

Research Article

Trauma and the Overstimulation of the Death-Drive: A Psychoanalysis of Self-Destructive Compulsions in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*

Nahreen Saleha Shahadat¹ 

¹Dept. of English, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Dhaka, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author: salehanahreen@gmail.com

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Abstract— The paper aims to link the theory of the death drive by Freud, formally known as thanatos, with traumatic experiences of individuals. In other words, the purpose of the study was to determine whether trauma overstimulates the inherent death drive in individuals in hopes for a better comprehension of the nature of traumatic events and the ways that individuals choose (or are rather compelled to choose) to cope with them. Hence the two characters from the two novels, i.e. Arthur Dimmesdale from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Captain Ahab from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, were selected in order to establish a synchronic juxtaposition. Both characters can be seen to be driven by self-destructive compulsions: self-harm in Dimmesdale and delusional grandiose in Ahab. Through a qualitative approach of textual analysis and theoretical scrutiny the paper aimed to first identify whether the two characters exhibit the characteristics of an overstimulated death drive, i.e. the need to reduce tension, masochism, compulsive behaviors that are destructive in nature, narcissism and an overpowering superego, and then whether these attributes originate from their respective traumatic and canonical experiences. It was found that the act of infidelity and his inability to take responsibility was a deeply traumatic experience for Arthur Dimmesdale for which he resorted to self-harm as a defense mechanism. On the other hand, for Captain Ahab the incident of his leg's amputation by the whale was a triggering and emasculating event that resulted in the fixation and delusional need to seek revenge despite the obvious and inevitable probabilities of self-destruction. Therefore, the paper illustrates how trauma can lead to the overstimulation of the death drive and hence lead to self-endangerment.

Keywords— Trauma, Death-drive, Thanatos, Dimmesdale, Ahab, Self-destruction, Psychoanalysis.

1. Introduction

Trauma is regarded as an enigmatic topic of interest. This is because the way that it manifests in individuals differ based on their subjective experiences. One common defence mechanism against trauma, that individuals often adopt, is self-sabotage. This can manifest in the form of self-harm, self-endangerment, self-subversion, and so on. Such examples of self-sabotage can be found in the two selected novels, i.e. *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, as the central characters grapple with their respective traumatic experiences.

In both the 19th century American novels, i.e. *The Scarlet Letter* as well as *Moby Dick*, two of the central characters, Arthur Dimmesdale and Captain Ahab respectively, can be seen to display uncanny characteristics, which can be best explained and labelled as compulsive self-destructive tendencies. In Dimmesdale we can identify compulsive self-harm that arise from his excessive guilt and shame that stems from his act of infidelity and abandonment of Hester and their child, Pearl. On the other hand, in Captain Ahab's case we

see a compulsive need to hunt Moby Dick in order to avenge the horrific and agonizing experience of losing his leg in a confrontation with the leviathan whale.

Due to the nature and certain characteristics of their self-destructive compulsions, these tendencies of theirs can be better understood in terms of the Freudian notion of the presumably inherent death-drive, aka thanatos. This, based on close reading of the texts, can be seen to have rooted from their respective traumatic experiences, meaning that there is possibly a synchronic juxtaposition between trauma and self-sabotage. Thus, the paper aims to psychoanalyze Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale and Melville's Captain Ahab by attributing their self-destructive compulsion according to the Freudian theory of thanatos and link the manifestation of this death-drive to the neurotic traumas that they have experienced.

The arrangement of the document is as follows: in Section 1 the paper's introduction can found with its subsections outlining the significance of the study as well as the primary and secondary research objectives. Related work is found in Section 2 which identifies similar studies and highlights the

existing gap in research. Section 3 outlines the theoretical foundation of the research. Section 4 explains the qualitative methodology and specifics of the materials used; it also illustrates the conceptual and theoretical framework that the research revolves around. The results and discussion are discussed in Section 5, and in Section 6 the research work is concluded with future directions. Finally, after the research is concluded the paper illustrates the data availability, conflict of interest, sources of funding, author's contribution, and acknowledgements from the author.

