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## Psychological Deprivation to Purgation and Self-discovery in *Veronika Decides to Die*

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### ABSTRACT

The regular course of life is being disrupted by aberrant developments, which leaves the human spirit with significant flaws and interferes with inner serenity. Now that the dimensions of time and space are entirely altered, the person finds himself or herself in an extremely dire predicament. It indicates that existential suffering, which makes individuals feel helpless both physically and mentally, becomes inevitable as time passes and life loses its meaning. Modern man struggles with a plethora of issues while continuing to suffer from the greatest calamity of the lack of interpersonal connections because he is perplexed in the web of a ludicrous and alienating civilization. His inner serenity often suffers due to social and cultural influences, which manifests as abnormalities in his bodily, mental and psychological attitudes. The problem of meaninglessness, which appear to be a serious threat, maybe found in all parts of human life. The ability to exercise individuality, make once own decisions and exercise liberty demand high cost. This paper explores the importance of positive emotions, worth of life and free choice experienced by the characters in Paulo Coelho's *Veronika Decides to Die*. The theoretical framework

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will be based on Martin Seligman's Positive Psychology theory. The psychological technique is seen as one that is best suited to use in this study because it emphasizes personality development and helping the subject find her new lease on life in order to produce an optimal individual. The work is a personality-driven examination of the nature of sanity and the constraints placed on us by our culture to fit in. It follows one woman's path towards eking out a meaningful existence free of deeply embedded social norms.

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## Introduction

Brazilian literature originated since 1500s. Numerous authors have been inspired by this literature as well as other writers throughout the ages and have shed light on various parts of these great cultures. The Portuguese started outlining the marvels of the new land after learning about Brazil. Brazilian literature includes any writing in the Portuguese language that was produced by Brazilians or in Brazil, including works that were produced before the nation gained its autonomy in 1822. Early Brazilian literature was heavily influenced by Portuguese literature, but as it looked for uniquely Brazilian subjects and varieties in the 19th and 20th centuries, it eventually began to develop its own distinctive writing style. Written during the colonial era the letter of *Pero Vaz de Caminha* to the Portuguese monarch proclaiming the discovery of Brazil marked the beginning of Brazilian literature. Brazil immediately recalls romantic notions. Brazilian writers from the Romanticism era, which started in 1836, were responsible for this romantic sensation. The second half of the Romantic era saw a weird fixation with illness and mortality. Following the Romantic era, pre-modernism, modernism, and post-modernism emerged. Contemporary Brazilian literature is the most recent writing fashion in Brazil which focuses on city life and all its characteristics, including isolation, animosity, political issues, and media censorship. Paulo Coelho, the most popular contemporary Brazilian author in the world broke the mold set by other authors from his country who were confined to their own country.

Paulo Coelho has created several intriguing and thought-provoking books that use fictional characters and their journeys to tell stories about real-life events and concepts. Since he is aware of many common human situations Paulo Coelho crafts his books with powerful universal themes that boil down to fundamental concerns that people frequently ask. *Veronika decides to die* mines the perceived mental

instability of his youth. He therefore has a unique bond with the protagonist of this book because he had a comparable circumstance to that of Veronika. The author's in-depth familiarity with the world of asylums, their interactions, and the comfort and fear of living in one has shaped this work. The new facets of life can be gathered through the writings of the author and take the readers to eccentric encounters and weird imagination.

Mental disorders have long been shrouded in mystery and stigma, often seen through the narrow lenses of fear and misunderstanding. These illnesses, which impact millions of people worldwide, have long been misinterpreted, which has resulted in a wide range of myths and misunderstandings. Fiction about mental illnesses has been a potent reflection of how society has changed over time, moving from sources of sorrow and terror to representations of the richness and resiliency of the human spirit. A literary journey demonstrates a significant shift in the way these situations are viewed and depicted. In the early days of storytelling, mental disorders were frequently cast as harbingers of chaos and fear. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for example, depicts the titular character's madness as a volatile mixture of existential struggle and grief, with his "antic disposition" vacillating between purposefully faked craziness and true insanity. The era's propensity to see mental illness as a mystery, an unpredictable force that may bring about both deep insight and terrible demise, is highlighted by this representation. In a similar vein, characters suffering from mental diseases were frequently employed in gothic literature to create tension and fear. The "madwoman in the attic" in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason, personifies the fears of the day regarding the unknowable and the unpredictable nature of mental illness. Bertha's description of someone who has been locked away and characterised in horrific ways highlights the tendency of the time to isolate and stigmatise people who don't fit the mould.

