# Emotionally Absent Parents

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## *How Does the Literary Child Build Resilience and Grow Out of Trauma?*

By

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I am deeply affected by the emotional journey of Billy Casper in *A Kestrel for a Knave* which I have studied in one of my PhD classes lectured by Associate Professor Yıldız Kılıç. I have been curious to search, understand, and process all the stages of childhood traumas. I have taken great pleasure in having come to realize to acknowledge, realize, and empathise the unmet emotional needs of the child characters in literature.

The aim of this book is to analyse the traumatised child characters deriving from the physical or psychological absence of their parents in the chosen texts: Barry Hines's *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968), Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978), and Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* (1996). These texts are confined to the second half of the twentieth century as the postmodern period, since children's literature comes to analyse the sub-text of the adult, the child, and the interrelationship between them, without favouring one over the other. The postmodern novels in this book present the reader how the child protagonists (Billy, Jack, and Frank) are able to develop their sense of self and grow out of their own traumatic past. The selected texts depict three child protagonists, all of whom are male and could also be regarded as future fathers/parents for the upcoming generations. In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Billy has a physically absent father and a psychologically absent mother; in *The Cement Garden*, Jack is affected by neglectful and dysfunctional parents not only through their psychological absence (during their lifetime) but also through their physical absence (after his death); in *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir*, Frank is abandoned by his father (like Billy), but both parents are ill-equipped and emotionally absent. All these texts offer a variety of dysfunctional parenting and traumatized childhoods; furthermore, Billy, Jack, and Frank are capable of growing out of their traumatic past in *alternative* ways, as they have their own space in their lives.

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Dr. Zehra Aydın Koçak

# INTRODUCTION

> The survivors do not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life. (Dori Laub)

Recalling and verbalizing traumatic childhood experiences is an emotional imperative not only for the adult self, but also for the child self *within* us because the adult tightly holds on to the emotional burden of the past unless resolved. As Dori Laub states, the individual needs to acknowledge out loud "one's buried truth" (Testimony, 78) in the psyche. Apparently, 'trauma survivor' connotates as staying alive after experiencing devastating traumatic events such as the Holocaust or the World Wars. Nevertheless, when it comes to being 'a child' in the nuclear family and society, children who face with emotional neglect or absent parenting can also be considered as 'trauma survivors' because their defence mechanisms are gradually shaped by the reactions and responses of their family, society, and culture in general. If they are not emotionally supported enough, they will eventually end up being trauma survivors within their own circumstances. That is why Laub's quote about the need to *vocalize* one's traumatic past can also be applied to the child in literature and thus to the child *within us*.

In the journey of confronting a traumatic past, a double bind emerges, particularly when we attempt to comprehend *how* the same defence mechanisms that protected us during the traumatic experiences in our childhood and *why* they end up becoming dysfunctional in our adulthood. Simply put, our childhood brain focuses upon one specific purpose, 'to keep us alive' while dealing with overwhelming experiences; therefore, suppressing traumatic experiences can help a child to continue to survive. In reaching adulthood, these same defence mechanisms become the main problem in the journey of self-development and authenticity because it is, *now*, time to resolve, understand, and *grow out of* our own traumatised childhood. As Gabor Maté puts it, "Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness" (Levine, In an Unspoken Voice, xii). That is why this book presents various psychological approaches

to understand and empathise with the child (characters) in *literature* in order to transform the reader into the journey of how to be an "empathetic witness" to a literary child, namely to our own traumatised child self. Understanding the child in literature will help us to remember what it means to be *a child* both through the adult and the child's perspectives.

In order to reflect the different decades in which society and family (especially in British culture and literature) have had an enormous impact upon the self-development of the literary child, I will present three texts in chronological order: Barry Hines's *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968), Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978), and Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* (1996). The chronological analysis of these novels will provide the reader to acquire a culminative opinion about the psychological developments of parent-child relationships, familial and social dynamics beginning in the 1950s till the end of the 20th century. Additionally, the child characters in these texts are studied in parallel with psychological developments of parent-child relationships ranging from the theories of D. W. Winnicott to Heinz Kohut, Selma Fraiberg, Gabor Maté, Alice Miller and more. Therefore, we will try to enhance our ability to empathise with the literary child while perceiving the nuclear family dynamics of the child, the psychological developments of the time, and the cultural impact of the society as dysfunctional or intrusive upon parent-child relationships.

This book aims to function as a mirror for traumatized individuals in order to transform the overwhelming residue of the traumatized past into a healing journey; thereby, literature can be used as a reflective tool to lead traumatized individuals to witness, experience, relive and (possibly) grow out of their own childhood traumas provided that they empathize with the literary child characters: Billy in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Jack in *The Cement Garden*, and Frank in *Angela's Ashes*. Our minds are capable of recalling the image or reflection of our own childhood especially when we are able to distinguish a parallelism with the experiences of Billy, Jack, and Frank in terms of their/our pains, cries, sense of loneliness, being emotionally or physically abandoned by their/our parents. Though the focal point of this book sounds *heartbreaking*, it actually holds a mirror to the suppressed traumatic past of the adult world that is metaphorically buried behind the positive image of the millennium. We owe our traumatized child self to provide necessary equipment to allow him/her to acknowledge out loud the repressed past because the child figure in literature shows us *who we are*.

Children's literature can be classified as 'literature *for* children'—primarily picture-based and intended for young readers—and 'literature *about* children'. I have chosen three novels that can be classified as 'literature *about* children' because these novels depict the adult perspective of the

child under two premises: childhood as a means of determining the adult mindset, channelled through their interaction with the child; and the impact the adult has upon the development of the child, be it an outcome culminating in autonomy, authenticity or traumatization. When it comes to the absence of parents in this book, it is so defined either because they are deceased or alive but *emotionally unavailable* and *dysfunctional* within the family unit of the literary child. This loss and absence of parents may be formulated as causing the child to be traumatized (like Billy in *A Kestrel for a Knave*); on the other hand, the same loss or absence may enable the child to be more independent in his/her psychological world –*to be on his/her own* (such as Jack in *The Cement Garden*). These situations open a space for the child to construct the self, though ironically the same situation may also be the source of childhood trauma.