1.1 Importance of the Study

Since the research aims to delineate and explore the possible causes or triggers of self-destructive compulsions, the findings can have several implications. Firstly, trauma is a timeless concept, and is arguably one of the key issues of the contemporary postmodern era. Although the findings are based on 19th century American novels the psychological dynamics of their traumas remain universal and timeless. Thus the findings have the potential to help readers understand responses to trauma from a psychoanalytical perspective. Secondly, the understanding of self-harm could aid in the management and elimination of self-destructive tendencies. Since the paper identifies a link between traumas and self-harm, individuals would attempt to alleviate their symptoms by confronting their past adverse experiences. Thirdly, the established links could illustrate to readers the far-reaching aspects that could be found in literary works, and thus could encourage readers to detect real life implications from literature. Finally, the synchronic juxtaposition identified between trauma and self-destructive compulsions could help readers to approach their own personal traumas and consequences from an objective point of view, which could in turn help them better understand their own tendencies and possible ways to manage them. Overall, the importance of the study lies in the paper's ability to dissect trauma and self-harm in a psychoanalytic lens and in its real-life implications.

1.2. Research Objectives

Primary research objective:

- i. To investigate whether trauma acts a catalyst that overstimulates the death-drive.

Secondary research objectives:

- ii. To explain Arthur Dimmesdale and Captain Ahab's self-destructive compulsions through the Freudian concept of thanatos.
- iii. To determine whether their traumatic experiences and their self-destructive compulsion are correlative.

2. Related Work

Although there aren't an abundance of prior research that have established a correlative connection between Dimmesdale's self-harm and Ahab's delusional conquest and an overpowering death-drive, there are papers that suggest that they have been inflicted by some sort of trauma and/or psychological harm that compelled them to act irrationally and destructively.

According to [1], due to his adultery, Dimmesdale experiences "mental deterioration" [1] that compels his hypocrisy. This mental deterioration, although not explicitly stated, can be interpreted as a result of an adverse event, which in other words can be viewed as trauma. [1] also linked this to his self-harm; which implies the connection between traumas and self-harm. Additionally, one notable characteristic of the overstimulation of the death-drive is narcissism and self-obsession and [2] identified Dimmesdale's self-endangerment as the "ultimate act of self-mutilation" [2]. This has been said because, according to [2], Dimmesdale was fixated on his own internal conflicts and thus subsequently failed to take any productive measures to help Hester and Pearl, who he abandoned. While on the other hand, Hester instead of dwelling over her sins, she resorted to philanthropic means in order to cope with the guilt of her actions. Hence, Dimmesdale has been illustrated to be a self-obsessed character. Notably, [2] does not adopt a Freudian lens in the analysis, however the notion of 'selfish preoccupation' can be linked with Freud's theory of thanatos, or the death drive.

Also, [3] in their paper elucidated the internal conflicts of the characters in the novel. Although [3] did not directly link Dimmesdale's act of carving the "A" on his chest as the overstimulation of his death drive, [3] did link it to his act of adultery and abandonment of his lover and child. Hence, although not mentioned explicitly, Dimmesdale's internal struggles have been associated with his previous acts of infidelity, i.e. his trauma.

Freud's psychoanalytical theories are often interconnected since they all stem from the basic assumption of the human psyche being divided into three components, i.e. the id, ego, and superego. Therefore, most Freudian psychoanalyses can be considered relevant to the current research. For example, [4] conducted a psychoanalytic study on the main characters of *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of the id, ego, and superego. [4] concluded that Dimmesdale was undergoing an "ongoing fight with his id, ego, and superego" [4] which subsequently led to "unconscious desires and repressed feelings" [4]. The repression element in [4] can be especially related to the current hypothesis of the paper since repression often, if not always, connotes trauma. Similarly, [5] also conducted a research incorporating the Freudian id, ego, and superego, stating that Dimmesdale was "repressing his feelings and emotions" [5]. Again, the notion of repression in [5] implies a deep-seated traumatic experience.

In regards to Captain Ahab, [6] stated that "Ahab feels unmanned by an eternal groin-piercing pain" [6]. Again, like in the paper regarding Dimmesdale's canonical life event, [6] here also does not definitively term that "groin-piercing pain" [6] as any sort of trauma, although it can be interpreted as such. In addition to that, [7] noted that Ahab strove for vengeance and was "Possessed by one inflexible purpose-to destroy the white whale" [7] and that this vengeance was evoked by his scarring experience with Moby Dick. This implies how Ahab's actions were driven based on his response to his traumatic experience.

