

AN ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC DYNAMICS IN SYLVIA PLATH'S POEM LADY LAZARUS

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Abstract

This study analyzes the character Lady Lazarus in Sylvia Plath's poem against the backdrop of widespread emotional stress among young people, which often leads to depression and anxiety. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this research examines the id, ego, and superego, as well as the techniques of condensation, displacement, and symbolization in the poem using Freud's theory. The results show that Lady Lazarus is dominated by the death drive (id), balances it with reality (ego), and rebels against social norms (superego). Additionally, the analysis of condensation, displacement, and symbolization in Lady Lazarus reveals that metaphors are used to convey complex psychological conflicts, particularly the struggle between life and death, objectification, and the desire for renewal and self-destruction, which are in line with Freud's theory. These techniques uncover complex inner conflicts and represent the loss of humanity in the struggle between life and death. Data is collected through reading and analyzing the poem, identifying sentences that reflect id, ego, superego, and psychological conflict metaphors. Using Freud's literary psychology approach, the analysis involves (1) classifying and examining data through condensation, displacement, and symbolization; (2) interpreting findings; (3) drawing conclusions; and (4) compiling a research report.

Keywords: *psychoanalysis, character, psychological conflict, metaphor, Sigmund Freud*

INTRODUCTION

Humans are complex beings, possessing various aspects within themselves, including thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are interconnected and influenced by life experiences. For example, many young people face great pressure from their families and social environments, where demands for academic achievement and self-image creation through social media have negative impacts on young people (Hoxhaj et al., 2023). This often leads to depression, difficulty in managing emotions, as well as feelings of anxiety and loss of direction.

This complexity of human emotions and struggles is often reflected in literature, with many writers drawing from their personal experiences to convey themes of mental health and inner turmoil. Sylvia Plath, an American poet, explored her struggles with depression and emotional trauma in her works, particularly in Lady Lazarus, which reflects themes of destruction and resurrection influenced by her father's death and early psychological pressures, often analyzed through psychoanalytic theory that examines the subconscious, emotional conflicts, and past experiences in shaping behavior (Grisafi, 2012).

Humans exhibit various behaviors that arise as a result of interactions with others. To gain a deeper understanding of human nature, the science of psychology is essential (Nofrita & Hendri, 2017). Many psychological approaches are based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which states that humans are largely influenced by their subconscious mind, where humans experience events unconsciously or against their will (Assegab & Mujiyono, 2023). Psychoanalytic theory is a framework that explores the nature and development of human personality (Ardiansyah et al., 2022). One of the most renowned approaches in psychoanalysis is the theory introduced by Sigmund Freud (Freud, 2024). In Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, there are three aspects: the id, the ego, and the superego (Farihah, Yuwana, & Rengganis, 2023). This theory paved the way for further study of how the unconscious influences our everyday behavior. The id is the element of personality present

from birth that seeks to avoid discomfort in pursuit of satisfaction, while the ego mediates between the id and superego, acting as the decision-maker, and the superego is the moral component of personality, concerned with distinguishing right from wrong according to societal standards or norms (Wilyah, Akhir, & Ruslan, 2021). On the other hand, the term character etymologically originates from Latin, referring to traits, dispositions, and qualities found within a group of people (Yulianto, Nuryati, & Mufti, 2020).

Freud's psychoanalytic theory is relevant to be applied in the poem 'Lady Lazarus' because it explores various human's subconscious mind and the conscious mind (Ikhwani, Najmuddin, & Syarkawi, 2022). Sigmund Freud introduced three dream mechanisms: condensation, displacement, and symbolization (Rusman & Wirajaya, 2024). Condensation unites hidden thoughts into a single image, symbolization expresses ideas indirectly through symbols in a work of art, and displacement is the transfer of feelings to a more appropriate object (Yogacakti, 2019).