Throughout this book, I will concentrate upon *how* the identity development of the child is generated; *how* it is motivated by the physical or psychological absence of the adult from the perspective of trauma theory; and *most significantly*, *how* the child, whose memory is shattered and distorted after the traumatic experience, is able to *heal through his/her own emotional capabilities*, perhaps by developing an emotional bond with the substitute parent or becoming a substitute parent himself. The chosen texts will be analysed with regard to the traumatic experience of the child characters, who are narrated either in their childhood or in adulthood by remembering their past. The variety of these texts will help us understand how an adult or child is shaped by and subjected to the changing perceptions of childhood and parenthood across different decades and to what extent these changes correspond with these three novels.

The characterisation of childhood changes dramatically throughout history, as it is shaped by the perceptions of *adult* individuals, including philosophers and writers. In the 17th century, John Locke's concept of the child's mind as a "tabula rasa", or blank slate, defines the child as not having been born with innate knowledge but acquiring knowledge from the external world (Gianoutsos, "Locke and Rousseau: Early Childhood Education", 2). In the 18th century, Rousseau further elaborates on this, stating "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains." (The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right, 108): believing that society has the power to limit by corrupting the child's purity and to prevent their moral and educational potential. Given then the philosophical background from which the concept emerges, Romantic ideology may be censurable for placing too much emphasis upon the social motive and not taking into consideration the responsibility and choices of the individual towards *self*-definition. However, it can also be argued that the second half of the 18th century was

not as yet conducive to the individual demanding to shape their own identities; not while society continues to be an all-encompassing authority over the individual, and most particularly, over the child. In 18th and 19th century society, the child figure was portrayed as a material object or a source of income; Victorian exploitation of child labour[1] is an extensively documented issue. The Victorian middle-class child is 'under the gaze' of a controlling and manipulative adult order, that often abuses while trying to educate, or suffocates while trying to love and protect the child; the problematic issue arises because in this relationship the child is not the subject of care, but the object of parental/adult possession. Peter A. Levine points out the issue from the perspective of the child, stating that objectivization causes a sense of *loss* in the self, "The less the body is experienced as a living entity, the more it becomes an object. The less it is owned, the further it is divorced from anything having to do with one's core sense of self" (In an Unspoken Voice, 285). Objectivization possibly let to the inability of society to conceptualize the child as an individual and let to their marginalization within the adult world. Unlike the Victorian concept, Charles Dickens, within the Bildungsroman tradition, attaches even greater consequence to the formative actions of the child, who is urged by circumstances beyond their control to *make decisions regarding their own lives*. In *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Great Expectations* (1861), Dickens, pre-emptively depicts his child protagonists, Oliver and Pip, respectively, as orphans having to make their own way in life; thereby allowing the readers to analyse the clash between the children and society in the absence of the parental figures.

In the Edwardian Period (1901-1914), the "Golden Age" of children's literature, the concept of childhood underwent a significant transformation. The child was *re*defined from being perceived as an object or labourer to *seemingly* being recognized as an individual free to fulfil his wishes and desires. The adult perception of childhood, previously characterised by the notion of being "seen and not heard", evolved into the one to be "protected, longed for, and recognized as having their own needs and desires" (Gavin and Humphries, "Worlds Enough and Time: The Cult of Childhood in Edwardian Fiction", 1). The Edwardians longed to create an idealized child figure as a means of escaping the restrictions of their own childhood; therefore, they conceptualised "the cult of childhood". Francis Thompson

[1] The economic necessity of child labourers may have been the choice of their families, but it was certainly the fault of state. Children were considered cheap labour; their small frames were used in specific industries and tasks such as a textile work, chimneysweeper or factory work.
(https://victorianchildren.org/victorian-children-in-victorian-times/)

elaborates on this concept as being "[…] endowed with a special capacity to sympathise and identify ourselves with children; we play at being children (Shelley: An Essay, 28)" (Gavin and Humphries, "Worlds Enough and Time", 1). The hidden intention was likely rooted in the fact that the adults of that time had problematic backgrounds with their own childhood due to having spent their formative years within the relative trauma of a Victorian upbringing, during which they had been marginalized as 'the other'. The Edwardian period achieved the vital development of separating the child from the adult world, yet in reality the child was just as quickly refigured and artificially defined as an adult *construct*. As an Edwardian writer, J. M. Barrie creates his Peter Pan character who *refuses to grow up* and take his place in the adult world. Though it seems that Barrie concentrates only upon the freedom and individuality of the child, the problematic lies within gender identities such as the performance of Wendy as a mother representing the intrusiveness of the adult world in the consciousness of the child. The Edwardian era generally used the child figure for their own purposes to redefine the period of childhood that they had never experienced and longed for.

Following the Edwardian cult of childhood and the two World Wars, the 20th century started to perceive the child as an individual; the child stepped into experiencing his individuality by receiving less parental supervision than before due to the economic and political changes of the time (Campbell, "The Twentieth-Century Child", 3). It was a time of extreme upheaval and consequently the shattering of previous ideologies, replacing them with the dictate that 'the individual serves society' became 'society should serve the individual'. The adults of the 20th century came to the realisation that their childhood years had been wasted due to the Victorian expectations of sacrificing the individuality of children for the adult world. They experienced an inner interrogation of the development of their individuality; prompting the adult world to realize the uniqueness of individuality as lying in the formation of childhood, in *"identity formation"* and *"attachment theory"* according to the prominent psychologists of the 20th century such as Jacques Lacan and John Bowlby, whose theories were derived from the studies conducted by Sigmund Freud. Ultimately, the 20th century dismantled previous ideologies and placed individuality at the core of human psychology. Regarding how psychoanalysis requires *re*visiting childhood memories; thereby, childhood occupied a prominent stage in the process of individuality.

