

The Psychoanalytical Study of Susan Lewis' *Behind Closed Doors*

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Abstract- *The objective of the study is to explore the various interpretations in the novel with respect to psychoanalysis. The psychoanalysis of the novel will also aim to bring out the alliance between psychoanalysis, trauma, and feminism, which are the prominent areas of discussion in the novel. The novel also projects a larger area of interest in psychoanalytic feminism and not feminist psychoanalysis. The research will also try to correlate the emergence of traumatic experiences in the novel, tracing their origin to the author's own sub-conscious. The retrospective episodes in the novel reveal the secret history of the characters. The study discusses in a larger context, the various interpretations of the novel with respect to psychoanalysis. This research paper would throw light on the psychological events in the novel, compelling them to unravel the mysteries behind the minds as well as the hearts of the characters. With reference to the additional quote in title of hardcover publication of the novel, "You never know what secrets lie Behind Closed Doors", this paper would aim to bring out the reality in the true nature of its characters and their secrets.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Susan Lewis, tend to connect more psychologically in this novel *Behind Closed Doors* rather than any of her other novels. The authors are influenced by the psychoanalytic concepts which are reflected in the characters of their works and also in their mind. The psychoanalytic concepts which were proposed by Sigmund Freud influenced the psychoanalysis of authors are the primacy of the unconscious, the iceberg theory of the psyche, dreams are an expression of our conscious, infantile behavior is

essentially sexual and the relation between neurosis and creativity.

In this novel, A fourteen-year-old girl, Sophie Monroe, suddenly vanishes one night, it looks at first as though she is run away from home. However, towards the end of the novel things have turned a lot more tragically than expected. Sophie Monroe's mother died when she was ten years old which is evident that it is not just any death, but also the implications from the death of the author's own mother, who passed away while she was ten years old in a battle against cancer.

Only because the author has experienced this own sense of grief, she is more easily connectable with the death of Sophie's mother. The images from the past of Sophie and her mother foreshadows the author's experience with her mother. Sophie, her mother Jilly Monroe and her father Gavin Monroe even had a band named „The Upbeats', they were very happy until death did part them. Sophie and her mother had a diary in which they would have their memories paneled down as they moved on. As her mother knew that she wouldn't be around her anymore, they started to fill this diary with memories that are important to hold on to even after her absence. Sophie's innocence seemed so beautiful and heart-felt when the contents of the diary came to light in the later part of the investigation.

Freudian critics depart from the traditional conventions of literary criticism, in reconstructing an author's psyche based on the conclusions from his writings. One important aspect of this approach of literary criticism is that it validates the importance of the literary work, as it is constructed on a literary key for the decoding. Freud's theory of psychoanalysis argues that literary texts, like dreams, express the

secret unconscious desires of the writer, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses. One may even psychoanalyze a character in the work of art, but it is usually the author's psyche that is projected through the character i.e., consciously the author may not have the intention to do so, but subconsciously the author did, which is an involuntary response of the author's neuroses in such cases.

Psychoanalysis, being a critical endeavor of the literary text, seeks answers and evidences of unresolved emotions, psychological dilemmas and conflicts, guilts, ambivalences, traumas, prejudices and so forth that may lie consciously or unconsciously in a literary text of what may deduce a disunified literary text. The author's own personal traumas, sexual conflicts, fixations, anxieties, family life and such will be noticeable or traceable in the characters of the literary work, whereas the psychological material will be expressed indirectly, disguised or encoded, as in dreams, through prospects such as "symbolism" (the repressed object presented in disguise), "condensation" (several emotions or thoughts represented in a single image) and "displacement" (anxiety locked onto another image by means of association).

The novel, *Behind Closed Doors* tend to unravel many secrets that the author had not intended to say so but had said unconsciously. The first step in psychoanalyzing a text is establishing the relation between the text and the author's psyche. Trauma is often regarded as a paradox or contradiction. It is one of the first and foremost areas of analysis in psychologically analyzing a text. Trauma is the present-day effect of a past event that has a compelling effect on the person. It is mostly involved with horrible incidents during the person or character's childhood, but not only childhood, also other stages of these event's occurring. Many of the contemporary novels are concerned with traumatic events of the past, whether these emerge out of collective experiences such as war, slavery or the Holocaust, or the more individual experiences of rape or bereavement or the loss of someone. This kind of trauma that follows, affect the person in his or her day-to-day activities, and are explicitly seen in many novels and movies in the contemporary period.

The implications of trauma aren't only seen in novels but also trace their prominent existence in movies and digital media. Film and digital media being powerful medium for communications, convey the emotions and feelings in a more profound manner. In the movie, *Baby Driver*, the implications of trauma are more profound. The main protagonist of the movie, Baby suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), that was due to the car accident he was in, while he was a child. He lost both his parents in the accident, even after fifteen years of the accident, he feels that he could still hear the sound of the crash that killed her parents. Throughout the movie, he listens to songs that others created and songs that he himself created.

In the Netflix original series *Sex Education*, the main protagonist Otis Milburn, witnesses his father having sex with a stranger, while he was a child. Though he was innocent enough to ask his mother why his dad was naked with that lady in his office, it had a serious effect in his adolescence. He found it extremely difficult to connect sexually with women. Whenever he tries to do so, he just collapses and faints. This is because, him witnessing the act - was the reason that tore his family apart and he was also afraid that he might just become someone like his father.

