

A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF AYOBAMI ADEBAYO'S *STAY WITH ME*

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this study was carried out by Okorodudu Prudence (Miss) in the department of English and Literature, university of Benin, Benin city, under my supervision

DR. E.J. LEGAMAH
SUPERVISOR

DATE

DEDICATION

This essay is hereby dedicated to God Almighty for his steadfast love. This essay is also dedicated to the lovers and scholars of literature who loves to explore in learning.

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Most importantly, I want to thank this big God whom is too faithful to fail.

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I thank you who holds this piece of work and be grateful for the beauty of literature in examining all aspect of human intent.

ABSTRACT

This study examined how characters in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* demonstrate the dimensions of human consciousness and the nature of the human mind using psychoanalytic theory. This study is limited to Adebayo Ayobami *Stay with Me* (2017). It focused on exploring the psychological lens of the main characters.

This study employed psychoanalytic theory to analyze how unconscious desires, fears, and conflicts shape the characters' behaviors and relationships in *Stay with Me* . The study aimed to apply these psychoanalytic principles specifically to examine the unconscious motivations, internal psychological struggles, and defense mechanisms employed by the novel's main characters, particularly Yejide and Akin.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study aims to examine how characters in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* demonstrate the dimensions of human consciousness and the nature of the human mind using psychoanalytic theory. The purpose of this study also explores the unconscious motivation, repressed desires, and internal conflicts of the characters, showing how psychological forces influence their actions. This study was chosen because it powerfully explores deep human emotions, love, betrayal, and identity struggles, all within a Nigerian context. This reading will uncover beyond the novel's plot surface and interpret the interpersonal dynamics. It gives deeper understanding of the human psyche as represented in African literature.

1.2 Scope of Study

This study is limited to Adebayo Ayobami *Stay with Me* (2017). It focuses on exploring the psychological lens of the main characters. This reading is explored through psychoanalytic theory, basically on Sigmund Freud's concepts of the unconscious, repression, and stream of consciousness, with contributions of other psychoanalytic theorists. This reading doesn't extend to other works by Adebayo Ayobami, nor does it interfere with other theories except as they relate to the psychoanalytic readings.

1.3 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and interpretative methodology, focusing primarily on a detailed and comprehensive textual analysis of the novel *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo. The qualitative research approach is particularly suited for this study because it allows the researcher to explore complex psychological themes, character motivations, and symbolic elements within the narrative in depth and detail. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell, is an approach that emphasizes understanding phenomena through exploration of meanings, themes, and patterns rather than quantifiable data (Creswell 4). This aligns well with psychoanalytic literary criticism, which seeks to uncover unconscious desires, conflicts, and psychological dynamics embedded in literary texts.

The primary text under investigation is Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay with Me*, a contemporary Nigerian novel that intricately explores themes of love, infertility, betrayal, and the social pressures woven into marital relationships. Published in 2017, the novel has gained critical acclaim for its vivid portrayal of Nigerian culture and the emotional turmoil experienced by its characters. The novel's narrative style, which includes the use of stream of consciousness and intimate interior monologues, facilitates access to the characters' psychological depth and making it an ideal text for psychoanalytic reading.

Qualitative and interpretive approaches to research are appropriate for this project since they allow for the researcher to develop a rich, contextualized understanding of the subject matter rather than relying solely on quantifiable data. Critic Lois Tyson has suggested that the complexity of psychological phenomena within literature are often best explored using research methodologies that emphasize nuance and depth, which may not always be achieved

through strictly quantitative analysis (Tyson 110). Additionally, this approach enables a critical evaluation of the cultural and literary contexts of the novel, allowing for a richer and more comprehensive interpretation of the characters' inner lives and the themes central to the novel. Qualitative research method also gives room for the study of humanities which tallies to the reading of this research work.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The psychoanalytic theory that forms the foundation of this study was originally developed by Sigmund Freud, widely regarded as the father of psychoanalysis. Freud's work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries changed the understanding of human psychology by insisting that much of human behavior is influenced by unconscious mental processes inaccessible to the conscious mind (Freud 10). Central to Freud's theory are concepts such as the unconscious, repression, and the structural model of the psyche, which are the id, ego, and superego. The id represents initial desires and instinctual drives such as the ego mediates between the id and reality, while the superego embodies internalized social and moral standards (Freud 15-26). These elements interact dynamically to produce conscious thoughts, behavior, and psychological conflicts.

Freud also introduced the idea of defense mechanisms, a psychological strategy employed by the ego to manage anxiety and internal conflict by distorting or denying reality. Repression, denial, projection, and displacement are among the mechanisms relevant to literary character analysis (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 82-95).

Beyond Freud, this study draws on Melanie Klein's contributions to psychoanalysis, particularly her object relations theory, which emphasizes the role of early childhood relationships in shaping the self and psychological patterns in adulthood. Klein's theories illuminate the ways in which characters in *Stay with Me* relate to each other and manage internal conflicts through splitting and projective identification (Klein 45-60).

To further enrich the Freudian foundation, this study also considers the work of Jacques Lacan, who reinterpreted Freud's ideas through the lens of language and symbolism. Lacan's concepts, like the "mirror stage" and the influence of the "Other," offer useful tools for analyzing how the characters see themselves and how their desires are shaped by the social world around them (Lacan 89-105). This adds another layer to understanding the complex interplay between identity and cultural pressure in the novel.

It's also impossible to separate the novel's powerful psychological texture from its author. Ayobami Adebayo, writing from her lived experience as a Nigerian woman, infuses *Stay with Me* with an authentic sense of Nigerian family life, gender roles, and social expectations. Her background allows her to portray psychological trauma and relational dynamics with a depth that feels both personally resonant and culturally specific. Ayobami Adebayo's narrative style marked by its emotional honesty, deep dives into her characters' inner thoughts, and nuanced handling of mental states that creates a world that is exceptionally a good study field for a psychoanalytic reading. Her sensitivity to psychological complexity is what makes the novel such a compelling subject for this kind of study.

