

## Unraveling the Trauma of the Protagonist in 'My Dark Vanessa' Novel (2020)

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### *Abstract*

*The study is entitled "Traumatic Experiences of Main Character in My Dark Vanessa Novel (2020)". The purpose of this study is to analyze the traumatic experiences by main character when she was teenager and deal with the traumatic in the novel "My Dark Vanessa". The method of this research is qualitative method. The data sources uses in this study were from the dialogue, sentences taken from the novel "My Dark Vanessa". The researcher uses the Concept trauma by Cathy Carruth (1996). The result showed that trauma experienced by the main character has several symptoms experienced main character such as intrusion or re-experiencing, nightmares, mood changes or cognitive, flashbacks and avoidance. The results of this analysis indicate that Vanessa suffered from trauma caused by the tragic events she experienced when she was teenager due to adult. The researcher also found how to deal with traumatic such as secret identity, compartmentalizing, denial, safe place to tell the truth, silencing, and the last right brains therapy.*

**Keywords:** *abused, deal, literature, main character, traumatic*

### **A. Introduction**

This study is about analyzing one of Kate Elizabeth Russel finest literary works, *My dark Vanessa* (2020). Trauma experiences also happen to teenagers, such as the main character in the novel "My dark Vanessa" (2020). Vanessa is traumatized by bad experiences in her past, and this trauma is not easy to her to deal with. In this research, the researcher discussed Vanessa's trauma where the one of the novel's character has suffered hard moment on her past. The event was so hard for her because she was trapped by forty-two her English teacher for a magnetic and manipulative man called Jacob Strane. Her trauma caused of violence, rape, and sex abuse. In the moment when she was suffered that horrible moment, she was in struggling to be able to escape from the place. Feel trauma in daily life in one of symptom of trauma.

The reason the writer choose this novel to be a study is to analyzed the traumatic experiences of person who turned out to be suffering from trauma in the past. Problems like this often occur in real life. From the novel, the writer found how the suffering by person who was in her worst time. So, the conclusion is that trauma is not something easy for a person to deal with because many , but rather a mental disorder that has a negative impact on the life.

## **B. Method**

This research adopts a qualitative approach to delve into the complexities of the subject matter, allowing for in-depth exploration and the generation of novel insights. According to Bhandari (2020), qualitative studies are particularly adept at analyzing non-numeric data, such as video, audio, and text, while also elucidating concepts and experiences. Commonly utilized in fields such as social sciences, history, and education sciences, this approach enables researchers to delve deeply into problems and foster innovative research avenues.

Narrative analysis serves as a key methodological tool in this study, offering a nuanced exploration of the storylines and character internal thoughts within Kate Elizabeth Russell's novel. By employing narrative analysis, the researcher aims to illuminate the traumatic experiences of the main character, drawing upon the conceptual framework outlined by Cathy Caruth (1996). Caruth's work provides a theoretical foundation for understanding trauma, enriching the analysis of the novel's themes and character dynamics. The primary source of data for this research is the text of "My Dark Vanessa" by Kate Elizabeth Russell, published in 2020 by Harper Collins Australia. The novel, comprising 369 pages across 17 chapters, serves as a rich repository of textual material for analysis. Additionally, supplementary data from relevant literary works and novels are drawn upon to bolster the findings and enrich the analysis.

The research methodology entails several key steps:

- Thoroughly reading the novel multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text.
- Systematically noting and documenting expressions, statements, and situations within the novel that support the identification of traumatic symptoms.
- Classifying and organizing the identified aspects and themes present in the novel to facilitate analysis.

Data analysis revolves around the traumatic concept as elucidated by Caruth (1996), serving as the overarching theoretical framework guiding the study. The analysis centers on the traumatic experiences encountered by the main character, with quotations from the novel serving as evidential support. Furthermore, the analysis draws upon the researcher's interpretation and understanding to establish connections between the ideas presented in the novel and the theoretical concepts underpinning trauma theory. In summary, this research methodologically combines qualitative inquiry, narrative analysis, and the application of trauma theory to provide a nuanced exploration of the portrayal of traumatic experiences in "My Dark Vanessa" by Kate Elizabeth Russell. Through systematic analysis and interpretation,

the study aims to shed light on the complexities of trauma within the context of the novel's narrative landscape.

