

**THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA ON THE LIFE OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE NOVEL *ELEANOR OLIPHANT IS COMPLETELY FINE*  
BY GAIL HONEYMAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article is entitled “The Impact of Psychological Trauma on The Life of The Main Character in The Novel *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman”. This study aims to determine the factors and impacts of psychological trauma on the life of the main character (Eleanor). The method used in this research is descriptive method and uses library research data analysis techniques by describing the intrinsic and extrinsic elements that are contained in the novel. The theory used is Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic theory is used with the aim of knowing the personality state of the main character by looking at her past history. The results of this study show that the house fire that was deliberately carried out by her biological mother had an effect on Eleanor's personality and life.

**Keywords** : trauma; impact of trauma; main character; psychoanalysis.

**I. BACKGROUND**

Events or experiences that are frightening or terrifying will increasingly become traumatic for a person. Trauma is a psychological disorder in which there is a disturbance resulting from mental or physical pressure (KBBI V) (Haris & Suwartini, 2019).

Trauma comes from the Greek which means wound (Cerney, in Pickett, 1998). The word trauma is used to describe the incident or situation experienced by the victim. The victim will accept traumatic events or experiences differently, so that the victim's reaction will be different when facing the incident (Tarmizi, 2012).

Traumatic experiences are events experienced or witnessed by someone who could threaten their safety (Lonergan, 1999). Therefore, it is a natural thing when a person experiences shock both physically and emotionally as a stress reaction to the traumatic event. Sometimes this aftershock effect doesn't take place after a few hours, days, or even weeks. A person's response that occurs generally is a feeling of fear, helplessness, or feeling terrified. The symptoms that appear depend on the severity of the incident. Likewise, the way a person deals with the crisis will also depend on their experiences and past history.

There are various kinds of trauma, one of which is psychological trauma. Psychological trauma is trauma that arises as a result of extraordinary events or experiences that occur spontaneously (suddenly) in a person without the ability to control it (loss control and loss helpness) and damage the function of a person's mental endurance in general.

Trauma can be caused by two factors, namely internal factors (psychological) and external factors. Internal factor is a form of mental dysfunction or disorder, or mental health caused by failure to react to the adaptation mechanism of mental functions to external stimuli and tensions, resulting in dysfunction or structural disturbance of one part, one organ, or the mental system. / mental pathology to social stimuli, combined with other secondary causative factors. While external factors can be caused by parental factors in socializing in family life, persecution that causes physical injury or trauma. Crimes or irresponsible actions that result in physical trauma in the form of injuries to the victim's body and organs. From this description, it can be understood that the cause of traumatic conditions in humans when experiencing a disaster, both large and small, is because it is stored in

long-term memory and directly enters the human subconscious mind.

Not only in real life (Reality), trauma can also occur in fiction. One of the works of fiction that contains psychological trauma is owned by Gail Honeyman, Gail wrote a novel entitled *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (Honeyman, 2017).

In this work, Gail tells a story about a girl named Eleanor Oliphant who has psychological trauma after a fire that was accidentally started by her biological mother with the aim of ending the lives of Eleanor and her younger sister, Marianne. After what happened to her when Eleanor was a child, Eleanor grew up to be a woman who withdrew herself from the social environment, even her life seemed monotonous. Eleanor doesn't have any friends, let alone having a family. Since childhood, Eleanor only lived with her mother and sister, Eleanor never found out who her real father was and how he looked. Whenever Eleanor asked her mother where her father was, her mother always answered that she didn't know, and every time Eleanor asked what her father looked like, her mother always replied that her mother forgot what Eleanor's real father looked like.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive method. Descriptive data were obtained from data in the form of text. According to Livia Vasantadaja in the journal LITE Volume 13, Number 1, March 2017 with this method, research reveals and studies problems or conditions or events that are happening now descriptively and systematically, researchers also reveal visible facts or data. observed as the basis of analysis, so that it can provide a factual and accurate picture of the problem or phenomenon that occurs. In this regard, the descriptive analysis carried out by the author is to describe the intrinsic elements contained in Gail Honeyman's *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* and extrinsic elements as supporting materials.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Eleanor Oliphant is a treasurer at a graphic design company based in Glasgow. She is very academically intelligent, has a classical undergraduate degree and a high level of literacy. At the age of ten, Eleanor was traumatized. The fires that occurred nineteen years ago hit her and her sister never left her memory. It is this reason that makes Eleanor experience prolonged trauma.

After the fire she spent part of her childhood in an orphanage because her biological mother is currently placed in an unknown institution, after Eleanor becomes an adult, her mother gave Eleanor access to a 15-minute conversation on Wednesday night by phone.

Growing up as a woman who withdrew from society left Eleanor with no friends. She is socially awkward and leads a solitary lifestyle (living alone without anyone else). At the urging of her new colleague at the office, Raymond, Eleanor visited a general practitioner and referred her to a mental health counselor. Gradually, with the help of a consultant and Raymond, the complete story of her childhood emerged, including the details she was hiding. When she was ten years old, her mother had started a house fire with the aim of killing Eleanor and her four-year-old sister, Marianne. Although Eleanor survived the disaster, her mother and Marianne died. The weekly phone conversations with her mother were completely in Eleanor's imagination.

