

WINDOW OF PSYCHOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION, TRAUMA AND REDEMPTION IN A. J. FINN'S *THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW*

S. A. Ausmitha Srinithi Christy

PG and Research Department of English, St. Mary's College (Autonomous),
Thoothukudi

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

Literature is all about understanding the stream of life. One can witness the flow of life and the pull of life through Literature. A. J. Finn, as an American writer, he has concentrated on the ethics of an ordinary living in his novel. This paper on Finn's *The Woman in the Window*, focuses on the impact of past happenings in one's present life. The Trauma and the suffocation, the protagonist Anna faced in her agoraphobic condition is given importance, so as to reveal the objective of this paper that 'forgiveness is the key factor for a happy journey.' With the guilty consciousness, Anna has been leading her life isolated away from her social connection as a psychologist; until she's able to redeem and forgive herself at the end. The paper exposes the concept of redemption through the theory of Johari Window model application. 'The blind self that everyone has in their life is the key to unlock the door of redemption'; with this finding as hypothetical statement, this paper aims to prove that it is the past experience that reshapes and rebuilds a person in their esteemed way.

Keywords: Trauma, forgiveness, redemption, guilty consciousness, psychological mind set of humans, past influence.

The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean. As Robert Louis Stevenson says, anyone can write any form of literary work. Literature is all about understanding the stream of life. One can witness the flow of life, the pull of life through literature. Literature deals with the flow of life and exposes the theme of acceptance in life. And in contrary, the pull of life exposes the other side of life, where the theme of fate accompanies along with all the other themes. In Literature, without appreciation analysis, one cannot taste the essence of the work of art imposed by the author. Literature provides the experiences to the readers experiences that are familiar as well as unfamiliar that create opportunities for the readers to know about

the outside world and its culture and practices as it talks of history as well as present life realities. Such essence of Literature has also dealt with the psychological aspects, the essence of life, in the early period. In the writings of ancient Greek philosophers, the origins of psychology has been found. Particularly, it is found in the works of Aristotle, who has used the term psyche to reference to the essence of life.

Generally, psychology is defined as the study of human minds. In literature, it is the studying of author's imagination and characters. Psychology in literature is nothing but analysing a work of art from the psychological perspective, and not considering the author's point of view. Significant authors in the field of psychology are Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erik Erickson, Lawrence Kohlberg and Ivan Pavlov, as well as Adler. Their theories which exposed the concepts of moral and psychological developments and the notion of inferiority complex help in analysing the cognitive and the personal developments in the particular character of the novel. With the help of the various theories of the psychologists, a literary work can be interpreted and examined. Many American writers have used this approach of applying such theories in their literary work.

The American writers who have incorporated psychological theories in their literary works are William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison. J. Finn, the contemporary American writer has written the novel *The Woman in the Window* that has made him famous, helped him gain commercial success. A. J. Finn is a pseudonym for Daniel Mallory, who was born on January 28, 1979 in New York city and grew up in Manhattan. He developed a passion for writing at a young age and pursued his education at Duke University and later in Oxford University for his junior year and graduate work. After completing his undergraduate studies, Mallory attended the University of Oxford, where he earned a Master's degree in Comparative Literature. During his time at Oxford, he also worked as an intern at the publishing house William Morrow, which sparked his interest in the publishing industry and solidified his determination to become a writer. Mallory's career in the literary world took off when he secured a job at William Morrow as a publishing editor. Over the years, he honed his writing skills and gained valuable insights into the publishing process, further fuelling his desire to write fiction. Inspired by the classic authors like Agatha Christie and Patricia Highsmith, Mallory decided to write under the pen name A. J. Finn and introduced his favourite characters from crime

novels.

The Woman in the Window, released in 2018, catapulted A. J. Finn to international acclaim. The psychological thriller quickly became a *New York Times* bestseller and received praise for its suspenseful narrative and intricate plot. The selective reason for choosing A. J. Finn as author, is because of his unique style in writing. Unlike other authors, Finn has depicted the real life challenges that are faced by a single woman who suffers from a disorder. How does the society view her and how she views the world are pictured by Finn. And as a contemporary author, A. J. Finn has portrayed trauma in the ordinary tone. Anna Fox's ordinary lifestyle, how as a young psychiatrist she herself needs therapy in the modern world are projected. Finn has also sketched the plot in such a way that the minor characters play an important role in Anna's life and that she is able to connect those characters personally with her life. Since the novel *The Woman in the Window*, revolves around the daily scenario of Anna Fox, it presents not the individual role of Anna Fox but the stereotypical roles of every woman who is affected psychologically and suffers individually.

The title of the novel is significant as it traces the influence of the past in determining the upward mobility of the present. Anna Fox being the woman in the window, what kind of reflection does she look for herself on the glass are studied using the psychological theories and through the concepts of Johari Window model and existentialism.

