



JANIE'S CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND PSYCHOPATHY BEHAVIOUR IN LUCINDA BERRY'S NOVEL "THE PERFECT CHILD"

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyse the connection between childhood trauma and the behaviour of one of the characters, Janie, in The Perfect Child novel by Lucinda Berry. This study employed a qualitative method and used Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory to obtain a deeper understanding, particularly, the defense mechanisms and the tripartite model (id, ego, and superego). The study finds that there is an imbalance in Janie's personality structure that was caused by her childhood trauma, in particular, abuse and neglect that have been done by her birth mother, Becky. Thus, Janie's trauma triggered her psychological behaviour which tends to refer to signs of a child at risk of psychopathy, such as; aggression towards animals or pets, cheating on friends or enemies or individuals who are neutral and bullying other children. Subsequently, due to Janie's trauma of her birth mother, she defends herself around women. Especially those who resemble mother figures.

Keywords: Behaviour, childhood trauma, psychoanalysis, psychopathic disorder.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mencari relasi antara trauma pada masa kecil dan perilaku dari salah satu karakter, Janie, dalam novel The Perfect Child karya Lucinda Berry. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dan teori psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih mendalam, khususnya, mekanisme pertahanan dan model tripartit (id, ego, dan superego). Penelitian ini menemukan adanya ketidakseimbangan dalam struktur kepribadian Janie yang disebabkan oleh trauma masa kecilnya yaitu penyiksaan dan penelantaran dilakukan oleh Becky atau ibu kandungnya sendiri. Maka dari itu, trauma yang dialami Janie memicu perilaku psikologisnya yang cenderung merujuk kepada tanda-tanda anak berisiko psikopati, seperti; sifat agresif terhadap hewan atau hewan peliharaan, tidak dapat membedakan teman atau musuh ataupun individu yang netral, dan menindas anak lain. Kemudian, akibat dari trauma yang dialami oleh Janie dengan ibu kandungnya, ia melindungi diri dari wanita-wanita disekitarnya. Terutama mereka yang menyerupai sosok ibu.

Kata kunci: Perilaku, trauma masa kecil, psikoanalisis, gangguan psikopat.

INTRODUCTION

Literature and psychology have similarities in analysing personality. The difference between the two of them is that psychology analyses real human behaviour. Meanwhile, in literature, the difference is it analyses the character's behaviour in a piece of literary work. As many people believe, literary psychology does not indicate the resolution of psychological issues. The goal of literary psychology is to figure out what psychological elements are present in a piece of literature. Authors use literary works to express how they feel, perceive, and deal with environmental situations including human behaviour. The characters in most psychological literary works have experienced traumas, the majority of which occurred during their childhood which affects their current psychological behaviour in literary works (Aras 2015, 251). Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis theory defined trauma as something that

is able to cause harm to the psyche of an individual. An individual who has childhood trauma and they failed in the psychosexual stages might have an uncontrolled id. Which happened often in the case of psychopaths, especially in literary fiction where they portrayed a psychopath as someone with bad childhood traumatic experience (Heidarizadeh 2015, 790).

According to Dennis (2013) in the Indian Journal of Social Studies and Humanities, psychopathy is defined as a psychological condition marked by a set of problematic personality characteristics. Some of the characteristics of the psychopath could be seen in Hare's checklist of psychopathy behaviour such as lack of empathy, poor guilt, pathological lying, poor behavioural control and sexual promiscuity. Normal persons have a good balance of the id, ego, and superego in their mind, but this does not apply to those who are unable to control their ego due to strong id desires and a weak superego which often appear in literary psychology where the characters are portrayed with psychopathy behaviour (Hare 1996, 46).

According to the explanation stated, the researcher used the psychological criticism defense mechanisms and the tripartite model (id, ego, and superego) by Sigmund Freud to analyse childhood trauma that could be the cause of the character's psychopathic behaviour which is shown in Janie and how the defense mechanisms are reflected by her actions which could be categorised as psychopathy behaviour.

