

# An Analysis Characters and Theme of *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* By Kafka Asagiri

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## Abstract

This study is entitled An Analysis Characters and Theme of *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* by Kafka Asagiri. Purpose of this study which to analyze the intrinsic elements such as characters and its characterization, and also the theme that formed in the story. This study was designed as qualitative research by Creswell presented in the form of dialogue and text. The data are collected by analyzing the data found in a novel entitled *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019) by Kafka Asagiri. This study using descriptive qualitative methods. The theories used are Wellek & Warren's concept of character, and theory of trauma by Caruth (1996) to explain the theme. The result of the study the writers find out that the main character of the novel is Akutagawa Ryunosuke and the supporting characters are Atsushi Nakajima, Osamu Dazai, and Oda Sakunosuke and also their characterization in physiological, sociological, and psychological dimensions. The themes of this novel are friendship and Teamwork: The relationship between the main characters and the members of the Armed Detective Agency shows the importance of friendship and teamwork in facing challenge, the other themes are traumatic experience by the characters such as Akutagawa's character who lived in a cruel environment, Atsushi's character with child abuse, and Dazai's trauma of losing a friend.

**Keywords:** *characters, characterization, theme, traumatic, Bungo Stray Dogs*

## Introduction

One form of literature, novel, is a very interesting form of storytelling. It is where human life is explored through in-depth plots, characters and conflicts written according to the point of view of the main character created by the author. Although novels are fictional, which means they are based on the author's imagination, the problems offered by novels are a reflection of real life. As explained by Hasniyati (2018), that novels are works of fiction that are imaginative. As an imaginative work, fiction offers a variety of human and their problems, life and living. Therefore, no matter the genre of the novel, whether science fiction or fantasy that sounds absurd, the problem in the novel's story must be relatable and occur in real life.

One of the issues that is still relevant to us today is about mental health, especially trauma. Some people around us, or even ourselves, may have experienced it and are experiencing it in our daily lives, making this topic commonly one of the real-life issues that often appear in literary works. The story of "Bungo Stray Dogs" is set in Yokohama, Japan, and follows the adventures of Atsushi Nakajima and his friends as members of the Armed Detective Agency, an organization that deals with supernatural and criminal cases. Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey in their book "*What Happened to You?* (2021): Unraveling the Experience of Childhood Trauma" discuss narrative and neuroscience approaches to understanding the effects of childhood trauma. Here are some key points

from their approach including, Childhood experiences; our earliest experiences shape our lives, and childhood trauma can have long-lasting impacts on a person's mental health and behavior and Narrative approach: The narrative approach allows a person to recount their traumatic experiences and give meaning to them. In doing so, a person can process and cope with their trauma. Based on that explanation can be summarized that trauma is described as a psychological experience resulting from deep and complex experiences that occur in humans. Trauma is an interesting topic which, unconsciously or consciously, silently haunts the people around us or even ourselves. This problem is necessary happen in society but due to the lack of awareness made trauma sufferers are perceived as weak and have self-blame for the trauma they have experienced. In any literary works, trauma serves not only as a 'salt' in the plot but also as a reflection in real life. The novel "Bungo Stray Dogs" has several interesting problem ideas, including problem Ideas Identity and Self-Search: Atsushi Nakajima and other characters search for their identity and purpose in life, showing the theme of self-searching and self-discovery. Trauma and Past Experiences: Many characters have traumatic backgrounds, showing the theme of recovery and how they overcome bad experiences.

In novels, trauma is usually portrayed to highlight the impact of length on the characters and how they struggle to deal with the effects. By reading a story that highlights trauma the reader can reflect on and feel empathy with readers can contemplate and empathize with traumatic experiences. These novels are not only entertaining but also understand the complexity of emotions and the need to empathize with the sufferers. This problem is also reflected in novel *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019) where some of the characters suffer from major trauma with or without their notice.

*Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* actually a spin-off story that is an alternative universe from the original story of *Bungo Stray Dogs*. This novel tells the story of a universe where the positions of Atsushi Nakajima and Akutagawa Ryunosuke are switch from the main story. A world where Akutagawa works as a detective and Atsushi as a Mafia member. The story begins when the main character, Akutagawa, avenges the death of his friends and encounters "Man in Black" who kidnapped his sister, Gin. Four and a half years later, he is 'picked up' by Oda Sakunosuke and works at the Armed Detective Agency. This novel tells the story of Akutagawa's daily life at the Armed Detective Agency and the progress of his sister's kidnapping case. This novel was chosen because it portrays the issue of trauma on the characters. Here is one of the studies of the theory of PTSD: PTSD theory can be used to understand how the characters in "Bungo Stray Dogs" experience symptoms of trauma, such as flashbacks, anxiety, and avoidance. Trauma arises through the conflicted and violent life experiences the characters have had in the past. Kafka Asagiri uses the characters Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Atsushi Nakajima, and Dazai Osamu for exploring how the trauma can affect their complex personalities and actions. Not only that, trauma also affects the dynamics between characters, motivations, and how the characters try to heal their wounds.