Metaphor is one form of stylistic language (Sari, 2015). Metaphors are used by comparing something with something else, usually having similarities or similarities in physical form, nature or character, even based on someone's perception (Alfiya et al., 2023). In this poem, the character of Lady Lazarus can be analyzed to understand how the elements of the Id, Ego, and Superego interact, creating tensions that reflect the inner struggle with death and resurrection, as well as the metaphors present in the poem. By analyzing 'Lady Lazarus' through Freud's theory, it might be easier to grasp the complexity of the emotions and conflicts faced by the character.

Several previous studies have analyzed literary works using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, though the focus has been limited to Indonesian literature and song lyrics. Afifah (2021) analyzed the unconscious mind in the lyrics of 'Dehidrasi' by Baskara Putra using Freud's psychoanalytic approach, aiming to reveal the psychological dynamics of the characters within the song. Similarly, Amalia, Jumadi, & Dewi (2023) focused on the psychological interpretation of the lyrics of 'Gala Bunga Matahari' by Sal Priadi, where Freud's theory was employed to examine the psychic elements in the song. Additionally, Suprpto (2019) analyzed the personality of the characters in the novel 'Jalan Tak Ada Ujung' by Muchtar Lubis through Freud's psychoanalytic approach to explore the internal conflicts of the main character. While these studies demonstrate how Freud's theory has been applied to Indonesian literature and song lyrics there might be limited research that explicitly discusses Western poetry in the context of Freud's psychoanalysis, particularly about the Id, Ego, and Superego. Thus, this research is intended to examine the psychoanalytic dynamics and how metaphors in Lady Lazarus reflect the poem's themes of death, rebirth, and psychological conflict.

Therefore, this study will address two main questions: (1) How do the id, ego, and superego reflect the character in Sylvia Plath's poem Lady Lazarus? (2) How do the metaphors in 'Lady Lazarus' reflect psychological conflict through the mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and symbolization according to the perspective of psychoanalytic theory?

This study introduces novelty by analyzing Sylvia Plath's poem 'Lady Lazarus', a Western literary work that has rarely been studied in the context of Freud's psychoanalysis, especially concerning the dynamics of the Id, Ego, and Superego. Moreover this study also focuses on how the metaphors in Lady Lazarus reflect psychological conflict through the mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and symbolization according to the perspective of psychoanalytic theory. These mechanisms depict the inner conflict and themes of rebirth and self-destruction, which are essential elements in Plath's work but have not been extensively explored in previous studies. Thus, this research not only broadens the scope of psychoanalytic studies but also offers a new approach through metaphor analysis to illustrate psychological dynamics.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative research is essentially a method of interpretation or meaning-making of a phenomenon or symptom, whether related to its subjects or the products of their actions (Saleh, 2017). Descriptive research is used to gain the broadest possible knowledge about the research object at a certain time (Zellatifanny & Mudjiyanto, 2018). In collecting the data, the researcher analyzes Sylvia Plath's poem Lady

Lazarus using the literature review method, which is defined as a summary obtained from a source of reading related to the research topic (Ridwan et al., 2021). Data is collected through reading and in-depth understanding of the poem, followed by recording sentences that reflect the concepts of id, ego, superego, and metaphors that describe psychological conflicts. The data analysis technique used is content analysis, using the approach of Sigmund Freud's literary psychology theory. The data analysis techniques used in this study are as follows: (1) Classify and analyze data based on the concepts of id, ego, superego, and metaphors, through condensation, diversion, and symbolization mechanisms according to the perspective of psychoanalytic theory. (2) Interpret the classified data. (3) Draw conclusions based on the results of the analysis and interpretation. (4) Compile a research report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Exploring the Id, Ego, and Superego in Lady Lazarus

The poem "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath strongly depicts the desire to rise again from death, reflecting an inner struggle in facing the cycle of destruction and rebirth. The poem also complexly explores the dynamics between destructive impulses, self-awareness, and the pressure of social norms. Below is the classification of Id, Ego, and Superego found in the poem.

