

THE EFFECT OF CHRONIC CHILDHOOD TRAUMA IN THE NOVEL THE GATHERING ANNE ENRIGHT

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Abstrak

Artikel ini merupakan analisa novel *The Gathering* (2007) karya Anne Enright. Masalah yang dibahas adalah sejauh mana novel ini memperlihatkan akibat yang muncul dan mempengaruhi kepribadian seseorang setelah mengalami sebuah trauma yang kronis di masa kecil dan kontribusi unsur sastra seperti karakter, konflik dan setting yang mengacu pada text based interpretation untuk mengungkap akibat tersebut. Tujuan dari penganalisaan ini untuk mengetahui sejauh mana novel memperlihatkan pengaruh trauma masa kecil bagi kehidupan pribadi seseorang. Analisa didasarkan pada teori sastra yaitu repression dan unconscious mind oleh Sigmund Freud. Hasil penganalisaan menunjukkan ada dua efek yang muncul setelah mengalami trauma masa kecil yang kronis yaitu menjadi seorang paranoid dan solitari.

Kata kunci: effect, chronic, childhood, trauma

A. Introduction

Environment where people spend their childhood era has an important role in developing their personality. Many things that happen during childhood period may influence their life in the future. If they live in a good environment during their childhood, they may experience many good moments. They run their life normally. They also get chances to get everything that they want. It is not surprising if their personality develops in a good way, for example they are able to solve their problem.

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It will bring positive effect to their life. In contrast, people who grow up in unsupportive childhood environment such as living in a family of divorced parent, suffering serious illness and being exposed to domestic violence usually get difficulties in developing their personality. They may face really hard problems that make them shock. They keep their problem without sharing to other people. These conditions make them despair and bring the negative effect to their life.

People who grow up in an unsupportive childhood environment usually enable to relate bad events that happen to them. They tend to hide their bad events and repress their feeling. If this condition happened continuously, it will affect their psychological development and produces trauma. According to Murray (2004) trauma is long term depression and psychological illness. He says that trauma is caused by traumatic events that happen repeatedly. It is clear that people will get trauma when they face a repeated terrible events and they are forced to repress it.

One of traumatic event that produces trauma is an abuse experienced as a child such as sexual, physical and verbal abuse. D'Silva (2000) said that child abuse is one such crime which is rarely noticed and seldom reported. It is rarely noticed because when children get the violence or abuse, especially from someone who is close to them, they tend to keep it by their own. They do not know how to tell their anxiety and sad story. It is possible if they decide to keep silent and try to forget it. It is seldom reported because some of the parent will get embarrassed if other people know about the abuse. They will deliberate to hide it and believe that their children can forget it quickly.

A case of child abuse can be shown from the experience of Tyler Perry. He is a living witness and a victim of physical, sexual and emotional abuses that happen during

his childhood. Perry was born September 13, 1969, in New Orleans, Louisiana. At the age of 5 and 6, Perry was assaulted and physical beaten by his own father. He said that his father hates him but he did not know the reason exactly. He was also sexually assaulted by a neighbor, a male nurse in a hospital and a man in the church. As a result of the repeated abuse, Perry has a deep trauma. Even though he has succeeded in his life, he can not forget his trauma. He becomes paranoia of people and all of things that related to his past.

As a result of experiencing serious bad events and not being able to solve their problem, children might become afraid of people, isolate themselves from the society or do the same abuse to someone else. Freud in Forster (2009) states that it is highly possible that children will carry these straits to their adult life because they feel helpless and vulnerable in a dangerous world. As a result they tend to have difficulties to trust others and isolate themselves from the society. For example, they may become paranoid and solitary person.

Some experts proposed definitions of paranoid. Fenwood in Mental Health Headline (2001) says that paranoid is usually caused by a breakdown of various mental and emotional functions involving reasoning and assigned meanings. The reasons for these breakdowns are varied and uncertain. Some symptoms of paranoid may arise from repressed, denied or projected feelings. W. Long in Mental Health (1995) said that:

Paranoid is a condition characterized by excessive distrust and suspiciousness of others. This disorder is only diagnosed when these behaviors become persistent and very disabling or distressing.

