

## **PSYCHIC TENSIONS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN WINTON'S CLOUDSTREET**

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### **Abstract**

This research attempts to expose the journey of psychic tensions of Sam, Dolly and Rose, three of the main characters in Cloudstreet. In this regard, the researcher analyzes the causes of psychic tensions that are experienced by those main characters. The researcher uses the descriptive qualitative method. The purpose of using this method is to make a description of the investigated topics systematically with the psychoanalytical approach of Klein's and Winnicott's Object Relation Theory (Mother-Child Interactional Conceptualization). By using the mother-child concepts the researcher attempts to see how the characters develop their selves through their relationship inside the family, primarily with the mother. From the analysis, it can be concluded that Sam lacks confidence, Dolly lacks self-esteem and lacks emotional attachment, and last, Rose lacks confidence and is frustrated. Each of their psychic tensions affects their behaviours in adulthood. Sam becomes lazy to find a job and only entrusts his entire life to luck, Dolly is addicted to sex and hates women, and Rose hates her mother very much and loves books. The researcher finds that the root cause of psychic tensions and idiosyncratic behaviours of Sam, Dolly, and Rose is the result of an unsatisfying relationship between mother and children in their early childhood. Therefore, their unsatisfying relationship with their mother affects their behaviour in their adulthood.

**Keywords:** Winton, Cloudstreet, Mother-Child Interaction, Psychic Tensions

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most fundamental elements in literary work is the character, especially in prose. The character performs all events or phenomena that occur in the story. Since the character in the story is mostly human, it shows a link between humans in real life and human as subject matter in the story. However, it does not mean that human in real life is the same as human in the story as it has been explained that human or character in literary works is one of the imaginary elements. According to Chomsky (1988:159), literature is one of the most useful media that can be used to

gain psychological knowledge:...we will always learn more about human life and personality from novels than from scientific psychology. In conclusion, it can be considered that the link between the character in the novel and human in real life are both of them experience psychological condition.

To analyze the psychological condition of character, the psychology of literature is the right approach to use because it helps the researcher to explore and analyze characters' feelings, emotions, thoughts and actions which are shown in literary works. Literature benefits from psychology in terms of successfully

presenting characters, expressing mood and bringing the reader into the psychological dimension of human reality (Emir, 2016:49). Therefore the researcher decides to use the psychology of literature approach to analyze the psychological condition of the characters in Winton's *Cloudstreet*.

Among the characters in the novel, the researcher considers that several characters have shown a psychoanalytical reflection such as unconscious emotional lives that are merely expressed through the story directly. Then, it inspires the researcher to trace the journey of psychic tensions of the characters. It is noted that the journey begins by revealing the psychic tensions and their causes by using Klein's and Winnicott's Psychoanalysis Approach.

Klein's and Winnicott's concepts are different from Freud's theory which is often used to analyze literary works, it emphasizes the biological impulses (id, ego, and superego) as a motive for individual behaves. Whereas, Klein's and Winnicott's concepts emphasize a pattern of consistent interaction between mother and child as a motive for individual behaves. They focus on the relationship between an individual and other people as they consider that a person's personality and behaviour can be influenced by the person's relationship with others. Therefore, the interaction between mother and child is very important in shaping the child's behaviour. By using Klein's and Winnicott's psychoanalysis approach the researcher focus on the interaction between three main characters with their mother to trace what kind of psychic tensions are experienced by the character and the causes of their psychic tensions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this research, the researcher uses the psychoanalysis approach and employs Mother-Child Interactional

Conceptualization to analyze *Cloudstreet*. Object Relations Theory or often called as Mother-Child Interactional Conceptualization is a theory that sees the developing child as shaped by early family interaction in the first years, primarily the mother-child relationship or primary caregiver. This theory provides an understanding of the earliest developmental phases of childhood and studies a process of great importance not only for individual personality functioning but also for familial and social adaptation (Slipp, 1984:3).

