

A Literary Psychology Analysis of Trauma and Moral Ambiguity in Children in *Takopi no Genzai*

Bayu Wisnu Wiguna and Akhmad Saifudin

Universitas Dian Nuswantoro, Semarang, Indonesia, 312202101036@mhs.dinus.ac.id,
087708338821

Abstract. This study analyzes psychological trauma and emotional isolation in *Takopi's Original Sin* using Judith Herman's (1992) Trauma Theory and Erik Erikson's (1950) Psychosocial Development Theory. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research examines character dialogues and narrative events to identify how trauma is represented and how it influences psychological development. The findings reveal that trauma in the manga is chronic and interpersonal, resulting from neglect, bullying, and lack of emotional support, which aligns with the concept of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD) characterized by emotional dysregulation, disconnection, and disturbed self-perception. Consequently, the characters experience psychological and emotional isolation, reflected in their withdrawal, inability to express feelings, and difficulty forming relationships. Furthermore, trauma disrupts key psychosocial stages, particularly trust, identity, and intimacy, leading to developmental derailment and preventing healthy psychological growth. Therefore, emotional isolation emerges as a long-term consequence of unresolved trauma, demonstrating that trauma functions as the primary cause while isolation becomes its psychological and developmental outcome.

Keywords: Psychological Trauma, Emotional Isolation, Complex PTSD, Psychosocial Development, Manga

RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS

The story of *Takopi's Original Sin* is a disturbing and fascinating tale that delves into themes of psychological trauma, emotional pain, and moral ambiguity among children. Instead of depicting childhood as an innocent phase, the manga portrays the psychological struggles associated with being abused, bullied, and growing up in a dysfunctional family environment. In other words, the story shows how the trauma of childhood can impact the characters emotionally, socially, and morally through their various experiences.

In literature and psychology, there is a new trend towards understanding trauma not just as a reaction to isolated events, but as a long-lasting experience that develops within relationships. According to Judith Herman (1992), trauma can lead to the development of a complex post-traumatic stress disorder. It is defined by a lack of self-regulation, negative self-image, and relationship difficulties. In *Takopi's Original Sin*, the characters show signs of complex PTSD and have a tendency to repeat the same mistakes in their lives.

However, it is also necessary to take into account the developmental perspective when discussing the effects of trauma from a psychological perspective. Psychosocial Development Theory, proposed by Erik Erikson in 1950, offers an important framework for examining the effects of trauma on essential stages of development, including trust, identity formation, and intimacy.

Disruption of these stages results in what can be referred to as developmental derailment, when normal psychological development is affected. Thus, one could argue that trauma not only causes temporary psychological discomfort but changes the course of psychological development itself.

Similar issues related to literature and the media had previously been explored. Fadhilah et al (2023) identify how the dysfunctional nature of parental figures leads to trauma among characters in *Takopi's Original Sin*, pointing out the influence of external causal agents on psychological problems, which in this case relate to one's family background. Sari (2022), analyzing *Your Lie in April*, identifies trauma as an experience connected with loss and guilt that causes emotional distress and influences personality development. Pratama (2021), focusing on *A Silent Voice*, notes that bullying leads to emotional loneliness and makes it hard for a person to engage socially. Although such findings prove to be important, they do not combine trauma with other elements under study since trauma is viewed either as a causation or as an emotional reaction.

Moreover, trauma and morality tend to be considered independently in the field of literary psychology. In narratives like *Takopi's Original Sin*, however, trauma has a direct impact not only on emotions (such as isolation) but also morality as it results in deviant actions that can be viewed as psychological strategies of self-preservation.

Consequently, the current research intends to examine the role of chronic trauma in the development of isolation and maldevelopment of the main character in *Takopi's Original Sin* based on Judith Herman's theory of trauma and Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory. This research will attempt to contribute to the current knowledge of trauma not only as a psychological trigger but also as a powerful source of development that forms one's personality and moral vision of life. In its turn, this study will be an important contribution into the field of literary psychology.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Furthermore, psychological trauma can be defined as another theme explored within the two disciplines. According to Herman (1992), the term "trauma" and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) refer to the psychological condition experienced after prolonged exposure to interpersonal violence, neglect, and exploitation. In contrast to simple trauma triggered by one event, complex trauma leaves the victim in a confused state, in which he/she experiences emotional dysregulation, helplessness, and disintegration of the self. It can be portrayed in literature as a condition involving withdrawal, silence, and perception of reality through skewed views.

