

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 6. Issue.4. 2019 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN  
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

GOTHIC IDENTITY IN THE NOVEL 'THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO' THROUGH  
THE CHARACTER LISBETH SALANDER

S.SHALINI<sup>1</sup>, AISHWARYA J.NAIR<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Krishna Adithya College of Arts and Science,  
Coimbatore

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Krishna Adithya College of Arts and Science,  
Coimbatore.

doi: [10.33329/ijelr.64.28](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.64.28)



ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the Goths, Goth culture and the reasons for exploring themselves in a subculture. Lisbeth Salander, a Swedish woman who had a traumatic childhood isolated herself from the culture and the society. This article finds how Lisbeth encounters her new identity as a Goth in order to escape from her traumatic past. Culture plays an important role to realize one's presence in the society where Lisbeth lost it because of her childhood.

**Key Words:** Goth, Identity, Culture, Childhood

*The Girl with Dragon Tattoo* was published in 2003. The story starts with journalist Mikael Blomkvist at Millennium, a financial magazine with his longtime lover Erika Berger. He is forced to resign his job, after being convicted for defaming the financier, Hans-Erik Wennerstrom. Mikael receives a job offer from Henrik Vanger, the retired C.E.O of Vanger Corporation, while he was waiting for his two months prison sentence. He recruited him and wants him to stay with his family for a year, as he is investigating the disappearance of Henrik Vanger's great-niece, Harriet, forty years ago. Harriet has the habit of presenting pressed flower to Henrik for his birthday. Even after she disappears, Henrik receives the pressed flowers and he believes that her murderer is doing this to torture him. Mikael accepts the job and moves to Hedeby Island where he is surrounded by the Vanger family.

Lisbeth Salander, a young woman with tattoos and piercings is working as an investigator for Milton Security. She was hired to create a background search on Blomkvist. Lisbeth's troubled background made the court to place Lisbeth under the guardianship of Nils Bjurman. Lisbeth decides to take revenge on him, when Bjurman brutally rapes her. Mikael learnt that Harriet vanished from Hedeby Island when she was sixteen-years-old. That day, the entire Vanger family had gathered for an annual business dinner. However, the dinner was interrupted by a serious car accident in the bridge that connected the island to the mainland. As a result, the bridge was closed for an entire day.

Henrik is sure that one of his family members killed Harriet since nobody was able to get on or off the island for the entire day during her disappearance. While investigating the story, Mikael meets all the members of the Vanger family, starting with Harriet's brother, Martin, who now runs the family business. Then he met Cecilia, whom he had a brief affair with and Martin's mother Isabella, who resents him for barging in her family's history. At that time, Blomkvist asked if he could hire a research assistant to help him with the disappearance of

Harriet, so Frode recommends Salander. While investigating Harriet's diary, Mikael and Lisbeth are confused by the list of names and phone numbers. They later learn that the names are referring to women who were brutally murdered many years ago. Alongside the list there were Bible verses that described how and why these women were killed.

The entire puzzle led them to Gottfried Vanger, father of Martin and Harriet, who killed and raped women and taught his son to do the same. It was later revealed that both Martin and Gottfried raped Harriet. While escaping, Harriet drowned her father and later escaped the island with the help of her cousin Anita. Later, Lisbeth saves Mikael, who was imprisoned in Martin's torture basement. Martin tries to escape the island by car, but was quickly pursued by Salander on her motorbike. During the chase, Martin crashed onto a truck and died. After these events, they both find that Harriet is living in a sheep farm in Australia. They convinced her to come back to Sweden and reveals the death of Martin.

Lisbeth with the help of her computer skills helps Mikael Blomkvist to escape from the Wennerstrom issue by exposing the mafia information regarding the Wennerstrom issue and she steals millions of money from them. Later, she realized that she was in love with Mikael, when she tries to confess, she finds him with Erika Berger and realized he will never accept her.

