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Book Review

Innocence revisited: A tale in parts

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There is an emerging genre of autobiographical memoirs about the experience of abuse. *Innocence Revisited* is one of the more complex books addressing this distressing subject. It is complex because the extent of the pathology in this family unit is at the severe end of the mental disorder spectrum. The author's resultant dissociation and depression can be viewed as a coping response to serious, ongoing abuse from allegedly responsible adults who should have provided unconditional love and protection but who did not.

Kezelman is blessed with a literary style that reveals the gruesome details of her abuse in the manner of a psychological thriller - except her tale is real. The themes of the different abuses unfold through the different voices of the dissociative personalities that Kezelman has adopted to escape her reality. It is the death of her beloved niece that appears to have triggered an acknowledgement that Kezelman had effectively obliterated her childhood memories from her current reality. Gradually, Kezelman was forced to confront the harsh realities of her developmental history and through a long and painful process in psychotherapy gradually came to understand the extent of her family's collusion in the denial of its horrific history.

While this memoir is beautifully written, it is not easy reading because its content is so palpably sinister. It is also relentless in its telling. There are no light moments to be had; understandable given the extent of the abuse. While the focus stays with the trauma inflicted on Kezelman and her extraordinary way of dealing with it, the reader can't help but wonder how her current family coped with this debilitating and long process. Her husband and her therapist appear to have provided the unconditional nurturing and support that Kezelman's childhood did not. Notwithstanding Kezelman's resilience, these people also continue to assist in her recovery.

I think this book shows how particular disorders can emerge as a response to aversive circumstances. Its best audience would be therapists who want to learn more about the complexities of mental disorders rather than a general population who may find its impact hard to shake. I would have liked more about how Kezelman survived the years before her niece's death because she indicates she was able to lead a successful existence as a GP and a mother of four. I would have appreciated a few lighter moments so that I could process the intensity of her experiences, but perhaps this absence is indicative of her family's denial. It was too hard and too shameful to process the extent of her abuse.

This memoir reminds me a little of Kate Grenville's novel about abuse, *Dark Places*. It unfolds in a similar manner but it is told as a tale of black humour, though the message is equally disturbing.

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