A study by Hidayah (2024) entitled "Depresi Tokoh Dazai Osamu dalam Anime *Bungou Stray Dogs* karya Igarashi Takuya" also analyze the same story series as this study. The writer focused on psychoanalytical approach using Beck's theory of depression to analyze depressive experience of the main character Dazai Osamu in the anime series of *Bungo Stray Dogs*. This study discovered that there were signs of depression caused by past trauma, loss of meaning in life, and suicide attempts on the character of Dazai Osamu. In addition, there are two other studies that also analyze intrinsic elements. Ariani (2010) wrote her paper "Character and Theme Analysis in J.M.

Coetzee Novel *Disgrace*" that discuss about character and the theme. The results of her study are the characterization of the character such as David Lurie, Lucy Lurie, and Petrus and the theme in this novel that is about the superiority and inferiority of white and black. The last study is from Pebrianti (2023) entitled "An Analysis of Characterization in Movie *Moana*". Her paper found that there are three types of characters found in *Moana* movie such as main character which is Moana, Maui as the second character and Villager, Heihei, Te Fiti, Tui, Sina, Gramma Tala and Tamatoa as the supporting characters.

From the above studies, none of them analyzed the characters and themes in the novel *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019). In this novel, an understanding of the characters and their characterization is needed to understand what themes the author is trying to convey. Therefore, this research formulates several questions, as follows: How is the characterization of the characters? And how is the theme of trauma depicted in this story? Understanding the characters includes how their presence, background, and social relationships in this story affect their decisions and behaviors so as to form one of the themes, which is trauma.

## Method

This study using descriptive qualitative methods. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative descriptive data which consists of information presented in textual form and not related to numbers. This data is used to explain and gain more in-depth insights into specific phenomena, contexts, or experiences. According to Palmer & Bolderston (2006), qualitative research is commonly utilized when analyzing literature. This is because literary works are frequently regarded as systematic reviews, where findings from qualitative studies are compared (Grant & Booth, 2009). Qualitative methods are chosen for literary research as they are the most appropriate for generating ideas and insights. Analysis Steps in the descriptive qualitative method a in reading and analyzing Text: Read the novel "Bungo Stray Dogs" thoroughly and analyze the text to understand the theme, characters, and plot. In addition, also identify themes and characters, namely identifying themes related to trauma, identity, and friendship, as well as the characteristics and development of the main characters.

Since the object of this study is a novel entitled *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast*, the data in this study are piece of narrative and dialogue. In collecting data for this study, the writers use some step. First is read and re-read the novel, next is select the important data focusing of the topic of the study that is, and last reduce the unnecessary data. The data collected will be analyzed using Wallek & Warren's character theory (1956), and Caruth's theory of trauma (1996) to explain the theme. The data will be analyzed based on the research question, identifying how the characterization of selected character and the experiences reflect the themes of trauma in the novel.

## Results

This study found that intrinsic elements such as characterization and theme play an important role in the development of the story. The analysis was conducted on four characters, such as Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Atsushi Nakajima, Dazai Osamu, and Oda Sakunosuke, using Wallek & Warren's (1956) characterization theory and Caruth's (1996) trauma theory. The characterization of each character is categorized into three dimensions: physiological, sociological, and psychological. According to Wallek & Warren (as cited by Putra et al., 2024), the physiological dimension includes how the

character's presence such as appearance, gender, age, body type, skin color, and other appearances can reveal the character's physiological state. The sociological dimension relates to the social environment, including factors such as economic status, profession, and family relationships. Finally, the psychological dimension includes the character's attitudes, feelings, thoughts, mentality, dreams, ego, temperament, and emotions.

The results of this study on the characterization of the selected characters are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Characterization of the selected characters in *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019)

| Characters          | Physiological  | Sociological  | Psychological  |
|---------------------|--|---|--|
| Akutagawa Ryunosuke | A young man, vicious looks   | A former street kid, an intern detective                      | Traumatized by loss of friends and sister, not fear of death, obsessive for revenge, cold and intimidating personality |
| Atsushi Nakajima    | A boy, white hair, innocent face, wearing a black overcoat                       | Member of Port Mafia  | Traumatized by childhood violence, fear of death, gentle and calm personality  |
| Dazai Osamu         | Slender, messy black hair, wearing bandages                                      | Boss of Port Mafia criminal organization, government fugitive | Traumatized by the loss of his best friend, manipulative, mysterious   |
| Oda Sakunosuke      | Dressed in a sand-colored coat, reddish-copper hair, thin beard, calm expression | Senior detective, Akutagawa's mentor                          | Wise, caring for orphans, kind-hearted.  |