The quotation explains that paranoid can be identified by their distinctive attitude such as copious mistrusts and negative opinions to others. This situation persists continuously and for a long time. According to Grohol (2010) paranoid can be seen

from several symptoms. They tend to bears grudges by unforgiving insults and slights; they have a negative point of view or recurrent suspicious; lack of trust and unjustified doubts about the loyalty. In short, paranoid people tend to keep their own arguments about other people negatively. It happens because they have irrational mistrust to every parts of their life.

On the other hand, solitary is the other condition that appears after experiencing serious bad event. This condition may appear when people isolate their life from the society. According to M. Oldham (1998) Individuals with solitary personality style have small need of companionship and comfortable being alone. Moreover Kendra Cherry (2010) argues that solitary people prefer to solve their problems by themselves. They enjoy being alone and generate ideas from the internal sources. In short, it explains that solitary people may live in the company of others situation and may even marry or have several close friends. But they need more time by themselves because they are not being able to respond other people's emotional needs.

The phenomenon of chronic childhood trauma is the most interesting topic that narrated by *The Gathering* (2007), a novel by Anne Enright. The novel shows how chronic childhood trauma affected the character's life some years later. The way how the protagonist repress her trauma builds her different personality in her adult life.

B. Methodology

The analysis of this novel is done through text based interpretation. The fictional devices are character, plot (conflict) and setting. They can not be separated in exposing the meaning of the text because they are interrelated each other. It gives big contribution in the process of analyzing by giving help to reveal the meaning. Moreover, the analysis of this study is dealing with the idea of Sigmund Freud's concept of repression and unconsciousness.

C. Discussion

This article shows how fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting reveal the effect of chronic childhood trauma. In the novel, *The Gathering*, the main character is Veronica. She is a representative of a person who experiences traumatic event when a child. Hence she gets the chronic childhood trauma that influences her entire life. Those traumatic events affect her to become a paranoid and a solitary.

1. Being a Paranoid

A person who suffers paranoid shows some of the following symptoms. The paranoid usually persistently bears grudges by unforgiving insults or slights, She has a negative judgment or recurrent suspicious; mistrust and unjustified doubts about the loyalty. This appears as the effect of bad experience during childhood. The main character, Veronica, shows this symptom. Her bad childhood condition serves as a

setting that causes her to be a paranoid. Meanwhile, her paranoia can be seen through internal conflict she starts suffering from childhood. As a paranoid, she has a negative judgment and copious mistrust to other people even her immediate family like her mother, sister, and husband.

The character has a negative judgment toward her mother. She bears grudges toward her and blames her for every problem in her life. It can be seen in the following quotation;

My mother had twelve children and – as she told me one hard day – seven miscarriages. The holes in her head are not her fault. Even so, I have never forgiven her any of it. I just can't.

I have not forgiven her for my sister Margaret who we called Midge, until she died, aged forty two, from pancreatic cancer. I do not forgive her my beautiful, drifting sister Bea. I do not forgive her my first brother Ernest, who was a priest in Peru, until he became a lapsed priest in Peru. I do not forgive her my brother Stevie, who was a little angel in heaven. I do not forgive her the whole tedious litany of Midge, Bea, Ernest, Stevie, Ita, Mossie, Liam, Veronica, Kitty, Alice, and the twins, Ivor and Jem.

The text shows that the condition of her childhood is very unsupportive. She had to live in a big family consisting of many siblings. Living in a big family causes some tedious problems and build internal conflict in her life. It is likely that she got lack of love and affection because there are so many children to take care. This condition forces her to take care of herself alone. This case builds a deep anger to her mother. This anger can be described from the words I don't forgive her that is mentioned repeatedly. This clause means the character is unforgiving her mother for every insult and slight in her life. The utterance I don't forgive her my beautiful drifting sister Bea, I don't forgive her my first brother Ernest, who was a priest in Peru until he became a lapsed priest in Peru, I do not forgive her my brother Stevie, who was a little angel in heaven shows that the character builds her anger to her mother. She claims that her mother has ruined

her life and her siblings. She causes many suffering to her children. This judgment has been kept for a long time and influences her relationship with her mother.