Similar to the studies found regarding *The Scarlet Letter*, specific psychoanalyses of *Moby Dick* is relatively rare. However, the findings of the available papers are nonetheless relevant. For example the psychoanalysis found in [8] denotes that Ahab's obsession for vengeance overpowered his rationality which allowed him to be perceived to possess "enigmatic and maddening disturbance" [8]. The obsession element found in [8] relates to the idea of compulsions that are dealt with in this current paper. [9] also draws similar conclusions, mainly focusing on how Ahab's "social image crisis" [9]. This 'crisis' of his can be perceived as a traumatic experience.

Other than direct studies on *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*, there are several other researches that have studied psychology, trauma, mental illnesses, etc. which can be relevant to the this study. For example [10] investigated personality development through Freudian psychoanalysis, proving that Freud's theories can be employed to understand the human psyche. Secondly, [11] also briefly implies how personal experience could influence mood. Overall, both papers illustrate how human psychology and behaviour are interlinked.

Thus both of the characters' self-destructive journeys have been linked to their past experiences in one way or another, hinting at the possibility of interpreting their self-destructive compulsions in the context of the Freudian theory of the death-drive.

2.1. Research Gap

Although a considerable amount of research has been conducted in regards to both of the selected texts, it can be observed that there is a lack of papers that aim to analyse and elucidate the idiosyncratic compulsive behaviours of Arthur Dimmesdale and Captain Ahab. There are even fewer papers that link these tendencies to their respective traumas as well as their inherent death-drive, i.e. thanatos. Thus the paper aims to offer a better understanding of the nature of self-harm, as seen in Dimmesdale, and self-destructive compulsions, as seen in Ahab. This allows for a systematic and theoretical approach, through Freudian theory, to studying trauma and the ways that individuals attempt to cope with it.

3. Theory

The current research utilized Sigmund Freud's theory of the death-drive. In the account drawn by reference [12], an illustration of Freud's idea of the death-drive can be found. [12] attempted to delineate how Freud chose to explore self-destructive behaviours in "individuals, who seemed bent on destroying themselves psychologically if not physically" [12]. Thus [12] noted that thanatos can be seen as a logical and biological explanation for the destructive patterns of individuals.

According to [13]'s review of Freud's account of the death drive, as found in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) [14], they stated that death is not only an inevitable

part of life but also perused as a final escape form worldly troubles. Death, and hence the death-drive, is an escape from suffering. What [14] essentially illustrated was that humans have two opposing drives inherent to their psyche, i.e. the life-drive (Eros) which is linked with sexuality, and the death-drive (Thanatos) which is more primitive and basic. [13] stated that according to Freud "all life strove toward a reduction of tension to an inorganic zero point" [13]. [14] postulated that such a death-drive should not exist as, according to the pleasure principle, human beings should be programmed to avoid such drastic ends. Furthermore it was noted that it is traumatized patients who exhibit a "compulsion to repeat" [14] which was in essence quite drive-like. Hence, Freud put forth the idea, which was revised by [13], that the death-drive is often, if not always, a way to reduce tension that results from traumatic experiences which then leads to certain compulsive and repetitive behaviours.

According to [15] certain elements or tendencies of people that are indicative of them being death-driven are the overbearing presence of the superego, masochism, and narcissism. Freud, quoted in the paper, stated that since, according to the pleasure principle, individuals strove to maximise pleasure "masochism is incomprehensible" [15]. This means that the existence of masochistic tendencies goes against the life-drive and thus is attributive of the death-drive; Freud thus perceived the death-drive "diametrically opposed" [15] to the life-drive. It was also mentioned that the overbearing power of the superego can lead to masochistic tendencies and thus project the tendencies postulated by the death-drive. In terms of narcissism, it was only identified as an element but not much elaborated on. [15], besides illustrating the theories and concepts of Freud, also gave subjective analysis in which it was stated that the death-drive and the life-drive are not fundamental contradictions, rather the death-drive is the "fulfillment of Eros" [15].

