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Psychoanalysis and the Representation of Desire and Trauma in Netty Ejike's *Stormy Affairs*

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Abstract

This study examines psychoanalysis and the representation of desire and trauma in Netty Ejike's *Stormy Affairs*. Contemporary writers portray interpersonal relationships as mere battlegrounds of passion, frequently overlooking the deeper psychological undercurrents that dictate behavioural patterns. The problem lies in understanding how surface-level romantic pursuits in contemporary genre fiction actually serve as masked manifestations of deep-seated trauma and unarticulated psychological desire. This study adopts a psychoanalytic literary theory based on Sigmund Freud's theories of repression and desire, alongside John Bowlby's attachment theory, to reveal the subconscious motivations of the protagonists. The close-textual analysis of Stormy Affairs revealed character dialogue, internal monologues, and behavioural contradictions. The research deployed purposive sampling in the novels under study. The data was collected by close reading**,** plot events, journal articles and previous psychoanalytic studies that provide theoretical support and interpretations. This qualitative research was library-based while the method of data analysis was description of characters with observable features traumatic experiences, dreams

and fantasies. The study demonstrates how the narrative tension mirrors the perpetual friction between the id and the superego which proved to be therapeutic, though painful, in the volatile romance. The study concludes that Netty Ejike's Stormy Affairs offers a complex exploration of human psychology where romance acts as a crucible for trauma resolution. The psychological trajectories of Miles and Brooke highlights how contemporary romance can successfully stage deep-seated existential anxieties. The research proved that reconciliation with a partner is fundamentally tied to an internal reconciliation with the self.
Keywords: unconscious, psyche, id, ego superego, experience, therapeutic

Introduction

The psychoanalytic study of literature has opened up fascinating ways to understand characters, authors, and the reading experience itself. Bridging the gap between literary analysis and psychological theory allows the interpretation of *why* characters behave the way they do and *how* stories affect our minds, as they relate to *what* happens in a text. **This analysis e**xamines texts through the lens of the unconscious, repression, desires, and the structural model of the mind (the id, ego, and superego).

Psychoanalysis comes into literature as the application of science to the study of art. Science may help in the study of art but it is pertinent to note that science cannot be art. Long before modern psychology formalized the study of behaviour and the subconscious, authors were acting as intuitive psychologists, charting the depths of human motivation, trauma, desire, and identity. The intersection of literature and psychology is a profound space where storytelling meets the science of the human mind. Fiction provides a safe, simulated environment to observe complex human behaviour. Authors construct internal worlds, defense mechanisms, and emotional arcs that mirror real psychological phenomena, allowing readers to study personalities

and inner conflicts in depth. Techniques like stream-of-consciousness writing (pioneered by authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce) directly reflect psychoanalytic concepts of free association and the fluid nature of thoughts, bridging artistic expression with early 20th-century depth psychology. Reading acts as a catalyst for cognitive and emotional simulation. Neuroscience and psychology research shows that engaging with literary fiction enhances the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others. It directly boosts empathy and emotional intelligence. Art is qualitative in nature and can also help in the study of science. For instance, in science fiction, oxygen, carbohydrate, carbodioxide, meteor, etcetera can represent characters.

So, the application of science to the study of art does not make art science. This is the basis of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. According to Shevrin, "extraclinical methods must be drawn upon in addition to the clinical method because the clinical method is the only way we can be in touch with certain phenomena" (259). This shows that psychoanalytic writers do not need to go to a psychiatrist hospital for explanation to the cause of patient's illness.

The recent developments, notable books, and major thematic shifts in psychoanalytic scholarship published over the last five years. Much of the contemporary literature reflects on collective anxiety, political polarization, global uncertainty, and the psychological impact of public crises. Works like Karyne E. Messina's *A Psychoanalytic Take on Our Political Realities: Resurgence of Global Populism* (2022) and Donald Moss and Lynne Zeavin's *Hating, Abhorring and Wishing to Destroy: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Contemporary Moment* (2021) examine how deeply social hatreds entrenched and political dynamics infiltrate the unconscious and manifest in public life. Recent papers in journals like *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* and *Psychoanalytic Psychology* have increasingly focused on identity shifts, protests, and systemic

oppression (e.g., psychoanalytic reflections on movements in Iran, climate anxiety, and digital isolation).

