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**Representations of Mental Health in Contemporary American Literature:
Exploring the Portrayal of Mental Health in a Psychoanalytical Reading
Case Study of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman (2017)**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master's
in literature and civilization

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Dedication

With overflowing gratitude, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my family, to whom I owe every achievement. Their tireless love and support have contributed to the very essence of who I am today.

To my rock, my mentor, my father, who has been my source of strength during this journey.

To my everlasting inspiration, my mother, who shaped me with her grace and boundless love.

I honour you H.B because you guided my path from afar through the light of our shared memories.

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Abstract

In contemporary American literary works, mental health is presented differently. These works depict a blurry line between sanity and lunacy; however, the clarification of the concept requires further studies so that the meaning and the interpretation of the concept may be grasped. This study aims to contribute to the growing understanding of how authors depict issues of mental health and expound the role of social conversations about mental health issues and awareness in contemporary American literature. Moreover, this study discusses mental illness stigma and social support in Gail Honeyman's *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. To achieve the aim of the study, three questions are asked: First, how do contemporary authors depict issues of mental health in fictional characters? Second, how can creative storytelling contribute to meaningful and stimulating conversations about mental health awareness? Third, how can creative storytelling illuminate personal issues? This study adopts a qualitative approach, with a primary focus on textual analysis of depictions of mental health in society in contemporary American literary works. After the textual-conceptual analysis, it appears that mental health is represented differently from one individual to another based on personal experiences and growth, mostly when each individual is influenced by past-traumatic events. Nonetheless, when social support and hope are present, the situation does not always end with depression and long-lasting mental illness stigma; instead, it blossoms into redemption, healing, and giving self- second-chances.

Keywords: Mental Health; Mental Illness Stigma; PTSD; Recovery; Social Support.

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents	iv
General Introduction	6

Chapter One: Analytical Representation of Mental Health

Introduction	11
1.1 Definition of Mental Health	11
1.2 Mental Health in Nineteenth-Century Literature	12
1.3 Mental Health in Twentieth-Century Literature	14
1.3.1 The Functions of Mental Health in Twentieth-Century Literature.....	15
1.4 Mental Health in Twenty-First-Century Literature	16
1.5 Importance of the Portrayal of Mental Health in Contemporary Literature.....	17
1.6 The Contribution of Literature to the Understanding of the Complexities of Mental Health	19
Conclusion.....	20

Chapter Two: Psychological Analysis of *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*

Introduction.....	21
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2.1 Thematic Analysis	21
2.1.1 Loneliness and Isolation.....	21
2.1.2 Trauma and Family Dynamics	23
2.1.3 Mental Health Stigma.....	24
2.1.4 Redemption and Salvation.	25
2.1.5 Hope and Second Chances	26
2.1.6 Coping and Misunderstanding	29
Conclusion.....	30

Chapter Three: in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*

Introduction	31
3.1 Critical Assessment of Depictions of Mental Health.	31
3.1.1 Relatability of the Character.....	31
3.1.2 Portrayal of Real-Life Plots.....	32
3.1.3 Depictions of Mental Health	33
3.1.4 Psychological Depictions.	36
3.1.5 Depictions of Therapy and Counselling.....	37
3.2 The Analysis of the Framework	38
3. 2.1 Literary Elements	39
3.3 The Use of Literary Allusions	39
3.4 The Contextualization of the Findings.	40
3.5 The Examination of the Characters.....	42
Conclusion.....	44

General Conclusion	45
Appendix A 'Biography and Bibliography of The Author'	48
Appendix B 'Front and Back Covers of The Novel'	50
Works Cited.....	52
Abstract in Arabic.....	58

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad's *The Idiots*, Edgar Allen Poe's *The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether's*, and Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* are examples of novels with mental health as a major theme. Mental illness is presented differently through these texts, but they all depict a blurry line between sanity and lunacy. The central focus for the analyses of these texts is to show how mental illness is presented through the interpretation of language, point of view of the characters, and the stories that depict different diagnoses of mental illness.

The short stories and novels are all written in different decades of the twentieth century; therefore, it is possible to trace the development of psychiatry through the texts. They situate different problems attached to mental illness; in addition, the theories of treatment and execution also differs between the narratives. Mental illness as seen in these texts is closely connected to relationship, more specifically to family relationship, marital relationship, and doctor-patient relationship. As a literary theme, it now occurs more often and more openly than previously. These types of theories enable a discussion around the literary interpretation and show a clear connection between the content of texts and mental illness as a literary topic.

Lilian Feder states that literature about mental illness has existed since the fifth century B.C.E., but the scope and visibility of the topic has changed towards modern times (279). In her preface of *Idioms of Distress: Psychosomatic Disorders in Medical and Imaginative Literature*, Feder explains: "I have attempted to write not a history of madness in literature but a study of representative literary explorations of the deranged mind" (279). Feder asserts that mental illness is and has a history of being a taboo topic.

Critical and narrative theories play a significant role in examining representations of mental health in literature. Feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic approaches allow for

nuanced analyses of representations of mental health issues and the powerful relations inherent in these representations. For example, Elinor Cleghorn in her book *Unwell Women* explore how gender influences representations of mental illness and highlight the of identities.

As regards postcolonial theory, Frantz Fanon particularly in his book *'The Wretched of the Earth*, allows us to examine how colonial history and oppression contributes to the construction of mental health narratives in literature from different regions and proposes insights into decolonizing mental health .

As for psychoanalytic approaches, such as Sigmund Freud *The Interpretations of Dreams* and *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, they address the symbolic and unconscious aspects of mental health expressions and provide interpretations that go beyond surface-level expressions.

Narrative theory, on the other hand, focuses on narrative techniques used in literature to convey mental health experiences delving into the protagonist's descent into mental illness like Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. According to the cognitive narratologist David Herman *Narratology*, narrative medicine explores how the structure, language, and influence of readers' perceptions shape the portrayal of mental health (2009). By analysing narrative decisions such as point of view, voice, and temporal aspects, we gain important insight into how authors present and discuss mental health topics (Rita Charon 2006). Narrative medicine, in particular emphasizes the empathetic potential of storytelling in promoting the understanding of mental health issues and reducing the stigma around its issues (Arthur Frank 2019).

To explore these critical and narrative perspectives more thoroughly, scholars frequently refer to significant works of literary theory. Foundational texts for critical approaches such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), and Sigmund Freud's

The Interpretation of Dreams (1899), include theories that can be applied on mental health in literature.

As to narrative theory, influential works such as Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1972), David Herman's *The Basic Elements of Narrative* (2009), and Rita Caron's *Narrative Medicine: Celebrating the Narrative of Illness* (2006), are all works that offer insight into the psychology of humans. Integrating these critical and narrative frameworks enhances our understanding of how literature shapes societal perceptions and discussions about mental health.

In research, examining mental health in literature is crucial for authors, critics, and readers. This topic encompasses an array of complex themes and emotions central to human experiences, making it an important subject of exploration within contemporary literary works. Modern literature serves as a powerful mirror reflecting the challenges and complexities of our time. Recently, representations of mental health in fiction have become increasingly nuanced and diverse, moving beyond stereotypical portrayals to address the complex experiences of people suffering from a variety of psychological issues (Andrew Solomon 2001).

A frequent issue in the representation of mental health in literature is the reinforcement of stigmatizing stereotypes and misconceptions. Even with the increasing awareness and advocacy for mental health, many books like those of Kay Redfield Jamison (1995) still depict characters with mental illnesses in a limited and often sensational manner (Elaine Showalter 1985). Such depictions can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, like associating mental illness exclusively with violence or portraying people with mental health problems as inherently unpredictable or dangerous. The consequences of such representations can maintain social stigma misconceptions about mental health and foster a culture of fear and discrimination. Additionally, the tendency to romanticize and trivialize mental health issues in literature can

diminish the seriousness of these conditions and reduce the empathy and support needed by those affected.

This dissertation is expected to contribute to the understanding of representations of mental health and the stigmatized stereotypes and misconceptions in contemporary literature. It focuses on analysing ‘*Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*’ (2017) by Gail Honeyman. This study employs literary analysis, consisted of few focus points showing that the literary theme can be excerpted from the interpretation of language, point of view, and characters in the texts. Furthermore, it explores the effectiveness of literary devices in conveying the subjective experience of mental illness. Considering the role of literature in reducing stigma and promoting empathy for people with mental health problems (Andrew Solomon 2012), it will also gain insight into the potential of literature for contributing to positive social change and mental health awareness.