Finally, according to [16], there seems to be a link between the manifestations of thanatos and trauma. The idea of "death instinct manifestations can be discerned in the survivors of trauma" [16] was hypothesized. According to [16], a key indicator of individuals' being deeply impacted by trauma is their "withdrawal of cathexis, or the failure of the empathic connection" [16]. This means that people with neurotic trauma find it difficult to identify emotionally with others. It was also stated the death-drive works as a psychological defence against this type of trauma.

Overall it can be concluded that the death-drive is not a one-dimensional notion that postulates the inner drive to die but also denotes a multitude of other aspects. According to Freud, indications of an over-stimulated death drive are: the need to reduce tension, masochism, compulsive behaviours that are destructive in nature, narcissism, and an overpowering superego.

4. Experimental Design

The paper's methodology revolves around a qualitative research approach. The main focus of the study is upon two

fictional characters from two novels, i.e. Arthur Dimmesdale and Captain Ahab. Arthur Dimmesdale is a Puritan priest who held a grandiose reputation in the fictional world created by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Captain Ahab, on the other hand, is the eccentric voyager who irrationally assumes a sense of rivalry with the leviathan whale, Moby Dick, hence Herman Melville's title *Moby Dick*. Both of the characters' idiosyncratic mannerisms allow subjective psychoanalyses. Therefore the primary sources of data are *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville.

A range of secondary sources of data are also employed in this research, such as journal articles, websites, and other online information, in addition to the primary sources. These additional resources give a more thorough backdrop for the analysis and helps to broaden the study's reach and depth. The study integrates information from multiple sources in an effort to present a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the subject.

Additionally, the theoretical framework of Sigmund Freud's death-drive, or thanatos, has been incorporated in the subjective analysis of the research. The death-drive is theorized to be an inherent drive within the human psyche and is characterized by the need to reduce tension, masochism, compulsive behaviours that are destructive in nature, narcissism, and an overpowering superego; they are often thought to arise due to traumatic stimuli and/or circumstances that evoke acute distress. By identifying these characteristics, the paper aims to psychoanalyze Arthur Dimmesdale's and Captain Ahab's self-destructive compulsions.

The methodological structure of the research thus revolves around the primary and secondary sources of data along with the theoretical framework of Freud's death-drive (thanatos). After reviewing the existing literature, i.e. the secondary sources of data, to substantiate the possibility of correlating trauma and the death-drive, the research first reviews the primary data through textual analysis in order to detect and highlight aspects that would indicate self-destructive behaviours and cross check to see whether they align with Freud's postulation of the characteristics of an over-stimulated death-drive. After identifying death-driven attitudes of the selected characters, these tendencies are connected with their past traumatic experiences in order to establish a synchronic juxtaposition. For clearer understanding, the research constructs a table to highlight the characters' symptoms that align with the notions of the death-drive. Based on the two characters' individual results a conclusion is drawn.

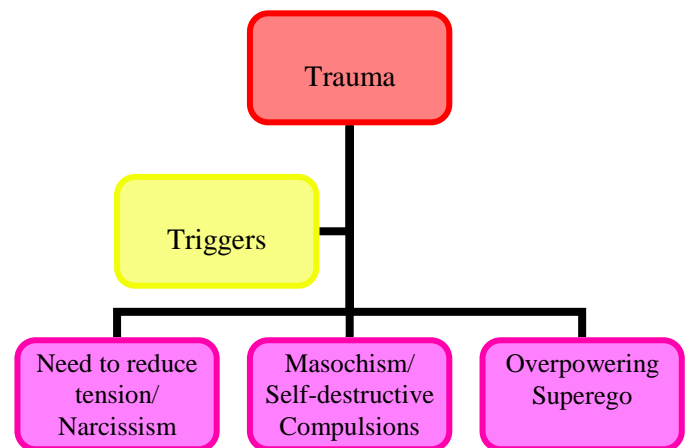


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the correlation between trauma and the symptoms of an over-stimulated death-drive.

The figure above illustrates how the two key elements of the research, i.e. trauma and thanatos, have been conceptually interconnected. Essentially the framework is based on the assumption that when confronted with a highly traumatic situation the brain, or rather the inner psyche, is triggered to counteract the trauma. This in turn leads to the manifestation of the desire to reduce stress, narcissism, masochism, self-destructive compulsions, and an over-powering superego. This conceptualization is aimed to be brought out from the qualitative and exploitative analysis of the two primary sources of data.

