

## **Psychological Structural Analysis to “A Child Called It” by Dave Pelzer**

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### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to explore a child abuse, the reason and the effect of the character’s psychological development using the theory of psychological development and structural analysis. Two approaches are used in this paper. Those are structural approach and psychology, especially developmental psychology approach. The first approach focuses on literary intrinsic elements. The second approach focuses on the character’s psychological development based on the developmental stages and tasks. Those are integrated into a psychological structural analysis. The result shows that child abuse that experienced by David is physical and psychological. He got the first stage of abuse committed by his mother who didn’t give him food and the last stage evidenced by some physical abuses when he lived with his mother. The primary reasons of David abuses are disciplinary patterns and he was regarded as a trouble maker.

**Keywords:** *Psychological structural analysis, child abuse and psychological development.*

## **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan kekerasan pada anak, alasan dan dampak dari kekerasan tersebut terhadap perkembangan psikologis tokoh dengan menggunakan teori perkembangan psikologis dan analisis struktural. Ada dua pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Pendekatan tersebut adalah pendekatan struktural dan psikologi, khususnya psikologi perkembangan. Pendekatan pertama berfokus pada unsur intrinsik sastra. Pendekatan kedua berfokus pada perkembangan psikologis tokoh berdasarkan tahap dan tugas perkembangan. Kedua pendekatan tersebut diintegrasikan ke dalam analisis struktur psikologis. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan terhadap anak yang dialami oleh David adalah kekerasan yang berupa fisik dan psikologis. Dia mendapat tahap pertama kekerasan yang dibuktikan dengan ibunya yang tidak memberinya makanan dan tahap terakhir dari kekerasan yang dibuktikan dengan beberapa hukuman secara fisik ketika ia tinggal dengan ibunya. Alasan utama David mendapatkan penyiksaan adalah pola pendisiplinan dan ia dianggap sebagai anak yang menjadi sumber masalah.

**Kata kunci:** *Analisis struktur psikologis, Kekerasan pada anak dan Perkembangan psikologis*

## **Introduction**

Novel as a genre of literary work has intrinsic elements such as character and characterization, plot and plotting, setting and point of view. Those transfer the writer's ideas to readers. Some novels are personal, seeking to explore human relationships, conflicts, desires and fears. This novel seems to appeal to readers in the way that described the writer's idea. For example, Dave Plezer, the writer of novel trilogy *A Child Called It, The Lost Boy* and *A Man Named Dave* tells his idea about child abuse in his novels. This paper only focuses on his first novel, *A Child Called It*.

David Plezer through Dave—tells about a child who tried to survive from his mother's cruelty. His father only watched without ability to help him. Even when he was legally taken by his country, his effort to be freed from his mother's shadow couldn't be stopped. Until at last he can prove that he can become a famous writer.

This paper tries to explore the kind of child abuse and its effect to a child by analyzing its character and characterization, plot and the writer's point of view. Because the problem is the psychological development of a child so it needs developmental psychology. Those theories will be integrated.

Wellek and Warren (1976:81) state 'by psychology of literature', we may mean the psychological study of the writer as type and as individual, or the study of the creative process, or the study of psychological types and laws present within works of literature, or , finally, the effect of literature upon its readers (audience psychology). It is known that psychology can be used to analyze the writer's soul, his creative process, psychological types and the concept of psychology in literature and the effect of literature works upon its readers. It can be said that there is a significant relationship between psychology and literature. Psychology helps to clarify the problems in literature and literature presents insight to psychology.

### ***Developmental psychology***

Monks, et.al (2004:1) say that the object of developmental psychology is the human development as an individual. Development refers to a process leading to bring out capabilities and cannot be repeated. Some psychologists differ in their opinion about growth and

development. Growth refers to the adding of body weight and physical's function, whereas development refers to distinctive nature of psychological condition.

