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Dissociation Disorder of Pierre Janet in Dave Cousins' *15 Days Without a Head*

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Abstract

Dissociation is a mental disorder that disturbs individual's behaviors and thoughts. Presently, psychologists widely acknowledge dissociation as a prevalent global mental disorder that warrants thorough examination and exploration, particularly within various academic fields and through literary analysis. Dissociation is the problem of the age and we need to shed light on it. The core of the study focuses on studying Dissociation as a relabel part to mental illnesses and as a defense mechanism, its reasons, and its destructive consequences. The main data sources utilized in this study are derived from the novel *15 Days Without a Head* authored by Dave Cousins. The aim of this study is to identify and examine the mental health issue as well as how to understand it, particularly in novels. The research is of the descriptive type and employs a qualitative methodology. The writer employs Psychoanalysis theory, dissociation, and defense mechanisms as conceptual frameworks that support the analysis. The research findings indicate that the

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protagonist of the novel *15 Days Without a Head*, Laurance, resorts to dissociation as a defense mechanism.

Keywords: Dissociation, defense mechanism, *15 Days Without a Head*, Dave Cousins.

اضطراب الانفصال لدى بيير جانيت في رواية ديف كوزينز "15 يوماً بدون رأس"

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المستخلص

التفارق هو اضطراب عقلي يزعج سلوكيات وأفكار الفرد. في الوقت الحاضر، يعترف علماء النفس على نطاق واسع بالتفارق كاضطراب عقلي عالمي منتشر يستحق الفحص والاستكشاف الشامل، وخاصة في مختلف المجالات الأكاديمية ومن خلال التحليل الأدبي. يعتبر التفارق مشكلة العصر ونحتاج ان نسلط الضوء عليه، تركز الدراسة الحالية على دراسة التفارق كجزء من الامراض العقلية وكآلية دفاع، أسبابه وعواقبه المدمرة. المصادر الرئيسية المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة مستمدة من رواية خمسة عشر يوماً بدون رقيب من تأليف ديف كوزينز. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد وفحص الصحة العقلية وكذلك كيفية فهمها، وخاصة في الروايات. البحث يعتبر من النوع الوصفي ويستخدم منهجية نوعية. يستخدم الكاتب نظرية التحليل النفسي والانفصال وآليات الدفاع كأطر مفاهيمية تدعم التحليل. تشير نتائج البحث إلى أن بطل رواية خمسة عشر يوماً بدون رقيب، لورانس، يلجأ الى التفارق كآلية دفاعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الانفصال، الآلية النفسية، خمسة عشر يوماً بلا رقيب، ديف كوزينز

1. Dissociation: Introduction

The term Dissociation encompasses a range of experiences that involve a fragmented or disconnected sense of self, spanning from common occurrences like daydreaming to the intriguing and debated phenomenon known as dissociative identity disorder (DID), previously referred to as multiple personality disorder. It is a psychological condition characterized by enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that deviate significantly from societal norms and expectations. Pierre Janet was the first to demonstrate in a clear and methodical manner that dissociation is the primary psychological defense mechanism against extremely distressing traumatic experiences, despite the fact that the concept had been before mentioned. Dissociation can be defined as a process in which specific mental functions that are typically integrated with other functions operate in a more compartmentalized or automatic manner, often outside of conscious awareness or memory recall. Pierre Janet provided a comparable explanation of dissociation a hundred years earlier. Although he did not originate the theory, he was its most significant disciple. Janet's idea of dissociation is once again gaining the recognition it deserves. Janet's theory is highly pertinent

to the study of traumatic stress due to its emphasis on the function of dissociation in trauma-induced diseases (Craparo et al., 2019).

Pierre defined dissociation as a psychological occurrence marked by the interruption or separation of certain elements of an individual's conscious awareness. It entails a perception of detachment or disassociation from one's ideas, emotions, recollections, or even their sense of self. Individuals who undergo dissociation can experience a feeling of disconnection from their own identity or the environment around them. Individuals can feel a sense of detachment, perceiving oneself from a far standpoint or perceiving their experiences as lacking in reality or like a dream. It can also encompass an absence of emotional connection or a sensation of emotional numbness (as cited in Van der Hart and Friedman, 1989).

Dissociation can exhibit a range of levels of severity and lengths of time. Certain individuals can encounter intermittent moderate dissociative episodes, but others may endure persistent and intense dissociative experiences. Dissociation can occur as a typical reaction to stress or as a coping strategy to manage intense emotions or painful experiences. Dissociation is frequently linked to conditions like dissociative identity disorder (DID, in which individuals can exhibit numerous separate identities or personality states. It may also manifest in other psychological diseases, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or dissociative disorders. Dissociation can arise from a multitude of situations, such as traumatic experiences, intense stress, or a background of abuse. Dissociation is thought to serve as a protection mechanism used by the mind to shield itself from extremely upsetting or overpowering situations. Using psychological theory to analyze literary texts facilitates a clearer comprehension for critics and readers regarding the mental states of characters, thereby eliminating any lingering questions about their impulses and behaviors, and preventing the emergence of contrived analyses that may distort the text's essence or the scientific understanding of the human psyche (Abdul-kareem, 2022).

Janet observed that the frequent and severe experience of emotions can lead to dissociation, which in turn manifests as several broader issues like abulia, lethargy, heightened emotional reactivity, and a heightened need for external direction and support. In contemporary terms, these reactions would be classified as a post-traumatic deterioration, as discussed by Titchener (1986). Typically, the impact of intense emotions tends to have a disintegrative influence on the relatively new and less stable components of an individual's personality.

Janet (1889) observed that recently formed and less organized memories are often the first to be dissociated. This fragmentation can lead to personality regression, reverting to a state that predates the disruption of integrated experiences. Subsequently, throughout the therapeutic process, it is possible that the synthesis can be restored. However, when these feelings frequently reoccur, they impede the process of restoration, causing the individual to remain emotionally connected to the traumatic event and the developmental phase that occurred before it (Craparo et al., 2019). This prolonged connection to trauma can manifest in various ways, including relational trauma, which can disrupt reality testing by leading to fragmented perceptions of others or a dissociated awareness of the self. Traumatic experiences may be so unusual that they cannot be integrated into existing cognitive frameworks (Dorahy, Gold and O Neil, 2022).

The majority of contemporary research on traumatic stress mostly focuses on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, the research conducted by Janet emphasizes the need to investigate the traumatic roots of a greater variety of diseases. Various improvements are currently under progress. Numerous investigations conducted in the realm of dissociative disorders, particularly those with a specific focus on multiple personality disorder, have provided evidence suggesting that dissociative symptoms have their roots in childhood trauma (Putnam et al., 1986). A recent study has shown similar findings in relation to borderline personality disorder (Herman et al., 1989). These findings highlight the impact of psychic trauma, which is defined as an experience that disrupt the individual's ability to integrate their emotional and cognitive processes, leading to a fragmented sense of self and difficulties in emotional regulation (Dorahy et al., 2019).

Psychological tension is the main concept of Janet's dissociation theory. It is the availability of a person's psychic powers for use. Janet thought that everyone had a different level of psychological force available to them, and that this level changed based on the person and their situation. Individuals who are physically sick or under a lot of stress, for example, tend to have less psychological force, which makes them more likely to develop dissociation (Craparo et al., 2019). Heim & Bühler (2018) argued that the weakening of mental force and tension reduces the ability to synthesize, or causes a lowering of the mental level. Optimal psychological tension enables a person to effectively use their psychological resources, selecting the most suitable actions and exerting an adequate level of force. Psychological tension is the ability to make efficient use of your mental energy. It has to do with how well a person can understand and connect their ideas and feelings to the world around them. It has a lot to do with attention too. Focusing on both the outside world and your own thinking keeps your mind in a state of stress. When attention is split up, psychological stress can slow down (Craparo et al., 2019).