Society is regarded as a *necessity* no matter the efficiency of its functionality, or whether it serves as a model for social norms and human relations. The reason being that it is not the only factor affecting the child's

self-development process. Initially, the child is born into the microcosm of society –as a component of the nuclear family before taking his place in society as an adult. The family unit is naturally and universally associated with security, love and a place of nurture for the child; however, social history contradicts this notion when the issue of parenting practices are entered into the equation. First, it is essential to clarify the notion of 'good parenting': it represents a natural necessity for the child that the parent is able to help the child learn to channel emotions, provide affection and care to facilitate the self-development of the child. However, the essence of bad parenting lies in prioritizing *not* the child's emotional needs, *but that of the parent*; therefore, these parents tend to focus upon their own emotional hunger, possibly stemming from unresolved and unacknowledged deprivation in childhood. As a consequence, the physical or emotional absence of the parent poses a significant challenge to the development of the child's individuality. The child has to stand for himself as an individual, lacking an authoritative figure to lean on; therefore, he becomes the one who must learn how to deal with life. The child without a functioning parental figure will face difficulty; however, the child will be empowered to create his own world as an authentic individual if the child fosters healthy attachments grounded in the instinctual capacity to form emotional bonds with the Other.

As a result of Modernism, individualism gained prominence, and consequently, the child was also elevated to importance. Therefore, the perception of children emerged as a recognition of newly acknowledged individuals, unlike the Romantic concept of the child as a tabula rasa or the Victorian adult *Other*. Postmodernism punctuated this trend by further focusing on the marginalized and brought multiple perspectives to literature and these perspectives in turn enriched the diversity of the child-parent relationship. The second half of the 20th century also contributed to the recognition of women's rights[2] enabling the choice of whether to be a mother or not. Hence, the perception of motherhood changed from being a biological inevitability to a personal preference, and therefore significantly contributed to the changing relation between parent and child. In the past, society had advocated the role of women to domesticity and child-rearing, but postmodernism altered this social construct. Postmodernism differentiated between that which society expected from an individual and that which the individual wanted by not cherishing one choice over another.

Postmodernism *blurred* the distinctions among the different perspectives of family members without emphasizing one more than the other, thus

[2] The Abortion Act was passes in the 1977, the contraceptive pill was prescribed to women in the 1960s, and finally the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s offered new possibilities to the women.

underlining the problematic situation of previous perceptions. Rather than being an adult *construct*, children's literature comes to analyse the sub-text of the adult, as well as the child, and the interrelationship between them, maintaining a balanced perspective without favouring one over the other. In this book, the authors of the chosen postmodern novels present the reader with the absentee parent's affect upon the self-development of the child and how the lack of parental authority opens up space for the child's autonomous and authentic journey toward individuality. The premise of this book aims to pose the following questions: how does the physical or emotional absence of the parent or substitute caregiver affect the development of the child's individuality; how does this situation affect the representation of the child figure in British literature; and how does the child cope with trauma both while experiencing it or while *looking back* upon it through memory? Cathy Caruth explains, "for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*" ("Trauma and Experience: Introduction", 9). Therefore, this survival will serve as the core of my book in analysing the traumatized child characters (Billy in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Jack in *The Cement Garden*, and Frank in *Angela's Ashes*), their experiences of trauma, and most importantly, their *resilience* and ability to *survive*. This can be exemplified with the well-known example of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) when Heathcliff endures a repressed childhood when he is physically and psychologically tortured as an adopted child particularly by his stepbrother following the death of his foster-father. He loses his compassionate, even human self, and the consequent social alienation transforms him into a completely malevolent character –particularly towards those who were cruel to him during his childhood years. Emily Brontë reflects on how social environment induces trauma that distorts a child's consciousness and ultimately leading to the destruction of the self.

The emergence of trauma theory in psychoanalysis was profoundly influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud, so that "traumatic" comes to mean, "any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield" ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle", 29). Freud's theories examine the relationship between the adult and the child through the lens of sexual desires: "Freud began to interpret their symptoms not as deriving from sexual violation, but as being rooted instead in their childhood 'oedipal' wishes, fantasies to have sex with the parent of the opposite gender" (Levine, In an Unspoken Voice, 309). Freud's point of view is a prominent step in analysing the individuals' psyche by revisiting their *childhood years* and this focal point can be applied to contemporary

trauma theory and parent-child relationship, suggesting that children may not be sexually, but *emotionally violated* or may require meaningful *interaction* and *connection with the parent not as a sexual but an emotional intimacy*; the end result is that, they get *stuck* in their trauma if they are unable to fulfil their needs to *connect with parents or parental figures*.

Lacan, another prominent figure**,** defines the need to have a parent (mother) to assist the child in initiating his/her journey of self-identification with the mirror stage. In examining the impact of the absentee parent on the child's self-awareness, a correlation emerges between the beginning phase of Lacan's mirror stage[3] and the identity formation of the child in the absence of the parent. Before confronting himself in the mirror, the child perceives himself as a part of the mother, thereby uniting his existence primarily with his parent.[4] The parent, in a way, functions as an obstacle for the child in his journey towards self-understanding. In the physical or psychological absence of the parent, through whom does the child connect with the world, or with whom does the child identify his self? In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, how supportive is the mother of Billy Casper? To what extent does Billy's non-existent father contribute to the psychological development of Billy? The child has to declare his individuality not through the presence or support of a parent, but by being alone in this world. Exploring these issues and providing answers to the associated questions is the primary focus of this book.

