

The Writer as a Psychiatrist: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*

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Abstract

Chris Abani is one of the prominent writers of our 21st century. Notable for his enchanting, moving and rare style of writing with which he has flavoured the scene of African literature, the writer continues with the combine efforts of other notable voices to proclaim a new dawn and display realistic signs that future of African literature is only getting brighter. In the novel, *Becoming Abigail*, the writer narrated a soul touching and emotional laden tale of a traumatized young girl who in trying to become herself as well as the Abigail the society wanted her to be ended up destroying her life and the lives of some other characters around her. Our aim in this paper is to examine the novel from the perspective of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. This theory deals with the workings of the human mind, the id, the ego and the super ego. Id is the pleasure seeker; ego provides the balance between the id and super ego while super ego is the extreme part of the human psyche. This is also the adopted theoretical framework for this study. The idea of examining the novel from a psychoanalytical point of view is to demonstrate how the writer created characters under the workings of many unconscious elements beyond their control. It is from this perspective that we tend to understand our human environment better and come to term with the intricacies and complexities of human lives, a knowledge that will help us to adjust and continue to adapt fittingly in our alien environment. How the writer created characters who are under the dictates of the unconscious part of their human psyche, their actions and inactions and how these fictive characters come to play roles in enlarging and enriching our understanding of life that will aid a cohesive and adaptable society is the crux of the study.

Keywords: Psychiatrist, Psyche, Psychoanalysis, Literature, Oedipus complex, Id, Ego, Super Ego

Introduction

Literature has over time become an important aspect of human life in the quest to adapt and understand our enigmatic world better. It has become pertinent and crucial to man in his efforts to make the most important assessment of the values of his past, his present and articulate his future. In the words of Obi, "literature has become an important means of understanding and interpreting human beings and aspects of society such as politics, religion, economics, social conflicts, class struggles and human condition through the medium of language." (487) Nnolim Charles emphasizes that:

Literature as art deploys language embellished with pleasurable accessories, to paraphrase Aristotle ... and it is around the embellished use of language that the creative energy of the story deploys itself. And to invest the story with meaning, there must be some truth about life, something to chew over, some theme, some moral, some philosophy of life and some metaphor of life that tugs at the edges of symbol. As in all art, literature is useful, for as art, it is not a waste of time.... (3)

This is the role of art in every society as Van Der Post in his examination of literature and art expresses thus that art:

...is the technique of presenting unrealized and hidden values of people potentially capable of appreciating and understanding those values ... writing, especially, can be a magic mirror which holds up to a man and society, the neglected and unrealized aspects of him and his age. (16)

Literature we gather is a social art, a means of exposure and self-expression through which the societal values, dreams and aspirations are brought to lime light for a thorough and patriotic appraisal. It presents the unrealized and hidden values of society, and as a mirror, it holds up to man and society, the neglected and several unrealized aspects of the dreams of his age which it hopes to help and guide society in realizing. Literature gives insights, ideas and information, pointing at the right track and direction through which man and society can find the measure of peace they so desire.

