

The price of sunflowers

Business



“ People often ask me questions that I cannot very well answer in words, and it makes me sad to think they are unable to hear the voice of my silence.” - Inayat Khan

The mind of a hopeless man is a place void of all beauty, happiness, and love. Depression can consume a victim; swallowing his dreams, his life, and his very mind. A picture of a broken man is not unfamiliar; literary and visual texts endeavour to embody the destructive nature of depression and this is done with skill and effect. However, it can be observed that representations such as this often ignore the progression of the character's condition. 'Beauty' transpires in the resistance - creative abilities and outlets flourish and the complexity of the human mind is revealed.

The battle, the journey, and the final result of surviving depression is worth more attention than the illness itself. Depression is a common subject of human experience portrayed amongst authors, poets, lyricists, films, and playwright. With the foundations of the illness rooted within the cruellest of human emotions, depression affects more than 120 million people worldwide and is the most common cause for suicide and additional anxiety disorders.

The visual and literary construction of depression in modern society generally focuses not on the illness itself, but on its self-destructive and disparaging nature. Audiences empathise with the daily torment and mental struggle experienced by depressed characters, relating most to individual aspects or causing factors of a character's depression.

The tragic portrayal of a depressed mind can be most clearly observed in representations of the most internationally acclaimed artist, Vincent Van Gogh; the heart breaking tale of Alaska Young; and the confronting account

of a depressed mental patient. Each source effectively conveys the animosities of depression and the individual triumphs of those who suffered from the consuming (and potentially fatal) grasp of the illness. Binary oppositions are used throughout texts to further emphasize the connection between beauty and the 'ugliness' of such a life. 'Vincent' by Don McLean, highlights the torment and pain of artist, Vincent Van Gogh's, troubled life. The song compares the beauty of Van Gogh's artwork to the hardships he endured; reflecting on his daily battles and isolation from society. The song acknowledges Van Gogh's depression and in contrast to the artist's work.

This is shown in the lines, "Starry, starry night. Paint your palette blue and grey, Look out on a summer's day, With eyes that know the darkness in my soul." In this opening verse, McLean narrates Van Gogh's creation of 'Starry Starry Night', one of the artist's most famous works. His reference to Vincent's eyes suggests that the illness is ever present and influences most aspects of the artist's life. The use of alliteration (starry, starry; paint your palette) and rhyme (grey - day) further emphasise the importance of the stanza and adds to the aesthetic appeal of the lyrics. The song's chorus most effectively represents Van Gogh's depression and the overwhelming sense of loneliness that he experienced during his lifetime.

McLean connects personally with Van Gogh in the chorus "Now I understand, What you tried to say to me. How you suffered for your sanity, How you tried to set them free. They would not listen They did not know how Perhaps they'll listen now." McLean's most powerful statement highlights the ultimate price of Van Gogh's brilliant, yet tormented mind - referring to the absence of all hope, and his lost love with life and his art; "For they could

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not love you, But still your love was true, and when no hope was left in sight on that starry starry night, You took your life as lovers often do; But I could have told you Vincent, This world was never meant for one as beautiful as you.” The powerful lyrics of Don McLean’s ‘ Vincent’ are emphasised in television production, Doctor Who’s ‘ Vincent and The Doctor’.

This highly significant use of intertextuality supports the tragic portrayal of depression whilst further analysing Van Gogh’s torment. The production revolves around Vincent Van Gogh and his lack of both self-appreciation and worth; his battle with his ‘ inner monsters’ (depression); and his ability to see true beauty in the world around him. The text allows the audience to relate to Van Gogh as a person – reflecting on his illness and the purpose it served in his life. In accordance with Don McLean’s song, Vincent and The Doctor is told not from the perspective of the protagonist, but from an observers (and audiences) point of view. In this text, Van Gogh’s depression is given physical form and manifests in the shape of an inter-galactic creature.

The eventual slaughter of this creature symbolises Van Gogh’s momentary triumph over his illness. This emotional ‘ high’ highlights the temperamental moods and their frequent changes often experienced by those suffering from depression. During a moment of reflection, Van Gogh describes to the Doctor the world as he sees it; “ The complex magic of nature blazing before our eyes.” To which the Doctor replies “ I’ve seen many things, my friend. But you’re right. Nothing’s quite as wonderful as the things you seen.

” This statement suggests the characters acknowledgement of Van Gogh’s achievements and the power of his illness. Van Gogh, in his realm of paint

and colours, is untouchable. “ His command of colour, the most magnificent. He transformed the pain of his tormented life into ecstatic beauty. Pain is easy to portray but to use your passion and pain to portray the ecstasy and joy and magnificence of our world. No one had ever done it before.

