



**Mohamed Khider University of Biskra**

**Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages**

**Department of English and Literature**

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# **Master Dissertation**

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## **The Protagonist's Defense Mechanisms in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*: A Psychoanalytic Approach**

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Arts and Foreign Languages in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master Degree in English Language  
Option: Literature & Civilization**

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## **Dedication**

*With great honor, I dedicate this modest work to my parents for their sacrifices,  
prayers, and for teaching me all the valuable lessons in life.*

*To my lovely sisters Amira and Ilhem for seeing past all my imperfections and  
managing to love me.*

*To my priceless friends Rayane and Hadjer for always being there for me.  
You will always have a special place in my heart*

*To my amazing colleagues Meriem, Kaouthar, Aya, Anfel, Zahra, Salsabil,  
Fadoua, Seif, Abd Eldjalil, and Zack for being the best companions.*

*I love you all, eternally, endlessly*

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### **Declaration**

I, undersigned, do hereby declare that this dissertation has been carried out by me as a partial fulfillment for the Master's degree in English literature and civilization under the guidance and supervision of Mr. Boulegroune Adel, Faculty of Letters and Languages, English Language and Literature Department, Mohamed Khider University of Biskra, Algeria.

I further declare that the interpretations put forth in this thesis are based on my own readings, understanding and examination of the original texts. The reported findings that I have made use of are duly acknowledged at the respective place. Also, I declare that this work is not published anywhere in any form.

**Zeriguët Inasse**

**Date: 21/ 06/ 2022**

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## Abstract

This dissertation is an investigation into the defensive mechanisms of the main character of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* including sublimation, displacement, anticipation, and externalization. The problem underlying is her character and the psychological operations she embraces to protect herself from related to internal conflicts. The study adopts the Freudian psychoanalytic approach, its defense mechanisms, and trauma theory to shed the light on the protagonist's psyche. The presented research attempts to analyze the major events that form Lisbeth Salander's trauma which resulted her defense mechanisms. It also tackles her psychological makeup and her major psychological difficulties. The research reveals that Lisbeth's psychological makeup and defense mechanisms are influenced by her traumatic experience. The impact of her defensive strategies proves to be both destructive and constructive. However, she demonstrates that she is able to overcome her trauma.

### Key terms

Anticipation, Displacement, Externalization, Freud, Lisbeth Salander, Psychoanalysis, Stieg Larsson, Sublimation, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, Trauma Theory

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## General Introduction

Stieg Larsson's *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* is well notable with its wit, playfulness and twisted events in Scandinavian crime fiction. The novel came out shortly after the abrupt death of Larsson in 2005. It was firstly published in Swedish with English editions in England. Tragically, Larsson did not live to witness the overwhelming success his book has reached as dozens of million copies were sold worldwide becoming one of the best-selling books in history.

The novel chronicles the journey of Lisbeth Salander and Mikael Blomkvist who work aside to scrutinize and solve the mystery of the unsolved murder of the the Vanger's family niece "Harriet", in the meantime, an intimate relationship develop between the two. Subsequently, Blomkvist takes advantage of this chance to save his reputation after being charged with defamation.

Lisbeth Salander is the protagonist of the trilogy. In her mid twenties, young Lisbeth uses her tracking skills to work in freelance surveillance to provide for herself, while she is still under Swedish legal custody because of her troubled personality and for showing violent altercation towards others. As a product of her devastated experience, Lisbeth displays a distinct behavior which can be understood through psychoanalyzing her defense mechanisms.

Correspondingly, the problem being understudied is Lisbeth Salander's character and the psychological operations she embraces to protect herself from anxiety-producing thoughts and feelings related to internal conflicts and outer stressors. Lisbeth has had recourse to a number of defense mechanisms to protect the integrity of her psychological make-up. Accordingly, what are the defense mechanisms that contribute to avoiding her trauma? Do they prove to be positive or negative?

The investigation of this research is distinguished in trying to understand the protagonist's personality and how she manages to cope with her environment.

1. How is Lisbeth's personality described in the novel?



2. What are the major devastating events that occurred in Lisbeth Salander's life?
3. To what extent the conflicts she experienced contributed to shaping her defense mechanisms?
4. How do her defense mechanisms have constructive or destructive consequences on her life?

The current study aims at

1. Analyzing Lisbeth Salander's psychological makeup.
2. Identifying the major events that form Lisbeth Salander's severely violent life.
3. Describing how Lisbeth's psychological makeup has affected her social relationships.
4. Investigating defense mechanisms seen through Lisbeth's behaviors.
5. Finding out whether or not her defense mechanism has a destructive impact on her life.

This investigation plans to focus and shed light on the protagonist, Lisbeth Salander, based on her characterization and development in terms of personality and its interpersonal factors. Particularly, the defense mechanisms she follows to deal with her internal conflict will be the main focus of this study.

This research intends to follow the qualitative research method because it deals with collecting and analyzing written data to understand concepts, opinions, and experiences. It follows a descriptive and analytical research paradigm to identify because the illustration in the researcher's hand will be described, analyzed, and interpreted qualitatively.

This study consists of a novel that contains in its body characters, and the analysis of these characters will be followed through qualitatively. It further aims at using characterization analysis, particularly the aspects that deal with character and its characteristics, in physical and mental terms.

Via applying the qualitative approach, the researcher analyzes Stieg Larsson's creation, Lisbeth Salander, and the defense mechanisms she embraces in order to put distance between herself and the unwanted feelings that arise from her trauma. This analysis will elaborate whether

these mechanisms have destructive or constructive consequences of the personal and interpersonal terms.

The analysis of the character of Lisbeth would be carried out with the application of defense mechanisms of psychoanalysis and trauma theory. Accordingly, the defense mechanisms and their effects on the protagonist's character are the researcher's main aims, which will be achieved with an analytical method using the qualitative approach.

In this research, the researcher uses textual analysis in three steps which are collecting the data, analyzing, and presenting the result of the analysis in the end. Mainly based on bibliographical research, data will be collected as follows: primary source which is Larsson's *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, translated from the Swedish by Reg Keelan. Extracts from the novel would be selected according to their relevance to the study. The secondary source contains a number of books, dissertations, scholarly articles, and interviews related to psychological criticism, the application of defense mechanisms on characters that were subjected to traumatic events by using a librarian research method, including reading books, articles, and browsing the internet.

In analyzing the data, the researcher follows some steps. Above all, the researcher reads Stieg Larsson's novel entitled "*The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*" comprehensively to get a better understanding of the main character of Lisbeth Salander who had a traumatic experience. Then, the researcher identifies the inner conflicts of the main character and her way to overcome them to comfort herself as data analysis is based on the application of defense mechanisms of Sublimation, displacement, anticipation, and externalization and trauma theory to the character of Lisbeth. Furthermore, the researcher reads other materials related to psychoanalytic criticism focusing on defense mechanisms and trauma theory. The final step is presenting the results of the analysis in elaborated through words.

This research will contain two chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to the theoretical background including characterization, psychoanalytic, and trauma theory. The

second chapter will contain the characterization of the protagonist through the novel in mental and physical terms as a reflection of a devastated individual, a psychoanalytical reading to her character, the defense mechanisms that she embraces to manage her internal conflicts and their results in terms of personal and interpersonal factors.

This novel has reached colossal audiences with his twisted crime novel. Therefore, he captivated the attention of many writers, journalists, and scholars that made them criticize his work.