### LISBETH SALANDER

Lisbeth Salander is the main character in *'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo'*. She possesses a photographic memory and legendary hacking skills. She works as a freelancer for Dragon Armansky at Milton security. She teams up with Mikael Blomkvist in *'The Girl with Dragon Tattoo'* to solve the mystery surrounding Harriet Vagner's disappearance. Lisbeth was born to Agneta Sofia Salander and Alexander Zalachenko and became the younger sister of Camilla. From early childhood, Salander has a history of violence and vindictive behaviour. At twelve, Salander threw gasoline on her father and set him on fire, as he tortured her mother, causing her brain damage. She was declared as danger to herself and to others by the court at age thirteen and sent for treatment at St. Stefan's Psychiatric Clinic for Children in Uppsala. She refused to talk with psychologists, police, teachers and social workers. The one person that she would barely speak to was Advokat Holger Palmgren who was assigned as her trustee.

After running away from her first few foster families, Palmgren explained that she would be taken back to the psychiatric clinic which convinced Salander not to run away from the next foster family. After a violent attack on a man who abused her, the court psychiatrists felt she should be institutionalized. At the court hearing, Palmgren acted as her legal representation and worked hard to convince the court that she was not dangerous and should instead be put under a guardianship. Palmgren, went from being her trustee to her guardian. Their relationship grew to be one of the most importances for Salander. When Palmgren had a stroke and was bed ridden, Nils Bjurman becomes her new guardian. At that time, Bjurman raped Salander where she revenged him by tattooing the words "I am a rapist pig" on his chest.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gaia Vinci in her article, *Goth subculture may protest vulnerable children*, says that half of the teenage Goths have harmed themselves or attempted suicide before identifying themselves as Goths. These young people of Goth subculture is gaining valuable social and emotional support from their peers which helps them to get rid of their tough thoughts. The subculture offers them the cure to escape from the pain that they undergo.

Hitchen's in this article in 2009 says that, "the girl" in the title refers to the author's beloved niece, 'Therese' who is tattooed and has suffered from anorexia and dyslexia but she can fix all the computer related problems. Even Larsson mailed her several situations that Salander supposed to face in his works in order to know how she can handle the same situations.

Louise Tickle in his article "Growing-up Goths" says that the punks want to remain same, even though it may become harder to combine with the responsibilities that come with age. Goth only refers to the long,

dyed-black hair, black clothes, pale faces contrasted with dark, dramatic eye makeup to the outsiders, but actually they are passionate about the characteristics of Goths, Goth music and style. Some Goths have an interest in the dark side of life and a natural tendency towards a degree of angst that drives them towards black.

'Goths seem with several perspectives but they way they find themselves in different from the perceived notions of the outsiders'. There are several distressed people surviving in a culture without realising where they actually belong, but Salander who is also a distressed character finds herself in the Goth subculture where she can find the solace and happiness. She was not happy with the life she lived before she put herself in the subculture.

#### OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the emergence and evolution of Goths.
- To understand the characteristics of Goth subculture.
- To identify how culture and environment influence the society.
- To focus on the reasons for the transition from Swedish culture to Goth subculture with reference to the specific character 'Lisbeth Salander' in the novel '*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*'.

#### GOTHS

Goth were a Germanic tribe in the Migration period who were remembered for defeating the Roman empire and their rising power in the northern region of Europe and in Italy. They were first referred as 'Scythians' because they lived in the regions surrounded by The Black Sea which was traditionally called as Scythian territory. But modern history has rejected the identification of the Goths with the ancient Scythians. The primary source for Goths is Jordanes' *Getica*, presented half mythic version of the story of these people. Romans called them as, Gutones, a Germanic tribe identified as the Goths. They were later defined as 'Visigoths' and 'Ostrogoths'. Visigoths were originally ruled by a family called Balthi or Balts, whereas Ostrogoths were ruled by Amal family. The Goth incorporates catholic Christianity, Roman artistic traditions and other aspects of Roman culture. The gothic kingdom fell to the Moors in 711A.D. Today, the meaning of the word 'goth' has been evolved. In the late middle Ages, a style of architecture arose; they are characterized by large, imposing cathedrals and castles. It blooms in the field of literature to refer the artistic beauty. Later, it influenced the punk rock bands to use the gothic values and it emerged as Goth rock.