Aimee Gibbs in the same *Sex Education* was sexually assaulted on a bus on her way to school, although it was not a matter of concern for her at that time, she found that she was haunted by the fear of being sexually harassed again. She found herself in a state where she was unable to board the bus for the fear of being harassed, she even walked 7 miles to school to avoid boarding the bus. The assault against her, instilled in her sub-conscious that she was weak and feeble. She even resisted to engage in a sexual relationship with her boyfriend which was quite unusually, as she was sexually active. Thus, trauma exists not only in terms of a major accident in the past or childhood of a person but also the sexual concerns of the individuals can be a problem of trauma. Many teenagers find it more difficult to cope up with sexual traumas especially girls, who are always subjected to such assaults and molestations quite often. Freud, in his theory of psychoanalysis stated that the sexual drives and concerns form a major part of an individual's psyche. He or she is

subjected to this sort of sexual trauma either consciously or unconsciously. Though sexual trauma is not of major concern in this novel *Behind Closed Doors*, it is to be considered while examining the character of Sophie Monroe, as she calls for unwanted attention from men twice her age.

The initial trauma that is explicitly seen in the novel is the loss of the author's mother from the reflection of the loss of Sophie's mother. It is indeed a real hard time as losing a loved one is not that easy to cope up with. Sophie as well as the author, being just a kid at that time felt it extremely difficult to comprehend. In the case of Sophie's loss, she lost the only thing that is dearer to her than anything in the whole world. She was in desperate need of love and attention. When her father couldn't deliver the same love to her after his wife's death, Sophie was abandoned. Though Sophie was comfortable with Heidi once she and her father are together, she couldn't bare the loss of attention, love and care after the birth of Archie. She was a kind girl who had many plans for the birth of the child, she was left out in all that chaos and commotion between the child and the family. She was bullied at school, people in the school called her names.

Sophie left alone in the world, with no one to look after her, was desperate. As any other girl of her age would have aspired, all she asked for was love, attention and a family. She sought attention in men who are twice her age. The question that has a major concern in the novel is that why Sophie seeks the company of older men instead of the boys in her age. She felt that after all that loss she had experienced in such a young age, she is mature enough for relationship even though she is only fourteen. Sophie also had the thought that she is capable of handling men who are twice her age. She hid all her innocence behind her purple-streaked hair and much shorter mini-skirt. Since many girls of her age had totally transformed once out of uniform. They are already grown up. Can't tell them anything..." (26).

The author in establishing how a teenage girl turns out after the loss of a loved one, has involuntarily established her own grief and mindset in attaining attention from older and mysterious men. Sophie loved Tomasz Sikora, a mysterious man from Poland,

a plumber and a singer and also a man who is involved in an underground operation of transporting stolen goods and women. Though he was in a relationship with Kasia, Sophie loved him, not because he loved her or paid attention to her but just because he is attractive and muscular. This context could also be reflected with the author as she also had a desire for mysterious and dangerous men. In her memoirs, she had even mentioned that she fell in love with a man who was on FBI's most wanted list.

Every aspect in the novel could always be attributed back to the author's psyche, redeeming the literature as a fulfilment of the innate desires of the author's unconscious mind rather than a purely fictitious work of art. The author's wish for having a relation between Andre and Graeme is more to speak of. When Graeme says that he is about to buy a vacation home, just for him and Andre to spend some quality time together, Andre is much moved by the prospect, though they don't come together at the end of the novel. Andre was more fascinated by this propagation by Graeme, where she even thought of abandoning her job to go with him to Italy. She has always dreamt of Italy. These wishes from the Detective Andre Lawrence and not just her wish, but also the author's innate desires, which she have expressed in Andre's character. The author has intertwined the life of her characters with her own. Graeme has two sons of whom he is prouder of, so does Susan Lewis, her husband has two sons of whom she feels prouder. For the novel *The Truth About You's* research, she along with her family took residence in a villa in Italy, which also foreshadows on the fact that Andre desires to go to Italy along with Graeme, leaving everything behind, for which she stands for. In a Q&A session with *My Weekly* magazine, she stated herself that, she doesn't consciously include her own life into her works, but that sort of happened without her acknowledgement. The novel reveals the struggle between the author's conscious and unconsciousness. The deductions from psychoanalysis portray that it is explicitly seen that the author is incapable of creating a completely pure fictitious work of art. Elements of her innate desires, prejudices, and passions tend to appear at times in the novel, though it is not what the author has intended to do. These aspects of the novel create a displeasing effect, making it devoid from becoming a pure work

of fiction. This is because the readers have no intention to enter the minds of other people. i.e., to invade the personal lives of someone who is of no importance. Though it is not in the case of memoirs, biographies or autobiographies, it is of utmost importance in a fiction. While the author consciously or unconsciously lets his or her innate desires get the best of them, the fiction, like dreams, becomes a fulfilment of the author's unconscious desires. This unconscious rendering of the personal judgements of the author in the novel makes the novel devoid of authenticity. When there is no authenticity intact, the reader doesn't possess the intensity of plot or story in the novel.