The juxtaposition of these primary and secondary sources enables an all-inclusive apprehension of the multifaceted consequences of trauma and the numerous subjective ways that it could manifest within the mannerisms of individuals. The employment of a heterogeneous approach not only allows an extensive analysis but also enhances the research, providing the readers an in-depth and theoretical understanding of the possible consequences of trauma as well as the underlying reasons as to why individuals often resort to self-destructive methods to counteract their said trauma.

5. Results and Discussion

Trauma and self-destructive compulsions are complex notions due to their subjective and multifaceted natures. Both of these elements can manifest in various different ways in individuals. Just like the entirety of the human mind, how an individual reacts to trauma is somewhat perplexing. No single theory could possibly encapsulate the psychological mechanisms of the way that trauma is processed or provide an all-inclusive justification of self-sabotage. However, through theoretical and systematic studies of both of these enigmatic concepts, one could get one step closer to understanding contextual instances of an individual's trauma and their subsequent compulsion to endanger themselves. Although not mutually exclusive, they can have a correlative connection. This connection and synchronic juxtaposition is aimed to be delineated through the Freudian psychoanalytical theory of the death-drive, i.e. thanatos, and hopefully allow readers to better understand the aversive coping mechanisms of trauma.

5.1. Arthur Dimmesdale’s Overstimulation of the Death-Drive

Based on Freud’s theory of thanatos the central characteristics of an over-stimulated death-drive are the need to reduce tension, masochism, compulsive behaviours that are destructive in nature, narcissism, and an overpowering superego. All of the aforementioned attributes correspond with Dimmesdale’s behaviours meaning that his tendency to self-harm can be explained through thanatos.

When reading the experience of Dimmesdale in the novel, one prominent aspect of his narrative arc is his self-harming tendency. Due to the guilt of his infidelity, his apparent hypocrisy, and his inner conflict between retaining his grand reputation as a Puritan minister, i.e. “Master Dimmesdale, her godly pastor” [17] and confessing his sin and taking responsibility for his actions, he resorts to means of self-harm as a defence mechanism. This notion of compulsive and repetitive self-harm can be seen through his carving of an “A” over his chest, i.e. “a scarlet token in his naked breast right over his heart” [17], as well as the narrator’s account stating that “his inner trouble drove him to practices, more in accordance with the old corrupted faith of Rome” [17]. Because of his consistent duelling over his sins, this habit can be labelled as compulsive masochism as he is repeatedly tormenting himself both physically and psychologically, which can be seen as a way of dealing with his guilt and shame, and thus a way to alleviate his tension. Notably, it is his masochistic tendencies that eventually leads to his early demise, i.e. “had the foreboding of untimely death” [17]; “with such a deathlike hue; it was hardly a man with life in him” [17].

Narcissism and an overbearing superego are also indicative of an individual being driven by thanatos. This can also be seen in Dimmesdale. Hints of his narcissism can be identified from his preoccupation with his reputation and his sins. Despite the fact that due to their act of adultery Hester and Pearl were the central victims, as seen through their public humiliation, alienation and difficulty thriving in a strongly Puritanical and patriarchal society, Dimmesdale seemed more concerned with the issues of his personal social reputation and his perception of self-identity while neglecting his duty to Hester and their daughter. Furthermore, he only confessed not because he wanted to act justly for Hester and Pearl but because he wanted to gain redemption through confession as he was in his “death hour” [17]. Such a perpetual act of self-victimization can be depicted as narcissistic behaviour. Secondly, the issue of his overbearing superego can be linked to his masochistic tendencies. This is because he seems to be only duelling in self-torment because he has committed a crime that goes against his very Christian and Puritanical code of morals and ethics. This breaching of principle is what drives him to act self-destructively.

