

Locating Existence and Cure of ‘Seven Sins of Narcissism’ in Esteban Trueba from ‘The House of Spirits’ (Isabella Allende)

Rana N*

University of Wah, Quaid Avenue, Wah Cantt, Pakistan

*Corresponding author: Rana N, University of Wah, Quaid Avenue, Wah Cantt, Pakistan, Tel: +051-9157000; E-mail: Mrsnosheenrana@gmail.com

Received date: September 14, 2018; Accepted date: November 19, 2018; Published date: November 26, 2018

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Abstract

This paper attempts to look deep into the psychology of Esteban Trueba, the main protagonist of Isabella Allende's novel *The House of the Spirits*. The study is focused on only one psychological attribute of Esteban that is ‘Narcissism’. American psychiatrist Hotchkiss' theory of ‘Seven Deadly sins of Narcissism’ has provided foundation for the detailed analysis whereas the idea is further developed by the approaches of Dr. Lisa Firestone and Melanie Tonia Evans who provided therapy for NPD (Narcissist personality disorder). The study is qualitative in nature and through textual analysis is entailed to identify ‘Seven Sins of Narcissism’ in Esteban and moves further to find out those factors that lead to the healing of ‘Narcissist Personality Disorder’ in him to convert him into a ‘generous and considerate’ human being.

Keywords: Psychological disorder; Self-love; Seven sins of narcissism; Therapy; Generosity

Trueba in detail it is essential to have a clear idea of ‘Narcissism’ or ‘Narcissistic Personality Disorder’ and its depiction in literature.

Introduction

There is no refutation of the fact that literature is reflection of human life and characters in fictions are the true representation of human beings. Protagonists and antagonists behave differently in different circumstances and settings. It is not the setting but the human mind which makes a man hero or villain. Isabella Allende's famous novel *The house of the Spirit* is flooded with such different characters but there is one main character Esteban Trueba who is hero and villain of the book at one and the same time. The novel mainly compact the story of many generations of Trueba family with the background of Chile's socialist government and the military coup of 1973 which resulted in the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. *The House of the Spirits* is to the Chilean revolution and counter revolution what ‘A Tale of Two cities’ is to the French revolution as the novel captures the same ‘best of time and worst of time’ site where powerful landlords, army, capitalists, church and army are on one side and common, suffering, poor, rejected and disappointed people reside on the other side.

Isabella Allende, niece of Chilean assassinated president Salvador Allende, was in exile from her martyred country when she got the news that her grandfather Augustine Llonca had ‘decided to die’. To make him believe that he would always be alive in his ‘granddaughter's memories’ Isabella shaped a fictional character Esteban Trueba as cenotaph to her grandfather.

The story revolves around Esteban Trueba's life journey from a struggling young man to the owner of a grand state Tress Marias and to a distinguished senator who is utterly against the rule of democracy. ‘Patron Trueba who is feared and obeyed by his workers and family senses himself unique and superior. He starts believing that the whole world revolves around him thus ultimately suffers because of this false assumption. The proud, egoistic and Narcissist Esteban Trueba comes out of his flawed state and dies as a completely changed person in the end of the novel. Before imploring complicated psychology of Esteban

Literature Review

The term ‘Narcissism’ is instigated from the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book III) in the first century. The story of Prince Narcissus was later found to be the depiction of a highly specialized psychological disorder, ‘Narcissism’. Sigmund Freud associated certain connotations with this term Narcissism in his book ‘On Narcissism’ [1]. He suggested that Narcissism is a natural drive every child is born with. Freud opines that this ‘self-love’ provides energy to individuals and leads them to survive in the outer world but in certain individuals this simple yearning to be accredited by others eventually leads to narcissism (self-love). For Otto Rank this word ‘Narcissism’ refers to a condition where a man considers others as ‘river’ in which he can see his own reflection, so his own requirements, wishes and desires become more important than anything else in the world [2-5].

