

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Research

Tracy Letts is a great and successful playwright. He is an American playwright, screenwriter, and actor. Letts received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *August: Osage County* and a Tony Award for his portrayal of George in the revival of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. As a playwright, he has written ten plays, and *August: Osage County* is his fourth work, which was premiered at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago on June 28, 2007, and closed on August 26, 2007.

Further, in *August: Osage County* the writer finds expression of the author's life that he has put into it. According to Abrams, "Drama was a prominent and widely influential form of expressionist writing" (1999: 86). *August: Osage County* is one play that deals with a psychological problem. The writer assumes that the most psychological problem in the play look like post-traumatic stress disorder, because the writer finds in the author life and the play like symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder is "an anxiety disorder that some people get after witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event" (Barbour 2010: 6).

Therefore, there are some reasons why the writer chooses this topic and interested in analyzing *August: Osage County* as represented the author life. The first reason is because of the play itself. The play has several complicated problems such

as suicide, cancer in two of the characters, broken home family, forbidden love, and dishonesty. The writer believes all of them are connected with psychology, especially trauma impact.

The second reason is that in an interview, the author of this play tells the reason why he writes this play in the first place. It is because the way of his grandfather's dead by accident was haunting to him and that make him trauma. So, here the writer sees the author from psychological effect from that event that haunts the author and wants to prove that in this research he put it into his play. The urge to analyze this play is strengthened by some emotional research that the writer feels because last year the writer directed some students of class of 2015 of English Departments Andalas University to perform this play.

Then, the elaborate of the problem is Tracy Letts get trauma from his grandfather's suicide, and because of that, he had a nightmare. Then he leaves his hometown, he angers early, and he uses a lot of alcohol and drug. That all such as the symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Based on the reasons above, the writer wants to analyze Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* by using expressive theory that is related with Biographical and Psychoanalysis by giving it a title "Tracy Letts' Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as Reflected in His Play *August: Osage County*".

1.2. Identification of Problem

In an interview, Tracy Letts' said she was haunted by the way of his grandfather's suicide. Then the writer finds he getting nightmares, staying away from Oklahoma, outbursts of anger, alcohol and drug abuse. Therefore, the writer assumes that Tracy Letts was in psychological problem.

Then, in Musicomh Magazine, the writer finds the statement "*August: Osage County* is a play based on actual events in the author family as the source of inspiration" (Tripney 2008). From the quotation above, that make the writer triggers to researching the psychological problem of Tracy Letts that also can be seen in his play *August: Osage County*.

1.3.Scope of Research

In order to make the analysis stands clearer, the writer formulates the scope of analysis. The following are the main points that are needed to be analyzed:

- a. Traumatic events and symptoms of Tracy Letts' post-traumatic stress disorder.
- b. The reflection of Tracy Letts' post-traumatic stress disorder to *August: Osage County*.

1.4. Research Question

The writer focuses on analyzing the psychological problem of the author that has impacts on his work. Then the writer describes the play and the psychological problems in it. The specific questions investigated are:

- a. Does Tracy Letts experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? What are the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that Tracy Letts experience?
- b. What are the reflections of Tracy Letts' of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to his play *August: Osage County*?

1.5. Objectives of Research

First, this research aims to analyze the author's life after his grandfather's suicide to diagnosing him suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Secondly, this research aims to reveal and prove that the author has reflected his psychological issues look like post-traumatic stress disorder to his play *August: Osage County*.

1.6. Review of Related Studies

The writer finds an essay which analyzes this play. Bradford (2017) in his essay entitled "Characters and Themes from Tracy Letts' *August: Osage County*" focuses on the characters and themes as the title suggests. A little information about Bradford Wade is a playwright, a freelance writer, and an English professor. His

plays have been performed in schools and theaters throughout the United States and England. In his essay, he also mentions “A post-colonialist critic could write an entire paper on that alone” which means that he thinks *August: Osage County* contains an element of post-colonialism. But in the play’s theme, he derives from the male and female archetypes in *August: Osage County*. There we can see that the play *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts can be analyzed with many approaches which give the writer the idea to analyze the play by using psychological approach. The weakness of Bradford’s essay is that he does not write about all characters. He just writes and explains six out of thirteen characters in the play.