The theoretical framework, Freud's psychoanalytic theory, divided the psyche into three sections under the tripartite model: the id, ego, and superego. As it is always present, the id symbolizes a constant in the personality. The pleasure principle controls the id. The ego is the next step after the id. In a sentence, id is when you do or want something without considering the consequences. Meanwhile, the superego functions similarly to the morality principle. Freud believes the human personality interact in three level of consciousness; conscious which refer to immediate awareness; subconscious or preconscious as the memories and dreams are stored; and unconscious which is made up of thoughts and desires deep below our awareness (Freud 1920). He believed these three levels of awareness have a role to shape human behaviour (Sibi, K J 2020). Subsequently, since the three parts of personality have each goal, they will be in constant conflict. If the conflict that the individual face is too much and they could not handle the conflict well, their ego will develop defense mechanisms to reduce the conflict. Defense mechanism is defined as an unconscious psychological operation that functions to protect someone from anxiety (Ahmad 2021).

Theoretical Background

In order to analyse the data, this chapter discusses several relevant theories to the subject being analysed in this research. There hasn't been any study conducted on the particular novel *The Perfect Child* by Lucinda Berry during the time of this research conducted. Although, the researcher found some studies related to the issues of childhood trauma and psychopathic behaviour.

Types of Psychopaths

An article in the Journal of Humanities about the psychopath in literary works is entitled *Miss Emily Grierson's Psychopathy in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily": Overt Disorder, Covert Order used Freudian psychoanalysis*, particularly used the tripartite model and the Oedipus complex to analyse the main character. The study found that there is sexual repression in the main character and there is an imbalance in the character's personality structure (Romdhani, 2016). The next study by (Fathi & Ahmadi, 2017) entitled *The Analysis of Psychological Conflicts in Khalid Hussaini's Novel the Kite Runner*, analysed one of the characters in the novel used the psychoanalysis approach by Abraham Maslow and Sigmund Freud. The researcher found psychological conflicts in the main character and the dominance of *ego* in the character's personality structure based on his actions throughout the story. Related to psychopaths, in particular, the secondary psychopaths as a product caused by environments in the study entitled *Traumatic Experiences and*

Psychopathic Traits in The Novel Hannibal Rising by Thomas Harris: A Psychological Study of The Main Character (Ramadhina et al., 2020). This study used a psychological approach and described the text's structure followed by didactical elements. The study found that the trauma in the main character influences psychopathic traits followed by post-traumatic stress disorder towards others in the novel which tends to refer to secondary psychopaths caused by environmental issues (Ramadhina et al., 2020). The scope of this review is limited. The researcher will only focus on Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyse Janie, who is one of the novel characters.

Trauma's Impact on Defense Mechanisms and Psychopathy

According to Freud, the ego operates defense mechanisms to reduce anxiety and stress that may arise. To defend themselves against unpleasant events, actions, or emotions, people employ defense mechanisms (Freud, 1920). These psychological techniques may assist in the isolation of someone from dangers or unpleasant feelings such as guilt or shame. Symptoms from a previous traumatic event may cause psychological anxiety. Those who experience violence or abusive behaviour or have bad relationships experiences with their family are reported to have anxiety and other range of disorders such as depression and PTSD which is also known as Post-traumatic Stress-Disorder which triggers someone's traumatic experience and follows by certain sudden physical reactions (Weich et al., 2009). Defense mechanisms may play a role in the process to overcome past trauma. Personal characteristics show that traumatic life events happened because of many factors such as trauma (Mills, 2008). There are multiple forms of trauma. Some of the examples of trauma, based on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network are, medical trauma which happened to someone due to an experience with medical events; refugee trauma refers to someone who has suffered mental or physical harm as a result of war-related trauma, and childhood trauma defined as a traumatic experience that happened to someone during their childhood. One of the factors that mostly occur in many cases of trauma, especially in literary psychology is childhood trauma. People with an imbalanced personality structure have poor habits and are often careless about what they do. As Robert D Hare stated in the psychopathy checklist, a psychopath lack of feeling guilty for their actions, as stated in their study about the relationship between lack of guilt and shallow emotions in psychopaths (Yadriha and Mariana, 2019).