The character builds her hostility to her mother. She is complaining her mother without finding justification first. It can be seen from the following quotation;

I am saying that, the year you sent us away, your dead son was interfered with, when you were not there to comfort or protect him, and the interference was enough to send him on a path that ends in the box downstairs. That is what I am saying, if you want to know.
(p.213)

The quotation explains that the character keeps her hatred in her internal thought to her mother. She represses her hatred to her mother. This repression expanded to the internal conflict in her life. She exposes every fault of her mother. The setting refers to the atmosphere of character's deep disappointment to her mother irresponsibility. It is supported by utterance when you were not there to comfort or protect him. The utterance shows that the character blames her mother for every chaos in their family. She claims her mother as a cause of every trouble that happened to her brother. This pain influences her way of thinking and opinion toward her mother. The mother is unable to take care and protect her children. As a consequence of this disability, the character and her siblings had to face several bad moments in their childhood by themselves. It brings trauma and make her become a paranoid.

The character keeps negative judgment to her sibling. She has a bad quality of relationship with her sibling. It can be seen from the way they interact each other. This situation can be supported by the quotation below;

Here it comes. Ita has been drinking so long she has been made sober by it, and slow, and violent. She has some terrible revelation to make and I wonder what it will be. You never told me I was beautiful. Or something worse: You stole my best hairband in 1973. Family sins and family wounds, the endless pricking of something that we find

hard to name. none of it important, just the usual, You ruined my life, or What about me? Because with the Hegartys a declaration of unhappiness is always declaration of blame. (p.210)

The quotation above describes the condition of a dysfunctional family. The utterance you never told me I was beautiful explains that there is no tender love in the family. It seems that the member of family never pay attention to each other. They never care and appreciate for every positive thing done by other member of family. The words you stole my best hairband in 1973 and you ruin my life reflects that they often have a quarrel between siblings. They blame other people based on their own opinion and judgment. The setting refers to bad atmosphere of a dysfunctional family. This atmosphere leads them to be in conflict with others by making prejudices. They tend to claim that every bad thing is caused by someone else. Every single moment has no meaning because the family's trust does not exist. It seems that some negative things are common in the family. This condition makes their relationship worst. The character does not feel safe and comfortable in her family. Therefore, she becomes hard to trust her sibling.

The character's chronic trauma is not only caused by living in an unsupportive family but also from the experience of sexual abuse that happened in her childhood period. It can be seen in the following quotation;

But it is a very strange picture. It is made up of the words that say it. I think of the 'eye' of his penis, and it is pressing against my own eye. I 'pull' him and he keels towards me. I 'suck' him and from his mouth there protrudes a narrow, lemon sweet. (p.221)

The quotation shows how the experienced of sexual abuse in her childhood period has influenced her much. The setting refers to the horrible situation that forces the character to repress the memory. The utterance very strange picture shows that the experienced was very traumatic. She tries to forget and deny her memories. The word "eye"

describes the character's fear of the threatening situation that she must face. This condition affects her whole life. She builds her own problems with other people especially men.

The character builds her mistrust to her husband. She continuously mistrusts her husband without any reasonable reason. It can be seen from the following quotation;

I think he stopped hating me after I left work. Of course, Tom would say he never hated me, that he loved me all along. But I know hating when I see it. I know it, because there is a part of me that wants to be hated, too. (p.180)

The quotation describes how her copious mistrust to her husband influences her life. The way she acts and thinks shows that she does not trust her husband. The setting refers to the uncomfortable atmosphere between the character and her husband. This situation influences her mind and her way of thinking. The utterance I think he stopped hating me after I left work explains that she has lack of communication with her husband. She tends to make assumptions based on her own judgment. This assumption leads her to reject any possibilities in dealing with her husband's point of view. The rejection builds internal conflict to her life. She builds her own conflict by creating bad assumptions. She conceives distrust to her husband without any logical reasons. The words Tom would say he never hated me, that he loved me all along. But I know hating when I see it shows that the character has more inner conflicts with her self than her husband. She keeps her judgment without knowing the reason exactly. This judgment expands to the copious mistrust and disturbs her trust. As a result their relationship as a couple becomes completely obstructed.

The character doubts her husband loyalty. She accuses her husband having another woman. She kept her negative point of view without any proof. It can be seen from the following quotation:

Here it comes – the four o'clock wake-up call. It creeps into me and I wake to the slow, slick, screaming heebis- jeebies. What are they? He is sleeping with someone else. No that isn't the four o'clock call. The four o'clock call is a much older, more terrible, thing.