Even though the emotional support of parents is necessary in acquiring self-awareness by the child, the effects of absentee parents may not mean

[3] Lacan explains the stages of the mirror stage by pointing out how the presence of the mother influences to the individual journey of the child. At first, when the child encounters the mirror, he/she perceives his/her reflection in the mirror as a real entity. Secondly, he/she attempts to approach this image or to grasp it. It represents an initial confusion between self and the other. The initial step reveals the child's subjection of "the imaginary register" and the second step establishes a decisive step in the process of "identification". The child starts to understand the image in the mirror is not a real being but only an image. (Jean Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the / as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", 1-6)

[4] Lacan's perspective of mirror theory is used by Winnicott who refers to it by applying to the mother-child relationship in the analysis of A Kestrel for a Knave. Likewise, Heinz Kohut improves both the theories of Winnicott and Lacan by developing "self psychology" in the analysis of The Cement Garden. Moreover, Kohut transforms the mother-child relationship in a broader perspective by including the parent (rather than maternal responsiveness), twinship (the ones who look similar to the child to feel connected), and idealization (to help the child idealize and identify his self with and through the admired parent).

that the consequences will be completely disadvantageous. This exemplifies what postmodernism presents as a cause-and-effect relationship. The existence of a viable parent in the life of a child does not immediately mean a positive outcome, since there are too many variables that may produce the opposite effect. Nevertheless, the absence of a parent (the negation of a biological norm) does enable a more decisive evaluation of the positive and negative outcomes upon the child. Even in the postmodern period with all its grey areas, the impact and oppression of society is indisputable upon the individuals. With absentee parents, the child has to face society prematurely; has to learn to cope with or alienate himself/herself from it.

Peter A. Levine describes how trauma is processed in the psychological world of the traumatized child when he/she "loses a sense of his internal structure and nuance. As the body freezes, the 'shocked' mind and brain become stifled, disorganized and fragmented […] These children […] have become 'stuck' at some point" (Levine, In an Unspoken Voice, 137-138). Traumatized children lose connection with others and in so doing become alienated; this alienation turns into a solitary and forsaken identity within the society, resulting in both positive and negative outcomes in the psychological world of the child. The child has the opportunity to observe the adult world; however, the child can only watch, not judge them. Through this observation, the child loses faith in being emotionally connected in relationships and this belief haunts the child for the rest of his/her life. As for becoming "stuck", the child cannot develop into wholesome adulthood and incessantly repeats the formative trauma of his past, becoming formulated by that *moment* in the past. Therefore, the adult version alienates his/her child-self or tries to find an escape route in order to overcome the residue of the traumatic past. Levine highlights how trauma leaves an indelible mark upon the psyche, "traumatized people can lose their way. They don't 'feel like themselves' anymore; loss of sensation equals loss of a sense of self" (In an Unspoken Voice, 136). In *The Cement Garden*, Jack experiences this phase during which he stops cleaning himself because he is afraid of losing his bodily existence as if there were a slow disease like "cancer" which directly refers to one's frustrations. Due to not being allowed to be mirrored by the Other, these frustrations remain fixed like this for a very long time, immobile, just like "rotting away" (McEwan, The Cement Garden, 100); thereby recalling the existence of an unresolved trauma in one's psyche. Therefore, Jack embodies Levine's description of "the loss of a sense in the self."

In connection with the distorted mind and the traumatic past, Caruth mentions Freud's term "latency/ traumatic neurosis" as the period between an individual's first encounter with a traumatic event and the first appearance

of symptoms derived from that traumatic experience ("Trauma and Experience: Introduction", 7). A distorted mind can manifest itself in the form of flashbacks, nightmares or a non-chronological time sequence in the narration of traumatic past because a traumatic experience is "a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" (Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction", 153). The incomprehensibility of trauma is neither completely about remembering nor about forgetting; it is about the *impossibility* of placing the trauma into *consciousness*: "what returns in the flashback is not simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness" (Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction", 152). As a key to healing[5] from trauma, the significance of *being connected* with the social world is pointed out in *Trauma and Recovery*, "To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context […] this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers and family" (Herman, 9). Through exemplifying with literary child characters, I try to indicate how childhood trauma *haunts* an individual's childhood and adulthood.

In *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968), Billy Casper is introduced to the reader along with his dysfunctional family and tense school environment. Billy escapes from them by alienating himself and resisting contact. What Billy experiences in the interaction with the adult world is broadly a mirror, reflecting what he is exposed to by the oppressive and uncaring individuals around him; his teachers, schoolmates, his half-brother, and even *his own* mother. Billy finds a way to experience the sense of *being connected* by training a hawk and by emotionally being attached to Mr Farthing.

In *The Cement Garden* (1978), the core of the novel is the desire/obsession of Jack's father to completely cover their garden with cement. The novel raises the question of how neglectful and dysfunctional parents affect the emotional world of their children not only through their psychological but

[5] I want to point out that 'healing from trauma' does not refer to a complete recovery in this book; on the contrary, it is impossible to heal from a traumatic past because the past is irreversible. What can be healed is the gradual progression of understanding a traumatised past (external factors such as absentee parents, a dysfunctional society or an emotionally blocking adult world). Thus, traumatised individuals are able to develop defence mechanisms and gain a new perspective on their past experiences after coming to terms with the scattered residues of their past, trying to make sense of them (without blaming themselves), and finally accepting that there is nothing more they could have done differently in order to change their past. This acceptance brings with it "healing process" alluded to -namely no longer carrying the overburdening past on one's shoulders.

also through their physical absence. The novel problematises the child characters who maintain a deliberate distance from societal figures. However, this behaviour is derived from their parents who neither introduce visiting relatives nor any friends with whom to develop a relationship. After losing their parents one after another, they do not want to be controlled by social services and subsequently try to control their own lives. Even though these children fail to complete their plans, it is revealed that Jack *faces* his overwhelming traumatic feelings, *stays* with them, and allows them to *flow* just like the "rain" pouring from the sky, and finally creates an integration with his authentic self.

