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Theme of Trauma in *Me Before You*

In *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes, the theme of trauma and its impacts is intricately woven into the narrative, profoundly affecting the lives of the main characters, Louisa Clark and Will Traynor. Louisa, a vibrant and quirky young woman, carries the invisible scars of a traumatic event from her past that has shaped her self-worth and life choices. Her journey throughout the novel reflects her struggle to overcome this trauma and find her own identity and purpose. On the other hand, Will Traynor, a once adventurous and successful man, grapples with the physical and emotional trauma of a life-altering accident that leaves him paralyzed. His character embodies the profound despair and frustration that can accompany such a drastic change in circumstances. Louisa's trauma is portrayed through her stifled, ambitious and constrained life choices following a past incident, while Will's trauma is depicted through his struggle with identity and purpose after his accident.

The theme of trauma is deeply explored through Lou's character. Lou's trauma is not as overt as Will's, but it is equally significant. Her past experiences, particularly the assault she endured, have left her with deep-seated fears and insecurities. Lou's trauma is subtly revealed when she admits, "I can tell you the exact day I stopped being fearless" (Moyes 154). This secrecy highlights the weight of her burden. Her reluctance to leave her hometown and take risks is a direct result of her trauma, as she confesses, "I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want to do

anything" (Moyes 89). This quote expresses that she would rather stay home than go anywhere else. Her trauma also affects her relationships, making her hesitant to trust and open up to others. "I haven't talked to anyone about ... It's ... it's stupid." (Moyes 245). This shows that she doesn't want to open up to people about this incident. However, throughout the novel, Lou's journey towards healing is evident as she begins to confront her past. She goes into the maze again and thinks, "I glanced over at the maze, at its dark, dense box hedging. I was being ridiculous. Perhaps I had been behaving ridiculously for years. It was all over, after all. And I was moving on" (Moyes 242). This reflects a moment of self-questioning about whether she was just being dramatic after all. By the end of the story, she finds the courage to pursue her dreams, symbolizing her resilience. Lou's character arc is a testament to the enduring impact of trauma and the possibility of recovery and growth.

Through Will's character, the issue of trauma is extensively explored. Before his accident, Will was a dynamic, adventurous man, but the trauma of becoming a quadriplegic drastically changed his life. His emotional and psychological struggles are evident when he says, "I am not designed to exist in this thing, and yet for all intents and purposes, it is now the thing that defines me" (Moyes 325). This quote captures his sense of loss and frustration. Further, Will's trauma is further highlighted by his desire for control over his life, including his wish for assisted suicide, as he states, "I need it to end here. No more chair. (Moyes 226). This quote explains Will's decision not to want to live anymore. His interactions with Lou also reveal his inner turmoil; despite their growing bond, he pushes her away, saying, "I can't be the kind of man who just accepts" (Moyes 325). The novel portrays his trauma as not just physical but deeply emotional, affecting his identity and sense of purpose. However, through Lou's unwavering support, Will experiences moments of joy and connection, showing that even in the depths of trauma, there can

be glimpses of hope. “You, Clark, are the only person I have felt able to talk to since I ended up in this bloody thing” (Moyes 246). This quote suggests that he has finally felt better since his accident. His character ultimately embodies the devastating impact of trauma and the complex, often painful journey towards acceptance. Will's story is a poignant reminder of the profound effects of trauma on one's life and the strength required to face it.

In *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes, symbolism and imagery are used effectively to connect to the theme of personal growth and transformation. The symbolic use of the castle, where Lou works, represents her feeling of being trapped in her own life, much like a prisoner in a fortress. Similarly, the imagery of the changing seasons reflects the evolving relationship between Lou and Will, as well as Lou's internal journey from a place of fear and hesitation to one of courage and self-discovery. The contrast between Lou's colorful, quirky clothing and the more subdued environment around her also symbolizes her struggle to maintain her individuality and hope in a life that often feels constrained by her past trauma and current circumstances. These elements work together to highlight the central theme of breaking free from limitations and embracing change.

Ultimately, *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes masterfully employs symbolism and imagery to underscore the theme of personal growth and transformation. The castle serves as a metaphor for Lou's initial sense of entrapment, while the changing seasons mirror her evolving relationship with Will and her own journey towards self-discovery. Lou's vibrant clothing amidst a subdued environment further emphasizes her struggle to maintain her individuality and hope despite her past trauma. Together, these elements vividly illustrate the novel's central message of breaking free from limitations and embracing change, ultimately showcasing the profound impact of personal growth on one's life.

Moyes, Jojo. *Me before You*. London, Penguin Books Ltd, 2016.

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