Erikson approach in discussing the process of child development is to outline the stages of psychosocial development. Those are trust versus distrust (0-1 year), autonomy versus shyness and doubtful (1-3 years), initiative versus guilty (3-6 years), ability feeling versus low self esteem (6-12 years), identity and role disoriented (12-18 years), intimacy versus isolation (21-40 years/early adult), generative versus stagnation (40-65/middle adult) and ego integrity versus desperate (65-die). Those phases have their own developmental task.

Meanwhile Piaget in his theory about cognitive development explains that cognitive development is discussed based on the phase of sensoric-motoric, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational states (Piaget, 1952:18,42,153). At every process of development there is a combination of self-encouragement to maintain and develop the self-encouragement. This means that what have been achieved will be maintained and used as a basic moral for further development. As a result of the defense, one will store all the useful experience. This experience will make the person more intelligent and mature.

Kartono (1995:40) states that the combination of self-defense and encouragement of self-development is a process of new synthesis integration, namely the impulse of self realization and self-transcendence efforts. The developmental psychology also mentions that the principle of development, the main motive of life is to negate and break away from all obstacles, sense of tension, and inner

disequilibrium to reach and satisfy state of inner equilibrium. This balance would be achieved if all the requirements are met so all tension and mental disorders are lost.

## **Discussion**

By using the first person point of view (I), the narrator seemed to make the reader able to feel all feelings experienced by the character. David as the main character and is a complex figure as can be seen from the dynamics of his life. It can be seen from his efforts to survive in the face of violence committed by his mother. The character in this novel is figured in dramatic ways. The reader will know the character and his attitude from several measures taken by him to survive. In the process of reading the novel, the reader will soon be brought with the dynamism of the character who never gave up in his quest to survive the abuse.

*“I act timid, nodding to her threats. ‘Please, ‘I say to myself, ‘just let me to eat. Hit me again, but I have to have food. ‘Another blow pushed my head against the tile counter top. I let the tears of mock defeat stream down my face as storms out the kitchen, seemingly satisfied with herself. After I count her steps, making sure she’s gone, I breathe a sigh of relief. The act worked. Mother can beat me all she wants. I haven’t let her take away my will to somehow survive. I finish the dishes, then my other chores. For my reward I receive breakfast-leftover from one of my brother’s cereal bowls.” (4)*

In his very young age (6-12 years), David has known that he had to get food if he wanted to live. His effort is not only having food but also stealing, slacking off when his mother would torture him, being very obedient and others. Based on the plot of time analysis, this novel

uses flash back. The first chapter of the novel is *Rescue*. It tells about David's life at the end he got abuse from his mother, as cited in the first chapter of this novel:" 5 March 1973, Daly City, California-I'm late I've got to finish the dishes on time, otherwise no breakfast; since I didn't have dinner last night, I have to make sure I get something to eat" (3).

From this note, it can be seen that at the first narration, the narrator at this case is David who brings the reader to the situation when he had to finish his task if he wanted to get a plate of rice. In this chapter, David also tells about the rescue that was done by his school teacher and ends the abuse from his mother. Then he was brought to foster house by a police officer.

*"I run to the administration office, and I'm there in a flash. My throat is raw and still burns from yesterday's 'game' Mother played against me. The secretary leads me into the teacher's lounge. After she opens the door, it takes a moment for my eyes to adjust. In front of me, sitting around a table, are my homeroom teacher Mr. Ziegler, my math teacher Miss Woods, the school nurse, Mr. Hansen and a police officer... I have no idea that they are about to risk their jobs to save me" (9)*

Then, the story is back to the situation when he was happy with his family and when his mother still loved him:

*"In the years before I was abused, my family was 'Brady Bunch' of the 1960s. My two brothers and I were blessed with the perfect parents. Our every whim was fulfilled with love and care" (17).*

In this step through the chapter of *Good Times*, David tries to explore his mother's closeness with her children and David's admiration of his mother. *"My Mother, Catherine Roerva, was a woman of average size and appearance. I never could remember the color of her hair or eyes,*

*but Mom was a woman who glared with love for her children...*" (18).