Contemporary psychoanalytic theory increasingly emphasizes the relational matrix over rigid drives (Benjamin 45). The integration of neuropsychoanalysis offers a fresh framework for understanding early childhood trauma (Fonagy and Target 112). Intersubjectivity in the clinical setting redefines the boundaries of countertransference (Coburn et al. 78–80).

Review of Related Scholarship

Many scholars have made considerable inroads into the psychoanalytic reading of characters. In the words of Celine Surprenant, "Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field. However, all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature is fundamentally entwined with the psyche" (199). Though there were divergent views in what constitute psychoanalytic theories, the idea of psychoanalysis revolves round an individual's actions determined by sequence of causes independent of his own will. Through a conscious synthesis of all these perspectives, the researcher has put the weird characters on the pedestal of psychic study. Meanwhile, the generally accepted view of psychoanalysis is the application of specific analytic principles, especially those of Sigmund Freud, in the practical reading of literature. The three parts of this review of related scholarship are conceptual framework, theoretical framework, and empirical study.

Conceptual Framework

The related concepts that form the basis of interpreting Netty Ejike's *Stormy Affair* include determinism, freudalism, surrealism, realism, expressionism, pessimism, escapism, sexuality and bildungsroman. Determinism is the doctrine that individual actions are determined by sequence of causes independent of his own will. The repressed memory is the source of hysteria in patients. The

fantasies and desires stored in adulthood often leads to patient's illness, neurosis or change in psychological behaviour.

Another concept of psychoanalysis is freudalism which states that man is not responsible for his actions because he is controlled by his subconscious mind. The concept borders on human psyche, its formation, and its maladies. The unconscious mind is the storehouse of all memories and past experiences, both those that have been repressed through trauma and those that have simply been consciously forgotten and no longer important to us. A more closely related concept is surrealism. It is a 20th century style and movement in art and literature in which images and events that are not connected are put together in a strange or impossible way. For instance, dream tries to express what is happening deep in the mind. A person's development is determined by often forgotten events in early childhood, rather than by inherited traits alone.

Escapism is an activity, a form of entertainment and other ways that help one to forget unpleasant or boring things. It has to do with suppressed and repressed feelings. The next related concept is realism. It is the truthful representation of a work of art. Realism is demonstrated in the tripartite psyche of Freud's structural model. The id, ego and superego are the three theoretical constructs in terms of whose activity and interaction our mental life is described.

According to this model of the psyche, "the id is the set of uncoordinated instinctual trends; the superego plays the critical and moralizing role; while the ego is the organized, realistic part that mediates between the desires of the id and the superego" (1). The superego can stop from doing certain things that one's id may want to do. Pessimism, on the other hand, is the constant fear that something bad would happen in the future. This makes the characters opt for denial, projection, and other defence mechanisms.

Similar to this is expressionism. It is a style or movement in early 20th century art that tries to express people's feelings and emotions rather than showing event or objects in a realistic way. It is the psychological strategies brought into play by the unconscious mind to manipulate, deny, or distort reality in order to defend against feelings of anxiety and unacceptable impulses and to maintain one's self-schema. These feelings of power and security allow the individual not only to act as part of the mass, but to also feel safety in numbers. Freud later calls the theory of repression "the cornerstone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests" (8).

Bildungsroman is the developmental stage of the stage of characters. The common thing in bildungsroman novels is growth (psychological growth). The relationship between bildungsroman and psychoanalysis is neurosis or change in psychological behaviour of characters. In psychoanalysis, this experience is usually a tragic loss or sense of unhappiness.

Psychoanalytic Approach to Literature

This research is based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory which emphasizes the recognition of childhood events that could influence the mental functioning of adults. In literature, Freud's Theory of Sexuality plays a role in the psychological development of a main character. Through the scope of a psychoanalytic lens, humans are described as having sexual and aggressive drives. As the child passes the stages of psychosexual development, some desires, fantasies, emotions and often forgotten events or childhood experiences have a way of confronting an individual in adulthood. According to Freud, the four main phases of psychosexual development are oral (ages 0-2), anal (2-4), phallic-oedipal, today called 1st genital (3-6), latency (6-puberty) and mature genital (puberty-onward) (25).

