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Romanticization of Obsession in *Haunting Adeline* and Readers' Perception Shift on TikTok

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Abstract
This study analyses the romanticization of obsession in H.D. Carlton's (2021) novel "Haunting Adeline" through Michelle Balaev's (2012) trauma theory, which emphasises the role of spatiality in shaping, triggering, and healing trauma. Using textual analysis of the novel and contextual analysis of 100 Haunting Adeline reader comments on TikTok in 2022–2026 using Voyant Tools, the study found that Parsons Manor functions as spatialized memory, landscape, trauma, dislocation, reconstructed spatiality, and intergenerational memory, transforming Adeline's stalking trauma into a romantic obsession with Zade as trauma relief. Comment analysis shows a shift in perception, from predominantly negative in 2022–2023 to positive in 2024–2026. This shift in perception is driven by the virality of dark romance, which has allowed it to capture global attention. Furthermore, its global popularity has made it a source of escapism for people amidst rising global depression.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's novels are not only available in physical books but also in digital books. There are several kinds of novel genres; the dark romance genre is currently a hot topic of discussion. In France, the genre accounted for 7% of the book market in 2023, while in the United States and the UK, sales of dark romance novels reached their highest point since the release of "*Fifty Sides of Grey*" in 2012 (Bigey, 2024). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the dark romance genre still holds the highest throne in the romance category (Donaldson, 2023). The search hashtag for the dark

romance genre itself has reached 1.75 thousand novels, and 1.61 thousand novels for the obsession category search hashtag on the Wattpad application, and still increases until right now (Bigey, 2024). According to Moazzem (2019), dark romance emerged in America in the 19th century, beginning with classic authors such as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Dark romance became popular after the release of Emily Brontë's novel Wuthering Heights in 1847. Wuthering Heights was initially considered a strange book because of its unusual storyline, but it gradually gained critical acclaim as modern literary concepts encouraged the revaluation of older works (Chiste, 2023). As the name suggests, dark romance works tend to explore the dark side of romance, fear, obsession, trauma, and physical and verbal violence.

In the context of cultural phenomena, this genre is further expanded by the existence of social media. Puspita & Ahmadi (2025) states that a plot that contains mystery can trigger the reader's curiosity until the reader becomes addicted. One of the social media platforms that has become a trend in this modern era is the TikTok application (Moazzem, 2019). The nature of TikTok allows everybody to access the platform. Not only through the application, but also can be accessed via the web. Then, anyone who has an account on TikTok can upload any content, whether in the form of photos or videos. Some of this content appears on FYP (for your page), such as the homepage on TikTok, while some does not appear on FYP. TikTok's "For You" page quickly identifies through artificial intelligence what users like, which is likely to result in users using TikTok longer than they want, which can lead to users becoming addicted to using TikTok (Montag et al. 2021). In this platform, there is a hashtag #BookTok, which is a place for book lovers to gather. Whether reviewing books, looking for book recommendations, or discussing books that are trending in society (Tukstra, 2024). In the hashtag #BookTok, the most frequently searched genre is dark romance. Because dark romance invites a lot of viewer interaction, TikTok's algorithm reads that content discussing dark romance as interesting content, especially for book lovers. Therefore, dark romance is recommended by BookTok (Fortune, 2024). One of the dark romance novels that has been widely discussed on BookTok is *Haunting Adeline* by H.D. Carlton.

This novel was first released on Amazon.com on August 12, 2021. The story of Adeline, who is a victim of a stalker's obsession, ends with her falling in love with the man she considers the most dangerous (Bellorin, 2025). *Haunting Adeline* gives readers a glimpse into how psychological trauma can be romanticised, where a person's obsession, which at first felt scary, turns into the most comfortable place. In this novel, place plays an important role. All the trauma experienced by Adeline as the main character occurred in one place. Not only is it a cause of trauma, but it is also a trigger and a healer of trauma itself. The places referred to here are not all places, but certain places that are spatial in nature. Have a clear scope regarding the place in question. In relation to the trauma experienced by Adeline, this study uses the trauma theory in the book *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, developed by Michelle Balaev in 2012. Conceptually, Balaev's opinion about literary trauma is that trauma can not only be identified through awareness and memory, but also from the aspect of various narrative and cultural expressions of trauma (Balaev, 2012). More specifically, this study draws on Balaev's theory, which posits that trauma can be formed and triggered by spatial settings. In this context, the Gothic house inherited from Adeline's grandmother becomes the main object.