From the summary of the story above, it can be concluded that in the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, Gail Honeyman presents Eleanor Oliphant as the main character of the novel. From the relationship between this character and other characters in the novel, we can see the reasons that strengthen Eleanor as the main character.

Physically, Eleanor is a woman approaching thirty years old who is described as having large brown eyes, long straight hair, light brown, pale skin, burn marks on her face, small nose, standard ear shape, average height

and weight. In the social (sociological) aspect since childhood, Eleanor has never met her biological father, no photos are stored of her biological father and her mother has never discussed her father. In terms of psychology (psychology), Eleanor is a woman who experienced trauma in her past due to a fire that occurred nineteen years ago when Eleanor was ten years old.

The main cause of trauma experienced by the main character is that the main character is a victim of a fire that was started by her birth mother nineteen years ago when the main character was ten years old. The description of how the incident happened was revealed by Eleanor to a counselor during their consultation session. Another cause that shook Eleanor was that when the fire happened, Eleanor didn't have time to save her sister, Marianne. This made Eleanor feel guilty and blame herself for the incident.

The causes above then develop and cause various kinds of trauma symptoms that occur in Eleanor's character. Not infrequently, sometimes painful things leave a deep impression on the sufferer's heart, so that the sufferer does not want to remember or feel the same thing as that time again. Likewise, what happened to Eleanor's character, shortly after the incident, Eleanor was rushed to the hospital and afterward was cared for by her adoptive parents, but Eleanor's behavior was very concerning.

Her relationship with Mr. and Mrs. Reed's children was not good especially with Mr. and Mrs. Reed's eldest son, John, who was fourteen years old. Eleanor shows insolent and rude attitude to Mrs. Reed every day and when Mrs. Reed tries to discipline her by placing her in the spare room above her house to reflect on her behavior, Eleanor becomes hysterical and on one occasion commits physical violence, Eleanor sometimes pretends to pass out in an attempt to escape the discipline. Eleanor is afraid of the dark and keeps her adoptive family awake with her hysterical cries, she has been given a night light but still reacts with loud cries and shakes. Eleanor often refused to eat the food prepared for her; mealtimes have become a

source of conflict at the family table. Eleanor also refused outright to help with simple household chores, such as lighting fires or cleaning ashes. These are the symptoms of trauma experienced by the main character. Eleanor's behavior has made Mr. and Mrs. Reed as the adoptive parents of Eleanor worried about her situation. Eleanor's change in behavior is actually an early symptom that she has experienced trauma. Another symptom that arises is, Eleanor cannot accept the fact that her mother has died and she says that she has regular communication every Wednesday night with her mother by telephone.

From the above symptoms, it indicates that there is an id attached to the Eleanor character. The id contained in Eleanor's character appears based on the pleasure principle, which is trying to get pleasure and avoid pain. The pleasure principle is processed with a primary process, namely the reaction of imagining or imagining something that can reduce or eliminate tension called *nosh fullment* such as hallucinations. Id is only able to imagine something, without being able to distinguish fantasy from reality that really satisfies needs, it is very clear that Eleanor cannot accept reality and instead thinks that her mother is still there and communicates regularly with her. In the hallucination, Eleanor describes her mother as someone who is very manipulative and always says bad things about Eleanor. Eleanor also often hears her mother's voice in her mind, this is also based on the role of id in Eleanor who hallucinates that she hears her mother's voice, which in fact the mother doesn't really speak in her mind.

Sometimes Eleanor also experiences insomnia or a condition where someone is often awake and has difficulty falling asleep, which is one of the symptoms experienced by trauma sufferers. Usually what keeps Eleanor awake from her sleep is when she finishes a communication session with her mother. Because the conversation between Eleanor and her mother made her uneasy and restless.

Another common symptom experienced by Eleanor is that she cannot forget all of the fires. She still often

remembers all the events that happened in her past. Sometimes the shadows come back (flashback), it is clear that this condition is very disturbing psychologically Eleanor.

Some of the effects of trauma experienced by Eleanor's character, one of which greatly affects the development of her character. Eleanor's character becomes a person who is awkward with the social environment and if there is an awkwardness between herself and other people, she will blame that person. As a result of being awkward to the social environment, Eleanor doesn't have any friends. Her colleagues at the office think Eleanor is a strange person, because Eleanor often spends her time alone without mingling with others and is engrossed in completing crossword puzzles, so it's not uncommon for them to bully Eleanor and mock her as "Mental". Besides getting the nickname "Mental", Eleanor is also often referred to as "Wacko Jacko" by her colleagues at the office, because Eleanor suffers from a congenital disease that is inherited from her mother's genes, namely eczema where "Wacko Jacko" or better known as Michael Jackson also has eczema.

Apart from having no friends, Eleanor has an apathetic nature, namely feeling indifferent or lacking in emotions, often a sign of depression or alcohol or drug abuse. It is known that Eleanor often consumed alcohol. For Eleanor vodka is a household necessity, just like bread or tea. She needed vodka to help her fall asleep so that she wouldn't hear voices calling out her name and asking for her help. Eleanor's apathy was evident when she attended a music concert where she won a ticket from the lottery. At that time there were several colleagues in the office who attended the music concert and were chatting, so Eleanor chose to leave and did not want to interfere in their business.