Narcissist possesses an unwanted wish of getting fame which is basically a ‘Noble prize complex’. If a Narcissist is sure about his victory he starts believing that ‘divine power’ is supporting him because he deserves it. Narcissists are authoritative as they want others to follow them without any question and if others fail to do so they punish them. Self-love gives rise to the feeling of command and arrogance and they behave like ‘sharks’. Jerome Kegan and Susan [6] believe that a narcissist thinks his unique personality deserves power, fame and success in every field. When he does not receive compliment from any one he tries to compensate it by admiring his own self. If there is some irreparable loss or mistake, the blame is simply shifted to others by this narcissist personality. Another side of Narcissists is that seems to be strong and arrogant outwardly but they are very sensitive beings, and can easily get hurt by others. They enclose themselves like ‘glass bubbles’ so no one can peep what is inside them. Their self-love makes them more lonely and isolated from the society. Narcissists have unclear sense of right and wrong, they think themselves to be men of principle but in reality their values and principles change as soon as their ‘circumstances’ and ‘preferences’ change. Burstein explicates this

interest of narcissist in his own self as 'Mental care of one's own self'. Narcissists spend their time in social activities only to get recognized by people. They have a forceful self-interest and extreme fantasies which are at the back of each of their action.

Heinz Kohut detects that this psychological disorder is developed in those individuals who want an escape from their bad inner-self or their negativity. D.W. Waincoat approves the idea that narcissism is a trait that develops in very young age but he witnesses that it is exhibited only in a mature age. Horney argues that it is not self-idealization at young age that leads to Narcissism rather it is the output of certain kind of atmosphere that acts on particular kind of temperament. She believes that self-idealization is there in almost every individual but it is the excess or deficiency of this self-esteem which becomes the reason for 'narcissistic' attitude [2]. In the Fourth edition of 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorder' certain traits of a narcissist individual are given. Which are; great sense of self-esteem and a tendency to change their talents and achievements, they expect themselves to be recognized as superior, they are obsessed with the idea of unlimited power, success and intellect. Narcissists are open to any distortion and disturbances because only in this way their sense of superiority is endangered. They don't possess stable emotional personalities rather their response varies time to time.

In literature many writers took the idea of self-love and exhibited it in their works. William Shakespeare's characters like King Lear and Macbeth explicitly exhibit an element of self-love behind their severe actions. Francis Bacon borrows this idea of self-esteem when he gives reference of Cicero and Pompey in his work The Essays. Byron in nineteenth century considered the idea of self-love as something completely evil which is more poisonous and dangerous than the 'sting of snake'.

Theoretical Framework

In 2003 two US Psychiatrists, Hotchkiss and James F. Masterson identified seven deadly sins of narcissism which are dominant in the personality of a Narcissist [3]. These sins are described as follow:

Shame is non-existent in a Narcissist. He does not possess the idea of shame in real sense however it may lurk behind their apparent surface. A Narcissist knows how to convert his feeling of shame into rage against others.

Magical thinking is the ability to create an illusionary world in front of others thus leading others to be affected by their magical thinking.

Arrogance is a visible trait in narcissists and is third sin of Narcissism. Narcissist considers others not as fellows but inferiors. He continuously degrades his subjects to satisfy his ego.

Envy is the fourth sin of narcissism which is just to secure the superiority sense of narcissists. Anyone who dares to challenge this superiority is being envied by narcissists.

Need for entitlement is the fifth sin of narcissism which is the direct result of the feeling of being special. Narcissist expects from everyone to identify and appreciate him and if anyone refuses to do so he makes him victim of his wrath and fury.

Exploitation being the sixth sin of narcissism can be in various forms. There can be economical, social or sexual exploitation. Narcissist considers it his right to make use of others without any hesitation. Mostly they can easily exploit the subservient class without any resistance.

A bad boundary is the last deadly sin of narcissism. According to Hotchkiss, Narcissists have no sense of boundaries. For them people are just to make them happy and satisfied. Narcissists are unable to draw a boundary line with others. People are just to fulfill the necessities of the Narcissist otherwise they don't seem to exist at all. They also believe that others are in their power and their does not exist any boundary, they can rule over them the way they want to.