In relation to the theme of the gothic house as a spatial setting, Sasani and Arjmandi (2018) show that the trauma experienced by the novel's characters after a tragic event can be released through the motif of illusion and memories of a particular place. Similarly, Faizin (2022) identifies that the main character's obsession is a form of trauma repetition. The ending of the novel's storyline shows that the main character can achieve some resolution from the trauma he experienced. Poe's story shows that obsession can become an uncontrollable form of death drive

and provides insights into the psychopathology of art (Kasprabowo, T., & Maisaroh, R, 2025).Qiong He (2025) shows that trauma is not only psychological or temporal, but also tied to geographical locations that shape identity, memory, and recovery. This study also found that damaged landscapes often amplify the experience of trauma by creating isolation or collective memory, while healing spaces can facilitate healing. Beach (2025) found that novels in this genre can manipulate readers' emotions and influence their real-life identities. When someone experiences psychological trauma, the memories containing that trauma will influence their actions in the future (Setiawan et al., 2025)

Discussion of *Wuthering Heights* as a novel in the same genre, Christie (2023) shows that in the early 19th century, *Wuthering Heights* was considered an immoral novel because it contained the theme of obsession. Then, in the 20th century, this novel began to receive positive attention from feminist critics who considered it to voice women's aspirations about patriarchy. In line with the popularity of *Wuthering Heights, Haunting Adeline* has become one of the most popular novels that has gone viral on TikTok. Judijanto (2025) found that TikTok can increase reader interest through viral content. This broadens access for book lovers to find new reading recommendations. The TikTok platform can be accessed by the people, thus enabling wider community interaction (Agustin, 2024). Fortune (2024) shows that 65% of respondents said BookTok content made them more tolerant of non-consent in relationships. Furthermore, 40% considered "dark" elements romantic. Readers' perception of the dark romance genre could shift due to content on TikTok. From a cognitive perspective, perception is defined as a cognitive process in which an individual interprets experiences based on environmental input. Perception is also considered a social construct, with dark romance readers viewing dark romance novels as a tool for global integration (Suyadi & Aisyah, S., 2021).

Although some of the researchers above discuss dark romance, trauma, and TikTok influence, they do not specifically discuss the romanticization of obsession depicted in dark romance novels. Discussion about romanticization of obsession, Chen (2021) found that romanticization is the action of someone who wants to change something that was originally seen as negative into something better or into something more positive. While obsession is an act aimed at controlling someone based on deep love. This act tends to be negative because it involves threats and violence (Maisaroh, R., & Kasprabowo, T., 2025). This study addresses the gap of previous studies above by examining how the romanticization of obsession occurs in *Haunting Adeline* as a dark romance novel. Applying Balaev's concept of literary trauma theory to analyse how spatial settings can be a shaper, trigger, and healer of trauma. Also, how do readers of the novel *Haunting Adeline* perceive the romanticization of obsession depicted in the novel. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following question: How is romanticization of obsession depicted in *Haunting Adeline*, and how does the readers' perception in 2022 to 2026 on TikTok relate to the romanticization of obsession in *Haunting Adeline*.

METHOD

This research uses the theory of literary trauma by Michelle Balaev, which focuses on the theory of spatial place. This theory emphasises that trauma can be represented through space, both physical space and imaginary space, in narrative. Balaev (2012) argues that spatial place is a metaphor for traumatic experiences that a person has experienced, such as captivity, violence, or even recovery. Balaev's theory was inspired by literary trauma by Cathy Caruth and literary geography, which says that places are not static but dynamic, thus they can influence or be influenced by experience. Balaev's trauma theory is suitable for analysing the novel *Haunting Adeline* because this novel explores obsession as a form of romanticisation of trauma. Spatial place theory allows for an analysis of how spaces in the novel process this. Zade, who continues to stalk Adeline at her house, shows that the trauma Adeline experienced could turn into an

obsessive love narrative. This research employs textual and contextual analysis methods. Textual analysis is used to analyse how the romanticization of obsession is depicted in the novel *Haunting Adeline.* Meanwhile, contextual analysis is used to show how readers perceive the romanticization of obsession depicted in the novel.