David also told that her mother was a perfect woman for him.

*"When it came to house keeping, Mom was an absolute clean fiend. After feeding my two brohters, Ronald and Stand, and I breakfast. She would dust disinfect, scour and vacuum everything. No room in our house was left untouched. As we grew older, Mom made sure we did our part by keeping our room neat. Outside, she meticulously attended a small flower garden, which was the envy of the neighborhood, with Mom, everything she touched turned into gold. She didn't believe in doing anything halfway. Mom often told us that we must always do the best could, in whatever we did" (18-19).*

From David's story readers can know that David admired and loved her mother so much. Her mother really cared of her sons and her house. Even her neighbors were also jealous with the way she managed her house. It is told by David when he was four (4) years. According to Kohlberg moral developmental psychology (1968:12) a child in this age is on the sensoric-motoric and preoperational phase by interpreting a thing or an event. David also uses his sensoric-motoric by starting to evaluate his house condition and his mother which makes him comfortable. This comfortable state can be seen from his happiness when he lived with his parents and his brothers. At Halloween and Christmas celebrations his mother always gave the best things to him. Because his father was a fire man who worked for 24 hours, he and his brothers spent most of the time with his mother. Base on the Erikson psychosocial development, David didn't get bias of development when he was in 0-11 months or in the phase of trust versus un trust and when he was in one (1) until three (3) years old or in phase of autonomy versus shyness and doubtful. Because of that, David had really trust on

his mother. His mother's love in giving his daily needs when he was hungry or thirsty made him feel comfortable. He was never scared of his mother and it also made his mother close to her children. At that time, he was the youngest child in his house. He could play with his brothers well.

The story develops with his mother changing and to ill treat David as the conflict in this story emerges. In the chapter of *Bad Boys*, David told that his mother's treatment to him changed dramatically because of disciplinary reasons. His mother often gave punishment to him. It made him afraid of his mother. His fear is the conflict source in this story and makes the story more developed.

*“About this time, Mom’s behavior began to change radically. At times while father was away, she would spend the entire day lying on the couch, dressed only in her bathrobe, watching television. Mom got up only to go to the bathroom, get another drink or heat leftover food. When she yelled at us, her voice changed from nurturing mother to the wicked witch. Soon, the sound of Mother’s voice began to send tremors down on my spine. Even when she barked at one of my brothers, I’d run to hide in our room, hoping she would soon return to the couch, her drink and her tv show” (30).*

It can be seen from the quote that the abuse happened when David's father was not at home. His mother's attitude changed and this change made David afraid. His mother who was initially described as an ideal mother for her children, day by day her character changes. The problem between David and his mother developed more as when his mother often gave David punishment. The punishment started from standing at the corner of the bed to smashing and pinching.



*“SMACK!” Mother hits me in the face, and I topple to the floor. I know better than to stand there and take hit, I learned hard way that she takes that as an act of defiance, which means more hits, or worst of all, no food”(37)*

*“Mother claimed that she had seen me that very day playing on the grass, which was absolutely forbidden by her rules. I quickly answered that I never played on the grass. I knew Mother had somehow made a mistake. My reward for observing Mother’s rules and telling the truth was a hard pinch in the face” (40-41)*

In the chapters *The Fight for Food* and *While Father is Away*, David tells his mother abused to him. In exploring those abuses, the narrator brings the reader to the phase of the end of the character’s torturing. Plot of the story presented the existing conflict between David and his mother and makes it interesting. The worst punishment that David got from his mother was when she didn’t allow David going out with his father and his brothers when they went out.

