

## **The Trauma and Overcoming The Trauma in Kana Akatsuki's Violet Evergarden (2018)**

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### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini menganalisis trauma yang terjadi pada tokoh utama animasi Jepang berjudul Violet Evergarden. Memanfaatkan teori Cathy Caruth dan Dominick LaCapra, khususnya pada konsep trauma dan rekonsiliasinya. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi trauma yang dialami tokoh utama, faktor-faktor yang menyebabkannya, dan cara tokoh mengatasinya. Temuannya mengungkapkan bahwa karakter mengalami tiga jenis trauma seperti mati rasa, keterlambatan, dan pikiran mengganggu. Selain itu, untuk mengatasi trauma, karakter mengalami proses yang disebut melewati masa dan menindak. Penelitian tersebut menyimpulkan bahwa para karakter memang mengalami serangkaian trauma akibat masa perang dan berusaha menjalani kehidupan saat ini.

**Kata Kunci:** Trauma, Rekonsiliasi, Mati rasa, Keterlambatan.

### **Abstract**

This study analyses the trauma that transpires in the main character of a Japanese Animation entitled Violet Evergarden. Utilizing Cathy Caruth's and Dominick LaCapra's theory, particularly in the concept of trauma narratives and their reconciliation. This research explored the trauma undergone by the character, the factors that contributed to it, and the way the character overcomes it. The findings revealed that the characters experienced three types of trauma such as emotion numbing, belatedness and intrusive thoughts. Additionally, to cope with the trauma, the character experiences a process called working through and acting out. The research concludes that the characters are indeed undergoing a series of trauma due to the war time and attempting to live in the current life.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Reconciliation, Numbness, Belatedness.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

According to Pathak and Dewangan (2020), trauma refers to an emotional response to a devastating occurrence. It may occur due to considerable occurrence, and it can be through accidents, violence, natural disasters, abuse, or other significant life changes that frequently transcend a person's capability for adjustment, resulting in long-lasting psychological and physical consequences. In the process of trauma, initially, individuals may react with shock and denial, but over time, they may develop. It evolves into unpredictable emotions, such as flashbacks and physical sensations like headaches, tremors, numbness, or nausea. Moreover, negative consequences can create unhealthy patterns in interpersonal interactions, and experiencing these symptoms for an extended period can negatively impact an individual's well-being.

In literature, trauma theorists seek an opening in which past, present, and future generations might find a community willing to hear their stories, where traumas become narratable and attentive to whom and what we have historically been unable and unwilling to hear. Trauma is also not about confronting the past in order to

go on, nor is it concerning about comprehending how to overcome trauma, but rather about persisting in living with it and even valuing oneself and the world in the face of it (Dewani, 2023). Additionally, several researchers have engaged in various theories related to trauma and human experiences, including Cathy Caruth, a well-known expert in this field whose study has contributed significantly to the knowledge of the complexity of trauma narratives.

According to Caruth (1996), trauma does not refer to only an unexpected experience in a person's past. Instead, it is how the trauma is intensely and utterly overlooked at the time but then reappears in the survivor's life after that. Trauma occurs abruptly in the initial; then, it is continuously replayed in the thoughts and memories of the survivors. Moreover, Caruth also describes how her initial aim was to discover every work of writing that offers a separate story and how particular words or figures frequently appear across the text, producing a distinctive textual experience (Caruth, 1996).

In correlation with trauma narratives, this study intends to analyze a Japanese animation (anime) entitled Violet Evergarden by Kana Akatsuki. It is an animation in which the main character, Violet, has a tragic background.

In the story, Violet starts as an ordinary girl without a name until another character, Gilbert, gives her one. She was once sold to the military to serve as a human weapon in a war zone. Living in these conditions, Violet matures into someone who lacks an understanding of everyday human life, and Gilbert begins to teach her the basics. Unfortunately, both Violet and Gilbert experience accidents in the war zone, leading to Gilbert's death and Violet's losing arms. These accidents have a profound impact on Violet's mind and self. Thus, to summarize this anime raises the issue of trauma during World War I and focuses on Violet's path to healing. The story takes place in a post-war period, and Violet embarks on a journey to understand human emotions and life.

