

TED ANKARA COLLEGE PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL

ENGLISH B EXTENDED ESSAY

“YOU DON’T KNOW ME”

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Abstract

David Klass has published 14 novels and more than 40 screenplays for Hollywood. His novels are generally composed of problems that teenagers struggle while getting into adulthood. The novel ‘‘You Don’t Know Me ‘’ is a psychological novel concerning the question;

To what extend do the main character John’s mood and relationships effect each other in the novel To what extend is the impact of the main character john’s mood on his relationships and vice versa.

As it is experienced during a life time, mood and relationships affects each other. Bad mood may eventuate with bad relationships as well as bad relationships may cause bad mood. In the novel ‘‘You Don’t Know Me’’ the main character John has both bad mood and bad relationships which is reversed as the time passed. In this investigation, it is proved that during his adolescence the main cause of mood/relationship paradox changes.

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Introduction

The investigation of the nature and causes of individual behaviours, feelings and thoughts is a great concern of social psychology studies. These thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals are influenced by actual, imagined and implied presence of others, which can be generalized by the concept 'relationships'. The contrary situation is also valid, such that; the thoughts, behaviours and feelings influence the relationships. This ends up to be a paradox in social psychology.

The novel, *You Don't Know Me* by David Klass presents John's letter to his mother, in which he introduces himself. John's relationship with his friends and family are described based on remembered dialogues and John's monologues. Throughout the novel sexual influence and social status are taken into consideration as affectants of mood.

Since the novel proceeds with John's narration as a monologue, his inner conflicts can easily be detected. In the beginning of the novel John is a socially isolated teenager. The absence of his father is one of the biggest reasons for this choice to be alone. In a way, this is his way to get along with life. In these chapters the dominance of his mood towards his relationships can be seen. He doesn't count any of his bonds with people as relationships but obligations. The change in his view towards his relationships starts with Gloria. His date with Gloria and then his union with Violet affects his mood and makes him start to observe life from a different perspective. This also changes and improves the dominance of his mood towards his relationships.

In this essay the dominancy transitions in between the relationships and mood of the main character, John will be investigated.

John's Relationship with his Mother

The whole letter is written to John's mother. Until the end of the letter, there is no sign of significant relation between his mother and John. As the title indicates, John blames his mother for not knowing him and not paying attention to what he is going through. *"you may have created my past and screwed up my present but you have no control over my future."* (p.5) It is understood that although John suffers a lot from his step father, his mother is not aware of the situation, and this strengthens the power and control of his step father over John. *"You don't know me so you cannot possibly know how I loathe this man."* (p.218). Although John's mother does not satisfy his needs John is a very understanding person in deep. He feels sorry for his mother because she has to work at two different jobs and comes tired back at home. At those times John feels closer to his mother yet he does not show his emotions. This is one of his greatest conflicts. At one side his mother is the one responsible for the cruel man to be at home but at the other side she is lonely, tired and wants to be taken care. He continues to alienate himself from the rest and to watch from a distance. However, when the truth about her boyfriend is understood things also change between his mother and John. Because this is the first time they have a real talk and that they understand how important they are to each other. *"You are the family I have. The only person I can count on. You're the flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood..."* (p.258). Until now, the oppression of his step father on John is so much that he refuses to understand his mother and this relationship gets also effected from his desperate mood. Yet after John's life gets to balance he starts to see things more clearly. *"From the very beginning- from my first four words in this angry little tale of woe- I was wrong."* *"So you do know who I am after all."* (p.259)