ID

1. Soon, soon the flesh
The grave cave ate will be
At home on me.

This line shows a strong id impulse toward death. The speaker almost joyfully welcomes the destruction of her body by the grave, revealing a subconscious drive that deeply desires to reach a total nihilism, where everything material will disappear. This desire is a manifestation of the death instinct, where the id dominates with an uncontrollable urge to succumb to physical destruction. There is no rational thought from the ego that restrains this desire, only a total submission to the instinct to die, demonstrating how powerful the influence of the id is on the speaker's consciousness.

This reveals that the powerful drive suggested by the id in psychoanalysis, which leads toward death, can be seen as a reflection of the internal conflict between life and death instincts within a person. The line signifies a complete surrender to physical destruction without any intervention from the ego or superego, which typically serve to balance and limit extreme desires. The depiction of "flesh" and "grave" reflects a shift in perspective from material life towards a nihilistic afterlife, where everything related to physical existence is temporary and meaningless. This can be viewed as a form of escape from painful reality or an inability to face life itself. The desire to eliminate everything material speaks of an unease in seeking meaning beyond the physical body, ultimately leading to a wish to disappear.

2. Dying
Is an art, like everything else.
I do it exceptionally well.

The id impulse dominates as the speaker considers death as a form of art she masters. Here, death is no longer merely a biological event but a pleasurable act experienced with artistic depth. The speaker implies that she finds pleasure and satisfaction in death, which she performs exceptionally well, showing how the id continually drives her into destructive acts. The satisfaction derived from this destructive act reveals how the id operates beyond rational boundaries, where the pleasure felt comes from self-destruction.

This describes a character who is strongly influenced by the id's urges, focusing on fulfilling primitive desires without regard for social norms or logic. Viewing death as an "art" she

masters emphasizes her distorted perspective, where actions that should be horrific are instead seen as a form of aesthetic satisfaction. The phrase "I did it so well" affirms the speaker's confidence in carrying out this destructive act, reflecting an uncontrolled dominance of the id. In this context, the speaker is not only trapped in a cycle of self-destruction but also finds satisfaction in it, showcasing how the id can lead an individual toward destructive behavior without considering the consequences.

This illustrates a speaker entirely dominated by id impulses, guiding her towards self-destruction without regret. By admitting she is "burnt out" as portrayed in the verse "I do it exceptionally well" and disregarding others' concerns, the speaker reveals an impulsive attitude that ignores consequences or external warnings. The decision to "turn and burn" as portrayed in the verse "I do it exceptionally well" reflects the dominance of the id that drives her toward deep destruction, disregarding any form of control or moral consideration.

EGO

1. I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it——

Here, the speaker realizes that this cycle of death and rebirth is not a coincidence but a pattern that regularly recurs in her life. The ego, as a mediator between external reality and internal impulses, emerges as the speaker acknowledges that her destructive actions are an inevitable part of her existence. The ego acts as self-awareness that can see this pattern and attempts to control it, even though the strong urges from the id always trigger repeated destruction every decade. The speaker not only acknowledges this destruction but seems to accept the cycle as her fate, demonstrating how the ego attempts to adjust to the destructive instincts.

This shows the speaker recognizes and accepts the recurring cycle of destruction in her life, reflecting the strong influence of the ego trying to balance the destructive impulses of the id. By acknowledging that her destructive acts happen every ten years, the speaker demonstrates an understanding that destruction is part of her inevitable life pattern. Although the ego tries to control this pattern, the speaker seems to accept it as fate, depicting the conflict between self-awareness that seeks to survive and the id's persistent push towards destruction.

2. I am only thirty.
And like the cat, I have nine times to die.

In this part, the ego takes control by recognizing the time constraints in her life. At thirty, the speaker still feels she has opportunities to "die" and "rise again" several more times like a cat said to have nine lives. The ego identifies the reality that life goes on, even though death repeatedly approaches her. There is an awareness that time and opportunities are still on her side, but at the same time, the ego is also aware of how vulnerable she is to this recurring cycle of destruction. This illustrates how the ego attempts to manage the harsh physical realities of time and life experiences while still confronting the id's destructive impulses.