Besides characterization, this study also identified the main theme of the novel, which is trauma. The trauma experienced by the characters in this novel not only shapes their personalities and motivations, but also becomes the main driver of conflict in the story. Atsushi has a gentle and calm personality, but has a traumatic experience related to violence. This can show that he has the ability to overcome trauma and still have a good nature. Dazai has a messy appearance, but has a smart and manipulative personality. This can show that he has the ability to separate his outer appearance from his true personality. Oda has a harmonious personality between his mature and wise physical appearance and his caring and kind nature. According to Caruth (1996) in her book entitled "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, trauma", trauma is a delayed reaction to a stressful event. Trauma not always acknowledged or felt directly. Instead, the experience resurfaces later, often unconsciously, as memories or a belated emotional reaction. The American Psychiatric Association categorizes the symptoms of trauma experienced by people who have traumatic experiences into four, which are Intrusion or re-experiencing, avoidance, negative cognition and mood, and arousal. Lathifah (2022) explained that intrusion, or re-experiencing, is a condition where survivors repeatedly experience intrusive memories, flashbacks, or dreams that bring back traumatic events. Then a condition where survivors try to avoid places, people, objects or situations that can trigger memories of their traumatic experience is called avoidance. Negative cognitions and moods are persistent thoughts or feelings such as

anxiety, fear, anger, guilt and shame experienced by survivors directed at themselves or others. While arousal is a reactive trauma symptom that includes increased irritability, moodiness, impulsive or self-destructive behavior, and difficulty making good decisions. These trauma symptoms are found in three characters, namely Akutagawa, Atsushi, and Dazai.

The findings regarding the theme of trauma are summarized in the following table:

Table 2. The theme of trauma in *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019) based on theory analysis:

| Characters          | Type of Trauma                     | Cause of Trauma  | Symptoms   | Effect to the characters   |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Akutagawa Ryunosuke | Trauma of loss & harsh environment | Watched the slaughter of his friends, kidnapping of his sister | Negative cognitions and moods (deep hatred), arousal (impulsivity, loss of fear)   | Obsessive about revenge, driving him to become stronger and search for his sister.   |
| Atsushi Nakajima    | Violence & abandonment trauma      | Abuse in orphanages, loss of authority figures                 | Arousal (extreme fear, tremors), negative cognitions and moods (low self-esteem)   | Following Dazai's orders without question to avoid fear                              |
| Dazai Osamu         | Trauma of loss                     | Death of his best friend, realization of parallel worlds       | Intrusion or re-experiencing (keeps remembering the other world), negative cognitions and moods (deep guilt and depression), arousal (manipulative, obsessive actions) | Creates a grand plan to save Oda as an attempt to repay the loss in the other world. |

Theory study: Trauma Theory- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Akutagawa experienced symptoms of PTSD, such as negative cognitions and bad mood, as well as excessive arousal. The study of Atsushi Nakajima's theory can be done using several psychological theories, including: Trauma Theory - Trauma of Neglect and Violence: Atsushi experienced trauma of neglect and violence in an orphanage, which can affect his trust in others and himself. The study of Dazai Osamu's theory can be done using several psychological theories, including the theory of emotions, namely that Dazai's negative emotions, such as deep guilt, can influence his behavior and make him more likely to commit obsessive acts.

Table 1 and Table 2 show that the theme of trauma in this novel influences the characters' existence as it affects most of the important characters, and also the direction of the story as the main character suffers from the trauma. This influence can be seen in how Akutagawa's obsession with revenge, Atsushi's dependence on authority, and Dazai's depressive tendencies all stem from their past trauma. Their psychological struggles shape their decisions, relationships, and the overall development of the narrative. The results of this study show that trauma is not only the background of the characters, but also the main driver of conflict and character development in the story.

## Discussion

### Characters and its characterization in *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019)

This study is limited to analyzing several selected characters, such as Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Atsushi Nakajima, Dazai Osamu, and Oda Sakunosuke. By applying Wallek &

Warren theory that divides characterization into three parts: physiology dimension, which is how the character looks, body shape, and the clothes they wear; sociology dimension, that is about how their social character such as work, relationship with others, status, etc.; psychological dimension, is the characters' attitudes, feelings, thoughts, emotions, etc. (Putra et al., 2024). The analysis of each character with this theory will be explained below.

### **Akutagawa Ryunosuke**

In novel *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019), the most highlights character in this plot is the character of Akutagawa Ryunosuke. The story focuses on how Akutagawa searches for his younger sister and avenges him with 'Man in Black'. This shows that the main character in this story is Akutagawa. This statement is supported by an explanation from Kenney (1966) who said that the main character is a character who is the most highlighted through the story. Based on Freytag's explanation (1900), Akutagawa also consider as the protagonist which is his struggle is the main problem in the story, even if he is not a character who looks morally "good". Characterization of Akutagawa based on three dimentias by Wallek & Warren (1956) is as follows:

*Tanizaki had encountered various miscreants and criminals due to the nature of his work, but he'd never seen such a vicious looking someone's eyes before. The newcomer's name was Akutagawa. He was a young man who'd just passed the agency's entrance exam the day before* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 14).

From the data above, several things can be known, regarding the physical, social, and psychological dimensions of Akutagawa's character. The physical dimension of Akutagawa's character can be seen from the data. Physiological aspects include appearance such as gender, age, skin color, and general health. He represented as "a young man" that can be inferred that he is around 18 – 25 years old in age. He also has "a vicious looking" eyes which is affected by his harsh past. This look is also what makes him look scary and is often interpreted by people to mean that he hates them, but it is more of a natural expression on his face.

*Akutagawa was a child of the slums, and one of the many who never knew his parents. He lived on the streets with eight other kids who shared his fate. ... Turning his sleeves into blades and flinging them around was no more shocking than a magic trick. ... The eight boys and girls who lived on the streets with him knew how dangerous he was. This filthy, frail boy dressed in rags could approach someone, his eyes void of any emotion, and slit their throat without warning* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 1-2).