The primary data in this study is the e-book version of the novel *Haunting Adeline* by H.D. Carlton, published on August 12, 2021. This novel was published by Zando. There are two versions of the novel: the print version has 608 pages, while the e-book has 629 pages. The secondary data in this study consists of reader comments on the novel *Haunting Adeline* on TikTok, using the hashtag #HauntingAdeline in the search bar. The 100 comments will be collected from 2022 to 2025, with the comments coming from the worldwide response. Using Voyant Tools to analysethe comparison of reader perception on TikTok from 2022 to 2026. The research step includes: (1) close reading to identify elements consist of spatialized memory (when a place stores memory), landscape (a place is not just a background), dislocation (trauma worsened by not having access to the source), reconstructed place (a place built in memory), and intergenerational spatial memory (trauma can be passed down between generations); (2) quoting directly from the e-book novel about the page, chapter, and context of the quote. Then, classify them based on which quotes show elements of spatialized memory, landscape, dislocation, reconstructed place, and intergenerational spatial memory; (3) search for readers' comments on the *Haunting Adeline* novel on TikTok by using the hashtag and keyword features in the search bar, then sort the posts from oldest to newest; (4) achieve around 100 comments on a video post about the novel *Haunting Adeline* from 2022 to 2026; (5) analyze the comments using Voyant Tools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Romanticization of obsession in Adeline

Spatialized memory and landscape

The discussion explains the findings and relates them to the underpinning theories and previous studies. The author otherwise. The romanticisation of obsession in *Haunting Adeline* unfolds in a spatial setting where trauma, obsession, and recovery intersect. The place in question can be seen from the spatialized memory possessed by Adeline as the female lead. The depiction of spatialized memory in Adeline is shown in the quotation below.

“I grew up in Parsons Manor, running alongside the ghosts in the halls and baking cookies with Nana. I have fond memories here—memories I refuse to let go of just because Mom didn’t get along with Nana.” (Carlton, 2021:11).

Looking back at the contents of the old house (Parsons Manor) left by her grandmother, Adeline's memories stored in that house resurfaced. Little Adeline often baked with her grandmother and ran to every corner of the house. In Balaev's trauma theory, Parsons Manor is not just a legacy, but a place that has become fused with Adeline's memory. The quotation above illustrates how Balaev's concept of spatialized memory operates in the novel. The phrase "running alongside the ghosts in the halls" reveals that Parsons Manor is not only a physical space for Adeline, but also holds emotional memories. Furthermore, "baking cookies with Nana" is a sensory activity directly tied to the kitchen space of Parsons Manor. The stored memories that suddenly emerge when Adeline lives in Parsons Manor are a manifestation of Balaev's spatialized memory theory, which emphasises that the relationship between space and memory is reciprocal (Balaev, 2012).

Besides acting as a spatialized memory, Parsons Manor also acts as a landscape. According to Balaev, landscape is not just a setting, but something that can influence a person's thoughts or

actions (Balaev, 2012). The influence of Parsons Manor on Adeline's thoughts and actions can be seen from the quotation below.

"I decided to travel around the country, never really settling in one place. Nana died about a year ago, gifting me the house in her will, but my grief hindered me from moving into Parsons Manor." (Carlton, 2021:11).

Parsons Manor held fond memories for Adeline until the day her grandmother, Nana, died there. Nana's death devastated Adeline. It took time for Adeline to accept the fact that her grandmother had passed away. Every corner of Parsons Manor made Adeline miss her grandmother more and more. Therefore, Adeline decided not to move into Parsons Manor until she was truly ready. In *Haunting Adeline*, Parsons Manor not only acts as a spatialized memory and landscape for Adeline, but also a spatialized trauma.

Spatialized trauma

In relation to the concept of spatialized memory, which states that a place can store memories for a person, there is also spatialized trauma, which says that a place can store traumatic memories for someone (Balaev, 2012). In *Haunting Adeline*, two things caused Adeline's trauma to occur at Parsons Manor. First, trauma because someone was stalking Adeline and was obsessed with her. Second, the trauma that was passed down from her grandmother (Nana) and great-grandmother (Gigi) was only realised when Adeline lived at Parsons Manor.

"It feels like an eternity has passed, but I imagine it's only been seconds before I see movement." (Carlton, 2021:114).

"It feels like an eternity passes", as Adeline said in the quote above, shows that in that condition, Adeline's mental state was under pressure. This happened when the stalker entered his house for the umpteenth time. The quote above is an illustration of the concept of spatialized trauma in Balaev's theory, where space can be a source of fear (Balaev, 2012). When the stalker enters Adeline's house repeatedly, the physical space becomes a spatial trauma (Balaev, 2012). Every corner of the house turns into a trigger for traumatic memories. This makes Adeline experience time distortion in response to dangerous situations or the feeling of time slowing down "eternity" indicates that Adeline's brain is in survival mode, where every second feels painful because threats always lurk. According to Balaev, this condition attacks the physical and erodes the safe boundaries between public and private spaces.