The above detail shows that Narcissism is basically a psychological disorder but this disorder has a therapy that is provided by many psychiatrists but in this study only two approaches/therapies will be discussed. Melanie Tonia Evans, a Narcissistic abuse recovery expert, in her article 'Healing a narcissist' describes three steps which could be adopted to heal NPD. The first step is 'solitary confinement' with zero contact with the outside world so that the narcissistic supply (of praise) can be stopped. Second step is to make a committed effort to release the emotional trauma. The last stage is of stimulation and then re-learning of empathy, in which there is connection to life and other people. According to Dr. Evans these three steps if followed rightly could bring a balanced and rational approach towards self-esteem in a Narcissist.

Another remedy is by Dr. Lisa Firestone, who in her article 'Is there a cure for Narcissism?', ascertains that one can easily come out of this syndrome if he gets heedful of his faults. She states that by identifying one's 'critical inner voice' one can also come out with good results. This 'Inner voice' helps in inculcating a compassionate attitude which leads the patient to shift his focus from inward to outward thus getting 'generous' not only with himself but with others as well. Generosity being the key element to positive sense of self is a 'mental health principal' which keeps one alive. Generosity has four important elements which are as follow:

Giving your most important and dearest thing to another person even if it is one's own self.

Being open to the person even if he is appreciating you.

Only 'giving' is not important in Generosity, 'accepting' what the other is giving is also important element of generosity.

Showing appreciation to the other person is the last essential element of Generosity.

Dr. Lisa believes that an act of kindness can end that 'false self' which longs for the attention and pride. This would eliminate Narcissist's need to boost his self-esteem only. He would not compare himself with others and show more ethical behavior towards society. Giving more importance to compassion and less importance to self-esteem builds a solid sense of self that leads to less stress and more relaxed state of mind.

Textual Analysis

The way Narcissist people treat others in their young age is shaped by their family experience during their infancy. This theory is very true in case of Esteban Trueba whose childhood was 'full of discomfort, harshness, interminable night time rosaries, fear, and guilt'. His sad memories of childhood were the mixture of 'the rancid smells, frozen mornings, greasy soup of his impoverished childhood, his invalid corpse like figure of mother and drunken father'. He could not come out of his childhood memories 'of cold, empty stomach and loneliness', of 'a ruined home, with economical and moral destruction'. With shame Esteban could recall his very 'carefully mended shirt and loneliness'

and in winter he had to be conscious not to let anybody hear 'crunch of the paper as it moved against his skin' because he was wrapped with 'the layers of newspaper' since he didn't have woolen clothing. Esteban had never loved his mother or felt at ease in her presence. This woman was always present in 'his nightmares with her 'rancid smell of medicine, frail moans, and interminable prayers'. In fact his mother and sister had only peopled his childhood with 'prohibitions and terrors and weighed his manhood with responsibilities and guilt'. He wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible. This deprivation of love turned shy Esteban into a furious child as there was great rage that had been gnawing at him ever since the day he first learned how to think. Right from his childhood he had 'the trait of moodiness, he could grow violent and throw himself on the floor foaming at the mouth so furiously that he could scarcely breathe, and kicking like one possessed by the devil. He had to be plunged into freezing water to regain control. This rage became visible trait of young and old Trueba even 'Senator Trueba' at certain times lost his temper and screamed so much that he turned red and they (his family) had to throw a jug full of cold water in his face so that the fit would pass and his breathing would return to normal.

At a stage when child looks for the ideal parents and circumstances to rely upon, Esteban could find nothing, thus he developed high self-esteem which compensated the lack of parental empathy. What was left from those days was Esteban's flawed sense of self, fury and outsized pride. In order to 'survive' a crushed childhood phase he started loving and appreciating his own self which was later developed into 'Narcissist Personality Disorder'. As the story proceeds we see expansion of all 'Seven Sins of Narcissism' in his personality [4,5].