Erikson's (1950) psychosocial development theory presents another theoretical framework used in the exploration of identity development. As suggested by Erikson, there are several psychosocial crises that people have to overcome in the course of development. They include trust vs mistrust, identity vs role confusion, and intimacy vs isolation, among others. People who successfully pass through each crisis develop into psychologically healthy adults. On the contrary, those who fail to cope with the above crises have problems in terms of psychosocial adjustment. Psychological trauma sustained during particular psychosocial crises results in "developmental derailment."

Recently, various studies based on the theories of literary psychology and media analysis have used their insights to analyze trauma in literature. For example, Sari (2022) has identified that

trauma in the story *Your Lie in April* arises from loss and feelings of guilt, which lead to emotional repression and loss of self-identity. Likewise, Pratama (2021) highlights that bullying causes social isolation and affects one's capacity to establish healthy relationships within *A Silent Voice*. In a similar manner, dysfunctional parenting plays an important part in creating trauma in *Takopi's Original Sin*, according to Fadhilah et al (2026).

There are certain limitations associated with these studies. First, trauma is mostly treated as a cause or as an emotion rather than as a process in any research work. Additionally, the relation between morality and trauma has been neglected by researchers even though morality plays an important part in such narratives. Lastly, most researchers limit themselves to using a single psychological theory rather than adopting a comprehensive approach.

These deficiencies become especially apparent when analyzed from the standpoint of *Takopi's Original Sin*. Trauma in this case is not just portrayed as a state of mind but as an omnipresent factor affecting the character development, interactions between characters, and their ethical choices. The actions of the characters that can be considered unethical and even immoral can be viewed as a consequence of trauma and the disruption of the development process. Thus, the three elements mentioned above need to be studied together in order to provide a full-scale analysis.

Thus, it is proposed that this study incorporates a theoretical integration of Herman's Complex PTSD with Erikson's psychosocial development model. In this way, a complex analysis can be conducted where trauma is seen as the cause of events, the disruption of the developmental process as the process itself, and emotional isolation as the result of these phenomena. Through such an analysis, the present research hopes to make a contribution to the study of the portrayal of trauma in literature.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research makes use of the qualitative descriptive research design in studying psychological trauma and emotional isolation in *Takopi's Original Sin*. The two theories used in analyzing these concepts are Judith Herman's Trauma Theory in 1992, especially the concept of C-PTSD, and Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory in 1950, particularly developmental derailment. The two theories will be employed to examine how trauma and emotional isolation are portrayed in the story and how they serve as the outcome of the process.

The data source in this research includes dialogues, monologues, and scenes in the story of the manga titled *Takopi's Original Sin*, authored by Taizan 5. This manga was released from 2021 to 2022 by Shueisha. The data include excerpts from the manga that portray psychological trauma and emotional isolation of the characters. Additional data will be extracted from books and academic references related to the theories mentioned above.

The data collection method follows the following procedure: (1) critical reading of the manga in order to comprehend its plot line, (2) choosing quotations relevant to trauma and emotional alienation, and (3) classifying the data according to major concepts presented by Herman and Erikson.

The data analysis method is performed within the paradigm of thematic analysis. Firstly, the data are evaluated under the framework offered by Herman to establish if there are symptoms of trauma such as emotional dysregulation, disconnection, and distorted self-image among others. Secondly, the data are evaluated within the framework offered by Erikson to uncover problems in his psychosocial theory, especially those connected with stages of trust, identity formation, and intimacy. Finally, the results obtained from the two perspectives are used to demonstrate the impact of trauma on derailment of development causing emotional isolation.