By exploring the intersection of mental health and contemporary literature, this research attempts to provide valuable insight into how storytelling can illuminate personal issues and contribute to broader social conversations about mental health awareness and social inclusion. This discovery has the potential to enrich discussions in literary analysis and deviates concerning the topic of mental health. Furthermore, it could serve as a catalyst for inspiring new creative endeavour aimed at reducing stigma surrounding mental health and fostering greater empathy and understanding of the mental health journey. Addressing these problematic representations in literature fosters a more nuanced and accurate understanding of mental health, fosters empathy, and opens up open conversations that help reduce and break down harmful stereotypes.

To frame the scope of this dissertation, three key questions are asked:

- How do contemporary authors depict mental health issues in the core of fictional characters?
- How can creative story telling contribute in boarder social conversations about mental health awareness?
- How can creative storytelling illuminate personal issues?

This dissertation adopts a qualitative approach and focuses on in-depth textual analysis of a selected corpus of contemporary American literary work. The analysis draws on critical theories of mental health, narrative theories, and cultural studies to interpret the representations within Gail Honeyman's novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*.

The current research consists of three chapters, each exploring a different essential variable. In the first chapter an investigation of the changing discourse of interpretations on mental health in society and how it is reflected in writing is conducted; besides, examination of the impact of restorative progressions, societal developments, and social shifts on the depiction of mental well-being is carried out. In the second chapter, we provide an outline of the psychological analysis of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*. In the final chapter, evaluation of the analysis of the portrayal of social expectations of mental health in Gail Honeyman's novel is performed.

CHAPTER ONE: Analytical Representations of Mental Health

In this chapter the representations of mental health during the last three centuries will be briefly examined, knowing that people around the world have been suffering from mental health since time immemorial. Whilst it is important to appreciate that mental disorders have always existed, we must note that their social perceptions have been changing as humankind has evolved throughout history.

1.1 Definition of Mental Health

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that empowers people to manage with the stresses of life, realize their capacities and abilities, learn and work well and to contribute to their community efficiently (Jane Shemilt, May 3, 2020). It is a fundamental component of health and well-being that supports our person and collective capacities to make choices, build relationships and shape the world we live in (World Health Organization WHO). Mental health may be seen as an essential human right that is vital to personal, community, and socio-economic improvement, and it is more than the nonappearance of mental disorders¹ (DR Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus).

Mental health exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced in an unexpected way from one person to the another, with shifting degrees of difficulty and trouble and an exceptional diversity within social and clinical results. Individuals with psychological and biological components, such as enthusiastic skills, emotions, substance use and genetics can

¹ Shemilt, Jane, 'Tracing the portrayal of mental disorders in literature over time, through five books', on CrimeReads (3 May 2020)

make them more defenceless and powerless regarding mental health issues² (Dr 'Tedros World Health Organization).

Risks can manifest themselves at all stages of individuals' life, but those that happen during developmentally delicate periods, particularly early childhood, are especially inconvenient. (Tedros Adhanom). For instance, cruel parenting and physical punishment are known to weaken children's health; in addition, bullying could be a driving risk factor for mental health conditions Each single risk has restricted predictive strength. Most people do not create a mental health condition in spite of their exposure to a risk; eventually, numerous people with no known risk still develop a mental health condition. (World Health Organization) In any case, the collaboration determinants of mental health serve to improve or weaken mental health. Mental health conditions incorporate mental disorders and psycho-social disabilities as well as other mental states related with critical trouble or risk of self-harm³. (Nationally Representative US Sample: P:92)

1.2 Mental Health in Nineteenth-Century Literature

Mental health was a common and prevalent subject in nineteenth-century writing. The field of psychology and understandings of mental well-being as we know them nowadays were beginning to develop in this period, and writers and artists might play a part just as important as researchers and logicians within the arrangement of this developing discipline. In spite of the fact that it is presently an obsolete term for Victorian creators and readers, "madness" enveloped an entirety run of distinctive conditions which are nowadays perceived as mental disorders and illnesses such as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Although it was published in the late nineteenth century, it addresses themes of mental illness in the sense of

²Mental Health." World Health Organization, World Health Organization, . Accessed 8 June 2024.

³Physical Punishment and Mental Disorders

madness and its restrictive treatment of women's mental well-being during the Victorian era. Those suffering from madness who were often on those women, might pull back from the world waste away or even be hidden and bolted absent. Whether they were locked up for their own good for the security of those around them or because their condition and practices were dishonourable. (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus)

Moreover, mental health lies at the dim heart of a few of the most prominent and most well-known books within the world, reflecting its power to drive a story; therefore, readers become profoundly captivate, like *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt and *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara, which are stories that carries deep emotional scars from traumatic different childhood. (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus)

Mental well-being is considered as if we are reeled in by our fear of the obscure, by the unexplored obscurity out there that it represents as well as the terrifying plausibility that it is additionally inside us. Indeed, mental health is an outdated term including an assortment of mental disorders and illnesses. The knowledge that so numerous of us are on a spectrum that ranges from mellow uneasiness to extreme psychosis.⁴ This makes the literary representations of the mentally unwell compelling as well as perplexing (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus).

Since mental health is diagnosed by doctors, it could additionally be characterized by society, because society chooses what makes behaviour⁵ abnormal, undesirable or indeed "mad."⁶ Mental illness and suicide are on the rise and so is stigma. Stories which let us inside the mind of sufferers are key to the creation of empathy and understanding such as *Turtles All*

⁴ Psychosis is a mental health condition where a person breaks from reality like hallucinations.

⁵ Behaviour is the way persons act.

⁶ Clinically, it refers to irrational behaviour or dissociation from reality. Sociologically, it labels behaviours that deviate from norms and expectations.

the Way Down by John Green which tells the story a teenager that deals with (OCD) which is obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus).

1.3 Mental Health in Twentieth-Century Literature

In the twentieth century, attitudes toward mental health in literature began to change. Gone was the portrayal of the madwoman in the attic and the Romantic woman sighing over lost loves. Part of the change was in the medium of writing about mental health. Instead of poems or novels, there was a shift toward authors drawing on their own experiences of mental illness to inform their writing (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus).

This shift meant that twentieth-century literature about mental health brought with it a more sympathetic approach to mental health in literature. There was a recognition of the experience of the sufferer rather than just the reactions of those around them, and the causes of mental illnesses began to be explored.

Portrayals of mental health in twentieth-century literature raised important philosophical questions exploring the complexities of human consciousness, identity, and societal norms, those questions may be seen in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, *Sartre's portrayal challenges ordinary ideas of sanity by depicting mental distress as a philosophical request into the limits of human understanding*. Mental health or more specifically mental illnesses are sometimes shown to be a social product, resulting from repression, greed or some other socially sanctioned values. Political interpretations of mental health show madness as a label that stigmatize and suppress individuals to establish power structures on those who are seen as threats as in the case of Michel Foucault in his work *Madness and Civilization* in 1961, he traces the historical development of mental health in Western society emphasizing on how madness is a concept socially constructed by political authorities to exert discipline over marginalized people, that

this strategy of social control is applied by those with political power on those who would try to subvert them. (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus).

1.3.1 The Functions of Mental Health in Twentieth-Century American Literature

While mental health has been a prominent theme in literature since ancient times, twentieth-century writers have found it particularly suited to portraying the modern world (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus). Many artists have suggested that the First and Second World Wars and the increased mechanization of the twentieth century have contributed to a sense of growing psychic imbalance. These writers have additionally equated madness with an escape from an existence that has become overwhelmingly complex. In twentieth-century feminist literature, for example, madness has represented a form of freedom and rebellion for intelligent, ambitious women who rejected the passive roles assigned to them by patriarchal society⁷.

Mental health has also served as a metaphor for the creative process, and many critics have debated the relationship between creativity and mental instability making it a significant debate in literature, psychology and artistic circles. For example, the famous Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh who is a prime example of the tortured artist archetype, has struggled with mental illness such as depression and psychosis, which were often reflected in his expressive paintings, that powerfully represented his inner struggles like '*Starry Night*' and '*Sunflowers*'. These types of art can be interpreted as a coping mechanism for mental instability between creativity and psychological turmoil.

Mental health in literature was also considered closely connected to religion. Literature has portrayed mental health throughout history as religious beliefs that evolved different social perceptions of mental illness. In Medieval literature, it was viewed as manifestations of divine

⁷ It is a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family or a society controlled by men who use power for their advantages.

punishment or possession; Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* possess narratives in which moral corruption and torture suggested a connection between spirits and mental anguish. Although mental illness has always been seen as a form of sickness, its causes differ through centuries such as in ancient civilization like Greece and Rome, where mental illnesses were seen as divine punishments by gods like Dionysus. Similar beliefs were during Middle Ages and Renaissance, where it was thought that sickness was linked to sins and moral weakness. It was not until the nineteenth century, that modern psychiatry and medical sciences led to the shift towards mental illness as a physiological and neuro-biological conditions.