Several theorists discuss this Mother-Child Interactional Conceptualization. The researcher decides to elaborate some of the most related aspects of the theory with this research. It needs to be noted the aspects are closely tied to the early relations of a child and mother interaction. Therefore, Mother-Child Interactional Conceptualization from Klein's and Winnicott's lens is described as follows.

### a. Klein's Concepts

Klein attempted to describe the earliest mental development of the child, as she considered that the stages are the root of understanding the behaviours and disturbances of older children and adults. There are three main concepts of her earliest mental development of a child in her Mother-Child Interactional Conceptualization. They are Unconscious Phantasy, Projective Identification, and The Paranoid-Schizoid and Depressive Positions. Those concepts are described as follows:

#### 1) Unconscious Phantasy

Klein's significant contribution to this theory is the role of phantasy. In Kleinian theory, unconscious phantasy is the unconscious mental life of a person, considered as primary mental activity, the prime mover and essential for psychological growth and could be used defensively (Spillius in Bronstein, 2001:19-20). She claims that 'instinct' to be merely

another phantasy in the context of the mother-child interaction. Klein sees phantasy as a method the child uses for adaptation, just like myths are employed in primitive cultures (Slipp, 1984: 45). Klein views unconscious phantasy as synonymous with unconscious thought, and that she perhaps used the term 'phantasy' rather than 'thought' because the thought of a child is more imaginative and less rational than common adult thought is supposed to be. She also adds that such thought phantasy is closely linked to physical experience (Spillius in Bronstein, 2001: 21).

According to Slipp (1984: 53), Freud found that unconscious phantasy is shaped by instinctual drives and influences the way the child perceives reality. Normally, phantasy will come closer to external reality through positive feedback. For example, a child who sucks its thumb is enacting the phantasy of feeding. Satisfying experiences are re-enacted internally through phantasies. The child who is not getting the mother's breast will use anything that feels similar to the breast to satisfy himself through his phantasy. However, if the external reality in the family parallels with the child's internal phantasy, then phantasy could not be differentiated from external reality.

## 2) Projective Identification

Projective identification is defined by Grotstein as a mental defence mechanism whereby the self experiences the unconscious phantasy of translocating itself, or aspects of itself into an object for exploratory purposes. Then, the self may believe that through translocation, it can rid itself of unwanted aspects (Slipp, 1984: 44).

As an addition, Krech (in Minderop, 2018:35), states that one obvious way to defend against anxiety arising from failure or guilt is by the projection of the blame onto someone else. For example, imaginatively splitting off and getting rid of

unwanted parts of the self that cause anxiety or pain, projecting the self or parts of the self into an object to dominate and control it and thus avoid any feelings of being separate, getting into an object to take over its capacities and make them its own, invading to damage or destroy the object.

## b. Winnicott's Concept

There are two main concepts of him in this theory. They are Mother-Child Interaction (good-enough mothering) and Transitional Object. These ideas have influenced literary theory. In particular, as Murray Schwartz has shown, Winnicott's concepts enable us to understand how literary work feels 'in here and 'out there.' Therefore, two of his main concepts are described as follows:

### 1) Mother-Child Interaction (good-enough mothering)

Winnicott has noted the importance of the mother-child interaction for the normal growth and development of a child. He is the first to emphasize the effect of early mother-child interaction on personality development. He has been strongly influenced by Klein's work, which focuses on unconscious phantasy and several defence principles as a significant thing to child development (Slipp, 1984:47).

For Winnicott, it is the mother's devoted, responsive sensitivity to the child's needs, which he terms "good enough mothering" that is very important. For example, the child is fed when he is hungry and soothed when he is anxious, and so forth. This concordance creates sufficient essential trust and security for the child to internalize the good mother function (Slipp, 1984:48).

When the mother provides a "holding environment" that contains the child's aggression without retaliation or abandonment, further individuation and separation can occur well. He also proposes the term "holding environment" mother

provides the child during the first few years of life. If the "mothering" is responsive to the child's shifting needs, the child will experience a sense of security, control, and understanding. This facilitates the acquisition of the internal capacity to perform functions previously performed by the parents, such as self-soothing. Soothing refers to the mother's ability to provide emotional and affectional nourishment, comfort, and primary caregiving for the child. If maternal care is not good enough in these regards or if the mother is unresponsive because of absence, ambivalence, rejection, or hostility, the child is unable to internalize essential functions (Slipp. 1984: 47-49).