Table 1. Results of analysing Arthur Dimmesdale from a Freudian lens

Symptoms of an over-stimulated death-drive	Arthur Dimmesdale’s Symptoms
Need to reduce tension	Need to overcome his guilt of sinning
Masochism	Carving the ‘A’ on his chest
Self-destructive compulsions	Constant act of harming himself physically and mentally
Narcissism	Self-victimization; abandonment of Hester and Pearl
Overpowering Superego	Constant guilt

Based on the results elucidated above, it can be seen that Arthur Dimmesdale does in fact experience from an over-stimulated death-drive since his narrative arc corresponds with each of the characteristics. The symptoms of an over-stimulated death-drive have manifested within him in several ways, i.e. need to overcome his guilt, self-harm, and self-victimization.

5.2. Arthur Dimmesdale’s Trauma

Thus, based on the aforementioned characteristics Dimmesdale can be said to have been acting based on his inner death-drive. Therefore, it is now important to identify how this death-drive is a reaction against trauma.

Dimmesdale’s trauma, in a broad sense, can be related to his core issue of his unstable sense of self, a notion postulated by Freud’s theory of ego defence mechanisms. The idea of the ego defence mechanisms stems from the belief that individuals always have deep-seated internal issues; this idea was also proposed in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. As mentioned before, the failure to maintain emphatic bond is a key indicator of trauma, and in the text Dimmesdale’s fixation of his own sins while neglecting and abandoning Hester and Pearl can be seen as his inability to be empathetic. Furthermore, Dimmesdale is a well reputed minister who socially and personally maintains certain ethical, moral and religious guidelines. However, due to his act of infidelity with Hester, his sense of identity can be said to have shattered; the very core of his identity that revolves around his Puritanical reputation and sense of self becomes unstable. This is the traumatic experience that helps to manifest the attributes of the death-drive within him. This trauma results in the overpowering influence of the superego as it tries to compensate for his id driven mistakes, which leads him to become preoccupied with his wrongdoings and compels him to resort to compulsive masochistic acts in an attempt to cope with the subsequent tension. Hence, his trauma leads to the manifestation of his death-driven attitude.

Table 2. Results of analysing Dimmesdale’s symptoms and its correlation with his traumatic experiences.

Dimmesdale’s Symptoms	Trauma
Need to overcome his guilt of sinning	Sinning
Carving the ‘A’ on his chest	Hester’s Public Humiliation
Constant act of harming himself physically and mentally	Sinning
Self-victimization and abandoning Hester and Pearl	Sinning
Constant guilt	Sinning and abandoning Hester and Pearl

The symptoms that correspond with the symptoms of an over-stimulated death-drive have been found to be interlinked and correlated with his trauma. As mentioned before, due to his grand reputation in society, sinning is a great source of trauma for him. His self-destructive symptoms have been found to be direct consequences of his trauma. The idea of sinning was so unbearable to him that he was desperate to reduce his anxiety, which led him to self-harm physically and mentally, victimize himself, dwell in his guilt, and abandon Hester and Pearl. Thus the results elucidate how Dimmesdale's death-driven mannerisms are directly correlated with his traumatic experiences.

5.3. Captain Ahab's Overstimulation of the Death-Drive

Compulsive masochism in Captain Ahab materializes itself in the form of his delusional quest for revenge. However, unlike Arthur Dimmesdale, Captain Ahab's masochistic traits aren't as concrete and explicit. His hyper fixation to confront the deadly leviathan, Moby Dick despite the obvious dangers that accompany his self-destructive conquest can be seen as deliberate masochism. Another instance of deliberate masochism can be seen through his refusal to overcome the incident. Instead of trying to cope with the loss of his leg and undergo rehabilitation, Ahab chose to dwell in his misery and dream of destroying the whale. This is synonymous to Dimmesdale's constant dwelling of his sins. In several instances in the text it has been hinted that Moby Dick is indestructible, and Captain Ahab's complete disregard to this fact can be interpreted as his overpowering death-drive. Moby Dick has been described to be a "monster", "a sperm whale of uncommon magnitude and malignity", "so incredibly ferocious as continually to be a thirst for human blood", "immortal", "intelligent malignity" [18], and so forth. Furthermore, the act of hunting the whale was notoriously known for the catastrophe it warranted, i.e. "already several fatalities had attended his chase" [18]. The most transparent illustration of him being death-driven can be found in chapters 134 and 135 where Captain Ahab was adamant on a direct confrontation with Moby Dick, i.e. "he told them he would take the whale head-and-head" [18] and "let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee" [18]. And just like Arthur Dimmesdale, the captain also received an early death, i.e. he "disappeared into the depths" [18]. This apparent and repetitive negligence to acknowledge the inevitable destruction of himself, his ship, and his crew mates can be seen as a compulsive masochistic tendency indicative of him being driven by thanatos.