Janet said that psychological tension is a state of mental strain or stress that happens when a person has conflicting thoughts or feelings. If this stress isn't dealt with, it can lead to a variety of mental health problems. Anxiety and stress in the mind are major causes of mental diseases. When individuals don't deal with their stress, it can show up as worry, sadness, or other mental illnesses. This point of view stresses how important it is to deal with mental issues in therapy. Janet thought that mental stress could cause individuals to act in strange ways. He said individuals may show signs of mental illnesses when they can't handle their own problems (Plante, 2013).

Psychopathology, on the other hand, occurs when there is an imbalance in psychological force. This can cause people to behave in ways that aren't proper for the situation. Janet explained that "psychological tension consists of the capacity to react to stimulation with actions on a higher level" (Heim & Bühler, 2001, p. 5). For instance, having too much psychic force and not enough stress could cause certain urges or compulsions, as well as tics or habits. Janet's therapy methods involved personally evaluating a person's mental strength and stress and suggesting unique ways to help them, emphasizing that "the best methods are those that cause the assimilation of the arousing event" (Heim & Bühler, 2001, p. 15).

Literature Review

DID has been studied extensively because it is recognized as a highly prevalent form of mental illness. One of the reviews was written about DID is by Merry (2017) called *Fictional representations of dissociative identity disorder in contemporary American fiction*. It said that mental health illnesses and conditions are portrayed more in modern books, films, and TV shows. It's common for imaginary characters to have illnesses and syndromes like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, autism and Asperger's syndrome, Tourette's syndrome, and split identity disorder. This makes people think more critically about these works of fiction. This paper looks at how dissociative identity disorder (DID) has been portrayed in modern American fiction since 1994. It focuses on a few specific works, including the books *Set This House in Order* (2003) and *Fight Club* (1996), as well as the TV shows *Dollhouse* (2009–2010) and *United States of Tara* (2009–2011). In the present paper, trauma theory, illness narratives and genre theory, and queer theory are all used to show how the texts use dissociative identity disorder as a way to resist normativity. This includes the social normativity that the characters face in the texts as well as generic or narrative norms. In this way, the texts present DID as an ideal condition that lets people who have it fight against systems of normativity and support identities that are not normative. There is a conflict between how diseases are used as metaphors in fiction and how people who have these problems live their lives in real life. This thesis looks at how much the texts suggest that DID can or should be seen as a disorder of non-normativity by looking at all the ways they go against norms and their idealistic tendencies.

Another article entitled *Comparing Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) Portrayed in Sidney Sheldon's Tell Me Your Dreams and Alice Jamieson's Today I Am Alice Nine Personalities; One Tortured Mind* by Kristi (2020) looks at how Dissociative Identity Disorder is shown in two works of literature from two different countries. Through a comparison, this study tries to find out how dissociative identity disorder is shown in the main characters and what is the same or different about the problem of dissociative identity disorder that the major characters have. Based on the results of the study, there are some similarities and differences between the two major characters' experiences with dissociative identity disorder.

Mirani (2016) conducted research titled *Dissociative Identity Disorder of Main Character In Sybil* Novel by Flora R. S Based on Psychological Perspective. The book *Sybil* talks about dissociative identity disorder. It is about a woman who has sixteen different personalities. The research has been grounded in a general psychological understanding of dissociative identity disorder rather than referencing a specific theorist's model. The author wants to find out how the sixteen characters and mental illnesses are portrayed in that book. The author wants to know more about the symptoms, reasons, and treatments of the dissociative identity disorder that *Sybil* has. The writer found that Flora, the author of the book, uses both direct and subtle characterization to show what kind of person each character is. Characterization can be seen in what the character says, what they think, and how the author tells the story. For the most part, *Sybil* has dissociative identity disorder because her mother abused her physically and sexually, and she doesn't have anyone to talk to about her issues or help her figure them out. It forces her to find a new way to solve her problems by giving them to other characters. she has split personality disorder. She doesn't know what she did or what she said until she sees Dr. Wilbur, the therapist who is working with her to change all of her identities.

Dissociative identity disorder of the main character in Shyamalan's Split was written by Rini (2019). The article talks about Dissociative Identity Disorder. It used literary analysis techniques and psychological perspectives to examine the portrayal of dissociative identity disorder instead of clinical psychology and psychiatry. Kevin Wendell Crumb, a character from M. Night Shyamalan's movie *Split* who has 24 different personalities because of traumatic events in his youth, is the main subject of the study. The study uses literary and psychological techniques to figure out the problem with Kevin. It is revealed that Kevin's DID is caused by the physical abuse he received from his mother when he was young. This is what caused seven strong personalities to appear, including Dennis, Barry, Patricia, Hedwig, The Beast, Orwell, and Jade. The purpose of the study in this paper is to give a full picture of Kevin's DID and show how stress can lead to the development of multiple personalities.

Although general research on the representation of Dissociative Identity Dissociation in literature has been conducted, there is a scarcity of studies focusing on *Fifteen Days Without a Head*. The present study is unique in that it is the first to emphasize the issue of dissociation in this novel. The results of the study are expected to fill the gap in the existing literature.

2. Dissociation as a Defense Mechanism in Dave Cousins's *15 Days Without a Head*

Dave Cousins published his first novel, *15 Days Without a Head*, in 2013. The novel garnered widespread praise for its depiction of familial dynamics, unwavering determination, and the profound influence of affection. The narrative takes place in a coastal town in Britain and centers around the experiences of Laurence, a teenager of fifteen years, as he struggles with the difficulties of life while assuming responsibility for his younger sibling, Jay. *15 Days Without a Head* resonated with readers of all ages, earning Cousins extensive acclaim. The book received many prestigious awards, such as the Branford Boase Award and the Hampshire Book Award, further establishing Cousins' reputation as a skilled and influential author.

15 Days Without a Head is a young adult psychological realism novel that explores the intricate landscape of human identity and the complicated workings of the mind. *15 Days Without a Head* narrates the events of Laurence Roach, a fifteen-year-old who lives in Grimsby, England. The novel is told from Laurence's perspective. He resides with his younger brother, Jay, and their mother who struggles with alcoholism. In analyzing *15 Days Without a Head*, I will examine the difficulties and traumatic situations Laurence faces from the very beginning to the end of the novel, which ultimately lead him to dissociation. Cousins vividly illustrates Laurence's life, allowing the reader to empathize with him. Laurence's balanced behavior with his family enables him to appear older than his real age. He has the responsibility of looking after Jay, while their mother often goes out drinking, leaving them to fend for themselves. He is eager to undertake any action necessary to ensure the presence of his younger brother Jay, by his side. His mother is struggling with several difficulties. She drinks a substantial amount of alcohol. The novel *15 Days Without a Head* explores themes of family, dissociation, and perseverance, which profoundly impact the structure and character development.