By weaving together classical Freudian theory, these wider psychoanalytic perspectives, and

a deep respect for Ayobami Adebayo's authorial voice, this study seeks to uncover the hidden psychological drives that not only propel the characters but also form the very heart of the novel's themes.

1.5 Literature Review

Since the publication of *Stay with Me* in 2017, the novel has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly from feminist and sociocultural perspectives. Critics such as Chiamaka Eze and Funmilayo Adebayo have explored how the novel addresses the emotional and societal burdens borne by women in Nigerian society, especially regarding motherhood, infertility, and patriarchal expectations (Eze 89; Adebayo 14). Eze highlights the novel's poignant depiction of the stigmatization of childless women and the psychological consequences of such marginalization (Eze 92). Funmilayo Adebayo discusses the critique of patriarchal structures embedded in the novel, emphasizing how societal pressure exacerbates marital tensions and individual suffering (Adebayo 22).

Other scholars have focused on the sociocultural dimensions of the novel, analyzing how traditional Nigerian values related to family, fertility, and gender roles shape the characters' experiences and identities (Okeke 101). These studies provide important insights into the cultural context that informs the narrative and character behavior.

However, relatively few studies have examined *Stay with Me* through a psychoanalytic lens, creating a gap in the scholarship that this research seeks to fill. While some researchers, such as Okafor, acknowledge the psychological complexity of the novel's characters, their analyses do not deeply engage with psychoanalytic theory or explore unconscious

motivations in detail (Okafor 134). Nwosu's work on trauma in contemporary African literature touches on psychological suffering but stops short of a psychoanalytic interpretation (Nwosu 78).

Psychoanalytic theory is becoming an increasingly popular method to analyze literature from Africa as well as the themes present in those works. Both Chinua Achebe who is one of the first to apply psychoanalytic theories to African Literature and Ifeoma Nwankwo's work on analyzing character formation, identity and the internal world of African characters in relation to cultural expectations, have provided evidence of how psychoanalysis will allow readers to see deeper psychological forces at play within the stories of Africa (Nwankwo 40; Achebe 56).

As such, this research will contribute to this emerging field by providing another voice to the conversation by using psychoanalytic lenses to analyze the book *Stay With Me*. The book has been extensively analyzed through the lens of both feminism and sociology culture, but as it is different, psychoanalytic perspectives will provide a similar, yet different, analysis of the book. This analysis will be focused on the unconscious; repressed desires, hidden fears, and internal struggles that propel the story and determine the fate of each of the characters.

1.6 Thesis statement

This study explores how characters in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* are driven by unconscious desires, repressed emotions and conflicts that shapes their experiences of love, betrayal, and forgiveness, using Freud's psychoanalytic theory to show how these hidden psychological forces influences their behavior and reveals a deeper understanding of African Literature through a psychoanalytic approach.

CHAPTER TWO

PSYCHOANALYTIC LENS ON CHARACTERS IN *STAY WITH ME*

2.1 Introduction

Adébáyò Ayòbámi's *Stay with me* is an extremely effective portrayal of love, loss and psychological distress in a marriage struggling due to lack of fertility and societal expectations. Underneath the family drama exists a complex web of emotions that demonstrate the unconscious conflicts present in the two main characters Yejide and Akin. Although the novel has received significant attention relating to gender, culture, and patriarchy, the novel can also be interpreted from a psychoanalytic perspective. Utilizing a Freudian perspective when interpreting the novel will allow us to better understand how the characters' behavior and emotion are being motivated by suppressed desire, unresolved childhood losses, and unconscious defense mechanisms.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, human behavior is primarily governed by unconscious motivations that frequently exist below the threshold of conscious awareness. Repression, projection, melancholy, and the superego are some of the concepts that help us understand how individuals manage or displace their emotional pain. As such, the inner struggles of Yejide and Akin; especially those related to motherhood, masculinity, and love, are also a reflection of the tension between the demand of the unconscious and the expectations of culture. Therefore, Chapter 2 will apply the classical theories of Freud to examine the internal dynamics of both characters and how their relationship is impacted by unresolved issues and/or what they have repressed.

This chapter consists of three primary sections. Section 2.1.2 will introduce the relevant

Freudian concepts used in this chapter. Section 2.2 will examine Yejide through the lens of loss, repression, and melancholy, which will illustrate how her early experiences as a child contribute to her adult behaviors and relationships. Section 2.3 will focus on Akin, who demonstrates internal conflict between his love, guilt, and societal expectations for men, as well as his secretiveness, which relates to his male identity. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion summarizing how both characters demonstrate the operation of the unconscious mind within the structure of love and marriage.

2.2 Psychoanalytic Framework

To understand the psychological depths of Ayobami Adébáyò's *Stay With Me* characters, we can turn to classical Freudian theory, as laid out in key works like *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Mourning and Melancholia*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and *The Ego and the Id*. Freud's central argument is that our lives are not run by rational thought alone. Instead, we are often driven by unconscious desires and fears that leak out in our dreams, in slips of the tongue, and in the behaviours we find ourselves repeating without knowing why. A cornerstone of his theory is the concept of the return of the repressed and the idea that what we shove into the unconscious doesn't disappear, but instead comes back to us in disguised or subconsciously.

One of the most critical concepts for this analysis is repression. Freud suggested that our minds actively force painful or socially shameful thoughts out of our conscious awareness and into the unconscious. Yet, this buried material doesn't lie dormant; it continues to shape our behaviour from the shadows. It often resurfaces through our dreams, through

psychological or physical symptoms, or through patterns we can't seem to break. In *Stay With Me*, we see this clearly in both Yejide and Akin. Yejide represses her profound grief and yearning for a child, while Akin buries his guilt and anxiety about his infertility. Because neither can face these feelings head-on, they become trapped in a cycle of pain and miscommunication that defines their relationship.

Another key idea is Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is a healthy, if painful, process where we slowly detach from a lost person or thing, eventually allowing ourselves to heal. Melancholia, however, is a state of arrested grief. Here, the ego turns inward, internalizing the lost object so that the anger and disappointment once directed outward are now aimed at the self. The result is a profound sense of worthlessness, self-blame, and depression. Yejide's character is a textbook example of this; her enduring grief and relentless self-reproach after her miscarriages are not just sadness, but the unmistakable hallmarks of melancholia.