The second review is about an article from an Oklahoma-born, LA-based actor, writer, and director. She is Kimberly Guerrero. Her article is entitled “The Indian(s) in the Attic—Divining a Message from *August: Osage County*” (2015). She focuses on analyzing the meaning of Johnna character that has the role as Native American and gives the message to American Theater to hire, produce, and cast the native American not because they are native, but because they are good at what they do. Storytelling is in their blood. They have fresh insights, unique approaches, and valuable new perspectives to bring to the table. The benefits and the weakness to the writer in this article are Guerrero also mention a bit about Tracy Letts. It can add to the biography of the author in the next chapter although it does not have such a big influence on her research. She states that “Dennis Letts was a member of the

Muscogee (Creek) Tribe. Along with European ancestry, he also passed indigenous DNA on to his sons. Tracy Letts is of mixed blood.”

Thirdly, the writer finds related studies with this research about the same literary work, but now coming from English seminar capstone research paper at Cedarville University by Kate Soules in 2012 with an article entitled “Waste, Wasting, Wasted: Repercussions of Simulations on the American Family in Tracy Letts’s *August: Osage County*.” Kate Soules’s uses Postmodern Theory based on Jean Baudrillard and Postmodern Literary Theory based on Lucy Niall supported by Postmodern Theory by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner. In Soules’ research, she concludes that Tracy Letts’ *August: Osage County* is a dark drama that proves beneficial because it exposes problems inherent within the workings of American culture. Letts does not provide an exact answer as to how to fix these problems, perhaps the end of the play can serve as a warning. If the world ends with a mother left sobbing on a staircase abandoned by her children, this drama may be read as the worst-case scenario. The weakness found in Soules’ research paper is that the absence of an important point of discussion which results in the reader’s difficulty to understand it. Meanwhile, on the other side, the research provides so many useful information and supporting data as their strengths.

Fourth, the writer finds a thesis with the title “Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Experienced by Charlie in Stephen Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*” by Farah Nur Fatimah. She is alumni from Gajah Mada University, this thesis was

submitted to the board of examiners in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the sarjana degree in the English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences GadjahMada University in 2016. Fatimah's thesis discusses the traumatic experienced of the character in a novel and used post-traumatic stress disorder theory. From her thesis, the writer gets information about post-traumatic stress disorder and this is as a proof that post-traumatic stress disorder can be applied to analyze literary work. The difference between Fatimah's and the writer's thesis is that her object is a character in the novel, while the writer's object is the play as reflected by the author.

1.7.Theoretical Framework

The writer applied expressive theory by abrams as a bridge of literary work can be represented by the author life, biographical approach is to conduct the author life, psychoanalysis as analyze the psychology of the characters in *August: Osage County* as a reflection of the author psychology problem, and post-traumatic stress disorder used to analyzed the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder of the author.

Expressive Theory

In order to get a sufficient and appropriate analysis of the play, the writer applies expressive theory, since the theory concerns with the relationship between the autor's life, feeling, thought, perceptions and the literary work. Dealing with this, Abrams states that:

The central tendency of expressive theory maybe summarized in this way: a work of art is essentially the internal made external, usually from a creative

process operating under the impulse of feeling and embodying the combined product of the poet's perception, thought and feeling. The primary sources and subjects matters of poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's mind or its aspects of the external world, these only as they are converted from the fact to poetry by feeling and operations of poet's mind. (1953 : 22)

The quotation above shows that literary work does not only cover internal aspects but also the external one, which influences the work, and usually it comes from a creative process of the author's perception, feeling and thought about something. The subject matter or the theme of literature is based on the author's mind. If the aspect is the external world, it must be transformed from the real fact to a form of literary work. Based on Abrams's opinion, this research also needs Biographical Approach to know the author's life.