From the very beginning of the novel, the reader learns that Laurence's dad is dead and his mother is an alcoholic. Laurence as the older son, has to take care of his younger brother. He has to dress him, make him food, take him to school and take him back from school. These responsibilities make Laurence traumatized because he himself needs help from his mother. Their mother is always nervous and bad tempered. However, she feels happy only when she drinks. Her boys are waiting for her 'Happy Hour' in order to communicate with her freely. From this perspective, the present study analyzes *15 Days Without a Head* based on dissociation theory which encompasses psychological tension as an important concept:

Mum coughs, drags a chair across the floor, and sits down. The smell of cigarette smoke drifts into the front room, where me and Jay are being quiet. Keeping out of the way until Happy Hour—when the first drink has worked its magic and made her smile again. “Where are my beautiful boys? Where are they hiding?” That's the signal, the all clear; it's safe to go out there. Happy Hour has begun. (Cousins, 2013, p.7)

Happy Hour symbolizes love, attention and affection for the two boys. It is a good chance for them to speak with her, hug her and be close to her. Laurence's mother is depressed, which is why she is an alcoholic. She tries to be disconnected from her daily life. She holds two menial jobs in order to generate sufficient income to support for all of them. However, Laurence tries to do anything just to make her happy. Even sometimes he takes her shift at work when she drinks so much and can't wake up in the morning. Laurence makes diligent efforts to maintain order and stability, consistently attending to his mother's needs, waking up at 5 am to assist her in preparing for her job, and even taking over her responsibilities:

Some days she won't get up at all and I have to do the shift for her. It doesn't matter which one of us goes, so long as somebody swipes the little plastic card through the machine to prove she's been there. If the offices get cleaned, Mum gets paid. So long as Mum gets paid, we have food to eat and a place to live. (Cousins, 2013, p.19).

Laurence's strong sense of duty is demonstrated by his willingness to take on his mother's responsibilities, even though they are hard for him. He ensures everything is done as it should be. The fact that Laurence is determined to swipe the plastic card to prove her attendance shows what a risk their position is, if the cleaning doesn't get done, she could lose her job and, with it, their food and home.

Laurence's ability to wake up early and do this job shows how mature and strong he is. But even though he is young, he knows what is at risk because their existence depends on what he does. Because he is responsible for them, he has to act like an adult and put their basic needs ahead of his own wants or tiredness. Aside from a feeling of responsibility, his actions show that he also wants to protect his family by making sure they stay safe in a place that is otherwise harmful. As Laurence tries to fulfill all of his obligations, this relationship reveals the tension between his role as a child and the adult responsibilities he is burdened with. His ability to help his mother shows how strong he is and how hard things are for them both, highlighting the harsh truths they face together. Laurence's actions reflect his love for Jay and his determination to hold their family together in their mother's absence.

Looking back a year, it becomes clear that Laurence experienced severe trauma when his mother made an attempt on her own life. Worse than this, Laurence and Jay had to live with Sheila and Graeme next door after taking their mother to the hospital. Sheila was very nice, but her husband, Graeme wasn't:

The room smelt bad. I made myself switch on the light, and that's when I saw the sick on the carpet, a trail of it from Mum's mouth across the duvet. Her eyes were closed and her skin was the color of Blu-Tack, but she was still breathing. I ran straight out of the house and got Sheila from next door. That was my first mistake. But I didn't know any better then; I still trusted people. I'd always been told that if I ever needed help, I was to go and find a policeman or tell a grownup and they would know what to do. (Cousins, 2013, p.49)

This quote offers insight into an important occurrence that took place in the protagonist's life. Laurence, as a traumatized person, uses the flashback to recall the bad memories that he faced. At a certain time in the past, Laurence comes home from school and immediately notices a disconcerting atmosphere. The home seems empty and silent. Laurence went to his mother's room and he was shocked when he saw his mother on her bed as if she was dead. She tried to kill herself. The ambiance within the house is fraught with tension and unease. The author used the spilled beverage on the carpet as a visual indicator to accentuate the disorder and turmoil that the protagonist confronts when entering the home. Laurence did not know what to do due to his young age, so he calls their neighbor Shiela.

We were sharing a big double bed and I think I must have fallen asleep, because Jay woke me up, snivelling. At first I thought he was just missing Mum, but then I felt the wet on his pajamas and saw the stain on the sheets. They probably wouldn't have found out, except Sheila chose that exact moment to come and check that we were all right. (Cousins, 2013, p.50)

Sheila took the two boys to her home to take care of them after the ambulance took their mother to the hospital. She was very kind with them. She used to come and drink coffee with Laurence's mother, but her husband Graeme was not kind like her, he was a furious person. Laurence felt that Graeme didn't like them and didn't want them in his house. Graeme slapped Jay just for wetting the bed. This slap was a turning point for Laurence because he treats Jay kindly and doesn't allow for anyone to hurt his five-year old brother. In this sense, another traumatic situation is added to Laurence life. He was an excellent brother, always looking after Jay and constantly showing strength. He is truly resilient, carrying a huge amount of responsibility on his shoulders. So that, he promised himself not to tell anyone that they are alone in the home anymore in order not to live with other people or be separated by social services

For a second nobody moved. It was like in a film when the action freezes and the camera pans round so you can see everyone's face. Graeme was at the opposite side of the bed, leaning over Jay, the veins in his neck bulging. The next thing I knew, I was flying through the air towards him. I think the surprise knocked him off balance, because we both ended up in a heap on the floor—which is when I started laying into him, until Sheila dragged me off. After that, I had to go and stay with a kid I knew from school, leaving Jay with Sheila

and Graeme. I was allowed to go round and see him each evening, before Graeme got home from work. (Cousins, 2013, p.50).

According to Haddock (2001), when an individual experiences trauma during an early childhood and finds it too overwhelming to process, they may resort to dissociation as a means of survival. Cousins clearly describes the terrible events in *15 Days Without a Head* so that readers can feel what the characters feel. This quotation shows a time of strong feelings and conflict, showing Laurence's need to protect Jay and the confusing of the situation he is in. The first pause sets a dramatic mood and makes the moment seem more important. It brings out the stress in the room because Laurence sees Graeme slap Jay, which points to a physical and mental fight. The vivid description of Graeme's "bulging" veins shows that he is angry or agitated, which adds to Laurence's fear for his brother. Laurence's quick reaction "flying through the air" shows his innate, almost desperate need to protect Jay. Because Laurence is willing to put himself in danger to protect Jay, this rash action shows how close the brothers are. Sheila moves in and drags Laurence away, which adds another layer to the picture. There are people there, trying to handle things, but Laurence feels helpless, which is made clear by the word "powerless." Even though they got into a fight, he is eventually split from his brother and has to stay with another child from school. This split makes Laurence's mental problems even worse, since he is fighting for his brother and also trying to deal with the fact that he is not close to him anymore.

Laurence and Jay's split is very hard, which shows how deeply traumatized Laurence is emotionally because of their unstable family situation. This breakup is more than just a physical one; it means that their bond has been broken and they no longer feel safe and at ease with each other. The split makes Laurence feel even more anxious and useless. He had already taken on the part of protector, so the sudden change makes him face the fact that he can't always keep Jay safe. He has been trying to keep things stable in the midst of chaos, but this loss of control is upsetting to him. The fact that Laurence isn't with his brother makes him worry about what might happen to Jay without him.

After a year, Laurence decides to participate in a television competition hoping to win an all-expenses paid holiday just to bring joy to his mother. According to Laurence, if he wins the competition, he will make his mother happy forever, "If there's anything that is going to cheer Mum up enough to stop her drinking, it's a two week, all-expenses paid holiday in the sun" (Cousins, 2013, p.17). This competition is allowed for people aged 18 and over, that makes Laurence impersonate his dead dad's voice.