Sigmund Freud and his Psychoanalytical Theory and Ideas

Sigmund Freud is an atheist Austrian psychologist from Jewish descent. He spent most of his life in Vienna investigating the intricacies of the human mind and formulating ideas that have largely guided the treatment of mental illness in the West up to the present day. Freud developed the concept of the unconscious which is central to Freud's account of the mind. Freud believed that while poets and thinkers had long known of the existence of the unconscious, he had ensured that it received scientific recognition in the field of psychology. The unconscious has to do with the phenomenon of repression with which he tries to explain what happens to ideas that are repressed. He postulated a cycle in which ideas are repressed, but remains in the mind, removed from the consciousness yet operative, then reappear in consciousness under certain circumstances. Freud also believed that the libido developed in individuals by changing its objects, a process codified by the concept of sublimation. He argued that humans are born "polymorphous perverse" meaning that any manner of objects could be a source of pleasure. He further argued that as humans develop, they become fixated on different and specific objects through their stages of development. First is in the oral stage, then in the anal stage, then the phallic stage, latent and genital stages. Freud also projected the idea of id, ego and super ego in the human psyche. The id is the pleasure principle; ego is the balance between the id and super ego. Again Freud projects that people are driven by two conflicting central desires: the life drive (Libido or Eros) (survival, propagation, hunger, thirst and sex and the death drive. The ego the "I" sits at that centre of some pretty powerful forces: reality, society as represented by the super ego; biology, as represented by the id, when these make conflicting demands upon the poor ego, it is understandable if it, (If you)... feel threatened, feel overwhelmed, feel as if it were about to collapse under the weight of it all. This feeling is called anxiety, and it serves as a signal to the ego that its survival, and with it the survival of the whole organism, is in jeopardy. Freud projected different kind of anxieties-realistic anxiety, moral anxiety and neurotic anxiety. In all, a more general criticism of Freud's theory is its emphases on sexuality, everything, both good and bad, seems to stem from the expression or repression of the sex drive. Many people question that and wonder if there are any other forces at work. Freud had projected that human beings are driven by unconscious sexual libido which will be harmful to repress. Thus, the overemphasis on sexuality brought much criticism on Freud's psychoanalysis and though he later added the death instinct as another psychological drive, it proves to be another one of his less popular idea.

It was Sigmund Freud who gave a theoretical basis for the understanding of the questions and issues connected with changes in the human personality which had bothered some critics centuries before. It was Sigmund Freud that advanced his theories about the workings of the human psyche, its formation, its organization, and its maladies. His students and followers, the likes of Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, and Carl Jung, were later to build on his ideas and pushed the frontiers of the knowledge of the unconscious of the human mind. Freud was troubled that he could not account for the complaints of many of his patients by citing any physical cause of their ailment. He had subject them to series of studies and he came to a conclusion that the source of hysterical in his patients was as a result of repressed fantasies, desires stored in the unconscious of the patient. He believed that the sub-conscious exert influences on human behaviour even in adulthood. Some desires, fantasies and suppressed emotions have a way of confronting an individual in adulthood and leads to neurosis that leads to a patient's illness or change in psychological behaviour. Sigmund Freud projects that the human mind is made up of 3 parts: The Unconscious: Which is a very vast area of the mind, the Sub-Conscious, which is the place where certain forgotten experiences are stored in the subconscious and it is responsible for involuntary actions like when driving. The conscious, which is where conscious actions are stored, actions you are aware of. Freud also projects the Tripartite psyche the id, ego, super ego.

The id is the repository of the Libido, the source of our psychic energy and our psychosexual desires. It is the pleasure seeker, always hungry for pleasure and operates without any thought of consequences, morals, ethics, caution and repercussion. It is lawless, and selfish. The id can be socially destructive force, for unrestrained and uncontrolled id could aggressively seek to gratify its desires without any concern for law, customs or values. It can even be self-destructive in its drive to have what it wants. It could be regarded as the 'Devil in us' as it urges us to do things against the dictates of the law, society even taboo and abominable acts with terrible consequences.

According to Freud, the Id is the only component of personality that is present from birth. This aspect of personality is entirely unconscious and includes of the instructive and primitive behaviours. According to Freud, the Id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants and needs. If these needs are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state anxiety or tension. For example, an increase in hunger or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink. The Id is very important early stage in human life, because it ensures that an infant's needs are met. If the infant is hungry or uncomfortable, he or she will cry until the demands of the Id are met.

However, immediately satisfying these needs, it is not always realistic or even possible. If we were ruled entirely by the pleasure principle, we might find ourselves grabbing things we want out of other people's hands to satisfy our own cravings. This sort of behavior would be both disruptive and socially unacceptable.

According to Freud, the Id tries to resolve the tension, created by the pleasure principle through the primary process, which involves forming a mental image of the desired object as a way of satisfying the need. It is also the pleasure seeker.