Alex Berenson in his review of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* novel in The New York Times says that the novel offers an ugly view of human nature. According to him, Larsson has perfectly depicted that nearly every man is a violent misogynist when it comes to treating other women

A dissertation proposed by Efiyanti Puspita Sarin suggests that Lisbeth Salander's personality development is very influenced by her posttraumatic experience. She describes Lisbeth's personality and the devastating events that led to shaping it.

Robinson S. Rosenberg and Shannon O'Neill wrote a book entitled *The Psychology of the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo: Understanding Lisbeth Salander and Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy* in which they study the mind and behavior of Lisbeth Salander because she seems to be one of the most compelling, complex characters of our time. They argue that no character in the Millennium trilogy is as fascinating or complex as the female protagonist Lisbeth Salander. Her behavior, her lifestyle, and even her appearance has led some readers to ask if she's a psychopath.

In December 2011, Christine Cavalier in her book review said that "Lisbeth Salander is one of the most intriguing literary characters of all time. The Psychology of the Girl with The Dragon Tattoo not only looks into Lisbeth's reasons behind her behavior, but places those behaviors in a larger society as a whole, giving us a broadened perspective on the beautiful logic and justice of Lisbeth.

Kate Rose in her study called “*Abuse or Be Abused: Traumatic Memory, Sex Inequality, and Millennium as a Socio-Literary Device*” applies the research of French psychiatrist Muriel Salmona to literary analysis of Stieg Larsson’s protagonist. It suggests that Larsson’s novels may be useful in raising awareness of childhood sexual abuse bringing to light a misunderstood social problem, through reading neglected signs linked to the neurology of traumatic memory.

Dwi Mei Suhartanti Christinawati in her article named “*The Impact of Traumatic Childhood Experience on Martin Vanger’s Sadistic Personality in Stieg Larsson’s The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo*” “discusses the impact of childhood trauma depicted in Martin Vanger’s character in Stieg Larsson’s novel. This study focuses on Martin Vanger’s sadistic personality as a product of his childhood trauma and the defense mechanisms developed from his traumatic childhood. Martin, as a victim of his father’s sexual abuse develops strong impulse to rape and kill women. The impulse is suspected as the impact of his trauma and disruption on the psychosexual stage.

Fertunata Monica Darsono states in her research named “*a Study on Lisbeth Salander’s Fear of Intimacy in Stieg Larsson’s The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*” that Lisbeth Salander overcomes her fear of intimacy by experiencing the interpersonal process, communication or sharing, friendship or love, sympathy, and touch or physical closeness with Bloomkvist.

## **Chapter One: Theoretical Background**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter aims at providing a theoretical framework for the study of characterization, defense mechanisms of psychoanalysis, and trauma theory. It presents the literary approaches that will be devoted in order to conduct this research. Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to introducing the approaches that will be applied to the analysis of the literary work. Consequently, it focuses on psychoanalytic literary theory with a reference to Freudian models of the mind including sublimation, displacement, anticipation, and externalization defense mechanisms, and how these approaches can be related to trauma theory.

### **1.1 Characterization Theory**

#### **1.1.1 Character**

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the origin of this term goes to the Greeks. The noun implies “mark or distinctive quality”, while the verb means “to sharpen, cut in furrows, or engrave”. English borrowed the word in the 14th century meaning "a distinctive differentiating mark," or "a conventionalized graphic device placed on an object as an indication of ownership, origin, or relationship". Later on, in the 17th century, the related interpretation to the word that arose was “the complex of mental and ethical traits marking and often individualizing a person, group, or nation.” Following that, people started using the word to refer to individuals in the 17th century (“Character”).

In literature, character refers to the person presented in the literary work that can be interpreted by the reader according to the provided moral disposition and emotional qualities that are expressed in what they do and by what they say. This term became popular in literature early in the 17th century. At that time, there was an increase in interest in the analysis of character (Cuddon 126). Characters, according to Bennett and Royle, are the core of literature; they are the

center of our curiosity and fascination, affection and dislike, admiration and condemnation. They argue that we conceive ourselves through the power of identification, sympathy and antipathy (60).

According to Bennett and Royle, Henry James insists in his essay “The Art of Fiction” that characters are the determination of incidents, which are the illustration of characters (60). He suggests that plot and character are equally and mutually determining to literature, while Aristotle makes the significance of characters secondary in comparison to the plot. Our memory of a particular novel or play often depends as much on our sense of particular character as on the ingenuities of the plot. Subsequently, fictional characters have even become part of our everyday language. For example, Oedipus is associated with Freudian psychoanalytic theory, according to which little boys want to kill their fathers so as to have sexual intercourse with their mothers. Character types include: dynamic character, round character, static character, stock character, and the symbolic character. Fictional characters can be classified according to their rotations and development through events. A dynamic character is in constant change over the course of the story. An example of a dynamic character is Charles Dickens’ Ebenezer Scrooge. Throughout the events of the novel, he goes from being selfish and coldhearted to being generous and happy. However, round characters can be related to dynamic characters in fluidity and the capacity of change (“Writing 101: All the Different Types of Characters in Literature”). An illustration of this type is Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*. Static characters, also known as flat characters, are characterized by being consistent and not changeable over the course of the story. For example, Jane Austen’s Mr Collin and Harper Lee’s Atticus Finch are classified as being static characters.

All in all, characters are deemed to be of great importance as the plot is created and pushed forward by them. They pave the way for readers to get the sense of the world the writer builds through them in terms of how they interact with and perceive their surroundings.

### 1.1.2 Characterization

According to Chris Baldick, characterization is the representation of characters in narrative and dramatic works. It is a method in which the author uses details to depict a person's traits from values to feelings to goals (37). This device is essential to portray the character to the reader to help him get a clear picture of it which can be done through direct characterization (via the narrator, another character or by the character themselves) or indirect characterization (through the character's thoughts, actions, choice of words, manner of speaking, physical appearance, mannerisms and interaction with other characters, including other characters' reactions to that particular person).

According to Abrams, characterization in narratives include showing and telling (33). The author shows a character's thoughts, feelings, and responses to what he or she goes through in showing, leaving it to the reader to draw conclusions behind that. However, in telling, he directly creates judgment of the character by describing and assessing his or her motives and dispositional qualities. For example, in the opening chapter of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen tells how Mr. and Mrs. Bennet talk about Mr. Bingley. Then, she tells about Mrs Bennet's mean understanding, ignorance, and uncertain temper. Nevertheless, recent structuralist critics have attempted to dissolve traditional fictional characters of novels that can be assimilated to realistic characters of real life into a system of literary conventions and codes so that they can be related by readers to their own stereotypes of individuals in real life (Abrams 33-34).

In brief, this process is crucial as characters must appear real, distinguished and unique in order to engage and move readers. Characterization offers to them a distinct feeling of the personalities and complexity of individuals; it makes them alive, and realistic. Eventually, the audience can have a clear grasp of characters in stories by accurately interpreting the author's characterization tools as it is critical to have a thorough understanding of the story's conflict.

## **1.2 Psychoanalytic Literary Theory**

### **1.2.1 Freudian Psychoanalysis**

The Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud is best known for initiating the psychoanalytic clinical approach. First of all, psychoanalysis is a therapy method of treating mental disorders in which the therapist explores unconscious elements and tries to bring out repressed conflicts to the patient's awareness. According to Freud, unconscious desires and unresolved childhood conflicts produce psychological issues which rest on the hotly contested tenets of determinism, conflict, and the unconscious. Psychoanalysis alters undesirable behavior by identifying and eliminating its psychic determinants (Heller 183).