Although in Captain Ahab we do not see an overpowering superego, we can identify a narcissistic attitude. His narcissism can be attributed to his complete disregard for the lives and well-being of his crewmates as well as the family that he apparently abandoned. As mentioned before, his personal vendetta with Moby Dick warranted a delusional and self-destructive journey, and it is evident that Ahab was not only aware of this but was persistently and deliberately remaining ignorant of this fact. This subsequently not only put his own life in danger and impending doom but also the lives of his crewmates. He was blinded by his desire for vengeance so much he was preoccupied with his own

personal quest while the others, initially, remained ignorant on this aim and was pursuing whale hunting in hopes for monetary profit. Furthermore, it was also mentioned that Captain Ahab had a wife and child who he basically abandoned to fulfil his need for revenge, i.e. "he has a wife – not three voyages wedded... that old man had a child" [18]. This preoccupation and obsession with vengeance all the while jeopardizing the lives of others can be interpreted as narcissism that is attributive of a high death-drive, i.e. Ahab had deliberately sailed upon the whaling expedition with the "all-engrossing object of hunting the white whale" [18].

Table 3. Results of analysing Captain Ahab from a Freudian lens

Symptoms of an over-stimulated death-drive	Captain Ahab's Symptoms
Need to reduce tension	Need to overcome his sense of emasculation
Masochism	Constant dwelling of his past experience
Self-destructive compulsions	Deliberately going on a dangerous expedition; directly confronting the whale
Narcissism	Putting his crewmates in danger just to be able to get his revenge; abandoning his family
Overpowering Superego	N/A

Other than an overpowering superego, it can be seen that Ahab's mannerisms correspond with the symptoms of an over-stimulated death-drive. Time and time again Ahab has been found to endanger himself and those around him; such acts of endangerment adheres to four out of the five symptoms of a death-driven individual. It is important to note that in the context of psychological issues it is not necessary for an individual to adhere to each and every symptom. As mentioned before, the human psyche is highly complex, hence the symptoms are not always linear. Thus the fact that Captain Ahab projects 4 out of the five symptoms is more than enough evidence to suggest that he was death-driven.

5.4. Captain Ahab's Trauma

The trauma that can be linked to the manifestation of the characteristics of a high death-drive in Captain Ahab can be traced back to his first encounter with Moby Dick. In a whaling expedition Ahab's ship was attacked by the whale during which he lost his leg, i.e. "it was devoured, chewed up by the monstrousest pharmacetty that ever chipped a boat" [18]. This can be interpreted as the traumatic event that triggered and unhinged Ahab as it has been noted that he was deeply disturbed by this incident, i.e. "In fact, he ain't sick; but no, he isn't well either" [18], "he was a little out of his mind... ever since he lost his leg last voyage by that accursed whale he's been kind of moody" [18]. It is important to note that Captain Ahab is a well-reputed and fearless Captain highly regarded by all, i.e. "he's a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab" [18]. Thus the incident of his catastrophic confrontation with the whale might have triggered him to manifest an unstable sense of self, as a defence mechanism, which can be interpreted to have been very traumatic.

Thus in order to reduce the tension that was caused by his trauma, the manifestation of an overpowering death-drive took place. This, as illustrated above, is seen through his compulsive masochism and narcissism. Therefore it was his trauma that over-stimulated his death-drive and compelled him to act self-destructively

Table 4. Results of analysing Ahab's symptoms and its correlation with his traumatic experience.

Ahab's Symptoms	Trauma
Need to overcome his sense of emasculation	Losing his leg and becoming crippled
Constant dwelling of his past experience	The amputation of his leg
Deliberately going on a dangerous expedition; directly confronting the whale	Losing his leg and becoming crippled
Putting his crewmates in danger just to be able to get his revenge; abandoning his family	Losing his leg and becoming crippled

Just like in the case of Arthur Dimmesdale, Captain Ahab's symptoms have been found to be directly linked to his traumatic experience. As a man and the captain of a ship physical strength was a key indicator of his strength and his credibility as a voyager. However, when he lost his leg and became crippled, it destabilized his sense of self-worth. Thus he was so adamant to avenge his amputation and restore his integrity. This traumatic experience is what drove most, if not all, of his actions. Thus his trauma led him to blindly strive for revenge and subsequently endangering himself and others in the process. Thus his trauma and his death-driven qualities are directly correlated.