John's Relationship with his Stepfather

John as indicated before, does not have a father role model instead he has a step father who insults and beats him. This torture he does to John causes an oppression on John's mood and character. John at an age of 14 is not able to express himself at home which he calls a "war zone" and also at school. His step father causes John to be kept in a desperate mood. As John tells in his letter, *"your real enemy is someone who knows you. And the better they know you, and the closer they are to you, the greater is their capacity to do you harm."* (p.150) he sees his step father as a real enemy. John feels trapped in his life because he has no where to go and no one to tell what he is witnessing. He has day dreams of running away from home. Yet besides being too young, John is a responsible boy. Even if he does not confess it, he

cares about his mother. This exactly is what his step father is aware thus, he knows that John won't tell his mother about the control he has over John. There is just one significant situation where John refuses this control, that is when his stepfather wants to be called father. Until his step father tries to kill John this situation continues. Yet, when the truth about the step father is understood and he goes to jail, John becomes able to gain confidence and starts to trust in other people. The step father is the most effective person on John's mood because John is just a 14 year old boy and it is hard for him to think an alternative way while this oppression exists. Yet whenever the stepfather is literally away John gets back to a balance in his life. From that point John is able to listen to himself and follow his desires which will build his identity.

John's Relationship with his Father

John calls his father, "the man who named me after a toilet". It appears that his father left John and his mother when John was a baby. John never knows what really happened to his father. He blames his father for the bad experiences he has to face with his step father. Even if his feelings are hurt in deep he has a belief, that one day his father will show up and rescue him from his "life that is actually not a life". He has a father fantasy in which his father is very handsome, strong and has answers to all of John's questions, even the reason for why he has left John. While waiting for Gloria's reply to his date propose, he confesses to himself and his mother that he actually misses his father a lot. "*Permit me a father fantasy. It is odd but I think I have never missed the man who named me after a toilet as much I do tonight.*" (p.58) For a boy at John's age having a role model is very important. The role model who usually is the father, determines how the world will be perceived. John not only lacks that model but also has a cruel stepfather instead. This draws him to isolation and to rebellion until some extent. The desire to find his father and his feeling of having a missing part, never changes but when things start to change in his life his desperateness changes accordingly. After he starts to have real relationships and gains self-esteem, John reaches a balance in his life and mood. "*a war zone remains bleak, even after the last gun has been silenced. The boy's real father will not suddenly appear-...*" (p.265). Towards the end of the letter, John still misses his father and feels his lack yet he starts to become aware that his father won't come but life goes on.

John's Relationship with Mrs. Gabriel

During his time at school John always recalls the experiences he had with his step father. *"Mrs. Moonface, obviously I can not answer your question, because my ears are still ringing from the two WHOPS"*(p.10) This is why his mood is dominant over his relation with the school and teachers as a student. John feels different than the other students because he is aware that normal children don't experience such a torture at home. All other children have fathers and mothers who support and take care of them. John thinks that he has too much real stuff to deal with which are more important than school. He calls the school an "anti-school" as well as the maths class, "anti-math". His maths teacher, Mrs. Gabriel, is a tough teacher because she avoids to get closer with the students and simply algebra is hard for the class. Yet, John can be cruel in his thoughts while he is in a bad mood, thus he calls Mrs. Gabriel Mrs. Moonface because of her skin problem and thinks that she is lonely and miserable. However while he suffers from not being understood he does the same to Mrs. Gabriel. But this is related to his age and the struggle he experiences. His desire to learn algebra is parallel to his feelings towards Mrs. Gabriel. Still, when Gloria accepts to go on a date with him his self-confidence increases depending on his mood and effects his understanding in algebra and he corrects a mistake of his teacher. This is important because it is the first time that John understands he is intelligent. Yet, the climax of his relationship with Mrs. Gabriel is experienced, the day after his step father tells him that he is going to marry John's mother. The anger towards his step father makes him loose control and tell his thoughts toward Mrs. Gabriel loudly. It is crucial to go into the fact that although John has worse feelings towards others, the only one who he tells his real thoughts is Mrs. Gabriel. This is because he correlates himself with Mrs. Gabriel. They both are lonely and isolated. No one tries to understand them and give a helping hand. They both have to struggle and for that reason they are distant to people. The real relationship between him and his teacher starts when Mrs. Gabriel comes to the hospital to visit John. This shows that not only John but also Mrs. Gabriel changed afterwards. Thus, in the end John's relationship becomes dominant over his mood and he understands that Mrs. Gabriel has a lovely heart.