In *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* (1996), Frank McCourt writes his childhood memoirs up to adulthood as a (*partially* autobiographical) fictional novel. Frank is emotionally ignored by his parents and parental figures, not unlike Billy Casper and Jack. His traumatised childhood begins with his parents overburdening him with responsibilities, as if he were a parental figure. Throughout his childhood, Frank has felt *guilty* for responsibilities that were beyond his control; nonetheless, he is capable of growing out of his traumatic life by transforming *fleeting* memories into *floating* memories and thereby healing.

In all the novels I have chosen, the protagonist of each text develops different defence mechanisms tailored to their circumstances and unique characteristics. Traumatic experiences can cause individuals to lose their ability to articulate what has happened as "speechless terror" (Kolk, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Nature of Trauma", 8), to "need to tell their stories in order to survive" (Laub, Testimony, 78) or to experience the "loss of the capacity to be a witness" (Laub, Testimony, 82), and to *re*experience the trauma in the form of "nightmares, flashbacks, and reenactments" (Kolk and Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma", 174). In Hines's novel, the trauma of Billy Casper "creates a speechless fright that divides and destroys identity" (Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory"). The child characters in the chosen novels experience their childhood traumas as "not only a loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family and community" (Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community", 198). For these forsaken children, the lonely struggle without parents is unbearable whereas this absence and burden can serve as a driving force for them in order to seek, process, and acquire the *self*. The child figure in literature can function as a *mirror* to the lives of adults and may remind their own childhood experiences. Furthermore, Billy, Jack, and Frank, as trauma survivors, do "not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also [need] to tell their story in order to survive" (Laub, Testimony, 78).

# CHAPTER I

# "FLYING BEYOND": THE CRAVING FOR AUTHENTICITY IN *A KESTREL FOR A KNAVE* (1968)

The journey of a child's individual development starts at the very early child stages of life. The beginning of a child's psychology goes back to the period within the womb. A child figure goes through an interrelated process in life which encompasses the construction of his/her "individuality, psychological birth and the influence of maternal emotions during pregnancy" (Piontelli, From Fetus to Child, i). Therefore, the mother's psychological health during her pregnancy determines the child's psychology[1] profoundly; studies in psychology have shown that the traumatic pasts of some people may go back to their time within the womb. For instance, an unwanted child during pregnancy has an adverse foetal reaction to the mother's stress hormones and it may cause the foetus to experience long-term psychological health problems in the future. Dr. William R. Emerson, as a pioneer in psychotherapeutic interventions in the field, has innovated special treatments with primal regression therapy about prenatal[2] and perinatal[3] trauma in infants, children, and adults. In his article "The Vulnerable Prenate"[4], Emerson mentions Dr. Frank Lake, an English theologian and psychiatrist, who found in 1975 that,

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[1] It is essential to note that the father's psychological support and healthy approach is also greatly vital upon the mother's psychological well-being during and after pregnancy.

[2] Prenatal: "occurring, existing, performed, or used before birth." (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prenatal)

[3] Perinatal: "occurring in, concerned with, or being in the period around the time of birth." (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perinatal)

[4] This paper ("The Vulnerable Prenate") is an edited and elaborated version of the same-titled paper presented at the 1995 San Francisco APPPAH (Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health) Congress in San Francisco.

> [T]he most influential events were maternal experiences […] Maternal emotions (and paternal emotions through the mother's emotional response to them) infiltrate the fetus. Research shows that what mothers experience, babies also experience. A good example is the following case. A woman's father died just prior to the conception of her child. She spent the whole 9 months feeling depressed and grieving the loss of her father. If it is true that babies experience and remember what their mothers experience, then her baby should also have experienced loss and depression, and these feelings would be expected to resurface during childhood and/or adulthood. This appeared to be the case. As a child, her baby was periodically depressed, and medical personnel could find no physiological or psychological basis for the depression (they were not cognizant of the child's prenatal experiences). When he was depressed, he would draw pictures of old and dying men in caves (in pre- and perinatal psychology, caves are symbolic of wombs, the place where he experienced the loss of his grandfather). (8)

Within the given case, Emerson adds that this child is exposed to being a traumatized individual even in adulthood. Even the consciousness of a foetus within the womb is affected by his/her mother's hormones; therefore, the consciousness after birth may continue to be exposed to the encounter of trauma from societal or parental figures. The adult contingent might then be said to be responsible for the traumatized child.[5]

In the encounter of trauma, individuals, being severely and psychologically affected by external factors, may not continue their lives as easily as those whose psychological needs are met in their childhood. An individual's "perception of the world as a safe, predictable, comfortable […] place is usually shattered following exposure to trauma […] it is the victim's perception and cognition of alterations that occurred to the world by trauma" (Zepinic, The Self and Complex Trauma, 65). Therefore, a traumatized

[5] It is highly important to illustrate a crucial and paradoxical subtext that the 1970s seemed to take care of a child by emphasizing how vital was the bond between a mother and a child (as referred in F. Lake's quote); however, that period imposed the parental responsibility for a child's physical and psychological development only over women until the second-wave feminism brought light upon it. As quoted within the text, Lake's theory (1975) is quite outdated for this research that focuses upon the late 20th century novel; however, A Kestrel for a Knave was written in 1968 by Barry Hines whose perception of motherhood was quite parallel with his time and Emerson's theory because the 1970s perspective put too much burden only over women in terms of taking care of children just like Hines' novel presents only Mrs Casper as the responsible and existing parent within the whole novel without even slightly questioning the physical absence of Billy's father. Therefore, the theoretical timeline in the scope of child development and parental duties will focus upon the periods from the 1950s until the 21st century.

individual's perception of the world cannot be compared and comprehended by others without any effort or attempt to reconnect with the traumatized one.

