

TOPIC: TO EXPLORE THE THEME OF 'PROJECTION' IN TONI MORRISON'S A MERCY: PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITIQUE

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Abstract

The covered research focuses upon exploring different elements and the causes of the defense mechanism 'Projection' in the novel *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison through the lens of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical theory. The paradigm undertaken for this research is qualitative mode of inquiry. Purpose of the research is to explore and examine the causes of Projection through the content analysis of the characters e.g. Florens, Rebecca, Minha Mae, Sorrow and more of the novel *A Mercy* (2008). The Novel '*A Mercy*' by Toni Morrison has been selected as the sample of the study and psychological projection has been employed as the theoretical framework which supports this research. This study looks upon how the characters of the novel '*A Mercy*' used to Project others for their weaknesses by ascribing the causes of unpleasant thoughts to other people and how others used to suffer as being the victim of their projection. The study is an attempt to analyze different elements and causes of psychological projection by analyzing different characters such as Florens the protagonist of the novel, Minha Mae, Rebekka vaark, Jacob vaark, etc. *A Mercy* is a true portrayal of psychological projection, where everyone is busy in attributing others for their own unacceptable urges, memories and drives. The characters and actions represent a clear picture of projection as described by Sigmund Freud such as Florens projected by her Minha Mae (mother) Sorrow projected by Rebekka and Minha Mae projected by the white master. Qualitative research under observation revolves around the elements and causes of psychological projection in the novel *A Mercy* as its selected sample. This article attempts to investigate and examine the causes of *Projection* which caused the characters to suffer in the novel in the light of Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) psychoanalytical theory. The study has been delimited to the content analysis of the novel '*A Mercy*' (2008) by Toni Morrison' (1931) probing the elements and the reasons of projection through the characters of the novel. Freud's *psychological Projection* has been taken as the theoretical framework which according to the theories of Freud (1856-1939) is a psychological defense mechanism whereby one 'projects' one's own unacceptable thoughts, memories, urges, emotions, drives so on onto someone else or simply to project our problems onto some other individual e.g. one might hate other but the superego tells him that such hatred is unacceptable so he might have the solution for the problem that he starts thinking that the other hates him. As the Projection has been conceptualized by Freud therefore the novel has been analyzed through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytical theory and psychological projection has been employed as the theoretical framework.

Keywords: Psychological Projection, a mercy, defense mechanism, attributes, ascribe, psychoanalytical theory, explore.

1. INTRODUCTION

A Mercy is a novel written by Toni Morrison and was published in 2008. It is written to explore not only a time before slavery and raced issues but those of freedom; geography, gender and religion are among many. Toni Morrison is an American novelist and her works are known for their epic themes, richly detailed

characters and vivid dialogues. This study focuses upon different elements and causes of psychological projection through different characters such as Florens, Minha Mae, Rebekka vaark, Jacob vaark, etc. in the novel *A Mercy* (2008).

Projection is one of the defense mechanisms in which an individual defends himself against his own distressing and nasty instincts by rejecting his own subsistence while ascribing them to others as discussed by Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalytical theory. This study looks upon how the characters in *A Mercy* used to Project others for their weaknesses by ascribing the causes of unpleasant thoughts to other people and how others used to suffer as being the victim of their projection. *A Mercy* is the true depiction of psychological projection, where everyone is busy in attributing others for their own unacceptable urges, memories and drives, The characters in which the element of projection could be seen easily such as florens projected by her Minha Mae (mother) Sorrow projected by Rebekka and Minha Mae projected by the white master. Qualitative research under observation revolves around the elements and causes of psychological projection in the novel *A Mercy* as its selected sample. This article attempts to explore and examine the causes of *Projection* through different characters in the light of Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) psychoanalytical theory.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

- To explore the elements of projection in the novel *A Mercy* by Toni Morrison with reference to Sigmund Freud's (1856-1935) psychoanalytical theory.
- To find out the causes of projection through different characters of the novel *A Mercy*.
- To examine the role of projection in the lives of the characters of the novel *A Mercy*.