"What I have to remember is to keep the voice going. You have to be eighteen to play, which is why I'm impersonating my dad—don't worry, he won't find out: he's dead" (Cousins, 2013, p.13). The protagonist, Laurence, exposes his involvement in an act of dissociation as a result for the trauma that he had in his short life. According to Janet (1889), dissociation in this sense functions as a psychological defense mechanism in which an individual disengages from his own identity or reality in order to manage overwhelming stress, frustrating events, or trauma (as cited in Van der Hare and Friedman, 1989). Laurence's use of dissociation as a coping strategy is evident in his admission of assuming the identity of his deceased father for the purpose of engaging in a program. These findings indicate that he is using dissociation as a means to evade the reality

of his distressing encounters. Through assuming another persona, Laurence is capable of momentarily disengaging from his own emotions and recollections, therefore offering a comforting respite from the strain and anguish he is enduring. Laurence's portrayal of his late father, Daniel, and his deliberate choice to speak with his dad's accent in order to hide his true voice indicate a distinct dissociative reaction. This fulfills the first part of the dissociation triad. By adopting this other character, Laurence is effectively disengaging from his own identity and establishing a psychological dissociation from his own reality. Laurence does not meet the age requirement, but his dissociation enables him to avoid the rule requiring participants to be eighteen.

The phrase, "do not be concerned, he will not discover: he is deceased," reinforces Laurence's dissociation. This internal monologue enhances the reader's comprehension of Laurence's psychological disposition, his mental patterns, and the inner conflicts he encounters throughout the novel. The inclusion of this element enhances the intricacy of his portrayal and contributes to the overall progression of the narrative. By accepting the death of his father, Laurence is effectively establishing a separation between his present self and the fact that his father is no longer alive. It is possible to interpret Laurence's mimicry and deliberate voice masking as a means of coping with the difficult circumstances and preserving his composure. Through the process of dissociation, Laurence is able to disengage from his own personal identity and assume the role of his father.

Laurence suffers from painful memories and shows symptoms consistent with trauma, which functions both as a narrative device and a psychological phenomenon. Trauma propels the storyline, influencing Laurence's actions and relationships. His distressing past directly affects his behavior, particularly his sense of responsibility for caring for his younger brother, Jay. This causes tension and conflict throughout the narrative.

The novel also examines the psychological effects of Laurence's traumatic childhood, exploring his mental turmoil, including feelings of desertion, anger, and confusion. The author offers a profound understanding of the psychological consequences of trauma and its impact on Laurence's cognition, actions, and general state of being. Janet differentiated between emotions and feelings, which he believed controlled conduct. When unable to adjust, individuals feel great anxiety. Janet said that their energy turns into low-quality, chaotic acts. Strong emotions hinder brain processes, making it harder to organize and breaks down new facts, and can lead to dissociation. Traumatic memories are permanent fixed ideas that might grow subconsciously. They can manifest as dreams, flashbacks, and other dissociative experiences (Van der Hart and Horst, 1989).

The traumatic death of Laurence's dad is also portrayed through *15 Days Without a Head*. Laurence's father died in a dreadful incident, has exerted a tremendous influence on him. The recollection of his father's death elicits profound sentiments such as sorrow, remorse, or apprehension. Laurence's psychological well-being is profoundly affected by this horrific experience, causing a disturbance in his sense of security, stability, and normalcy, which has a lifelong impact. Laurence's trauma is clearly apparent in his behaviors and emotions throughout the novel. In addition to that, he assumes the responsibility of looking after his younger brother, Jay, due to his mother's battle with addiction and frequent absence. The load of this obligation,

imposed on him at an early age, together with the lack of parental assistance, adds to Laurence's emotions of being overwhelmed, stressed, and emotionally burdened.

‘So Daniel, I’ve got to ask—do you feel lucky?’ Jay presses his lips against the wall of the kiosk and licks the glass. I pull him away. ‘Get off!’ He glares at me. ‘Whoa!’ says Baz, in my ear. ‘Are you all right there, Champ?’ ‘Yeah, fine, sorry!’ Too late, I realize I forgot to do the accent. I just spoke to Baz in my normal voice! (Cousins, 2013, p. 31).

On Wednesday, Jay accompanies Laurence to the phone station as it is 9 pm and their mother has not returned home yet. This day indicates the beginning of their mother’s absence for the second time. However, Laurence firstly does not express much concern, because she has previously disappeared, indulging in drinking until her funds are gone. Laurence in the above quotation instinctively reacts to protect Jay as he observes Jay's behavior of licking the glass, prompting him to remove Jay away. At this particular point, Laurence unintentionally abandons his act and replies to Baz using his usual voice, thus neglecting to uphold the accent that aids in preserving his dissociative identity. The revelation that Laurence conversed with Baz using his usual vocal tone elicits a feeling of astonishment and remorse. Laurence's cry of "Yeah, fine, sorry!" suggests his acknowledgment of the mistake and departure from his dissociated condition.

Laurence’s reaction here illustrates a temporary lapse in his dissociative state, reinforcing the idea that dissociation is not always fully controlled. According to Janet's theory, individuals can experience temporary lapses in their dissociative personas when faced with overwhelming emotions or unexpected interruptions (Janet, 1889). Laurence's emotional reaction to Jay’s behavior and his focus on protecting him interrupts the facade he is trying to maintain. This moment supports Janet’s theory that such dissociative identities can be fragile and easily disrupted by intense emotional responses or unforeseen circumstances. Laurence's temporary disconnection suggests that his dissociation can be disrupted by unexpected circumstances or intense emotional reactions. Dissociative states may only allow for partial awareness of thoughts and feelings (Craparo et al., 2019).

When individuals are unable to address their emotional needs, it can be especially harmful, because as unresolved emotional conflicts can lead to further mental health problems (Titchener, 1986). This happens to the main character, Laurence, as he tries to maintain a facade while dealing with his painful experiences. This brief loss of awareness shows how harmful dissociation can be as a coping mechanism, and how hard it is to fully understand and deal with one's feelings. According to Dorahy, Gold, & O’Neil (2022), individuals in these states often experience a narrowing of consciousness, where they struggle to fully grasp their thoughts and emotions. Disordered human conduct may arise when individuals confront unforeseen difficulties (Rasheed, 2024).

We get back to the flat, and there’s nobody waiting for us except the roaches. I screw up my note and bury it in the bin, then tell Jay it’s time for bed. ‘Not going to bed.’ ‘Yes, you are.’ ‘It’s not up to you!’ ‘Mum’s not here, so it is up to me actually. (Cousins, 2013, p.32).

After Laurence finishes his call with Baz, they go back home and their mother is not there. Laurence tries to keep everything normal as if their mother is with them because he fears they

might be separated if anyone finds out the truth. The weight of Laurence's responsibilities without their mother is clear from the conversation between him and Jay. The stark image of returning to an apartment where no one is there but insects, gives us the impression that it has been neglected and is falling apart, which emphasizes how hard their living conditions are. This setting makes it clear that they don't have much support or security, which puts more pressure on Laurence to become a parent. Laurence's answer, "Mum's not here, so it's up to me actually," shows that he is aware of how their family has changed. Laurence knows that without their mother, he must take care of Jay, even if that means making Jay follow rules that he doesn't want to. Laurence's mental stress is shown by how hard it is for him to stay in charge while taking care of his brother. It also shows how fragile their situation is, since they have to handle tasks that no child should have to handle without their mother.

Traumatic stress is the main topic of most modern studies on severe stress. Janet's research shows the importance of examining the stressful causes of a wider range of illnesses. Several studies on dissociative disorders have found evidence that symptoms have their roots in traumatic events that happened in childhood (Putnam et al., 1986). Laurence's painful experience comes from his mother's neglect, the uncertainty of his home life, the death of his father, and the heavy emotional burden he carries. All of these factors make his problems worse and shape his character throughout the story.