I can not feel the weight of my body on the bed. I can not feel the line of my skin along the sheet. I am swinging an inch or so off the mattress, and I do not believe in my self – in the way I breathe and turn – I do not believe in Tom beside me: that he is alive (sometimes I wake to find him dead, only to wake again), or that he loves me. (p.133)

The quotation describes the clash of character's feeling and thinking toward her husband. She thinks that her husband is unfaithful. This negative point of view can be seen from the utterance he is sleeping with someone else. This words show that she doubts her husband allegiance. Despite the absence of proofs, she is sure that her husband has another woman in his life. The internal conflict can be reflected when she says and I do not believe in my self – in the way I breathe and turn – I do not believe in Tom beside me. The utterance explains she shows conflict within her self. They have no respect and never share each other. She explores her thought and produces several accusations to her husband. These accusations break the couple's faith and trust. Therefore she distrusts her husband's loyalty even though she can not to prove it.

The character's negative judgment not only applied to her immediate family, but it is also done to people who completely stranger for her. She blames people based on her own judgment especially men. It is supported by the following quotation;

I have never trusted men who pray. Woman have no option of course – but what do men think about, when they are on their knees? I do not think it is in their nature to pray: they are too proud. (p65-66)

The quotation shows that the character does not believe in men. She considers that everything men do is such hypocrisy. It can be seen from the utterance when they are on their knees? I do not think it is in their nature to pray: they are too proud. This word describes the negative point of view. She believes that men never humiliate themselves. This trust leads her to think that men never pay attention to the any religious activity. They are deceivers that wearing a mask on their face. This negative point of view continuously happens in her life. The point of view emerges in character's mind and creates an internal conflict. She continuously thinks that men have no goodness in their life. All good things that happen to the men are a falsehood. This feeling affects her personality and makes her paranoid become worse.

In summary, paranoid in this analysis can be seen from character's way of thinking and actions toward people around her. The bad experienced in childhood lead her to repress every bad moments. This makes she has a tendency not to trust somebody else. She builds a suspicious feeling to the loyalty of people. The setting refers to the atmosphere of anger, disappointment, and hatred. This condition builds conflict within the character. This conflict influences how she builds her relationship. The conflict can be reflected from the way character explores her emotion to her mother, siblings and husband. She keeps her deep anger and hatred all along her life. She judges people based on her own opinion. She tends to keep distances from people and it brings paranoid in her life.

2. Being a Solitary

Solitary is a psychological condition of person who tends to be alone and avoid social interaction. The character in this novel concerns in her own world more than the real situation. The bad events that she experienced when she was a child make her hard to believe in other people. The effect of this condition is the character avoids sharing her thought and feelings. She prefers to stay alone.

The character never shares her ideas. She keeps her problems by her own. She faces all of her problems alone by exploring her thought and feeling. It can be seen from the quotation below;

Don't tell Mammy. It was the mantra of our childhoods, or one of them. Don't tell Mammy. This from Midge, especially, but also from any one of the older ones. If something broke or was spilt, if Bea did not come home or Mossie went up to live in the attic, or Liam dropped acid, or Alice had sex, or Kitty bled buckets into her new school uniform, or any number of phone messages about delays, snarl-ups, problems with bus money and taxi money, and once, catastrophically, Liam's night in the cells. None of the messages relayed: the whispered conference in the hall, Don't tell Mammy, because 'Mammy' would- what? Expire? 'Mammy' would worry. Which seemed fine to me. It was, after all, of her own making, this family. It had all come – singly and painfully – out of her. And my father said it more than anyone: level, gallant, There is no need to tell your mother now, as if the reality of his bed was all the reality that this woman should be asked to bear.(p.9)

The text means that the character represses her bad feelings. The setting refers to the suppressed atmosphere of her feeling toward her parent. It is supported by the words don't tell mammy. These words are mentioned several times at the text. This repetition shows clearly how the family is constructed. This constructed is not allowed her to express her feelings and share her problems. She has to keep the problems by herself. This case causes internal conflict to the character. The utterance Don't tell Mammy, because 'Mammy' would- what? Expire? 'Mammy' would worry. Which seemed fine to me describes how she represses her disappointment in her past. Even though she

wants to share her problems, she has no body to share out. It shows that the family pattern force children to solve their problems by their own way. The children have to grow up without supervisions from their parent. This condition leads the character being a solitary person.