It was John Stickney, a musical critic coined the term 'Gothic rock' in 1967. Gothic rock/ Gothic band is born from the political frustration of the punk rock. This culture is multifaceted as it possesses several aspects. There are three major components of Goth subculture, the first one is the involvement and the community spirit where they have regular meet up and they discuss their views and ideas. The second one is gothic personality, which can also be called as individualism, interest towards the darker side of life and towards supernaturalism, focuses on dark aesthetics, art, emotion, creativity, intellectualism, mystery and drama. Almost everyone in the gothic group have this component in common. The last one is the passion for gothic music but in the present context people prevail to be a Goth though they don't want to listen to the gothic rock.

This deals with the Goth/ Gothic punk, their characteristics and the Gothic Identity of the character Lisbeth Salander. She was mentally affected by the incidents of her childhood where her father who caused a vicious beating to her mother. Lisbeth couldn't tolerate the attitude of her father and she threw gasoline on him and set him on fire which mentally breaks her down. She was told as danger to herself and to others by the court at the age of 13. Her childhood trauma made her life hard. Childhood trauma can affect a person in multiple ways.

Children who have experiencing complex trauma find it difficult to identify, express and in managing their emotions. Their emotions are always unpredictable, they have only limited language for expressing emotions and they turn their aggression towards everything else, as they find difficulty in expressing their emotions upon everyone. Even Lisbeth was institutionalized; she has no idea, other than her arrogance towards the people around her.

With regard to personal record, the opinion concluded that there was grave risk of alcohol and drug abuse, and that she lacked self-awareness. By then her cashbook was filled with terms such as introverted, socially inhibited, lacking in empathy, ego- fixated, psychopathic and asocial behavior, difficulty in cooperating, and incapable of assimilating learning. (143)

People, who have encountered her, gave her several names because of the responses from her and that made her to choose a new cultural identity. Lisbeth has used this transition as a tool to escape from the trauma which helps her to get out from the trauma. When the institutions and the people around her urge her to speak, the Goth people never wanted to express and to react unless Lisbeth wishes to speak.

According to the society of Sweden, no one is allowed to expose their feelings in public and then Lisbeth was institutionalized by the government of Sweden to give her a better life. Lisbeth distrusted institution and refused to talk to the police officers, psychologists and to the social workers.

Lisbeth always wants to stay away from the authorities and institutions, because of its stereotypical nature. But in the case of Lisbeth, she hated them when she had the compulsion to accept all the rules. Even at the end, when Martin Vanger was accused for the reason for missing by Lisbeth and Mikael, Martin tried to escape from being accusing and tried to flee. On the way, he died of car accident.

Lisbeth who encountered the death refused to call for police, as she doesn't want them to know that she has involved in the issue. So, Lisbeth wants Mikael to reveal all the truth to Vanger family instead of calling police officers. As Lisbeth says to Mikael,

If you call the police, I'm leaving; I don't want to have anything to do with them. (414)

Lisbeth wants to protect herself from several authorities like child welfare, guardianship, tax and police. Lisbeth realized that there are people who really hates the institutions and authorities and isolate themselves from others.

When she found the Goth subculture, Lisbeth saw herself as one among them as her identity matched up with the Goth stereotype. People in the society have several identities in their life but it differs for a traumatic patient. A citizen has several roles to play in the society but people who are affected by trauma have made a separate and damaged self-image because of their traumatic incidents.

Lisbeth might have escaped from her childhood trauma, as she diverted herself in the Goth subculture and in her profession which made her to escape from the trauma. She started to share her feelings to Palmgren, but it came to an end when he was bedridden.

Lisbeth had similar problem but the Goth culture paved the way to identify herself in the culture. She had a big hope towards the authorities when Palmgren gave her some hope. But it was lost when Bjurman was appointed as her guardian when Palmgren was hospitalized for having stroke. Bjurman brutally raped her and Lisbeth took revenge on him by capturing video when he rapes her, before leaving she tattooed him, 'I am a sadist pig, a pervert, and a rapist'. Goths have a satanic attitude of punishing people which is easily found in the character when she punished Bjurman brutally.