The quote above depicts Adeline confronting her stalker. The man was dressed all in black. Even though she was covered in fear, Adeline still tried to face the strange man. The description of "tremor" when Adeline spoke was a form of her body's reaction to feeling afraid. In Balaev's theory, Adeline's stalker trauma is related to space because the perpetrator systematically invades the victim's private space, so that the boundaries between safe and dangerous places become blurred. The physical reaction of "tremors" to Adeline's voice indicates that her body automatically responds to the same spatial threat. Balaev (2012) explains that stalker victims experience spatially contaminated trauma, where every space carries an emotional burden and reminds them of threats.

"You already know my great-grandmother had a stalker. One that she fell in love with. And now so do I. Living in the same house and…" (Carlton, 2021:400).

This quotation is a scene where Adeline and Daya dig deeper into information about Gigi's death case. Adeline's discovery of Gigi's diary reveals that both Gigi and Adeline had stalkers. This is what drives Adeline to find out who killed Gigi. She wanted to make sure that a stalker was indeed dangerous and could threaten her life. Based on Balaev's theory, the situations

experienced by Adeline and Gigi demonstrate the concept of intergenerational spatial memory. Balaev (2012) argues that spaces that have been the site of trauma will activate those traumatic memories when subsequent generations inhabit the same space.

According to the concept of intergenerational spatial memory, Balaev (2012) stated that individuals who inhabit a traumatic space will experience a profound emotional response to the tragedy that occurred in that space, even without having direct recollection of the event. Adeline never met Gigi and has no personal memories of her, but her presence at Parsons Manor sparks a deep desire to understand what happened to Gigi. This investigative drive reflects the spatial memory embedded in Adeline's subconscious. Balaev's theory provides a framework for understanding that spatial trauma can be "passed down" not through genes or family stories, but through embodied experiences when subsequent generations enter and inhabit the same space (Balaev, 2012).

“My brain gets clogged with all that information, and the utter shock that my mother also played a hand in covering up Gigi’s murder.” (Carlton, 2021:464).

Adeline's suspicion that Gigi's stalker and killer were the same person turned out to be wrong. After everything was revealed, what shocked Adeline even more was that it turned out that her grandmother and mother already knew who the perpetrator of Gigi's murder was. In fact, they participated in covering it up. That's why Nana spent the rest of her life at Parsons Manor as atonement for covering up her own mother's murder. That was also the reason Adeline's mother was strongly against Adeline's decision to live at Parsons Manor. This situation suggests that Adeline subconsciously received trauma from Gigi about her stalker. She also received trauma from Nana, who witnessed her own mother's murder.

The quote illustrates how Adeline must process her own stalking trauma, and the heavy burden of her family hiding the truth for decades. This condition is the point where Adeline's mental space is filled with buried generational memories. The spatial relationship between Parson's Manor as the family home and the physical presence of Nana who spent the rest of their years in the house creates a traumatic cycle that continues to repeat itself. Thus, this quote shows how Balaev's spatial trauma of memory operates, where a place holds collective memories that are unconsciously transmitted to the next generation, forcing Adeline to inherit the family's fears and dark secrets.

Dislocation

According to Balaev (2012), trauma can worsen when it lacks access to its source. The result is dislocation. In this case, the body reacts before reason. The body shows signs that the place holds a traumatic memory, but reason has not yet recognised it as a traumatic experience.

“My paranoia only heightened when renovations started two weeks ago.” (Carlton, 2021:50).

Upon entering Parsons Manor, Adeline decides to renovate the inherited house. Simultaneously, the terror from her stalker intensifies. Not knowing who her stalker is makes Adeline feel paranoid as many people pass by her house. This situation illustrates that the dislocation Adeline experiences from being unable to access the source of her trauma further exacerbates her trauma. According to Balaev, dislocation is a state in which trauma victims experience alienation from the source of their trauma, which actually exacerbates their traumatic experience. In this context, Adeline's inability to identify her stalker creates an epistemological vacuum that makes her trauma feel more threatening and unpredictable. When Adeline cannot access information about the source of the terror she faces, she is unable to construct a coherent

narrative about her situation. The paranoia she experiences during the renovation reflects her inability to distinguish between a real threat and a supposedly safe environment.