In social aspects such as economic status, occupation and family relationships, The study of theories in social aspects such as economic status, work, and family relationships can be done using several sociological and psychological theories, including Sociological theory; Social Stratification Theory which analyzes how economic status and work affect social positions and relationships between individuals and also Family theory which analyzes how family structure and dynamics affect relationships between family members. little Akutagawa lives in a 'slum', shown in data above, which is a place inhabited by lower-class people living in poverty. Akutagawa himself, his younger sister and eight friends were street children "who never knew their parents" and experienced a hard life in slum. Until four and a half years later, someone invited him and work in a detective agency and took care of him properly. Akutagawa, who was previously socially a street kid who lived in a slum area, has now turned into an intern detective.

*He wasn't afraid of death, for he believed that hell would be far more pleasant than this place. Nor did he fear the pain of dying, as day after endless day was nothing but torture* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 3).

This data reveals the psychological dimensions of Akutagawa who is emotionless and does not feel fear of his death and also the consequences of the harsh environment which is reinforced by the shock of the slaughter of his friends. Previous data also shows Akutagawa's characterization through his cold and intimidating personality shown by Tanizaki's reaction.

### **Atsushi Nakajima**

Another character that plays an important role in this novel is Atsushi Nakajima. He is introduced as a character who is opposed to Akutagawa. He is on the opposite side and throughout the story he is a subordinate of the person Akutagawa hates. This makes Atsushi consider as the antagonist of the story, a character who prevents the protagonist, in this context is Akutagawa, from achieving his goals.

*Startled, the leader aimed the muzzle of his gun at the beast, but what the attached tactical flashlight illuminated was no beast but a boy. He had white hair, and his bangs were cut with a slant, which complemented his innocent features. He wore a black overcoat that went all the way up to his throat, almost completely covering his entire body as it fluttered in the faint breeze* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 22).

Physiology dimension is how the character look like their facial features, body shape, clothing, age and so on. In this data, Atsushi is described as "a boy" and has "innocent features", which can be interpreted as being a minor and possibly 16-18 years old. Atsushi has white hair that is cut at an angle. In fashion, Atsushi prefers modest clothing. In this data also mentioned that he wears "a black overcoat" which is long enough to cover from his neck to almost his entire body. This is because Atsushi is a member of the mafia and a murderer so he has to cover himself up to avoid being recognized.

*"So it was true...," babbled the leader in shock. "The White Tiger—the Port Mafia's White Reaper—really is just a boy"* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 22-23).

Based on this data, can be seen that socially Atsushi's existence is only a rumor, unknown, that is why the leader is shocked when he finds out that he is "true". He worked as a skilled Port Mafia assassin to earn the nickname "the Port Mafia's White Reaper" from his opponents. Because of his achievements, he is someone who is considered special to the internal organization and trusted by his boss.

*"I see you're not afraid of dying. I'm jealous," admitted the teenager with hint of sorrow—or perhaps some kind of similar emotion—in his voice. "Because I'm afraid to die. I'm afraid to get hurt. I'm afraid to get shot and bleed. That's why I became the Reaper...because if I merge with death itself, then death will never be able to find me"* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 24).

Psychological dimension of Atsushi Nakajima quite opposite from the characterization of Akutagawa. But it makes sense since he is Akutagawa's rival. Data above depicts Atsushi's deep fear of death and pain. He expresses his fear of death, wounds, and bleeding, which reflects his vulnerability as an individual. To overcome this fear, Atsushi chooses to become "the Reaper", attempting to blend in with death in order to no longer feel fear. Not only that, Atsushi also has a gentle and calm personality. He spoke to his opponent calmly and even praised him a few times. Atsushi has a gentle and calm nature, which can show that he has the ability to calm himself and others.

### **Dazai Osamu**

The next character is Dazai Osamu. He is the main villain in this book. At the beginning he is described as a mysterious figure who suddenly appears, convicts

Akutagawa and kidnaps his sister. Dazai Osamu's character analysis can be done by considering several aspects, including: Personality Manipulative Nature: Dazai has a manipulative nature, which can indicate that he has the ability to influence others and achieve his goals. He also has intelligence and Strategy: Dazai has high intelligence and strategy, which can indicate that he has the ability to analyze situations and make the right decisions. Sometimes he has emotions Guilt and Regret: Dazai has guilt and regret related to his past experiences. Anxiety and Fear: Dazai has anxiety and fear related to his future and the consequences of his actions. This makes him an antagonist in the story whose presence starts the conflict of the story. But even so, Asagiri always presents this character with all his complexities throughout the *Bungo Stray Dogs* series.

