, offering readers an in-depth look at how individuals react to prolonged exposure to hardship and suffering. The trauma experienced by Marek, shaped by his environment and personal history, demonstrates the ways in which defense mechanisms operate as a means of coping with overwhelming psychological distress. By analyzing these psychological dynamics, this study will provide a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between trauma and the mechanisms used to manage it. This analysis will not only contribute to a richer interpretation of *Lapvona* but also offer broader insights into the psychological impact of living in a world marked by violence, injustice, and emotional neglect.

Many scholars, like McWouldiams (2011) and Safran & Muran (2000) have studied defense mechanisms. However, this study would Many scholars, like McWouldiams (2011) and Safran & Muran (2000), have studied defense mechanisms. However, this study would focus more on Freud's original ideas. Freud's work gives a classical way to understand the defense mechanisms used by *Lapvona*'s characters. This research would look at how these mechanisms appear in the novel, especially in response to trauma, without discussing modern updates to Freud's theory. Some studies have looked at trauma and defense mechanisms in literature, but there is little research on regression and intellectualization. Most studies focus on broad themes like survival, violence, and morality, rather than specific psychological coping strategies. For example, Kaihilahti (2024) studied Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, but focused on how the novel shows female suffering, not defense mechanisms. Similarly, Maisyarah & Alamsyah (2024) and Moreno (2022) discuss unhealthy coping strategies but do not focus on regression or intellectualization.

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Freud in (Tarigan et al., 2022, p.97) states that a self-defense mechanism is the process of applying problem-solving methods in response to danger, used by individuals to defend themselves against the id and against the superego. Based on the researcher's experience, each person has a diverse range of self defense mechanisms that serve various functions. Some use it to survive and forget trauma, whereas others use it to justify crimes, which can then be employed to describe a person's character. The writer believes that the main reason for choosing the self-defense mechanism to analyze is that numerous people are still unaware of the role of the self-defense mechanism in their daily lives.

Lapvona offers a compelling portrayal of trauma and its psychological consequences, making it a rich text for examining how individuals cope with extreme adversity. By using Herman (1992) theory of trauma and Freud's theory of defense mechanisms, this study will shed light on the psychological struggles of Marek and other characters in the novel, providing a more nuanced understanding of the impact of trauma on human behavior. This research will contribute to the broader field of psychoanalytic literary criticism and help readers appreciate the complex psychological landscapes created by Moshfegh in her novel.

1.2 Research Questions

There are two research questions in this research, as follows:

1. What are the causes of the trauma experienced by the main character in *Lapvona*?
2. How does the main character in *Lapvona* cope the trauma throughout the story?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The research objectives based on the research questions above are as follows:

1. To find causes the trauma experienced by the main character in *Lapvona*
2. To find how the main character in *Lapvona* employ Freud's defense mechanisms in cope to the trauma throughout the story

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is supposed to be beneficial for:

1. Theoretical Benefits

This study contributes to psychoanalytic academic criticism by applying Herman (1992) theory of trauma and Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanisms, particularly focusing on the mechanisms of regression and intellectualization in *Lapvona* (2022). By analyzing how the main character of *Lapvona* experiences trauma and utilizes these defense mechanisms, the study enhances our understanding of the psychological dynamics of the protagonist. It offers valuable insight into the relationship between trauma, identity, and defense strategies, thereby enriching the broader academic discussion on how these mechanisms are represented in literary narratives. Additionally, *Lapvona's* medieval setting provides a unique lens through which to examine how psychological defense mechanisms emerge in oppressive and harsh environments, contributing to the wider discourse on mental health representation in literature across various historical and cultural.

2. Practical Benefits

From a practical perspective, this research helps raise awareness about the presence of defense mechanisms in literature among readers, educators, and students. It promotes a deeper understanding of how characters in literary works exhibit psychological responses to trauma. The findings of this study may serve as a useful reference in academic settings, especially for those researching the intersection of psychological theory and literary analysis. Educators can use this research to illustrate how psychoanalytic theories can be applied to literature, particularly in courses focused on trauma, mental health, and defense mechanisms. Furthermore, this study deepens the appreciation for Ottessa

Moshfegh's work by providing readers with a critical perspective on the psychological complexity of her characters.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study involves a psychoanalytic discussion using Herman (1992) theory of trauma and Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanisms, particularly focusing on the ways these mechanisms are manifested in the main character of *Lapvona* (2022) by Ottessa Moshfegh. The study examines the trauma experienced by the protagonist and explores how Freud's defense mechanisms, such as regression and intellectualization, are used to cope with it. This analysis aims to interpret the psychological implications of these defense mechanisms and their role in shaping the character's behavior and emotional responses.

The limitation of this study lies in its data selection, which is confined to the text of *Lapvona* only. It does not analyze other defense mechanisms beyond Freud's concepts of regression and intellectualization, nor does it compare the findings with other literary works or empirical psychological case studies. Additionally, this research focuses solely on a textual analysis within the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, without expanding into a broader analysis of trauma or defense mechanisms in other literary.