

The Effect of Chronic Childhood Trauma in Anne Enright's Novel

The Gathering (2007)

Thesis

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By:

Meira Adriani

83674/2007

Advisors:

1. Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
2. Delvi wahyuni, S.S, M.A.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND ARTS
STATE UNIVERSITY OF PADANG

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HALAMAN PERSETUJUAN SKRIPSI

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Nama : Meira Adriani
NIM/BP : 83674/2007
Program studi : Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Jurusan : Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Fakultas : Bahasa dan Seni

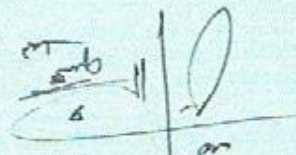
Padang, Agustus 2012

Pembimbing I



Dr. Hj. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
NIP: 19540626 198203 2 001

Pembimbing II



Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A.
NIP: 19820618 200812 2 003

Diketahui
Ketua Jurusan



Dr. Hj. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
NIP: 19540626 198203 2 001


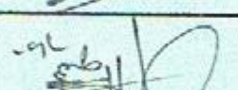

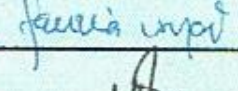
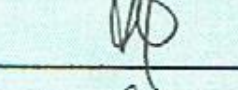
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Dinyatakan Lulus Setelah Dipertahankan di Depan Tim Penguji Skripsi
Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni
Universitas Negeri Padang

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Fakultas : Bahasa dan Seni

Padang, Agustus 2012

Nama	Tim Penguji	Tanda Tangan
1. Dr. Hj. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.	Ketua	()
2. Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A.	Sekretaris	()
3. Dra. An Fauzia R. Syafei, M.A.	Anggota	()
4. Muhd. Al-Hafizh, S.S., M.A.	Anggota	()
5. Havid Ardi, S.Pd., M.Hum.	Anggota	()

ABSTRAK

Meira Adriani. 2012. “The Effect of Chronic Childhood Trauma in Anne Enright’s *The Gathering* (2007)” Thesis, FBS UNP

Skripsi 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 trauma yang kronis di masa kecil dan sejauh mana kontribusi unsur sastra seperti karakter, plot dan seting yang mengacu pada *text based approach* mengungkap akibat tersebut. Tujuan dari penganalisaan ini adalah untuk mengetahui sejauh mana novel ini memperlihatkan pengaruh trauma masa kecil bagi kehidupan pribadi seseorang. Analisa dikaitkan dengan 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.

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Bismillaahirrahmaanirrahiim. In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful. *Allhamdulillaahirabbil'alamiin*, praise are only due to Allah, lord of the universe who has given the writer love, blessing, 'a drop' of knowledge, ideas, health, strength and protection in completing this thesis entitled *The Effect of Chronic Childhood Trauma* in Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (2007). Greetings and shalawat are also sent to the last prophet, Muhammad, the leader and the greatest man in the world.

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The Writer

MEIRA ADRIANI

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

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. 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.

1.1.1 Effect of Chronic Childhood Trauma

There are two terms that need to be explained in this analysis. There are effect and chronic childhood trauma. The first term is effect which refers to “produce as a result” or “power or ability to influence or produce a result”. According to Herbert Spencer (2000) an effect is produced by the action of an agent or a cause and follows it in time. Thus effect is something that appears as a result of an action or situation.

The second term is chronic childhood trauma. Chronic is commonly used in medical and physical activity. Thesaurus Dictionary (2010) defines chronic as “of long duration”. It is used to describe low progress and long continuance of a disease. This condition is undefined and varies with circumstances. According to American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2010) childhood trauma means an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking which may result in lasting mental and physical effects that happen in the childhood. Freud in Forster (2009) states that:

Trauma is an event that occurs to which subject cannot respond because of its intensity, you cannot respond to it. Children seem more vulnerable than adults to compulsive behavioral repetition and loss of conscious memory of the trauma.

From the quotation, it can be understood that trauma is caused by bad experiences that happen repeatedly and the victim is unable to respond to it. Children are very potentially to get a trauma because they have no capability to solve their problem and tend to force them selves to forget the bad events. They will repress their memories until they can forget the whole of their bad experiences.