“He’s out there. I can’t see him, or even make out his silhouette. But I know he is. I can feel him.” (Carlton, 2021:82).

The quote is from a scene in which Adeline feels terrified after hearing a sound she believes indicates the stalker's presence. She searches for him but can't find him. This makes her even more anxious. The dislocation in the quotation above indicates that Adeline faces the most excruciating form of alienation. She knows a stalker is nearby but cannot identify, locate, or even verify the source of terror. This inability to see her stalker creates a traumatic state far more severe than if she could see her enemy directly. Adeline feels the stalker's presence viscerally in the quote "I can feel him," yet this sensory experience cannot be translated into a coherent cognitive understanding of who or where the threat is. According to Balaev (2012), this state not only maintains trauma in an active state but also prevents Adeline's traumatic experiences from being processed and integrated into the narrative of her individual life. Thus, Adeline's inability to see her stalker is not simply a practical obstacle, but a factor that actively deepens and prolongs her traumatic suffering.

Reconstructed spatial and relief trauma

When a person's trauma becomes more severe due to dislocation, the person tends to construct a place in memory. This is what Balaev calls reconstructed spatiality in his book. This condition can be demonstrated in the quotations below.

“If Genevieve Parsons is as wild as Nana said she was, then I imagine these diaries have all sorts of stories to show me.” (Carlton, 2021:35).

The word "wild" in the excerpt above immediately made Adeline imagine the contents of Gigi's diary, which she had found. Moreover, Gigi had spent the rest of her life in that house. In Michelle Balaev's reconstructed spatial theory, the space where trauma occurs never leaves the victim (Balaev, 2012). It remains present in their memories and imaginations as a place to be understood, explained, and confronted again. Nana's use of the word "wild" about Gigi is not simply a character description, but rather a trigger that activates the process of spatial reconstruction in Adeline's mind. Adeline begins to imagine the stories stored in the diary as a way to understand the space that has shaped Gigi's life and perhaps also her death. Thus, the old house Adeline occupies is not simply a physical setting, but an arena where past trauma must be confronted through spatial reconstruction.

“And as I slowly make my way towards the staircase, I feel eyes from the pictures lining the walls watching me as I pass by.” (Carlton, 2021:36).

In this scene, Adeline knows that the stalker is lurking around her house. She intends to find out who it is by checking outside. However, the atmosphere at Parsons Manor at night makes Adeline imagine frightening things. For example, when walking down the stairs, Adeline feels a pair of men watching her from the darkness. The quote above illustrates Michelle Balaev's concept of reconstructed spatiality in *Haunting Adeline*. Parsons Manor has transformed into a traumatising place for Adeline. When Adeline feels "the eyes of the photographs on the walls watching her," this shows how a domestic space that should be a haven becomes a source of threat, reconstructed by a traumatised mind. Balaev (2012) asserts that trauma victims do not simply remember painful events but also reconstruct the space where the trauma occurred. The eyes that Adeline imagines from the darkness are a manifestation of how the space has been contaminated by past trauma and now affects the sensory and emotional experiences of its residents. After all the traumatic experiences Adeline experienced at Parsons Manor, the process of recovering from

the trauma began when Adeline first met her stalker. Balaev (2012) argues that trauma does not always result in pure suffering but can instead elicit complex forms of relief.

"This is wrong. So wrong. I shouldn't be attracted to a stalker." (Carlton, 2021:157).

The quote above depicts Adeline's first encounter with Zade, her stalker. Adeline's previous confusion about who the stalker was has been resolved. At that moment, Adeline felt afraid. The trauma of those restless nights surfaced. However, on the other hand, she was also attracted to Zade's handsomeness. Adeline's fear of the stalker and physical attraction to Zade's handsomeness align with Michelle Balaev's trauma theory's concept of trauma relief. In *Haunting Adeline,* Adeline's attraction to Zade, whom she recognises as a stalker, is a manifestation of this relief trauma. The quote above clearly demonstrates Adeline's awareness of her mixed emotions. This phenomenon demonstrates that the romanticization of trauma is not merely a plot element, but rather a depiction of how trauma victims often seek forms of emotional relief. However, such relief appears problematic and has the potential to prolong their cycle of trauma.

"I still hate you," I mumble, and the lie tastes chalky on my tongue. "But I want you to lie down with me, Zade." (Carlton, 2021:159).