Furthermore, as a sub-field of disability studies, "mad studies" deal specifically with representations of mental distress rather than physical otherness. As an emerging academic discipline, Mad studies examine social constructions of mental health and it challenges the old traditional medical models about mental illness, it rather focuses on comprehending mental distress throughout social and cultural lenses than seeing it as individual biological pathology, as an example Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* or Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. These novels examine how "madness" enables writers to convey certain meanings or produce certain stories. In minor characters, these meanings are implanted into characters' function within the symbolic model of disability. Madness works also as a device for plot, mental depth (of other characters) and thematic resonance. On stage, in theatre for example these meanings change as they occupy the social/political/cultural model of disability instead of the therapeutic or typical models, their purpose is beyond depicting individual psychological turmoil only, it takes further implications and meanings once seen through social lenses. As in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the character's madness Hamlet serves both as a plot device and a tool to explore deeper themes, moral dilemmas and the consequences of political intrigues.

1.4 Mental Health in Twenty-First-Century Literature

Today, we are far more open about mental health than in years gone by, and today's perception regarding mental health has become far more sensible. We are still a long way from dismantling all taboos and stigma around mental health, but society as a whole is far more ready to acknowledge mental health issues—including in literature. Mental health in twenty-first-century literature is characterized by its diversity, authenticity, and commitment to challenging stigma and promoting understanding. Through authentic depictions of lived experiences, authors challenge stereotypes⁸, confront stigma, and foster empathy among readers, inviting them to explore the intricate interplay between psychology, society, and personal identity⁹.(Goffman 1963).

1.5 Importance of the Portrayal of Mental health in Contemporary Literature

According to Jensen and Richmond, the exact portrayal of mental health in modern literature is imperative to help fight the stigma surrounding mental illness (Jensen, 2019; Richmond,2014; Scrofano,2015). Bishop (1990) states that young adults need literature to act as 'mirrors'. To accurately reflect their lives back to them as a way of affirmation (Bishop1990). Novels can be used to validate a young adult reader's lived experience by relating a story that is authentically and realistically portraying a social issue they may be experiencing. Furthermore, Wickam (2019) claims that young adult literature often deals with social issues and problems, so an update in young adult literature dealing with mental health is not a surprise (Wickham 2019). Authors regularly attempt for a basic examination of mental health, shedding light on the systemic boundaries and inadequacies that people confronting mental illness experience. Researchers have previously studied the portrayal of mental health in young adult literature. Ma (2017) studied media portrayal of mental illness and its effects. The author found

⁸ It is an often unfair and untrue belief that people may have about other people or thingsc.

⁹ Social stigma is is when someone sees you in a negative way because of your mental illness which influences your identity and the person you once were.

that often people with mental health issues were represented as “inadequate, unlikable, and dangerous” (p. 91). The study found that media representation is generally negative and contributes to mental illness stigmatization. This, in turn, leads consumers who have mental illness to avoid seeking treatment. Scrofano (2019) performed a study on young adult novels that focused on mental health issues, its purpose was to analyse contemporary young adult novels and help librarians as well as teachers understand what types of novels are being published about mental illness, and then recommend to young adults the type of story they need or want (Scrofano 2019, 3-4).

While Scrofano studied young adult literature and novels for mental illness representations. Irwin and Moeller (2010) analysed graphic novels for exclusivity of disability. Irwin and Moeller cited in the *27th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* in the United States, that six million children aged between 6 and 12 were served under the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* in 2003. This represents 9.1% of American school system’s population (Irwin and Moeller 2010 1). Irwin analysed the sample using a list created by the researchers Biklen and Bogdan of 10 disability stereotypes most commonly found in the media, which are (Biklen and Bogdan 2008):

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (1) Pitiable and pathetic | (6) laughable |
| (2) Object of violence | (7) their worst and only enemy |
| (3) sinister or evil | (8) burden |
| (4) atmosphere (background) | (9) nonsexual |
| (5) Super Crip | (10) incapability of living |

These misconceptions and stereotypes were used in order to analyse the 30 graphic novels (Irwin 2010). Moeller concluded that 12 graphic novels had at least one depiction of

those mentioned above. So according to Biklen and Bogdan's list of stereotypes, the most common one in the 12 graphic novels was the first 'pitiable and pathetic' stereotype. (Irwin and Moeller 2010). Which helped them conclude that those graphic novels only fit negative and unrealistic representations of mental health. Additionally, in contemporary literature, authors frequently examine the impact of pharmaceutical companies and the medicalization of mental illness drawing on readers to consider the complexities of mental health such as in Lauren Oliver's novel *Some time recently I Drop*. In this novel, the protagonist Samantha Kingston grapples with misery and self-destructive idealization, looking for comfort in medicine prescribed by her specialist. However, as Samantha digs deeper into her psyche, she starts to question the viability and morals of depending exclusively on medicine.

1.6 The Contribution of Literature to Understanding the Complexities of Mental Health

Literature contributes to the understanding of the complexities of mental health by the investigation of recovery and resilience. Characters set out on journeys stamped by challenges, difficulties and moments of significant transformations. They experience many forms of treatment, confront their inner demons, past traumas but all along they also gain strength from individual experiences. These may be a confirmation to the capacity of the human spirit to overcome difficulty.

By depicting the ups and downs of the recovery, literature offers readers trust, motivation, and a more profound understanding of the complexities of living with mental illness. Through the portrayal of different ways of recovery, authors emphasize that healing is not direct but a multifaceted process that unfolds over time. They highlight the importance of perseverance, self-compassion, and strength in overcoming mental health challenges.

One compelling illustration about recovery and resilience in the complexities of mental health can be found in Celeste Ng's novel *Little Fires Everywhere*, where the character Izzy

suffers from an undiagnosed mental health issue caused by family pressure and daily social expectations. As Izzy undertakes her violent journey, she stands up to her inner demons seeking for comfort but eventually comes to embrace herself at the end. Ng's depiction of Izzy's strength promotes a piercing reminder of the power of self-acceptance in the face of mental health complexities.

In the core of literature related to mental health, we come across narratives about recovery and inner strength that serve as powerful and effective counterpoints against narratives of despair and hopelessness by exhibiting characters who not only survive but flourish within the confrontation of misfortune. Literature motivates readers to believe in their own capacity of development and personal growth through stories that remind us that regardless of the fact that mental health is part of our daily life, it does not define us nor our capabilities; therefore, we should always hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the advancement of mental health representations over the past three centuries emphasizing on the fact that Literature has played a critical part in forming perceptions of mental health, with nineteenth-century works investigating the affect of childhood trauma on emotional well-being moving forward until the twentieth-century works that digs into the societal and political measurements of mental health, addressing customary notions of rational soundness and highlighting the ways in which mental well-being can be affected by broader social variables. The following chapter will explore the novel *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman and analyse the different mental health themes presented in the novel.

Chapter Two: Analytical Exploration of

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine

In this chapter, different themes of mental health will be discussed because they constitute a significant part of the novel under study. These major themes are the psychological aspects of human traumas and conditions, the possible causes that create these psychic troubles. The final part of this chapter will also discuss a number of possible solutions to these troubles. Furthermore, the final part of the chapter will underscore the impact of these solutions on mental health. Moreover, the ability of these solutions to enhance significantly mental health will be indicated in this section of the chapter.

2. 1 Thematic Analysis

In this section, various themes such as loneliness, isolation, trauma and family dynamics, mental health stigma, redemption and salvation will be discussed.

2.1 .1 Loneliness and Isolation

These two themes are tackled very frequently throughout the whole novel. The novel begins with Eleanor who is immersed in her structured routines and isolated from social interactions. Her life is characterized by simplicity and predictability: “I don’t have a social life, for obvious reasons” (p.8). This early part of the story lays the foundation for understanding how trauma can compel individuals to maintain a facade of normalcy, concealing their internal struggles. Eleanor’s unawareness of the depth of her trauma is reflected in her casual disregard for social engagements and her reliance on alcohol to numb her emotions: “I’ve noticed that

people who regularly drink wine rarely carry a glass of water” (11). We can understand and see that Eleanor, the eponymous anti-hero, enjoys loneliness and avoids the company of people at all costs, for she is used to be isolated. Eleanor's profound sense of loneliness permeates the narrative which shapes her daily routines and interactions that are full of solitary activities like consuming pizza and alcohol. Honeyman writes: “These days, loneliness is the new cancer –a shameful, embarrassing thing, brought upon yourself in some obscure way. A fearful, incurable thing, so horrifying that you dare not mention it; other people don’t want to hear the word spoken aloud for fear that they might too be afflicted.” (35)

Honeyman expresses this isolation in terms of what is missing in Eleanor’s life and routine., such as Eleanor’s boring office job and her empty flat. This expresses a soporific silence. We are surprised at some part in the story when the phone rings and Eleanor’s mother sings down the line: “she laughed, cocktail party tinkle - the light, bright sound of a Noel Coward character enjoying an amusing exchange of bon mots on a wisteria-clad terrace.” Eleanor says of a wedding: “I sat on my own and no one asked me to dance and I was absolutely fine with that” (67). These quotes demonstrate how boring Eleanor’s life is, and how she finds salvation in loneliness and enjoys her own company.