*It was slender and dressed in a black coat, but the moonlight cast a shadow over its face. All Akutagawa could make out were the figure's disheveled black hair and white bandages. ... Its voice was young and could even pass for a teenage boy. The young man in the black coat hopped off the tree stump, but his face was still in the shadows. And yet, Akutagawa could somehow feel his cold, distant gaze peering into his heart (Asagiri, 2019, p. 9-10).*

The quote provided an overview of Dazai's characterization based on his physiological dimension, namely his unique and immediately striking physical appearance. Dazai is described as "a slender" figure wearing "a black coat". Dazai's most striking physical features are his messy black hair and white bandages that wrap around his body. His voice sounded young like "a teenage boy," it meant that Dazai at that time when Akutagawa was a little was still a minor aged 13-17. In addition, Dazai is depicted wearing a black coat, which makes him seem like a dark and mysterious figure. Although his face is covered in shadows, Akutagawa can sense "cold, distant gaze peering into his heart", which reflects how Dazai's physical presence creates a cold and distant aura that is able to penetrate the feelings of others. This shows that Dazai's character is not only determined by physical features, but also by the strong psychological effects he has on the people around him.

*"Lower your head, captain," snapped an executive standing in the back of the room. "You're in the presence of the boss." Atsushi immediately dropped to one knee and deeply bowed his head. "My sincerest apologies" (Asagiri, 2019, p. 34).*

This data illustrated how Dazai Osamu is seen through the sociological dimension, specifically in terms of his social status. He is a "boss" or leader in a hierarchy who is highly respected by his subordinates. Furthermore, the executive's strict order for Atsushi to bow his head before Dazai indicates that Dazai is not only respected, but also feared. But in data bellow shown Dazai's organization is an enemy of the government and very difficult to arrest him, instead they send assassins. This emphasizes how socially Dazai was so hated by the government that he could have been killed right away.

*"... our boss is also a professional...when it comes to people attempting to assassinate him. Highly trained killers sneak into our base almost every day in an attempt to take his life, but not one has ever been successful. Most don't even make it past the lobby on the first floor...just like your group" (Asagiri, 2019, p. 23).*

In psychological aspect, this data illustrated the characterization of Dazai that he is invincible. Using psychological aspects, data about Dazai Osamu can be illustrated as follows: Dazai's Psychological Characteristics for example, manipulative: Dazai has a manipulative nature, which can indicate that he has the ability to influence others and achieve his goals and the last one, intelligence and Strategy: Dazai has high intelligence and strategy, which can indicate that he has the ability to analyze situations and make the right decisions. This dialogue is spoken by Atsushi as he is explaining how professional Dazai is at being targeted for assassination because no one has ever been

successful. In the previous data, Dazai is also known as a mysterious person that Akutagawa refers to him as the "Man in Black".

### Oda Sakunosuke

The last character in the *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019) novel that will be discussed in this study is the character of Oda Sakunosuke. As one of the supporting characters of the story, the role of Oda Sakunosuke is very important for the development of the main character, Akutagawa Ryunosuke. His role as Akutagawa's mentor and coach makes him consider as the protagonist because his role does not hinder the main character.

*Dressed in a sand-coloured coat, the man had reddish-copper hair and a five-o'clock shadow. It was difficult to get a read on him from his expression. It always seemed that he was both concentrating on something, yet thinking about nothing at the same time* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 29).

This quote provided physiological dimension information about how Oda dresses, his physical features and facial expressions. Theoretical studies on physical features and facial expressions can be conducted using several psychological and anthropological theories, including, first, the theory of Psychology, namely the Theory of Emotion which analyzes how facial expressions can influence individual emotions and behavior and personality theory, namely analyzing how physical features and facial expressions can influence perceptions of individual personality. Oda is described as wearing a 'sand-coloured coat', 'reddish-copper hair' and the shadow of a thin beard. The description that his expression is difficult to read as he always seems to be "concentrating on something" however does not indicate that Oda seems to be always awake in his thoughts, but does not openly show his feelings or reactions to the situation. This could also be a sign that Oda is hiding more complex personal emotions or thoughts, which are not easily accessible to others.

*"Uh... Akutagawa, I'm sure you already know who he is but allow me to formally introduce you. This is Sakunosuke Oda. He's been a detective at the agency for two years now, and from today on, he's going to be your mentor." "I look forward to working with you, Oda." Akutagawa bowed his head reverently* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 30).

Information about Oda's character about social aspects such as his work and his role in the story provided in quote above. With his experience as a "detective" for two years, he will play the role of a "mentor" who guides Akutagawa who has just joined. Akutagawa's bowing to him shows a healthy social relationship where Oda is recognized by Akutagawa as a mentor and he accepts the role.

*"If you hadn't found me, I would have surely perished at that riverbank," said Akutagawa. Watching Akutagawa submissively lower his head, Kunikida mentioned, "Oda has a habit of going out of his way to help orphans in need, after all." "I just felt like it," commented Oda ...* (Asagiri, 2019, p. 30).

In addition, according to the psychological dimension, previous data and this data also show that Oda is a wise and kind person. When Akutagawa told him about how he would die if Oda did not help him, Kunikida said that it was Oda's "habit" to help orphans. This means that helping orphans in particular is a common thing for Oda which shows his kindness. Furthermore, his simple demeanor and brief response, "I just felt like it," indicates that the help he provides is a natural impulse from the goodness of his heart, not out of a desire for praise or recognition. This shows that Oda's kindness comes sincerely from within without any ulterior motives, making him a character with a gentle yet humble heart.