Biographical Approach

Simply said, Biographical approach is experiences of the author that she or he puts into the works. According to Burto, Barnett, and Cain, "The really good biographies not only tell us about the life of the author, but they enable us to return to the literary texts with a deeper understanding of how they came to be what they are" (2008:1547). Their statements above become the base of the writer to seek for the author's life, because this research also requires deeper understanding of the author's life. The writer decides to use biographical approach to get the data whether *August: Osage County* is the reflection of the author's life or post-traumatic stress disorder of the author. Next to complete theory of this research is, based on the title, the writer

needs Psychoanalytic Criticism. Still according to the authors above, they say: “One form that biographical study may take is psychological or psychoanalytic criticism” (2008:1547).

Psychoanalysis

Since the writer tries to reveal the author’s post-traumatic stress disorder, the writer uses psychoanalysis, as Tyson states:

If psychoanalysis can help us better understand human behavior, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts, which are about human behavior...psychoanalysis is [also] used to help us to resolve our psychological problems, often called disorders or dysfunctions. (Tyson, 11-12)

Tyson states that using psychoanalysis is the best way to understand the behavior of the literary characters, and the goal of psychoanalysis is to resolve problem. So, the focus of this theory is on the patterns of destructive behavior.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder, commonly known as PTSD, “...refers to an anxiety disorder that some people get after witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event” (Barbour 2010:6).

As we know, when Tracy Letts was ten years old, his maternal grandfather committed suicide. Based on that the writer uses children signs and symptoms of post

traumatic stress disorder from Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre to diagnose Tracy Letts's post traumatic stress disorder. Kelty Mental Resource Centre is a key mental health literacy program at BC Children's Hospital, they says "the child or youth might have Post traumatic stress disorder if the symptoms of it do not go away after they experienced or witnessed a traumatic event" (Kelty Mental Health).

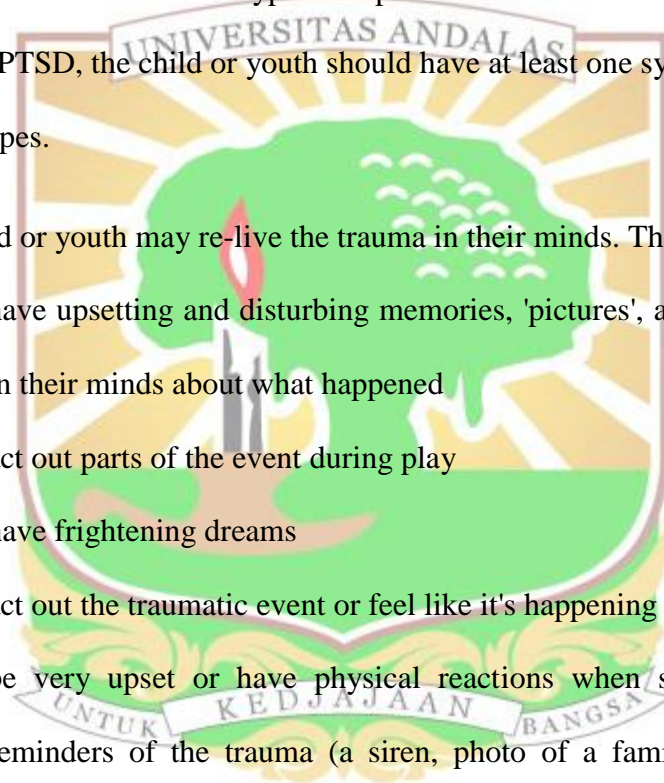
There are four different types of post-traumatic stress reactions. To be diagnosed with PTSD, the child or youth should have at least one symptom from each of these three types.

A. The child or youth may re-live the trauma in their minds. They may:

1. have upsetting and disturbing memories, 'pictures', and thoughts stuck in their minds about what happened
2. act out parts of the event during play
3. have frightening dreams
4. act out the traumatic event or feel like it's happening right now
5. be very upset or have physical reactions when seeing or hearing reminders of the trauma (a siren, photo of a family member, door slamming, bedroom)

B. The child or youth may avoid things that remind them of the trauma. They may:

1. stay away from things associated with the trauma (clothing, dogs, if trauma was a dog attack)



2. avoid thoughts, feelings or conversation associated with the trauma

C. The child or youth may experience changes in thoughts and feelings as a result of the trauma. They may:

1. forget parts of the trauma or be confused about when things happened
2. think more negatively about themselves, others, and the world
3. blame themselves or others for the event
4. feel negative emotions (anger, fear, horror etc.) that won't go away
5. lose interest in things they used to enjoy (quit sports team or dance class, no longer want to swim or play with friends)
6. show little emotion after a trauma or not want to be around people
7. not be able to feel positive emotions (pleasure, satisfaction etc.)