Freud also identified several defence mechanisms that the ego employs to protect itself from anxiety. Projection involves offloading your own unacceptable feelings onto someone else. Denial is the outright refusal to accept a painful truth. Splitting is the tendency to see people or situations as all-good or all-bad, with no middle ground. We can observe these defences at work throughout the novel: in Yejide's fraught relationships with other women, where she projects her own sense of failure onto them, and in Akin's self-deceptive justifications for his actions, where he denies the full reality of the harm he is causing.

Finally, Freud's concept of the superego, the internalized voice of parental and societal authority helps explain the powerful role of culture in shaping personal guilt. For Akin, the

cultural mandate to father children becomes a tyrannical superego demand, one that pressures him to sacrifice his personal ethics for the sake of family honour. For Yejide, the societal ideal of the "good wife and mother" becomes a harsh internal judge, a standard she constantly measures herself against and inevitably finds herself failing, plunging her into guilt and despair.

By applying these Freudian concepts, we can see that Ayobami Adébáyò's *Stay With Me* characters are caught in a powerful tug-of-war. Their tragedies are not just the product of external cultural pressures, but are equally born from the hidden, unconscious conflicts raging within their own minds.

2.3 Psychoanalytic Reading of Yejide

From the very beginning of *Stay With Me*, it's clear that Yejide's life is defined by profound psychological wounds that originate in her childhood and stubbornly resurface in her adult life. She is a woman haunted by what's missing, the mother she never knew, the unconditional love she never received, and later, the children she cannot carry to term. Freud's idea that our earliest experiences lay the groundwork for our unconscious mind gives us a valuable lens for understanding Yejide's emotional turmoil. That initial, foundational loss of her mother sets the stage for a lifelong melancholia, where her sense of self-worth becomes inextricably linked to her ability to fix that original loss or find a replacement for it. She states

I believed I was Moomi's favourite daughter-in-law. As a child, it was expected that I

would call my stepmothers Moomi, even my father encouraged me to, but I refused. I stuck to calling them Mama. And whenever my father was not around, some of the women would slap me just because I refused to honour them by calling them 'my mother'. I did not refuse because I was being stubborn or trying to defy them as a number of them concluded. My mother had become an obsession for me, a religion, and the very thought of referring to another woman as Mother seemed sacrilegious, a betrayal of the woman who had given up her life for me to live(P 45)

The circumstances of Yejide's birth and her mother's death leave her with a heavy burden of guilt and an unconscious tendency to identify with loss. Her father's frequent admonition, "Yejide, love is like a test," frames her mother's death as a cautionary tale about the perils of emotional attachment. This isn't just a passing comment; it becomes a core belief that shapes her entire approach to love, teaching her that it is something conditional, something to be earned through suffering and perseverance. In Freudian terms, this is the superego at work: the internalized voices of her father and stepmothers become a harsh, internal judge, constantly pressuring her to meet an impossible standard, even if it means sacrificing her own well-being.

When Yejide marries Akin and confronts infertility, this old childhood wound is violently reopened. Her desperate need for a child is more than just a response to social or marital pressure; it is a deep, psychic attempt to fill the void left by her own mother. Freud called this a "repetition compulsion" the unconscious, almost frantic need to reenact a past trauma in a futile attempt to somehow master it or get it right this time. Every failed pregnancy and every

miscarriage is not just a new tragedy, but a cruel echo of that first, fundamental loss. Her body literally becomes the stage where this unconscious grief performs, translating profound psychological pain into tangible, physical suffering.

We see this repressed grief erupt in moments of complete physical and emotional collapse. After one particularly devastating loss, she admits,

I did not feel better. I would not feel better for a very long time. Already, I was coming undone, like a hastily tied scarf coming loose (P 21).

This powerful image perfectly captures the Freudian concept that repressed emotions don't vanish; they return as symptoms. To "come undone" is to experience the disintegration of the self under the weight of grief that has never been properly processed. Her sadness is not just in her mind, it is psychosomatic, a clear example of how the unconscious can use the body as an outlet for expression.

This internal turmoil also profoundly shapes her relationships with other women, like her mother-in-law, Moomi, and the new wife introduced into her marriage. Her interactions are characterized by projection and splitting two classic Freudian defense mechanisms. She consistently perceives these women as walking reminders of her own failure or as direct threats to her value.

She states

I did not feel like going to work because I was not ready for another confrontation

with Funmi. It was clear to me that she would not stop showing up at the salon (P 43).

This is projection in its purest form: Yejide takes the anger and disappointment she feels toward herself and directs it outward onto them. So, when Moomi says, “A good mother’s life is hard,” Yejide doesn't hear a general observation; she hears a personal indictment that mirrors her own deepest fears of inadequacy. Her fury at Moomi is, at its core, the fury she feels toward herself, redirected to protect a fragile and crumbling sense of self.

2.4 Psychoanalytic Reading of Akin

While Yejide's psychological battle is fought in the open arena of loss and grief, Akin's war takes place in the shadows on a private struggle built on secrecy, guilt, and the deep-seated fear that he is not enough. Through Akin, Adébáyò gives us a heartbreaking look at the psychological toll of masculinity in a society that measures a man's value by his ability to father children. Akin's anxiety about parenthood and his choice to conceal his infertility aren't just moral missteps or social failures; they're symptoms of the unconscious civil war Freud described between the id, ego, and superego. His genuine love for Yejide, his terror of public shame, and his buried feelings of inadequacy collide, creating a psychological crisis that fuels the novel's tragic momentum.

When Akin was first introduced , he presents himself as the rational, devoted husband. He declares,

I loved Yejide from the very first moment. No doubt about that. But there are things even love can't do. Before I got married, I believed love could do anything. I learned soon enough that it couldn't bear the weight of four years without children. (P 23).