It is confined primarily to the instinct of survival and nature; the “Id” is on behalf of the source of all the “drives” The energy of personal psychological function is from the instinct of the life and death or the instinct of the sex or invasion. They are a part of the Id. When they perform their functions, the Id seeks how to release excitement and tension, then energy. It works in accordance with the pleasure principle, that is, it tends to pursue the happenings and avoid suffering. According to this mode of operation, the “Id” seeks immediately to release the energy completely. The “Id” cannot stand any setbacks, and has no scruples. In a word, the “Id” is excessive, impulsive, behind irrational, non-social, selfish, and is to indulge in pleasure.

The Ego is the component of personality that is responsible for dealing with reality. According to Freud, the ego develops from the Id and ensures that the impulses of the Id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world. The ego functions in both the conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious mind. The ego operates based on the reality principle, which strives to satisfy the Id’s desires in realistic and socially appropriate ways. The reality principle weighs the costs and benefits of an action before deciding to act upon or abandon impulses.

In many cases, the Id’s impulses can be satisfied through a process of delayed gratification, the ego will eventually allow the behavior, but only in the appropriate time and place. The ego also discharges tension, created by unmet impulses, through the secondary processes, in which the ego tries to find an object in the real worlds that matches the mental image created by the Id’s primary processes. It provides a balance between the Id and superego. There are certain thing you do the ego will tell you whether it is right or wrong. It is moral ethics guiding some people. Freud used the term ego “strength” to refer to the ego’s ability to function despite these dueling forces. A person with good ego strength is able to effectively manage these pressures, while those with too much or too little ego strength can become too unyielding or too disrupting.

The ego provides balance to the id and the super ego. The ego is the reality principle and operates as a regulating agency.

The last component of personality to develop is the superego. The superego is the aspect of personality that held’s all of our internalized moral standards and ideals that we acquire from both parents and society. Also it is our sense of right and wrong. The superego provides guidelines for making judgments. According to Freud, the superego begins to emerge at around age five. There are two parts of the superego.

The Ego Ideal includes the rules and standards for good behaviours. These behaviours include those which are approved of by parental and other authority figures. Obeying these rules lead to feelings of pride, value and accomplishment.

The Conscience includes information about things that are viewed as bad by parents and society. These behaviours are often forbidden and lead to bad consequences, punishments or feelings of guilt and remorse.

The superego acts to perfect and civilize our behaviour. It works to suppress all unacceptable urges of the Id and struggles to make the ego act upon realistic standards rather that upon realistic principles. The superego is present in the consciences, pre-conscience and unconscious. It is being too principled highest point of human consciousness.

According to Freud, the key to a healthy personality is a balance between the Id, the ego, and the superego.

It can be regard as the moral of the ego. Super-ego highlights two aspects; conscious and ego-ideal. The opposite of the Id is the super-ego, that is, it is the branch of human psychology and moral function, and it contains those concept we are working for and the exposed guilty when we go against our code of ethics. This part of the structure of personality is based on community standards to control the behavior and to perform its functions, rewarding good behavior (pride, self-love), and punishing the bad behavior (guilty, inferiority, accident). The super-ego plays the function in the primitive level, so it cannot stand the test of reality relatively that is, cannot change one’s actions in different atmosphere. The super ego provides additional balance to the id. It operates according to the morality principle for it provides the sense of moral and ethical wrongdoings. Parents who enforce their values through punishments and rewards exemplify the super ego at work. The super ego works against the drives of the id and represses socially unacceptable desires back into the unconscious. Balance between the id and the restrictions of the super ego produces a healthy personality. The super ego can at some time became too strong and this could lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the self. Thus, the need for ego to put a balance at all time between id and super ego but it happens that when the ego can no longer control the overbearing id and overbearing super ego, the ego will collapse and break into any of the psychological disorder allowing one to over throw the other. It could lead to pervasion in sexual drive, impotence, or uncontrolled sexual drive.