One of the effects of other trauma in the life that Eleanor has lived so far after the accidental fire by her biological mother to kill Eleanor and her sister Marianne occurred nineteen years ago, making her life an irony. The

irony that occurs in Eleanor's life is verbal irony. This irony can be seen when Eleanor always says that she is fine, which in fact is not in a good state. The events from Eleanor's life are shown when she talks about Johnnie the musician she met when she won tickets to a free concert with her mother on the phone. Eleanor also said that she was fine with the social worker who regularly visited her every six months to check on her condition.

Another impact was when Eleanor was waiting for the bus with her new colleague at the office, Raymond, they saw a middle-aged man who was walking staggered and fell. Then when approaching the middle-aged man Raymond asked Eleanor to call 999 for an ambulance, but Eleanor was unable to call 999 because it reminded her of a fire accident that was deliberately set by her biological mother nineteen years ago.

Eleanor also shows the impact of trauma that happened to her in her life when she visited a middle-aged man she helped with Raymond the other day at the hospital, the man known as Sammy. When Sammy thanked Eleanor for saving him, Sammy held Eleanor's hand and Eleanor felt that she didn't want to let go of Sammy's warm hand. When they came home from the hospital after visiting Sammy, Raymond told Eleanor that Sammy was a nice middle-aged man. Eleanor agreed and still tried to hold back the feeling of Sammy's hand which made her feel comfortable and safe.

Eleanor also felt a warm feeling when Raymond invited her to visit Raymond's mother's house. When seeing the closeness between Raymond and his mother, Eleanor realized one thing that so far no one had ever looked at her like Raymond's mother looked at Raymond with affection, but at least Eleanor knew how that look. After a long time Eleanor never interacted intensely with anyone, finally Eleanor felt warmth between Raymond and her mother.

Eleanor also just realized that a small act she did could elicit genuine responses from others, and she was

touched when Raymond's mother thanked her for stopping by to visit her and help with the housework. Arriving home, Eleanor felt an extraordinary feeling. Feelings that she had never felt before, because she had never socialized with anyone before such as visiting Raymond's mother's house, helping with housework there, and when she was going home she got a sincere thank you from someone and she felt very happy.

Eleanor's feelings can be said to be the impact of her trauma because it is known that since she was a child, Eleanor has never received complete love from her parents. Her father is unknown and where he is, while her mother doesn't want Eleanor's presence and often hits Eleanor to cause many bruises on her body, the climax is when her mother decided to burn their house with the aim of killing Eleanor and Marianne while they were still sleeping soundly. Since then Eleanor closes herself from the social environment and lives a solitary life, but after meeting Raymond, Eleanor feels how it is like to socialize with people without feeling awkward, and gets genuine treatment for the little things she does and it makes her feel safe and comfortable. Feelings of security and comfort that she had never felt before, it made her happier.

One time when Eleanor visited the concert she was disappointed because she felt that her hopes for Johnnie did not come true, she was also triggered by the effect of dry ice beside the stage which made her remember the fire incident again. After that he had a house and did not appear at the office and this made her boss worried and asked Raymond to visit and see Eleanor's condition. When Raymond arrived at Eleanor's residence, he was surprised to see Eleanor's condition and asked what had happened but Eleanor did not tell Raymond then Raymond suggested him to meet with a therapist for a consultation session on the problem.

The consultation sessions continued for weeks until finally Eleanor told of an incident nineteen years ago when her mother tried to kill her and her sister by burning the house. Since having regular consultation sessions with

consultants, Eleanor feels that she is much better than before. Eleanor also said that in the past few weeks she has stopped drinking alcoholic beverages such as vodka, has slept better and has not been disturbed by the nightmares that have plagued her.

After conducting regular and smooth consultation sessions, Eleanor finally felt happy, she gradually got used to feeling the various human emotions that exist, their intensity, and the speed at which they change. In the end, all the terrible experiences that traumatized Eleanor were finally resolved. Eleanor regained her lost confidence. The support from Raymond, Dr. Temple the counselor, and people around Eleanor have helped her in treating her trauma so that she can think more positively about life and her future.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on Tarmizi 2012 which states that the word trauma is used to describe the incident or situation experienced by the victim, the factor of psychological trauma experienced by the main character in the novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman is the house fire factor that occurred nineteen years ago deliberately done by the biological mother of the main character who experienced sexual trauma due to sexual abuse she experienced when giving birth to a child, but she did not want Eleanor's presence and she hated her so she decided to burn her own house with the aim of ending her daughter's life.

Some of the effects of trauma experienced by Eleanor's character, one of which greatly affects the development of her character. Following the authors describe some of the characters of Eleanor after the fire incident, namely, awkwardness with the social environment, having no friends, apathy, often consuming alcoholic drinks, living an ironic life, not daring to call emergency calls, and feeling the feelings that she has never felt before. such as feelings of security, comfort, warmth, affection, and feeling touched.

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