## 2) Transitional Object

The transitional object is a famous phrase invented by Winnicott refers to an object that the child uses to alleviate the stress of separation from the mother. Such an object can be represented as the mother or other significant objects (Gulerce, 1991: 187). For example, the blankets and stuffed animals enable children to comfort themselves when the mother is absent. Eventually, the child usually develops the ability to "play alone in the presence of its mother," a vital sign of growing confidence in the developing self. At this point, the child begins to be able to relate to the mother as a whole person rather than as an extension of its own needs.

## METHOD

In collecting data, the researcher uses the library research method. It helps the researcher to find out and collect some literature from various researches by reading the articles and theories which are considered relevant to this research. Not only reading the data carefully but also taking important notes to gain relevant data.

In analyzing data, the researcher uses the descriptive qualitative method. The

purpose of using this method is to make a description of the investigated topics systematically. In this research, the researcher focus on the psychic tensions of three main characters as reflected in *Cloudstreet*. Then, the data are analyzed based on Klein's and Winnicott's Psychoanalysis Approach.

This research is started by investigating the words, the narrations, and the dialogues of characters in the novel, which are considered related to the subject matters of this research, which is the psychic tensions of the main characters. Through investigating process, the researcher tries to confirm Klein's and Winnicott's concepts which are unconscious phantasy, projective identification, the paranoid-schizoid and depressive position, mother-child interaction (good enough mothering), and transitional object to see how the characters develop their selves through their relationship inside the family, primarily with the mother. Then, every data related to those concepts are elaborated to reveal the causes of the psychic tensions of the main characters. The last, the researcher interprets all the data by connecting them with mother-child interactional conceptualization.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Findings*

### *The Causes of Psychic Tensions of Main Characters*

#### a. Sam's Lack of Confidence

In *Cloudstreet*, Winton depicts Sam experiences a lack of confidence from time to time. Sam is depicted to have a lack of confidence in his abilities. He continues to be negative in trusting his ability to perform.

Sam Pickles was a fool to get out of bed that day, and he knew it ever after. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 8)

He [Sam] looked at his hands, which were white with work. Every time he looked at them, he knew he was a small man, small enough to be the jockey his father once wanted him to be. What a thing, hoping for smallness in a son. Well, he was small, in more ways than he cared to think about, but Sam never was a jockey. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 10)

From the first quotation above, it can be seen that Sam begins to leave himself less confident and considers that he is a fool every time he starts his day. Then, the following quotation describes that Sam also lacks confidence in his appearance as every time he looks at his hands, he thinks that he is a small man who could not do anything with his hands, even to become a jockey that his father wants him to be. It makes him think that he never could be a big man or in more ways, he could not do anything as a small man.

As the story goes on, Sam keeps showing his lack of confidence in many ways. He seemed to be growing smaller (*Cloudstreet*, 2007:393).

By seeing Sam's lack of self-confidence, the researcher identifies that Sam, who suffers the lack of confidence is the root cause of not getting good-enough mothering in his childhood. The exposure is elaborated through the analysis below. The researcher indicates that Sam does not get good-enough mothering because, through the chapters in the novel, it is difficult to find a story about the relationship between him and his mom. The opportunity for a mother and son activity has never been shown. In contrast, Sam has a very close relationship with his Father, Mary.

Sam had spent his boyhood sharing a bed with the old man [his father]. Sam's mother slept in the narrow child's bed in the next room. She was a simple, clean, gloomy woman, much younger than her husband. Even as a boy, he barely thought about her.

She was good to him, but she suffered for her lifelong inability to be a man. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 11)

This quotation explains that Sam's relationship with his mother is not close. The researcher considers that Sam does not experience warm, intimate, and continuous contact with his mother. Therefore she is not memorable for Sam. Moreover, it is quite surprising that Sam's mother has a desire to be a man. In contrast to his relationship with his mother, Sam has a very close relationship with his father. They even share the same bed, whereas the mother sleeps on a different bed in the next room. From the quotation above, it can be concluded that Sam spends most of his childhood with his father.