Through his multiple recorded case studies, Freud argues that most of our actions are motivated by the psychological forces that we have very limited control over. Freud illustrates by comparing the human mind with the iceberg as if they both have the same structure that most of its package lies beneath the surface or below the level of consciousness (Guerin et al. 203). Furthermore, Freud highlights the importance of the unconscious by insisting that most of our mental processes are unconscious and that even the most conscious processes are temporary. He also states that human behavior is motivated ultimately by sexual energy, but this claim has been rejected by many psychologists such as Carl Jung and Alfred Adler. Moreover, He asserts that many of our desires and memories are excluded from conscious awareness or repressed as they could be of sexual impulses related to social taboos (Guerin et al. 203).

In this study, this approach is used to read the protagonist's character from a psychological perspective. The psychological analysis of Lisbeth Salander is concentrated upon tracing her defense mechanisms, including her personality traits and organization.

### **1.2.2 Freud and the Unconscious Mind**

Sigmund Freud, in his most profound assumptions on the human psyche, hypothesizes that the model of the human mind is divided into three layers that are in a continuous



development process throughout our lives: conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The conscious mind is made up of our current thoughts, feelings, focus, and everything that exists inside our awareness. The preconscious (or subconscious) mind includes the things that we aren't thinking about right now but may bring into conscious awareness by recalling or retrieving them from our memory. However, the unconscious is the deepest level of our mind that occupies the things that could only be available to the conscious mind in disguised form, including motives that provoke our behavior (Cherry). For instance, dreams can be a fine demonstration of the contents of the unconscious. Freud argues that a dream is nothing but a disguised wish. He assumes that by interpreting dreams, we may be able to reveal the unconscious influences on our conscious actions.

To understand how the conscious, preconscious and unconscious processes affect each other, Freud uses a metaphor in which he resembles the unconscious mind as being the mostly hidden part of the iceberg, while the conscious awareness is the part that floats above the surface. The human mind examines its impulses and decides if they should be let (to the conscious) in or should be turned away (to the unconscious). For instance, if you ask your friend why he didn't smile at the news of your other wife's promotion, he might not know that his fear that she might surpass his accomplishments would be unacceptable to his conscious mind. In short, he would push this unacceptable fear and repress it in his unconscious mind (Heller 204). However, if the impulses are to be acceptable, they are in the preconscious until they are recalled by the consciousness. In this sense, the unconscious and the preconscious are agencies or authorities which the wish has to satisfy, the unconscious is more tolerant, and helps the wish to smuggle itself past the censorship of the preconscious.

### **1.2.3 Freud's Tripartite Model of the Mind**

Because the first model contradicted Freud's assumption of the mind being in a continuous conflict, he suggested a more structured model of the mind that could match with his

initial concepts of consciousness and unconsciousness. The human mind is divided into three parts in this model:

### **1.2.3.1 The Id**

According to Freud, the id works at an unconscious level (Cherry). In *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, it is said that the id is where libido and the primary source of all psychic energy resides. According to Freud, it aims to unconsciously and immediately gratify the pleasure principle (Guerin et al. 204). Correspondingly, a newly born baby is all Id. He is only guided by his primary instinct-driven impulses which are entirely far away from drawing a distinction between right and wrong. As the child grows, he begins to learn that not following the rules of the real world might have consequences. Here, his primary process of thinking becomes less prominent. Moreover, unbridled Id strivings must remain controlled because if not, it would lead to serious destructive and self-destructive consequences to satisfy its urges for pleasure (Heller. 91).

### **1.2.3.2 The Ego**

The Ego develops as a second brain component from the Id to protect the individual and society. The ego is considered to be responsible for rational reason and common sense (Geurin et al. 205). It functions to adjust the instinctual demands of the id to fit with moral and societal constraints in order to release them in a more tolerable manner. The ego is the judge and the decision maker to the human mind. According to the restrictions that the external world imposes, it examines the blind thoughts of the id and filters them to the conscious if acceptable and to the unconscious if not as it represents the home of our executive functions. The ego is characterized by being partly conscious: it helps us function rationally and make wise decisions at the conscious level, and assists us to cope with the conflicts that we experience through defense mechanisms at the unconscious level. According to Freud's adopted conceptualization of the ego,

we gain control of our actions and make wiser decisions in life by dominating it, which is very different from the terminology used to define the ego referring to it as self-inflation and being blinded by pride (Heller 91, 92).

### **1.2.3.3 The Superego**

The superego, which is mostly unconscious, is where the morality principle resides. Its goal is to guide individuals to behave in a socially and morally acceptable manner. The superego is the storehouse of morals and pride. As mentioned in Freud's *The Anatomy of the Mental Personality*, the superego stores moral codes and advocates the impulse toward perfection and higher things in human life (95). It plays the role of the mind's moral censoring agency as it serves to repress into the unconscious what is considered socially unacceptable and create an unconscious sense of guilt. Also, Freud assigns the development of the superego to parental influence as parents are expected to punish and reward bad and good behavior according to what society considers. All in all, the ego is in charge of keeping balance between the devilish and the angelic forces of the id and the superego in order to protect the individual and society (Guerin 205-206).

### **1.2.4 Defense Mechanisms**

Because we are continuously exposed to unwanted feelings, the human mind resorts to defense mechanisms to avoid them. A defense mechanism is a mental process that allows the mind to find strategies to reduce anxiety. Mostly unconscious, internal drives that threaten to lower self-esteem or provoke anxiety are backgrounded in this process. The term "Defense mechanism" was firstly coined by Sigmund Freud in his paper "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" (1894). Defense mechanisms are built upon the theory of the unconscious that because each part of the mind has a different primary goal, there are forces that are in constant clash against each other ("Defense Mechanism | Definition, Examples, and Facts"). When a person's

ego can no longer handle the conflict, one or more defense mechanisms may be activated to protect him. Through his writings, Freud listed a number of ego defense mechanisms. Later, other psychologists, including Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, have added other mechanisms to the list.

#### **1.2.4.1 Sublimation**

Because living among society requires following principles and moral guidelines, sublimation aims to destruct instinctual unacceptable drives, usually related to sex and violence, into positive energy. According to George Vaillant, it is considered as a mature defense mechanism to adapt arising anxieties. As id impulses arise from libido energy, the ego and the superego sublimate them to produce socially valuable accomplishments in order to prevent producing guilt and unacceptable feelings (Waude).

An illustration of sublimation mechanism is artistic endeavors. Freud says that because Leonardo da Vinci's mother left him at a very young age, his Madonna painting can be seen as a reversed creative energy of his longing for her intimacy (Heller 70). Another embodiment of sublimation is engaging in sports. Here, sublimation is seen as a way to channel anger urges or fighting with others into beneficial physical actions. Likewise, control issues can be sublimated to utilize this energy in leadership and business management.

#### **1.2.4.2 Displacement**

Freud defines displacement as shifting negative emotions from an unacceptable target to a more acceptable or less threatening one. Understanding that expressing such ideas to a specific recipient might have serious consequences, the ego blocks them from being expressed and displaces them towards another recipient (Cherry).

A displacement example is a husband who feels that they would be fired if they express their anger towards his boss, goes home and redirects his anger towards his wife, the less

threatening target, as an unconscious action to reduce possible damage. Another example of displacement is the case of Little Hans. Rather than reacting to his father, Freud believed that the boy's horses phobia is a displacement of the fear of his father as their blinkers and facial features reminded him of his father (McLeod).