The Link Between Childhood Trauma and Psychopathy in Children

Antisocial personality disorder has been associated with childhood trauma, along with physical and emotional abuse, as well as emotional neglect, which appears to be linked to it. Traumatic experiences, particularly those that occur during childhood, appear to raise the probability of aggressive and unpredictable behaviour, such as violence (Farina et al., 2018). The researcher believed that emotional neglect and trauma can be the cause of violence and aggressive behaviour that appear later on. Children who have been victimised by neglect and abuse, particularly from their parents, may suffer psychological consequences. They may experience fear, which can lead to trust issues and difficulty in socializing among others.

According to some experts, many of the depression symptoms that emerge in adolescents are simply normal aspects of growth, and they tend to drift away once the child grows (Bensaheb, 2006). In contrast, many of the symptoms that are present in a diagnosis of psychopathy can be recognized in children and are more than merely typical developmental symptoms (Johnstone & Cooke, 2004). According to Seagrave and Grisso (2002), the traits of psychopathy and how a teenager manages this stage of development are similar.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted by using a qualitative method that entailed gathering and analysed non-numerical data (Polkinghorne, 2005). The researcher also used the note-taking method which is considered a useful information-processing tool that is still adopted in many professions or everyday life to categorize the section of narrative that is connected to the problem and the research purpose in order to obtain the data easily (Hartley, 2002). Following the qualitative method, the researcher used Freudian psychoanalysis defense mechanisms and the tripartite model (id, ego, and superego) to analyse the childhood trauma linked to psychopathy behaviour shown by one of the characters in the novel, Janie in *The Perfect Child* novel written by Lucinda Berry. The secondary data was gathered from journals, website articles, and books on the related topic of childhood trauma and psychopathy behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Janie's Childhood Trauma

This part, it is contained the discussion about childhood trauma of Janie based on *The Perfect Child* book by Lucinda Berry. Janie, a six-year-old kid found in a parking lot with only a diaper and a dog collar around her neck. Her small body was also covered in bruises and old scars. She was then later transferred and treated at the Northfield memorial hospital where Christopher and Hannah work. They decided to take on the role of Janie's temporary guardian. Nevertheless, upon spending more time together, the Bauer came to the conclusion that Janie should be a part of their big family. Janie's behaviour, especially against Hannah, worsens after they legally become a family. She started ignoring Hannah and attempted to keep Chris away from her.

Causes of Janie's Trauma

a. Abuse

Abusive behaviour that the character Janie experienced is in the form of physical and emotional abuse. Emotional abuse could be in the form of intimidation, harassment, threats, or humiliation (Paul Moglia, 2015). Research in terms of physical abuse, the character Janie experienced being chained with a dog collar on her neck. "...She was only wearing a diaper and some kind of weird collarthing around her neck..." (Berry 2019, 15).

From the dog collar around her neck, the researcher believed that the character Janie was severely abused by her birth mother Becky that treated Janie inhumanely. To add up, the investigator of Janie's case, Ron even found some evidence of abusive behaviour carried out by Becky towards her by exploiting her.

"...they discovered Becky had been pretending Janie had cancer and creating fake GoFundMe accounts to get people to donate money for her medical expenses." (Berry 2019, 36)

b. Neglect

While Janie was being taken care of in the hospital, Piper, the social worker investigated Janie's grandmother. Sue or Janie's grandmother stated that she neglected Janie because Janie behave strangely. "I just let her do whatever she want till she got bigger, but thenshe turned even worsor." (Berry 2019, 69).

From the conversation between Piper and Janie's grandmother. It seems clear that Sue wasn't even wanted to take care of Janie in the first place. After witnessing her

behaviour, she completely ignored Janie. Janie neither attends school nor receives a proper education from her mother or grandmother. Janie was nonetheless neglected by both her mother and grandmother. They were unable to meet Janie's basic or psychological demands and failed to protect her, thereby affecting her development and physical along with her mental health (Department of Health 1999, 6).

c. The effects of the trauma

In the book, Janie's violent behaviour appears to have a deeper meaning. It particularly involved females, especially young adults or adult females. In the book, her rage was often directed against women. The researcher believed her current behaviour is connected with her childhood trauma. She detests women since her birth mother locked her up and abused her.