As a result of their close relationship, the development of Sam, mainly Sam's unconscious phantasy, is hardly influenced by him. Sam inherits his father's traits and behaviours, especially the notion of luck or they prefer to call it as Shifty Shadow.

Sam's father Merv had been a water diviner. He was a soft, sentimental sort of man, and he never beat Sam. Sam followed him, loved him, listened to him talk. He believed deeply in luck, and he called it the shifty shadow of God. All his life he paid close attention to the movements of that shadow. He taught Sam to see it passing, feel it hovering, because he said it was those shifts that governed a man's life and it always paid to be ahead of the play. If the chill of its shade felt good, you went out to meet it like a droughted farmer goes out, arms wide, to greet the raincloud, but if you got that sick, queer feeling in your belly, you had to stay put and do nothing but breathe and there was a good chance it would pass you by. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 10-11)

From the quotation above the researcher believes that Mery has a significant influence on Sam's unconscious phantasy related to the notion of Luck or Shifty Shadow. The idea of a man's life is being controlled by luck is passed down to him. Since Mery believes deeply in luck and always pays close attention to the movements of the shadow, Sam becomes familiar with that kind of thing since he always spends his time with him. Without realizing the effect, the unconscious phantasy of Sam is working to recognize the Shifty Shadow. Especially, Mery himself teaches Sam to see how it works on him. He even says to Sam that the shadows govern a man's life. It is troublesome for a little Sam because he only can receive the notion without any further thinking about that. Eventually, he takes it and put it deeply in his mind that everything he wants to do must be based on luck.

#### **b. Dolly's Lack of Self-Esteem and Lack of Emotional Attachment to Women**

Dolly is considered to have low self-esteem and having no dignity because she does not feel shame to seduce men with her persona, takes great pleasure in a relationship with men, and even enjoys the unplanned and casual physicality of sex with them. Her low self-esteem is more depicted in several moments when she tries to seduce men.

Dolly had to keep up the wit, the sass, the fun; she was singing for her supper, alright. She'd be happy, crack jokes, catch blokes looking her way. When they came her way she'd have a snappy line for them, she'd knock their hats sideways and shriek when their palms stung her backside on the way past. The blokes behind the bar always had a good word for her. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 152)

Dolly comes across, takes his cup, and kisses him [Lester Lamb]. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 245)

Dolly Pickles sits frightening a group of young men with the kind of jokes she knows, and asks her to dance. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 321)

The quotations above are the depictions of Dolly having low self-esteem. Some parts of the novel show that she entices several men, tries to engage in a relationship, even in a sexual relationship, in fact, she already has a husband. Those behaviours are primarily based on her desire, as well as the attraction that she gets from the men. The researcher believes that she is indeed a woman with low self-esteem because she wants sex in a desperate attempt to make someone likes her. It can be seen from the way she responds to the blokes who look at her, she definitely goes to the bloke and seduces them back. She does not avoid them or leave them. She even takes an approach first to attract them by kissing or talking with them. She persuades the men to develop a short-term sexual relationship with them.

Besides Dolly having low self-esteem, she is also considered to lack emotional attachment to women. She is unable to feel emotionally connected to women. She seems more comfortable connecting with men than women. She even states that she hates women, as in the quotation below.

You should never trust a woman.  
I thought it was men you hated.  
Me? No, men are lovely. Gawd, I [Dolly] was mad about men all me life.  
Yes, said Rose.  
It's women I hate. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 356)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Dolly has a different feeling towards men and women. She madly loves

men, whereas she hates women. The researcher considers that Dolly feels that women are not as enjoyable as men when they interact with each other. Simply, she does not enjoy spending time with women. Eventually, it makes it hard to see women as special or even fellow human beings.