### **The theme of trauma in *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* (2019)**

Theme is the central idea or message that an author conveys through a literary work, reflecting on real-life issues and offering commentary on human experiences (Kirsznner & Mandell, 1991). A theme is often revealed through elements such as conflict, characters, dialogue, and the title itself, which work together to highlight the story's deeper meaning. Themes give deeper meaning to the story and make it more meaningful to the reader. Stories can explore multiple themes, as they often mirror the complexity of life and human relationships, with main and additional themes interwoven to enrich the narrative (Gultom, 2022). Themes such as love, family, fear, or justice offer readers insight into the struggles and emotions of the characters while encouraging reflection on universal issues.

In *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast*, there are themes such as supernatural, moral ambiguity, and self-discovery. The characters in this series have supernatural special abilities, which may indicate that they have extraordinary powers. But the theme of trauma is the focus of this study. Trauma depicted in the novel *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* experiences by several characters. That is the reason why one of the themes this book contains is trauma, because the trauma happens to most of the important characters, and also the story directed by the protagonist that is suffered by his feelings caused by the trauma he has. This trauma is caused by the traumatic events they experienced. According to Durand & David (as cited in Liyyah, 2021), when a person sees or is faced with a situation where it threatens his life both physically and mentally to himself or others, that is what is called a traumatic experience. This trauma is the main driver in the development of the story and characters. The three main characters, namely Akutagawa, Atsushi, and Dazai, experience traumatic events in the past, which then affect the way the characters make decisions, build relationships, and deal with conflicts.

The cause of trauma in the main character, Akutagawa, is described at the exposition regarding Akutagawa's background who lived in a cruel environment since a kid. In a murder that occurred in the Slump, Akutagawa witnessed his friends being brutally slaughtered. This incident became a turning point in his life, fostering a burning sense of revenge within him. After he succeeded in avenging the deaths of his friends, tragedy struck again when his younger sister was kidnapped by a mysterious man known as the "Man in Black." All of these events occurred in one terrible day, adding layers of trauma that deepened Akutagawa's experience. The massacre that witnessed himself as the victim and the survivor and his younger sister's ancestors made him even more obsessed with revenge and the desire to save his younger sister, even without a clear clue about his whereabouts.

*His insides burned and his hair stood on end from an emotion so powerful that it seemed ready to burst from his throat. That emotion was hatred, the first Akutagawa had ever clearly felt. Despite his knowledge that he was heading toward the gates of hell, this feeling only continued to grow and consume him. He would not hesitate. He was simply going to slit his enemies' throats with a single blade as his hatred dictated him to do (Asagiri, 2019, p. 3).*

In the quote, Akutagawa felt a very strong hatred, which completely controlled him, as the first reaction to the traumatic event he experienced. Based on the trauma theory of Cathy Caruth (1996), this feeling can be understood as a symptom of a late trauma response, which appears as a reaction to a very stressful event, but is not immediately recognized as a trauma. Akutagawa, who was previously described as a child without feelings, this was the first time he felt such a strong emotion, hatred, that appeared suddenly and overflowed. This is in accordance with Caruth's understanding that trauma often appears after a traumatic event has occurred, through memories or

feelings that emerge later, often without full awareness. Intrusion or re-experiencing, which is reflected in the strong and persistent hatred that arises as a reaction to the traumatic event he experienced. Akutagawa feels such deep and overwhelming hatred, that it seems to "burn" him from within. This symptom describes how feelings of trauma re-emerge uncontrollably, forcing Akutagawa to constantly remember the violence he has witnessed, including the massacre of his friends. The traumatic experiences that Akutagawa went through can affect his feelings and make him have a strong hatred towards certain people or situations. The hatred becomes a kind of haunting memory, unavoidable, and acts as an unexpected emotional reaction due to a traumatic event that has not been fully processed.

*"Come find me once you figure out what makes you so weak. We'll have a rematch. I'll be holding on to your sister until then." "What...?! Wait...!" moaned Akutagawa. However, his body temperature had rapidly plummeted, and he was unable to move even a single finger. Wait! Don't take my sister! Stop! I don't care that I'm a fool, that I'm going to die—just don't hurt my sister...!" (Asagiri, 2019, p. 11-13).*

The traumatic experience that Akutagawa experiences in this excerpt is closely related to the loss of his friends in the Slump massacre and the kidnapping of his sister, which directly shapes his primary motivation throughout the story. After successfully avenging the deaths of his friends, Akutagawa is forced to confront a new, deeper trauma when his sister is kidnapped by the "Man in Black." This traumatic experience not only shatters his emotional composure, but also creates a powerful urge to save his sister, who is the only connection he has after countless losses. Akutagawa's feelings of helplessness reflect how this trauma has eroded his rational abilities and replaced them with an obsession to restore what has been lost. This motivation to save his sister becomes the center of his struggle throughout the story, showing how his trauma drives Akutagawa's goals and actions, and shapes his complex moral compass, between the desire for revenge and the need to protect the people he loves.

Another character in this novel who experiences trauma is the character of Atsushi Nakajima. In *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast*, Atsushi Nakajima's character is portrayed in a very different way compared to his original version in the main story, where he is a kind-hearted member of the Detective Agency. Here, Atsushi is a dutiful member of the Port Mafia who is very dependent on his boss, Dazai, who also holds a great influence on Atsushi's behavior and decisions. His trauma made him always feel helpless and excessive guilt, making him feel that he should always follow Dazai's orders without question and this greatly influences his actions throughout the story.