Freud also projects the idea of Oedipus complex, Electra complex and Jocasta complex with which he tried to explain the psyche of human mind. He also recognized five stages of the stages of development. The five

psychosexual development stages of human development according to Freud are, the Oral, the Anal, the Phallic, the Latent and the Genital. All these stages of human development are all working hand in hand to explain the complexities of the human mind. This theory has influenced many writers at the wake of the 20th century and continues to dictate the tone of many literary works since inception. A good example is D.H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* among many literary works that could be examined from the point of view of psychoanalysis.

Theoretical Framework

The adopted theoretical framework for this study is the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. This theory deals with the workings of the human mind, the id, the ego and the super ego. Id is the pleasure seeker; ego provides the balance between the id and super ego while super ego is the extreme part of the human psycho. Id is meant to work in our childhood days, while in our maturity, the ego takes over and then the super ego, the moral principle controls even the rest of our lives. As Sigmund Freud projected in the theory, we realize that these things work interchangeable in our lives irrespective of our level, age and exposure. We often see an adult under the control and the dictates of the id, and so it is with the changing circumstances of the human psycho. Sigmund Freud also highlighted the idea of unexpressed feelings in the life of a man which has a way of affecting him greatly in his adulthood. In his bid to provide a cure for so many neurotic patients he had, he was able to discover how some unfulfilled desires and repressed feelings in the past exert a great control in the psychological nature of a person in adulthood. This he believes affects the character greatly and could lead to depression or some degree of deformity. Again is the psycho-sexual part of the human nature. Sigmund Freud had maintained that the human mind is controlled by an unconscious sexual libido which will be harmful to repress. Sexual feelings and libido, desire to have sex and fulfill the desires of the flesh is a greater part of the human subconscious and Freud X-rayed how these work unconsciously in the human system. There are so much that is inherent in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory that it influenced greatly the scene of the 20th century both in literature and ways of life. Overtime, Sigmund Freud ideas of psychoanalyses has continued whether consciously or unconsciously, acknowledged or not to influence writers which our Africa writers are not out of the picture. It is from this dimension that we will analyze Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* for a fruitful academic reward.

Psychoanalytic Reading of Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*

Becoming Abigail is one of the novels of Chris Abani. The idea of examining the novel from a psychoanalytical point of view is to examine how the writer created characters under the workings of many unconscious elements beyond their control. The person who said that the novelist who goes to a psychiatrist is paying for what he should be paid for is heading unto something. The psychiatrist is a person who deals with the human minds and the novelist, like the psychiatrist is not far removed from such act. Art confers on any human being the status of a God and once a writer assumes his position to write, he becomes a God who creates characters at will. The writer just like God is at liberty to create characters. He gives them life, destiny, actions, dialogues. He watches over them as they live their lives, drink, eat, marry, make love and in the end whatever happens to these characters is all to the dictates, the whims and caprices of the writer and a fulfillment of the goal he originally sets out to achieve as an artist. This is part of what make writers unique. So many writers in the course of their writing have created memorable characters that are easily identified in society and have become prototypes of many people, in our own flesh and blood, a situation made possible by the manner of composition and personality the writer bequeathed on the character at the point of creating him. Just like we have the character of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Ihuoma in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Jagua Nana in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, and Eugene Achike in Chimimanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. These characters are easily equated and likened to some real life characters as a result of their fully realized personality and embodiment bequeathed on them by the writer. But suffice it to say that the writer in the course of his story creates characters who behave in so many abnormal ways. This is where the role of writer is equated to that of a psychiatrist. The author in the course of telling his stories creates 'psychos', characters who in so many ways we may consider 'abnormal', 'non-conformist' or 'weird' but in reality it is only their psychological nature that is at play and a writer handles this so well in his story there by helping the readers too to be aware of such characters, what to expect of them, how best to avoid being like them and above all, their psychosexual drives that may hinder or galvanize their desires either in the negative and positive direction. A writer who does this well, deserves the accolades worthy of a renowned psychiatrist and only in that vein can a novelist boost to have lived up to expectations. He will receive his wages and he has not need to go to the psychiatrist to learn about the human minds and how they could be handled as he too in his daily adventure as a writer deals with all that. The idea of the above is to show case how a writer is a psychoanalyst and how the influence of Sigmund Freud's theory is manifested in the writing of many writers.