On the surface, this sounds reasonable, but it's actually a classic example of rationalization, a defense mechanism where the ego creates a seemingly logical excuse to cover up an uncomfortable truth. Akin uses the abstract idea of love's limitations to hide from the specific, shameful reality of his own infertility. He desperately wants to believe their problem is philosophical rather than physical, because admitting the truth would mean confronting his own perceived failure as a man.

This repression leads him to the novel's most devastating deception: the secret plan to have his brother, Tunde, impregnate Yejide. Freud warned that when we bury an unacceptable truth, it doesn't just disappear. It resurfaces in twisted and destructive forms. Akin's inability to be honest about his infertility transforms into a betrayal that ultimately shatters the very relationship he was trying to save. In a painful twist of psychological projection, he often dismisses Yejide as being too emotional or irrational. In reality, he's projecting his own sense of masculine failure onto her, accusing her of the very instability he feels inside but cannot acknowledge.

Akin's psyche is utterly dominated by what Freud called the superego, the internalized voice of societal rules and moral authority. In his case, this voice echoes with Yoruba cultural expectations that tie a man's identity to his ability to produce heirs. He has so completely absorbed this norm that it becomes an absolute command, creating a brutal conflict between

his ego (the part of him that genuinely loves Yejide) and his superego (the part that demands he conform to social ideals at any cost). This internal tug-of-war explains why he lives a double life, constantly torn between authentic love and destructive deception. His outward composure is just a mask for what Freud termed the "return of the repressed" the deep psychic anxiety that his secret will be exposed.

As the story unfolds, the weight of this secret becomes unbearable, creating emotional distance, relentless guilt, and profound exhaustion. When the truth finally erupts, the resulting storm of anger and grief is that "return of the repressed" in its purest form. The unconscious truth he worked so hard to bury violently breaks through his psychological defenses, and the carefully constructed harmony of his life shatters. He learns the hard way that you cannot hide from what you refuse to confront.

Akin also exhibits what Freud called disavowal. It is a state of knowing and not knowing at the same time. He understands on some level that his deception is wrong, yet he convinces himself it's a necessary evil. He exists in the impossible space between his love for Yejide and his terror of societal shame, unable to fully commit to either truth. This psychological splitting allows him to function temporarily, but the cost is a fragmented sense of self, resulting in overwhelming guilt and self-punishment. This explains his later feeling of profound emptiness and his poignant admission that

If the burden is too much and stays too long, even love bends, cracks, comes close to breaking and sometimes does break.(P 23).

The "burden" he describes isn't just external pressure; it's the crushing internal weight of his own guilt. We can also understand Akin's guilt through Freud's concept of melancholia. Unlike Yejide, who turns her sadness inward as self-blame, Akin's guilt manifests as a need to control and manipulate the situation. He tries to "fix" things through elaborate schemes rather than through emotional honesty, which only deepens the damage. His ultimate sense of failure feels like a punishment from his own merciless superego, which acts as an internal judge and jury, condemning him for his transgressions. His breakdown represents not only the end of his marriage but the victory of this unforgiving internal critic.

Perhaps most tragically, Akin's behavior shows signs of what Freud termed the death drive (Thanatos), an unconscious impulse toward repetition and self-destruction. Even as he witnesses the carnage his lies create, he continues to withhold the full truth, trapped in the same cycles of avoidance. This repetition compulsion reveals a psyche that would rather relive its trauma than risk the vulnerability of true change.

In the end, Akin's story is a powerful demonstration of how repression and guilt can eat away at love from the inside. His silence, which began as a misguided attempt to protect Yejide, becomes the very poison that destroys their trust. His psychological defenses ultimately crumble under the combined weight of cultural expectations and the undeniable truth he tried to bury. By the novel's conclusion, he is a ghost of a man haunted less by society's judgment than by the enemy within his own mind.

CHAPTER THREE

**PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF LOVE, BETRAYAL, REPRESSION AND
UNFORGIVINGNESS IN AYÒBÁMI ADÉBÁYÒ'S *STAY WITH ME*.**

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel, Ayòbámi Adébáyò *Stay with Me*, explores the unspoken dynamics of an unhappy marriage. Beneath the surface level of the issues facing Yejide and Akin lies the unconscious desires, fears and unresolved hurts which ultimately dictate the decisions made by both characters. The novel takes place within the complex world of a very traditional Nigerian society and it highlights the struggles faced by this young couple when confronted with the challenges of infertility, social pressures and painful secret revelations. Although the novel can be interpreted in many ways including gender and cultural analysis, a psychoanalytic reading provides a closer look at the silent internal battles of each character that drive all of their actions.

The major themes of love, betrayal, repression and unforgiveness are all manifestations of the unconscious mind and provide a unique perspective into the deep psychological battle of Yejide and Akin. According to Freud, the unconscious mind operates through repression, projection, melancholy and ultimately that which is suppressed will eventually resurface. Therefore, these concepts offer a solid basis for examining the behaviors and motivations of Yejide and Akin as two people who find themselves caught between their love and resentment towards one another and the comfort of deception versus the pain of honesty, and the potential for forgiveness versus the harsh realities of punishing oneself.

Thus, Chapter 3 will explore *Stay with Me* from a psychoanalytic perspective and focus on

the manner in which the themes of love, betrayal, repression and unforgiveness clearly illustrate unconscious conflict. In doing so, Chapter 3 will demonstrate that Adébáyò presents her characters as individuals who are victimized by the expectations of their society and further by their own inner worlds haunted by unresolved anguish and motivated by emotional needs that they themselves do not completely understand.