People with trauma immerse themselves in some other concepts to escape from the pain. Even, Lisbeth diverted herself in computer and she became one of the best hackers in Sweden. Salander is a world class hacker, under the pseudonym 'wasp', she becomes a prominent figure in the international hacker community known as the Hacker Republic. She uses her computer skill to earn her living, doing investigation for Milton Security.

Lisbeth doesn't have any identity after all the consequences of her childhood trauma where she doesn't have a society or culture to fit in. She once met Cilla Noren, a Goth girl with plum red hair streaked with black, black leather trousers, a ring in her nose, and rivets on her belt as Lisbeth. She is having a wasp tattoo about an inch long on her neck, a tattooed loop around the biceps on her left arm and another around her left ankle.

Getting a tattoo requires a type of physical pain which helps relieve mental pain. Even Lisbeth had a tattoo in ankle when she was raped by Bjurman. People usually get tattoo when they are emotionally broken,

for them the pain in getting a tattoo is far better than the emotional pain that they are experiencing. When Lisbeth was raped by Bjurman, she has no one to express the sufferings and pain that she has encountered. Goths were found to be the most likely group to be depressed. Health experts said that people should be aware that Goths are more likely to suffer mental health problems than other depressed youngsters.

Lisbeth is the member of *Evil Fingers*, a suburban band consisting of four teenage girls who are into hard rock. Lisbeth who hates to socialize and having friendship is really hard but they become friends. "Salander was not the easiest person to be friends with, and especially not during those but Cilla ignored her silences and took her along to the bar." (211)

Lisbeth never exposed her secrets or about her family to her friends, she didn't want them to react as all people do on knowing her life. Lisbeth always loves to be alone and loves her own company, which is one of the stereotypes of Goth people. Her silence is ignored and she never forced to share her feelings or to express her emotions or to exhibit the reason why she has been silent.

But Lisbeth finds happy and satisfied when she is with her Goth community which was noticed by Armansky when he encountered her in a cafe,

Salander was with three girls and a boy; all dressed in much the same way. Armansky had watched her with interest. She seemed to be just as reserved as she was at work, but she had actually almost smiled at a story told by one of her companions. (38)

One of the three components of Goth culture is that the involvement and community spirit in attending the Goth meetings. She always attends the Goth meeting without fail, though she has nothing to express on the social and political issues, she is allowed to stay quiet. She found herself on the fringe of the group and rarely contributed to the talk, but she was accepted for who she was. She could come and go as she pleased and was allowed to sit in silence over her beer all evening. (212)

But they didn't know about her traumatic childhood. She wanted to have a new identity and she never wanted to be remembered by her past incidents. "If there was one place where she felt any sort of group solidarity, it was in the company of Evil Fingers and, by, extension, with the guys who were friends with the girls." (212)

While she is with them, she had a sense of belonging as she has the faith that they would stand for her at all occasions. In the article, *Pieces of Mind* by Karyn Hall, she says that belongingness refers acceptance as a member or a part of the group or community. This single word possesses a huge concept. A sense of belongingness is a human need, like the need of food and shelter. The belongingness is the most important thing in seeing values in one's life.

Like all Goths, Lisbeth wears black most of the time and it has been ten years since she joined the Evil Fringes but Lisbeth is the only one who hasn't changed a bit. The way she dresses up, is explained in several occasions of the novel,

Salander was dressed for the day in a black T-shirt with a picture on it of E.T. with fangs and the words "I am also an alien." She had on a black skirt that was frayed at the hem, a worn-out black, mid-length leather jacket, river belt, heavy Doc Martens boots, and horizontally striped, green and red knee socks." (212)

Punks have a violent way of expressing their opinions and political views. On the other hand, Goths are peaceful, introspective and artistic. Goths tend to share their views in an artistic ways through fashion, music, writing and visual art. Goth people love mythology, mystery, supernatural, nature, romanticism and they hold things that are dying out. They feel that modern society has become greedy.