Eleanor struggles to remember the last time she saw inside another person’s home, and how much she loves her houseplant Polly most in the world. Eleanor’s love for reading is one of her favourite hobbies. It helps her fill the emotional hole with reading. Using books and reading as panacea for the absence of close human contact justifies her formal vocabulary which is heavily laden with anachronisms. In the author’s words, she buys “comestibles” and “divests” herself of her clothes.

Seen through Eleanor's eyes, society becomes a strange place. She knows nothing of popular culture: She mistakes Zumba for a person, and Arnold Bennett for an omelette chef. Towards the conclusion it feels dreary. As an exploration into the effects of acute solitude and

isolation, we find that Eleanor's social interactions are due to emotional agnosia¹ and traumatic childhood.

Eleanor struggles against social alienation and acceptance to fit in socially because of her unconventional appearance and her awkward behaviour: "I don't understand how people are supposed to live. How do they get through the days? Other people. What do they do with them? People" (78). Her interactions with her colleagues at work are often fraught with misunderstandings and judgments.

2.1.2 Trauma and Family Dynamics

In *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, the protagonist struggles with trauma, and it is portrayed in a deeply moving and enlightening way. Eleanor is a reclusive and socially awkward woman who seems to manage her structured life effectively on the outside, but she is actually dealing with profound emotional scars from a traumatic past. Eleanor's mother represents a big scare of her past, for the fragmented memories of her abusive childhood keep resurfacing throughout the novel. We understand that her healing is intertwined with those memories and her mother who likes to adopt "the accent and argot" of places where she has been detained. The nature of the detention is not revealed, but we know that she is deprived of her epicurean tastes for honey-glazed poussin and celeriac fondants. We also know that she is clever, manipulative and a bully. As her voice becomes sly and quiet, Eleanor feels sweat on the back of her neck: "You grew inside me, your teeth and your tongue and your cervix are all made from my cells, my genes. Who knows what little surprises I left growing inside there for you, which codes I set running. Breast cancer? Alzheimer?" (145).

¹ A rare disorder where a patient is unable to recognize objects, persons, or sounds.

Through the therapy sessions and introspection at the end of the novel, we witness Eleanor confronting the demons of her past seeking to make sense of her experiences: “There are scars on my heart, just as thick, as disfiguring as those on my face. I know they’re there. I hope some undamaged tissue remains, a patch through which love can come in and flow out. I hope” (230).

2.1.3 Mental Health Stigma

We get the feeling that Eleanor is telling her story very much to herself. This is reinforced by her posing of questions of self-identity and self-worth that go unanswered. This challenges the narratives that she has internalized about herself. She muses on the chance of her dying alone and undiscovered in her flat. She asks: “Would the officers break down the front door? Find me, covering their faces, gagging at the smell?” (89). She says of a wedding: “I sat on my own and no one asked me to dance and I was absolutely fine with that” (77). But the emphasis betrays a false conviction. Eleanor internalizes the stigma associated with mental illness, often blaming herself for her struggles. She thinks: “There are days when I feel so lightly connected to the earth that the threads that tether me to the planet are gossamer thin, spun sugar. A strong gust of wind could dislodge me completely, and I’d lift off and blow away, like one of those seeds in a dandelion clock” (167).

She constantly berates herself for her perceived shortcomings, often using negative and harsh self-talk to describe herself: “I’ll always be like this, a turtle inside a shell, inside a turtle inside a shell” (244). She adds: “I’m a social leper. I’m a freak. I’m a psycho from hell” (244).

Eleanor is full of contradictions. She likes sausage rolls from Greggs, and Suetonius’s *The Twelve Caesars*. She has mittens on string and shoes with Velcro fastenings, but finds trendy Raymond’s duffle coat childish. Her Power Rangers clock, a fondness for Alphabetti Spaghetti, and her frog-shaped pouffe might cause us to sneer were it not that they counterpoise

our realization that Eleanor is a product of living the same empty existence for more than a decade.

Eleanor tends to use humour as a camouflage for her awkward reactions and situations, to hide her uneasiness. Occasionally we glimpse how troubled she is. It is uncomfortable, only made more so by the knowledge we had been laughing a moment before: “Eyelids are really just flesh curtains. Your eyes are always ‘on’, always looking; when you close them, you’re watching the thin, veined skin of your inner eyelid rather than staring out at the world” (72).

For a funny book, it is surprisingly and succinctly damning of modern life. Eleanor’s social criticism extends to loneliness, reality TV and feminine ideals:

I’d made my legs black, and my hair blonde. I’d lengthened and darkened my eyelashes, dusted a flush of pink onto my cheeks and painted my lips a shade of dark red which was rarely found in nature. I should, by rights, look less like a human woman than I’d ever done, and yet it seemed that this was the most acceptable, the most appropriate appearance that I’d ever made before the world. (191)

2.1.4 Redemption and Salvation

Throughout the story, Eleanor undergoes an informative journey of personal growth and healing despite her initial isolation barriers: “I simply didn’t have the necessary processing power, like a computer that freezes when you try to run too many programs at once” (211).

From her interactions with Raymond and Sammy, we can notice that Eleanor begins to open herself up to the possibilities of connection and acceptance which become the key catalysts for redemption. These relationships prompt Eleanor to confront her past and acknowledge the emotional wounds she has long suppressed. Through her unexpected friendship with Raymond that served as a beacon of hope in her otherwise solitary existence, she discovers the informative power of compassion, empathy and kindness. Raymond’s unwavering kindness and lack of

judgement offer Eleanor a glimpse of authentic human connection, encouraging her to reassess her self-perceptions and attitudes towards others. These helped her to overcome her sense of isolation and truly experience love and acceptance, and they pave the way for her salvation: “She looked me right in the eye (You're not ugly, Eleanor. You're beautiful). I returned her gaze. (You are the most disagreeable person I have ever met in my life) I told her” (256).

This exchange reflects Raymond's genuine care for Eleanor, challenging her negative self-perception and offering her a newfound sense of self-worth. Her journey towards recuperation is stamped by moments of passionate catharsis² and self-discovery, underscoring the versatility of the human soul within the confront of difficulty: “I don't understand how people are supposed to live. How do they get through the days? Other people. What do they do with them? People” (44).

The crush ends severely, and slowly Mummy's mischief-making fades; when her week-by-week phone calls cease altogether two-thirds through the narrative, it feels disappointing. Her mother was darkly comic, and her occasional presence influenced the locks of change in tone. From here, the story focuses on Eleanor's salvation. The counselling sessions that Eleanor took are sensitively portrayed: “The sky didn't fall in, Mummy wasn't summoned like a demon by the mere mention of her name” (233). Eleanor says: “Anyone this broken is unlikely to become whole again, and the dipsomania and obsessiveness seem too easily resolved” (234).

2.1.5 Hope and Second Chances

In one of the last parts of the novel, after Eleanor starts to believe that she can be healed and can move on, she says that anyone who is broken is unlikely to become whole again, and the dipsomania and obsessiveness seem too easily resolved. By saying this, she gives the

² The process of releasing and providing relief from repressed emotions.

impression of positive thinking and believing in healing. In other words, if we lose something of the truth in life, this novel may be an inspiring source, one of hope and transformation. Hope and second-chances are intricately woven into the fabric of Eleanor's journey towards self-discovery and healing. For instance, her friendship with Raymond which gives her hope and grapples her with the idea of a second chance is a dramatic illustration: "It's never too late to start again. Of course, it's true. But I can't help but wonder what I've lost. My life is built on a catastrophic lie, and it's too late to do anything about it now" (246). This reflection typifies Eleanor's willingness to embrace the plausibility of a new starting, in spite of the challenges and vulnerabilities that lie ahead.