6. Conclusion and Future Scope

In conclusion, both Arthur Dimmesdale and Captain Ahab's self-destructive compulsions, i.e. self-harm and self-endangerment, can be psychoanalyzed through the Freudian theory of thanatos. Both of these characters can be labelled as death-driven as they exhibit characteristics that correspond with the attributes of thanatos, i.e. repetitive masochism, narcissism, overpowering superego, and the persistent need to decrease stress and or/tension. Additionally, by identifying their traumatic past experiences, which is Dimmesdale's act of adultery and the subsequent abandonment of Hester and Pearl which shattered his notion of self-identity, and Ahab's loss of his leg which likewise distorted his self-perception and emasculated him, it has been established that these traumatic experiences led to the manifestation of an overpowering death-drive. Based on the above analyses it has been found that both Arthur Dimmesdale and Captain Ahab exhibit death-driven qualities. In Arthur Dimmesdale we can see a need to overcome his guilt of sinning, carving an 'A' on his chest, constant act of harming himself physically and mentally, self-victimization, abandoning Hester and Pearl, and constant guilt. All of these issues are tied to his trauma of sinning. In Captain Ahab on the other hand, we can find a need to overcome his sense of emasculation, constant

dwelling of his past experience, deliberately going on a dangerous expedition, directly confronting the whale, endangering himself, placing his crewmates in danger just to be able to get his revenge, and abandoning his family. These are all tied to his traumatic experience of losing his leg to Moby Dick.

Therefore the paper was successfully able to establish a causal correlational link between trauma and the over-stimulation of the death-drive, and thus gives a better coherent understanding of the nature, explanation, and consequences of both trauma and self-destructive behaviours.

6.1. Future Scope

The overall findings of the research suggests a number of future scopes since the relevance of this study stems from the fact that it allows readers to better understand the link between trauma and self-harm. Although the current study does not provide an all-inclusive understanding of mental health or its inner mechanisms, it does help readers to be one step closer, and thus highlights the scope of the implications of other psychoanalytical theories. Notably, no single theory or research can provide a complete image of trauma and their defence mechanisms. However the study does promote and encourage individuals to look deeply and theoretically into the issues of coping mechanisms of trauma and adverse life events. Despite the success in being able to draw a synchronic juxtaposition between the two selected notions the analysis was limited to a small number of characters, and a more thorough and comprehensive understanding may be obtained by more extensive research with a wider variety of storylines, timelines, and characters. Thus there is scope for further research in this specific context and field.

Looking ahead, more advocacy and research projects would provide the best chance for further progress. Self-sabotage is not the only coping mechanism of trauma and nor is it exclusive to trauma. More psychoanalytical theories could be employed in studies to better understand human mannerisms, such as those by Lacan, Jung and so on. The illustration of the dynamic and multifaceted nature of human psychology, especially under adverse stimuli, suggests that there is scope for consistent research.

Data Availability

Due to the qualitative nature of the research most, if not all, data can be easily found from the primary and secondary sources employed in the study. The data was generated based on the subjective approach of textual analysis, incorporating Sigmund Freud's theory of the death-drive (thanatos). Deeper explanation of the psychodynamics of the death-drive can be found in Freud's book titled *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Conflict of Interest

This was a single-authored research, therefore there were no scopes of any conflict of interest at any point of the study.

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Authors' Contributions

This was a single-authored research, therefore all aspects of the study were conducted, analyzed and deduced by the author.

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AUTHORS PROFILE

Nahreen Saleha Shahadat is currently pursuing a Masters of Arts degree in English Literature and Cultural Studies under the Department of English, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), and has completed her Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) in English Language and Literature from the same institution. She is also currently acting as a Teaching Assistant under the same department and university. Her research interests include psychoanalysis, feminism, diaspora and cultural studies, identity formation, myths, etc.