Concerning trauma narratives, there has been a considerable amount of research conducted to analyze various traumas in literary works.

According to the previous study conducted by Lathifah (2022), There are some symptoms of trauma and reconciliation in the novel "Eat, Pray, Love" that delves into the protagonist's journey of grappling with trauma and subsequently finding reconciliation, utilized an analysis approached through the theories of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra. Within the protagonist's character, there are symptoms of trauma such as fear, anxiety, depression, self-harm tendencies, and suicidal attempts. The paper's exploration concludes that the character navigates their reconciliation with trauma by actively steering clear of potentially distressing situations and by sharing their deposition through the art of novel writing.

In addition, a previous study also conducted in 2022, Jelínková, conducted a study on trauma narratives within Janice Galloway's Short Stories, explicitly focusing on the experiences of child characters. The research explored how these characters inherited historical trauma, as proposed by Sigmund Freud and further refined by Cathy Caruth. The research included examples from the short stories to illustrate how these characters acknowledge, bear witness to, and communicate their traumatic experiences.

Nevertheless, in the form of Japanese animation, only a few researchers have conducted a thorough analysis despite its significant influence on current society. Thus, this research is based on the observation that there have been relatively few analyses of this particular Japanese animation. However, this does not imply that no analyses of this literary work have ever been conducted.

Azzi and Amanda carried out a previous study on this anime in 2021. They approached the anime of Violet Evergarden from a feminist perspective, focusing on portraying the female main character as a strong and stable figure.

Moreover, to address the gap, the writer intends to explore this anime from a different perspective, utilizing a trauma-based approach to examine the type of trauma experienced by the characters and how they overcome and heal from it utilizing the reconciliation theory.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research utilized data from the Japanese animated series '*Violet Evergarden*' by Kana Akatsuki as its primary source. The series, consisting of 13 episodes, falls within the drama and fantasy genres that take the setting of World War I place settings and post-war setting of time. The data was gathered by carefully examining specific monologues, dialogues, and character descriptions within the anime, emphasizing the characters, setting, and plot. Particular attention was also given to the background, atmosphere, and cultural and historical context of the anime's setting. The focus of the study is to thoroughly analyze and concentrate on the characteristics of the main protagonist in the anime, which was chosen due to the character's significant impact on the animation.

Furthermore, the study explicitly limits its scope to the lives and storylines of certain characters. The data was initially examined by meticulously noting and observing each event in the series. Every scene and sequence was closely scrutinized to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the anime's plot. Additionally, the researcher compared the series to relevant theories and gathered evidence.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Trauma in Violet Evergarden**

Violet Evergarden is an anime series adapted from a 2018 light novel by Kana Akatsuki. The titular character, Violet Evergarden, embarks on a journey to discover her true identity and the purpose of life after the war. As she encounters new people and navigates various challenges, she gradually unveils the layers of her persona and the genuine meaning of her existence. Throughout the series, Violet Evergarden undergoes significant character development. She transitions from a reserved and unemotional soldier to a more open, empathetic, and understanding individual. Through her profession as a letter writer, she cultivates greater empathy and learns to express her emotions sincerely. Audiences witness her evolution from an apparently robotic and detached individual to someone attuned to human emotions and behaviors. This growth serves as a central theme of the series, showcasing Violet's resilience and willingness to embrace change. The series delves deeply into the theme of trauma, portraying it through the emotional numbness

experienced by the main character, and the lingering effects of past and present wounds.???