The Woman in the Window revolves around a woman who has experienced something mysterious and devastating who responds by socially isolating herself, self-medicating with alcohol, and having emotionally vexed phone conversations with absent family members. Anna used to be a prominent child psychiatrist, but since her mysterious trauma she's been beset by crippling agoraphobia. Now she spends every day locked in her house alone, drinking and popping prescription pills, and watching her neighbours through her camera. And the story proceeds on like this. The novel also serves as a traumatic past experience life of any individual. Like one can know incidents through history, one can relate a person's well being through their past events. With one such idea, the novel outlines how Anna's past life impacts her.

There are many other themes that were focused on the writings of A. J. Finn. Apart from the American dream and its society, the concept of disillusionment could be

studied from Finn's work. *The Woman in the Window* presents not only the concept of disillusionment, but also its consequences and how past can have influence on the present. And as T. S. Eliot reveals that past has connection to the present, the present life of Anna is a reflection of her past life experiences. The fact that one's past has greater influence on one's present either consciously or unconsciously has been demonstrated well by A. J. Finn in *The Woman in the Window*.

Like the saying, 'Never judge a book by its cover' here in the novel, Anna's mental and sociological condition is also the same. The readers come to know about the background only after reading in depth. What really is the cause of her condition is 'Agoraphobia' which can be studied as a background analysis in Anna's life. Having lost her husband Edward and daughter Olivia in a car accident, Anna almost became a victim from that particular accident. How as a victim she faces the real life scenario are studied under Psychological lens in unveiling the threats of society.

To the question what is Anna really into, A. J. Finn gives her current condition as "I slug a glass, float upstairs, settle myself at my desk. Reach for my Nikon . . . I muse, watch alongside my neighbor. Or I might view it right here, on his set, through the lens" (16). As Thangasamy in his book *Educational Psychology* says,

Psycho analytic theory assumes that personality is composed of id, ego and superego. The id is irrational and impulsive seeking immediate gratification. The ego is realistic and logical, postponing gratification until it can be achieved in socially acceptable ways. The superego imposes moral codes. (96)

Here, in the novel, Anna's personality can be interpreted that of Ego in trait. She does postpone gratification until it can be achieved in socially acceptable ways. And not only socially acceptable ways, but also physiologically when she's ready to go. It is only at the end, Anna achieves something on her own. Her wait; her way of postponing her dreams of being social with everyone exposes the matured characteristic in Anna though bound by her physical weakness.

Anna's tragic flaw is that she believes what she sees. It is her nikon camera that shows the world for her. Through the camera lens, through the window, Anna believes the objects rather than thoughts. There is this intuition; a kind of inner feeling; an egoistic trait that corrects the human error, which Anna must

have failed to realize. But at the end, in her flaw, Anna's superiority is seen when she kicks Ethan to get away. She forces herself to exit up to the roof despite her condition. While it's raining hard outside, they get to the edge of the roof and he knocks her over. When Ethan is about to attack her, Anna stops him by lying and saying that Katie told her who Ethan's father is. Anna starts saying things about how Katie loved the guy, he was an architect and he died, which is why she fell apart and turned to drugs. All these things, Anna says it on her own. These are not Katie's words. But it is through these words, the readers can understand the reason for Anna turning to drugs. 'An architect who died' which Anna mentions is not Katie's lover but it is Ed that Anna refers to. Professionally Ed is an architect and he died. This is the reason for Anna's drug addiction. Through this final note, the love that Anna has for Ed can be seen as an irreplaceable one, though guilty.

And as Ethan clings to the information, Anna hugs him and then she pushes him onto the skylight, which then breaks and he falls downward. "And then, with all my weight, I lean into him and push him onto the skylight" (419). Though it may seem like a tragic ending, it is not. Alistar is arrested for covering up the murder of Katie. And Anna ventures from darkness to lightness. After six weeks, Anna with the help of Bina, her physical therapist, she ventures into the garden roof.

She releases my hand and walks into the garden, tracking footprints
in the snow. She turns, beckons me.

"Come on."

I close my eyes.

And I open them.

And I step into the light. (427)

Her different phases in life, has taught her to fight against fear. And importantly, through Anna's character, how one must be able to forgive oneself is

seen significantly. Psychologically how her mental state suffers from past traumatic experience is also evident. How at first Anna blames herself for the accident caused by her, gives a clear-cut view to the readers that, as individuals it is natural to feel guilty over things. But as time passes, it is the guilty consciousness that paves way for redemption. In Anna's case, it is only at the end, she has a clear picture of the exterior world and about characters like Ethan; sweeter on the outside but sick on the inside. The finding from the plot is that, Anna is able to forgive herself, for she has seen what wicked actually means. She has blamed herself for the car accident occurred previously in her life, but on the other side, the unseen side that she did not make an attempt to see is that, the other side of human beings; the other side of world's function.