Chris Abani's novel *Becoming Abigail* is a heart touching story about a young girl who in trying to become her mother Abigail became something different which destroyed her. In the story, Abigail had a mother

who was the real Abigail. The father loved the mother so much that when she died giving birth to her only daughter, he was forced to name the surviving girl Abigail, as a reminder of the woman he loved so dearly.

It happened that it was not just in the name that the father wished to remember this woman very well but also in character. He did so much to force the young girl to be like her mother, Abigail. So much was expected of the young girl to be 'Abigail'. The girl wanted to be herself, develop her own unique personality and shape her own destiny but her father, her society wanted her to be the exact dead Abigail, her mother with all her virtues and ideals. She has no choice but to force on herself the ideal of Abigail, her mother and in the task and agonizing situation of becoming Abigail, she became a different thing altogether, something that was not even herself and it destroyed her. Our concern here is not on the story or the sorry situation of the young girl Abigail but on the psychological dispositions of the characters created by Chris Abani. The writer in the novel, created many characters that lived out in so many ways the principles and doctrines of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. First was the character of Abigail who was not strange as a result of her own makings but as a result of the dictates of her father and what the society expects of her. We see how the id in her in so many cases takes a greater control of her personality. Then is her father, a man under the control of the superego the extreme part of our human nature. Sigmund Freud maintained that when the ego can no longer provide the balance between id and super ego, the ego breaks, allowing either id or super ego to take over. The case of Abigail's father is a typical case of a man under the control of the super ego with no ego insight to restore the sanity in him after the ego must have been broken as a result of the combined struggle between the superego and the id. The superego dominated and this in the end destroyed the man as we shall soon demonstrate. Again is the character of Peter who was greatly under the control of id. Peter was a good example of how a man's unfulfilled desires and repressed feelings could cause harm and affect the person's character greatly in the most adverse way. Peter had once seen Abigail's nakedness while she was twelve as she had squat to urinate in the bathroom. The picture of the naked Abigail had stayed in his mind and refused to fade. He had always a sexual contact with Abigail and this led him to so many absurdities that culminated to the loss of his penis. Then is the character of Derek, a social worker under the control of the id. Derek had rescued Abigail but ended up falling in love with her even though he was married. The sexual and libidinous nature of man took over him and in the end he paid heavily for that singular act. All the characters portrayed in the novel seemed to have a rooted psychological problems and that is the part that makes the novel thrilling and exciting in all dimensions. Abigail was just a simple minded and natural girl driven to psychosexual madness by the dictates of a superego and psychopathic father. As early as Abigail could remember even as a child, there was a high degree of expectations on her to be like her dead mother. As early as her memory could carry her, she remembered thus:

But how could she be sure she remembered this correctly? He was her father and the coffin held all that was left of her mother, Abigail. This much she was sure of. However, judging by the way everyone spoke of Abigail, there was nothing of her in that dark iroko casket. But how do you remember an event you were not there for? Abigail had died in childbirth and she, Abigail, this Abigail, the daughter not the dead one, the mother, was a baby sleeping in the crook of some aunt's arm completely unaware of the world. (12)

The father had loved the mother, the dead Abigail so much. She was his life and everything about him revolves round her. She was an ideal woman, a role model, a mother and a wife. She died giving birth to Abigail and after her death, nothing again could console or assuage the father. The father allowed this singular event in his life to destroy him. He could not control that part of him that ought to realize that life continues and death is part of life. The death of his wife, Abigail's mother reduced him into a vegetable. He often loses touch with reality. He lives his life with reckless abandon and cared less about his daughter Abigail. His superego was too hard to control. His ego broke allowing the superego to drive him. He does not speak with his daughter. He lived a life of isolation with drink and jazz. Abigail explains his sorry state thus:

She looked up. Her father stood in the doorway to the kitchen and the expression she saw on his face wasn't a lie.