## C. Findings and Discussion

### 1. Traumatic experiences portrayed in the novel

#### 1.1 Intrusion or re-experiencing

I try to remember *that* last conversation he and I had before I left- in his backyard, night falling around us. How panicked I was begging him to tell me it would be ok, I hadn't ruined everything he seemed horrified by me; that's what I remember most about that conversations : his look of repulsion as he watched me fall apart ,hiccups and snotty nose. I don't remember saying id take care of anything. I just remember him saying we would be ok (Russel, 2021, p. 244)

#### 1.2.Nightmares

The second symptom is nightmares or sleeping disorders, maintenances and insomnia. That all are common among individuals who are diagnosed with traumatic disorder are conditions that affect sleep quality, timing, or duration and impact a person's ability to properly function while they are awake. These disorders can undermine quality of life and contribute to other medical problems.

"By the middle of the day , I'm struggling to keep my head up, so rather than eating during lunch , I sneak back to Gould , curl up in my bed, and cry. If its, going to be this hard, I wonder why even bother ? (Russel, 2021, p. 15)

#### 1.3 Mood changes or Negative cognition

The statements above negative is emotionally unstable and affects mood deterioration. After that behavioral disorders are usually manifested as more negative changes in the victim's behavior, such as excessive laziness. Finally, cognitive deficits that affect the victim's way of thinking and often make it difficult to concentrate fantasies, fantasies, etc.

I've been wrapped up in my own frustration and impatience, never considering all that was on the line for him or how much he's already risked touching my leg, saying he wanted to kiss me. (Russel, 2021, p. 75)

#### 1.4 Flashbacks

Flashbacks is when someone vividly re-experience a past traumatic incident. These flashbacks tend to occur suddenly and unexpectedly. While not everyone diagnosed with traumatic

Trust me, I know how hard this is." Janine lowers her voice

"I'm a survivor, too."

That word, with its cloying empathy; that patronizing, flattening word that makes my whole body cringe no matter the context it pushes too far. My lips curl up over my teeth as I spit out, "You don't know anything about me," and I hang up the phone, bolt across the lobby to the empty staff bathroom, and throw up into a toilet,

curling my arms around the bowl until the wave passes, my stomach empties out, and I'm coughing up bile. (Russel, 2021, p. 232)

### 1.5 Avoidance

The response toward Trauma may include avoiding people, places, or situations that can remind them of their traumatic events.

"I know how hard this must be for you," he says, "but it could be an opportunity, right? To make peace with it and move on." Ie myself to breathe through the thought. "Make peace and move on" sounds like jumping off a cliff, sounds like dying.

"Can we talk about something else?" I ask

"Sure," he says. "Of course." He asks me about work, if I'm still looking for a new job. (Russel, 2021, p. 244)

## 2. Dealing with Trauma

### 2.1. Secret identity

Secret identity by Vanessa as main Character is Vanessa as individuals with visible "stigmas" (in some contexts) such as gender, race, and physical handicap are always "on display," requiring them to prepare in advance, and manage, social interactions that place them in an out-group. People with "concealable stigmas," they note, such as mental illness, criminal record, or sexual orientation, "have the option to hide the identity, 'passing as one of the favored in-group and avoiding the negative consequences of being part of the out-group'"

Stunned, I type the old URL into my browser. After everything that happened in college, I made the blog private, inaccessible without a password. Now it loads with every post visible, reverted back to its default public setting. I can't remember the last time I checked to make sure it was locked it could have been sitting out in the open for years. Scrolling down the page, I see "S.," my name transparent code for Strane, scattered across the blocks of text.

"It shouldn't have been accessible," I say as I bring up the login screen, try to remember the decade-old password. "I don't know what happened."

"I'd like to reference it in the article." "No," I say. "I can say no, right?"

"I'd prefer to have your permission," she says, "but the blog was public."