As societal understanding of mental health began to progress, so too did its representation in literature. The 20th century brought a shift towards more nuanced and empathetic portrayals. In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, we follow Esther Greenwood's struggle with depression, a portrayal that is both intimate and stark. In Plath's book, the sensationalism that is frequently connected to mental illness is stripped away, exposing the internal conflict and crushing hopelessness that can go along with it. In a similar vein, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* presents characters who, in spite of their varied situations, are described with depth and sympathy, offering a critical look at the treatment of mental illness within institutional settings. The book exposes the deep psychological effects of social repression against those who don't conform to society's rigid standards of normalcy. The complicated interaction between one's own self-perception and cultural expectations is ultimately revealed by the

way mental illnesses are portrayed in literature. These stories push for deeper understanding and empathy and force us to reevaluate our views about mental health. Fiction offers us a chance to address the harsh realities imposed by cultural conventions and to advocate for the significance of mental health and personal authenticity by exploring the inner lives of people grappling with mental illness. Our understanding of the human spirit's tenacity and the need to build a more inclusive and caring society is deepened by these tales.

## Objectives

- To discover the intrinsic worth and essence of life.
- To realize that taking care of oneself is certainly not self-centered and that giving in to other people's demands is erroneous.
- To appreciate the value of self-realization in developing our sense of perception.
- To analyse an individual's surroundings in determining how one's personality develops.

## Methodology

### **Martin Seligman's Positive psychology theory:**

Martin Seligman, widely recognized as the pioneer of positive psychology, is a world authority in the areas of resilience, learned helplessness, despair, optimism, and pessimism. He is a renowned expert on strategies for preventing despair and enhancing well-being. Developing a field of study called Positive Psychology was one of Dr. Seligman's presidential goals while he served as president of the American Psychological Association in 1998. The scientific study of what facilitates societies and individuals to flourish is known as positive psychology. Positive psychology is one of the most recent subfields of psychology that has evolved. This particular branch of psychology focuses on ways to assist people in thriving and leading lives of wellness and happiness. Positive psychology is focused on assisting individuals in feeling better, in contrast to many other fields of psychology that frequently tend to focus on dysfunction and abnormal behaviour.

A successful life for one individual may not be successful for a subsequent one. Positive psychology is not prescriptive but descriptive. To put it another way, studies that investigate the elements that

promote fulfillments can guide people in making decisions that adhere more in line with their beliefs and interests. In other words, we aren't mandating to people exactly what decisions to make or what to take into consideration. Seligman found that when individuals feel powerless to change their circumstances, they are more likely to simply give up than to struggle for control. Positive psychology emerged in part as a response to psychology's historical emphasis on mental health problems. Positive psychology explores how we might develop human characteristics like resilience, joy, and meaning rather than attempting to correct what is wrong with individuals.

### **Textual Analysis**

A 24-year-old woman's attempted suicide and hospitalisation in a psychiatric hospital are the subjects of this narrative. Veronika is a young Slovenian librarian who, albeit leading a respectable life, lacks fulfilment. She is viewed as the epitome of a "perfect woman" since she has everything one could desire, including a good career, a safe house, acquaintances and family. But she's not content! Because she feels unable to produce any enhancements in her life and thinks that the situation will only grow more dire as she ages, Veronika resolves to consume an inordinate amount of sleeping tablets and forfeit her life. Veronika doesn't die; instead, she regains consciousness at the notorious Vilete asylum for lunatics, where Dr. Igor tells her that irrespective of her initial failure, her suicide attempt will unquestionably be successful. She will only be able to survive for no more than five days because of the havoc that her heart has sustained. Veronika battles with her failure and her imminent success while sequestered in a ward with other crazy people.