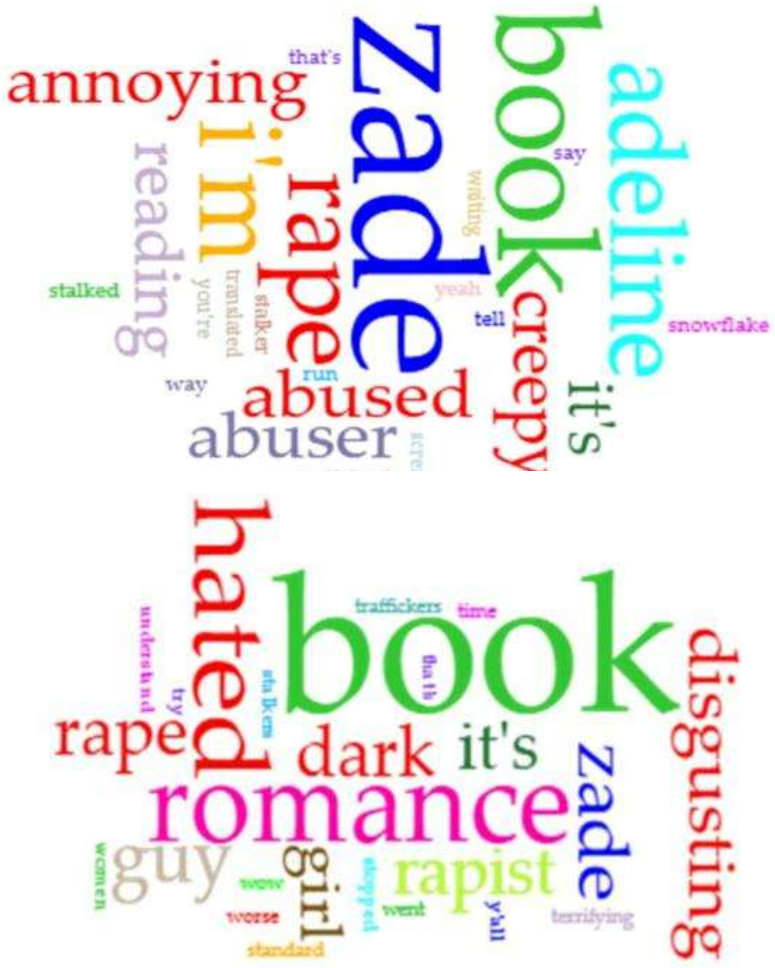
The quote above shows that ultimately, Adeline wanted Zade to stay close to her. Adeline consciously knew that Zade was a stalker who was initially frightening and made her afraid. However, Adeline was also unable to deny Zade's charm, which captivated her. Zade's obsessive romanticization of Adeline is clearly depicted in this quote. Adeline consciously feels attracted to Zade, even though Zade is the one who has been stalking and obsessed with her. This situation illustrates Balaev's concept of trauma relief, where Adeline's trauma is healed not through conventional healing but through acceptance and release of some of her traumatic burden by romanticizing Zade's obsession. Thus, Balaev's theory helps explain why Adeline cannot resist Zade's attraction, because, from a trauma relief perspective, the relationship becomes a medium for trauma relief.

From the several quotes above, it is clear how the trauma relief process occurred for Adeline. Typically, someone who reaches the source of their trauma will feel fear, hatred, and a desire to never see it again. However, something different happened to Adeline. Instead of feeling afraid and hating Zade, Adeline actually felt attracted to her stalker. Zade's obsession with stalking Adeline actually makes Adeline feel comfortable, and she becomes obsessed with staying with Zade in the end. Apart from seeing how the process of romanticizing obsession occurs, Adeline also sees a shift in perception. Adeline, who was initially afraid and angry before meeting Zade, fell in love after meeting him. This development of Adeline's character is what Balaev means in her theory, which states that a spatial place is a metaphor for traumatic experiences that a person has experienced, such as captivity, violence, or even recovery.

In the findings section, researchers have discovered a perception shift in Adeline's character and how Zade's obsession with Adeline romanticized. So, how do readers of *Haunting Adeline* respond to the romanticization of this obsession? Researchers have collected 100 comments from content about *Haunting Adeline* on the TikTok platform from 2022 to 2026. To explore readers' comments on *Haunting Adeline*, the infographic is divided into 6 sections according to the timeline. Analysis of each section with a separate corpus allows for systematic comparison of common words, narrative frameworks, and major themes. This approach highlights how readers of Haunting Adeline express their opinions about the novel's storyline. Using Voyant Tools for

visualisation and frequency, researchers examined how reader comment patterns changed from 2022 to 2026.