I can't let anybody know that Mum's not here—not even Jay. I don't trust him to keep his mouth shut. I'll tell him she's doing extra shifts at work or something. Until she comes back, we have to carry on like normal, and make everyone think that Mum is still here. How hard can it be? (Cousins, 2013, p. 50,51).

Days go by and their mother still hasn't come home, and Laurence is worried about her absence. He doesn't tell anyone about her, not even Jay. However, over a period of time, he becomes aware that there is something special or unusual about her disappearance. In order to retain Jay's presence, Laurence must pretend the continued existence of their mother. Furthermore, he is worried from their neighbor, Nelly, who uses to stand at her flat's door and watches people, "Whenever you go in or out she's there and she knows everything about everyone" (Cousins, 2013, p. 21). Laurence feels anxious because he doesn't want Nelly to know about their mother's absence, especially since she has not seen her in the last few days, in order not to tell the social services and will be taken to the foster care.

I find the wig in a plastic bag at the bottom of Mum's wardrobe. Thick, chestnut red, and curly. I remember the morning I came down to breakfast and discovered that Mum had shaved all her hair off. She cried for two whole days, then went out and bought the wig. It was almost exactly the same as her real hair, and she wore it all the time for about six months, until her hair grew back. I pull it on now, tucking my own dull brown curls under the itchy cap, but I still look nothing like her. Maybe some lipstick would help? I sift through the tubes on Mum's dressing table and pick one called Vampire's Kiss. (Cousins, 2013, p. 53).

Janet thought that everyone had a different level of psychological force available to them, and that this level changed based on the person and their situation. Individuals who are physically sick or under a lot of stress, for example, tend to have less psychological force, which makes them more likely to develop dissociation (Craparo et al., 2019). Laurence has an excessive amount of psychological tension because of several types of stressful events that have a big effect on his life and behavior. Firstly, the absence of his parents leaves him alone in his most difficult situations. Because his mother doesn't always do her responsibilities, Laurence has to take care of his younger brother Jay. This switch in roles causes Laurence a lot of stress because he feels like he has to make sure they stay alive in an unstable environment. He worries all the time about taking care of Jay, which makes him anxious and makes him feel like he's not good enough.

Second, the fact that they live in a chaotic place makes his mental stress even worse. Their run-down, neglected home is a metaphor for the mental turmoil they are going through. The appearance of pests like roaches not only shows how bad their situation is, but it also reminds them all the time that they can't change their surroundings. Laurence's life is also made more difficult by his interactions with people like Graeme and Nelly. The conflicts make him feel more vulnerable and put him in cases that make him anxious. The fact that these meetings are hard to plan adds to his total mental stress as he struggles with his fear for his and Jay's safety. Finally, Laurence's mental struggle to deal with these problems makes him feel alone. He often feels alone with his tasks and can't fully talk about how he feels or ask for help. This feeling of being alone adds to his stress and makes it hard for him to deal with it in a healthy way.

As a way to deal with all these difficulties that he faces by himself without telling anyone and without asking for help, Laurence dissociates by putting on his mother's wig to make Nelly believe that his mother is still at home and that they are not alone. Laurence escapes the fact that his mother isn't there by acting to be his mother. He also gets away from his fear of being split from his brother because when noisy Nelly sees their mother, she will not call the foster care to take them to other families. On top of that, it shows how Laurence wants to hide from his bad life and take on a different personality. This is made clearer by the fact that he wears lipstick and tries to act and behave like his mother.

Dissociation as a way to deal with difficulties is one of the main ideas in this novel. Janet observed that the frequent and severe experience of emotions can lead to dissociation (Titchener, 1986). The difficulties and consequences of using dissociation to cope with trauma are evident in Laurence's dissociation through identity confusion and his use of his mother's wig to deal with his difficult situations. Dissociation is a coping mechanism here due to the difficulties that Laurence faced by himself without any tiny help even from his mother who is supposed to stay with him as well as help him. Instead, he finds himself lonely, taking care of his younger brother.

But I have to try. I have to make everything look normal—the same as always. And every morning Nelly watches Mum leave the building on her way to work—except yesterday. If Nelly doesn't see Mum today, she's going to get even more suspicious. I pick up Mum's cleaning overall and put it on, then look back at the figure reflected in the mirror.

(Cousins, 2013, p.53).

Laurence, tries to keep up his front and keep up appearances for Nelly, he is feeling a lot of psychological stress. This psychological stress can be understood through Pierre Janet's idea of dissociation and how it helps individuals deal with painful events. Janet says that dissociation is a way for individuals to protect themselves psychologically by separating themselves from their own identity, feelings, and thoughts in order to deal with upsetting or stressful events (Craparo et al., 2019). This can show up in many ways, like identity changes or confusion, forgetfulness, or fugue states. Laurence goes through dissociation because he has identity confusion, which means he has more than one personality and can't figure out who he is.

Janet stated that individuals afflicted with dissociation employ the strategy of developing other personalities to cope with or reduce the distress caused by earlier traumatic experiences (as mentioned in Van der Hart and Horst, 1989). In this regard, Laurence experienced this phenomenon, by developing a new character to deal with his bad situations. He tries to be like his mother physically and emotionally by putting on her wig and her clothes and by impersonate her. This can be considered as coping mechanisms, an escape when there is no escape, that helps Laurence to escape the reality that he is left alone fighting against the bad circumstances.

Like Laurence, individuals who have experienced a violent or neglected childhood and continue to live in such environment have trouble integrating, controlling themselves, and building a sense of trust and safety. In the worst cases, this harmful setting can also have a big effect on how someone sees themselves. So, the first thing individuals often do to protect themselves is dissociation. According to Baker (2010), individuals who faced sever neglected childhood, find it difficult to integrate with their bad life so they dissociate.

Laurence's dressing up in his mother's cleaning uniform, draws attention to the mental and psychological strain he feels as he dissociates himself from his own feelings and adopts his mother's identity. Laurence feels psychological tension because his truth and his image are at odds with each other. Although Laurence's mother isn't there, he still feels the need to make everything look normal and the same as always. This shows how scared and anxious he is. Even more psychological stress is being put on Laurence because he has to deal with both the pain of his mother's absence and the effects of his coping strategy.

I focus on the exit, forcing myself not to look as I walk past Nelly's flat. I make a bet—if I can hold my breath until I get outside, then this is going to work. My head feels like a balloon; I can hear blood pumping through my ears with each footstep. (Cousins, 2013, p.53, 54).

This scene highlights the challenging circumstances that Laurence encountered, causing him to hold his breath until he exited the premises. It clearly shows the psychological tension that Laurence feels, which is a reflection of his inner battle and worry. He says that his head feels like a bubble, which illustrate his intense pressure and strong emotions. Hearing his blood moving through his ears makes him even more alert and shows that he is greatly moved by what is going on around him and what he is hearing. He senses Nelly's gaze upon him. Janet asserts that individual acts are governed by environmental influences. In addition, there are internal regulating processes that aid in our experience of physical direction and motion (as cited in Van der Hart and

Friedman, 1989). Laurence experiences a change in his state of mind when he disengages from his environment and focuses solely on Nelly. He can't behave normally. Instead, he behaves as his surrounding environment obliges him.