### **Belatedness and Burning**

Cathy Caruth's concept of the *"double wound"* explores the pervasive and unexpected nature of traumatic experiences, which can be too overwhelming for the conscious mind to fully process. As a result, the emotions and memories associated with the trauma may become embedded in the subconscious, waiting to resurface at a later time. These suppressed traumas can manifest through distressing nightmares and repetitive behaviors as the mind strives to unravel and understand the events (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

Moreover, Caruth's work emphasizes the idea of belatedness, indicating that the full impact of trauma is not immediately absorbed or comprehended. Instead, the traumatic experience often reemerges later, disrupting the individual's usual cognitive and emotional processes.



Figure 1. Claudia converse to Violet

As depicted in the scene above, highlighting the dialogue of another character, namely Claudia the Violet, he mentions the words burn. The highlighting part of this word is pointed out in the idea of *"trauma"* of Cathy Caruth.

This analysis delves into the use of the words *"fire and burning up"* to express the implicit experiences of trauma survivors. These terms encapsulate the profound physical and psychological impacts of traumatic events. *"Fire"* represents the catastrophic event, while *"burning up"* signifies the emotional and psychological scars that survivors carry. These wounds are as significant as physical injuries and are the result of the intense emotional and psychological strain endured during and after the traumatic event (Caruth, 1996, p. 7).

Moreover, throughout of the story of Violet Evergarden, Violet encounters several recurring instances of sadness in the form of nightmares, and breaking down. This instances featuring of the trauma of losing her beloved person and repeated distressing dialogue of Claudia's conversation. This has heightened her emotional anguish and made it more challenging for her to cope with

her symptoms. The persistent dialogue of burning up then represents a double wound, where past traumatic events resurface, triggering memories and emotional scars. This agony continues to plague her in her present condition.

Furthermore, the concept of belatedness arises in which Violet Evergarden initially rejects the idea of burning up. This rejection stems from her inability to experience the emotions associated with burning up. She denies being burnt out both physically and mentally as a result.

It is also mentioned by Cathy Caruth, in her theory, underscores that trauma is not just an immediate occurrence but a continuous and forceful presence that can keep affecting survivors long after the initial incident. Additionally, the impact of trauma is not restricted to the first event but can appear in the ongoing recurrence of traumatic memories and experiences. What is particularly distressing is when survivors don't fully understand the traumatic incident when it happens and only come to grasp its full significance later on, gradually. This delayed understanding can intensify the traumatic effects, heightening the impact of the trauma and its grip on the survivor's mind.



Figure 2. Violet acceptance of burning

In addition, the scene above shows where the portrayal of Double Wound, belatedness, and burning reaches its culmination. This is the pivotal moment when Violet realizes the profound loss of someone dear to her, resulting in a profound experience of trauma. The scene unfolds in a room where Violet fully confronts the depth of her loss, leading her to feel overwhelming grief and hopelessness. Throughout the scene, Violet goes through a series of emotional breakdowns, emphasizing the intensity of her pain as she grapples with accepting her loss. The depiction underscores Violet's recognition of being engulfed in emotional turmoil. Once more, the term 'burn' is used to symbolize the emotional scars of the trauma she has endured. Having been tormented by recurring nightmares and memories, she finally confronts and embraces the agonizing pain associated with the trauma. She articulates feeling 'burned', echoing Claudia's earlier observation.

Haunted by past events that continue to impact her, she carries the weight of her past actions.

Therefore, throughout the series, the word "*burn*" is repeatedly emphasized, particularly around the fourth instance, representing the character's trauma. This aligns with Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, which explores the idea of double injury and delayed understanding. Essentially, Violet Evergarden grapples with the concept of double injury, indicating that she is not only affected by her past traumatic experiences but also feels their impact in her current situation. Violet's trauma is depicted through recurring nightmares, triggers, and dreams, serving as constant reminders of the suffering she has endured in the past, which makes it difficult for her to move forward.