In this analysis, the effect of chronic childhood trauma is the negative results that appear in someone’s personality after having a really bad experience in their childhood repeatedly. Many effects may appear after someone experiencing bad events but being paranoid and solitary are the effects of chronic childhood trauma that appear in this novel.

1.1.2 A Brief of Anne Enright

Anne Enright was born in Dublin in 1962. She married with an actor and director Martin Murphy; their children are aged four and seven. She lives in Bray, County Wicklow, Ireland. She studied English and Philosophy at Trinity College, Dublin. She went on to study for an MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. She is a former RTE television producer. She wrote for the London Review of Books and the Iris Times. She began writing full-time in 1993. This career has inspired her to be an amazing writer later.

Her short stories have appeared in several magazines including *The New Yorker* and *The Paris Review*. She won the 2004 Davy Byrnes Irish Writing Award for her short story, 'Honey'. Her short story collection, *The Portable Virgin* was published in 1991, and won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature. Two collections of stories, *Taking Pictures* and *Yesterday's Weather* were published in 2008.

Her novel, *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), shortlisted for the Irish Times/Aer Lingus Irish Literature Prize; winner of the 2001 Encore Award and shortlisted for the 2000 Whitbread Novel Award; Her other two novels are *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002); and *The Gathering* (2007). *The Gathering* is talk about a large Irish family gathering for the funeral of a wayward brother.

In 2007 Anne Enright won a Man Booker Prize for her Fiction *The Gathering* (2007). It has changed her formerly low-profile reputation dramatically. It is an intense and powerful novel which takes an acutely honest look at painful family relationships, hidden secrets and festering emotional wounds. Howard Davies, chairman of the Booker judges, described Enright's novel as an unflinching look at a grieving family. It's the bleakness of one woman's vision, a bleakness rooted in her family, her marriage and the death of her brother. Gale Thomson in *Biography of Literary* (2005) state that:

Anne Enright, one of the most promising fiction writers to appear in Ireland in the 1990s, , has received considerable critical attention and literary accolades for her short stories and novels. She also writes essays and columns for such periodicals as the *London Review of Books*, *The Irish Times*, *Harper's*, and *The New Yorker*. Most critics agree that her work is postmodern and deconstructionist while utilizing a cinematic style suggestive of both the celluloid quality and pace of contemporary life. The term "magic realism" is often employed to describe her work.

This statement reflects that Enright's work is focused on modern issue that really happen in the modern society. She exposes something that usually appears in real life and makes it more interesting through literary works.

Anne Enright mentions her great predecessors in the unflinching scrutiny of family life. When she got Man Booker Prize Award in 2007, she said that:

There often is a dark secret in books... There is often a gathering sense of dread, there's a gap sometimes in the text from which all kinds of

monsters can emerge... So I knew all of this.
And I went there anyway.

From statement above, it is explained that Enright like to expose family relationship. She influences reader to think about the relationship between a member of family and all parts of human life. She reveals something crucial that usually hidden in interpersonal relationship between family members.

1.1.3 The Gathering

The Gathering (2007) written by Anne Enright uncovers the effect of chronic childhood trauma. Chronic childhood trauma is an emotional wounded that creates long lasting damage to the psychological condition of children's life. The effects of chronic childhood trauma appear when the children have bad experienced in their childhood period frequently. It will produce psychological symptoms many years later. The effect of chronic childhood trauma is represented by the protagonist, Veronica Hegarty (39). She experienced sexual abuse when she was a child. The protagonist is one of twelve siblings. She was entrusted to her grandmother's house when she was nine years old. Nevertheless she thought her mother did not care anymore and wanted to throw her away from the house. She experienced child abuse in her granny's house. The protagonist repressed her disappointment to people around her. That's why; she has abnormal personality as the effect of her childhood trauma. The effect of chronic childhood trauma can be seen in two points; being paranoid and being solitary.