Seven sins of narcissism

According to Hotchkiss Narcissists do possess an invisible sense of 'Shame', he either acts shamelessly or converts feeling of embarrassment or shame into rage. After coming out of a 'shameful childhood' Esteban learnt to hide his sense of shame and converted himself into a senseless (shameless) person [6,7]. He could blame anybody for anything without any pricking of conscience. Esteban visited his mother before her death and realized for the first time that she 'had rotten, oversized legs with open wounds full of larvae and worms'. He felt angry rather than being shameful. Similarly Esteban kicked his unmarried old sister Ferula out of his house one night shamelessly and when was informed about her death in an extremely pathetic condition, he felt the same rage, and felt that his sister had managed to make him 'feel guilty' by dying so. As a young Patron he raped many young innocent girls shamelessly, he never knew the number of his illegal children, nor did he accept them rather he would threaten those women shamelessly. After leading such shameful scandalous life when he heard about his daughter's love affair with her childhood mate, Esteban Trueba did beat her mercilessly, 'lash upon lash, until the girl fell flat and rigid to the ground'. When his wife Clara tried to recall him his past shameful life he lost control and struck her in the face, knocking her against the wall.

'Magical Thinking' is the ability to create a 'magic world' and this trait is very much evident in the personality of Esteban who worked in 'coal mines' but kept on dreaming about Gold mines and wealth. Letters which he used to write to Rosa were always full of the details of his dreams of future. He imagined a perfect world with extreme wealth and 'the most beautiful girl' of the town. He survived through the 'lonely life' with the power of his 'magical thinking'. As a patron of Tres Marias he made his people believe that they could flourish only under

his patronage. He told them that everything he touched flourished because he has mind and techniques and innocent people believed in him.

'Arrogance' is the most noticeable sin of Narcissism in Esteban's personality. All his childhood unfulfilled wishes created in him an idealized sense of self [8]. His physical body gave the impression of a haughty man as all the lines of his body were vertical and swept upward. He sat stiffly, he walked straight as pole. His sharp aquiline nose, his pointed eyebrows, his high forehead, his thick, spatulate fingers and his big bones, in short every inch of his body held a mixture of pride, distrust, and myopia. He always had sour expression on his face. He reached Tres Marias as an ordinary young man but as soon as he saw the 'poor, barefooted and dried faces of tenants' and was addressed as 'Patron', a 'Narcissist bull' hidden within him came out with full power. He ordered those poor workers to work for him and they obeyed him. He started taking full credit of everything whether it is the construction of high strong walls or garden. He forbade others to talk back to him as he could tolerate no oppression. Esteban did not encourage any intimacy with his subordinates because of his extreme 'monumental pride'. He thought himself to be the 'best patron' who had changed everything. Peasants knew that they had to put up with his 'tantrums, his inconsiderate orders, and his self-importance'.

Esteban Trueba was arrogant to the point that he never shared his deepest feelings and thought to any living being. When Esteban got seriously injured during earthquake he spent four months wrapped in bandages and stiff as board, he never told anybody about his pains because it was a matter of pride' and he didn't want to degrade himself by sharing his feelings.

...I'll admit, my bones ached. On chilly evenings or humid nights, the pain in the bones that had been crushed in the earthquake became so unbearable that I would have to bite my pillow to keep people from hearing my screams.

Envy being the most serious and deadly sin of narcissism is Esteban's emblem trait. Being an arrogant and self-centered person he got envious of his own family members. What could be more abnormal of a person who felt jealous even of his own children who kept Clara busy? He couldn't bear the presence of third person in his house. He was jealous of Clara's supernatural skills and selfishly wanted Clara to think of nothing but him. Amazingly enough, brother and sister became rivals and finally he threw her out of his home, blaming her for being involved in lesbian acts with Clara. Since he himself was a 'jealous tyrant', he thought he could make others jealous as well. He tried to have good relations with Blanca to make Clara jealous but he discovered she did not possess any Electra complex. Just to hurt Clara's feelings he started going to red lantern area and started raping peasant girls but he got more and more furious and irritated because Clara could not be blackmailed or made jealous.

Need for entitlement is a particular trait of a Narcissist and Esteban Trueba is no exception, his decision to propose Rosa was just to show the world that his wife is the most beautiful woman of the town and his prolonged mourning over her death was in fact his mourning over the death of his dream of becoming a proud husband of a beautiful wife. As Patron he took every credit of progress in Tres Marias. Esteban got addicted to praise. When he couldn't get appreciation from others he satisfied himself by self-praising he thought that his presence made people secure. He started considering himself godfather of the tenants

who had saved them from death and disease but he wanted them to b acknowledge his greatness and be grateful to him.