"She locked her in a trailer and never let her out. Not once. She tied her up with a leash like a dog and barely fed her. Didn't take care of her..." (Berry 2019, 113)

Women, especially mothers, reminded her of her birth mother, Becky. As a response, Janie's behaviour is a mix of rage and fear aimed indirectly at her biological mother. Dr Chandler highlighted Janie's actions and why she doesn't trust Hannah as a mother figure.

"...In her mind, the world isn't a safe place, and mothers can't be trusted. Think about it—usually when babies cry, they're picked up or fed when they're hungry. But Janie's never had this." (Berry 2019, 114)

Janie's defense mechanism

This part discusses the defense mechanism the character Janie uses to protect herself from anxiety that occurs (Parin, P 1961). Janie's anxiety occurred due to her childhood trauma: abuse and neglect done by her birth mother, Becky. She associates women with mothers. Therefore, Janie becomes defensive around women and develops defense mechanisms:

a. Regression

Reversion to the earlier stage of development. A child who suffered from fear or anger might develop early childhood behaviour such as bedwetting or could become clingy (Grohol 2016, 2). When Janie lives with the Bauer and is potty trained by them, she still urinates on things.

"She looked right at me and took her pants off. She walked over to the rug in the dining room and peed on it. Then she laughed like it was the funniest thing in the world." (Berry 2019, 201)

Janie wants to prove that she does not care and is scared of Hannah. Janie often does that, and her behaviour eventually makes Hannah terrified of her.

b. Acting out

Using excessive behaviour to communicate thoughts or feelings that an individual is unable of trying to express. In the case of the character Janie, in the novel, she is often throwing tantrums. Furthermore, children's temper tantrums are considered a form of acting out since they could not get ways from their parents (Grohol 2016, 2).

The nurses at the hospital informed Chris and Hannah to lock their refrigerator. In case, Janie eats too much of her portions, it would damage her stomach. She hurts herself and throws tantrums when she could not get food from the refrigerator.

"She flipped around, and before we knew it, she was bashing her head violently against the floor. We rushed to her side. Rhonda had instructed us on the importance of keeping her from hurting herself during her tantrums and shown us some holding techniques." (Berry 2019, 75)

Acting out with self-injury might imply those who could not stand to feel emotional and as result, they express it in physical pain (Grohol 2016, 2).

c. Projection

Re-direction of impulse or misattribution of a person's undesired thoughts onto another person who does not have that thought (Grohol 2016, 2). The projector needs to stay in contact with the recipient to maintain a connection to the disowned feelings. Manipulate an individual or a group to act as if those projections are true (Halton 1994, 247). In Janie's case, she projected to other people to think that she is a nice and innocent girl. On page 91 when Janie met Hannah's mother, she immediately clung to her, which is very different from her real behaviour.

"Janie flung herself into her arms. "Hiya, what's your name?" she asked, all smiles. My mom was taken aback. She'd been listening to all of my stories about Janie for the past few weeks and hadn't expected such a warm reception. "I'm Lillian, and I'm your grandma." (Berry 2019, 91)

Meanwhile, Janie's behaviour was the total opposite when she is alone with Hannah. She turns into a different girl and often ignores Hannah (Berry 2019, 96). In the novel, Dr Chandler mentioned that Janie tried to separate Chris and Hannah which is related to her trauma. "It illustrates perfectly how she's worked to pit the two of you against each other," she said. (Berry 2019, 117)

From the relation between Janie's projection with her behaviour towards others, the researcher believed the projection that Janie's conduct is connected with one of the major signs of psychopathy which is manipulative (Hare 1996, 46).

d. Displacement

Redirection of thoughts, transfer of negative feelings from an individual or object to another less threatening individual or object (Ahmad 2021, 10). Since Janie could not project her hatred towards her biological mother who abused and neglected her. Instead, Janie redirects her negative feelings into less threatening individuals. As Dr Chandler stated in the book on page 113 that Janie is redirecting her anger toward her birth mother, Hannah.

