



Childhood Trauma and Attachment Issues: A Curse in Yuki Tabata's *Black Clover*

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| Abstract | Article info |
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| <p><i>Childhood trauma is a curse that leads to many unbearable aftermaths in the life of a human being. Literature is the lens that reflects such truths about children and the atrocity they face. This paper explores the impact of childhood trauma on the individual and the emergence of attachment issues. Japanese anime dared to discuss mental health issues as content, variously and deeply. Henceforth, this research work examines the animated manga Black Clover's traumatized characters from the Black Bulls. Trauma literary theory is used to analyze two characters, namely, Asta and Gauche. The analysis results in bridging the bond between the traumatized child and one specific character. This relation tends to revolve around obsession and can be classified under attachment issues.</i></p> | <p>Received 03/03/2020 Accepted 11/03/2020</p> <p>Keyword:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Attachment Issues✓ Black Clover✓ Childhood Trauma✓ Children's Literature✓ Trauma Literature |

1. Introduction

Literature has been, for ages, the mere reflection of truth. Although many authors tried to veil atrocity from children readers, others put an extra emphasis on cruelty in their pages instead. This inclusion vs exclusion of the psychological issues has been a matter of conflict in the genre of children's literature. "Managing the confluence of childhood in and the atrocity in fiction is a difficult, if not impossible, task" (Nestfield and Smith, 2022, p. 2). The fear of traumatizing a child through a literary piece is the major barrier a plethora of authors face, as a scary reality might halt the outgoing nature of an active child, or a wrong behavior might influence them.

However, if this fear of writing is to be considered, then no literature is to be produced. In this sense, some authors found refuge in the formula of fantasy to make the youth aware of many factual

horrors in a different world. Psychological issues, mainly trauma, have been explained and introduced through fantasy in many works. Japanese manga is one among many genres that shed light on the psyche, acknowledging that a considerable number of its audience is juvenile. The problem, though, is how trauma and attachment issues are portrayed through anime and whether there is a focus on certain elements of the story more than others or not.

This article takes one of the celebrated anime in the twenty-first century, *The Black Clover* by Yuki Tabata, as a case study. The manga is rich in characters and multilayered in plots; henceforth, the main focus will be on the Black Bull squad's members. This research paper, then, aims at exploring the effect of childhood trauma on the characters' development within their group and the reason behind their extreme attachment issues. Gauche and Asta are Black Bull's knights who live with attachment issues the most, mainly the sister complex, so tracing their past reveals more about their trauma.

2. Literature Review

It is mandatory to introduce childhood trauma before analysing it in the *Black Clover*. There is also a need to trace the rise of trauma literary theory and how some specific works are classified as trauma literature. These concepts lead to the focus of this research, which is attachment issues and their variation and complexity. Manga, or the genre of the selected literary work, is to be briefly introduced in relation to psychological themes. The total of these titles permits the understanding and analysis of the selected characters of the work.

2.1 Children Trauma

A child is the youngest version of human beings, one of their most vulnerable entities who acquire care and protection for sane uprisal and growth. In general, defining a child is not mandatory in terms of meaning, but in the sense of trauma, it is indeed. Trauma is an immense shock that the human brain finds it difficult to process; it is "unmanageable and unthinkable" (De Thierry, 2021, p. 9). Beyond its abstract sense, trauma leaves physical traces, scars, and dormant spaces in the brain. Considering that this definition is broad and common among all ages, children suffer from the same effect, but severely. Nevertheless, adults mostly obtain fully developed brains, whereas children are in a developing phase of their mental abilities. Consequently, trauma may halt their neurodevelopment.

Childhood trauma, in this means, differs from adult trauma in terms of perceiving and processing the shock and also in deciding what is shocking and what is not. The traumatized child suffers from physical and psychological symptoms that can last longer than expected, yet, healing remains a possibility. Mintz assures that parents can be the cure when they open up about their child's trauma and initiate psychotherapy. Aside from therapy, she concludes that the best therapy for a traumatized child is supportive parents and caregivers who accompany and surround their children with peace

Childhood Trauma and Attachment Issues: A Curse in Yuki Tabata's The Black Clover

(Mintz, 2022, p. 3). This point provides hope in a way but still sheds light on another type of childhood trauma where parents are absent and such a cure is far from their reality: orphans or kids with unknown parentage.