The subject of trauma in fiction presents the reader with characters whose memories are distorted and shattered after their traumatic experiences. For child characters, adults or parental figures may be formulated as causing the child to be traumatized due to their dysfunctional roles. The problematic adults dealt with here may give you a chance to draw inferences about the relationship between them and their respective offspring and how they may affect the child's development beginning from the mother's womb. I will focus mainly upon the actions of Billy Casper, the effects of the adult interference, and how Billy *reacts* to these extraneous actions. These questions will be analysed in this chapter: How is Billy able to cope with his trauma when his father abandons the family and never comes back? What is the role of dysfunctional parental figures in Billy's journey of searching for his self? How could he survive in an unloving and uncaring family atmosphere and find alternative ways to feel '*connected*' to the world by his instincts? The central point of this chapter is *not* to discuss the reasons why Billy is traumatized; rather it is *how* Billy endeavours to handle his trauma and to find an escape route to relieve from his overwhelming traumatic past to *reconnect* with life and his self, by adopting a kestrel hawk, even though he hardly ever has any supporting parental figures during his childhood.

Some children are substantially surrounded by a dysfunctional adult world. Problematic adults may cause children to live through traumatic experiences, and thereby lead the child to collapse into emotional immobility or to an arrested development; therefore, as a result of being neglected, unperceived, unseen and having unmet expectations, the child is *imprisoned* within his emotional world. Every individual creates a different way of dealing with his problems and creates an escape plan. Before creating this plan, every traumatized individual faces the difficulty of encountering the trauma in their body, soul, and mind. Bessel van der Kolk emphasizes what trauma does to a human being and what the imprint of trauma is afterwards:

> Nobody can "treat" a war, or abuse, rape, molestation, or any other horrendous event, for that matter; what has happened cannot be undone. But what can be dealt with are the imprints of the trauma on body, mind, and soul: the crushing sensations in your chest that you may label as anxiety or depression; the fear of losing control; always being on alert for danger or rejection; the self-loathing; the nightmares and flashbacks; the fog that keeps you from staying on task and from engaging fully in what you are doing;

> being unable to fully open your heart to another human being. (The Body Keeps the Score, 239)

Considering these processes after a traumatic experience, the focus of my book is to consider how the literary child figures overcome their traumatic experiences and how they find a way to recover what is lacking in their psychological world. These children are defined by the adult world as passive individuals who are always in need of adult guidance. Nevertheless, there are family relationships in which the adult is incapable of being a functional parental figure to the child. The child is abandoned to his psychological world; therefore, he tries to create a way out of his problematic situation.

In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Billy Casper is a 15-year-old boy who is living with his mother and half-brother, Jud. His father is physically absent from the novel; however, Billy, as the protagonist, is aware of his father's abandonment of the family and is having difficulties in facing this traumatic event throughout the novel; frequently daydreaming to escape from the harshness of real life, especially when he feels emotionally *stuck*[6], or *re*-living his traumatic past with flashbacks. Billy is a child who is born into an unloving and dysfunctional family and is emotionally abused and exposed to physical violence and bullying by both his teachers and his schoolmates. Every child needs to create a specific escape plan to survive within harsh conditions. He/she can continue his/her life by means of these plans which his/her natural survival instincts lead the child to explore. For some children, withdrawing into themselves serves as a protective shield against their uncaring environment, while for others, manifesting themselves or being subversive may be a coping skill. Billy protects himself by shutting down against such a surrounding which does not give him the feeling of being cared for and loved unconditionally. Therefore, he finds a way to experience what is lacking in his emotional world by providing his unfulfilled emotional needs such as love, care, affection, and devotion to another living being *–a kestrel hawk*. He achieves an extremely difficult task by trying to transform his neglected, uncared, and even bullied

[6] It needs to be clarified that "feeling emotionally stuck" is and will be frequently used in this book because it describes how a traumatized child/adult experiences past events from two perspectives; on the one hand, the mind of the traumatized individual is stuck within past emotions as a result of being suppressed within the subconscious; on the other hand, at the same time the traumatized individual experiences his current life in the present due to flashbacks and intrusive memories, coming out of the subconscious. Through all these experiences, the traumatized child/adult experiences this sense of being 'stuck' unless the traumatized past is resolved.

childhood into a functioning parental experience by training a kestrel, known as a wild bird and only possible to be trained by an experienced falconer, for more than a year. Even though the reader witnesses a loving and caring individual in Billy's training of his hawk, Billy is consistently accused of being subversive by the people around him. It gives the reader an implicit message; a child is defined by society as disobedient and rebellious, and the core issue very often is emotionally unfulfilled and even physically unmet needs. The relationship between Billy and the kestrel hawk is quite significant and will be discussed later within this chapter.

Just as Billy searches and tries to find an appropriate way to approach the wild nature of the hawk, the adult world needs to make a tremendous effort in order to acknowledge the nature of each unique child. Expecting a disturbed child, with a traumatic past, to fit easily and perfectly into society is nothing short of wishful thinking. Consequently, child figures might revolt against the grown-up world by attempting to make an effort, understand and realize their own needs, and accept their sense of self. Billy chooses his particular way of fulfilling his own needs through self-motivated nurture. He instinctually knows he needs to be cared for and loved unconditionally; however, he also knows the surrounding adult world is incapable or unwilling to provide these for him. Therefore, he creates a path to train his hawk and declares to the adult world as if to say, 'This is the way you should approach me.'