"She's acting out her attachment issues with you, but they're not directed at you, even though they seem like they are. They're directed at her mother...All her anger and feelings toward her biological mother are directed at you." (Berry 2019, 113).

The defense mechanisms that Janie projected, most of them are primitive defense mechanisms: regression, acting out, and projection. Meanwhile, only one of them which is displacement as a more mature defense mechanism. Those with psychopathy traits often use more immature defense mechanisms than those who do not (Weber; Gottdiener; Chou 2021).

Psychopathy behaviour

Psychopathy is defined as a personality disorder which is categorized by behavioural characteristics such as manipulative, egoistic, lack of guilt and empathy, deceitfulness, and violating society norms (Cleckley, 1976; Hare, 1996). The character Janie, in the novel, seems to behave aggressively toward animals. Aggression toward animals or pets is considered one of the signs a child is at risk of psychopathy (Uytun, 2017). Janie killed the

family cat by suffocating the cat using a pillow. The reason why Janie did that, is because Hannah threatened her since she was not behaving. Instead of being afraid, Janie showed Hannah that she didn't care at all by killing the cat.

"I put my pillow on her and sat on her head. She really meowed. She didn't scratch me though, because I had the pillow, so she couldn't get me." She said it like she was proud that she'd thought it through. (Berry, 2019, p. 208)

Early behaviour problems, especially cruelty to animals are relevant to serious behavioural or emotional problems. It is related to the lack of empathy which they don't feel sorry after hurting living things (Hare, 1996).

The next sign portrayed by Janie is cheating friends, enemies, and individuals who are neutral (Salekin, 2017, p. 1182). Janie is unable to identify between allies and enemies. Janie mostly hurt Hannah in the novel. At school, she met Elodie who is the only kid in her new school that could get along with her. Unfortunately, Janie has been hurting Elodie this whole time and Elodie's mother noticed some bruises on her daughter's arm.

"Janie has been hurting Elodie at school. She's been coming home with bruises... Last night, she noticed Elodie's entire arm was covered in bruises. She finally got her to talk, and Elodie said that Janie pinches her when no one is looking." (Berry, 2019, p. 154)

From her action, the researcher believed that Janie is lack guilt or remorse as one of the signs a child is at risk of psychopathy (Uytun, 2017).

Last next sign portrayed by Janie is bullying other children (Salekin, 2017, p. 1182). Janie bit one of her classmates in her first school because the kid refuses to give her a toy that she wanted.

"...But then Janie bit another child when he wouldn't give her the toy she wanted, and Mrs Allulo called us in for an emergency meeting." (Berry, 2019, p. 128)

Janie's personality structure

The *id* acts according to the pleasure principle, which is the idea that all needs should be fulfilled immediately. The *id* here is projected on Janie's psychopathy behaviour. The researcher believed that the trauma caused by her birth mother Becky left a huge impact on Janie's current psychopathy behaviour because the *id* triggers her lust. Because of that, Janie violates social norms and causes harm to society which is considered a sign of psychopathy (Uytun, 2017).

As part of the personality, the ego becomes the decision maker (Feist-Feist, 2009, p. 3). Janie's ego is how she decides her own choice or belief. Due to her trauma of a mother figure, Janie decided to believe in Christopher, but not Hannah. Janie thinks of Hannah as a threat, therefore she tried to separate Chris from Hannah. The *ego's* task is to maintain the *id* and *superego* in balance and will define someone's behaviour in society (Ahmad, 2021, p. 6).

Superego is placed on every human being by his or her caregiver (Ahmad, 2021). The *superego* of Janie is taught by her parents. Janie didn't get a proper education or basic manners when she was living with Becky. Since Janie's personality structure is unbalanced due to her childhood trauma. She develops signs of psychopathy behaviour that cause harm to society.