2.2 Trauma and Attachment Issues

Childhood trauma related to losing parents and caregivers leads to a series of coping mechanisms; some children grieve longer than seven stages, whereas others get attached instead. People's love language is usually a response to the caring they have received as children, mainly, their bond with their parents (Lawson, 2023, p. 1). The lack or absence of this specific love in the life of an individual leads to a multiplicity of reactions. The person may tend to face difficulties in expressing love or develop an obsession instead (p. 1). The focus of this research is not on the numbness of feelings and the lack of interest. However, it draws attention to the trauma effect leading to attachment issues. Such issues reflect the unconscious mind of the traumatized with a sense of unawareness about their obsessiveness or difficulty in giving space.

Attachment issues, similarly to trauma, have physical reactions along with the stress effects of the bond. Such health problems can be as severe as heart disease, high blood pressure, and chronic illnesses (Lawson, 2023, p. 8) or simply specific symptoms such as dizziness and fever. In this case, orphans suffer from a forced break with their parents, primarily deaths and wars, which results in a certain aching and ailment that can be narrowed down in tension if they find refuge in other subjects.

2.3 Trauma Literary Theory

Trauma literary theory is a discipline that emerged in the 1990s by a myriad of scholars. Actual traumatic events when cruelty and atrocity circled the human race functioned as pillars for this theory. The Holocaust, the Second World War, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Atomic Bombing, and the new nuclear power are only a few to cite next to the oppressed and voiceless sufferings of the colonized. Such actions soon obtained literary reactions where authors discussed many traumatic events and topics, which provided a fertile matter for major scholars to study. Henry Krystal (1968, 1978, 1988), McDougall (1989), Van Der Kolk, Weisaeth (1996), and many others facilitated the emergence of the trauma literary theory by explaining trauma as a concept (Ringel and Brandell, 2012, p. 3).

The war and atrocity obliged authors to voice out and write down their distressful and shocking daily life to an audience, in what is called postcolonial literature, or mainly Trauma literature. The use of several theories to analyze these specific texts seemed unnecessary to scholars, and they were obliged to think of one specific theory. A multidisciplinary theory appears to target and combine the total with a focal specialty, that is, the Literary Trauma Theory.

The Trauma literary theory did not appear out of nowhere, as it referred to the psychoanalytic literary theory as a pillar and an umbrella theory, then dived into an interdisciplinary and detailed approach to target the core concepts (Davis & Meretoja, 2020, p. 3). “the ‘new’ trauma theory is still in the process of developing paradigms to match those of its classical, psychoanalysis-inspired predecessors” (Buelens et al. 2014, p. 19). From the psychological basics to the cultural, political, social, and contemporary approaches, the trauma literary theory appeared.

The theory aims at exploring how trauma is translated into words and how it reflects the authors’ inner emotions or a whole society's feelings of suffering. Buelens et al (2014) describe it as a “knot tying together (different) representations” (p. 34). Davis and Meretoja also put an emphasis on the interference of other branches in the rise of the theory, from suffering to law, ethics, and medicine. They consider “The literary trauma studies as a particular branch of work in the humanities has its own separate but related and interdependent genealogy” (2020, p. 3).

Freud related Traumatic hysteria to repression, which could be found in a literary work, hence, trauma literary theory allows digging the repressed in the character. “Freud suggests a causal relationship between mental state and the sort of narrative that it produces” (Morrissey, 2021, p. 34). In this sense, Freud referred to Literature to analyze the remembrance and the flashbacks of Trauma as he believed that fiction is a mirror of the mind. The studies considered Freud and his early findings as a reference but grew broader in developing and actualizing the concept in Literature.

In 1995, Kali Tal published a book *entitled Words of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma* where she collected a plethora of trauma analysis in books. The work is published one year ahead of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, the so considered the pioneer of Trauma Literary theory. This consideration is not a downgrading point of view to Tal's efforts, but a recognition of Caruth’s research as she managed to achieve a literary approach specific to trauma literature more than other scholars ahead of her.