### Emotional Numbing

According to Caruth (1996), the study of trauma theory can be broadly classified into two main perspectives. The first perspective looks at trauma as the breakdown of a previously unharmed sense of self. In contrast, the second perspective centers on the resilience of trauma, which enables individuals to navigate overwhelming experiences by emotionally numbing themselves.

Emotional numbing refers to a state in which an individual experiences no emotional reactions. It is commonly defined as an incapacity to sense or convey feelings, resulting in disconnection, indifference, or a reduced capacity to feel happiness, sorrow, or other emotions. This state may serve as a coping strategy in reaction to trauma, pressure, or overpowering emotions. In the series *Violet Evergarden*, the portrayal of Violet's emotional numbness is evident right from the start.



Figure 3. Another character's commented on Violet

In the depicted scene, Violet Evergarden is initially perceived by the other characters as resembling a doll. This comparison goes beyond her physical appearance and encompasses her mannerisms, which mirror the traits of a doll, lacking human gestures and facial expressions. This highlights the perception of Violet as an enigmatic and emotionally distant figure.

### Intrusive Thoughts

According to Caruth, unexpected ways may lead traumatic experiences to intrude into consciousness, such as through flashbacks, dreams, or involuntary memories (Caruth, 1996). The unconscious mind significantly influences the incarnation and re-experiencing of trauma. In addition, memories that arise without conscious effort or intentional recall are known as involuntary or spontaneous memories. Superficial impulses can trigger these memories, such as sights, sounds, smells, or other sensory cues. They often arise spontaneously in everyday life, are vivid and detailed, and can be associated with specific emotions.

Moreover, the experience of intrusion in the context of trauma involves the involuntary and unwelcome appearance of traumatic memories, thoughts, or feelings in the present moment. This occurrence leads to the past encroaching on the present, often causing distress to the individual's mind and body and making it challenging to experience the present moment positively. Intrusion symptoms can present in various forms, including intrusive thoughts, memories, nightmares, and triggers. In the series, the protagonist experiences intrusion attempts, such as trying to commit suicide.



Figure 4. Violet committed suicide

The scene depicted above shows Violet having nightmares about living in the present while haunted by past memories. She feels overwhelmed by the repetitive nature of her memories, leading to intrusive thoughts of suicide, where she tries to strangle herself using her own hand. Additionally, she also exhibits behavior such as hitting objects, screaming, and crying, which conveys the depiction of experiencing trauma.

In *Violet Evergarden*, the intrusion is portrayed through the main character, Violet, as she repeatedly experiences memories and recollections. This repetition ultimately leads to an overwhelming situation in which she feels disconnected from her sense of self.

## 2. Factors Contributed in Violet Evergarden



Cathy Caruth (1996) suggested that experiencing trauma can cause a psychological shock similar to a physical threat, disrupting the individual's perception of time. It was discussed how trauma affects survivors both mentally and physically. Furthermore, the previous conversation explored how the character Violet Evergarden has been deeply affected by a series of traumatic experiences. Nevertheless, the roots of these traumas are not entirely clear. It can be speculated that there are underlying factors contributing to her emotional pain and suffering. Therefore, this specific analysis aims to explore the various elements that led to Violet Evergarden's traumatic experiences. By examining her past and present circumstances, we seek to uncover the intricate emotions and psychological challenges she has encountered throughout the series.

This study seeks to comprehend the factors that contribute to these traumatic experiences. Accordingly, this discussion revealed that some factors linked to the character's traumatic experience are associated with her experience of abandonment, neglect, and inhumane treatment by those around her.

### **An Orphaned Girl**

When someone or something is abandoned, it means they are left behind without the intention of providing further support or returning. This can apply to physical items, animals, properties, or relationships. Early childhood traumas, such as mistreatment, neglect, and other emotionally damaging experiences, can harm a child's early attachment bonds. When children experience rejection or unsafe relationships, it can change how they see themselves, how much they trust others, and their perspective on the world (Dye, 2018).