1.1.1 Delimitation:

The samples for the study have been delimited to the content analysis of the novel *A Mercy*' (2008) by Toni Morrison' (1931) by exploring the elements and the causes of projection through the characters of the novel.

1.1.2 Significance of the study

Research on the novel *A Mercy* has been conducted many times in different countries by many people but the purpose of this study is to explore and examine the elements and causes of Projection through different characters of the novel *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison' (1931) in the light of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory. Despite the continuing discussion surrounding the novel *A Mercy*' (2008) and its characters there is a very little research on the topic of elements of Projection in the novel.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the research has been done many times in many countries on the novel *A Mercy*' (2008) and it has been analyzed many times by many people and study has been done on different psychological aspect of the characters of *A Mercy*' (2008) but there is a little research on the topics of exploring the elements and causes of psychological projection in the novel *A Mercy*' (2008).

According to the critical approach of Stave and Tally' (2011) *A Mercy* is the shortest texts which Morrison' (1931) wrote to explore slavery and raced issues that has been rehearsed at almost every conference session. The authors further added, the way Morrison' (1931) gives importance to the characters in her texts functions to direct reader attention to the interaction of her characters with the environments they travel across and the attention that is given to the places through which the characters used to travel as well as the historical magnitude of those areas for peoples in the process of dissipating, raises questions about how and for what reasons the environment is given importance or not, depending on the cultural doctrine. The study is not directly related to this research article but somehow helps to explore Morrison's (1931) perspective about her use of focalization and characters relation with the environment.

In the Review of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* by Jones' (2008) he said that in the novel *A Mercy* (2008) Morrison' (1931) has explored a number of issues such as the psychological and experiential experiences of the enslavement, the broken aspects of Christian piety and resistance of spirituality and the effect they had on the relationships of men and women. According to Jones' (2008) *A Mercy* is an important novel with a central narrative and the importance that is given to the women characters which are found to be very caring but cannot make a family because of the fact that they are slaves and cannot act on their own. This study by Jones (2008) though not directly related to this research paper as it concentrates on the elements of Projection while this study is concerned in exploring the psychological aspects other than projection.

According to Kelley (2013) Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) is one of the best books which shares common characteristics with most of the other stories particularly the theme of love. Kelley (2013) discussed many aspects of love in *A Mercy* such as seen in the relationships of Rebecca and Jacob, Florens love for Blacksmith, Lena and Rebecca's friendship and sorrow's love for her baby and more. Author further adds that love in *A Mercy* as whole is the opposite of love that is betrayal. Betrayal for Morrison is the absence or collapse of trust which the characters experienced in the novel. The study by Kelley (2013) revolves around the theme of love and betrayal and its psychological effects on the characters but no element of projection has been mentioned in his work as I mentioned earlier that no research has been conducted on the topic of exploring elements and causes of Projection in the novel *A Mercy* (2008).

A psychoanalytical study by Hsieh (2014) on the theme of trauma and healing in *A Mercy* whereby he analyzed the traumatic effect on the life of the main female character Florens by examining it through the theme of abandoned child. He analyzed the traumatic impact on Florens life through the psychoanalytical perspective specially the one discussed by Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth and later goes on to describe the theme of abandonment and traumatic impact on Florens through the use of Sigmund Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytical theory.

According to Updike (2008) *A Mercy* takes the reader deeper into the past than any other work of the author Morrison. In *A Mercy* (2008) Morrison's use of area and time overshadows her representation of people; she does better to represent the untidy colonial world than in populating another division of her noble and necessary fictional project of exploring the ignominies of slavery and the deprivation of being Black. The Native American characters in *A Mercy* come to life more readily than the African-Americans, and they less ambiguously dramatize America's discovery and resolution. *A Mercy* begins where it ends, with a white man casually answering the request of the slave mother, but he dies, and she fades into slavery's myriads, and the child goes mad with love. Beautiful use of language which circles around a vision, that is both stable and affective, of a new world turning old and poisoned from the start.

These studies are not directly related to this research article but somehow help to explore Morrison's (1931) perspective about her use of focalization and characters relation with the environment and to know about different aspects and elements of the novel *A Mercy* (2008).

3. METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative by mode as stated above the intended research is based on exploring the elements and causes of Projection in the novel *A Mercy* (2008) through content analysis of different characters of the novel *A Mercy* (2008) and the selected sample for this research is the novel *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

As the purpose of this study is to explore and examine different elements and the causes one of the defense mechanisms *Projection* in the novel *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory, *Psychological Projection* has been employed as the theoretical framework which according to the theories of Freud (1856-1939) is a psychological defense mechanism whereby one 'projects' one's own unacceptable thoughts, memories, urges, emotions, drives and so on onto someone else or simply to project our problems onto some other individual e.g. one might hate other but the superego tells him that such hatred is unacceptable so he might have the solution for the problem that is he starts thinking that the other hates him. As the Projection has been conceptualized by Freud therefore the novel has been analyzed through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytical theory and psychological projection has been employed as the theoretical framework.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of the study is to explore the elements of the defense mechanism *Projection* and its causes in the novel *A Mercy*. The data have been collected from the content analysis of the characters of the novel *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison.

The elements of the projection and its causes could be seen in many characters such as Minha Mae (mother of Florens) abandons her daughter because being an African slave she was not capable to do anything for her daughter and she was not able to protect her from the evil eye of her white master which was her own weakness which she attributed to Florens by saying "please, Senhor (her white master). Not me. Take her. Take my daughter." (P.30) she projected her daughter by granting her to the strange landlord Jacob vaark and throughout her life Florens recounts her shock, pain, and bitterness at this abandonment by her mother

which causes her to project others for her problems in her later life.

Another element of projection could be seen through the character of Rebekka (A native American lady married to Jacob Vaark) who was totally distressed and depressed because of deaths of three infant children and one of her daughters died in the age of five which takes her into a bad despair and therefore she developed a kind of hatred towards her slave Sorrow and her daughter which she didn't like as she reminds her of her own dead daughter so she used to project sorrow and other slaves such as Florens, Lina, Willard and Scully, in all possible ways because they were black except Lina and Rebekka thought herself superior to them being a native American. As Florens narrated "she makes us all, Lina, Sorrow and Sorrow's daughter and me, no matter the weather, sleep either in the cowshed or the store room" and another line which shows Rebekka's projection towards sorrow and her baby as Florens narrated "And no more fireplace for sorrow and her baby girl because Mistress does not like the baby." (P.186) Rebekka's behavior towards Sorrow and other slaves was just because of the death of her children and later of her husband, which was unacceptable for her and she projected others for her own problems and for her own acceptable thoughts, feelings, urges and drives.

The Element of Projection could be seen in the character of Florens when falls in love with Blacksmith who had an orphan child named Malaik and loved him a lot which was acceptable for Florens when she says "I worry as the boy steps closer to you. How you offer and he owns your forefinger. As if he is your future. Not me." (P.160-166) so she developed a kind hatred for Malaik which she knew was unacceptable for Blacksmith therefore she used to project Malaik for her own problems. Another cause that makes Florens to hate Malaik that he reminds her of her younger brother who is with Minha Mae and Florens thought that her mother loved her younger brother more than her and because of her brother she was abandoned by her mother. She says to Blacksmith that she saw a dream in which "it is me peering around my mother's dress hoping for her hand but that is only for her little boy" (P160) another point which makes her projection towards Malaik more clear when she Quotes "when I wake a minha Mae standing by your cot and this time her baby boy is Malaik". She sees the reflection of her brother in Malaik which causes her to project him for all the problems she had with her mother.

4.1 Conclusion

This research aims to explore elements and examine the causes of Projection in the novel *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison through the content analysis of its characters such as Florens, Minha Mae, Rebekka, and Sorrow etc. Projection is a defense mechanism conceptualized by Freud (1856-1939) in his letters to Wilhelm Fliess. The research on the novel *A Mercy* has been conducted many times by focusing on its different psychological aspects but this research intended to explore elements of psychological Projection and how it played an important role in the lives of characters through content analysis of the characters of the novel *A Mercy* (2008).

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