If it was up to me, I'd send it all packing and go live like a prince in the capital, but I have to stay here, because if I were to leave for so much as a week, it would all collapse and these poor creatures would be starving to death again before you know it.

He built the biggest house in his town that could survive for centuries he wanted to be loved by Clara. He wanted to have a beautiful child; he needed a boy to give him his name. Esteban wanted Clara to admire his house, his gifts and his achievements but had bouts of despair because she treated him with the same kindness she displayed toward everybody else.

Any other woman would have been delighted with all this and would have had her work cut out for her for months to come, but not Clara, who was impervious to these things.

Thus we find Esteban doing every single thing to get appreciation from others. During his first months on Tress Marias, he used to take bath and change dress for dinner but as soon as he realized that 'there was no one to appreciate his effort. He abandoned that routine' thus for Esteban even very personal action of bathing was for the sake of appreciation.

Exploitation is the supreme sin of narcissism. Narcissists are like 'sharks', they could snatch every praise and credit from others. The same trait is exhibited by Esteban. Being a patron Esteban had many workers, 'with no rebels among them'. He engaged all men, women, adults and even children into work. He did not want anybody to get education as it would be dangerous for his system. He started exploiting women and even little girls sexually to satisfy his lust and to enjoy the taste of power. He left those girls as soon as they got pregnant, because for him they were just objects and not individuals, they are just to entertain them otherwise they are not at all important. Word of his cruelty spread throughout the region. Nobody ever dared to challenge this cruel act of Esteban and those who tried were found dead. He hated and punished Pedro for spreading ideas of equality among the tenants. Esteban didn't allow his daughter to love a peasant and forcefully arranged her marriage with a characterless count Jean Stigney. Clara was not permitted to speak for the right of women. Being a narcissist he exploited others economically, psychologically and sexually. He had a philosophy that

...the only thing that really works in these countries is the stick. This isn't Europe. What you need here is a strong government, with a strong man. It would be lovely if we were all created equal, but the fact is we're not.

'Bad boundaries' is the last fatal sin of Narcissism. Being a narcissist Esteban did not have clear concept of boundaries, he believed that people were just to obey him and not the vice versa. The day he discovered that the son of his worker Pedro Garcia was spreading the idea of justice among peasants he summoned him in his office and in the very presence of his father gave him lashing with his 'snakeskin whip'. He told him with hatred in his eyes that he was the one in charge and wanted to be surrounded by the people he liked, he couldn't kill him but he cut three fingers of his hand with an axe. He used Jean Stigney as a tool when he found out that his daughter Blanca was expecting a child.

Therapy process of Esteban Trueba's NPD

As per the remedy suggested by Melanie Tonia Evans NPD can be cured though three steps which are: solitary confinement, release of emotional trauma and relearning of empathy. According to Evans if these three steps are followed in perfect order a Narcissist can be healed. The other therapist Dr. Lisa Firestone considers emergence of 'inner critical voice' and 'generosity' as therapy dose for the victim of NPD. In the novel '*The House of Spirits*' we find Esteban acts as a narcissist but as the story proceeds his healing process is also very evident As far as 'solitary confinement' is concerned Esteban is by nature an anti-social person as he has always set a clear gap with others. He felt happier when he was alone. He was so busy in the fields, with the new land he had bought and the various other businesses on which he had begun to cast his eye that he had no time to waste at the bedside of an invalid (his mother). He had no love bond with his children. But this confinement was Esteban's own choice. In his middle age he realized that though he was the wealthy and respected man he had always wanted to be but he was as alone as ever. He started craving for the company of his wife Clara but to his shock nobody was interested in sitting and talking to him

I felt more and more alone, for no one needed me anymore. I no longer had my sons, and Clara, with her habits of silence and distraction, seemed like a far-off ghost.

From this realization onwards we can figure out the beginning of Self-psychology Therapy process. Esteban discovered with surprise that he was shrinking mysteriously. This shrinking can symbolically be taken as shrinking of his narcissism.

He had to buy shoes one size smaller, shorten his trousers, and have a tuck taken in his shirtsleeves. One day he put on the black hat he had not worn all summer and it covered his ears completely, which led him to deduce that if his brain was shrinking, his ideas were also probably withering away.