John's Relationship with Gloria

One of the first secrets John tells his mother in the letter is his affection towards Gloria. *"... I am basically a good person with a good heart, which beats for her and her alone."* (p.66). For a long while Gloria, is the second highest influence over John's mood. Her

laugh, sight and presence changes John's mood in an instance. "*She is the essence of feminine, attractive girlness.*" (p.61) After John decides and asks her on a date, Gloria does not reply for a while, John describes that period as being in a "torture island". At that time, the idea of possible reasons for this delay take control over John, without giving him a chance to think about something else. Thus, when she accepts to go on a date with him he lives the best day in his life. Although in a positive way, Gloria also effects John's life through his mood not a real relationship. John becomes aware of this with Gloria's sudden attitude changes. After a hard experience with Gloria's father and his step father, John comes back to school and faces the accusation of Gloria. Instead of asking him what he has gone through Gloria is more concentrated on herself. "*You see I don't know who you are. And you don't know me at all.*" (p.184). Yet, Gloria changes a lot in John as his affection towards her is the only thing he is counting on for a long while. However, what John has towards Gloria is just an affection not real love. Because they do not build a real relationship. John and Gloria never try to understand each other or deepen their relation. They do not know the character of each other. Actually John deep inside undertsands that Gloria is not close to him and has other concerns but denies this truth for a while. Realizing this truth, starts John's re-creation of his own character. Having such an experience makes John think about what he really calls and expects from a real relatonship. Thus from that moment he is not able to decieve himself that looking good is enough for love. Still the little happy time that he spent with Gloria shows John that he has talents and qualities and that there is an alternative way of life.

John's Relationship with Violet Hayes

John and Violet are both from the school band. While his mood is effective over his relationships and permits him to have any he is unaware of the fact that Violet is in love with him. He gives a nickname "violent" to Violet just like he does to many people he has around and Violet is just a student or maybe anti-student, in the anti school. He does not give much importance to her. Still, it is soon understood that Violet watches him and has a deep affection towards him. Thus he can not understand Violet's change in attitudes after he goes on a date with Gloria. During his suspension from school, Violet visits John and persuades him to go to a dance together. Until then John never has someone who is concerned about him. Violet shows how caring and understanding she is. "*Oh, Violent Hayes, those eyes of you are killing me. Turn them off.*" (p.228) With Violet, John understands that real love and friendship is entirely different than what he has assumed. "*a jolly happy soul indeed. In fact, I am more than jolly- I believe I am filled with glee*" (p.247). He also finds someone whom he can truly

trust in after long years of feeling all alone. His trust in her strengthens his confidence in life and helps him to reflect his identity. *“I am feeling a strange kind of courage. It has been building all day and now, in my odd way, I am feeling quite brave.”* (p.231) Violet symbolizes real emotions. Because at first sight what John feels towards Gloria seems very strong yet it does not have solid ground. Violet tries to understand and help John. Although she does not know she is feels that something is wrong in John’s life. This does not stop her instead she tries even more to reach him and his heart. This changes John’s attitude in life because it shows the power of not giving up. He understands that he can trust Violet and let her come closer to him to share his feelings. After all the suffer he experienced, John reaches balance in his life and gets rid of the constantly desperate mood he had before. *“...and muddled and painful as it became in places, it was, in the end a love song.”* (p.267)