Eleanor's path to healing undergoes a profound shift when she begins therapy. Her therapist Maria Temple guides Eleanor through the process of unravelling memories from her abusive mother and traumatic childhood experiences. The novel vividly portrays this therapeutic journey: "I felt the familiar sensation of an invisible knife slicing through my chest, the agony as my lungs filled with blood" (177). Through these sessions, Eleanor starts to grasp the profound impact of her mother's manipulation and cruelty, which had left her with feelings of inadequacy. The most profound moment of realization occurs when Eleanor reaches a critical juncture and tries to take her own life. This moment serves as a stark, yet transformative turning point in her journey. It compels her to directly confront her pain. In the aftermath, Eleanor recognizes her need for support and the significance of being kind to herself. She acknowledges: "You can't continue living according to your mother's rules" (178). This revelation is pivotal as it signifies Eleanor's initial step toward self-acceptance and her readiness to embark on a healing process. The pivotal moment of wakening happens when Eleanor, overwhelmed by her struggles, tries to end her life. This critical juncture forces her to directly confront her inner turmoil. Following this ordeal, Eleanor recognizes her own vulnerabilities and the significance

of treating herself with kindness: “I can’t keep living under the shadow of my mother’s expectations” (167).

This realization is transformative as it signifies that Eleanor’s journey toward self-acceptance and her commitment to seek healing is nearing. At the conclusion of the novel, Eleanor demonstrates noticeable personal growth through increased self-awareness and taking meaningful strides to reconstruct her life. Her choice to reach out to her estranged sister and her willingness to embrace new relationships showcase her resilience and development. Eleanor’s narrative offers readers guidance on the path to healing, and it emphasizes the significance of addressing one’s history. It also substantiates support and experiencing the profound impact of compassion and human connection. Eleanor’s evolution from unawareness to realization demonstrates the remarkable ability of human spirit to heal. Moreover, it offers a relatable and inspiring journey for those grappling with unresolved emotional pain. This novel underscores the idea that despite the difficult path to healing, it is eventually rewarding and promising a richer interconnected life.³

2.1.6 Coping and Misunderstandings

In *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, the realistic portrayal of coping mechanisms or the lack thereof is the most compelling aspect. Since the protagonist epitomizes the profound struggles of living with unprocessed trauma, her social isolation and awkwardness are not just quirks but manifestations of deeper psychological issues. This serves as a critical reminder that outward appearances can be deceiving, and it highlights the invisible battles many individuals are engaged in. Eleanor’s life is structured around routines that provide her with a sense of control. She holds a dull office job, shuns social interactions, and spends her weekends in

<https://medium.com/@benjamindevoe888/unveiling-the-layers-of-trauma-and-empathy-in-eleanor-oliphant-is-completely-fine-6705e3c9cdee>

solitude with alcohol. She says: “These days, loneliness is the new cancer—a shameful, embarrassing thing, brought upon yourself in some obscure way. A fearful, incurable thing, so horrifying that you dare not mention it; other people don’t want to fear that they might too be afflicted” (35). Eleanor’s loneliness is not merely a state of being but a constant battle. It reflects the stigma and misunderstanding which are often associated with mental health issues. Since she struggles with social norms and expectations, it all resulted in many uncomfortable and sometimes humorous interactions that Honeyman expresses in the novel. However, these moments highlight a more serious issue: Her poor skill stems from a traumatic childhood and the emotional neglect she endured in her life. Eleanor confesses: “I have always taken great pride in managing life alone. I’m a solo survivor - I’m Eleanor Oliphant. I don’t need anyone else- there’s no big hole in my life, no missing part of my own particular puzzle” (55). Even though this statement is defiant, it exposes her deep denial and the emotional barriers she has constructed as a defence mechanism.⁴

By expressing these types of themes, the author encourages readers to suspend judgement and reconsider initial reactions to those who may be misunderstood, those who are socially awkward or isolated. Honeyman uses depictions of Eleanor as a call for greater empathy and understanding. Honeyman urges us to look beyond appearances. Likewise, Eleanor’s relationship with Raymond, her kind co-worker, exemplifies this theme. Raymond looks past Eleanor’s abrasive exterior and reaches out with genuine kindness and concern. His consistent support helps Eleanor confront her past and start the healing process. Honeyman notes in a *Q & A* interview: “While it’s important to address physical pain, attending to emotional wounds is even more crucial. For Eleanor, this journey is long and challenging, but

⁴ <https://medium.com/@benjamindevoe888/unveiling-the-layers-of-trauma-and-empathy-in-eleanor-oliphant-is-completely-fine-6705e3c9cdee>

it ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of herself and her ability to connect with others.”⁵ Ultimately, *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* reminds us that outward appearances rarely reveal the internal struggles someone might be enduring. The author’s skilful portrayals of trauma complexities underscore the significance of empathy and human connection in the healing process. Readers are urged to set aside their judgements and adopt more compassionate views.

Conclusion

This chapter has been a study of the different themes related to mental health in the novel. Some of these themes such as trauma and isolation are negative; however, others like redemption and salvation are positive. These themes have been ascertained through close examination of the characters and events of the narrative in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*. The subsequent chapter will reveal, analyse, evaluate, and support the findings of this study.

⁵ <https://womensprize.com/archives-a-qa-with-gail-honeyman/>

Chapter Three:

Insights and Evaluation of *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*

Mental health is a complex psychological phenomenon that can profoundly impact an individual's emotional well-being. In *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, Honeyman explores this theme through the experiences of the protagonist, Eleanor Oliphant, and other characters alongside the plots. In this chapter, an assessment of the depiction of traumatic experiences in *Eleanor Oliphant Is Totally Fine* will be made. Employing a psychological approach and drawing from literary trauma experiences, the interpretation analyses how the main character, Eleanor Oliphant, faces traumas and mental health issues and how the plot unfurls to resolve her mental instability.

3.1 Critical Assessment of Depictions of Mental Health

This novel looks at some really important and sometimes less discussed mental health topics that were portrayed in the different character's daily plots in the novel.

3.1.1 Relatability of the Character

The first thing we can notice about the book is how relatable the main character can be. She is an average woman, trying to fit into the mould society has built, but at the same time she does not really care about society and what it thinks of her. She is not a busy body trying to fit in with Instagram posts, and she does not go out of her way to disrupt her weekly routine of

work. She is a creature of habit, wearing identical clothes each day, and following habitual daily and weekly routines. She works in the accounts department of a design company, but her lowly position seems out of kilter with her high intelligence (Honeyman 2017).

Eleanor enjoys routine, lives a fairly isolated lifestyle, sees no friends nor relatives, and many people can relate to that. She appears to others as someone who does not make an effort. There is an Eleanor in most workplaces: the bland, plastic bag-clutching, slightly strange person who scurries away from all collective activities. They rarely speak or say a word that is not about the matter in hand, and there is a lot of speculation around their personal life. While the fact of how much relatable Eleanor is as a character is not always easy to admit it out loud, there is a worry that it may sound boring. At first, she is not an easy character to love, but during the narration of her story we get to know more things about her past. This makes us more sympathetic to her, and we understand her need for sticking to her routine. Just like a lot of people find comfort in routine as well, it helps them feel grounded and for most it allows them to be productive. As you delve into Eleanor's past and childhood traumas, you start to wonder if Eleanor Oliphant is completely fine?

3.1.2 Portrayal of Real-Life Plots

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine deals with a lot of new scenarios which we have all encountered at some stage or we are yet to, and it is refreshing to read how someone closes off to the world generally and goes about these experiences. When we first meet her, Eleanor's behaviour is taking the idea of routine to the extreme. She communicates poorly with others, being rather too literal and pedantic for most people to tolerate. Since she is eating exactly the same dinner every night for years, having the same lunch break routine, having the exact same weekend plans week in week out, we understand her incapability to form effective relationships.

3.1.3 Depictions of Mental Health

The dominant theme in the novel is “loneliness”. Eleanor’s life gives an accurate, enthralling, and beautiful description of what loneliness might feel like. Eleanor is isolated and does not really know what it is to have friends. She thinks:

People sometimes say they might die of boredom, that they’re dying for a cup of tea, but for me, dying of loneliness is not hyperbole. When I feel like that, my head drops and my shoulders slump and I ache, I physically ache, for human contact – I truly feel that I might tumble to the ground and pass away if someone doesn’t hold me, touch me. I don’t mean a lover – this recent madness aside, I had long since given up on any notion that another person might love me that way – but simply as a human being. (269)

While most depictions of loneliness that we see surround older people, in this book the protagonist is a 30-year-old woman with no social life, and the only conversation she has on the weekend is with her houseplant, Polly. Her loneliness is palpable and would make even the most cynical of readers feel grateful for the social support they may have: “When the silence and a lowness press down and around me, crushing me, carving me like ice, I need to speak aloud sometimes, if only for proof of life” (56).

Anyone who reads the book is finding it actually relating to Eleanor more than they would like when it comes to social isolation. The novel may provide some comfort and also hope. The author writes about something so beautifully in some of the social interactions between Eleanor and members of the public. The misunderstandings and social norms not being followed cause the reader to both cringe and laugh out loud at the same time. But it speaks to a more serious subject. Some of these interactions could feel familiar to some people, due to

social anxiety, or for any number of other factors. It reminds the reader of the importance of showing patience, empathy, and love to people we come into contact with day to day as we never know their stories (Golding 2017).

