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Research Article

“The Process of Overcoming childhood trauma” through Anna Quinn’s novel *The Night Child*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the process of overcoming childhood trauma with the themes of resilience, acceptance, and hope through the American contemporary novel *The Night Child* by Anna Quinn. This was the author’s first debut novel, which deals with the traumatic experiences faced by the protagonist in her childhood. To add more depth to her writing, the author emphasized ideas such as Sigmund Freud’s feminine Oedipus attitude complex and the stream of consciousness. This essay provides a more thorough understanding of the implications that unresolved trauma can have on an individual. The protagonist experiences physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her own parents during a terrible event in her younger years, and the trauma that lacks closure continues to haunt her. The primary theme in both the novel and the paper is the journey taken by the protagonist, Nora, to reach a state of acceptance and happiness. *The Night Child* is a struggle between the ties of the past and present where the body and mind struggle to save themselves despite all odds. Through the novel, Anna expresses her ideas and thoughts about childhood trauma in a straightforward narrative style. Her masterful weaving of all the Ideas results in a stunning and eerily beautiful novel.

Key words: *Mental health, trauma, acceptance, hope, and resilience.*

Introduction:

Anna Quinn, an American author of contemporary times, wrote the book *The Night Child*. She is a published poet and essayist with over 26 years experience teaching and conducting writer's workshops around the world. Black Stone Publishers first published *The Night Child* on January 30, 2018. American literature has a lengthy history and a diversified field that has grown over centuries to reflect the cultural, social, and historical aspects of the United States. The writing styles differ across different periods, and one such period is the contemporary period. It is a period where conventional practices depart and fresh techniques are explored. Realism, metafiction, postmodern, feminist, fragmentary, and stream of consciousness were the emerging labels used by American novelists in the contemporary period. *The Night Child* deals with themes like mental health, trauma, resilience, and the captivity of the mind, body, and spirit to save itself despite all

odds. The work is psychological fiction, as most of the story explores the inner workings of the character’s mind. Nora Brown, the protagonist, is a young mother and high school English teacher who is married and has a six-year-old daughter. She experiences a series of hallucinations that alter her life by bringing out the split personality within her, which contains memories of her horrific past. Nora is a girl who has abandoned her past and never spoken about it, causing her to experience anguish even after many years. The novel finishes with Nora learning to embrace her tragic background in order to overcome it. The author employed a simple narrative writing style that allows readers to easily connect with the emotions conveyed by the characters. The author gave less importance to the side characters and focused solely on Nora’s struggle to face her past. At the end of the novel, Nora embraces her inner self, which summarizes all of the processes she went through to conquer her inner anguish.

Characteristics of Nora and Margaret

Nora

Nora Brown is the protagonist of the novel *The Night Child*, written by Anna Quinn. The author portrayed Nora as a late-20s woman with a small family that included her daughter Fiona and husband Paul. She works as an English school teacher and loves doing her job. Throughout the novel, Nora seems to be considerate enough to stay a good mother to her daughter because of past traumas. In order to convey to readers how trauma can affect one's mental health, the author also created Nora as a person who denies all of her suffering. Her trauma comes into display through hallucinations, and she undergoes a series of therapy sessions. Her therapist, David Forrester, plays another prominent role in bringing out Nora's traumatic past, where she was physically and sexually abused by her own parents. Alongside of her internal traumas, Nora endures external trauma through her husband's infidelity and the death of one of her students, who was going through the same misery as Nora. Elizabeth, the student, serves as a catalyst for Nora as she helps her realize that running away from the past will not address anything. At the book's conclusion, the author drove Nora to acknowledge and confront her trauma, enabling her to heal.

Margaret

The second-most important character is Margaret, an imaginary character created by Nora. A church sister once read a book about St. Margaret to Nora and told her that she appears whenever there's trouble. Every time Nora was mistreated, she prayed for St. Margaret, and as a result, a mental image of the saint was formed. Margaret has become the other persona of Nora. Years later, this split personality emerges, reminding Nora of her past. When Margaret brought up the past, which Nora didn't think existed, Nora ignored her. As the novel progresses, it seems as though Margaret is a different character who speaks with Nora through the doctor, despite the author's original portrayal of Margaret as Nora's split personality. Margaret is someone who desires to keep Paul away from Nora and Fiona. She shows up when

Fiona turns six, which is the same age when Nora was abused. She is afraid that Paul would mistreat Fiona in the same way that her father did. At the end of the story, Margaret was embraced by Nora, illustrating how she accepts both her past and present.

Resilience

Resilience refers to the ability of a person to adapt to their situation and maintain their psychological well-being while undergoing the adversity phase. Nora, as a child, faced a circumstance where she was physically and sexually abused by her parents and left alone to live with her grandparents after her mother's demise. She didn't share any of her experience at home with her grandparents and blurred it all in the back of her mind. She kept on living through it for years. These can be wrongly considered as resilience, but the author contradicts and shows Nora's life as pseudo-resilience. Pseudo-resilience refers to a person who shows adaptive and strong behaviour, but they use a facade like that as a defense mechanism. Through these means, they believe that they are successfully coping with trauma, all the while being fragile inside. The author shows this through Nora when her childhood trauma returns after many years. Nora explores her past with the help of a psychiatrist, and her true resilient self comes out at the end when she chooses to believe, accept, and embrace her past.

The process of overcoming trauma

Trauma is categorized into acute, chronic, and complex. The one the author handles in her novel is chronic trauma, where the main character deals with her dark past for many years. Nora, who has been hiding her trauma at the back of her mind, couldn't make herself accept it when it came back to her after years. The author used Stream of Consciousness as a part of her novel where Nora has an internal conflict within herself. The author skillfully shows how Nora tries to defend her father even though her inner self knows the truth. This implies that the character Nora deeply believes that a parent figure could never hurt a child. These mere thought holds her back from overcoming the trauma. She undergoes a series of events, like her husband's betrayal,

Elizabeth's death, her fear of hurting her daughter, and the constant push of her therapist, which made her walk past her trauma. After a series of events and therapy, Nora accepts her past and heals her inner self, which longs for love and care.

Conclusion

Anna Quinn has explored the psychological fiction genre and spoken about the its free writing style and explores different themes with relatable characters. The novel kept one single character under the spotlight and Spot light and moved with its issues, which made the readers focus on Nora's turmoil alone. The author used books by other writers to subtly imply the main character's mood, ideology, or theme of the novel. To sum up, the author made her point that overcoming a past trauma will not happen in a single day. It needs resilience, hope, and the will to overcome.

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importance of overcoming childhood trauma. This work carries contemporary literature though