Caruth's work approaches the theory in a technical and theoretical manner before applying it, named “one of the best-known voices in the branch” (Morrissey, 2021, p. 29). This established the ground of the theory more to the following Literary applications. Cathy Caruth (1995, 1996), Shoshana Felman, the psychiatrist Dori Laub (Felman and Laub 1992), and the historian Dominick LaCapra (1994, 2001) are all canonical figures and works of the theory (Davis & Meretoja, 2020, p. 3). Most of these critics focused on the novel in trauma literature, or poetry as a second refuge for analysis. However, with the multiplicity of literature and the rise of importance in sub-genres, the focus is including all what contains trauma.

2.3 Manga, where Trauma Varies

Childhood Trauma and Attachment Issues: A Curse in Yuki Tabata's The Black Clover

The audience of Manga is growing day by day and its fame is beyond the Asian border, as manga became worldwide. It is a famous literary and artistic genre that has its roots in Japan under its Japanese name, yet its influence is international. Kern draws a line between traditional manga, which dates back hundreds of years, and modern manga, which emerged, as he claims, by 1920 (2019, p. 129). He defines this modern genre as the overlapping zone between the visual arts and the “confluence between Euroamerican and Japanese comics” (Kern, 2019, p. xxvii). This genre translates the Japanese culture and mixes it with different cultures in a hybrid style.

Manga is a genre with many orientations and subgenres. Like the novel, with detective, fantasy, romance, gothic, and so many other genres, Manga has a variety of themes that decide its type. The shonen is the main concern of this paper; it is a genre dedicated to young boys, as its name implies, and the Japanese equivalent of superhero comics, a fantasy-based genre. As Western superhero comics celebrate characters such as Superman, Spiderman, Hulk, and others, the Shonen manga present Naruto, Jujutsu Kaisen, Demon Slayer, and similar works are the equivalent of such works.

Since the dawn of manga, it has embraced complicated themes and discussed psychological troubles. In the twenty-first century, Manga reached its peak in portraying psychological issues and delivering characters in all their facets and situations, with no focus on the heroic elements only (Kiyoshi 13). Trauma is portrayed in the shonen as well, which is considered children's literature as addressed to the youth; then, childhood trauma is omnipresent in this genre in particular. *Black Clover* is a shonen that discusses various types of trauma, along with attachment issues as an aftermath of past wounds.

3. Analysis

3.1 Black Clover

The *Black Clover* is a weekly shonen Jump that started in 2015 and continued until 2023. It was adapted into an anime series in 2017. The story happens in the Clover Kingdom, a land ruled by magic. The Clover citizens practice magic more or less, and their magical skills vary, where the talented are part of their army. Every period, there is a contest for magicians, where different magic houses' leaders depict the best magicians from thousands of contestants to join their teams and be the magic knights of the kingdom. Every squad has its reputation and orientation, yet, most of the Magicians aim at entering the upper class and best-known houses.

The black bull is the weirdest team, downgraded by others and perceived as losers. It is a magical house with the worst reputation in the kingdom. The squad is led by Yami Sukehiro, whose reputation is no better than his team members. Despite the common laziness, the events in the black bull house are portrayed to be fun, and the members' bond seems ironic and shallow at the beginning of the work.

Hierarchy appears in the story between the magic squads, where the black bulls take the lowest status out of their clumsiness in fighting at the very first episodes. Eventually, they turn to be among the most effective groups when many wars were declared.

Soon after, the Black Bull knights appear to reflect different psychological issues, and suffer from a plethora of childhood trauma that interfered with their inactivity. Vanessa Enoteca is addicted and her appearance is always accompanied by alcohol when she is barely sober. Charmy Pappiston, is another character who portrays the eating disorder as she eats non-stop and has two different appearances as a fat little girl and a fit lady by the end of the story. Zora Ideale is a narcissist, and Finral Roulacase is a toxic male gaslighting many girls. These are just some of the characters and their representations based on their appearances by the inauguration of the story. However, the background of each character is revealed, and different traumas are highlighted to justify their mental health issues.

In this sense, *Black Clover* is an animated manga that can be identified as trauma literature out of containing a variety of shocks that left an impact and an unbearable trace on the characters. As this article focuses on a specific type of trauma, which is losing parents and caregivers at a young age, then, some characters are to be excluded. Linking trauma to attachment issues also excludes several orphans in the story ending up with two specific names, Gauche Adlai and Asta.