Freud opines that "people are simply actors in the drama of their own minds, pushed by desire, pulled by coincidence.

Psychoanalytic theory is utilized in this research to decipher or interpret the concealed meaning within Netty Ejike's *Stormy Affair* and/or better understand the author's intention.

Empirical Study

Psychoanalysis and its validity as a science are contested. According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia, "Freud first began his studies on psychoanalysis in collaboration with Josef Breuer, especially when it came to the study on Anna O." (10). Anna was subjected to both physical and psychological disturbances as she was not able to drink out of fear. Breuer and Freud both found that hypnosis was a great help in discovering more about Anna O. and her treatment. The research and ideas behind the study on Anna O. were highly referenced in Freud's lecture on the origin and development of psychoanalysis.

Freud, however, failed to include "evidence of the impact of the environment on the individual throughout his theory. The theory is also lacking in empirical data and is too focused on pathology" (20). Again, this theory lacks "consideration of culture and its influence on personality" (21). Though the medical specialty of psychiatry uses research in the field of neuroscience, psychology, medicine, biology, biochemistry and pharmacology, it has generally been considered a middle ground between neurology and psychology. Unlike other physicians and neurologist, psychiatrists specialize in the doctor-patient relationship and are trained in varying extents in the use of psychotherapy and other therapeutic communication techniques.

A more general criticism of Freud's theory is its emphasis on sex, sexuality; both good and bad seem to stem from the expression or repression of sex drive. Firstly, some critics contend that Freud's theory is lacking in empirical evidence and relies too heavily on therapeutic achievements, whereas others assert that even Freud's clinical data are flawed, inaccurate, and selective at best. Secondly,

the actual method or techniques involved in psychoanalysis such as Freud's ideas on the interpretation of dreams and the role of free association have been criticized. Thirdly, some critics believe that psychoanalysis is not a science of the principle upon which its base is inaccurate. Grünbaum asserts that "while psychoanalysis may thus be said to be scientifically alive, it is currently hardly well" (228). He teaches that:

> The reason for which Freud based his entire psychoanalytic theory was 'fundamentally flawed even if the validity of his clinical evidences were not in question' but that 'the clinical evidences are themselves suspects; more often than not, they may be the patient's responses to the suggestions and expectations of the analyst. (20)

Grünbaum sums it up by saying that "in order for psychoanalytic hypothesis to be validated in the future, data must be obtained from extraclinical setting" (228). Colby objects that "Grünbaum and other critics lack empirical data" (54). Edelson also disagree with Grünbaum and insist that "although extraclinical studies must and should be performed, clinical data are reliable and necessary source of evidence" (232). Shevrin insists that "Freud's admirable heuristic hypotheses did not come out of the thin air or simply out of imagination" (258) as other critics might have the readers believe. Instead, "extraclinical methods must be drawn upon in addition to the clinical method because the clinical method is the only way we can be in touch with certain phenomena" (259). Only with quantification, many critics assert, can supposedly scientific theories even begin to be evaluated based on their empirical merits. These critics contend that Freud's evidence is flawed due to lack of experiment" (54).

Greenberg believes that "Freud's case studies do not place enough stress on revealing the outcome of the treatment and that Freud's aim was more to illustrate his theoretical points" (240). According to Holt, "critics find fault with the demographically restricted

sample of individuals on which Freud based majority of his data and theory" (243).

According to Storr, "Grünbaum forcefully argues that free association is neither free nor validating evidence for psychoanalytic theory" (260). Spense contends that Free associations are not necessarily contaminated, and also makes note fact that psychoanalysts are "particularly sensitized on the danger of suggestion. They are schooled in a tradition which places emphasis on minimal comments and redundant examples" (259).