On the whole, this can be compared to Johari window model of communication theory. The Johari window model consists of four window panes which signifies personal information, feelings, motivation and the information known or unknown to oneself or others. The first window pane is known to self and others, it is called Open area or arena. When the author states the condition of Anna, both Anna and the readers are aware of her mental trauma and agoraphobia. With this condition, through the known past experience of Anna, the readers can study on her background. In the second pane of the window, the Blind spot, which is not known to self but known to others are exposed. Here, Anna's innocent facing of real world can be observed. Not knowing the character of Ethan, Anna blindly trusted Ethan. But on the other hand, Ethan's character was already known to the Russell family and they help in covering up his murder. Anna becomes a blind spot through this incident. Yet, later, it is through this incident, Anna gains consciousness of how the real world functions. Only through this incident, Anna gets enlightenment and dares to come out of the fear at last. In the third and fourth window panes, they are called the hidden area and the unknown pane. Here, the information is not known to self and others. In this case, the communication between Anna and Ethan stands as an instance. Ethan doesn't know that Anna lives in a delusional world where she keeps Ed and Olivia alive. Anna too is not fully conscious that Ed and Olivia died in a car accident. This signifies the hidden area or a facade.

As Roger Neighbour in his book *The Inner Physician* says:

Our hidden agendas; our character flaws and peccadilloes; for some of us, our politics, religion or serial preferences; the trauma that haunt us, the fantasies that excite or scare us; the emotions that perhaps embarrass us and the less-than- noble schemings that drive us these all go in Johari's 'private' quadrant. Some things about us other people can see, but we cannot. This, in Johari terms, is our 'blind' area. (243)

The blind area in Anna's case, therefore helps readers to be aware of the existential society. Is Anna really present in the current world; is she aware of the threat that surrounds her. To all those questions that arises in the readers mind, Anna makes it clear that she's easy to fall prey of. When Kate entered into the life of Anna, she imagined Kate to be her friend believing her to be Jane Russell and when Ethan entered her life, again she was ready to gel with him. This concept of open door in Anna's life, makes the study more interesting that the readers find the society daring to live in. The reason behind Anna's warm hands is that, in all her lonely state, all that she ever faced and felt was guilt. It is because of the guilty consciousness, Anna, in the motive to correct her previous past life, she invites the future without knowing the threat behind it. Unable to bear the lonely living, all she could do is make friends online with her agoraphobic condition. But when Kate and Ethan started to mingle with her face to face, Anna must have the felt the 'old her.' The days once she had with her family as face to face family time, Anna miss them; her past life. And that's the psychological reason behind Anna's unawareness towards the current society. With the blind area in her, she failed to understand the blind area outside her house. And with that influence of her past life, the research has been carried out to make readers understand the impact of one's darkness faced before and how it could lead them to blindness and also to do better in life. After all it is the experience that speaks more of a character. Anna's character is further studied deeply in the following chapter, building a connection between Anna's past and her emotional steadiness.

The concept of Johari Window has been analysed in this research paper, so as to prove the hidden side of each and every individual. Not just Anna, but everyone has something hidden in their past. It can be a conscious proof or even an unconscious one. Like the window that has four sides, each and everyone has four phases in their life, which are results of past experience. Some are revealed, but some are hidden; each

one has a different story. Anna's life as a proof, the readers can witness the conscious pretending of Anna. Though she knows she has no family, she imagines to be in a familial bonding with the dead person. This not only proves the hypothesis statement of past influence, but it also proves the agoraphobic disorder in Anna. The fear of going out of the house as well as her comfortable, familiar, family zone. And so, *The Woman in the Window* by A.J. Finn delves into the intricate exploration of how the past influences the present and shapes the character's behaviour and decisions throughout the novel. The protagonist, Anna Fox, grapples with a traumatic event from her past, which ultimately becomes a defining factor in her present reality. As the story unfolds, the readers witness how Anna's past experiences, particularly her trauma and resulting agoraphobia, impact her perception of the world around her and her interactions with other characters. Through flashbacks and snippets of memories, the reader gains insight into Anna's past and how it continues to haunt her in the present. Her past experiences are deeply intertwined with the unfolding events in the story, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. A. J. Finn skilfully weaves together past and present, demonstrating how unresolved issues from the past can resurface in unexpected ways and shape an individual's current reality. Anna's struggles with her mental health, triggered by events from her past, serve as a poignant reminder of how deeply past traumas can leave traces and how they can manifest in different ways over time. The novel underscores the idea that one's past experiences, no matter how buried or repressed, have a way of resurfacing and influencing present circumstances and decisions.

Thus, the novel, *The Woman in the Window*, can be justified as a work with influenced implicit memory that unconsciously changes the behavioural trait in an individual. It is through the past experience that people change unconsciously. The regrets one has in their life will slowly their anxiety level, causing trauma; for positive past experiences tend to generate optimistic expectations, while negative experiences can lead to pessimistic or cautious predictions. Therefore, this novel portrays many psychological themes and concepts that relates to past memory and trauma and can be assured as one of the quality works of A. J. Finn.

Works Cited

Finn, A. J. *The Woman in the Window*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2018.

Neighbour, Roger. *The Inner Physician*. CRC Press eBooks, 2018,



<https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429468100>.

Thangasamy, Kokila S. *Educational Psychology*. Maa Nila, 2005.