#### **1.2.4.3 Anticipation**

As a high level defense mechanism, anticipation is simply defined as solving problems before they arise (Ryan and Jose). It involves evaluating potential outcomes in order to be mentally prepared for them. Psychiatric Robin Skinner considered anticipation as a mature defense mechanism in which we reduce the stress of possible stressful events by forecasting what it will be like and anticipating how we are going to deal with it. Although it is assumed that the use of mature defenses increases with age, anticipation of bad events is expected to reduce (Wikipedia contributors, "Anticipation"). A person who is afraid to fail in a job interview might research the industry or the company, predict the interviewer's questions, and practice what to answer as an act of anticipation.

#### **1.2.4.4 Externalization**

As a psychoanalytical aspect, Freud defines externalization as an unconscious defense mechanism through which we project our internal characteristics outward or onto other people ("Externalization (Psychology)"). Externalized characteristics could manifest in multiple ways such as behaviors, interests and even appearance. These characteristics might include past experiences or internal traumas that we unconsciously express to protect from anxiety. This defense mechanism, according to an Oxford reference, aims at assigning inner impulses to the external world. A common form of externalization is projection ("Externalization"). According to new research, people who perceive this defense mechanism are more likely to manifest antisocial behaviors as a way to externalize unmanageable emotions and urges (Salters-Pedneault).

## 1.4 Trauma Theory

### 1.4.1 Trauma

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, 'trauma' is the Greek word for 'wound'. Greeks used this term to express physical injuries only. However, it is used nowadays to refer to emotional wounds. Because psychological injuries resulted from traumatic incidents can take a long time to be healed, the psychological disorder resulted in people who have witnessed or experienced traumatic events is now given a name: *post-traumatic stress disorder*, or PTSD. Depression, anxiety, flashbacks, and recurring nightmares are indications of this disorder which usually develops after stressful experiences such as combat exposure, childhood abuse, sexual violence or natural disasters ("Trauma").

In 1920, Sigmund Freud used this term to refer to how incidents can seriously damage the mind:

Trauma is the outcome of the development of a highly selective sensitivity to external stimuli in the mind. This selectivity is significant in the process of eliminating excessive amounts and types of stimuli in order to maintain a functional balance rather than the ability to receive and recognize stimuli. When it comes to young children, the filtering task is assigned to the mother who is in charge of controlling her child's exposure to extreme experiences that might be sensitive in the environmental and emotional terms. However, if adults have had good parental provision, they will have the capacity to take care of themselves, while others will be unable to achieve this degree of autonomy and will act in self-destructive ways as a result of internal issues. (Garland 10)

The human mind can engage in defensive strategies in order to protect itself from being wounded through defense mechanisms. If someone is faced with a devastating inconvenience, the defense is accordingly extreme. This might put him in a state of denial in order to patch up the occurred damage when it overrides his ability to make sense of or manage in order to avoid the breakdown

that might follow if exposed to reality (Garland 10). For an instance, a woman is in a state of denial towards accepting the death of the youngest of her children because she is unable to deal with this painful fact. She believes that he was alive, and that the police are conspiring against her so that she cannot find where he is being hospitalized. As such, she becomes unstable and unable to be there for the rest of her children who are in pain not only for losing their brother, but also the loss of their delusional mother.

#### **1.4.2 Trauma and Psychoanalysis**

According to the psychoanalytic perspective, trauma is associated with loss, and that loss could be actual as losing a loved one to death, or symbolic, such as the loss of hope, country, or identity. Unresolved childhood trauma surfaces when we are subjected to traumatic events which can affect us. That is, Freud's primary trauma model in which he puts that all traumatic event's memory must be worked through psychologically to become part of one's conscious psychic function (Manasseh).

To the psychoanalyst, the central focus of the study is not the events that occur in the patient's life but his unconscious fantasy life, and the purpose is to find a method for resolving a transference neurosis (Howell and Itzkowitz 12). Trauma and traumatic experience became an essential issue of psychoanalytic investigation and treatment now since the interpersonalists defined psychoanalysis' data as what occurs between people in interpersonal relationships and how they develop meaning out of their experiences. They believed that the healing potential of an effective relationship with the analyst equalizes the destructive impact of interpersonal-relational trauma (13).

It is important to know that psychoanalysts consider being stuck in traumatic events trigger unresolved pains of childhood conflicts. Treatment, however, may occasionally work when the psychoanalyst tries to understand patients without regard to their past, but for the majority of patients, it achieves to a certain extent a temporary and chronically unstable

quiescence of the more acute after effects of the immediate trauma (Garland 4). Accordingly, clinical findings indicate that devastating events have to be remembered and walked through instead of being forgotten or put out of one's mind in order to be overcome. For instance, the case of Holocaust survivors. In many cases, and despite their comprehensible urge to put the past behind, it appears that these hidden or denied memories become a burden that must be carried consciously by the children and even the grandchildren of survivors (Garland 4).

Psychoanalysis attempts to document and investigate this fact, which is the outcome of the structure of the human mind which concerns unconscious mental processes. Because it addresses directly what is felt to be most disturbing in the individual's response, the psychoanalytic approach is used here to understand and treat trauma. Subsequently, dealing with a level of disturbance that touches the patient's identity cannot be done quickly and easily. Therefore, the knowledge and the memory of the events must become part of the traumatized individual's consciousness in the healing process. This is important to the therapy journey because it provides meaning or common sense to the individual instead of throwing the blame on fate or bad luck (Garland 4).

### **1.4.3 Trauma and Literature**

According to research from Morrissey and McLaughlin, Cathy Caruth is one of the theorists that have become interested in the psychic correlations between trauma and literature (16). She maintains that such study has been going on virtually since the birth of psychoanalysis as Sigmund Freud himself used literature to illustrate the symptoms that he noticed in his patients. For Caruth, psychoanalysis and literary study are naturally related because Freud himself used literature to illustrate traumatic experience as both the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of trauma intersect in dealing with the complex relations between knowing and not knowing (Morrissey and McLaughlin 16).

Sociologists Michael Lambek and Paul Antze claim that it is necessary to refer to Freud



in contemporary debates about memory, but without depending on the popular misrepresentations of Freud that only repressing and incubating an earlier sexual trauma would be of deep effect on the individual's adulthood, he or she must already. Because this conceptualization seemed insufficient to Freud, he proposed other models of trauma. The first is concerned with adult neuroses resulted from childhood sexual trauma, with the absence of childhood trauma, while the second model is concerned with neuroses resulted from childhood sexual experience (Morrissey and McLaughlin 17). This concept suggests that if a childhood trauma is repressed and incubated to an adult trauma, it will result in traumatic stress disorders. However, while Freud's theories on traumatized psyches continued to evolve, he came to understand the connection of literature and psychology (Morrissey and McLaughlin 17). In his book *Totem and Taboo* (1913), he claims that art, religion and attitude toward life are essentials to understand a primitive man which we have learned from literature, through legends, myths and fairy-tales (Morrissey and McLaughlin 18).