*"N-no, I—I'm not a-afraid of..." Atsushi curled up into a ball on the floor, unable to keep his entire body from trembling any longer. "Please...give me orders...Dazai," Atsushi somehow managed to stammer despite his chattering teeth. "Right now. I'll never...go against orders...again. Never... Never again..." (Asagiri, 2019, p. 36-37).*

This quote happened when Atsushi had just returned from a mission to report to Dazai so that he could immediately receive new orders but his boss instead made him triggered by talking about the past when he violated the order to make Atsushi terrified due to trauma. Atsushi's symptoms of trauma are reflected in his arousal behavior, characterized by his body shaking violently and his stuttering speech due to deep fear. Atsushi's dependence on Dazai's orders illustrates how the trauma from his past has shaped his mindset and behavior of unconditional obedience, driven by fear of rejection or punishment. The trauma Atsushi experienced can make him feel insecure and need protection from others, such as Dazai. According to the American Psychiatric Association (in Lathifah, 2022), arousal is a symptom of trauma characterized by excessive

emotional reactions and an inability to control fear or anxiety. Atsushi's plea to accept orders, despite being in a very stressful condition, shows how the trauma has created a pattern of dependency as a defense mechanism, where he feels safe only by submitting to authority. This trembling and insistence on remaining obedient reflect an obsessive need to avoid further conflict or risk, a direct result of traumatic experiences involving a deep sense of helplessness in the face of violence or neglect in the past.

*A voice from my past echoed in my mind. Whose voice was it? It was Dazai's. It turned into a black chain and coiled around my body. It was a cursed voice. "Do not---no matter what, Atsushi." I couldn't escape no matter how fast I ran. I know it'll come after me no matter where I go. I wanted to scream, but I had no throat. I wanted to cry, but I had no eyes. My entire body trembled so violently that it felt like it was going to shatter into a million pieces. I continued to run away from myself. But you can't run away from yourself. Nobody can* (Asagiri. 2019, p. 96).

Another symptom of Atsushi's trauma is evident through the intense first-person point of view from Atsushi's own perspective of his attachment to Dazai's voice that manifests as "black chains" that shackle his body and mind. The symptom of trauma depicted is intrusion or re-experiencing, which occurs when memories of Dazai's orders resurface uncontrollably, haunting Atsushi with crippling emotional intensity. According to the American Psychiatric Association (in Lathifah, 2022), intrusion is characterized by the involuntary emergence of traumatic memories or experiences, often in the form of recurring images or sounds. Atsushi feels trapped in an inescapable memory loop, where Dazai's voice is not only a traumatic reminder, but also a symbol of the helplessness and dependency that has taken root in him. The description of his body shaking so badly that it feels like it is about to break reflects how this traumatic experience has deeply affected his physical and emotional state. His inability to escape, both physically and emotionally, shows how the trauma continues to shape the way Atsushi sees himself as an individual who is unable to free himself from the shackles of his past.

*That was the moment it suddenly hit me. No matter how much stronger I got or how much I grew, no matter how proud I was of myself, he would never be able to tell me "good job" or say "I'm impressed" ever again. There was a possibility he would've said that. One day. If he were alive. But he didn't say anything. I would never be able to hear the one thing I wanted the most in this world. Because I'd killed him* (Asagiri. 2019, p. 102-103).

From the beginning of the story, the reader does not know what makes Atsushi a coward person who always begs Dazai's orders, until in the rising action when Atsushi tries to stop Akutagawa from meeting Gin, his sister, he experiences flashbacks that remind him of something about what happened in the orphanage, the night when he violated Dazai's orders. This quote describes Atsushi's deep regret after killing the director of the orphanage, because he knows he will never hear the words of confession he so desperately wants, such as "good job" or "I'm proud of you." This guilt creates emotional trauma that continues to haunt her, shaping the fear of losing an authority figure. This explains why Atsushi is so obedient to Dazai's orders, as a way to avoid repeating the loss and gain the recognition he seeks, even though it is demanding on his psychology.

The last character to experience trauma in this novel is Dazai Osamu. Dazai Osamu's character in the novel *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* is inseparable from his background in the original universe of *Bungo Stray Dogs* series. In this novel, Dazai shows a darker, more manipulative side that is much different from the cheerful and somewhat casual imagery often shown in the original story. The trauma that Dazai experienced related to his past,

the loss of his friend that is Oda Sakunosuke, became an important element that shaped his decision in this story.

*"Because I'm a skill user who can nullify all skills, and I used that trait to create a point of singularity, which forced the worlds' fragments to connect. After that, I successfully managed to read the memories of the me who exists outside the Book—that is to say, the original me."*

*"...?!" Read memories? Of the other—the original Dazai? (Asagiri. 2019, p. 129).*

The quote occurs in the falling action when Dazai reveals his ability to read memories from the original Dazai, the *Bungo Stray Dogs* series, due to his ability to "nullify all skills". Dazai's trauma is deepened by the fact that he is able to access the memories of Dazai who lost Oda, a figure who means a lot to him. This realization adds to the loneliness and guilt that haunts him, because although he can see into other worlds, he cannot change the fact that he has lost Oda. This trauma motivates Dazai to plan all the ways for Oda to continue living in this world, including creating a meeting point between different worlds to try to change his destiny. The desire to save Oda is the main driving force for Dazai to act, even though he is aware that this is an effort full of sacrifices.