Farrell and other critics believe that "it is increasingly important for analysts to be aware of common sense and the role that it can, should, and does play in psychoanalysis" (260). In the words of Storr, "Only a few fundamentalist psychoanalysts of old-fashioned kind think that Freud was a scientist or that psychoanalysis was or could be a scientific enterprise" (260). Popper claims that psychoanalysis' "so-called predictions are not predictions of overt behaviour but hidden psychological states. This is why they are untestable" (254). Other critics claim that psychoanalysis cannot be considered a science due to its lack of predictions. Colby, however, considers that "neither of these predictions can be made with any accuracy" (55). Eysenck maintains that:

> I have always taken it for granted that the obvious failure of Freudian therapy to significantly improve on spontaneous remission or placebo treatment is the clearest proof we have of the inadequacy of Freudian theory, closely followed by the success of alternative methods of treatment, such as behaviour therapy. (236)

Contrary to the foundational principles of psychoanalysis, Northrop Frye argues that "literary critic finds Freud most suggestive for the theory of comedy, and Jung for the theory of romance. Later readers such as Carl Jung and another Freud's disciple, Karen Horney broke with Freud. Their works, especially

Jung's led to other rich branches of psychoanalytic criticism: Horney to feminist approaches of womb envy; and Jung to the study of archetypes and collective unconscious.

According to Waugh, "The development of psychoanalytic approaches to literature proceeds from 'content' to fabric of artistic and literary works" (8). For example, Hayden White explored how "Freud's descriptions tally with nineteenth-century theories of tropes, which his work somehow reinvents" (9).

Erikson, on his part, stresses on that "psychoanalysis today is shifting its emphasis on the study of the ego's roots in social organization, and that its method should be what H.S. Sullivan called 'participant,' and systematically so" (2). Herald Schultz-Hencke, a doctor and psychotherapist, created "the name Neopsychoanalyse in 1945" (13). In all, there is no particular definition of psychoanalysis that could contain the trappings of other definitions. According to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren

> The theory of art as neurosis raises the question of imagination in relation to belief analogous not only to the romantic child who tells stories – i.e. reconstructs his experience till it conforms to his pleasure and credit – but also to the man who suffers from hallucination, confounding the world of reality with fantasy world of his hopes and fears. (83)

A Psychoanalytic Study of Netty Ejike's *Stormy Affairs*

Netty Ejike's *Stormy Affair* recreates Miles and Brooke's childhood days, fantasies, longings, and passions, as they affect their psyche and propelled their psychosexual attitude. The complexity of the novel draws from two different background. Miles behaves the way he does because he lacks emotional support even from his wealthy family unlike Brooke who is born into a poor family but has parental care.

> Yes, his father had loved his mother to the point of stupidity, and yes, it seemed Miles was in danger of following his footstep, a circumstance he was determined to avoid. As a child, he had been neglected in the process of what he had come to call 'ill-love,' for how could love destroy people so much that they returned away from its by-product? Growing up with parents who didn't know he existed; who didn't know anyone existed except the two of them; Miles had learned, early enough, how to mask his hurt. (192)

Oedipus complex manifests as Miles begins to hate his father and wishes not to be like him. He grows jealous of his father to the extent that he no longer bears to watch him touch or make love to his mother. As there is no medicine that could cure his parents' craze for love, Miles becomes fixated to serious relationship without plan of getting married. His conscience does not allow him to follow the footstep of his parents who are so much in love that they abandoned him. This affects his relationship with Brooke as he starts distancing from her. Brooke, on her part, has never experienced loneliness since her 19 years of growing up, until Miles comes into her life:

> "Who's she?" Amanda asked, her eyes following the girl who walked like her model. "She's Miles Sanderson's lover "one of the most influential men in the city," Sophie replied. I wonder why she's alone," she added, narrowing her eyes. "She's hardly seen without him." (8)

Miles and Brooke are, however, inexplicably drawn to each other. At last, Miles breaks his cardinal rule of not falling in love with any woman. He proposes to Brooke but she tests and confirms that he equally loves her genuinely. The devil in Miles (id) leads him to make love with Brooke in the garden as they are about to return to Florida after a house party. Brooke takes advantage of Miles' unconscious desire to get one hundred dollars from him. Miles

takes the pain and carves out time from his busy schedule to teach Brooke how to drive.