Laurence is shown to be going through a lot of psychological tension and dissociation to deal with his difficulties. It is evident that Laurence employs dissociation as he tries to keep up his front for Nelly. He even holds his breath as he walks by Nelly's apartment to show how scared and worried he is about her response. Losing himself in Nelly and ignoring everything else around him helps Laurence avoid the truth of his painful experiences and keep his sense of control. To make this point even stronger, he can't act normally; instead, he has to do what his surroundings tell him to do, which shows that he has lost control.

Janet says that individuals are affected by their surroundings. This is clear in Laurence's choice to focus on Nelly and ignore everything else going on around him; he is highly affected by his fear of how she will respond and his need to keep up the appearance of calm. Laurence's use of dissociation as a way to deal with things also shows the problems and effects of these kinds of defense mechanisms. Laurence can't fully process and understand his own feelings because he dissociates himself from them and acts like his mother. This makes the bad effects of dissociation even clearer and shows how important it is to deal with and process feelings in a healthy way.

In order to avoid arousing suspicion from Nelly, he chooses an indirect path, retracing his steps and use the fire escape to discreetly approach the house. This underscores Laurence's strong sense of accountability. As Laurence tries to access the home by climbing through the bedroom window, he is met by Jay, his younger brother, who is sitting awake in bed and gazing at him leaving Laurence in shock. Another way Laurence deals with his problems is by avoiding noisy Nelly. For example, he doesn't look at Nelly and use the fire escape to get into the house because he doesn't want to make her suspicious. Laurence shuts the window and walks towards Jay's bed. Jay gazes at Laurence with a furrowed brow, perplexed by Laurence's attire. Laurence attempts to mimic their mother's voice as a coping mechanism to deal with this unexpected situation while informing Jay that it is not yet time to get up. This exemplifies Laurence's endeavor to uphold the facade of normalcy and provide reassurance to Jay. Laurence tries to protect Jay from their harsh reality of being alone without any help.

To keep everything normal for Jay as said before, Laurence told Jay that their mum was here while Jay was sleeping. When Jay said that he saw "her", Laurence was shocked because he thought that Jay was sleeping and cannot remember what happened 'Something kicks me in the chest from the inside'. Laurence started asking Jay many questions to make sure that Jay believes that the person he saw was mum not Laurence. Laurence feels comfortable when Jay said that she was in their room sitting on the window. Jay was speaking about Laurence when he impersonated their mother.

It's still early, but my brain is buzzing too much to go back to bed. I get dressed for school, then switch on the TV. There's nothing much on, so I watch three episodes of Pingu, then fall asleep. When I wake up, Jay is sitting next to me. I tell him that Mum came back late last night and now she's gone to work. I don't want him to tell anyone that she's not here.

(Cousins, 2013, p. 54,55)

Laurence is unable to return to sleep related to his frantic thinking. This indicates that his thoughts are consumed and agitated. Everything is normal for Jay and Nelly while Laurence carries the burden. Laurence struggles to keep things as they are, "I've been pretending that everything was normal, for Jay and Nelly." (Cousins, 2013, p. 68). It is essential to acknowledge that Laurence's desire to keep normality is a coping mechanism that can be arduous and unpleasant. He is probably struggling with his own feelings and anxieties over his mother's place. Engaging in pretend can generate emotional turmoil as Laurence navigates his own emotions while striving to establish a secure atmosphere for his brother. The author utilizes internal conflict as a psychological device to emphasize Laurence's endeavor to reconcile his own desires and responsibilities. The writer offers insight into Laurence's emotional and mental suffering by portraying his internal battle. This strategy enables readers to have empathy with Laurence and gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricacy of his situation.

Day after day, their mother is still away and everything become more complicated. They do not have money to buy the basic food and Jay misses his mum very much. Laurence is in a very bad situation because he only has one coin left on his mother's dressing table to buy food for himself and Jay. As Laurence thinks about what they will eat next, the hopelessness and insecurity of their situation weigh on him. Laurence already feels responsible and worried, but taking care of his younger brother Jay adds another layer of stress and worry. He is worried that he will let Jay down by giving him another small meal like dry toast as he tries to find ways to make ends meet. Laurence is strong and loves his brother very much, as shown by his desire to find a way to help Jay and make sure he is taken care of.

I don't tell him about the night I woke up and thought someone was breaking into the house. How I lay there holding my breath, too scared to move, listening to the crashing and banging downstairs—and then the other noise. It took me ages to realize what it was, because burglars don't usually start crying in the middle of a robbery. I don't tell Jay how I crept halfway down the stairs until I could see Mum, on her hands and knees in the front room, surrounded by a sea of smashed china pigs. I knew she'd done it, but I didn't know why, and I was afraid to go down.

(Cousins, 2013, p. 58, 59)

Individuals who have been through trauma frequently observe things from the past. The literary technique of flashback is used to give past information that shows important details about characters' experiences, growth, and emotional effects. Another common storytelling device in trauma fiction is flashbacks and memories. These let the author explore the characters' pasts and traumas, focusing on the painful scenes. Readers can better understand the character's fears, goals, and strength by using this method. It also shows how damaged people's past can still affect their present. The flashback of Laurence is very important for understanding his stress and the problems he has. It also gives us a deep understanding of Laurence's feelings and the difficulties in his everyday life. Laurence talks about a terrifying incident in his past when he thought someone broke into his house because he heard noises. When he looked into it, he found his mother upset and

surrounded by broken China pigs. The complicated relationships in Laurence's family are shown in this scene, which also hints at deeper problems, like his mother's problems and how they affect Laurence's own safety and well-being. It also shows how tense Laurence feels living in a place that isn't safe and where danger seems to be always around.

The picture of his mother on her knees with broken China pigs all around her shows how emotionally broken she is and how fragile their family life is. The broken things stand for how unstable things are becoming and the mental chaos Laurence has to deal with. The fact that Laurence chose not to tell Jay about this shows how protective he is. He knows that telling his younger brother such upsetting news could make him feel too much, which adds to Laurence's responsibility as a caretaker. This struggle inside him shows that he wants to protect Jay from the hard truths of their position, even though he is scared and confused himself.

“It’s past the hour that Mum should be home” (Cousins, 2013, p. 60). As the duration of their mother's absence increases, Laurence encounters a multitude of difficulties. He faces bullies at school, which exacerbates his challenges. Notwithstanding these obstacles, Laurence maintains unwavering dedication to his brother, doing his utmost efforts to guarantee Jay's attendance at school.

Jay’s still fighting the trees. He keeps running back to the phone box, then darting out to attack, then back, then out to a different tree. There doesn’t seem to be any sequence to it, sometimes he goes for the same tree, two or three times. I wonder how long it will be before someone comes along and tells him to stop it? ‘Daniel. WHICH of the following countries does NOT border France? Is it A: Monaco? B: Andorra? Or C: Netherlands?’

(Cousins, 2013, p. 65)

Laurence was obliged to take Jay with him to the phone station every day during their mother's absence to speak with Baz hoping to win the all-expenses holiday. He has to take care of his brother Jay as well as he must keep his sound like his dad. So, he has to concentrate very well. Laurence's inner struggle gets even worse when the question about countries comes up. While Jay is busy with his playfulness, Laurence needs to keep his mind on Jay at hand and talk to Baz clearly. This conflict shows how Laurence feels torn between his duties. He is trying to reach a goal that will make their lives more stable while also being a brother and taking care of Jay. This dynamic shows how much responsibility he has, highlighting how complicated their emotionally life it is and how hard it is to grow up in such a troubled place.

Jay’s in a bad mood. He wants to know where Mum is. It’s a good question. I wish I knew the answer. I tell him she’s working—she had to leave early before he was awake. I even make up a story about her coming in to see him before she went, how we both laughed because he was snoring. Jay doesn’t believe me. He doesn’t say anything though—just scowls and turns up the TV. But the question won’t go away.