FIGURE 1. Commentary corpus in 2022



The word cloud above highlights that **Zade** is the most frequently mentioned word, followed by **book, Adeline, annoying, rape, abused,** and **creepy**. The words **annoying, rape, abused,** and **creepy** are included in the category of **red words**, which show negative nuances. This shows that in 2022, most readers of *Haunting Adeline* commented negatively about the novel. For example, Adeline's response to Zade is considered annoying because Zade is considered to have committed a despicable act towards Adeline. An account with the username @Freakthemoi said, "*I'm in the first book, and I'm finding Adeline so annoying"*. Some readers think that *Haunting Adeline* is a book that romanticises rape, as written by the account @johouu "*It's also so romantic when he rapes her more than once".*

FIGURE 2. Commentary corpus in 2023

In the 2023 corpus, readers' responses to *Haunting Adeline* in TikTok comments were still dominated by **red words** such as **hated, rape, disgusting,** and **dark**. The word book is the most frequently mentioned in this corpus. This shows that in 2023, readers focused on commenting on the book *Haunting Adeline* and still considered *Haunting Adeline* to be an immoral book because it romanticized rape. An account with the username @Profile expressed his opinion on January 19, 2023, about the character Zade after reading *Haunting Adeline "I hated this book so much. Zade was disgusting and hypocritical"*. On May 2, 2023, the account @. also commented "*That's abuse not romance".*

FIGURE 3. Commentary corpus in 2024

A significant difference is seen in the 2024 corpus, where the dominant words are **green words** with positive nuances, such as **love, good**, and **like**. In this corpus, the word **Zade** reappears



as the most frequently mentioned word. This shows that the reader's attention is again focused on Zade's character. However, here the reader begins to accept Zade's character. On June 27, 2024, an account with the username @Mrs.Harper uploaded a comment, *"He is a good pookie"*. There was also a comment from the @Michaela account on July 1, 2024, which said *"I love Zadeeee"*. This suggests that by 2024, readers' perceptions of *Haunting Adeline* were beginning to shift, particularly regarding the character of Zade, who had been hated in previous years.



FIGURE 4. Commentary corpus in 2025

In this corpus, the word **Zade** still dominates. Followed by the word **Meadows**, which is Zade's last name. From the word cloud above, **green words** still dominate, such as **love, loves, like, good,** and **favourite**. This indicates that by 2025, readers' comments on *Haunting Adeline* on TikTok were mostly positive. An account with the username @mironroxana_ expressed their opinion about Zade on April 21, 2025:"*I'm obsessed with Zade Meadows"*. The word *obsessed* used by the account indicates that she wants to have a man like the character Zade. Likewise, the @Bri account commented "*I love Zade"*on October 5, 2025, which showed his love for the character Zade.

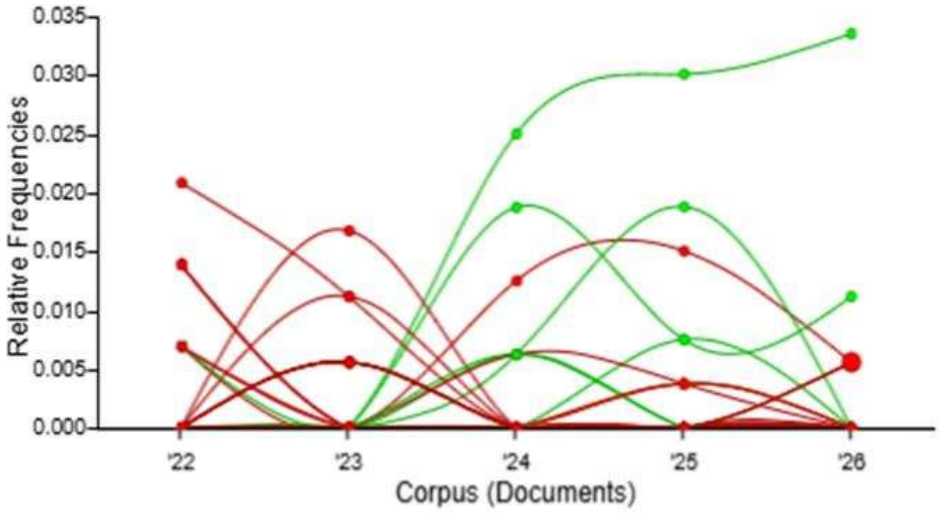
FIGURE 5. Commentary corpus in 2026



Just like the 2024 and 2025 comment corpus, the 2026 corpus also has the most frequently appearing word **Zade** and is dominated by **green words**. An example of a comment in question is "*I need me a Zade Meadows, this is perfect"*, written by the account @LycanSoul on July 2, 2026. Also, a comment written on February 23, 2026, by @sarareads, *"I love this man so much"*. This shows that in 2026, readers' comments on *Haunting Adeline* were still dominated by positive comments. As *Haunting Adeline* goes viral, more and more people are reading the novel. Among many readers, the negative perspective on *Haunting Adeline* at the beginning of its release has begun to shift over time.