John’s Relationship with Mr. Steenwilly

Mr. Steenwilly is the teacher of the school band where John plays the tuba. Although John refuses to see this fact, Mr. Steenwilly tries to give a helping hand to John because he understands that something is going wrong at home. It can be understood that actually, John’s loneliness and problems can be seen from outside. Mr. Steenwilly is an emphatic person. What is more he believes that John has a talent in music and most probably does not want this talent to be suppressed by others. However as John writes his mind talk in his letter, *“Please do not walk over to me as you are now doing.”* (p.18), John is not used to trust someone. He thinks that everyone around can and will hurt him. This is critical because it shows how weak and vulnerable John is wide inside. He does not have hope in anybody even if that person truly shows he is harmless. Instead of trying to depend on someone else John tries to overcome every difficulty himself. This is very tough for a 14 year old boy and explains many of his attitudes. As time goes by and Gloria accepts to go on a date with John, his positive mood enables him to see that Mr. Steenwilly might be right while telling John that he is talented. This happens because, whenever John gets rid of the pressure he shows another talent and virtue of his. Also he becomes able to appreciate Mr. Steenwilly’s presence. He recognizes that Mr. Steenwilly actually tries to help and might understand him. *“I have always been confident that Mr. Steenwilly, like everyone else in my miserable life, does not know me at all. But perhaps he does know me a little bit.”* (p.88). John in a way seeks for a

father model. Yet he can not confess it because deep inside he feels guilty for this. This is why John does not let Mr. Steenwilly to come closer, he is afraid that his dream of his real father coming back will get lost. Because actually Mr. Steenwilly is a good role model as he is. Still, Mr. Steenwilly is the one who rescues John from the hands of his step father. This strengthens the trust of John to Mr. Steenwilly. Thus, deep inside he forgives himself and lets Mr. Steenwilly to be his role model.

Conclusion

In this essay the control shifts in between the main character, John's mood and all of his relationships throughout the novel "You Don't Know Me" by David Klass is examined. In the beginning of the novel it is seen that this dominancy shift is mostly towards mood. It is observed that, the implied and actual presence of especially some people effects and controls this shift. The most effective person for this control is John's step father. The commanding mood in this situation is stable desperateness caused by the presence of the step father. Although the step father is not around in some cases, he is able to keep John under pressure. This pressure determines John's relationship with others. Rather than creating real ties, John chooses to isolate himself from the outside world because of the fear of being hurt. John for these reasons, becomes an introverted person. This can also be understood from the novel being written as a monologue. Without the interference of others, due to conversations, John explains himself, his thoughts and loneliness. This monologue is actually a letter written to the mother. As the title "You Don't Know Me" also indicates, he accuses his mother for not knowing thus not understanding him. John with the oppression caused by the step father is all alone without anyone, especially the mother, knowing his suffer. The more he thinks about and tries to examine his situation the more he alienates himself. He convinces himself that he is living an unfair life and should not trust in anyone, even his mother. This is a usual situation among teenagers yet the difficulties caused by the step father make John unable to get away from these thoughts. Although, normally teenagers have a mood that rises and falls due to the situation, John sticks to a constant desperateness. Another cause for this constant desperateness is the lack of the father model in his life. Not having seen him and being left by his father is an important reason for John's belief that he is living an unfair life. As a result of this constantly negative mood, he does not let anyone to help even if they try to. This is seen in the relationship between him and Mr. Steenwilly, who is one of his teachers He is rejected by John for his attempt to give a helping hand.

Another person who can take control over John's mood is Gloria, his classmate towards whom he feels affectionate. Although it does not last long, the rise in John's mood caused by Gloria, shows John a tiny bit of his talents and real character. This is essential because until this, John is not able to reflect his real identity because of the oppression he is feeling.

The relationship with Mrs. Gabriel, who is John's maths teacher, has an important climate. Until this climate Mrs. Gabriel is another person who is around but does not effect John. Yet when one day John insults her in front of the class, it comes out that this relationship is more than that. This symbolizes that John correlates himself and his teacher for their loneliness and desperateness.

The final shift towards the relationship dominancy, is first observed with the presence of Violet. Violet, with her insist, shows John that she cares about John and wants to help. This to some extent, changes John's thoughts about relationships. He, in a way lets himself to trust someone.

However, the real relief happens when the implied and actual presence of the step father is gone. After the step father goes to jail, John gets rid of the pressure. This enables him to express his identity. In addition to trusting people around. This does not mean that his mood will not effect his relationships from that point on but, it will be experienced in a more bareable manner.

"... And if the boy learns to recognize such moments, and savor them, infrequent and transitory though they may be, he may find they maket he whole shebang worthwile." (p.266)

References

You Dont Know Me – David Klass