3.2 PSYCHOANALYSIS IN LOVE: THE STORY OF STAY WITH ME

Yejide, in the novel *Stay with Me*, has no easy time of love. It is shown to have great ability to give us reason for living but can bring much sadness and loss. Yejide's entire view of love is shaped by the lack of love in her youth. When she lost her mother at birth and grew up with many step-mothers whom she reminded them of her mother, they did not want anything to do with her or show her love. Therefore, she learned that love is based on being worthy of receiving it. As well, Yejide's father emotionally distanced himself from her when she was young so she could not rely on either parent to give her love. Object Relations, a concept developed by Sigmund Freud, is the way our first two or three years of life develop into how we will love others as adults. Therefore, Yejide's need for love in adulthood is a result of trying to fix the childhood wounds that were created by the lack of love that she experienced. When Yejide married Akin, she finally felt like she would be able to receive unconditional love. Akin provided Yejide with the stable and loving relationship that she never had. Yejide states,

Akin was my beginning and my end. Before him, I had not known what it meant to be

truly seen.(p 13)

What Yejide is saying is that Akin represented a great deal to her. He was not simply her husband. He symbolized the love and acceptance of her mother that she lacked throughout her childhood. Yejide's attachment to Akin was not simply because he was her husband. She was attached to him because he represented a means of repairing some of the damage that occurred to her during her formative years.

Yet love in the world of *Stay With Me* is never just a private matter. It's constantly shaped and strained by social forces. In Yoruba culture, a marriage is considered incomplete without children. When Yejide struggles to conceive, the love that once held her and Akin together begins to fracture under the weight of this expectation. For Yejide, motherhood becomes more than a desire, it becomes proof of her worth and the solidity of Akin's love. She thinks,

If a child would make them leave us alone, then I would do anything to have one. (P 25)

Here, love transforms into obsession and to an unconscious drive to heal old emotional wounds through the achievement of motherhood.

Yejide's experience of love is far from the idealized romantic fantasy. It's tangled with fear, anxiety, and desperation. Her love for Akin becomes a project of emotional survival. We see in her actions what Freud termed "repetition compulsion" which is the unconscious urge to reenact painful experiences in an attempt to finally master them. Even when her efforts lead to heartbreak, Yejide continues to give more of herself, and this pattern makes her love self-destructive, rooted in a need she can't fully articulate.

Other characters further complicate Yejide's understanding of love. Akin's mother, Moomi, claims to love her son, yet expresses it through control and interference. Believing she is protecting his marriage, she arranges for a second wife, Funmi, to be brought in an act of "love" that ultimately shatters the couple's intimacy. Moomi's love is possessive, reflecting Freud's observation that love often contains elements of aggression and the desire to dominate. For Yejide, this is just another lesson that love in her world is conditional, transactional, and often manipulative.

Her stepmothers, too, represent a distorted form of love. Their coldness and rejection reinforce her deep-seated belief that she is unworthy of being loved. This emotional history makes Yejide's love for her own children, when she finally has them, overwhelmingly intense. She tries to give them the nurturing she never received, and when her first child dies, her grief is unbearable.

The house was silent, but I could still hear my baby crying in my head, (P 45)

she says. This haunting isn't just sorrow, it shows how love, when built on unresolved trauma, can tip into madness. The child was not just a baby, but a symbol of Yejide's hope, and losing him feels like losing herself all over again.

Akin's understanding of love is equally fraught. He loves Yejide deeply, yet he is imprisoned by patriarchal expectations that tie his masculinity to his ability to father children. His love becomes entangled with shame and pride. Freud's concept of the superego the internalized voice of cultural and moral authority helps explain Akin's inner conflict. The demands of his

culture push him to fulfill his role as a man, even if it means betraying the woman he loves.

He tells himself,

I loved Yejide from the very first moment. No doubt about that. But there are things even love can't do.(P 23)

This is a clear case of rationalization, a defense mechanism that lets him justify harmful actions to ease his own guilt.

In the end, Adébáyò presents love as both healing and destructive. It can bring profound joy and connection, but it also exposes the fragile, conflicted nature of the human psyche. Through Yejide and Akin, the novel shows that love, when mixed with fear and social pressure, becomes a psychological battleground. In *Stay with Me*, love is never just affection, it's a complex force shaped by repression, loss, and a longing that can never fully be satisfied.

3.3 BETRAYAL AS PSYCHIC CONFLICT AND PROJECTION

Betrayal is one of the strongest emotional undercurrents in *Stay with Me*. It takes multiple forms between husband and wife, between family members, and even between individuals and their own values. In a psychoanalytic sense, betrayal arises when a person's conscious values clash with their unconscious desires, producing guilt, secrecy, and projection.

Akin's betrayal of Yejide is the most devastating one. His inability to father a child becomes his greatest secret. Instead of confessing, he projects the problem onto Yejide, allowing her to carry the shame of childlessness. He hides behind deception, arranging for his brother Dotun

to impregnate her while pretending that the child is his. This is not just a moral betrayal but a psychological one. Freud's concept of projection explains Akin's behaviour which he attributes his own weakness to Yejide, making her bear the burden of his inadequacy. He tells himself that it is for love, but beneath that is fear, the fear of rejection, fear of social ridicule, and fear of losing control.

When Yejide discovers the truth, her sense of reality collapses. She says,

I stood there, unable to breathe, unable to think. Everything I believed in began to fall apart.(P 193)

The betrayal reawakens her deepest fear of being unloved and deceived. It also triggers her past trauma of abandonment, showing how the unconscious mind links present pain with earlier wounds. Her psychological breakdown is the return of the repressed emotions she has long for buried in anger, fear, and grief to come flooding back.

Moomi's role in the betrayal is equally significant. She disguises manipulation as love when she brings another woman, Funmi, into Akin's home. Her action undermines Yejide's dignity and destroys her sense of belonging. Freud would describe this as ambivalent love, a love that contains hidden hostility. Moomi believes she is acting out of care, but unconsciously, she is asserting dominance over her son's marriage. Her "solution" leads to greater chaos.

Funmi's entrance into the family is also tragic. She becomes both a victim and a participant in the web of deceit. Akin's manipulation drags her into a situation where love turns fatal. Later in the story, Yejide learns of Funmi's death, allegedly by Akin's hand. This act, whether

symbolic or literal, signifies the destructive outcome of repression and guilt. Akin's bottled-up emotions, shame, anger, and fear explodes into violence. Freud observed that suppressed aggression often returns through destructive acts. Akin's betrayal of both women Yejide and Funmi, thus becomes an external expression of his internal conflict.