Moreover, Freud writes a comparison between the psychology of primitive races taken from folklore, and the psychology of the neurotic or psychoanalysis, which uncover the similarities and the connection between the two which is reflected in the workings of the neurotic mind, in a culture's literature; and by studying the literature of times past, we can come to know the minds of the peoples who produced that literature (Morrissey and McLaughlin 18). In this sense, Freud suggests that there is an underlying relation between mental state and the narrative that it produces, and we can understand the mental states of people by analyzing the literature they created. Also, he believes that the literature's purpose is to inform us about our history and entire cultures and societies, and not just the individual authors who produced the works (Morrissey and McLaughlin 18).

## 1.5 Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter includes the theoretical foundations needed for a better

understanding of Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander, her psychological make-up, and her devastating experience. The first section contains an elaboration to characters in fiction, characterization and its importance in literary work. In the second section, the researcher explains the psychoanalytical approach as the main lense to analyze the protagonist's character, including Freud's hypothesis of the unconscious mind, his tripartite model of the mind which tends to explain the defense mechanisms to be traced in Lisbeth's pathology. Then, the last section includes a brief overview on trauma theory, its interrelationship with psychoanalysis, and the role of literary works in being a mode of illustrating trauma. All in all, this background paves the way for the researcher to analyze Lisbeth Salander's defense mechanisms as a trauma survivor.

## **Chapter Two: Psychoanalytic Analysis of Lisbeth Salander's character**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter is devoted to Lisbeth Salander's character portrayal and analysis. The objective is to identify her defense mechanisms as a result of devastating events that occur in her journey. The first part of this chapter contains her characterization in the novel in terms of personality and physical traits. Then, the second part is a psychological analysis which aims to understand the protagonist's personality through her levels of awareness of her three minds. The last part is dedicated to tracing her defense mechanisms as a consequence to a series of destructive events. Also, this chapter aims to examine childhood trauma as a significant factor in personality development.

### **2.1 Lisbeth's Profile**

Lisbeth Salander is the lead and main character of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. She is a skilful computer hacker who works as an investigator for a security company. She joins Mikael Blomkvist to work on the forty years old, unsolved death mystery of Harriet Vanger and other series of women murders. Later on, Lisbeth and Mikael develop feelings for each other and initiate an intimate relationship. Stieg Larsson describes Lisbeth as brilliant. Yet, she is a ward of the state and under government's supervision. She is assigned to a guardianship program as she is considered to be unable to take care of herself. Having a difficult life that is overwhelmed with violence and fear, we can make sense of her notion of Lisbeth being different from other people and possessing complex personality traits.

#### **2.1.1 Personality Traits**

##### **2.1.1.1 Alienation**

The protagonist is noticeably withdrawn. She is always worried about her social

relationships and she keeps herself emotionally distanced from almost everyone. Throughout the novel, Lisbeth can be profiled as a loner as she keeps her distance with others and lives free from any social connections. Her closest friends are strangers because she understands that tight bonds can make her vulnerable; therefore, she is careful not to have any, and that's why she is often conflicted about Mikeal, who makes her feel vulnerable. Lisbeth has no family or friends except for Mikael, her guardian Holger Palmgren, her boss Dragan Armansky, and her associate Plague.

Lisbeth is consistent in being distant from everyone in her life. This can be seen in her relationship with her colleagues in Milton security. She had a talent of being quite vexing to other employees and she doesn't engage with them in any conversations, even casually. In the office, she is known as the girl with two brain cells, one for breathing and one for standing up. She never talks about herself and she turns down anyone that tries to approach her or talk to her. She does not have the right attitude to encourage trust or friendship. Quickly, she is considered a hopeless case and becomes an outsider in Milton. Even with Armansky, "Salander [has] habits that sometimes drove Armansky to the edge of despair" (42). She never calls him or comes into his office wanting to talk to him even in serious cases. Armansky has always known that she is not to be friendshipped.

Lisbeth rarely laughs with him, and overtime, Armansky thinks that he has noticed her astonishing lack of emotional involvement. She has a dry sense of humor and an ironic smile: "He felt so provoked by her lack of emotional response that sometimes he wanted to grab hold of her and shake her to force his way into her shell and win her friendship, or at least her respect" (49). When she suspects that he might be attracted to her, she comes to his office as silently as a ghost and asks him if he is, and made it clear that he has no chance with her. Yet, and because he knows how special she is, he tells her that he knows that she's not a person who encourages friendship, and that he understands that she doesn't want anyone interfering in her life because he's not trying to do that but he wants to continue to like her and be her friend. Then, she gave him a spontaneous hug: "That was the only time she ever showed him any tenderness, and the

only time she ever touched him that was the only time she ever showed him any tenderness, and the only time she ever touched him” (51). This quote demonstrates that Lisbeth has never liked to be physically touched, and that hug was a surprise to Armansky.

When she was still in school, all of the attempts of any teacher or authority figure to initiate a conversation with her about her feelings, emotional life, or the state of her health were met to a great frustration, with the solemn silence and a great deal of intense staring at the floor, ceiling, and walls. She would fold her arms and refused to participate in any psychological tests. “She was anything but easy to handle “ (Larsson 151). In her personal record, she was described as “introverted, socially inhibited, lacking in empathy, ego fixated, and psychopathic asocial behavior” (153). Anyone who read this record would think that she is dissociated from others and is not easy to be communicated with. She is socially incompetent and she has a problem of silence.

#### **2.1.1.2 Violence**

Throughout the novel, Lisbeth manifests as a pretty violence individual. She uses violence to protect herself and to get revenge, and she doesn't think twice before using aggressive methods when she senses danger: “When she was thirteen, the court had decided that she should be institutionalized because she was considered to be dangerously violent towards her classmates and possibly towards herself” (151). Her violent behaviors had appeared at a very young age, and had led to her institutionalization when she was a child: “In middle school she had several times been sent home after getting into violent fights with classmates” (215). When she finds Martin after he tried to kill Mikael, she beats the pain out of him while saying “do you like pain, creep?” as if she was enjoying it (Larsson 419).

Lisbeth also used violence to get her revenge. A clear illustration to her vengeful, violent behavior is the way she punishes her guardian Bjuran after he sexually assaulted her. First, she has architected her revenge very well and has devoted a week to planning his punishment. She

has considered various methods until she has narrowed it down to a few realistic scenarios from which to choose: “No acting on impulse” (Larsson 227). She thought of every single word she was going to tell him. When she arrives at his apartment, “she [lures] him to bed and [shoves] the taser into his left armpit and fired off 75,000 volts” (239), unclothes and handcuffs him, seals his mouth, and does exactly what he has done to her. She shows him the tape of him raping her, and threatens him with institutionalization if he doesn't obey her rules from now on. Then, she inks a tattoo of four lines that covered his whole belly that says: “I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST” (246).

When she goes to visit Mikael on Christmas and sees him with Berger, “she [feels] a pain that is so immediate and so fierce that [she stops] in mid-stride, incapable of movement. She has wanted to take the metal sign and use the hard edge to cleave Berger's head in two” (Larsson 543). Here, Salander wants to salve her heartbreak with violence, although she usually is in control of her violent impulse.

### **2.1.2.3 Autonomy**

Lisbeth is self-directed. She acts on motives, reasons, and values that are her own. She works by herself, lives by her own, and solves her problems individually. She is independent to the point of not needing anyone. When she is in trouble, she doesn't go to the police because she doesn't trust them and because the system has disappointed her. However, she solves her problems by herself and in her own way. First, this appears in her educational background. She dropped out of school at a very young age and self-studied until she became a great hacker, investigator and reporter. When Armansky first hires her, he has not expected that a girl who had cut so many classes in school and did not graduate could write a report so grammatically correct: “It also contains detailed observations and information, and he quite simply could not comprehend how she could have acquired such facts [...] he discovers that behind her sullen facade there is an unusual intelligence” (Larsson 46-47). This indicates that Lisbeth has worked

to develop herself individually. Another illustration is when her guardian, Nils Bjurman, sexually assaults her. She decides to solve the problem on her own instead of going to the police and reporting the incident.