This describes that the speaker caught in an inner battle between self-awareness and destructive urges. By realizing that thirty is a point where she still has "nine more chances to die," the speaker demonstrates how the ego functions to manage the reality of time and opportunities in her life. Although the ego recognizes opportunities for survival and change, there is also an acknowledgment of vulnerability to the recurring cycle of destruction. This

reflects the tension between the ego's efforts to control life and the id's relentless drive toward destruction.

SUPEREGO

1. Do I terrify?—

When the speaker asks, "Do I terrify?", she expresses concern about the impact of her actions on others. This question indicates the functioning of the superego, which acts as a judge of morality and social norms. The speaker seems to question how her actions are perceived by those around her, whether they are frightened or feel threatened. This reflects a sense of guilt or social awareness assessing whether the destructive actions influenced by the id contradict societal expectations. The superego here serves as a reminder that there are laws and norms to adhere to, even as the id continually urges the speaker toward actions that violate those norms. With the superego of the question "Do I terrify?" it shows that the poet's character tries to be polite to others.

This depicts the speaker who, although driven by the id's destructive instinct, begins to feel a social awareness that emerges as the question, "Am I frightening?" This indicates that the superego starts to function, questioning the impact of her actions on others and whether she meets society's moral norms. Although the id pushes her to act without consideration, this question reflects doubt and guilt arising from the awareness that her actions may conflict with societal expectations. The speaker tries to assess herself from an external perspective, revealing the tension between personal impulses and the social rules that must be obeyed.

2. Beware, Beware.

The superego warns the speaker, implying an awareness of the consequences of the destructive actions she may take. The voice of the superego serves as a moral admonition, reminding us that even though the id's impulses are strong, there are ethical boundaries and social consequences that cannot be ignored. This warning reflects the role of the superego in keeping the individual aware of moral norms and the dangers of following the id's destructive impulses without control.

This indicates that the warning "Beware" reflects the voice of the superego, reminding the speaker of the consequences of possible destructive actions. The superego serves as a moral reminder that keeps the speaker from completely succumbing to the id's destructive impulses, emphasizing that there are ethical boundaries and social norms to be respected. This warning illustrates the role of the superego in maintaining the speaker's awareness of the dangers of following impulses without moral consideration, balancing the power of internal drives with the need to comply with social laws and norms.

The character of Lady Lazarus from Sylvia Plath's poem, according to the Id, is driven by a fundamental drive (the death drive), which makes her obsessed with death and resurrection as a form of fulfilling destructive desires. According to the ego, through the process of "resurrection," Lady Lazarus balances her destructive drive with reality, acknowledging the pain but still surviving and trying to control the trauma in a way that she can understand. Then, the superego, in this cycle of death and resurrection, contains an element of rebellion against the values or expectations of society, showing her rejection of oppressive standards, as if using this cycle as a symbolic resistance to external control. Through her Id, ego, and superego, the character of Lady Lazarus expresses the struggle between the drive to destroy, survive, and resist the limitations imposed by society. This is in

line with the psychoanalytic theory put forward by Sigmund Freud that the id is the element of personality present from birth that seeks to avoid discomfort in pursuit of satisfaction, while the ego mediates between the id and superego, acting as the decision-maker, and the superego is the moral component of personality, concerned with distinguishing right from wrong according to societal standards or norms.

Psychological Conflict and Metaphorical Mechanisms in Lady Lazarus

Based on the data analysis conducted on Sylvia Plath's poem *Lady Lazarus*, the metaphors depict intense psychological conflict. Through a psychoanalytic perspective, this analysis observes how the metaphors in 'Lady Lazarus' reflect psychological conflict through the mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and symbolization to reveal the underlying inner conflicts. This will be elaborated in detail in the following sections.

a. Condensation

In 'Lady Lazarus', the mechanism of condensation combines various emotions into dense, powerful imagery, creating strong metaphors.