Yejide also experiences betrayal from her own family. When she faces childlessness, instead of receiving empathy, she is mocked and pressured. Her father's house becomes a place of emotional alienation rather than comfort. She recalls how her stepmothers blamed her for everything, even for her mother's death. The lack of love from her own family leaves her vulnerable in her marriage. The betrayal from those closest to her reinforces her belief that she must earn love through suffering. When she finally breaks down, it is not only because of Akin's deceit but because every betrayal reactivates the original wound of rejection.

Throughout the novel, betrayal functions as both a plot device and a psychological pattern. The characters deceive not because they are inherently evil but because they are driven by fear. Akin lies to avoid shame. Moomi interferes out of misguided love. Yejide herself, at some point, hides truths to protect her sanity. These actions are all forms of repression and projection which is a defence mechanisms that Freud identified as central to human behaviour.

Adébáyò portrays betrayal as contagious to one's act of deceit leads to another, spreading pain across generations. The emotional aftermath is devastating, as trust collapses and love turns into resentment. The psychoanalytic insight here is that betrayal is not simply an external act but rather, reflects an inner betrayal of the conflict between what one desires and what one believes is right. Akin betrays Yejide because he has already betrayed himself by

living in denial of his truth.

3.4 UNFORGIVENESS AS REPRESSED EMOTION

Unforgiveness in *Stay with Me* is the natural outcome of love and betrayal. It grows from the inability to process pain and guilt. Freud believed that when grief or anger is not resolved, it becomes internalized, transforming into self-punishment or emotional paralysis of what he called melancholia. Both Yejide and Akin exhibit this condition in different ways.

For Yejide, unforgiveness is a form of survival. The magnitude of the betrayal she experiences makes forgiveness almost impossible. She says,

I cannot forgive him. Not for what he did to me. Not for what he took from me. (P 275)

Her statement carries the weight of loss, not only of her marriage but of her identity and sanity. The pain of losing her children, coupled with the deceit that surrounded their births, leaves a scar that cannot heal. Freud would describe her condition as the return of the repressed, the emotional pain she tries to bury keeps resurfacing, making forgiveness impossible.

Yejide's inability to forgive is also a way of protecting herself. Having been betrayed repeatedly by her husband, her mother-in-law, and even her family, she builds emotional walls. Yet, these walls do not bring peace. Instead, they trap her in bitterness and guilt. Her grief becomes self-destructive. She blames herself for her children's deaths, even though she is a victim. Her unforgiveness therefore transforms into internalized anger. Freud's notion of

melancholia explains this: when anger toward others cannot be expressed, it turns inward and becomes self-hatred.

Akin's form of unforgiveness is quieter but equally destructive. He is tormented by guilt and shame. He cannot forgive himself for lying to Yejide and for the death that followed. He lives with the psychological burden of his actions, unable to face the full truth. His silence and withdrawal show repression at work. He buries his guilt deep in his unconscious. Yet, the repression does not free him; it manifests as emotional numbness and loss of self-respect. His punishment is internal.

The connection between love, betrayal, and unforgiveness becomes clear in the final sections of the novel. The same love that bound Yejide and Akin becomes the source of their deepest wounds. Their inability to forgive each other is the tragic result of too much repression. They cannot revisit the past without reopening the pain, so they choose distance. However, emotional distance is not healing, it is another form of denial.

Adébáyò uses their separation to demonstrate how unforgiveness sustains the cycle of suffering. When emotions are not confronted, they remain alive in the unconscious, shaping future behaviour. Even after many years, when Yejide and Akin meet again, the past still lingers. The repressed returns, as Freud would say, not as resolution but as haunting memory. The couple's tragedy lies in the fact that they loved deeply but lacked the emotional tools to process their pain.

Unforgiveness in *Stay with Me* therefore operates on both a personal and symbolic level. Personally, it represents the inner imprisonment caused by repressed grief and guilt. Symbolically, it reflects a society that encourages silence and endurance rather than

emotional honesty. Yejide's suffering is not just individual; it mirrors the psychological cost of living in a culture where appearances matter more than truth. Through her, Adébáyò shows that unforgiveness is not strength but a continuation of trauma and a refusal of healing disguised as survival.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICAN LITERATURE THROUGH A PSYCHOANALYTIC LENS

4.1 Psychoanalytic Framework and Its Relevance to African Literature

Psychoanalysis, as introduced by Sigmund Freud, remains one of the most crucial frameworks for exploring human behavior and mental processes. Freud's theories about the structure of the mind which are the id, ego, and superego, which provides the foundation for understanding how hidden desires and internal conflicts influence human action. The id represents natural drives such as pleasure, sex, and aggression. The ego tries to balance the unrealistic desires of the id and the repression of reality, while the superego embodies moral and social standards. Together, they create the complex mix of human motivation and behavior. Freud further proposed that much of human behavior is driven by repressed desires that exist within the unconscious, influencing individuals in ways they may not even recognize (Freud 15–26).

In literary studies, psychoanalytic theory provides a deep interpretation of the inner worlds of characters, showing that human actions are not always guided by logic but often by unconscious fears and desires. While psychoanalysis originated in the West, it has found deep relevance within African literature, where emotional expression and moral conflict are often tied to social and cultural lifestyles. African writers, including Ayobami Adebayo, explore not only societal issues but also the inner struggles that shape the actions of their characters. This makes African literature a great study for psychoanalytic interpretation.

Freud's theories have been explored by scholars like Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan, whose contributions expand our understanding of the psyche. Klein's theory emphasizes how

early relationships shape adult emotions, while Lacan reinterprets Freud through language, suggesting that human identity is constructed through desire and lack (Lacan 91). When applied to African narratives, these ideas portray the tension between personal identity and cultural expectations. In societies like Nigeria, where community norms, gender roles, and family reputation carry immense weight, so individuals often experience internal conflict between personal desires and moral expectations that aligns closely with Freud's concepts of repression and guilt.