*“...Once in the cabin, I was scolded for making too much noise. For my punishment, I was not allowed to go with father and my brothers to the super slide. I sat on a chair in a corner, shivering, hoping that something would happen so three of them wouldn’t leave. I know mother had something hideous on her mind. As soon as they left, she brought out of Russell’s diapers. She smeared the Diaper on my face. I tried to sit perfectly still. I knew if I moved, it would only be worse. I didn’t look up. I couldn’t see Mother standing over me; but I could hear her heavy beating.”(53)*

David gets abused when he was four (4) years old. According to Erikson (1963:19) a child in this age is on the initiative versus guilty phase (3-6 years). In this phase the child started to develop his independency by his effort to wear his own cloth, to take his own food and to go to the toilet. David didn’t get development problem in this

phase because at the beginning of his life, he felt comfortable living with his family. He had been able to control himself. The abuses continuously happened to David. David hoped that his father could help him but he never got it. His father only saw what his mother had done to him. It made David hates his father so much:

*”...when I open them, I stared at Father who turned away to avoid my pain. At that moment I hated Mother to the end, but I hated father even more”. (64).*

According to Kohlberg moral development (1968:15), David’s feeling to his father emerged because David was in pre-conventional phase. He had learned about good and bad and he had known that what his mother had done to him was not good but he didn’t get support from his father. He came to hate his father as the result of his disappointment.

After David was pushed to eat his own vomit, his punishment was changed to the ammoniac. Because he couldn’t eat, his mother forced him to drink that liquid. As the child who didn’t know the dangers of the ammoniac, David thought that his punishment was too easy for him. He only needed to open his mouth and his problem would be finished. According to Piaget cognitive development (1952:42), the child 7 until 11 years old, his thinking is more rationale, imaginative, and can explore more object or situation to solve his problem. But his thinking ability isn’t completed. It also happened to David. His knowledge about the dangerous of the ammoniac wasn’t sufficient.

*“Without hesitation I opened my mouth, and mother rammed the cold spoon deep into my throat. Again I told myself this was all too easy, but moment later I couldn’t breathe. My throat seized. I stood wobbling in front of Mother, feeling as if my eyes were going to pop out of my skull...” (75)*

As a result of that punishment, David nearly died.. He couldn't breathe, his throat was burned and his body seized. But it didn't make his mother stop to punish him. His mother stabbed her knife into David's stomach accidentally.

*"She tried to regain her balance, snapping at Russell to let go of her leg, while she continued to scream at me. By then, her upper body looked like rocking chair that was out of control. Forgetting about her useless threats, I imagined that the old drunk was going to fall flat on her face. I focused all my attention on Mother's face. Out of the corner of my eye I saw blurred object fly from her hand. A sharp pain erupted from just above my stomach. I tried to remain standing, but my legs gave out, and my world turned black" (87)*

David thought with this accident his punishment would be over, but he was wrong. His mother still asked him to finish his food and wash all the dishes in thirty minutes. With his body still weak and in very severe pain, David followed his mother's instructions. This condition is like the climax of the story, but the tensions of the story still continued. His mother dunks David's face in the bathroom sink. Those abuses made David were very scared of his mother.

According to Hurlock psychological development (1991:131) about the changing relationship between children and their parents, it can happen because of the concept of a good child. If the child doesn't fulfill what his parents needed, his parents often become critical and punished. It also happened into David's mother who thought that David isn't a good boy because he always breaks her rules and always be able to have tactics to face each of her punishment and it makes her annoyed and made her give more and even worse punishment. "...*This*

*will teach The Boy to quit stealing food!*" (76). Her mother's reason giving hard punishments to stop David's habit stealing food in his school.

As 4-6 years child or in initiative versus guilty phase in Piaget (1952) cognitive development phase, David started his initiative by planning and trying new things. In his development phase he thought that it may not give a chance to him for fighting and he didn't have another choice to be freed from his torturing. The climax of this story is in chapter *The Lord Prayer* as the end of the chapter of *A Child Called It*. This chapter told about David's abuse when he was a proud of his writing was the best in his school and his teacher was very a proud of him. He hoped his mother would do the same but his mother never appreciated his works. His mother thought he was only it that had meaningless. His mother amuck made him had no spirit to survive.