## 1.1. The Society as a Dysfunctional Tool

Childhood is a process in which the individual should be loved, secured, comforted, accepted, informed and educated; initially starting in a family unit and continuing to school and society. Nonetheless, there is aggression, instability, and alienation in Billy's world from his surroundings. The teachers at school and other figures in society generally expect Billy to fit into their given and determined social norms without being criticized or questioned by the child. Therefore, the possibility for the child's self-acknowledgment is completely ignored and sometimes even may be sacrificed for the good and desires of the adult world. On the other hand, Billy is unparented, unloved and isolated. Despite all expectations, Billy cannot be described as the victim of society or absent parental figures; he is described by the writer[7] in the afterword as being, "a survivor, a tough little

[7] It is ironic and contradictory to note that Hines admires Billy's enthusiasm and efforts to feel connected to life; on the other hand, Hines adopts the problematic approach of the 1960s (and also the 1970s in child psychology) that pushes the mothers to the forefront but does not even question the role of the fathers in their

character, more Artful Dodger than Oliver Twist" (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 203*)* who always tries to find or create his own ways to overcome difficult situations like stealing the food he needs, stealing a book that a library does not lend him, or running away from his angry mother when he refuses to do anything against his own will.

Barry Hines's novel starts with an epigraph which inspires the title of the book:

> An Eagle for an Emperor, a Gyrfalcon for a King; a Peregrine for a Prince, a Saker for a Knight, a Merlin for a Lady; a Goshawk for a Yeoman, a Sparrowhawk for a Priest, a Musket for a Holy water Clerk, a Kestrel for a Knave.
> Selected from the Boke of St Albans, 1486, and a Harleian manuscript. (A Kestrel for a Knave, 7)

The manuscript "lists the kinds of falcons and hawks appropriate to each rank of medieval society, ranking all the way from the lordly eagle for the emperor to the lowly 'muskyte' for a holy-water clerk" (Forsyth, "The Noblest of Sports: Falconry in the Middle Ages", 253). The starting point of the novel emphasizes categorized permission for noble people's training birds of prey as sports in Medieval times according to the *hierarchy* in their society; thereby referring to the introduction of social fragmentation within the novel based on class in which Billy's intimate community is unwholesome and divided. Even though the 15th century is a distant time, society maintains a hidden hierarchy between the adult and child. In the literature of the past, as late as the 19th century, the individual was comprehended as a sacrifice for the social good; however, this perception has dramatically changed since then; on the other hand, this victimization has been transformed into the adult world's oppression of the child. As the quote emphasizes, a knave, who may be defined as a boy or servant, is perceived as the lowest rank in Medieval society. In the novel, encompassing the mid-20th century, the place of children in society is seen not to have changed significantly. Whereas the novel describes various relationships among surrounding adults, Billy's classmates, his family members and himself, Billy is always positioned as the lowest rank amongst them, just like the manuscript's hierarchical classification of a knave. Reflecting a boy's lowest hierarchical

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parenthood journeys. The main reason of that will be explained clearly later by referring to Hines's relationship with his own father. It can also be criticized that Hines's removal of a functional society and a functional father for Billy does not and will not aim to emphasize their importance by doing so; on the contrary, he may subconsciously evade evaluating their vitality for adults and children. It may be a way to step out of the writer's own past traumas in his personal life.

place within a family unit, Yorgos Lanthimos's psychological horror film *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017) mentions a family and their decision as to who to sacrifice within the family; Murphy and Anna are the parents, Kim and Bob (the younger sibling), the children. The surgeon father causes a patient's death due to intoxication during surgery.[8] At the end of the film, Murphy closes his eyes with a rifle in his hand and shoots randomly until one of three family members is killed, namely Bob.[9] The child is not only a scapegoat to the ineffectual and dysfunctional adult world of teachers unable to control their students and parents unable to maintain marriages or jobs but also an extension of the patriarchal status quo in which, along with other marginalized groups -like women, the working classes, the poor-, children in the postmodern period and even as late as the 1960s, like the portrayal of Billy Casper, continued to be victimized and made the casualty. Like Bob, Billy Casper experiences a similar attitude from his surroundings, not always as physical aggression but as impactful psychological attacks, which are just as hurtful, devastating, and subverting as the physical ones in his life journey. The 1960s questioned whether social demands regarding domesticity and the individual's obligation to commit to marriage and children could be re-evaluated, taking into consideration individual needs. This changing perspective of the 1960s focuses upon the needs and choices of the individuals rather than those of society, thereby creating and thinking

[8] Years later, this patient's son appears and curses the family until Murphy chooses a member within the family to kill. Throughout the film, the father figure never imagines sacrificing his own life even though he is the one actually responsible for the death and the curse. In the end, Murphy tied Anna's hands and ankles securely to prevent her from running away since he knows Anna wants to sacrifice one of their children; and he ties only the hands of his children, implying the psychological immobility and obedience of the children to the father as the authoritative figure.

[9] Yorgos Lanthimos generally criticizes the social order and values in his films. He visualizes his characters to express how vital society is for individuals in order to survive because the need to belong is a highly important need for human beings regardless of their age. His other film The Lobster (which asserts that being lonely is not allowed by the society and those who are alone are banished from the society to death unless they do not change their minds) like the above-mentioned film, shows the individual adapting the society in spite of their own requirements. Likewise, the child too needs to belong, be connected to a greater community first and foremost the family. Therefore, Lanthimos's perspective in connection with child, family, and society is relatable with Hines's novel. His film The Killing of a Sacred Deer shows how the father aims to live and exist at a cost that is to kill someone from his own family and shows also how the children need to feel connected and attached to their parents despite being killed in the end.

over other possibilities rather than sticking to the past.[10] The child, who has been prone, from the medieval period onwards, through oral, written, and visual narratives to adult victimization and being silenced and oppressed, is subsequently aided by changing postmodern values. Society is a supremely preeminent parental figure to the adult world; however, it hardly ever interferes with or judges adults' *assumed* rights over children; nor does it protect them against parents or figures in *loco parentis* because criticizing parents may affect, in return, society's rights and limits to interfere with individuals. This can be exemplified with different perspectives from different times; the Victorian is by comparison to modern times less aware and critical of child victimization. Child brutalization in the name of 'educating the child' is an issue that has *only* in recent years become a sensitive and critiqued issue. Therefore, the individuals and their needs have become a central issue in the history; however, it is generally about the *adult* individual rather than the child.