By seeing the psychic tensions of Dolly, the researcher identifies that the root cause of Dolly's lack of self-esteem and lack of attachment to women is arising from a failure to form a healthy attachment to primary caregiving figures in her early childhood, especially her mother. Because, in the last chapter of the novel, an unexpected past-time of Dolly is revealed. Dolly's father is her grandfather, and her mother is her grandmother. Her second oldest sister marries their father. This fact leaves Dolly in desperation. As a result, she hates women and never trusts them.

I [Dolly] had seven sisters. Jesus, I loved my father. My mother was always far away when I was around. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 356)

My mother was my grandmother. My father was my grandfather.

What?

The second oldest sister, the one who made me feel like rubbish all my life, that one was my mother. There we were. There we were. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 357)

The first quotation is the strong point that makes the researcher believes that when Dolly was a child, her psychical and emotional needs were not fulfilled by her caregivers, especially her mother. It is because her mother was always far away from her. It means that she never receives comfort, affection, and proper nurture from stable and responsive caregivers, even from her mother or her biologist mother who is her older sister.

Unfortunately, the researcher identifies that the effect of that surprising fact about

her mother is also her older sister leaving Dolly in depression and using projective identification as one of the defence mechanisms to alleviate her distress. The researcher also believes that her emotional detachment to women comes from a traumatic event, which was the fact that her mother is also her sister. Then, it makes her unconscious phantasy is splitting her caregivers into two parts, the mothers are bad, and her father is the good one.

#### **a. Rose's Lack of Confidence and Frustration**

The researcher believes that Rose lacks confidence. Her lacks of confidence are quite similar to Sam but in a different aspect. Rose lacks confidence in socializing with other people, as in the quotations below.

She [Rose] never went to the socials they organized with the boys' school. Boys thought she didn't laugh enough and her prettiness was turning to caricature the more she lost weight. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 162)

She [Rose] never looked anyone in the eye, and as often as not, she went unseen as a result. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 279)

From the quotations above, it can be seen that Rose has a problem with socializing with other people. She never looks anyone in the eye, laughs or even smiles at other people. She is known as a pretty girl, but it hardly could be seen since she does not socialize with other people. It is quite challenging to see Rose's activities with others. She is never being with other people, enjoying the interaction, or working together with other people besides her family. Therefore the researcher concludes that she lacks confidence in socializing, and unfortunately, she is never willing to open up herself to other people.

Besides Rose's lack of confidence, she also experiences frustration. When she was a child, she was depicted as a person who faced many problems, accidents, obstacles and has many responsibilities to do at her own house. She never had a chance to enjoy her childhood because she was busy maintaining her family.

She [Rose] was learning to cook these days because the old girl [Dolly] was always too drunk and the old man [Sam] was always late home. When they were home they were always fighting and tossing things at each other so dinner never got cooked. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 121)

Rose cooked at six. She learnt to cook, wash the laundry and to clean the house. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 141)

From the quotations, it can be seen that at a young age, Rose did every adult responsibility such as cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning the house because her parents could not manage to do them. Dolly and Sam are always outside the house. Dolly is always spending her time drinking alcohol, and Sam is always spending his time gambling. Even when they are in the house, they would never cook for their family because they are always fighting. Therefore, the researcher indicates that Rose did not enjoy her childhood, where she should have played and studied with her friends. She has to take up Dolly's duties as a mother in a family.

Rose looked frightening now, like a ghost, with those big eyes. Her wrists looked like twigs, and she did nothing but stare. Dolly knew what it meant, that stare. You're old and clapped out, it said, and you're getting fat, and your teeth are bad and you don't do a bloody thing, and here I am, young and clean and sweet and I'm doing your jobs, old girl, and I'll die from it and you'll suffer. (*Cloudstreet*, 2007: 94-95 pdf)

The quotation shows that Rose is furious with Dolly. The researcher identifies Rose's anger, and frustration had been growing like a balloon filling to its top of the volume. The burden of sadness has plagued her. It can be seen that Rose starts to explode by staring at Dolly until she finally speaks out what she has been hiding about her feeling towards Dolly's treats. She even states that anything she has done, which was not supposed to be done by her will make her die. The researcher considers that she could not hold her frustration because she wants to stop doing all Dolly's duties.