To ensure the reliability of the data, this study makes use of the principle of theoretical triangulation through the application of two psychological theories which complement each other. In this way, the interpretation is strengthened through the linking of the cause of trauma (Herman) to its developmental effects (Erikson). Hence, this study methodology offers a systematic way to analyze the topic at hand.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

a. Analysis of Psychosocial Derailment and Complex Trauma in *Takopi no Genzai*

A number of cases were highlighted by the study wherein the growth process of the characters had been disrupted owing to intense environmental factors. It is evident from the results that there exists a clear relationship between unresolved psychosocial crises of Erikson and the development of Complex PTSD (C-PTSD).

b. Data Presentation of Developmental and Traumatic Indicators

The following table synthesizes textual evidence from the manga with the two primary theoretical frameworks:

Textual Evidence (Quotes)	Location	Erikson's Psychosocial Derailment	Herman's Anatomy of C-PTSD
"I can't tell anyone. If I tell them, it'll just make things worse. I have to just take it."	Ch. 1, Vol. 1	Basic Mistrust: Fundamental belief that the social environment is hostile and unreliable.	Disruption of Attachment: The cessation of help-seeking behavior due to perceived betrayal by caregivers.

"It's all because of you... if you weren't here, Mom would be happy!"	Ch. 3, Vol. 1	Derailment of Initiative: Guilt replaces the child's natural drive for self-expression.	Alteration in Self-Perception: Internalization of the perpetrator's blame, leading to "Toxic Shame."
"I don't need a tomorrow. I just want Chappy back."	Ch. 6, Vol. 1	Stagnation of Hope: A collapse of the first "Basic Virtue," resulting in developmental paralysis.	Loss of Systems of Meaning: The destruction of a coherent sense of the future or personal safety.
"I did it. I killed her. Now we can finally be happy, right?"	Ch. 8, Vol. 1	Role Confusion: A breakdown of moral identity; the adoption of extreme survival roles.	Dissociative Defense: A traumatic alteration in consciousness to normalize or justify violent acts.
"Why is everyone so mean? I just wanted to make everyone smile-pi!"	Ch. 15, Vol. 2	Incompetence: The inability to achieve "Industry," resulting in pervasive feelings of inferiority.	Hyperarousal & Hypervigilance: A chronic state of anxiety focused on controlling the environment to prevent pain.

c. Summary of Findings

Through the analysis of the data above, the following thematic findings were established:

1. **Foundation Failure:** In the absence of security during the "Trust vs. Mistrust" stage, there is a cascade effect, rendering the next stages of Autonomy and Initiative unattainable.
2. **Identity Under Captivity:** The identities of the characters are not built on normal exploratory experiences, but rather are "forced Role Confusions," as defined by Herman as "Psychological Captivity," wherein the child cannot escape from his abusive family situation.
3. **Symptomology of Maladaptation:** Behaviors viewed as failures of morals or as "original sin" are actually psychosocial maladaptations, which act as survival techniques for a derailed psyche under conditions of complex trauma.
4. **Verbalization and Re-railing:** It is found that the healing process starts when the characters progress from isolation to Reconnection, which is the third stage of recovery according to Herman.

Discussion

This study reveals that trauma in *Takopi's Original Sin* has been used not only as an element of psychology but also as the driving force behind the change in emotional development, development itself and even morality of the characters. Based on the integration of concepts presented by Judith Herman in regards to Complex PTSD and Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, it is apparent that trauma works as a basis for the characters' issues and the development as the process while emotional loneliness works as a result of the former two elements. However, apart from the described causal relationship, one may conclude that the three elements discussed are intertwined as trauma constantly transforms the individual's sense of self, relationships with others and morality.

Based on the information presented by Judith Herman, it becomes clear that the trauma the characters suffered in *Takopi's Original Sin* can be described as prolonged (chronic) and interpersonal, which means that the effects the characters have undergone are caused not only by their psychological issues or some traumatic event(s) in particular, but rather because of continuous neglect, violence and abuse in general. In such way, trauma experienced by Shizuka and other characters can be characterized

From the perspective of Erikson's stages of development, this kind of trauma has led to something which can be described as developmental failure on a cascade principle. Because the first stage of development, trust vs mistrust, is interfered with, other stages such as autonomy, initiative, and identity become equally difficult for people to pass through. This study shows that there is a link between the stages that has not been discussed before, i.e., the idea that failure in one stage leads to an overall domino effect in development. It has been noted that *Takopi's Original Sin* demonstrates this cascading effect on the individual level.