*"Odasaku, you asked me why I lured Akutagawa to the Mafia headquarters," he began. "I did it to protect this world." "This world?" "This is but one of countless worlds," he replied while shooting me a pleading look. "And in another—in the original world, you and I were friends. We drank at this bar and spent time together talking about the most ridiculous things" (Asagiri, 2019)*

This quote illustrates how Dazai's trauma is related to the loss of Oda, which is a traumatic experience that reoccurs in his mind, in line with Caruth's theory of trauma. Caruth (1996) states that trauma is often not immediately felt by the individual, but only through flashbacks or unavoidable repetitions of the experience. In this case, even though Dazai is in another world and trying to convince Oda of the existence of a parallel world, in the real world he and Oda are "friends" who have fond memories together, and those memories continue to haunt his mind. This trauma influences his thoughts and actions, forming an obsessive motivation to save Oda from the reality of having lost someone very important to him. As Caruth notes, trauma is not just a feeling that occurs once, but recurs and affects an individual's behavior over a long period of time, along with efforts to understand and deal with it. This also reflects intrusion or re-experiencing (American Psychiatric Association, in Lathifah, 2022), a common symptom of trauma, where traumatic memories or emotions return in an uncontrollable way, affecting Dazai's actions and thoughts. His guilt and regret are evidence of this recurring trauma, as he cannot escape the bitter reality of the loss, which continues to influence his behavior and decisions.

*"This is the only world where he's alive and writing novels. I can't let that world disappear." The wind grew stronger, beckoning him, and Dazai slowly leaned back. "Yes... Yes... Yes..." His eyes were closed and his smile dreamy as he spoke. "The time has finally come. This long-awaited moment. I can't wait. I truly cannot wait... But I do have one regret: I'll never be able to read that novel you complete one day. That's the one last thing I wish I could do" (Asagiri. 2019, p. 130).*

This quote shows symptoms of trauma intrusion and negative cognition and mood (American Psychiatric Association, as cited in Lathifah, 2022) in Dazai. Symptoms of intrusion are seen from how memories of Oda and his desire to protect this world continue to haunt his mind, making him obsessed with ensuring that Oda remains "alive and writing novels" in this world, the only place Oda still exists. Meanwhile, symptoms of negative cognition and mood are seen through Dazai's deep feelings of despair and regret because he will never be able to read Oda's last novel. Although he smiles and appears calm, his actions of letting himself fall from a tall building show the despair that

arises from the guilt and loss that continue to weigh on him. Both of these symptoms illustrate the deep impact of trauma on Dazai's emotions and behavior, influencing his decision to commit suicide.

## Conclusion

This analysis of the novel *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* by Kafka Asagiri shows that intrinsic elements such as characters and themes contribute significantly to the development of the story. The main character, Akutagawa Ryunosuke, along with supporting characters such as Atsushi Nakajima, Dazai Osamu, and Oda Sakunosuke, demonstrate complex psychological and social dynamics that reflect serious traumatic experiences. Their characterizations were analyzed in three dimensions: physiology, sociology and psychology. Akutagawa is portrayed as a young man with a piercing gaze shaped by his harsh past, striving to prove himself as a better person amidst his childhood trauma and save his sister. Atsushi, bearing the scars of childhood abuse, is depicted with striking physical traits and serves as the antagonist in this narrative. Dazai, a boss of a criminal group and a mysterious man carries profound psychological wounds from losing his best friend. Oda, as a mentor figure, is characterized by his calm demeanor and his role in supporting Akutagawa's journey toward self-recovery. The theme of trauma, which is one of the social issues that is still relevant today, is depicted through the internal and external conflicts of the characters. Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Atsushi Nakajima, and Dazai Osamu also experienced symptoms of trauma that shaped their personalities. Akutagawa and Atsushi both showed symptoms of negative cognition and mood, along with arousal. These symptoms make Akutagawa obsessed with revenge and becoming stronger, while Atsushi becomes dependent on authority figures like Dazai to escape his guilt. Meanwhile, Dazai experiences Intrusion or re-experiencing, arousal, negative cognitions and moods that make him obsessed with alternate realities and trying to change destiny. These elements, characters and theme, underline how trauma can significantly impact an individual's life journey and social interactions. The novel explores themes of trauma and past experiences that affect the main characters. It also explores themes of identity and self-discovery, especially through the character of Atsushi Nakajima. The novel has deeper meanings about life, identity, and the human experience. Thus, *Bungo Stray Dogs: Beast* by Kafka Asagiri is a complex and interesting work that explores deep themes and has unique characters. The depiction of trauma in this study can still be specified in terms of other psychological theories such as post-traumatic or defense mechanism theories, or even broader themes. The depiction of trauma in this study can still be specified in other psychological theories such as post-traumatic theory or defense mechanisms, or even broader themes. By expanding the scope of analysis, future studies are expected to provide deeper insights into the relationship between literature and the social issues contained in it.

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