By seeing Rose's psychic tensions which are lack of confidence and have a frustration, the researcher identifies that all of them are considerably influenced by Rose's childhood experiences which was not getting a good enough mothering from Dolly. Since Rose was a child, her physical and emotional needs could not be fulfilled by her caregiver, especially her mother, Dolly. Whereas, at the young age of Rose, it is crucial for Dolly as a mother to give Rose a good environment in the family. In contrast, at a very young age, Rose has to take her parents' responsibilities such as cooking, looking after the family even when she is growing older she is forced to quit her school and get a job to earn money for the family. The researcher identifies that primary parents' responsibilities for children like maintaining their children's comfort, health and safety, promoting emotional well-being, instilling social skills and preparing children intellectually are never being fulfilled by Rose's caregiver, especially Dolly.

### **Discussion**

From the previous part of this chapter, it is clear that every quotation describes the kind of psychic tension of the main characters in the novel and the causes of



psychic tensions. In adulthood, Sam experiences a lack of confidence because when he was a child, his father teaches him to only believe in luck and it later affects his behaviour.

Sam is only close with his father, Mery. Sam is barely remembering his mother because he never gets an intimate interaction with his mother. Therefore, the researcher identifies that Sam's mother misses every chance to pay attention to him. She could not wholly adapt to Sam's needs when he was a kid, and as time proceeds, she adapts less and less thoroughly. The absence of her in caring for him makes Sam close only to his father. Eventually, his father has more chances to influence Sam's unconscious phantasy. Unfortunately, his father, who teaches him the notion of Shifty Shadow leads him to be a person who lacks confidence in his adulthood. He always hides behind the notion of luck and it affects his behaviour. He only believes in luck to govern his life. Then he is also obsessed with gambling. Her obsession with gambling is the evidence that he is still entrusting his life to luck whether he could be lucky win or unlucky lose.

The following is the root cause of Dolly's low self-esteem and lack of attachment to women is arising from a failure to form a healthy attachment to primary caregiving figures in her early childhood, especially her mother. She even has to face traumatic events that she knows her mother is her older sister, and his father is her grandfather.

Unfortunately, Dolly's trauma influences her projective identification, She splits a man as a good person and a woman as a bad person. It makes her loves every man whom she meets and always tries to engage in a short term relationship by having sex with men, whereas, she hates women including his daughter, Rose, whom she considers as an enemy.

The last, Rose is ultimately frustrated and hurtful when she was raised by Dolly, who never pays attention to her. Dolly is seen as a bad mother by Rose. As a result, Rose is not able to do something as she pursues her goals to be a happy child in a happy family and could be appropriately studied at school. In contrast, she takes up the duties of her mother as her mother could not manage her responsibilities.

Experiencing different treats from her parents makes her frustrated. Her frustration at home affects her behaviours. As same as Dolly, Rose's frustration influences her projective identification. She blames Dolly for being so hurtful to her and then splits her mother as a bad one and her father as a good one. Therefore, she hates Dolly very much, but she loves Sam.

## CONCLUSION

Winton's *Cloudstreet* is a book that provides an exciting storyline. The book portrays many aspects of human life and society in which represent the values and attitudes of Australian life. The author may have directed those things at the Australian society to make the reader understand their culture and attempt the reader to interpret it from their perspective.

As one of the readers, the researcher decides to take one interesting aspect of this novel and analyze it from a psychological approach. Therefore, all through this analysis, the conclusion has been drawn by matching several concepts of the Mother-Child interaction of Klein and Winnicott. From the analysis, it can be concluded that Sam lacks confidence, Dolly lacks self-esteem and lacks emotional attachment, and last, Rose lacks confidence and is frustrated. Each of their psychic tensions affects their behaviours. The researcher finds that the root cause of the psychic tensions of Sam, Dolly, and Rose is the result of an unsatisfying relationship

between mother and children in their early childhood. Their unsatisfying relationship with their mother affects their behaviour in their adulthood.

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