Abandonment, the act of being deserted or left behind, can have profound and long-lasting negative impacts on an individual, particularly when it happens during their formative years.

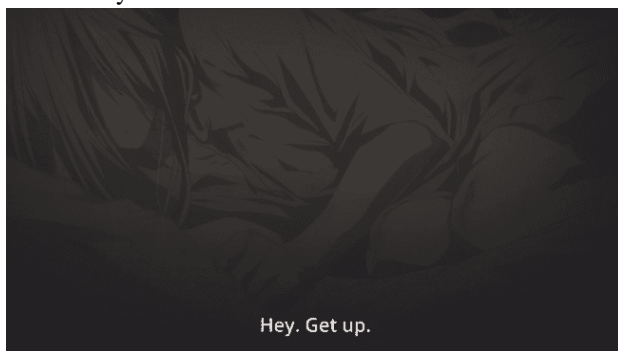


Figure 5. Violet first picked up

As pictured in the scene above, Violet's life is marked by a series of traumatic experiences that started when she was orphaned and abandoned. The feelings of neglect and lack

of support are noticeable, and one can only imagine the pain she must have endured. As the series progresses, we see that Violet is taken by a commander who forcibly removes her from the northern front where she had been stationed. She is neglected and taken forcefully from the northern front, alone and without any family at such a young age. This conveys a sense of being left without support or care, which leads to neglect or feeling forgotten. This conveys a profound sense of being abandoned, triggering emotional numbness. It is evident that this emotional detachment stems directly from the traumatic experiences she has endured, which have left a lasting impact on her.

Moreover, Avdibegović and Brkić (2020) suggest that experiencing neglect can significantly hinder the development of language skills, such as the capability to communicate and apprehend others. This delay in language acquisition can significantly affect an individual's emotional and behavioral growth, leading to various challenges later in life. This observation illustrates Violet's struggle to develop the capacity to express and comprehend emotions. Because she was abandoned at a young age, Violet lacked the support needed to learn how to perceive the world.

### **Exploitation as a War Weapon**

In the series, Violet Evergarden is depicted as a former weapon who has endured neglect and mistreatment. Consequently, she is enlisted in the military and utilized as a potent asset at the forefront of the war. Right from the start, it is evident to nearly every character that Violet is no typical soldier; rather, she is a deadly weapon that can defeat her adversaries using her physical force.

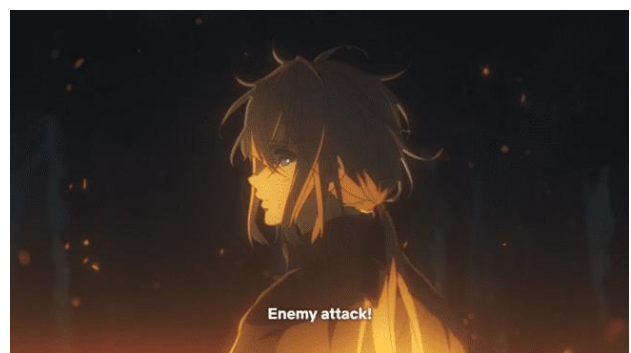


Figure 6. Violet first picked up

In addition, the scene depicted above shows Violet during the war when she was placed in the army to attack an enemy on the frontline. She mainly used herself as a weapon to slaughter most of the enemies there. This depicts how she was merely used as a controlled and ordered weapon.

*"Just exploit this orphaned girl as much as you can  
and dump her in the battlefield when  
she's no longer of use"*  
(Violet Evergarden, 2018, Episode 8)

As what the dialogue mentioned above, in the story, Violet experiences numerous occasions where her humanity is ignored by the other characters, relegating her to merely a weapon. Despite her sorrowful past as an orphan, the other characters overlook her, denying her any sense of self apart from her usefulness to them. This degrading treatment of Violet recurs throughout the story and underscores their society's harsh, uncompromising nature. The other characters perceive Violet as a tool devoid of genuine emotions or sentiments, a severe and unjust evaluation of her essence.