D. The child or youth may seem extremely alert and "on guard". They may:

1. have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
2. have a hard time concentrating or completing tasks
3. often be on "guard" or look for signs of danger
4. feel jittery or nervous, or easily startled; jump at sounds or possible threats (telephone ringing, a dog barking)
5. do things that are reckless and dangerous
6. become angry easily

Post-traumatic stress disorder may vary in different age groups. The following chart shows PTSD of children at different ages. It is important to remember that some of these symptoms may occur during stressful times and not just with PTSD. But if a

child or youth has symptoms in reaction to a frightening event that remain for a long time, they may be suffering from PTSD.

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Symptoms</i>
Early childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fear of strangers, family, or situations (clingy, avoiding, crying) • replays trauma through play or artwork • more alert (easily startled, very aware of danger) • act younger or no longer use already learned skills (stop using the potty, start sucking thumb) • body complaints (stomach aches, headaches, aches and pains) • frightening dreams unrelated to the traumatic event
School-aged children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • afraid of being separated from caregivers (doesn't want to be apart, trouble sleeping alone) • loss of trust (doesn't trust caregiver to keep them safe) • negative view of the world (thinks world is dangerous) • replays trauma through play or artwork • difficulty concentrating • loss of appetite • does more things without thinking first (impulsive, fights without considering the consequences) • defiant, or has intense anger outbursts or aggression • mood changes, be unhappy or depressed • loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy • body complaints (stomach aches, headaches, aches and pains)
Teenagers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • afraid to be separated from caregivers (clingy, resists being alone, tries to be near)

young adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of trust (mistrusts caregiver) • negative view of the world (thinks world is dangerous) • very irritable, angry outbursts • impulsive behaviour (substance use, self-harm) • defiant, aggressive • repeated thoughts of death, dying, killing themselves • risky behaviour, self-injury (cutting themselves, alcohol and drug use, unprotected sexual behaviour) • mood changes, seem unhappy or depressed • loss of appetite • loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy • body complaints (stomach aches, headaches, aches and pains)
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Then based on website Veteran Aid, after a traumatic event, men and women tend to respond differently and exhibit certain PTSD symptoms more commonly than others,

1. For example, research has shown that women are more likely to be jumpy, to have more trouble feeling emotions and to avoid things that remind them of the trauma. They are more likely to feel anxious and depressed.
2. Men, however, are more likely to feel angry and to have trouble controlling their anger, and are more likely to have problems with alcohol or drugs.
3. Both men and women who experience PTSD may develop physical health problems.(Hammons 2017)

Those explanations above are used to analyze the issue of PTSD of Tracy Letts as reflected in his play *August: Osage County*.

1.8.Methods of Literary Research

There are three steps the writer uses in conducting this research, they are collecting data, analyzing data, and presenting data. Firstly, in collecting the data of this research the writer uses library research method to gather two kinds of data, primary and external data. As the primary source of data, the writer uses the work of Tracy Letts *August; Osage County*. The external source of data include any books, articles, journals and other sources related to the play, author, psychological problem and theory of this research.

Secondly, to analyze the data the writer read the play and the supporting data by using biographical approach. The writer analyzes the extrinsic part of play by using the related sources and books of psychology and the author's biography which shows the experience of the author on his family, then the writer seeks the author's life and psychological problem until the writer gets conclusion that the author has post-traumatic stress disorder. The writer argues the author writes this play in order to express his psychological problem. Lastly, presenting the result of the research, the writer uses descriptive method by taking some quotations from play and all relevant sources to support the analysis.