3.2 Asta and Gauche; the Orphan Knights

Asta is the protagonist of the Black Clover manga and a very unique character who shows resistance and consistency toward his dream to be the emperor of magic, acknowledging that he has no magical skills at all. As mentioned in the previous title, Asta is not given a last name, unlike the rest of the Black Bull members, which is a reference to his unknown parentage. Gauche, on the other hand, is a very skillful knight with a recognized family, the Adlais, who belong to an aristocratic class. However, after the death of his parents, he discovers his extreme magical skills, yet, he suffers from ethical issues, selfishness, and lack of respect towards his peers.

Both of the characters were raised in a church, just Asta was there since a baby, and Gauche after the death of his parents when his family relatives inherited their fortune and kicked him out with his sister. The reasons for losing their parents are not stated, but as the Clover Kingdom is a target of many enemies and wars, it might be the most logical reason as many deaths and separations are caused by wars in war zones. Since their childhood trauma grew with them, and with a lack of attention forwarded to them, both of the characters developed an attachment issue, different in complexity and severity.

Gauche's name can be the first hint towards his character. Taking the origin of the name, the French meaning of Gauche is left, as in the direction, however, its implicit sense is maladroit or

Childhood Trauma and Attachment Issues: A Curse in Yuki Tabata's The Black Clover

someone who is awkward and out of the path. This meaning reflects the odd behaviors of Gauche in his relationship with others as he shows no normality in behaving with others. It is either extreme selfishness, extreme hatred of the enemies, or extreme love for his little sister. Gauche seems to find difficulty in being ordinary.

Asta's name reflects two different facets of his character. Asta as a Latin name means a starlike, or a bright person which can refer to his positivity and optimism towards his strength without having any potential, his hard work was rewarded throughout the story. However, his anonymity of origins and the weird magical book that was given to him led to the second assembling of the name. The five-leaf clover grimoire that Asta obtains, which enables him to have different swords that are anti-magic, is ruled by a demon, unlike the other books.

This shows the nature vs nurture theory, that although the boys were not raised by their families, some of their traits were delivered to them through their genes. However, the loss of the parenting side prohibited the major psychotherapy provided to children and made their cases worse in different senses. This part of trauma leads to the following title; the sister complex.

3.3 The Sister Complex

Gauche and Asta reveal a strong bond with the sisters' characters, this relationship is beyond loving a sister, but reaches the level of obsession. Gauche's sister, Marie, is his only family member, she is raised in a church among other orphans. Marie is a child who might be considered as a cute child by other characters, but to Gauche, she is sacred. Gauche keeps her picture wherever he goes, speaks of her to every person he meets and thinks about her all the time. The interpretation of selecting Mary as a name for the little sister is because it is a holy name in Christianity of Mary the Virgin, which reflects the importance of this character in the heart of her brother, just as religious people cherish Mary the Virgin. It shows her purity in the eyes of her brother.

Similarly, Asta is obsessed with a sister, but in his case, he does not share a blood bond with her. She is, though, a sister in the church he was raised in, and the person who cared for him all the time as an older sister. Henceforth, Asta always mentions marrying her once he becomes an emperor of magic. Although she cannot marry him as she devotes her life to the church, he keeps faith in that possibility; after all, it is not as impossible as being an emperor of magic. He speaks very often of her in front of his squad and also considers her one of his important achievements, as well as his family.

In both of the cases, the attachment issue is highlighted first, even before explaining the trauma. Gauche Adlai, for instance, mentions his sister very often, he even asked his boss to give him a one-year pause to celebrate her birthday in episode 30. The author then starts showing a glimpse of his past and explains the childhood shocks that led him to overcare for his only family and relative, Marie.

Just like Gauche, the narrative technique used starts with telling the readers about Asta's wish to marry the Sister from the church, then flashbacks are thrown through the narrative to his traumatic past where the Sister has been there for him most of the time and no matter how unskillful he was as a toddler. This justifies his extreme attachment to her, and the difficulty of just expressing his love towards her without exaggeration.