The first point is being paranoid. Paranoid is a personality condition of someone who tends to bears grudges and do not trust in others. In this novel being paranoid can be seen in three aspects. First, the protagonist bears grudges by unforgiving insults or slights to others. She keeps her hatred and cannot trust everybody even someone who is close to her, especially to the men. Second, she has negative suspicions in every part of her life. She blames people based on her own judgment. Third, although she finally married, she doubts her husband loyalty. She believes that her husband has another woman even though she can not prove it.

The other effect is being solitary. Solitary is a psychological condition of someone who tends to be alone and usually avoid the society. The protagonist is more concerned in her inner world than the real situation in her life. It can be seen in two aspects. First, the protagonist avoids sharing her thoughts and feelings to other people. The character keeps her problems by her own without sharing to another. She faces all of her problems by exploring her thought and feeling. Second, the protagonist prefers to spend her time by her self. She has bad relationship with her own family. She tends to think and does all things alone. She enjoys traveling alone with unspecific destination. She can leave her husband and children without any rational consideration and forgetting her own responsibility

1.2 Problem of Study

Since the problem is the effect of chronic childhood trauma. The research questions are:

1. How far does the novel expose the effect of chronic childhood trauma?
2. To what extent do the fictional devices such as characters, plot (conflicts) and settings supports the effect of chronic childhood trauma?

1.3 Purpose of Study

This study is going to find out how far the novel reflects the effect of chronic childhood trauma. Besides, it also explores to what extent characters, conflicts and setting support the issue of the effect of chronic childhood trauma.

1.4 Previous Study

The analysis of this novel that focuses on the effect of chronic childhood trauma issue has not been found yet. However, there are some studies that have given contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel.

The first analysis is written by Tim LaDuca entitled: *An Introduction to "Prisoners of Childhood" by Alice Miller (1981)*. This article studies the novel *Prisoners of Childhood*. This article is based on psychoanalytic concept "narcissism" by Sigmund Freud. This study analyzes human personality. It focuses on child behavior; the way of a child learns to behave at a very early age. The child is risk of losing his parent's love, complies, and behaves before he can possibly understand what the behavior means. In the process, he learns to repress rather than to acknowledge his own intense feelings because they are unacceptable

to his parents. Laduca explains the character avoid his “ugly” feelings (anger, indignation, despair, jealousy, fear) in the future. This condition leads character to be emotionally insecure and lost of self identity.

The other study that gives contribution to this study is written by Carrie Craft entitled *One Child's Courage to Survive* (2012). This article studies the novel *A Child Called "It"* (1993) by Dave Pelzer. This paper analyzes the perspective of a child who suffering an abuse from his mother. Besides being horribly beaten, the character was forced to eat his own vomit, swallow soap, ammonia, and Clorox. This was just the beginning of his mother's "games." The character's childhood wasn't always a nightmare. There were the "good years" in the beginning and he devotes a chapter describing the feelings of warmth and safety provided by his mother. By the age of 4 these feelings were replaced with fear, starvation and lowliness. It is eye-opening to see how the character perceived the treatment of his mother, as she didn't treat his other brothers this way, and how the abuse impacted his self-worth.

Both of these analyses help the writer to reveal the effect of chronic childhood trauma. The first analyses help to analyze the nature of a character who is suffering child abuse. This experience influences the development of his or her personality. The second analysis exposes how a childhood trauma brings some negative effects to someone's life. It can make someone become anti social even a criminal in their society.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this novel deals with the psychoanalysis concept of repression and unconscious mind by Sigmund Freud. Repression is a way to forget a threatening situation, person, or event. For example, the victim who suffers the traumatic experience tries to repress or put down all the things that they do not want to remember.

There are some of reasons why people want to repress their bad memories. Most memories of certain events can be extremely emotional. Therefore, their recall can contribute to post-traumatic stress or other similar conditions. The repression usually occurs because the victim is unable to solve their problem. Freud in Moo (2009) states that:

Repression involves placing uncomfortable thoughts in relatively inaccessible areas of the subconscious mind. Thus when things occur that we are unable to cope with now, we push them away, either planning to deal with them at another time or hoping that they will fade away on their own accord.

The text explains that repression occur when someone is not able to face their really hard problems and then they try to completely remove it from their uncomfortable thoughts. They hide their bad experience in order to forget all of bad events that happen to them. They hope these bad memories will vanish after the repression happened.