The Reflection of Janie's Psychopathic Behaviour in Real-Life Condition

After reading *The Perfect Child* novel by Lucinda Berry, the writer was reminded of

the case of Beth Thomas. As previously mentioned before, Beth Thomas was featured in a documentary called '*Child of Rage*'. It was stated that her behaviour was also influenced by the traumatic experiences that happened during her childhood. She was sexually abused. Both of them, Janie and Beth Thomas have some similarities, as children with traumatic experiences following psychopathy behaviour. It has been theorized that frequent contact with trauma and other unpleasant experiences that happened during childhood contributes to the person's effective outputs. For instance, are; having trouble expressing emotions such as facial expressions or physical movements. An individual might also have difficulty connecting with other people, which could be categorized as some of the characteristics at the core of psychopathy (Boduszek et al., 2019, p. 3). In the case of Janie, she has difficulty connecting with other people. She could not develop long last relationship or maintain a good relationship with her friend. Elodie, whom she referred to as her best friend. Janie ended up hurting her, and so does what she did to Hannah and Allison. Even though they are family, Janie could not differentiate between enemies and friends.

Freud stated in psychoanalysis, that languages could represent hidden meanings or deeper feelings of someone. The use of psychoanalytical criticism is to examine a character's personality in a piece of literary work. Freud also mentioned that writers during his era presented common features in their works and in that particular era. He noticed many of the psychological issues in people around him were reflected by characters in Shakespeare or ancient Greek dramas (Ahmad, 2021, p. 3). In the current literary era or the postmodern period where literary psychology is highly popular, according to querytracker.net crime and thriller are placed as the number six most popular genres. Furthermore, cited from the psychologytoday.com website, in 2006 a website called Amazon sold more than 1,400 books about murder and crime. The researcher believed that it is connected to today's situation where people can easily gain internet access and see the news all around the world, especially crime news that appears on the daily news. With the popularity of crime and thriller literature arise, the researcher believed that literature mirrors society and its mannerism. Nowadays, there are not a few cases of children or youngsters who attempt crimes. In particular, the case of school mass shooting in the United States is increasing and it is done by a student. In most cases, the cause of their actions was related to mental health especially involving the bad relationship between parents and children (Alfred.edu). In Janie's case, the researcher believed that there is an epidemic of generational poor parenting involved. Her grandmother said that she also whooped or beat her kid which refers to Becky (Berry, 2019). Related to today's situation, especially as we see on social media. Youngsters often share their disappointment with their parents who could not understand their mental health condition. Especially in Indonesia, where people still have a minimum understanding of mental health conditions.

The author herself, Lucinda Berry is a former clinical psychologist and leading researcher in childhood trauma and she writes novels with psychological aspects in the hope to give a better understanding to the readers of mental health and childhood trauma. Therefore, the moral that the researcher could get from this particular novel is not to underestimate children's behaviour and their mental health conditions. Even so, it is not assured that someone's behaviour will be permanently stuck in someone's life. Though there is some coherence in how we engage with our surroundings, it is not surprising that adult psychopaths' antisocial and criminal acts are continuations of behaviour patterns that originally manifested themselves in childhood (Hare, 1996, p. 97).

CONCLUSION

The researcher discovered the answers after analysed the findings and discussion based on primary data from Lucinda Berry's *The Perfect Child* novel utilised Freud's psychoanalysis defense mechanisms and the tripartite model. The imbalance in her personality structure was caused by her childhood trauma; abuse and neglect done by her birth mother, Becky. Therefore, her trauma triggered her psychological behaviour which tends to refer to signs of a child at risk of psychopathy, such as; aggression towards animals or pets, cheating on friends or enemies or individuals who are neutral, and bullying other children.

Furthermore, Janie develops defense mechanisms to protect herself due to the imbalance of her personality structure such as regression, acting out, projection and displacement. Most of them are immature defense mechanisms and psychopaths mostly use immature defense mechanisms. Thus, connected with Janie's behaviour as signs of a child at risk of psychopathy, most of her defense mechanisms are reflected through her psychopathy behaviour such as manipulative as projection; aggression towards animals or hurting people and bullying other children as displacement; aggression and violent behaviour as acting out.

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