(Cousins, 2013, p. 68)

This moment shows how much stress Laurence is under mentally. Focusing on both the outside world and the own thinking keeps the mind in a state of stress. When attention is split up,

psychological stress can slow down (Craparo et al., 2019). Laurence feels torn between wanting to keep things normal for Jay and the hard truth that they both have to face. He struggles to handle all of these duties, which makes him feel anxious, guilty, and very vulnerable. This shows how their situations affect his mental health emotionally. Jay's bad mood, which comes from needing to know where their mother is, shows how much kids need to feel safe and secure. The fact that his question is both easy and deep shows how unsure their lives are. The reason Laurence tells Jay that their mother is working is out of protective nature. He doesn't want his brother to know how bad things really are. The created story about their mother coming in to see Jay shows how hard it is for Laurence to keep things normal and comfortable for his brother, even if it means lying. He cares deeply about Jay and wants to keep their relationship strong even though things are going crazy. But Jay's frown and the fact that he turned up the TV show that he knows Laurence is just trying to make him feel better.

This scene shows how tense things are getting; Jay's disbelief shows that he has lost his innocence and is now aware of how bad things are for them. The question of where their mother is represents more than just their interest; it also shows a greater need for security and connection. "The question won't go away" emphasizes how unsettled their position is. This remaining confusion makes Laurence feel even more conflicted as he struggles with hopelessness and the weight of being responsible for both himself and Jay. Overall, this conversation shows how their mother's absence has affected their lives by showing the emotional turmoil they are going through as they deal with their difficult family relationships.

'Dunno where she is,' says Jay, already on his way back to the television. 'She's at work, I told you,' I remind him, for Nelly's benefit. 'On a Saturday?' Nelly's eyebrows attempt simultaneous vertical take-off, so I guess she doesn't believe me. 'Was there something you wanted?' I ask her. The treacle smile evaporates. 'I wish to speak with your mother. What time are you expecting her?' I shrug, on purpose. 'Dunno, she might have to do overtime. Then we're going out, to a friend's house, so we won't be back until late.' 'I see.' And I believe she does see—right through me. Nelly doesn't believe a word of it. (Cousins, 2013, p. 69)

It's clear that Laurence is scared of Nelly because he wants to keep himself and Jay from realizing that their mother isn't there. He makes up a story about their mother working extra hours, which shows how worried he is about telling the truth. Laurence knows that telling others about their situation could cause them to break up, which he sees as a threat. Nelly's suspicious response, especially the way she raised her eyes, shows that Laurence's reasoning doesn't convince her. This makes him even more scared.

Because Nelly wants to talk to their mother, Laurence's fear grows. He knows that telling her the truth about their mother's absence could have very bad results. Laurence's shrugs and vague answers show that he is having internal struggle. He is trying to look sure of himself, but the fact that he knows Nelly "sees right through" makes him feel weak. He is afraid of being found out, and this makes him feel even more useless in a situation over which he has little control. "Nelly knows Mum's not been here, I'm sure of it. All it takes is one phone call from her and the do-gooders from the social will be round here like a SWAT team" (Cousins, 2013, p. 69). This stress

is made worse by Laurence's strong desire to protect Jay. He is very aware that if social services get involved, they might have to split up or deal with other problems that would make their relationship as brothers much weaker. He feels the mental weight of the pressure to keep up looks and keep things normal, which is hard for him to handle.

I kept telling myself that she was just out on one of her drinking sessions, that she'd come home after a few days when the money ran out. But she didn't. And now Nelly wants to talk to her, and won't stop hounding us until she gets what she wants. I need to find Mum. But where do I start? What do I know? Not much. Mum just didn't come home after work on Wednesday night. But that's a start—the one thing I know for sure.

(Cousins, 2013, p. 71)

Janet said that psychological tension is a state of mental strain or stress that happens when a person has conflicting thoughts or feelings. If this stress isn't dealt with, it can lead to a variety of mental health problems (Plante, 2013). In this regard, Laurence's bad experience with Nelly shows how emotionally heavy his present situation is. When Nelly wants to talk to their mother over and over again, Laurence sees a threat. He sees her questions as constant pressure, which makes him even more afraid that the truth about their mother's absence will come out. Because of this, Laurence is anxious and desperate because he wants to keep himself and Jay safe from the effects of their mother's carelessness. Laurence's inner thoughts show how deeply this experience affected him. Being honest about how little he knows about where his mother is makes him feel even more useless.

I chew the end of the biro. The letter still doesn't sound right, but it's taken me an hour to get this far. I don't like Please don't inform the authorities—it sounds scared, plus I don't like begging Nelly. But maybe that's what I need to do. Make Nelly feel like she's in control, that she has power over us—she'll love that. I add a line in, before the begging bit: You are right, I should not leave the boys on their own in the flat, but Laurence is normally very good at looking after Jay. I have told him to be more careful. (Cousins, 2013, 125)

Janet thought that mental stress could cause individuals to act in strange ways. He said individuals can show signs of mental illnesses when they can't handle their own problems (Plante, 2013). This what has happened with Laurence when he impersonates his parents as a coping strategy to deal with his difficulties. Laurence tries to impersonate his mother again, but this time not by putting on her clothes or her wig. Instead, he deals with the situation differently. He wrote a letter to Nelly telling her not to inform the authorities and assuring her that “she” will meet her during the weekend. Laurence disengages from his own identity in this situation by adopting his mother's position and composing a letter that mirrors his mother's view. This dissociation is considered as a coping mechanism that enables him to effectively navigate the obstacles arising from his mother's absence and effectively handle the dynamics within the family. It functions as a coping mechanism to maintain a sense of stability and to preserve the structure and unity of his family. Laurence's portrayal of his mother and the message conveyed in the letter exemplify a type of dissociation in which he disassociates himself from his own identity and adopts the character of his mother. This

dissociation enables him to manage the intricacies of his family circumstances and alleviate the effects of his mother's absence on himself.

Being alone for many days without care, food or money, Laurence and Jay are starving. They have eaten just moldy toast for many days. Laurence remembers that his grandmother has kept money for him in the bank, but he is not allowed to withdraw it because of his young age.

The skirt doesn't look too bad, but my hairy legs definitely spoil the effect. I turn away from the mirror and look through Mum's drawers for a pair of tights. I've never worn tights before and I put a massive tear in the first pair, trying to get them on. I'm more careful the second time and manage to get the tights onto my legs without any damage—except now, the crotch part is hanging just above my knees. After a lot of tugging and wriggling I pull them into the right position. It feels weird, but my legs do look a lot better. (Cousins, 2013, p.125,126).

Laurence is compelled by his surroundings to dissociate himself from his own identity and behave in accordance with his circumstances. He tries to dissociate from his own identity by putting on his mother's clothes and go straight to the bank taking Jay with him when his friend Mina saw them and she recognized Laurence easily. Mina is a sweet heart girl. She prevented Laurence from going to the bank, also she gave him some money when he told her about being alone at home without food or money. By trusting in Mina and telling her about their mother's absence, Laurence establishes a moment of great confidence, stating "I want her to know. I can't carry the weight of the secret on my own any more" (Cousins, 2013, p.132). Throughout the story, he has mostly managed his situation in quiet, bearing the emotional burden of his family's instability. Through revealing this private information to Mina, Laurence exhibits a transformation in his coping strategies; he transitions from isolation to seeking support, therefore indicating his growing awareness of the need for interpersonal bonds and aid. Laurence forges significant relationships with individuals who provide him with valuable assistance throughout the narrative. Mina offers companionship, serving as a refuge from Laurence's chaotic circumstances.