He consulted doctors but they concluded that it was all in his mind, that there was no reason for him to believe that he was shrinking, that he had always been the same size, but that 'perhaps he had dreamt that he was once six feet tall and wore a size-twelve shoe'.

Thus it was his oversized ego which started shrinking but the real stroke hit Esteban hard when he restricts himself within his room. In fact he was forcibly restrained by his followers to go out because the angry crowd (workers of Tress Marias) would hang him from the lamppost. Trueba was more surprised than angry. It was when his inner critical voice told him.

Ferula was right, I thought; I've been left all alone and my body and my soul are shriveling up. All that's left for me is to die like a dog.

He lived completely cut off from society and it was when he gave an outlet to his emotions, he wept for his past life. He began to suffer from insomnia. Alba had never seen her grandfather with 'bowed head'. For the first time in his life now Esteban was found to be 'hunched in his arm chair, calling to Clara and his sons in a kind of interminable murmur'.

This was the part of another healing process of narcissism where the victim loses his contact with the outer world and the supply of praise is stopped. The second step is that of sufferings (emotional trauma). The proud Narcissist Senator Trueba was convinced that a period of dictatorship was necessary but then he himself was mad hostage though he kept on telling them,

"I'm Senator Trueba! For God's sake, don't you recognize me?"... "You can't do this to me! This is an outrage! I'm a friend of General Hurtado's."

He realized that everything was changed. He cursed them like a madman but they laughed and locked him in the dining room. Esteban Trueba collapsed and felt both physical and mental exertion. Dejected Senator Trueba was rescued by a revolutionary. As he came out with bowed head and red eyes, he fell to his knees, moaning like a newborn baby with tears in his eyes. His pride had been crushed as he couldn't face journalists. For the first time he felt defeated. In fact Esteban was challenged by the same evil which he himself had sowed. His imprisonment was not the only suffering he faced, his granddaughter Alba was kidnapped and then raped by his very old enemy, a young police officer. This was enough to make Esteban finally shun his ego. He went to a prostitute Transito Soto to seek help and begged her to take pity on a poor, destroyed old man.

Esteban's willingness to accept help from an ordinary prostitute was first step towards the adaptation of 'Generosity'. Once he wanted to take revenge from his peasants' who dared to protest against him but after coming out of his shell of Narcissism he was a different man. He felt like a father who has punished his children too severely. He returned to the city with heavy soul and feeling older than ever. Senator Trueba admitted he had made a mistake.

Sunk in his armchair like an old man at the end of his days, they saw him shed silent tears. He was not crying because he had lost power. He was crying for his country.

As the therapist says generosity doesn't mean to give only, it means to take also. We find Esteban accepting Pedro's offer that had come to rescue him, he even smiled at him. He allowed his daughter to live with her lover (Pedro). He told her.

"I haven't been a good father to you, my dear," he said. "Do you think you'll ever be able to forget the past?" Go in peace, my children."

After accepting his fault, breaking his shell of ego and becoming generous Esteban transformation was quite visible, for the first time in his life.

...when he observed hungry children and women appearing outside his house for anything to eat, instead of shouting at his servants to shut

the door and lowering his blinds to avoid their sight he gave extra money to Blanca and told her to make sure the availability of hot food to give away.

Esteban and Alba both cleaned the house and filled the garden with fresh fragrance, they walked arm in arm remembering the past. He seemed happy and satisfied and started writing a book based on his memories of his life. After writing everything he laid down on Clara's bed and death was not long in coming.

He did not die like a dog as he feared he would, but peacefully, in my arms... he died without pain or anguish, more lucid than ever and happy, conscious, and serene.

Conclusion

The present study has explored seven deadly sins of narcissism in the character of Esteban Trueba. Esteban possesses certain characteristics of a "Narcissist Personality Disorder." His narcissism is rooted in his childhood when he didn't get ideal care and attention from his parents. This psychological disorder of Narcissism goes to its peak until a time a time comes when that tight shell of Narcissism breaks and transforms Esteban into a changed person. The study has proved that Esteban came out of his NPD only when he underwent through a natural therapy process.

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