As the majority of the novel takes place inside a mental hospital, the characters in *Veronika Decides to Die* were carefully chosen and strategically positioned. Veronika, Mari, Zedka, and Eduard are the main figures in the story. Readers can grasp about the lives and experiences of each of these people, all of which, in certain contexts, mirror our own existence and the circumstances we are currently experiencing or have previously experienced. Jung (1933) says; "I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become." When we go deeper into the life of Veronika, it wasn't such a comfortable life as it seemed from the outside. She can be perceived as a young lady who was denied the liberty to navigate her life how she wanted or envisaged. She changed her life voluntarily or under duress to accommodate her parents' tastes, particularly her mother. Veronika wanted to be a pianist all her life. Her teacher encouraged her to seek a profession in it because she could do it well. When she told her mother about her dream, she was met with her mother's retort that no one ever made a living playing the

piano. Veronika followed her mother's instructions and finished high school, went to college, earned an excellent degree, yet she ended up becoming a librarian. She would have become one of the most well-known pianists in the world if her wishes had been fulfilled and her ambitions had been treasured. Veronika never approached life from the perspective of her own passions and desires; instead, she hired the opinions and aspirations of others, pawning her priceless life for the amusement of others around her.

The story also looks at the recent and previous encounters of Veronika's fellow inmates. In the asylum, she encounters the three most essential and distinguished persons of her life who aid as an accomplice for her self-realization. Zedka, a stressed-out and miserable housewife, Mari, a lawyer who lost her figments after developing panic attacks, and Eduart, a schizophrenic artist who has been spending his entire life rejecting love, make up the trio. These three individuals, who are flawless in their own eyes but are seen by the rest of the world as nothing more than crazy people, are the catalyst for Veronika's realization that every minute of life is worth living.

Veronika was enjoying herself for the first time in years. She felt alive and free. She was in a mental hospital, surrounded by people who had been labeled as 'mad,' and yet she felt more sane than ever. She had always tried to conform to society's expectations, but now she realized that true happiness came from being true to herself. She didn't care what others thought of her anymore. She was no longer afraid of being judged or criticized. She was living in the moment, experiencing life to the fullest. And she loved it. (Coelho 136)

Veronika had spent years trapped in the unseen bonds of social expectations, sacrificing her own aspirations and individuality in an attempt to appease others. Remarkably, she finds her real freedom in the walls of a mental hospital, a setting that society views as the height of detention and abnormality. It is incredibly ironic that she finds the sanity of living true to herself in an institution meant to treat madness. She learns that accepting her actual self will bring her true happiness instead of trying to live up to expectations from others. Once thought of as a place of confinement, the mental institution turns into a furnace for personal growth and freedom. Powerful revelation for Veronika is that she no longer gives a damn about what other people think. She no longer feels the constant worry of being judged and criticised for her actions. Without worrying about getting approval from others, she begins to live in the now and appreciate the richness of each experience. It's possible that Veronika feels really alive for the first time in her newfound freedom. She enjoys being herself, and she embraces her uniqueness and the

delight it offers. She is liberating her life from the grip of social conventions at this point, which has resulted in a profound awakening and a condition of pure, perfect happiness.

Veronika first made friends with Zedka among the villetes. Although she is a classic case of "Clinical Depression" and "delusion," she also has a completely typical life with her husband and kids. However, for some reason, she feels that her older lover is looking for her. Second, the story describes Mari, a successful lawyer, wife, mother and recipient of treatment for severe panic episodes. She had a common psychological problem that could have been easily treated at home, but she chose to live in Villette instead of keeping doctor visits at her house. She believed that receiving care at home would have an effect on her marriage because after her illness, her husband had been responsible for all of her household chores. She moved into Villette in the hopes that her husband would lead a happy life and that their marriage would endure, but it didn't. Mari was the one who gave Veronika lessons about life's experiences. She counselled her to put less emphasis on the past and more emphasis on the present, and to not feel ashamed of what had occurred.

As Veronika interacts with them, she discovers facets of herself that she had previously been unaware of and finds to be far more fascinating and satisfying than her former self.

Everyone has an unusual talent, and if you can find what that is and dedicate yourself to it, you will live in peace. For some people, that talent could be cooking, for others it could be raising a family. Sometimes it takes years to discover what it is, and sometimes you never know until the end. What is important is that you try to be who you really are, even if you think it might be too late. (Coelho 82)

Self-discovery may be a difficult and protracted process that takes years of research and experimentation. But for inner serenity and personal fulfilment, the pursuit of this calling is necessary. Inspiring people to accept their genuine identities and passions regardless of age or stage in life, it emphasises the idea that it's never too late to discover and embrace what makes you special.

Veronika resumes playing the piano, a longtime passion she had set aside. Eduard is drawn to her sonata, and she experiences a newfound love for him. He was a painter, an artist by choice but also someone whose dreams had been oppressed and due to which had developed schizophrenia. Veronika is aware that she is about to pass away, but she has changed her mind and wants to live her life with



Eduard. She has always been enchanted by certain things, and she is keen to leave villete to experience them all and learn more about what life is all about.