Miles suffers from neurosis or change in psychological behaviour in the presence of his domineering aunt, even as he gives her no room to introduce any other girl. Brooke, as a result, is filled with anxiety. She imagines that Miles' aunt is responsible for her reckless abandoned and their strained relationship:

> I'll be going to Zurich tomorrow." His voice was calm, and only the hand holding the glass in its slight tremor. He kept the glass in the holder on the arm of his chair. I'll be gone for five days," Brooke frowned. He was not using the correct pronoun. In confusion, she stared at him, and met her eyes, his face hard and unsmiling, as he added, "Alone." (50)

The writer believes that the subconscious exerts certain influence on human behaviour even at adulthood. Miles' childhood experience accounts for instability in his human personality. His ego makes him reconsider his decision "What was the essence of life without her? He refused to follow that train of thought. His mind was made up" (54). He longs for Brooke but her interest has returned to her sister, Natasha since Miles seems to have forgotten her. In spite of the numerous boys that hover around Brooke, Natasha is surprised that Brooke has, because of Miles, turned them down. Natasha, acting as an ego ideal, does not want her to separate from Miles:

> Why would you leave a man like that?" Natasha whispered, still staggered. "He's not married, is he? Are you pregnant? "No to all your questions. If you must know he ended the relationship." This news didn't sit well with Natasha. She couldn't imagine anyone being this generous to someone he didn't mean to have future with. "Did he say so?" He didn't have to spell it out." "Are you sure there was no communication breakdown between you two? "You shouldn't jump to conclusion easily. (69)

In reaction, Brooke leaves Miles' house and rejects the cheque he drops for her to his disappointment. His id makes him ask James her whereabouts only for his house counsel to inform him that Brooke has sued him for damaging her body. He now dwells in Kenya. His neurotic anxiety drives him to locate her at a hotel in the centre of Nairobi. She tells him that she needs nothing more than getting married. In her moral anxiety, she starves Miles with sex.

Her ego strength takes the spiritual dimension. She starts going to church which she has stopped ever since Miles comes into her life "You know what?" Brooke continued. I think we jumped into bed so fast that we really didn't take time to become friends. All in life is not just sex" (80-90). Brooke's id returns as anxiety and excitement make her long for Miles. He meets her at the hotel room 507. Out of moral anxiety, he asks Brooke if she is in the habit of opening door for people when she is practically naked. She is driven by the id to yield to Miles' kiss. Miles cannot also repress his sexual urge. She however, proves her ego strength in moral anxiety "please God give me strength, she prayed" (99). Brooke battles with her id and superego as she switches from one thought to another. The id finally overthrows the superego when she can no longer repress her intense sexual urge:

> Miles turned away from the large flat screen to look at her, his eyes narrowing in scrutiny. She was sexy as sin in dress. He stared at her long and hard and then shook his head "Change into another dress, will you? Throwing her hands helplessly, she groaned, "What's wrong with this dress. (37)

Miles's superego returns the moment his aunt, Moira invited them to have a dinner. He tells Brooke to change her sexy dress to a more descent one before they can attend the dinner. Brooke's id ends where Miles' id begins. She treats Miles shrewdly because he is evasive about their getting married and having children. Miles want relationship but Brooke wants marriage. Her superego returns

when she also tells Miles to dress up. Miles' ego restrains him from forcing himself on Brooke.

Miles' ego, however, suppresses the anger even as Henry calls Brooke on his hearing, demanding for ten million dollars. Brooke realizes the effect she has on Mile's psyche. Miles promises to give her the money even without knowing what she wants to use it for. On their trip to Massai Mara (reserve in Africa), Brooke at the club tent is enveloped with fear or reality anxiety. Her voice betrays her fear as she tries to suppress it. Hundreds of thousand cows make a death daring high jump into the water that produces what seem liked waterfalls. This makes Miles fragile as he remembers his pathetic experience. Miles thereafter, shifts ground as his ego balances with his superego. He shares in the fears of the animals he observes while their bravery in plunging into the river encourages him. They exult in triumph as they scale through to the other side of the river while feeling sorrowful at the death of others.