Psychoanalysis, therefore, allows African readers and critics to move beyond surface-level storytelling and uncover the hidden psychological forces driving characters' behavior. In *Stay With Me*, for instance, Ayobami Adebayo uses the marital struggles of Yejide and Akin not only to comment on infertility and gender but also to explore repressed desires, ego conflict, and emotional struggles. This perspective connects Western psychological theory with African cultural consciousness, proving that African literature can be both socially relevant and psychologically profound.

4.2 The Consequences of Desire, Ego, and Repression in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me*

Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* is a deep psychological exploration of love, marriage, desire, and the human cost of repression. The novel presents Yejide and Akin as two individuals caught between their id-driven desires and superego-imposed obligations, struggling to maintain balance through the ego, but the struggles lead to pain and tragedy. Freud's theory of the mind becomes an essential tool for understanding the psychological

depth of their suffering and the tragic consequences of their internal conflicts.

For Yejide, desire operates both as an emotional longing and as a social necessity. Her greatest desire is to have a child which becomes an obsession that consumes her consciousness. This longing reflects the id, driven by the natural and cultural instincts for reproduction and acceptance. However, her inability to conceive triggers deep repression and self-blame. In one of the most haunting moments of the novel, Yejide says,

I was barren. I was the woman who had killed her children before they could be born (P 54).

This interview of failure reveals how repression can distract one's sense of self, leading to guilt and self-punishment.

The ego in Yejide's psyche struggles to balance her subconscious need for motherhood with the reality of infertility and social pressure. She becomes trapped between her id's longing for fulfillment and her superego's absorbed cultural expectation that defines womanhood through childbearing. This conflict causes her to have an emotional breakdown, particularly when she begins to believe in the prophetic goat ritual and later when she imagines breastfeeding a non-existent child. Such episodes represent the breakdown of her ego's control under the weight of repression.

Akin, on the other hand, portrays another form of repression which is the repression of truth and masculinity. His inability to father children becomes the secret that drives the entire narrative. Rather than confront his infertility, Akin succumbs to fear and guilt, allowing his

mother to manipulate him into accepting a second wife, Funmi. This decision reflects both his ego's compromise and his superego's submission to cultural expectations of manhood. As he confesses later,

It was my fault. I should have told her the truth (P 223)

His repression of truth becomes a defense mechanism of denial and protecting his fragile ego from societal shame.

The consequences of these repressions and desires are devastating. Akin's deception leads to the unraveling of their marriage, the death of children, and psychological trauma that neither of them fully recovers from. Yejide's descent into grief and isolation can be read as the ultimate result of a repressed psyche unable to reconcile her desires with her reality. The love that once united them becomes corrupted by betrayal and loss. The tragedy is not just social but psychological, an internal collapse brought about by the dominance of repressed emotions.

Through these characters, Adebayo exposes how cultural norms can intensify psychological repression. Akin's lies, Yejide's emotional withdrawal, and Funmi's anger all started from a struggle between individual desire and collective morality. Freud's framework thus provides a means to understand how personal feelings and the culture mix together, shaping the tragic outcomes of their lives.

In broader terms, the novel becomes a mirror of the African experience, where individuals often suppress their personal truths to meet societal expectations. Yejide's and Akin's internal

battles are reflections of the larger human struggle for self-expression within restrictive environments. Their tragedy reminds readers that repression, when left unresolved, leads not only to emotional breakdown but also to the distortion of love, identity, and family bonds.

4.3 Psychoanalysis, Culture, and the Growth of African Literature

Applying psychoanalytic theory to African literature opens a fresh perspective for interpreting human behavior within a cultural framework. African societies often emphasize communal values, moral discipline, and social rules which correspond to the Freudian superego. In contrast, the id, with its desire for freedom and individual fulfillment, is often suppressed in favor of societal harmony. The tension between these two forces forms the psychological core of many African narratives.

In *Stay with Me*, Adebayo redefines African womanhood through Yejide's experience of love, repression, and survival. By tracing her internal conflict, the novel allows readers to see the psychological cost of patriarchy and infertility, issues that are culturally visible but psychologically unspoken. Through psychoanalytic reading, African literature gains a deeper voice, one that acknowledges emotional realities beyond culture and politics .

Moreover, psychoanalysis helps uncover the emotional truth behind African storytelling. While African literature has traditionally been analyzed through postcolonial, feminist, or sociological lenses, a psychoanalytic approach adds a human dimension and it reveals what characters feel but cannot say. It exposes the repressed traumas behind silence, the guilt behind obedience, and the desire behind conformity. For instance, Yejide's breakdown is not merely a feminist act of rebellion; it is the outburst of the unconscious which is a universal

psychological response shaped by specifically African circumstances.

This perspective also contributes to the growth of African literature by changing how psychology itself is seen. Though, psychoanalysis originated from the West, it becomes transformed when applied to African contexts. It reveals that African characters experience the same inner conflicts as Western ones, though mediated through culture, religion, and community. In this sense, Adebayo's novel exemplifies how African writers can normalize the human condition without losing cultural specificity.

In the classroom and in literary criticism, psychoanalytic readings of African texts encourage students and scholars to engage more deeply with character psychology. They highlight how issues such as infertility, gender roles, and family expectations are not just cultural but also mental and emotional experiences. This shift enriches African literary criticism, opening new pathways for understanding not just what African writers say, but why their characters feel and act as they do.

At its core, the psychoanalytic approach to African literature affirms that human emotions which is love, betrayal, guilt, and repression are not bound by geography. They are universal forces expressed through local realities. By analyzing works like *Stay with Me*, readers are reminded that the African psyche is complex, vibrant, and worthy of deep exploration. Psychoanalysis thus becomes not an imposition but a bridge connecting the universal human mind with the everyday lifestyle.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This research explored Ayòbámi Adébáyò's *Stay with Me* using a psychoanalytic approach, which focus closely on how the emotions and choices of the characters expose their inner psychological struggles, such as repression and desire, ego conflict and unconscious motivation.

Chapter One stated the main aim of the work, which was to find out how hidden emotions and suppressed desires shape the behavior and fate of the characters in Adébáyò's novel. The study focused only on *Stay with Me* and adopted a qualitative, interpretative method that relied on close reading and detailed analysis of the text. The theories of Sigmund Freud, particularly his ideas about the id, ego, and superego together with defense mechanisms like repression, projection, and displacement, formed the study's guiding framework.