#### **2.1.2.4 Justice**

Lisbeth is opinionated. She has her own thoughts and feelings about the world and the things that happen to her. Because she doesn't trust authorities, and because the system has failed her in so many ways, she goes illegal, plays the vigilante role and appoints herself doer of justice to the criminals who cross her path. In the novel, she can be seen as a superhero as she takes down villains who victimize others, especially women. Although she is abused, abandoned, and often misjudged for her appearance, she still could believe in justice, her own justice. Salander has a violent potential, but her anger is justified because we never mourn for the bad guys that she takes down. In fact, we feel satisfied with her choice of punishment because she serves herself and society better.

Throughout the events of the novel, Lisbeth appears as the violent brand of vigilante justice (Rosenberg et al. 274). It is evident throughout the trilogy that Lisbeth has good reasons for taking justice by her own hands considering the system that has always manipulated her mental health history, in addition to being a sociopath like her guardian Bjurman and the person who is supposed to look after her. After the first time Bjurman forces her to a sexual activity, "there's no question of advokat Bjurman going unpunished [...] and she [is] anything but forgiving" (Larsson 214). Lisbeth feels the obligation of not letting a monster like him without punishment "And she always [gets] revenge" (215). However, and after experiencing the terror and pain of being tied and raped by Bjurman, she takes an eye for an eye and does the same to him. She goes more extreme to punish him in a way that she has his reputation (by video tape), his relationships (by the tattoo she inked in his chest) and even his life (threatened to kill him if he touches her again) under her control (Rosenberg et al. 281). The tattoo that she has given to

himself represents the justice she has applied to Bjurman. Not just that, she makes sure he would never come around another woman: “She tells him that “if [she] ever finds out [he] have been with a girl again, and it doesn't matter if she's here of her own free will, if [she] ever find [him] with any woman at all ... "slender [makes] the throat slipping motion again” (Larsson 245).

As an investigator, “her reports would be a catastrophe for the individual who landed in her radar [...] if she finds out a person is an abuser of some sort” (Larsson 42), she would get in vigilante mode and plan a punishment as in the case of Wennerstrom. When she learns from Mikael that he has pressured a sexual partner of his into having an abortion by having his goons’ threat and torturing her, she decides that he deserves to be punished. First, she stole the money of a gangster that he’s laundering it for. When Wennerstrom couldn’t pay back the money, this gangster looks for him to kill him. Then, she had him killed by exposing Wennerström's hideout, which led to his demise.

### **2.1.2 Physical Appearance**

In the novel, Lisbeth is described as being a pale, anorexic young woman with hair as short as fuse: “She had simply been born thin with slender bones that made her look girlish and fine-limbed with small hands, narrow wrists, and childlike, flat chest so she might be mistaken for skinny boys at a distance. She was twenty four years old but she sometimes looked fourteen” (Larsson 43-44). This indicates that Lisbeth has a vulnerable appearance, and that she always looks so younger than her real age.

Lisbeth is a stereotypical Goth. She dresses for the day in a black T-shirt with a picture of E.T. and the words “I AM ALSO AN ALIEN” on it (Larsson 52). She has a significant clothing style. “She wears a black skirt that was frayed at the hem, a worn-out black, mid-length leather jacket, rivet belt, heavy boots, and horizontally striped with knee socks. She puts on makeup in a color scheme that indicated she might be colorblind” (Larsson 52-53). Her hair is dyed raven black but she is naturally redhead. Also, she often wears black clothing and black lipstick. Also,



Lisbeth has a load of tattoos. She has a wasp tattoo on her neck, a tattooed loop around her left arm biceps, another around her left ankle, and a dragon tattoo that covers her left shoulder blade. She has a pierced nose and eyebrows. In spite of the tattoos and pierced nose and eyebrows, she was attractive (44). All in all, it seems that Lisbeth crafts her appearance carefully. With her gloomy, odd, and weird looks, she can clearly be categorized by most people as a female Goth. In her case, her appearance speaks very loud. Her body modifications tell that she is the odd, the strange, and the outcast.

## **2.2 Lisbeth's Pathological Character**

### **2.2.1 Antisocial Behavior**

Lisbeth can easily be diagnosed with having an antisocial personality. According to Larsson's description, she barely talks to others and she is not comfortable to be with. Lisbeth gets violent when provoked. This is illustrated through so many incidents in the novel, from her childhood to her adulthood. Records from her psychiatric institution indicate that she has a "psychopathic asocial behavior" (Larsson 153). When she was a child, she was locked in a psychiatrist clinic because found emotionally disturbed and a danger to herself and others. Anyone who meets with her would confirm her antisocial attitude, starting from her colleagues at Milton security. She is just incapable of merging with others and she has no ability to behave in the right way. Blomkvist himself has noticed that: "Salander [is] the most asocial human being he has ever met. Usually she [ignores] any attempt on his part to talk about anything personal, and she [has] never accepted a single expression of sympathy" (Larsson 476). She is not even able to communicate with the person she falls in love with.

### **2.2.2 Fear of Intimacy**

According to Salander's experience in the novel, she has intimacy issues and she tends to struggle with connecting with other people. She has an apparent desire to isolate her emotions

from others and prevent people from getting close to her. She has difficulties in relating to others and tries to protect herself from everyone. However, “Blomkvist [has] a trying attitude to penetrate her defenses and get her to talk about personal matters and private feelings” (Larsson 537). He tries to make her feel comfortable talking about herself and opening up to him.

As we know about her troubled childhood which tells that she has been consistently ignored which could be the cause to reinforce her strange personhood. Considering the fact that there’s so much trauma in her life, she could not help but have troubles with intimacy (Rosenberg et al. 91). For some trauma survivors, the effects of the devastated experience might lead to self-destructive consequences including substance abuse, abusive relationships, and other troubling behavior. However, other survivors, if intelligent, will find their way to constructive lives far away from their trauma, but they would still feel unsafe in human relationships (92).

Larsson’s protagonist avoids attachments by every means, but she becomes very attached to Blomkvist in the end. Her fear of intimacy and vulnerability can be classified as one of her psychological difficulties (Fertunata 15). Paradoxically, she sometimes shows some need for intimacy. An illustration of that is when she spontaneously hugged Armansky when they were having conversation about their work relationship. Lisbeth’s struggles in intimacy are mainly in relationships (Rosenberg et al. 83). She doesn’t want to open up to the wrong people who might have bad intentions towards her. In this sense, she is always in a defensive state and wants to keep her secrets to herself and to herself only. This is documented in the novel. When she is in the cottage in Hedeby, Mikael asks her how she became a hacker. Instead of answering his simple question, she goes to bed without a word. She has reacted this way because she feels that he starts to reveal herself and secrets to him, and that he is getting closer to her each day, which is quite irritating to her. The narrator says: “As soon as he [tries] to ask her about her life she [shuts up] like a clam, [answers] monosyllabically or [ignores] them” (Larsson 362). Blomkvist’s acceptance of her silence irritates her more because it shows that he understands her real self, while she is making efforts to put herself and her secrets out of sight. However, she makes an

exception for him because they are somehow alike. Blomkvist also keeps his distance from others and likes solitude. Lisbeth could spend hours with him in comfortable silence. Both of them were neither nosy nor needy; they respected each other's space and remoteness. With him, “She [talks] about herself in a way that she would never, even under threat of death, have imagined doing with any other person. It [frightens] her and made her feel naked and vulnerable to his will at the same time [...] He makes [her] feel that she [has] never before in her life had such a trust in another human being” (Larsson 537-538). That is the moment Lisbeth realizes that she might be in love with him, and she feels that she could easily open up to Mikael. In the end, Salander begins to overcome this struggle with intimacy by communication, friendship, love, and physical closeness with Blomkvist.