Gauche, however, is obsessed to an extreme level. His attachment issues lead him to extremely miss his sister Marie and want to take care of her all the time and be only around her. She is his reason of living as he states in episode 30 "a former convict like myself is only able to live a proper life for the sake of your angelic cuteness Marie. It's all thanks to you." (9:13-9:18). Mary as a young girl feels suffocated of this excessive love and she often rejects her older brother's overcaring. This rejection can be conceived normally by others, but Gauche suffers from nosebleeding if he feels hurt because of his sister. This nuance reflects the physical effects of trauma that are resulted in attachment issues. Gauche suffers from actual ailments out of a simple rejection because he finds refuge in his sister. Despite being the eldest, he did not understand what is the right manner of parenting or showing love. In this case, his love language ended up being unstable.

At the same time, Asta's love for his not real sister, but a church sister, often makes her laugh instead. The sister is older than Asta and is mature enough to understand the impossibility of his wish, however, her reaction is never severe. It explains her understanding of his past trauma and his attachment issue, and acknowledging his age also maintains her peaceful treatment. In this sense, unlike Gauche, Asta never experiences rejection from Sister, but if Yono, his friend, or one of the Black Bull's members reject this idea, he often bursts out of anger. Anger instantly affects the physical state of the person, and thus, the same results are experienced based on trauma.

The sister complex is an anime feature of siblings who are raised alone and they end up being attached to each other. There is a slight difference: Gauche loves to protect his sister and lives up to her happiness, but he never thinks of her romantically. Yet, he hates Asta because his sister always expresses her love to Asta, which disappoints him and makes him think that he will eventually lose her. Asta loves the church Sister and wants to marry her only because they are unrelated. Usually, Japanese manga tends to highlight the variety of reactions to trauma, specifically by orphans

Fig.1. Gauche Adlai at Marie's Birthday, Nosebleeding out of Excitement

Childhood Trauma and Attachment Issues: A Curse in Yuki Tabata's The Black Clover



Source: Tabata Yaku, 2015, episode 30, 11:29

This scene shows that Gauche bleeds even when he is optimistic or thinks positively of Marie, and not mainly when upset. This very detail can refer to the hardness of love itself on Gauche. His trauma seems to affect the way he loves in general, and his trauma scars are linked to expressing his feelings. There is a possibility that the damaged part of his brain is the amygdala or simply the almond, which is responsible for managing emotions. The lack of love and parenting in his life, with the absence of older people, makes him needy for recognition, yet, he could not achieve neither being the parent nor the older brother to his sister. Asta on the other hand, has less severe attachment issues because the Sister is aware enough to treat him and care for him, which fills some of the orphanage gap.

4. CONCLUSION

The Black Clover is a Shonen manga that has received its share of fame and trends in the past few years. As a piece of children's literature, Tabata Yaku managed to imply the formula of fantasy to portray several facets of trauma, using atrocity indeed. Namely, death and orphanage trauma are the conquering themes of the manga, based on the Black Bull squad members as a case study. Growing up in a war zone, the Clover Kingdom, several shocks are a norm; however, as Mintz applies, parents interfere in healing their children's sufferings and scars, which is not the case for Gauche and Asta.

The major quest of this research is how manga and anime manage to portray trauma and attachment issues. As a response, manga writers craft skillful sub-plots to shed light on the character's trauma. They often start with the result, then provide flashbacks to the source of trauma. For instance, they make the attachment issues more prominent in the beginning, in the case of Gauche with Marie and Asta with the Sister, then trace the reasons through flashbacks to their early childhood with losing

their parents or not knowing who they are. There is indeed a focus on one element more than others, which is the characters themselves, as in Genre Literature.

To end with, characters are not simply round characters out of their psyche or supporting characters to the protagonist; each and every character is a representation of a psychological issue. Nevertheless, even naming is taken into consideration by the manga's author, as names provide prior knowledge and narration about the characters' stories and unconscious. More than that, the Japanese comics, Manga, dare to focus on neglected themes such as the sister complex, which is uncommon in Western literature. This point assures that people who do not receive love from their parents have difficulties in expressing it, not out of lack, but sometimes to the point of obsession, simply because they are orphans.

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Childhood Trauma and Attachment Issues: A Curse in Yuki Tabata's The Black Clover

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