*"...There is nothing you can do to impress me! Do you understand me? You are nobody! An it! You are nonexistent! You are a bastard child! I hate you and I wish you were dead! Dead! Do you hear me? Dead!" (140).*

Views of psychosocial development suggested by Erickson (1963:42), when David got abused from his mother, he was at the phase of feeling ability versus low self esteem (6-12 years). In this phase the child will begin to learn to work together to compete through academic activities. As well as David, he felt very happy when he succeeded in writing and it made his teacher proud of him.. He hoped her mother would also be nice to him when she knew that he was doing well in his school, but he was wrong. His mother did not appreciate and reward for all that was done by him. As a result David felt that he was useless and

he becomes low self-esteem. All his efforts to prove to his mother that he doesn't like what his mother's thought was gone. David finally found that he was only it just like what his mother said and his presence was only making a problem in his family. He did not have a passion for life. He resigned to that done by her mother until she eventually rescued by the teachers at his school.

David was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade when he was rescued. He started to get abused when he was in kindergarten, which was the age of 3-4 years. Refers to Kohlberg's moral development (1968:20) at that time child is in pre-convention at the second phase. It can be seen from David's-oriented attitude to punishment and obedience; he was very obedient to all that was done by his mother. The obedience to his mother made him more afraid of his mother. As a child he only felt fear when her mother suddenly punished him when his brother also did the same thing.

*“As a small child, I probably had a voice that carried farther than others. I also had the unfortunate luck of getting caught at mischief, even though my brothers and I were often committing the same ‘crime’. In the beginning, I was put in a corner of our bedroom. By this time, I had become more afraid of Mom. Very afraid. I never asked her to let me come out. I would sit and wait for one of my brothers to come into our bedroom, and have him ask if David could come out now and play” (29).*

According to Kohlberg moral development (1963:20) at the pre-convention phase, the child should get strong motivation from his family. This motivation is to make the child able to differentiate between good and bad in his attitude. But if the task of child's development isn't fulfilled, the child will not understand about good and bad label and he will be scared. Then it's happened to David. He doesn't

understand what his mistake was. He only knew that he got a lot of punishment from his mother.

With these experiences David became more mature than his age. He suffered early aspiration level; the level of struggle leads a higher level. With his attitudes, he was able to find a way to survive. He realizes, crying is not a settlement. He must be able to think quickly and act correctly when faced his mother. It is in line with the thinking of the Monks who said that by the encouragement to survive, someone will save all his useful experiences (2004:178).

Then, with those experiences, someone will be cleverer and mature and have deeper appreciation of life. Every stage of life has just achieved a form of temporary equilibrium point of departure for the effort and new activities. David, with his experiences, began to look for ways to be able to withstand his mother's abuse. *“Standing alone in that damp, dark garage, I knew, for the first time, that I could survive. I decided that I would use any tactic. I could think of defeat Mother or delay her from her grisly obsession” (43).*

In term of cognitive development, Piaget (1962), David's capabilities in addressing the abuses because when he was in 6-11 years old he is in concrete phase, he has been able to form his knowledge. David has been able to analyze the events in his life. He thought if he wanted to survive he had to have a tactics to face his mother.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis above, it can be seen that the writer uses flash back of the plot in telling his story. The writer made the story interesting and complex by revealing the tensions of the problem. The

writer wants the reader to feel what has been experienced by the character with using 'I' as the point of view of his narration.

By analyzing the structural point of the literature along with psychological development approach, it can be seen that David gets from the first to the last stages of the child abuse. The sign of the first stage is that he didn't get food from his mother and the sign of the last stage is physical abuse such as slap in his face, pinch etc.

The primary reason of the abuse that David received is disciplinary. His mother thought that David wasn't a good son so he should be disciplined by giving a lot of punishment that were very heavy for David. His mother also was annoyed with David because he was always able to face her punishment.

The effect of the abuse was that David became scared of his mother. He also feels disappointed with his father because he couldn't help him. David didn't understand why he got a lot of abuse from his mother because he was still a kid when he got those abuses.

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