“She would consider each day a miracle—which indeed it is, when you consider the number of unexpected things that could happen in each second of our fragile existence. An awareness of death encourages us to live more intensely” (Coelho 85). Not only does she experience her first true, passionate love for Eduard, but she also takes pleasure in it. The importance of her life is now completely understood by Veronika. Zedka, Mari, and Eduard eventually leave the walls of Villete in their own unique ways and for their own reasons. Veronika who is determined to make most of the time she has left, travels with Eduard. “Veronika had managed to arrive at a place where few people ever go: the moment when we discover that we are not who we think we are. And now she had a choice to make: to live a new life, or to return to the one she had known before. The decision was hers, and she had the power to choose her own destiny” (Coelho 172). At this point, it was revealed that Veronika was tricked by Dr. Igor into thinking she was going to die when she was going to live at this moment. In his experiment to urge individuals to value life more, Dr. Igor stated that “an awareness of death encourages us to live more intensely” and that all this has been a part of his experiment to make people appreciate their life. Veronika and Eduard are seen enjoying their liberation at the end of the story, and Dr. Igor is seen celebrating the success of his experiment.

*Veronika Decides to Die* is more than just a psychological suspense novel. It affects the conscience and influences how people think and see their own lives. Veronika’s journey during her intense week of global self-discovery is the central focus of the entire narrative.

It has a significant impact on the human race such that everything has its own purpose and light. We receive a variety of experiences from life where simply throwing away the negative experiences will allow us to replace them with positive ones and happy memories. Real mental and emotional well-being can only be attained by facing and expressing one's emotions, not by suppressing them. The metamorphosis that ensued from Veronika's path from repression to expression highlights the destructive force of unspoken emotions as well as the possibility of rebirth via expression and acceptance. “Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways” (Source: Freud, S. *Studies on Hysteria*, 1895).

Veronika was deeply disillusioned with the routine and boredom of life, which is reflected in her choice to take her own life. She ends up in a mental institution after her attempted suicide fails, and



there she is made to face the transience of human existence and her own death. Captured by social conventions and prerequisites, Veronika initially perceives herself as a lifeless observer with no purpose or autonomy. But her time at the mental institution forces her to reevaluate her own beliefs and objectives. She learns about her secret passions and abilities by her interactions with other patients, and she eventually comes to the conclusion that life is a priceless gift that should be appreciated. She starts to see that how she reacts to and interprets her events shapes her identity rather than being primarily defined by the things that have happened to her. It is a potent illustration of the idea that we are more than the sum of our experiences; in fact, we are what we choose to become through our decisions and actions. Her path of self-exploration also heavily relies on her image of herself. Veronika saw herself before her suicide attempt as a social misfit who couldn't live up to the impressions others had of her. Her contacts with Dr. Igor and the other recipients of care, however, cause her to reassess her own perception of herself and her preconceptions of sanity and insanity. Through her journey of self-discovery and reflective thinking, Veronika comes to embrace herself as she is and realizes that happiness genuinely comes from within.

## Conclusion

*Veronika Decides to Die* ends with an encouraging note that affirms the strength of human motivations and the transformational potential of self-discovery. The book emphasises the value of encompassing one's authenticity and pursuing pleasure despite obstacles in life by using positive psychology ideas. Veronika's story serves as a reminder that living truly and embracing our actual selves is what brings true happiness—not conformity or outside approval. Positive psychology, as proposed by Seligman, places a strong emphasis on values, capacities and the pursuit of pleasure. This philosophy is reflected in Veronika's journey, as she struggles through hopelessness in search of meaning and purpose. Veronika is the epitome of perseverance and self-actualization because she embraces her true essence and rejects social expectations. She gains the ability to accept unpredictable aspects of life and to live in its present state as she works through the complexity of her own thinking. Her encounters with other people teach her the value of compassion and empathetic behaviour as well as the interconnectivity of human experiences. Veronika overcomes her own obstacles and discovers a sense of significance and connection in the course of events. At the end of the book, Veronika shows up as a resilient and hopeful figure where her bravery and tenacity encourage others to question the established quo and encompass

their inner truths. Veronika embodies the transformational potential of learning about oneself and the quest of happiness through her acceptance of vulnerability and sincerity.

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