"Well, I'm deleting it now anyway." (Russel, 2021, p. 246)

### 2.2. Compartmentalizing

Compartmentalizing is second defense of main character did by separates feelings or thoughts that contradict each other into different "compartments" in order to avoid the cognitive dissonance that arises when a thought or feeling we have starts to contradict a different thought or feeling that we are also aware of

She studies me, deep lines in her forehead. "Knowing you, Vanessa, I think you're more likely to minimize than exaggerate." She starts talking in an authoritative tone I've never heard before, practically scolding. She says it's humiliating what Browick forced me to do. That being instructed to demean yourself in front of your peers is enough to cause post-traumatic stress, regardless of anything else I went through. (Russel, 2021, p. 261)

### 2.3 Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism that involves a refusal to accept reality, thus blocking external events from awareness

When I call home that evening, I offer a flood of explanations and platitudes : everything's fine, nothing's going on, the whole thing is ridiculous , a stupid rumor, of course it's not true, my parents are on different phones, both talking at once. (Russel, 2021, p. 168)

### 2.4. Safe place to tell the truth

The data found that Vanessa shared her story to ruby one person that Vanessa believed to tell her story life

I've been seeing ruby for eight months, ever since my dad died. At first it was grief therapy, but it turned into talking about my mom, my ex-boyfriend, how I stuck I feel in to my job, how I stuck I feel about everything (Russel, 2021, p. 8)

### 2.5 Right brains therapy

The last way to deal with trauma is therapy of the right side of the brain, because right side brain consists of emotional, expression ,and imagination the site of spatial and emotional functions as well as of implicit memory, is the side most involved in trauma. Therefore, he concludes, "we need to have right-brain therapies for right-brain problems.

When a person suffers from trauma, working with their right brain improves their social interactions and relationships. There are several explanations to this phenomena. The first is that, when a traumatic experience occurs, the left side of the brain shuts down and the right - side processes. Two sides of our brain work together most of the time. But they each have their own functions. The left side is designed for logical thinking. It is the side we use when we read, do math, figure out logic problems. When we wish to explain our past, spew out statistics. It has an orderly fashion of working.

Right brains therapy is a form self-defense that guides to positive strategy. Vanessa as Subject who apply this mechanism vent their feeling towards safer object or activities (in positive direction)

He tilts his head ,squints. "really. You've told your therapist that the man who abused you when you were kid was publicly accused of abuse by someone else and that's not something you two talk about? Come on" (Russel, 2021, p. 51)

## D. Conclusion

The Novel "My Dark Vanessa" is fictional novel by Kate Elizabeth Russel published in 2021 It can be concluded that the fact traumatic experienced because sexual harassment by her teacher, Jacob Strane when she was fifteen is not easy for teenagers to understand the abuse situation. After finding and analyzing the data in the novel My Dark Vanessa using Traumatic concept by Cathy Caruth theory, it can be concluded the trauma represented in "My Dark Vanessa" such as intrusion or re-experiencing, nightmares, mood changes or cognitive,

flashbacks and avoidance. Despite all the impact of the trauma she had experienced, she also trying to survive and try to fight her trauma. The character deal with the trauma in “My Dark Vanessa” (2020) Novel. The results of this analysis indicate that Vanessa suffered from trauma caused by the tragic events she experienced when she was teenager due to adult. The researcher also found how to deal with traumatic such as secret identity, compartmentalizing, denial, safe place to tell the truth, silencing, and the last right brains therapy. Vanessa apply her respective methods of self -defense, although, in the end, Vanessa get back up from her traumatic in the past. Vanessa start new beginning of life, she free from Jacob Strane. The writer suggest and expect this thesis is able to be significant contribution from the novel. Hopefully, this study can be useful for the readers or the future English Department students who are interested in studying the same topic. There were so much knowledge that can be taken from this research, hopefully all readers will be spoiled with the information from this thesis and hopefully they get some information. For the readers who are interested in Traumatic Concept by Cathy Caruth (1996), especially in literary work, they are understand the symptoms of the impact of traumatic and some information deal with traumatic through this study. In addition, it is also recommended for the next writer who are interested in doing further researches in the same field to use these findings as a starting point in conducting research.

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