### **2.3 Lisbeth’s Defense Mechanisms**

From the moment we encounter the protagonist, we notice that she looks, acts, and reacts differently than most of us. Her life is full of trauma and pain. When she was a child, she has been bullied and physically abused by others. She was born to a dysfunctional family and lived in foster families her entire teenage. When she grows up, she is still ward of the state. The guardian that she is assigned to has sexually assaulted her twice in a brutal way. However, and although being a trainwreck, Lisbeth is a strong individual. She isn't immune to external effects, yet she understands herself well and has developed sophisticated ways of self-protection accordingly to cope with the perception of reality.

#### **2.3.1 Sublimation**

Because Lisbeth’s violent impulse is under control, she appears to sublimate it into constructive endeavors. This is well illustrated in the novel. An example of that is when she could ignore her colleagues who are bullying her and referring to her as an outsider due to her lack of social skills in Milton Security. Instead of reacting with anger, she uses her intelligence to

transform an outwardly pleasant young yuppie into an “unreliable bastard” (Larsson 46). This indicates that she works hard to discredit her colleague and take away his job when Armansky is about to fire her. Another illustration to her sublimation is when she prevents herself from killing Bjurman after all the horrible things he has done to her, and decides that she will act in a more acceptable way. “No acting on impulse” (227). She wants to take her time to decide what she will do to him, and not to act impulsively without evaluating the consequences. Then, “by the end of the night, she had scrapped the idea of murder by poison and put together a new plan” (229). Instead, she wants to take the chance to control him, to control her own situation, and to get rid of her institutionalization. Also, there is her extraordinary ability to investigate anyone using her hacking skills, her photographic memory, and her unusual intelligence. Whenever Lisbeth is occupied with any investigative task, she withdraws herself into it and only comes out of her shell when completing her job. Perhaps this unconscious method is her way of reducing her ego’s anxiety that is resulting from trauma. Salander finds comfort in being busy. This need can be a reflection of someone who is afraid of what will happen when he stops moving and faces realities (Wayne). In this sense, Lisbeth tends to channel these destructive thoughts into productivity.

### **2.3.2 Displacement**

Lisbeth has a complicated situation when it comes to family. [Her] family [has] been categorised as dysfunctional, and she [has] no relatives who could look after her welfare” (Larsson 152). The trauma of having a dysfunctional family could be the main reason for young Lisbeth’s behavioral issues including violence, narcotics, and alcohol abuse. She has even been arrested several times for this reason:

At the age of seventeen, Salander was arrested by the police on four occasions; twice she was so intoxicated that she ended up in the emergency room, and once she was plainly under the influence of narcotics. On one of these occasions she was found dead drunk, with her clothes in disarray, in the backseat of a car parked at Söder Mälarstrand. She was

with an equally drunk and much older man. The last arrest occurred three weeks before her eighteenth birthday, when she, perfectly sober, kicked a male passenger in the head inside the gates of the Gamla Stan tunnelbana station. She was charged with assault and battery [...]With regard to her personal record, it was decided that there was grave risk of alcohol and drug abuse, and that she lacked self-awareness.... (Larsson 152-153)

This quote shows how troubled our protagonist was. Her substance abuse appears right after she is placed with a foster family. This could be seen as a mirror how destructive her familial atmosphere is. Lisbeth never has had a normal, stable family. We do not have many details about her biological family in the novel, but it was described as dysfunctional, which could be the result of neglect, abuse, or mental issues. Lisbeth did not have that fundamental element in her life which made her so angry and anxious about her parents and herself. She displaces this anger towards violence and substance abuse.

### 2.3.3 Anticipation

Trauma activates Lisbeth's anticipation. Throughout the events of the story, Lisbeth goes through multiple devastating events, from having a dysfunctional family, to institutionalization, to the incidents of her sexual abuse by Nils Bjurman, her guardian. These traumatic events influenced her need to develop strategies to always be ready for the storm. With a similar background, we can make sense of her fear of the unpredictable and the uncontrollable. Lisbeth anticipates solutions for problems before they arise. This is well illustrated in the novel. Salander to Bjurman:

[...] This is the rucksack I had when I visited you last week. This is a digital video camera. Do you ever watch Insider on TV3? This is the gear that those nasty reporters use when they have to record something with a hidden camera [...]Where's the lens, you're wondering. That's the great thing about it [...] the lens looks like a button and sits hidden in the buckle on a shoulder strap. Maybe you remember that I put the rucksack here on

the table before you started to grope me. I made sure that the lens was directed straight at the bed [...] I thought I could easily acquire good documentation to prove you're a filthy old prick.... (Larsson 242-243)

This quote clearly explains that after Bjurman's first sexual assault, which is a painful experience to Lisbeth, she goes to him the next time all set because she anticipates her second abuse. She made sure that her next encounter with him will turn tables to her own benefit. She plants a hidden camera and documents what Bjurman did to her to have leverage against him.

Not just that, she also anticipates a solution so that he never touches another woman:

[...] I'm going to appear in the bedroom with this in my hand." She held up the taser. "I'll be checking up on you. If I ever find out you have been with a girl again—and it doesn't matter if she's here of her own free will—if I ever find you with any woman at all..." Salander made the throat-slitting motion again.... (Larsson 245)

And she also makes sure he wouldn't dare consider killing her. Salander: "If I should die...if I should fall victim to an accident and be run over by a car or something [...] then copies of the video will automatically be posted to the newspapers. Plus a report in which I describe what it's like to have you as a guardian" (Larsson 245). In the end, she gives him a shameful tattoo as a present to remind him that he is at her mercy.

Another example of Salander's defensive anticipation is when Mikael shows up to her apartment: "She [searches] through her leather jacket that [is] slung over a chair. She [takes] the taser out of the pocket, [checks] to see that it [is] loaded, and stuck it in the back pocket of her jeans" (Larsson 305). Lisbeth makes sure she is ready to attack Mikael with her taser gun although she didn't know why he came to her. Here, we can make sense of her anticipation because she has been through a lot of trauma, and because she is constantly worried about potential danger. She likes to be always prepared to reduce potential damage.

### 2.3.4 Externalization

Salander's externalization is crystal clear. It manifests mostly in the protagonist's appearance. Lisbeth tends to show up her internal elements in her look. First, this appears in adopting a gothic style of clothing and the piercings, which give her an odd look. This can be traced to her sense alienating herself. Giving others a strange physical appearance would push them away from her. Another aspect is Lisbeth's interest in tattoos. "a week after the second rape, she walked from her apartment to a tattoo parlour in the Hornstull district [ ... ] She chose a simple little tattoo depicting a narrow band and asked to have it put on her ankle. The tattoo artist then told her that the skin is very thin there, and that it's going to hurt a lot, and she answered that it's a reminder" (Larsson 238). Lisbeth's intention here is to externalize her traumatic experience to her body. She wants her unfortunate experience to be expressed. Instead of putting a mask on it, she lives her torture through the physical pain of tattooing her thin skin. The tattoo is also a message to remind herself that she and only she owns her body. However, the tattoo that she gives to her rapist indicates that she owns his body, and that she can do with him whatever she wants, and that she is in power over him.