The character experienced some bad moments in her childhood and it brings the effect to her personality in adolescent. She used to hide her feelings and force her self to forget her problems. It explains in the following quotation;

Children do not understand pain; they experiment with it, but you could almost say that they don't feel it, or do not know how to feel it, until they are grown. And even then, it seems we always feel pain for the wrong thing. Or so it has been me. (p.129)

The quotation describes that the character has suffering her pain since she was a child. As a child, she has hidden her bad memories and tried to forget it all. This action brings out some effect to her life many years later. The setting refers to the condition of feeling helpless in her childhood. The internal conflict can be described from the utterance children do not understand pain; they experiment with it, but you could almost say that they don't feel it, or do not know how to feel it, until they are grown. It describes that the character explores her pain by forgetting the events. She feels helpless because she is unable to find the way out from the problems. The words and even then, it seems we always feel pain for the wrong thing. Or so it has been me explains that the character actually aware about her pain but she denies it. This denial saves her from the effect of this pain. This situation makes character prefer to keep her problems alone without sharing to other people.

Bad experiences in childhood affect character's attitude and behavior. She is more comfortable being alone. It explains in the quotation below;

There are long stretches of time when I don't know what I am doing, or what I have done – nothing mostly, but sometimes it would be nice to know what kind of nothing that was. I might have a bout of cleaning around four. I do it like thief, holding my breath as I scrub, stealing the dirt off the walls. I try not to drink before half past five, but I always do drink – from the top of the wine bottle to the last, little drop. It is the only way I know to make the day end. (p.38)

The quotation explains that the character prefers to be alone. It can be seen from the utterance I might have a bout of cleaning around four. I do it like thief, holding my breath as I scrub, stealing the dirt off the walls. This describes that the character tends to explore all things by herself. She enjoys to start her activities when other people having their time to take a sleep. The utterance there are long stretches of time when I don't know what I am doing, or what I have done shows that the character has a doubt in her self. She has no self confidence to face her life. This condition makes her hard to create a good socialization with someone else. This actions help her to keep survive and hold out in her comfort zone.

She prefers to escape from her real situation by spending time by herself. She is more comfortable being alone and shifted her world to alcohol. It describes in the quotation below;

Instead of turning left outside Mammy's, I turn right for the airport road. I don't think about where I am going, I think about the rain, the indicator, the rag of the rubber wiper against the glass. I think about nothing – there is nothing to think about. And then I think about a drink. Nothing messy. A fierce little naggin of whiskey, maybe, or gin. I float towards it in my nice Saab 9.3 – towards the idea of it, flowering in my mouth. (p25-26)

The quotation explains that the character avoids an interaction to other people. The setting refers to the oppressed condition. The internal conflict happens when she tries to escape from the reality. She decides not to think about her pain. She forces herself to completely remove it. As a result, she drinks alcohol to release her from hurt. The utterance I think about nothing – there is nothing to think about. And then I think about

a drink. Nothing messy explains that the character tries to hide her pain. She has serious burden in her mind and makes an effort to forget it all. She reduces her pain by spending her time in being alone. She rejects her real life and creates her own world in her mind.

Briefly, the character in this analysis shows her solitary by rejecting any social interaction. She prefers to spend her time alone. The setting refers to the condition of the character that tries to escape from her pain. The conflict more happens in internal of the character than the outer. She got many pressures from her parent and environment in her childhood. These pressures leads her to keeps her problems and never shares anything to other people. This affects her personality and relationship with other people.

D. Conclusion

The Gathering (2007) written by Anne Enright represents the effect of chronic childhood trauma. It is exposed through text based interpretation by focusing on fictional devices such as character, setting and conflicts. The character in this analysis is a woman who experienced several bad experiences in her childhood. She tries to repress all of her bad memories, however she could not. Thus she had to face many hard problems such as bad relationship with parent, siblings and husband. Therefore the effect of chronic childhood trauma can be seen through being a paranoid and a solitary person.

The first effect is being a paranoid. Her paranoid can be seen from her suspicious mistrust and negative point of view to her mother, siblings and husband. The

setting refers to the condition of feeling disappointment, anger and hatred. This condition creates internal conflict to her life. She cannot trust people around her. She creates some prejudices and blames others based on her own judgment. The other effect is being a solitary. She prefers to be alone and rejects any social interaction. The internal conflict is caused by her inability to respond her problems. She keeps her problems and never shares anything to other people.

Through this novel, it is clear that chronic childhood trauma brings some effects to the people lives. They will find their own way to keep survive because it is difficult for them to release their trauma. This condition makes them hard to interact with other people. As a matter of fact, they have bad relationship with their family, partner and others.

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