From the review of related studies, it was discovered that *Stay with Me* has mostly been discussed from feminist and sociocultural angles. However, very few scholars have tried to interpret it from a psychoanalytic point of view. This makes the current study different, as it uses Freud's theory to dig deeper into the novel's emotional and psychological layers.

Chapter Two used this psychoanalytic approach to look closely at the two main characters, Yejide and Akin. It explained how repression and unspoken desires affect their marriage and sense of identity. Yejide's deep wish for a child, shaped by her society and culture, comes across as both a personal longing and a reaction to the pressure placed on her as a woman.

Akin's hidden struggle with infertility, on the other hand, exposes the tension between being honest with himself and living up to the traditional idea of masculinity that his family and culture expect.

Their actions are not just moral mistakes; they come from bottled-up emotions and psychological defense mechanisms they aren't even fully aware of.

Chapter Three then turned to love, betrayal, and forgiveness, showing how these themes work as psychological struggles in *Stay with Me*. Adébáyò presents love not as something simple or pure, but as a place where desire, ego, and repression constantly clash. Yejide's idea of love becomes mixed up with her need for acceptance and wholeness which shatters and breaks apart when Akin betrays her and Funmi enters their lives. Betrayal, in this sense, isn't just an act of deceit, it mirrors the characters' hidden fears and insecurities. Their inability to forgive, meanwhile, reflects emotions they've buried for too long in pain and resentment that eventually destroy what's left of their relationship.

Chapter Four took the discussion further by connecting the novel's focus on psychology with everyday realities in African life. It explained that Freud's ideas of things like repression, desire, and inner conflict, don't just apply to individuals but also reflect the social tensions found in African communities. Reading African literature through a psychoanalytic lens, therefore, opens up a new way of seeing it. It lets us look beyond political or cultural issues to understand the quiet emotions, fears, and contradictions that shape people's choices. In this way, *Stay with Me* shows that African stories are not only about society or history, but also about the private emotional worlds that exist within them.

Looking at the study as a whole, *Stay with Me* comes across as more than a story about

marriage or infertility. It's really about the human mind, how love, pain, repression, and hidden emotions shape people's lives. The research also proves that psychoanalysis can serve as a bridge between psychology and literature, giving readers a deeper understanding of what it means to live, feel, and struggle within an African setting.

5.2 Conclusion

From the psychoanalytic study of Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me*, it is clear that the novel's power lies in its deep portrayal of human psychology under the weight of cultural expectation and emotional repression. Through the struggles of Yejide and Akin, Adebayo presents characters whose actions are shaped more by unconscious fears and desires than by reason or morality. Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego are visibly at play with Yejide's yearning for a child is driven by her id, her most subconscious desire for fulfillment and acceptance, her ego tries to rationalize this desire through her marriage and sacrifices, while her superego, formed by societal norms and her mother-in-law's expectations, continually judges her and pushes her into guilt and self-blame. Similarly, Akin's deception stems from repression into his inability to confront his impotence leads him to create false realities, displacing his shame and fear onto Yejide.

The novel thus captures how repression and denial, when left unresolved, can lead to self-destruction and the breakdown of relationships. The death of Yejide's children and the collapse of her marriage are symbolic consequences of emotional suppression of the ultimate cost of unspoken pain. By the end of the novel, both Yejide and Akin are victims of their unconscious, unable to forgive themselves or each other. This shows that unforgiveness is not

only moral but psychological, rooted in the inability to release repressed emotions.

In the larger context of African literature, *Stay With Me* shows that psychoanalytic theory is not foreign to African storytelling. The novel demonstrates that African writers also explore the subconscious through symbols, silence, memory, and emotional conflict. While earlier African texts often focused on social, political, and colonial themes, modern African writers like Ayobami Adebayo reveal the psychological dimensions of everyday African life. This reflects a maturing of African literature with one that now embraces both the outer and inner worlds of human existence. The application of psychoanalysis to African texts helps readers understand not only cultural pressure but also how individuals psychologically respond to those pressures.

Therefore, this study concludes that a psychoanalytic approach to African literature, using Freud's theory of the unconscious, repression, and desires, provides deeper insight into character behavior, emotional trauma, and cultural conflict. It connects Western psychological theory and African lived experience, proving that the human mind, though culturally shaped, operates through universal patterns of emotion and repression.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. To Literary Critics and Scholars:

Scholars of African literature should adopt psychoanalytic criticism more frequently as a complementary tool alongside cultural and feminist readings. It allows for a fuller understanding of character behavior and emotional depth in African narratives. By integrating

psychoanalysis, critics can explore the hidden dimensions of trauma, guilt, repression, and identity within African storytelling.

2. To Writers and Creative Artists:

African writers should continue to represent psychological realism in their works, portraying characters with internal struggles, contradictions, and desires. This helps readers relate to literature on a personal and emotional level, promoting empathy and deeper cultural reflection. Authors can also use psychoanalytic symbolism and dreams, and memory, silence to enrich their creative expression.

3. To Readers and the General Society:

Readers should learn from Yejide and Akin's experience that unresolved emotional wounds, secrets, and unforgiveness have destructive consequences. Society must also learn to reduce the social pressures, especially on women regarding childbirth and marriage that contribute to emotional trauma. Love and forgiveness should be understood not as weaknesses but as healing forces that restore balance to both individual and communal life.

4. To Academia and Research Institutions:

Departments of English and Literature, especially in Nigerian universities, should encourage students to explore psychoanalytic literary criticism within African contexts. Workshops, conferences, and seminars could help build new frameworks for studying African texts through the lens of human psychology.

In essence, *Stay with Me* teaches that behind every social issue lies a psychological story. Through love, betrayal, and repression, Adebayo reminds readers that emotional health and forgiveness are vital to human wholeness. This study therefore recommends continuous

engagement between African literature and psychoanalytic theory to promote not only literary depth but also societal understanding.

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