### 2.4 The Destructive and Constructive Impacts of her Defense Mechanisms

Lisbeth's defense mechanisms could be both destructive and constructive. The destruction therein lies in her appearance which would give others misjudgement and underestimation to her: "This is the main reason advokat Bjurman [has] chosen her as a victim. And that [tells] her something about the way she [is] viewed by other people" (Larsson 238). She is seen as an easy prey. People misjudge her often, especially for her appearance. Burjman, for instance, has made a huge mistake when he chose her as a victim, and he paid heavily for his misjudgment. Also, her attitude gave Armansky thoughts that she's a useless, ignorant office worker who's simply marking time and going nowhere. But she proves him wrong when she has the opportunity. Another negative aspect is her substance abuse and getting trouble with the

police. However, she has no adult history of narcotics and alcohol. And that is the evidence that Lisbeth is capable of overcoming her trauma. She is growing up to be a superhero with her extraordinary wit, intelligence and exceptionally hacking skills. She fights villains and men who hate women to make the world a better place. And she inks her body to remind herself that she's the victim of her bad luck and unusual circumstances, and carries on with her journey.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter is meant to provide a psychoanalytic analysis of Stieg Larsson's main character, Lisbeth Salander, with reference to her traumatic experience and the defense mechanisms resulting. The first section details the characterization of Lisbeth Salander in the novel in terms of personality traits and physical appearance. The second section tackles her pathology and the major psychological issues in her character, including being antisocial and having a fear of intimacy. The third section contains the analysis of her defense mechanisms that could be traced and linked to her traumatic experience. This section explores four defense mechanisms: sublimation, displacement, anticipation, and externalization. The protagonist uses all of the mentioned defenses to hide the internal conflicts that occur in her ego, and satisfy her id with consideration to the rules of the real world. The last section elaborates the destructive and constructive impact of these defenses on her personality and growth.



## General Conclusion

This dissertation attempts to psychoanalytically investigate the psychological operations resulting from the traumatic experience of Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* protagonist based on her characterization and development in terms of personality and interpersonal factors. It explores the character of Lisbeth Salander and the defense mechanisms she adopts in order to protect herself from anxiety-producing thoughts and feelings related to her internal conflicts, and whether they prove to be positive or negative. In the beginning, the researcher explains the required theoretical account needed for the study. Then, he explores the psychological makeup of the protagonist, her defense mechanisms that can be linked to her traumatic experiences, and their destructive and constructive impact on her in the personal and interpersonal terms.

As a sum up, the first chapter provides the recommended theoretical background to conduct the study. The first section contains an explanation of characterization theory. It provides a description of characters in literature, their types, and characterization theory. The second section is dedicated to the psychoanalytic literary approach. Within this section, four major points should be explored. First, it gives an overview on psychoanalysis found by Sigmund Freud and what it offers to understand the personality through three major levels of awareness. Thus, it discusses his hypothesis on the unconscious mind and how it can produce defense mechanisms. Then, it investigates Freud's tripartite model of the mind which includes the ego, the id, and the superego, and how they function. However, the analysis used this part of the theory in brief because they were more needed in the theoretical framework to explain how defense mechanisms are produced. In the end, the researcher explicates the defense mechanisms to be traced in the character of the protagonist. The last section gives an overview on trauma as a psychological phenomena, the psychoanalytic view on trauma, and trauma in literature.

The second chapter is an investigation of the psychological makeup of Lisbeth Salander and the defense mechanisms that could be linked to her traumatic experience. Above all, the first

section begins with analyzing her psychological make-up. It provides her profile including her personality traits and the way her physical appearance is described in the novel with reference to the major devastating events that occurred in her life. Then, the second section offers the major psychological difficulties of the protagonist, including her antisocial behavior and fear of intimacy with further elaboration from the novel. In order to attempt to understand her personality and how she manages to cope with her environment, the researcher tackles her defense mechanisms with regard to the conflicts she experienced which contributed to shaping them in the third section. The first defense mechanism to be investigated is sublimation. This appears in the way she keeps her impulsive drives under control and destructs them to constructiveness as she seems to never act without forethought, which could tell so much about her trauma. Then, the researcher analyzes her displacement. Lisbeth shows the signs of displacing her anxiety resulting from her family frustration towards aggressiveness and substance. At a very young age, and right after being placed in a foster family, she starts to face trouble caused by her anger issues and substance abuse. Another significant defense mechanism of hers is anticipation. Lisbeth manifests as a person who predicts solutions for her problems before they arise which could be seen as a trauma response. In the end, the researcher considers her externalization defensive operation to her trauma as a way to accept it and move on with her life.

The study concludes by considering the severe violent life and trauma Lisbeth has experienced and how it contributed to her being a complex figure. Lisbeth has experienced countless harmful occurrences from her childhood to her adulthood. The researcher deduces by claiming that the influence of Lisbeth's trauma is present in her psychological make-up. Her trauma proves to be the major factor of her destruction because it affects her social relationships and obstructs her from establishing social and personal healthy relationships. Furthermore, her traumatic experience is associated with her aggressiveness. From here, we can say that her defense mechanisms can be negative when it leads to her misjudgment by others or to her

substance abuse, and positive because in the end, she proves to be able to overcome her trauma. However, The lack of details about the protagonist's childhood and the mystery of her family did not allow to further investigate her childhood trauma in the best way. Her biological family is only described as dysfunctional when she was a child without any further details.

All in all, this investigation is still far from being perfect. It explores the complicated character of Lisbeth from a psychoanalytic perspective. Her trauma proves to be of great impact on her personality, and her internal conflicts are the major source of her destruction. The study covers the sublimation, displacement, anticipation, externalization defense mechanisms resulting from her trauma. Yet, the area of research could be investigated from other viewpoints.

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## ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل آليات دفاع الشخصية الرئيسية لرواية ستيغ لارسون المسماة الفتاة ذات وشم التنين. تشمل هذه الآليات التعلية، الإزاحة، التوقع، والتجسيد النفسي. يتبنى هذا البحث منهجية التحليل النفسي لسيجموند فرويد، آليات الدفاع النفسية، و نظرية الصدمة لتحليل الشخصية الرئيسية للرواية. يحلل هذا البحث الأحداث الرئيسية التي ساهمت في تشكيل صدمة ليزبيث سالاندر مما أنتج آليات دفاعها. كما يتناول هذا البحث الشكل السيكولوجي و المشاكل النفسية التي تعاني منها و التي تعتبر كذلك نتاج تجاربها السابقة. رغم أن تأثير آلياتها الدفاعية قد أثبت أن يكون إيجابيا و سلبيا، إلا أنها في النهاية أثبتت قدرتها على التغلب على الصدمات التي تعرضت لها و المضي قدماً.

## الكلمات المفتاحية

التحليل النفسي؛ الفتاة ذات وشم التنين؛ ليزبيث سالاندر؛ آليات الدفاع؛ فرويد؛ نظرية الصدمة.