For example, the beginning of chapter three delves into Eleanor's new obsession for the lack of a better word with Johnnie Lomond. She starts finding herself stuck in questioning her whole interactions with the young man and drowning into this toxic obsession. Thus, she starts seeing a counsellor, and expects answers to her questions and solutions to fight back her new obsession. In a review of *How Therapists were Portrayed in Films*, Otto Wahl found that the therapist characters in literary novels would often engage in a lot of unethical behaviour. This generally leads to the false portrayal of how therapy is in reality¹ (Brown 2018).

Humour is also one of the most obvious themes in the writing style of Honeyman's novel. The first half of the book is more of a light-hearted take on Eleanor's life. There are many moments when you laugh along as you read how Eleanor interacts and approaches people. Eleanor comes across the very anti-social and socially awkward. She is peculiar, blunt, and unintentionally funny which makes this book remarkably original. There are lots of things in this world we just accept because it is just what it is, but Eleanor questions these things which may push us also to wonder why we just do what we do.

A great example in the book is where she orders a pizza as take away for the first time, and questions how she would get the black pepper she is after on it: "I wondered how they managed with the black pepper. Would the man bring a pepper mill with him? Surely, he wouldn't grind it over the pizza while he stood on the doorstep?" (21). She finds it difficult to follow social

¹ <https://medium.com/@lauragolding/book-review-eleanor-oliphant-is-completely-fine-by-gail-honeyman-4c03fbb9e3d6>

standards and the way things are done, which we see as normal. For instance, when she goes to Starbucks, she does not want to give the barista her name due to privacy reasons and later in the book another character goes to give her a high, five and she does not know how to. Hilarious to some of us, relatable to others. Her complete obscurity to pop culture also proves interesting and laughable—literally.

In pursuit of Johnnie Lomond, she explores new horizons and opens herself to the world. One we might know very well, but for Eleanor it is all too new, and it makes for some funny occurrences. She has never paid too much attention to herself, and now she wants to change her clothes, wears make up, and gets her hair done: “It had crossed my mind that I ought to ready myself physically for a potential meeting with the musician by making a few improvements” (13). It might sound like nothing, but we are sure we have all been in a position where we went to some extremes to be the type people would like.

In real life, we know life is tough. We live in a world filled with all sorts of challenges, and often we can relate to other people’s struggles in movies, music or books. This certainly happens when we learn more about Eleanor’s life, and the way she has grown up; in other words, the way she deals with her mother and her putting Eleanor down, and the struggles she has dealt with in her first and only relationship with an abusive partner.

To deal with the silence, she has a weekly catch-up phone call every Wednesday with her mother, who is suggested to be in a mental institution for reasons unknown. Yet, often after their phone call, poor Eleanor feels worse than before. “Mummy” is controlling, manipulative, cruel, nasty. Eleanor is an adult, and yet there is something disturbing about the way she always refers to her parent as a child would (never “Mum” or “my mother”). The fact that Eleanor receives regular monitoring visits from social workers tells us that there is something dark in Eleanor’s past that has contributed to her present trauma. However, we are not told what.

Eleanor Oliphant comes across very anti-social and awkward. The way she was brought up has given her an unwavering belief that she does not have any friends because it is others who lack an understanding of following social cues (Golding 2017).

3.1.4 Psychological Depictions

Two incidents in Eleanor's life set off a cascade of events that will alter her life immeasurably. First, she encounters and develops a teenage-like crush on a musician. He is the lead singer in a band, well-known in the Glasgow area, lives locally and Eleanor has a remote connection with him as he attended school with a work colleague's brother. Eleanor decides that the musician is the one she wants to spend the rest of her life with. She fantasies about a romance with him and ultimately marriage. Emboldened by conversations with Mummy, who is all in favour of "the project" (whilst also questioning Eleanor's worth), she tasks herself with contriving to meet him, including visiting his apartment block, and sets about buying new clothes and improving her appearance. To bring herself up to the standard, she anticipates he would expect from a partner (Golding 2017).

The second incident is the collapse of an elderly man in the street. The old man is immediately attended to by Raymond, not a co-worker but someone she recognizes as working in the same building, and he involves Eleanor and commands her help. Between them, Eleanor and Raymond manage to give the man first aid and call an ambulance. After this, Raymond draws Eleanor into an unplanned friendship. It does not seem to be something that either of them is seeking, particularly. Indeed, Eleanor is very cool towards Raymond, looking down upon his smoking, his eating habits, his text-speak and what she sees as his lazy dressing habits. But he is warm and patient with her, and the friendship evolves. Through Raymond, Eleanor gets a glimpse of what "normal" life and "normal" family relationships can be, with all their faults (Golding 2017).

3.1.5 Depictions of Therapy and Counselling

The action takes place over a few months, and the pace is measured and authentic. We can witness the fantastic character development from being the quiet, bland, plastic bag-clutching weird lady working in an office. Eleanor goes through a transformation through the book to find her own feet, to learn about love and what it should be and to deal with her past without her mother blurring her judgement. Eleanor has learned to survive life but not live it.

It is ultimately a novel about mental illness, triggered by trauma in Eleanor's case. As the story unfolds, we learn more about Eleanor's past, so her present, tightly ordered life, held together so flimsily by a set of rigid habits, begins to fall apart. This unravelling may be painful for some readers. The novel echoes that tendency we all have to say we are "fine" even when we are not. Then Eleanor learns, the hard way, what "fine" means, and how to use that word honestly on her path to healing (Golding 2017).

The book emphasizes the idea of how small acts of kindness can completely change someone's life. She becomes friends with the IT guy in the office, Raymond, and later with the gentleman they help after an accident and his family. She realizes, then, that there is more to life than she thought. She learns that she can lean on other people who care for her like Raymond, instead of drowning her sorrows with too much alcohol and too many pills. From helping a man who fell, she started a new friendship. That man's daughter has made Eleanor feel better about herself by offering to give her a simple haircut. The kindness shown to others through the book has made us think that we too should adopt that way of living more as we all deal with struggles daily.

There is an incredibly touching moment when Eleanor is sent flowers by her work colleagues closer to the end of the book. This has reminded me that even though a kind gesture

might be small, it does not have to be insignificant. It will count as something for someone else, and we should do it more often. Eleanor's twisted sense of self-worth and volatile grasp on reality demonstrates the lasting impact of abuse and trauma. Through her counselling sessions and what she infers from the session, she learns to take ownership of her emotions. Even if subconsciously, we relate to this as it is easy to push things aside, deal with them later, yell at someone else because we feel woeful. When it is too late and all these things rush back, it is a lot to deal with. Just face it upfront, and know there is always someone willing to help.

3.2 The Analysis of the Framework

The methodology employed typically involves a blend of literary analysis and psychological perspective. The close reading and interpretation of the text allow us to delve into the character development, plots dynamics, language nuances, and different symbolic representations. These give a wide insight within the character's psyche and mental states. In the first chapters of the novel, for example, Eleanor's inner dialogues reflect her daily struggling with isolation. In one of the passages, she refers to loneliness as if it is a form of cancer which exemplifies how language is used to convey her emotional turmoil: "These days, loneliness is the new cancer—a shameful, embarrassing thing, brought upon yourself in some obscure way" (45).

Psychological theories and concepts are integrated within the character's emotional struggles, behaviour, and motives like the protagonist herself. In the narrative, themes of mental health are embedded through the nuanced exploration. As an example for psychological defence mechanisms and self-reliance, we can see an excerpt where Eleanor shields herself from feeling vulnerable and needy as she says: "I don't need anyone else—there's no big hole in my life, no missing part of my own particular puzzle" (72). The novel is juxtaposed with other literary works and real-life experiences which highlight similarities, differences, and social

implications as a portrayal of struggles of mental health and complications. Moreover, comparative studies are incorporated to enrich discussions about mental health by integrating perspectives from literature, psychology, and sociology.

3.2.1 Literary Elements

Literary elements are found virtually in each section of the novel, in the narrative as in the major conflict that seems to be between the protagonist Eleanor and the antagonist her “Mummy”. The internal struggle within Eleanor involves her buried memories attempting to surface and come back, while her subconscious tries to keep them repressed and stuffed back.

As for foreshadowing, it is seen in Eleanor’s assertion: “It often feels as if I’m not here, that I’m a figment of my own imagination” (34). This passage illustrates Eleanor as a woman deeply immersed in fantasy and illusion, creating for herself her own private reality. She exemplifies the clinically diagnosed depressive personality, where her suicidal despair and hopelessness remains unnoticed by those around her. As a result, she consistently downplays the severity of her condition with remarkable success.