Black is the colour of mourning in Western culture. They are influenced by Victorian mourning attire and by the characters of Gothic literature such as Dracula and Frankenstein. The modern Gothic fashion prefers black as they have the belief that they are mourning for things in society that are dying out. Apart from these factors, they mask up them with their clothing and attire, as Lisbeth does

She took the rings out of her eyebrows and nostril, put on a pale pink lipstick, and examined herself in the bathroom mirror. She looked like any other woman out for a weekend stroll, and she regarded her outfit as appropriate camouflage for an expedition behind enemy lines. (93)

One of the chief components of Goths is that they should love their Goth music for being a goth. But in modern days, they don't want to listen to Goth music for being a goth. Goth subculture has evolved, where the wide Goth categories turn into limited groups.

They are Weakenders, who will be a Goth only when they are with their Goth gang; Ultra Goths who are the extreme Goths; Satanists and Vampires who loves the dark mysteries and methologies; Mopey Goth who develops a sense of extreme angst and Perky Goth who loves the culture's music and style. She doesn't have any interest in listening to the music of Goth subculture, which is exploded when Mikael visited her apartment,

Lisbeth had a C.D player on a shelf. Her C.D collection was a pitiful total of ten C.D.s by groups he had never heard of and the musicians on the cover looked like vampires from outer space. Music was not probably her big interest. (299)

Lisbeth always seems to be unhappy because of her childhood trauma. Lisbeth falls under the Mopey goth category where she has a ton of angst. Mopey Goths are the ones who take up the whole 'dark and gloomy' side of life. According to them, a mopey Goth should never appear to be remotely happy it is hard for people to witness her happy other than being with her community, like Dragon Armansky refers, "Lisbeth rarely laughed. But over time Armansky thought he noticed a softening of her attitude. She had a dry sense of humor, to put it mildly, which could prompt a crooked, ironic smile."(39)

There are several people like Lisbeth who are not satisfied and distrusted with their culture and put themselves into a subculture. Subculture blooms because of the quest to find an identity, peer pressure, latest fashions or trends, rebel or to find a solution to discrimination. In the end, people find what they lack in their culture.

## FINDINGS

Goth possesses several reasons for being in the Goth subculture. In this research, Lisbeth Salander loses her identity when she comes out from the institution.. She is remembered for a person who tried to kill her father and she was institutionized because she is danger to herself and to the people around her. She has no other choice other than turning her culture because a new culture could make her a better person. As she is under the control of the court, she has been watched and trapped. She wishes to escape from all the clusters. Palmgren helps her to escape from the institutions and gave her the hope but it was again bursted by Bjurman who is appointed as her new guardian when Palmgren is hospitalized. Bjurman raped her brutally. Lisbeth found her friends who are Goths in a bar. She starts to learn all the stereotypes of Goth, move around with them and finally become a Goth, which gave her a self satisfaction and gave her strength to escape from problems. Lisbeth's past makes her who she is and she has transformed her sufferings into power.

Though she is not totally into the Goth subculture, she finds peace and feels secured when she is with them. She proclaims that she has friends who stand for her, when she is into any trouble. As a traumatic patience, Lisbeth struggles to express her thoughts and feelings, so she expressed herself by the way she dress,

While comparing with other punk movements, Goths have survived for a long period of time. Punks turned to mainstream culture out of compulsion and responsibilities but these Goths are mostly weekenders where they remain as Goth for a long time. They have their culture spirit till the end of their life. Most of the teenagers turned to be a Goth only because of abuse and bullying. These teenagers mostly harm themselves and even commit suicide. Goth subculture accepts people for who they are, even if they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Cilla, who is a friend of Salander is a lesbian where she chose the Goth community for being herself and they seek no approval from the society.

**LIMITATION**

Goths are flourishing for several reasons, though people have several reasons to change themselves into a Goth, this research only focuses on how a person's lack of identity helps him to find an identity in a subculture. Lisbeth who longed to escape from her insecurities used this opportunity of becoming a Goth. The researcher has interviewed some of the Goth. Through the interview, it has been identified that, they are arrogant when approached by people of other culture. They are approachable and friendly when the communication was well. Because of the lack of time, the researcher couldn't approach them with any detailed interviews which would help the researcher to explore more about the culture and Goth people.

**SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- Apart from lack of identity, they are several reasons to choose Goth subculture which are not focused.
- The Goth subculture has been evolved over period can be analyzed.
- Personal interviews can be made to explore more about the Goth subculture.

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