However, the integration of Herman and Erikson also reveals certain theoretical tensions. While Erikson's model assumes the possibility of eventual resolution and developmental progression, Herman's concept of complex trauma emphasizes the enduring and often irreversible nature of psychological damage. The narrative appears to align more closely with Herman's perspective, as the characters remain trapped in cycles of trauma without clear pathways toward recovery. This suggests that Erikson's stage-based model may be insufficient to fully account for extreme cases of chronic trauma, particularly those involving prolonged abuse and social neglect. Therefore, this study proposes that developmental derailment in such contexts should be understood not as delayed progression, but as a structural rupture in the developmental process itself.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that trauma significantly influences moral perception, leading to what can be described as moral ambiguity. Actions that may be interpreted as ethically deviant—such as violence or manipulation—are framed within the narrative as survival strategies rather than deliberate moral transgressions. This challenges conventional moral frameworks that assume rational agency and stable ethical reasoning. Instead, the characters' behavior reflects what may be termed trauma-conditioned morality, in which decisions are shaped by fear, insecurity, and the need for psychological survival. In this sense, morality is not absent but reconfigured under the pressure of traumatic experience.

Moreover, this approach can play a significant role in the debates in literary psychology about the connection between the representation and realism in narratives. While there are works like *Your Lie in April* and *A Silent Voice*, which represent trauma in a more optimistic manner because of its nature, the narrative of *Takopi's Original Sin* takes a darker turn. Instead of healing from the trauma experienced, the character is constantly living with the same kind of abuse from others, proving that trauma tends to be self-perpetuating and sustained by the society around us.

This study further develops past research by shifting from a cause-focused explanation of trauma to an integrative perspective where psychological, developmental, and moral aspects of the issue are linked together. Where previous studies highlighted such traumatic causes as dysfunctional parenting or bullying and viewed their consequences, such as emotional isolation, as outcomes of the experience, the current study shows that all the mentioned aspects form a continuous chain, through which trauma influences the development process, which, in its turn, affects emotional and moral spheres. The integrative approach used here helps understand the problem better in a literary context.

From the conceptual point of view, the results obtained in the course of the current research could be represented in a triad of trauma (the cause of the problem), developmental derailment (the mechanism behind the issue), and emotional isolation (the outcome of trauma). Moral ambiguity is the mediating dimension connecting inner experiences and external behavior in this case.

However, it is essential to recognize the constraints of the present research. In the first place, the interpretation of textual material involves the application of a certain perspective which might be subjective and thus biased. Furthermore, the use of mainly Western psychological models brings into question the cultural relevance of such a perspective, especially when applied to Japanese literature and considering the differences in perceptions and representations of concepts like individuality, social harmony, and emotional expression between cultures.

In summary, the present research has shown that *Takopi's Original Sin* is a work which depicts the theme of trauma in a complicated manner, addressing not only the effects of experiencing traumatic events on an individual but also the issue of development and moral aspects of the phenomenon. Thus, by applying Herman's and Erikson's approaches, one can understand the concept better.

CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis show that the psychological and emotional isolation of *Takopi in Original Sin* is primarily due to long-term exposure to traumatic events, which corresponds to Herman's definition of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The experience of trauma has negative effects on various psychosocial stages of development described by Erikson, especially at the stages of developing trust, personal identity, and intimacy. Consequently, people suffer from emotional disengagement, relationship difficulties, and self-identity issues. In this way, emotional isolation should be seen as a consequence of trauma rather than a social condition.

As one of the practical applications of the findings presented above, it is necessary to note that emotional isolation should be considered as a serious psychological condition. For this reason,

people suffering from isolation need empathy and assistance because they may have experienced emotional trauma.

As for further research, the topic could be applied to other literary pieces or forms of media in order to deepen the knowledge about trauma and isolation. In addition, it could include the use of other psychological theories or even an interdisciplinary approach in order to have a wider perspective on the problem under study.

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