The double wound and belatedness trauma of Violet Evergarden directly results from specific factors. As Violet expressed in the series, she is haunted by her past actions. Her lack of memory about being used as a weapon and killing without hesitation troubles her in the present. This also leads her to constantly question whether she truly deserves to live after causing harm to others, including those who have families.

### **Lossing Beloved Person**

Losing someone dear can be an incredibly difficult experience, especially if it happens in a traumatic situation. This can result in a type of grief known as complicated grief, which is intricate and deep. This type of grief is marked by enduring feelings of sorrow, an inability to manage, and a strong yearning for the departed individual. These emotions are often accompanied by persistent thoughts or visions of the deceased, as well as a sense of disbelief or an incapacity to come to terms with the painful reality of their passing.

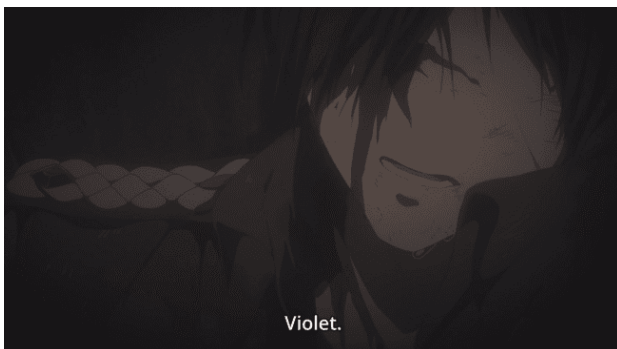


Figure 7. Gilbert last moment

Violet Evergarden's trauma stems from the loss of a loved one, namely Gilbert. This person valued Violet as a person, taught her literacy, and helped her understand

emotions and the world. Upon learning of the person's death, Violet was overwhelmed with disbelief and shock. The weight of the loss proved too heavy, and she felt her world shatter around her. In that moment, she felt helpless and despondent, struggling to accept the harsh reality. This moment led to her experiencing unconscious trauma. Unable to come to terms with the loss, she believed she couldn't continue living without the departed, leading to repeated memories and suicide attempts.

### **3. Reconciliation in Violet Evergarden**

Dominick LaCapra (2014) asserts that trauma can profoundly affect individuals and communities, shaping collective memory and influencing identities. The impact of trauma cannot be easily eliminated or dealt with; instead, it becomes firmly ingrained in our shared memory, significantly shaping our understanding of the past and our identity. This intimate link between who we are and specific mental mechanisms like suppression, disconnection, and refusal highlights the intricate way we absorb and handle our experiences. LaCapra's analysis of trauma is intricately intertwined with his theory of reconciliation. He asserts that reconciliation encompasses a complex process of negotiating between the past and present, requiring the acknowledgment of historical trauma and the development of new narratives to address and facilitate the healing of these wounds. Furthermore, the impact and resolution of traumatic experiences can be examined through the lens of acting out and working through (LaCapra, 2016).

### **Acting Out**

Behaving in a manner that reenacts past experiences as if they are happening in the present is a complex behavior known as acting out. This may be demonstrated through impulsive or destructive actions and is often an unconscious response to unresolved emotional conflicts or traumas. By repeating past experiences in this way, individuals may seek to gain a sense of control or mastery over their experiences. However, this behavior can also perpetuate negative patterns and obstruct their personal growth and recovery (LaCapra, 2014).

In the series, Violet Evergarden, acting out, is represented in the opening scene. This is portrayed through Violet's subconscious behavior, as she only responds to orders. She even states that she cannot live without orders, indicating her strong connection to the past. This illustrates how she acts out while still being influenced by her past.