### 1.1.1. The humiliation of the child through the adult gaze

Hines draws attention to the reality of the power struggle between adults and children; therefore, he creates Billy Casper who is humiliated, disrespected, and not trustworthy in regard to his words even after he "has reformed" (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 101) from getting into trouble as a result of his actions. Billy functions as a mirror for the grown-ups, as well as for us, to perceive and even criticize their understanding of being an adult; he refers to the reality of different perceptions, expectations, and needs of these two worlds in his educational life:

> 'Teachers. They never think it might be their fault an' all […]
> They think they're right every time. But there's sometimes when you can't help it, like this morning; an' like when you get thumped for not listenin' when it's not interestin', can you, Sir? […]
> You daren't say that to t'teachers though, they'd say, "Don't be insolent boy," smack! (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 100-101)

[10] It is vital to explain that 1960s society labelled commitment within a marriage as a cliché as mentioned above, as "sticking to the past". However, it is an irony of history that this society allowed its individuals "freedom" in terms of the individuals' right to choose when it comes to how to live their lives. On the one hand, the individuals were expected to live completely free, but on the other hand, the same society has curtailed the right of existing children to have a father and a mother, there. So, in a sense, the 1960s championed the right to freedom of adult people, but disregarded the rights and freedom of children who deserved a parent who was physically present and accessible to the child.

As a student, Billy is courageous enough to share why he does not listen to the lesson and how rational his explanations are from his point of view to his only open-minded and insightful teacher Mr Farthing; also, he adds how unfairly he would be treated with more humiliation and physical violence if he declares his ideas clearly to other teachers. Being an adult, 'grown-up', does not and cannot necessarily mean that adults have every right to criticize, being the ultimate decision maker for younger generations. The reason why adults use psychological violence towards the younger generation is probably hidden somewhere in their own traumatized pasts. If adults are not aware of their victimization in their own pasts and do not understand how they are *psychologically abused* by the older generation, they are highly liable to continue to transfer their traumatic pasts to the next generations. If they became aware of that fact, they would have to accept their traumatization, and it would be an unendurably painful experience; that is why they unconsciously find ease from their repressed traumas and use the easiest way to cope with this awareness by applying the same to the young generation. On the other hand, there is also a generational issue among adults of the time that a deeply traditional patriarchal authority is itself traumatized and refuses to be challenged, just like Billy's mother as a victim of a patriarchal society. From this general perspective, Billy may be a breaking point of the transference for not accepting the kind of treatment he receives and also by expressing the unfairness of the situation, because most of the teachers in the novel do not try to perceive things from a child's point of view. In addition to Billy's teachers, almost no other adult figures in the society seem to see or acknowledge Billy, let alone motivate him into bettering himself.

The novel introduces Mr Gryce, the headmaster, from the very beginning as a strict and vindictive teacher, and the ultimate power at school. In the assembly, students are supposed to read the hymn after "Gryce […] replaced his stick and addressed the school" (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 58). The pianist starts to play "moderately slow" (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 58) as stated in the book; however, the students' tempo was "dead slow" (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 58) because they are not informed about this direction from the book; therefore, they deliver the hymn in a monotone way:

> New ev-ery morn-ing is the love
> Our waken-ing and up-ris-ing prove;
> Through sleep and dark-ness safe-ly brought,
> Re-stored to life, and power, and thought.
> [Mr Gryce] 'STOP. . . I've heard sweeter sounds in a slaughter house! This is supposed to be a hymn of joy, not a dirge! […] open your mouths and

> SING […] Or I'll make you sing like you've never sung before.' (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 58)

The narrator concentrates upon Mr Gryce's threatening approach towards the students and how he intimidates students by means of psychological pressure. This hymn presents love, hope, liveliness, resurrection after every sleep, awakening and forgiveness in the latter verses that God might allude to his people to reflect and maintain his way towards one another; however, some people may prefer to perform a cruel and tyrant figure over the weaker ones like Mr Gryce. After the hymn, a boy comes to the platform to read from the Bible:

> [Boy] 'ThismorningsreadingistakenfromMattheweighteenverses […]'
> [Mr Gryce] 'Louder, boy. And stop mumbling into your beard.'
> [Boy] 'Never despise one of these little ones I tell you they have their guardian angels in heaven who look continually on the face of my heavenly Father. What do you think suppose a man has a hundred sheep if one of them strays does he not leave the other ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the one that strayed. And if he should find it I tell you this he is more delighted over that sheep than over ninety-nine that never strayed. In the same way it is your heavenly Father's will that one of these little ones should be lost here ends this morning's reading.'
> He closed the bible and backed away, his relief was pathetic to see. (Hines, A Kestrel for a Knave, 59)

The writer states the beginning sentence of the boy who will read the Bible without any space among the words. Therefore, he implies the fact that this boy is deprived of internalized faith or any thought while reading; and he only reads the Bible based on memorization without any enthusiasm or understanding of the sacred text. This is not the boy's fault, but probably the teachers' approach depending largely upon despotism and repressiveness as a dominant manner of education. Mr Gryce's understanding of children is similar, acknowledging them as being a "blank slate", to John Locke's ideology of the "tabula rasa" in the 17$^{th}$ century. In terms of referring to the universally acknowledged perception of children as a 'blank slate', an experiment was carried out in 1944 with newborns in the United States, who were tested for how they responded to the deprivation of emotional needs. In this experiment, 40 newborn infants were observed to determine whether they could survive *only* if their physical needs were met; the caregivers were allowed to feed them, bathe them and change their diapers without looking at or interacting with the babies. However, after four months, the experiment was called off because almost half of the babies had died. Even after the