Laurence exhibits behaviors that can be seen as a manifestation of dissociation. He is attempting to disengage or dissociate himself from his own identity. Laurence's choice to wear his mother's clothes serves as a means for him to establish a distinction between his ordinary identity and the identity of his mother that he wishes to convey. As Laurence's obligations escalate and the stress intensifies, he starts to question whether he can sustain this lifestyle. He addresses his mother's addiction and the repercussions it has on their lives. Laurence's path entails the exploration of his own identity, the ability to recover from adversity, and the quest for stability in the face of many difficulties.

I open my eyes and see movement on the boat. The silver haired man dropping his fishing tackle onto the deck. He opens the door and steps inside, reappearing a moment later carrying a black rubbish sack ... and there, behind him, framed by the dark rectangle of doorway, the pale figure of a woman. I can't make out her features and I don't recognize the clothes, but it's Mum ... it has to be. (Cousins, 2013, p. 146)

Laurence saw a grey-haired man many times in the street and in other places. Each time he saw him he thought his mother might be with this man. So, Laurence decided to follow him. The first time he followed him, he took Jay with him, but the man suddenly disappeared and Laurence returned home without any success. The next time, Laurence decided to follow him, leaving Jay at home with Mina. He realizes that the man lives in a boat. Because it was night, Laurence was not sure whether he saw his mother or another woman in the boat. He is waiting to be sure that this woman is his mother ‘I wait, heart-thumping, for something else to happen’ (Cousins, 2013, 147).

My heart is going so fast I feel sick. I’ve found her. I run all the way back to the Heights. I’ve been ages; Mina’s going to kill me. But when I get back, Mina and Jay are in the front room, drawing. The flat feels strange and it takes me a moment to work out why. (Cousins, 2013, p. 147)

This highlights Mina's role as a supporting presence for Jay in Laurence's absence. Mina's involvement in Jay's painting not only encourages connection but also gives a feeling of normality and amusement during a period of stress. Her presence in the apartment creates a peaceful environment, which stands in stark contrast to the disorder that Laurence is encountering in his search for his mother.

‘One ALL-expenses-paid, LUXURY holiday for you and your family—courtesy of our friends at Hardacre Holidaze,’ he says. ‘It’s yours, Daniel. Well done, my friend. VERY well done indeed.’ ‘Thanks,’ (Cousins, 2013, p. 157). When Laurence won the all-expenses-paid luxury vacation, it was a big turning point for the better in his life. This isn't just a time to win a game; it's a sign of hope and the chance to get away from his problems. Laurence needs to find his mother in order for his happiness to be completed. So, he took Mina with him to the boat where the grey-haired man lived to get his mother back to her home. Their mother is inside. She is exhausted and pale, holding the grey-haired man in order not to fall.

As fifteen days hardly passed, he found his mother with Phill who saved her life when she fell in the canal trying to kill herself. It was Mina’s idea to take her from the boat before the grey-haired man arrived and prevented her from going home with their boys. Mina told Laurence that it is easy for their mother to stay away from their children in order not to think of the immense responsibilities which make her worse. That is why she stays with Phil. Laurence expected a strong, angry response from his mother regarding the mess in her bedroom, which he had modified in some way. However, much to his astonishment, his mother appeared oblivious to or unaffected by the disorder.

But I’m tired of running. Sometimes you have to stand up and fight. I glance back over my shoulder, and there they are: the massed ranks of my army, watching me from their doorways—a woman who can’t get out of bed without the help of SavaShoppa Scotch whisky, and a six-year-old boy who thinks he’s Scooby-Doo. (Cousins, 2013, p.209)

This indicates Laurence's tiredness resulting from constantly avoiding their issues and his recognition that it is now necessary to directly confront their difficulties. As a means of healing, Laurence articulates a desire to assert their position and engage in a struggle for an improved existence instead of persisting in avoiding their challenges. When Laurence expresses his

weariness of running, he suggests that he has been attempting to elude or evade the issues that have afflicted his family. However, he comes to understand that avoidance is not a good solution and that it is important to face their challenges openly. The statement "Sometimes you have to stand up and fight" exemplifies Laurence's resolute attitude towards confronting challenges directly, rather than acquiescing to their conditions passively. This marks a change in his mental attitude and a readiness to proactively enhance their circumstances.

Encountering challenges is undoubtedly an essential element in the process of recovering from trauma and dissociation. Following a traumatic event, individuals can face coping strategies such as avoidance, dissociation, or emotional detachment as a way to safeguard themselves. Although these coping mechanisms can be effective in the short term, they might impede long-term recovery and personal development. Through actively confronting issues, individuals can initiate the process of liberating themselves from the pattern of avoidance or dissociation and actively interact with their emotions, experiences, and obstacles. This process enables individuals to directly address their fundamental problems, navigate through the distressing experiences, and restore a sense of control over their lives, and this is exactly what has happened to Laurence.

It is essential to acknowledge that the process of recovering from trauma is slow and continuous. Each person's healing process is distinct, and strategies that are effective for one individual may not be effective for another. Laurence's recovery and progress in the face of trauma can be facilitated by cultivating patience, practicing self-compassion, and seeking support. Laurence sets out on an effort to explore his own identity, facing the distressing recollections he has repressed for a long time. He starts the process of uncovering the intricate aspects of his own history, gradually acquiring the resilience to confront his most profound anxieties. Kluft (1996) advocated for a therapy strategy in which the focus is on addressing and giving importance to the traumatic experiences of individuals with dissociation. He acknowledges that the method is challenging because patients can resist recalling traumatic memories and accepting ownership of those memories. However, by employing an empathetic approach and receiving proper training, this method enables the patient to process their traumatic experiences and decreases the probability of disruptive events and crises. The study found that handling stressful content with greater efficiency and compassion reduces the likelihood of mishaps, compared to previous practices.

Laurence acquires the skill of fostering resilience, which is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. By engaging in self-reflection, and receiving support from his loved ones, he acquires techniques to effectively handle the difficulties that stem from his traumatic experience. Laurence's quest reaches its climax with a revitalized feeling of optimism, as he uncovers his inner resilience and commences the process of reconstructing his life.

Dave Cousins shows just how brilliant he is as a writer in *Fifteen Days Without a Head* by showing how well he can develop characters and make painfully deep connections between difficult ideas. By making main characters like Laurence, Cousins lets readers into his characters' inner problems, which makes them very real to us. His vivid descriptions and authentic dialogue draw the readers into the world of the characters. *Fifteen Days Without a Head* has become a success because it has deep emotional meaning, people that readers can relate to, and interesting stories. It has sparked talks about family relationships and personal growth.

Conclusion

15 Days Without a Head presents an authentic description of dissociation. Most of the symptoms stated by Janet in his model are depicted in Laurence, the novel's hero. Due to his father's early death and his alcoholic mum's frequent absence, he develops the schema of dissociation. He was traumatized because he has to keep everything normal as if his mum was with them in order not to live forcibly with other family. He takes the role of his parents to convey people that they live normally. Due to his young age of fifteen, it was too hard for him to take care of himself and his younger brother Jay. So that, he dissociates to deal with his traumatic events. Laurence resorts to dissociation through his attempt to mimic his mother's shape by putting on her clothes to convince people that their mother is with them. Also, he tries to impersonate his dad's voice in the TV program hoping to win the all-expenses holiday. These are considered as defense mechanism used by the protagonist to deal with his difficulties.

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