Figure 8. Violet insistance to fight in a war

When individuals are unable to move on from past experiences and find themselves repeating the same behaviors, they may struggle to behave ethically and responsibly. This state of being stuck in one's past is known as repetition compulsion. However, in cases of traumatic loss, individuals may need to act out in order to process their feelings of grief and trauma. The scene depicted above shows how Violet acts out through the grief of losing her past self and her identity as a soldier in wartime.

### Working Through

According to LaCapra (2014), The concept of working through involves navigating life while striving to gain a critical distance necessary for engaging with the present and taking responsibility for one's actions. This process does not entail completely separating from the past but instead coming to terms with it in a way linked to potential positive outcomes. These outcomes may involve rediscovering and revitalizing lost opportunities from the past, albeit with significant differences influenced by the present and future. Essentially, working through the past is a fundamental aspect of personal development that requires deep engagement with one's history, a critical understanding of the present, and a willingness to embrace future possibilities.

The mourning or losing someone phase is one of the significant examples of working through. Even though it may not be possible to detach from the loss or not feel any sadness completely, it is possible to find positive ways to move forward in life. A clear indication of progress during the grieving process is finding new interests, enjoying the present, and planning for the future without being consumed by grief (LaCapra, 2014).

In the series of Violet Evergarden, the process of working through past experiences to address and heal from trauma is exemplified through the character of Violet, who struggles to come to terms with her past as a child soldier after being rejected by society.



Figure 9. Violet confession of her duty

From the scene above, unfolds the story of Violet is gradually embraced by society and takes on a new job as an Auto Memory Doll. This profession involves writing letters for others, conveying emotion, and expressing feelings for people, which she had never pictured doing in the past.



Figure 10. Violet confession of her feeling

Also, in the scene above, Violet conveys how she discovers a new way of communicating and expressing herself through this job and learns to view her past experiences differently. Her daily interactions with diverse individuals with varying emotions and viewpoints teach her how to better express herself through writing and listening with empathy, even in the face of challenging emotions. Unbeknownst to her, her work begins to impact her as she is entrusted with the thoughts and feelings of those around her. This leads her to recognize the importance of confronting her inner struggles and reframing her past to find healing and move forward.

### CONCLUSION

A study has revealed that the lead character in the anime series Violet Evergarden goes through a series of distressing events. The series portrays various symptoms experienced by the protagonist. Initially, it illustrates how Violet feels emotionally detached, which makes it hard for her to express and comprehend emotions, both in herself and others. Moreover, the series also illustrates how Violet is impacted by past trauma that resurfaces in the present.

In addition, Violet also experiences an unconscious attempts of intrusive thoughts.

Furthermore, numerous factors contributed to Violet's traumatic experiences. Being an orphan, where she had to fend for herself without support from family or loved ones, was compelled to take part in wars, leading to emotional repression, and she also suffered the loss of a loved one, resulting in traumatic grief.

In addition, in order to cope with these painful experiences and move forward, she employs a therapeutic process called acting out and working through. Acting out happens when Violet struggles to come to terms with her past experiences. She may blame herself for what happened and feel overwhelmed by the emotions associated with these memories. Consequently, she engages in impulsive or destructive behaviors in an attempt to distract herself from her pain. However, this approach is an underlying part of the process of working through. Therefore, the working through process involves examining and processing her emotions, memories, and past experiences in a supportive and safe environment. This includes working through her feelings by writing letters and adjusting to the new job environment she currently resides in.

## SUGGESTION

To better understand the topic of the trauma portrayed in Kana Akatsuki's Violet Evergarden, one should explore Caruth's trauma theory in her book "Unclaimed Experience" This book helps one to understand trauma as a historical event. This challenges traditional ideas about trauma by showing how it shapes historical stories. One should also look at the impact of Caruth's work on discussions about trauma, including its effect on literary criticism, cultural studies, and the humanities. This could help one understand how Caruth's ideas influence the reading and interpretation of texts about traumatic experiences, leading to a better understanding of how trauma shapes stories and themes in literature.

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