FIGURE 6. Trends

The perception shift that occurs in readers of *Haunting Adeline* can be clearly seen in the



trend graph above. The comparison between the number of **red words** and **green words** in each corpus shows how readers perceived *Haunting Adeline* on TikTok from 2022 to 2026. In 2022 and 2023, the frequency of use of words in the **red words** category dominates. In 2024, the frequency of use of words in the **green words** category began to appear. This then continued to increase in 2025 and 2026, while the frequency of use of words in the **red words** category continued to decrease. This trend suggests that readers' perceptions of *Haunting Adeline* began to shift in 2024.

Among 100 comments analysed using Voyant Tools, a significant shift in perception was observed over the years. In 2022 and 2023, reader comments were dominated by negative connotations (**red words** like **rape, abuse,** and **disgusting**), indicating an initial rejection of the romanticization of violence. However, from 2024 to 2026, a shift occurred toward positive comments (**green words** such as **love, like,** and **good**). This data demonstrates a shift in public perception of obsession and dark romance. Obsession, which was originally seen as an emotion, has shifted to a symbolic form, expressing unresolved wounds and trauma (Mousa, 2025). This shift in perception is caused by two things. First, the viral popularity of dark romance novels has enabled them to be read by people worldwide. As researchers mentioned in the introduction about the popularity of dark romance. In the United States, revenue from novels in this genre reached 1.4 billion dollars in 2022 (Tabrizi, 2025). The more people read, the more they appreciate dark romance. This has led to a public perception that initially considered dark romance content to be negative, shifting to a positive perception that tends to normalize and even romanticize dark romance.

Second, the global popularity of dark romance has made dark romance one of the choices for escapism to modern society amidst increasing global depression (Tabrizi, 2025). This global depression continues to increase until it reaches 52.4 million cases in 2021 (Taquet et al., 2021). Therefore, tools are needed as a means of escapism from this global stress. Escapism is an escape from stressors by consuming something (Davide et al., 2023). Dark romance was chosen as one such escapism tool because it is considered capable of channelling extreme fantasies without real-world risks (Deane, 2026). The global popularity of dark romance allows people to access the same reading material, allowing for international discussion about dark romance. Therefore, there has been a shift in public perception from a negative perspective that tends to condemn dark romance to a positive perspective that considers dark romance as normal, especially in the romantic sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyse the romanticization of obsession in the *Haunting Adeline* through the lens of Michelle Balaev's trauma theory and examine how readers perceive the narrative. Based on an analysis of the novel *Haunting Adeline,* it can be concluded that the novel effectively maps the process of transforming trauma into romanticisation through the mechanisms of spatialized memory, spatialized trauma, and trauma relief. Textually, Adeline's character experiences a shift in perception from a victim of spatial trauma at Parsons Manor to an individual who accepts Zade's obsession as a form of healing. Balaev's theories on dislocation and reconstructed spatiality prove relevant in explaining how Adeline processes intergenerational trauma and stalking. This recovery process occurs through the romanticization of obsession, which functions as a trauma relief mechanism. Adeline no longer sees Zade as an external threat, but rather as an object that provides a sense of security and emotional comfort, even though, objectively, the behaviour is toxic.

This shift in perception was not only experienced by Adeline, but also by the audience. As seen in the 100 reader comments on *Haunting Adeline* collected by researchers using Voyant Tools, reader perception shifted from negative to positive. Figures 1 and Figure 2 show **red words** dominating the word cloud. Figure 3 begins to show more **green words.** Meanwhile, in Figures 4 and Figure 5, **green words d**ominate the word cloud. Thus, Figure 6 shows a trend that shows the existence of **red words** and **green words** from 2022 to 2026 as a whole. This data shows the shift in perception in question. This shift in perception occurred because dark romance content was perceived as a means of escapism for society to vent global depression (Deanne, 2026).

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