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,

Condensation occurs an image of her body with an object associated with cruelty and dehumanization, like a "Nazi lampshade." This creates a powerful metaphor for suffering and violence against her identity.

Condensation is used to condense multiple ideas into compact metaphors, reflecting psychological conflict regarding identity and destruction. The references to "Nazi lampshade" reveal how Plath feels objectified, even in the face of death and emotional trauma. This condensation unveils profound trauma and inner conflict between her life.

b. Displacement

The poem also demonstrates the mechanism of displacement, channels her intense feelings into metaphors connecting her emotions to objects or concepts that are more socially acceptable or safer.

The grave cave ate will be
At home on me

"the grave cave" becomes a symbol of feelings of burial or alienation, and displacement is used to personify a dark attraction to death.

This use of displacement allows them to express their feelings about fear and attraction to death indirectly. By displacing her feelings to "grave cave", it creates emotional distance, enabling readers to grasp the complexity of her struggle without being confronted with the raw reality. This displacement also reveals the inner conflict between her desire for death and for rebirth, where death becomes both a comforting and challenging space.

c. Symbolization

Symbolization in *Lady Lazarus* appears through metaphors that represent various psychological conflicts in a more abstract, symbolic way.

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair.

This image symbolizes rebirth from destruction, with the colour red emphasizing strength and courage.

Through symbolization, it reveals the complexity of her inner conflict. The use of symbols like ash provides a deep understanding of the dehumanization she feels. Her life and death are seen not as sacred but as mere objects. This symbolization reveals psychological conflicts related to life, death, and other's perceptions of her suffering. In the poem, these symbols reflect her being trapped in a cycle of renewal and destruction, ultimately leading to rebirth or self-destruction.

From analyzing condensation, displacement, and symbolization in *Lady Lazarus*, it is evident that the author uses metaphor to communicate complex psychological conflicts. Through condensation, traumatic ideas are condensed into powerful metaphors. Displacement allows indirect expression of negative feelings. Meanwhile, symbolization represent her inner conflicts more deeply, providing a stronger understanding of her struggle between life and death. This combination of techniques reveals not only deep-rooted psychological conflicts but also conveys a message about the loss of human value in her struggles with life. This is in line with the theory proposed by Sigmund Freud in 1900, as the psychological conflict and metaphorical mechanisms in '*Lady Lazarus*' through condensation, displacement, and symbolization, highlight the poem's underlying struggle between life and death, objectification, and the desire for both renewal and self-destruction. The analysis captures the essence of Plath's profound inner conflict and how it is expressed through rich, layered metaphors.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the analysis of Sylvia Plath's '*Lady Lazarus*' through the perspective of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory reveals that the dynamics between the id, ego, and superego within the character greatly influence their psychological conflict. The id manifests as a drive toward destruction, seen in the desire for death and symbolic objects representing death. Meanwhile, the ego functions as a mediator, aware of the life-and-death cycle, and attempts to manage these destructive impulses, though it is often overwhelmed by the power of the id. The superego, on the other hand, reflects societal and moral pressures, which evoke feelings of guilt or discomfort when confronted with societal norms.

The mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and symbolization in the metaphors of the poem also illustrate the character's inner conflict in facing self-destruction, social pressure, and the need for recognition. Condensation combines complex emotions into dense and sharp images, creating symbols that reveal suffering and trauma. Displacement allows the redirection of intense emotions onto safer objects or concepts, while symbolization represents various psychological conflicts abstractly. Through this approach, '*Lady Lazarus*' showcases the struggle between the id's destructive impulses, the ego's awareness, and the superego's morality, making it a profound psychological exploration of the life-and-death cycle and the influence of social perceptions on the character's self-identity.

Based on the conclusion, the researcher's suggestion for further research can be done by comparing the approach of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory with other psychological theories, such as humanistic or cognitive psychology theory, in analyzing characters in poems or novels. This approach can open up new perspectives in understanding existing psychological conflicts.

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