The id in Brooke returns as she wants to make love with Miles who no longer gives a second thought on the possibility of Brooke going after his money as well as his ring. Whatever she is, he is already done with her. Miles shrugs off the thought but on recalling his decision to let go of fears and to show as much love as possible, he forges ahead. Miles' ego appears as he has a rethink and subsequently proposes to Brooke who at first turns down his request:

> She had hoped on him, he says he wanted to marry her. He had been so adamant that he would not marry her, so, why the sudden change of mind? She could never agree to half-hearted proposal. She knew he really doesn't mean it, and had proposed out of pity. They were better off being friends. Perhaps they were meant to be just that. She didn't even mind being his lover again, but she would not marry him. (206)

Brooke battles with her ego strength as she sees Miles giving her body appraisal. She strips in front of him and becomes confused "I am confused! Should I continue as his lover?" (207). She unconsciously accords Miles all the respect due to a husband. She trembles with fear when he speaks. She finally defeats Miles" superego with humility and generosity the moment he learns from telephone call that Brooke gives out millions of dollar to children plagued by HIV, the motherless babies and the aged of their town. Henry also informs him about the contract that Brooke gives in his name for the building of hospital for free medical care. The children have been singing his praise and old people have been heaping load of prayers on him to marry a good wife and be blessed with children as he wants. Brooke's superego is equally subdued. She tests and finds out that Miles truly loves her:

> "But you know we can have a quickie before beginning the proposed sexless life," he taunted, moving about the room in only white boxer shorts. He seemed out to tease the hell out of her, in retribution for her enforcing those rules. "No." "Just think about it," Miles tempted, in that drawl as he puts his toiletries into his bag. "And you will always look back to this day and remember how we had great sex here, maybe standing by the window. I've come to love. (222)

Brooke displays penis envy as Amanda Cane moves with Miles at the party. She begins to doubt if she is really in love or in lust with Miles. The explanation that Miles later gives her drives her neurotic anxieties "fears, pretence, suspicion, and jealousy of the id. The feelings become unusual and improbable. Miles seems a better stuff for the kind of mutual love she wants. She shows him undying love and he makes no effort thereafter to suppress his feelings. Miles and Brooke go out together, shop together, eat together, and do virtually everything together. They are so close that they become husband and wife. Their stormy affair subsequently results to marriage:

> It was on the night of the dinner my aunt gave, that I realized I was head over heel with you. I'd care about people, but none had managed to ensnare me like you did. "And not only that, I could see all the symptoms of being obsessively in love with someone. The revelation shook me. I'd been careful never to fall victim of that kind of love. It was sickness. It was destructive. It was exclusive. "His voice shook as he dredged up scenes through his mind's eyes "As a child I could remember yearning for my parent's love, but I never got it." He paused for a while and continued, "I swore no woman would ever reduce me to a replica of my father. His whole life had rotated around my mother and hers his." (251)

Brooke somehow makes him change his stance. She is moved with pity for his explanation in defense of his love for her. Miles tells her plainly in tears how he loves her and desires to be with her above every other thing in the world.

In returning his love, Brooke lays bare her feeling of regrets, sympathy, pity, sincerity, hope, apology, forgiveness and reconciliation "Look Miles, I've been an idiot in more ways than I care to admit. I don't know how to amend things. Will you ever forgive me?" (256). Miles accepts her and they proceed to the chapel to wed amidst the admiration of people who do not want the newly wed to leave.

Conclusion

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory is manifested in Netty Ejike's *Stormy Affair,* a heart rending story about the unusual and improbable relationship between Miles Sanderson and Brooke Wilde. The novel confirms that certain childhood experiences have a way of confronting an individual in adulthood. Miles behaves the way he does because his parents so love each other that they neglect him. This culminates to his unrestrained and uncontrolled

sexual desire without any plan of getting married. Brooke, on her part, has never experienced loneliness in her 19 years of growing up because she has parents that care. So, when Miles comes into her life, she wants to get married. Her soulfulness makes Miles distance from her so as not to break his cardinal rule. After their trip to Massai Mara, Miles flashes back his neurotic anxiety to Brooke. Brooke finally defeats Miles superego with humility and generosity. Miles subsequently breaks his cardinal rule and they get wedded.

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