Perhaps no one ever will again. To my mind, that strange wild man who roamed the fields of Provence, was not only the world’s greatest artist but also one of the greatest men who ever lived.” Each of the source’s careful portrayal of depression collaborates with the other, portraying depression as an all-consuming and dangerous illness. The author’s of each source have been careful to highlight Van Gogh’s ability to produce ‘ ecstatic beauty’ from such a troubled life and offers a positive, yet heart-breaking approach to constructing the human experience of depression. Van Gogh is silenced in McLeans song, only to be given a voice in the television adaptation. Both song and supporting television production portray the symptoms, nature, and consequences of depression whilst bringing to light the beauty discovered by the tormented character.

This binary opposition can be found throughout the text – providing intertextuality amongst selected sources. *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), directed by James Mangold and starring Angeline Jolie and Winona Ryder, tells the controversial story, based upon true events, of a young woman’s journey through depression in a mental asylum. Susanna Kaysen suffers from both depression and a borderline personality disorder. The film follows Kaysen as she learns about her illness and is exposed to the other patients in her ward. This portrayal of depression is exceptionally self-destructive.

Kaysen's initial hold off, and denial of her depression plummets her further into insanity and instability. The source portrays Susanna's depression not as a character (as was done by the sources referencing Van Gogh) but as an extension of herself. Similar to Van Gogh's creative outlet, Kaysen's longing to see the beauty in the world is recorded in a private journal. The character's language and physique further emphasizes the film's portrayal of depression - Kaysen is quiet in nature and her use of educated language reflects the complexity of her mind, her characters, and her illness. Kaysen's miniature stature is a method of contention, whilst her and prowess is evident only in intellectual fields and alludes to the notion that depression is a sign of the physically weak.

This portrayal is maintained throughout the film until the conclusion of the tale - Susanna Kaysen is the first of the patients to successfully leave the asylum in full health; her triumph over depression silences all previously conceived ideologies. The film does not rely heavily on a soundtrack, but instead focuses on dialogue. Accordant and important speeches are delivered in the absence of additional audio. This can be clearly seen when Kaysen describes how she feels to her nurse, " I know what it's like to want to die. How it hurts to smile.

How you try to fit in but you can't. How you hurt yourself on the outside to try to kill the thing on the inside." The portrayal of depression in ' Girl, Interrupted' focuses primarily on the journey of recovery for a character. Despite this, the film's portrayal of depression - a dangerous and destructive illness, remains in accord with previous sources. Despite misconceptions early in the second film, stereotypes are not supported by the source.

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Initially, Susanna's stature and behaviour conforms to typical opinion- she is weak, self-destructive and talentless. Susanna's character does, however, progress with the story until finally, contrary to such a generalisation, her exceptionally strong will and powerful values transpire. The final source, *Looking For Alaska* by John Green, focuses on the ultimate consequences of denying depression. The novel is told from the perspective of boarding school boy Miles Halter (nicknamed ' Pudge' by his peers'), and details the events of his first year attending Culver Creek. The novel is split into two sections - ' before' and ' after'.

Each ' chapter' in the first (before) half of the book is labelled with a number of days that gradually count down until they reach zero (and the start of the second and ' after' half of the book). At the end of the first half of the book, Pudge's best friend and potential love interest, Alaska Young, dies unexpectedly in a car accident. The events surrounding her death result in her closest friends investigating the possibility that Alaska's demise was the result of suicide. As an obvious sufferer of depression throughout the novel, Alaska's rebellious attitude and flippant and moody demeanour invites the audience to assume that she had ended her life on her own accord. Pudge never discovers if Alaska's death was a suicide and concludes her memorial service with a reoccurring question throughout the novel, " How will we ever get out of this labyrinth of suffering?" Alaska's answer? Straight and fast. Alaska's behaviour and ultimate fate provides a contrast to Vincent; Vincent and the Doctor; and Girl, Interrupted.

Exercising the worst habits of a sufferer of depression, Alaska intentionally destroys herself and her wellbeing. Her self-destructive pattern is evident

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from the moment of her introduction to the story. Alaska's troubled past supports all stereotypes of a 'depressed and troubled teenager'. The book, however, provides perspective on suicide as a result of depression. Pudge answers his own question, "The only way out of the labyrinth of suffering is to forgive." Depression and its portrayal in a multitude of texts clearly demonstrates its versatility, non-conformity, tragedy, and disparaging nature.

The use of intertextuality can be used to strengthen an opinion, or to weaken it. When used in conjunction with the relevant poetic devices and binary opposition, depression in modern society is a strongly defined experience. Both the tragic and all-consuming nature of the illness and the beauty that one may find upon recovery are easily represented.