3.3 The Use of Literary Allusions

Eleanor and her sister share names with the protagonist from Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*. Eleanor refers to Johnnie Lomond as her Orpheus and compares her psychological state to Jane Eyre’s. Imagery underscores Eleanor’s reluctance to respond hastily and unkindly, it is often subtly an easily overlooked. She has a strong aversion to cigarettes and smoking. Her first haircut aimed to cover her scars on her face from a childhood fire incident, making her feel beautiful. she took the responsibility of taking care of the cat who got badly injured during that fire incident as well very seriously.

The way her ‘Mummy’ horribly treated her turned out to be a striking paradox .and lastly , both her pant named Polly and Glen the cat , serve as a complex forms of personification, representing Eleanor’s subconscious attempts to care for a living thing as a substitute for her deceased sister .

3.4. The Contextualization of the Findings

At the beginning of the first chapter of the novel *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, Eleanor says:

I’m nearly thirty years old now and I’ve been working here since I was twenty-one. Bob, the owner, took me on not long after the office opened. I suppose he felt sorry for me. I had a degree in Classics and no work experience to speak of, and I turned up for the interview with a black eye, a couple of missing teeth and a broken arm. Maybe he sensed, back then, that I would never aspire to anything more than a poorly paid office job...Perhaps he could also tell that I’d never need to take time off to go on honeymoon, or request maternity leave. (2)

Two key elements are at play within this quotation above. Firstly, it serves as an introduction, often considered the most challenging part for writers and in expositions. (Jane Golding) . Eleanor characterizes herself in a consistently self-deprecating manner. She shifts her own feelings of low self-worth into Bob, implying that her employer might not see her a suitable material as a wife and a mother. Secondly, she mentions her physical appearance without providing any context or explanation of her features, assuming that people won’t be interested in the details of any recent traumatic experience she may have had (Honeyman).

The second thing worth noticing is that Eleanor may be correct in this assumption, because there are no indication that Bob displays any particular interest. In fact, we only have

Eleanor's recollection of the job interview, and it's possible she omitted the empathetic part where Bob expressed concern. It is only at the nearness of the end of the novel that we get to acknowledge Bob's real feelings concerning Eleanor.

At some point within the novel, we come across the total rejection of Eleanor's mother for her to open-up about her past and traumas during therapy sessions: "Now, you listen to me, Eleanor. Under no circumstances are you to discuss your childhood with anyone, especially not a so-called 'counsellor.' Do you hear me? Don't you dare. I'm warning you, Eleanor. If you start down that path, do you know what will happen? Do you know what I'll do?" (45).

Eleanor attends regularly a therapist to address childhood trauma that shapes her isolated lifestyle. A fire claimed her younger sister's life and left her both with physical scares from trying to save her sister to the emotional wounds that affected her daily her whole life. Despite shielding herself, her heart and soul remain vulnerable to the flames of pain (Golding). Eleanor also has scheduled weekly appointments with her mother, where their brief phone calls reveal a pattern of maternal manipulation. These interactions highlight how her current challenges trace back to her childhood upbringings. While the fire and her sister's death are significant topics in therapy, Eleanor observes that she and her mother never discussed those topics before.

After this emotional outburst, Eleanor notices that while her mother is typically intimidating, it was the first time she had heard fear in her own voice after confronting her. In the first part of the book, Eleanor experiences love deeply, but this love leads to a significant physical transformation as she begins to care about her appearance for the first time in her adult life. The person she falls for is someone out of her reach that she admires only from a distance: local rock star Johnnie Lomond (Goldng 2017).

Although Eleanor claims she has been diagnosed with clinical depression, her behaviour in this instant really seems far closer, symptomatically, to borderline personality disorder². Without having met Johnnie in person, Eleanor idealizes him, and she constructs a fantasy where their encounter will result in love at first sight. She imbues the local celebrity with magical qualities. Moreover, she believes that he can fix her life and normalize her. However, this idealized relationship never comes to reality. When she witnesses Johnnie perform, she begins to realize the truth about her fantasy. The result is painful acceptance. She then realizes that he would never see anything worthwhile in her (Goldng 2017).

3.5 The Examination of Characters

The characters of the novel offer symbolic representations of various themes in mental health stigma. First, Mummy symbolizes the other kind of fire. Mummy is the symbolic incarnation of the repressing memories in Eleanor's subconscious with a burning ambition to be unleashed into her conscious mind so that she can finally face harsh truths and work her way out of the nearly two-decades long engine stall of an existence. The connection between the use of the word "Mummy" compared to its normal basic use, deepens upon a re-reading equipped with all the knowledge which is only revealed later in the story (Goldng 2017).

Second, Marianne is Eleanor's younger sister who perishes in the fire. Despite Eleanor's courageous attempt to save her sister Marianne, she fixates obsessively on her perceived failure to protect her. This singular failure, magnified beyond reason, becomes a central aspect of her self-perception. Eleanor internalizes this as a proof of her worthlessness, and she believes that

² A mental illness that severely impacts a person's ability to manage their emotions.

is unworthy of love. Her inability to rescue her sister symbolizes the extent of Eleanor's profound self-esteem issues (Goldng 2017).

Thirdly, Polly is the ironically funny name of Eleanor's plant, a Congo cockatoo that serves as Eleanor's only connection between life before and after the fire. Eleanor addresses Polly as if she is talking to herself or someone. Polly embodies more than mere companionship; it represents Eleanor's struggle with her past. Her hazy recollection of acquiring Polly before the fire underscores the blurred lines of her memory and the symbolic weight it carries (Goldng 2017).

Fourthly, the Phoenix myth serves as a prominent allegory in the novel. It symbolizes Eleanor's journey of regenerating through the fire mirrors her own transformative process. Despite intense tricks, Eleanor emerges anew. This illustrates resilience and a aeonic period of suffering (Golding 2017).

Fifthly, Raymond develops as a compassionate and persistent figure serving as a catalyst for Eleanor's change. His non-judgmental acknowledgment of Eleanor's characteristics and vulnerabilities makes a secure space for her to investigate her feelings and go up against her past injuries. Through their intuition, Raymond symbolizes regularity and steadiness in Eleanor's life. He provides her with a sense of having a place in the exterior world. In spite of his apparently straightforward deportment, Raymond shows profundity and complexity as a character by uncovering his vulnerabilities and individual challenges (Goldng 2017).

Sixthly, some character whose presence come with an impact such as Sammy, symbolizes recovery and hope in Eleanor's life. Through Eleanor's interest in his destiny, Sammy gets to be a catalyst for her reflection and inevitable self-discovery. Their complex relationship flow reflects the perplexing web of human feelings and encounters; furthermore, it

provokes Eleanor to confront her own past traumas and hunt for connection. Sammy's puzzling presence serves as a story gadget, driving the plot forward while exemplifying topics of depression, lament, and the all-inclusive human yearning for understanding. Eventually, Sammy clears out a significant effect on Eleanor's enthusiastic growth and change, highlighting the novel's investigation of sympathy, forgiveness, and the healing control of human association.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive evaluation of the analysis and findings of the study on *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* enlightens the significant profundities of the character "Eleanor" and story arc. Through a fastidious examination of her journey, we witness the complex exchange of trauma, isolation, and the versatility of the human spirit. Given the number of books about dementia, memory loss, and other issues of mental health, it is surprising that it has taken profound loneliness and too long to take centre stage. In doing so, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* challenges and reshapes our understanding of loneliness and mental health stigma in contemporary American literature.

General Conclusion

This study has been based on a deep exploration of how issues of mental health and struggles related to these issues are depicted in contemporary American society. More importantly, the subject of this dissertation has been how these are seen through the lenses of literature. Moreover, the study has dealt with how these depictions influence and change people's mindsets and perceptions. It has also dealt with how mental health blinds its victims to commit life-changing actions, even crimes which lead them toward difficult traumas, and leave them with deep scars, whether physical or mental. It has emphasized how these scars shape those individuals' personas and future perspectives concerning their own life or the lives of those around them.

The novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* is a powerful set that includes many representations of those depictions and struggles. It uses various characters to depict and personifies those sacrifices and the reasons that cause those issues of mental health. Gail Honeyman has introduced the impact of mental health very cleverly and positively as well as negatively. She has explained how those traumas can be healed through communication and social interactions, especially through creating relationships with what can be out of usual comfort zone. She has encouraged readers to have the courage to close painful sometimes traumatic chapters in life, and be optimistic enough to choose the hard and long road to healing and redemption. She has encouraged us to give ourselves second-chances and endless hope for a better, well-deserved future; also, she has contributed, as a creator of this story, to this healing. Honeyman's contemporary protagonist has become a real-model as well as a source of inspiration for those in need of such a model and such healing.