Moreover the repression of traumatic memories mostly happens to children. The children are very susceptible to be a victim of crime or abuse. Hence

they tend to conceal their disturbing moment rather to solve it. It is the way for children to come out from their problems. A psychologist, Lenore Terr (1996) says that a child does the repression to banish the awful events from awareness. They force to forget it to keep them survives. Most psychologists accept that it is quite common to consciously repress unpleasant experiences. In this case, children are inclined to conceal their unpleasant experiences in order to keep them in a comfort zone.

Many people consider that when they repress their bad experiences, they will throw away all of bad events from their memory. Unfortunately their bad experienced did not completely vanish. Freud in Moo (2009) proposes that:

Repression as desires and impulses are actively pushed into the unconscious mind. For Freud, the repression was a defense mechanism - the repressed memories are often traumatic in nature, but, although hidden, they continue to exert an effect on behavior.

The text shows that repression is a defense system of conscious mind to hide the traumatic memories. The memories that have been repressed did not really disappear. It can have an accumulative effect and unconsciously reappear as a dysfunctional behavior, manner and attitude. People who are suffering the traumatic moment attempt to cover their trauma from somebody else. However, the repression of their traumatic experience is reflected by their dysfunctional behavior, manner and attitude. Michael Fenichel, Ph.D, a psychologist, (2008) supports Freud's theory. He argues that repression is a refusal to think about

something painful or anxiety producing. It indicates that a stressful incident become a main case that make people do repression.

Most victims of crime or abuse do not forget traumatic experiences unless they are rendered unconscious at the time of the experience. It still exists on their unconscious even though they have tried to throw it. Freud in Guerin (2005) states that:

Unconscious is any mental process the existence of which we are obligate to assume because for instance, we infer it in some way from its effect. "Unconscious" when we have to assume that it was active at a certain time, although at the time we knew nothing about it. (99-100)

The text shows that unconscious is a mechanism of mind to protect the sufferer from the effect of their traumatic events. It is done because the sufferer is averse to knowing it consciously, but it still active. Continuously, the unconscious will influence our behavior, manner and attitude even though we are unaware of these underlying influences.

The combination of these theories takes an important role in analyzing this novel. In this novel, the protagonist experienced traumatic events in her childhood. She got sexual abuses and can not solve her problems. Consequently, she represses her bad memories and hides it from other people. Even though she has hidden her traumatic experienced, it still appears through her dysfunctional behavior, manner and attitude unconsciously. This fact carries repression and unconsciousness as the important concepts in this analysis since it is related to the topic of this novel.

The form of this analysis is text-based interpretation. It focuses exclusively on the text and requires close reading. The process of this analysis ignore the aspects outer the text. It means that the meaning is revealed from the text by analyzing the interrelationship of elements of the text. In analyzing this novel, fictional devices such as character, setting and plot (conflict) are important to be examined. Character is one of the most important elements in fiction. Henderson (2009) said that a character is a person who is responsible for the thoughts and actions within a story, poem or other literature. Characters are extremely important because they are the medium through which a creative author uses to assist in forming the plot of a story or creating a mood. They are the objects of our curiosity and fascination, affection and dislike, admiration and condemnation. The character in this novel is Veronica (39) who suffered chronic childhood trauma that affects her personality in her adolescence.

The second important element in analyzing this novel is plot which is focused on conflicts. Robert (1999) stated that conflict is not only between the protagonist and the antagonist but may also occur within the character's own mind. This analysis is focused on internal conflict of the character. The character was sent to her grandmother's house when she was a child. It is done, because she has many twelve siblings. Her parent can not take care of all their children. In her granny's house, she got sexual abuse from her granny's boy friend. She hidden bad events and tried to forget it.

Another element is setting. Endriga (2009) says that setting is the time, place, physical details and circumstances in which situation occur. Setting includes the background atmosphere or environment in which character live and move. The setting gives big influence in analyzing the meaning of this novel. In this analysis, the setting is an condition of the character that have to experienced some of bad events after she move to her grandparent's house. The sexual abuses that she got there play an important role of developing her different personality.

1.6 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.