This study has focused on the portrayal of mental health in contemporary American literature, using a blend of literary analysis, psychological insights, and social perspectives as a tool to conduct it. The current research has attempted to answer three main questions: First, how do American authors depict mental health. Second, what do these depictions reveal about mental health awareness and stigma? Third, how do cultural narratives shape perceptions of mental illness in literature? These questions have been answered by means of a qualitative-analytical approach because it is thought to be the most suitable; indeed, a quantitative approach would not have neatly and beautifully captured the nuances of the literary depictions.

. Therefore, the central thesis which we formulated at the beginning of this research has been adequately supported by the key findings which have been revealed in the final chapter of the present dissertation.

We make no pretence that this research on this topic and this novel is exhaustive; nor is any research. As a matter of fact, the wide-ranging topic of mental health continues to be extensively debatable. As a result, it further and much more careful study in the future, not just in disciplines such as psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology, but also in literature, especially American literature. At the present level, our study is and should be limited in its scope. In order to carry out further study on this extensive topic, an exhaustive approach should be privileged. Also, longitudinal¹ studies are essential for tracking mental health changes over time and assessing the lasting impact of interventions. Early identification of risk factors and promoting preventive measures can reduce the incidence of mental health disorders. Moreover, the advancements in technology, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and virtual reality, can enhance diagnostic tools and treatment options. Policy-research² is crucial for advocating

¹ A set of long-term studies.

² A type of research that deals with causal processes and explanations.

evidence-based strategies that support mental health promotion and improve treatment accessibility. Understanding the influence of community and family dynamics on mental well-being can also guide towards effective support systems. Lastly, efforts to reduce stigma through research can encourage more individuals to seek help, ultimately enhancing overall mental health outcomes.

One of the other major limitations of this piece of research is the subjectivity which inheres in the topic chosen for study. Various authors and researchers have varying interpretations of the same topic in the same novel. This has made the conduction of this research overly demanding. Another limitation is that the topic can be treated in-depth in disciplines such as psychology or sociology, but literary data acquisition about the subject proved to be an arduous task.

Appendix A



Author’s Biography and Bibliography

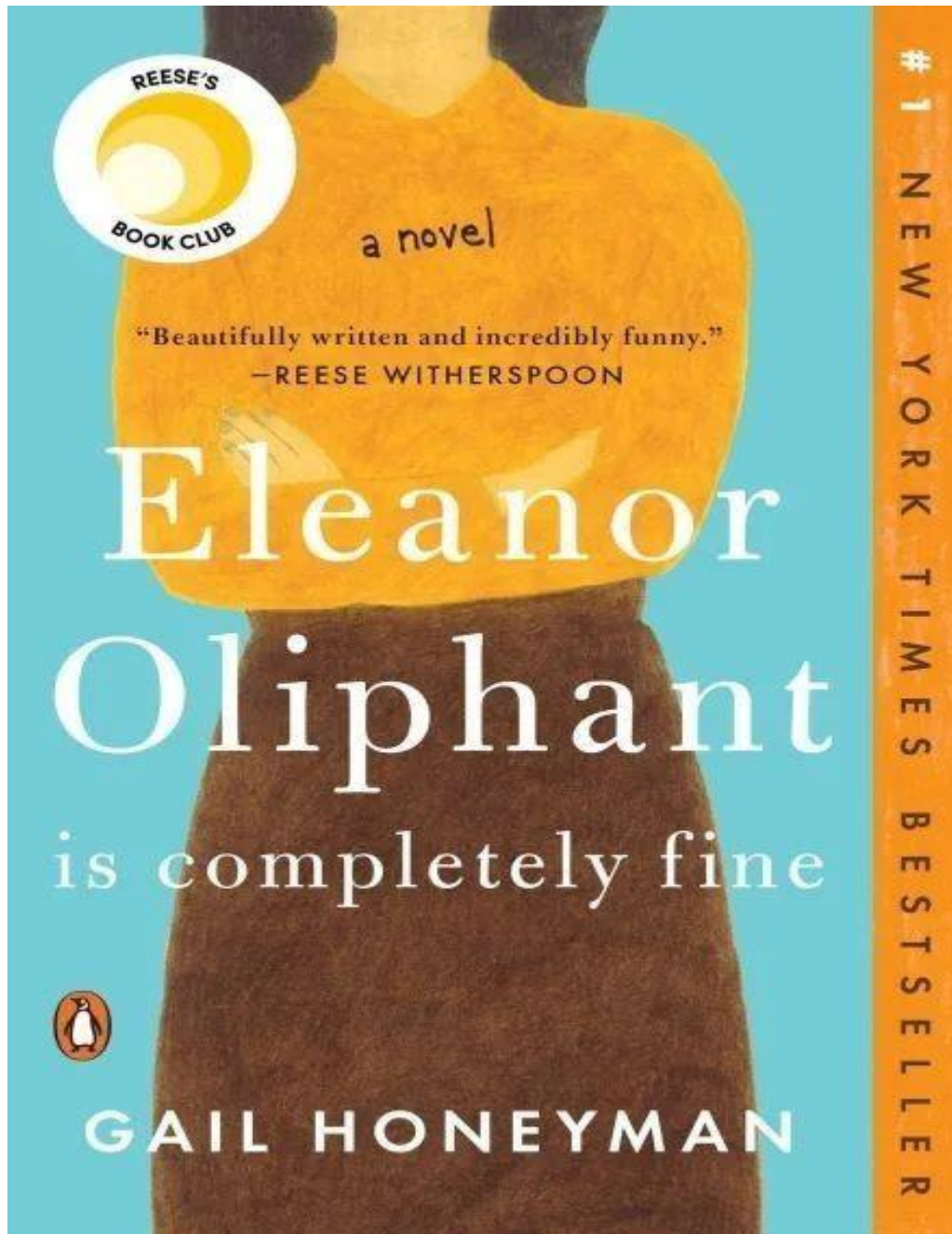
Born and raised in Stirling, Scotland, Gail’s love for reading began early, with countless trips to the local library. She pursued French language and literature at Glasgow University and even started a postgraduate course in French poetry at the University of Oxford. However, realizing that academia wasn’t her true calling, Gail embarked on various “backroom jobs,” including roles as a civil servant and university administrator.

Gail's passion for storytelling led her to enrol in a Faber Academy writing course while working at Glasgow University. There, she penned the first three chapters of what would become *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. Motivated by a competition for unpublished fiction by female writers, she submitted her work, and the rest is history. *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* is a touching story that delves into themes of loneliness and personal growth. Gail has shared that while *Eleanor* isn't based on her life, the emotions of loneliness are universally relatable. Currently, Gail is working on an exciting new novel set in a different period and location, promising to deliver another captivating read.

Appendix B

Front and Back Covers of the Novel

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine



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ملخص

في الأعمال الأدبية الأمريكية المعاصرة، يتم تقديم الصحة النفسية بشكل مختلف. وتصور هذه الأعمال خطأ ضبابيًا بين التعقل والجنون؛ إلا أن توضيح هذا المفهوم يتطلب مزيدًا من الدراسات حتى يمكن فهم المعنى وتفسير المفهوم. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الإسهام في الفهم المتزايد لكيفية تصوير المؤلفين لقضايا الصحة النفسية وتوضيح دور المحادثات الاجتماعية حول قضايا الصحة النفسية والتوعية بها في الأدب الأمريكي المعاصر. وعلاوة على ذلك، تناقش هذه الدراسة وصمة المرض النفسي والدعم الاجتماعي في رواية "إليانور أوليفانت بخير تمامًا" للكاتبة غيل هانيمان. ولتحقيق الهدف من الدراسة، يتم طرح ثلاثة أسئلة: أولاً، كيف يصور المؤلفون المعاصرون قضايا الصحة النفسية في الشخصيات الخيالية؟ ثانيًا: كيف يمكن أن يسهم السرد القصصي الإبداعي في إجراء محادثات هادفة ومحفزة حول التوعية بالصحة النفسية؟ ثالثًا، كيف يمكن للسرد القصصي الإبداعي أن يسلط الضوء على القضايا الشخصية؟ تتبنى هذه الدراسة منهجًا نوعيًا، مع التركيز بشكل أساسي على التحليل النصي لتصوير الصحة النفسية في المجتمع في الأعمال الأدبية الأمريكية المعاصرة. وبعد التحليل النصي-المفاهيمي، يتبين من التحليل النصي-المفاهيمي أن الصحة النفسية يتم تمثيلها بشكل مختلف من فرد إلى آخر بناءً على التجارب الشخصية والنمو، وغالبًا ما يكون كل فرد متأثرًا بأحداث مؤلمة في الماضي. ومع ذلك، عندما يكون الدعم الاجتماعي والأمل حاضرين، لا ينتهي الوضع دائمًا بالاكتئاب وطول الأمد