"Dad" she said. He stood in the doorway... He swallowed and collected himself.

She was doing the dishes buried up to her elbows in suds.

"Oh, carry on", he said. Turning abruptly, he left. The first time she saw that expression she'd been eight. He had been drinking, which he did sometimes when he was sad.

Although the word, sad, seemed inadequate. And this sadness was the memory of Abigail overwhelming him. When he felt it rise, he would drink and play Jazz. (13)

Such was the way a daughter and father relate to each other. The death of the wife was too much for him to bear and that makes him behave almost like an insane person. "Oh, carry on" was the only way a father greets a daughter. The sadness of his wife's loss was said to always overwhelm him and that same night while Abigail was asleep, the sound of Jazz woke her up and it was her father playing jazz in the middle of the night and drinking to stupor. Abigail reports thus:

Her father was in the middle of the room swaying along to “The Girl from Panama”, clutching the photograph of Abigail to his chest. She walked in and took the photograph from his hands.

“Abigail”, he said over and over.

“It’s all right, Dad, it’s just the beer.”

“I’m not drunk”

“Then it’s the jazz. You know it’s not good for you. But she knew this thing wasn’t the jazz, at least not the way he had told her about it on other countless drunken nights... This thing with her father was something else Abigail suspected, something dead and rotting.

“Shhh, go to bed, Dad”, she said.

He turned and looked at her and she saw it and recognized what it was. She looked so much like her mother that when he saw her suddenly, she knew he wanted her to be Abigail. (14)

This psychological imbalance in his father was soon to affect the daughter. Abigail perhaps, as a result of pity for the father and many other reasons wanted to be Abigail, her late mother. Again was the idea that her father sometimes blames her for the death of her mother. He sees her as the cause of her death; the very bad omen that took away the life of the mother he loved greater than life itself. The writer expressed this thus:

... It remained unspoken between her and her father, but as with all silences, it had all the will-worn familiarity to it of an over-loved pet, shedding fur everywhere it went, leaving faint traces of its animal scent on the hands. And always in that smell, the possibility of danger, of an edge untamed, like a knife unseen in the suds of a wash basin nicking a finger painfully. Yes, this thing was like that. The shadows under the smiling eyes that said over and over you killed her. You. Why her? I loved her. (37)

The father secretly blamed Abigail for the death of her mother. He sees her as the cause of her death as she died giving birth to her. Abigail on her own, to compensate her father and assuage his state of mind decided to be Abigail, her dead mother. She started going to the neighbour’s houses to do chores and menial jobs for them in the hope that she might obtain a story about the personality of her mother so as to be like her. She did so much and in the end she realized and gathered about the personality of her death mother, a position she might not be able fit into in a lifetime of trying. The writer captures her state of mind thus:

And yet even staring out at that truck, thoughts of Abigail filled her world. By all accounts she had been a tall, thin woman whose eyes held a power beyond the black pools of her irises. Tall, then, and dark, she, this Abigail, looked so much like the other that her father had named her the same. She was more ghost than her mother, however, moving with the quality of light breathing through a house in which the only footprints in the dust were those of her dead mother even her laughter, at once wild and reigned in, was all Abigail. (37)

The girl was traumatized as she lived a fake life. She sees herself as a ghost living in the shadow of someone already dead, yet her father continued to envy that ghost-like personality that was reflecting something of the woman he lost in her. He cared less about the welfare of the daughter but only wishes her to be ‘Abigail’ and continue to remind him of his dead wife which was the only panacea to the aching in his heart. The girl was highly traumatized as the writer pictures her dilemma in these words:

So she was always Abigail. Yet not. How could she be? How could she live up to the reputation of a woman who was known to confront wife beaters and explain to them, quietly and politely, that if they didn’t change she would cut off their penises? A woman who was feared by most men for her independent spirit; who at thirty-five became a judge, and set up the first free women’s advocacy group. The shape of that Abigail was so clearly marked, the limits traced out in the stories that filled the world around this Abigail, that it was hard to do anything but try to fill the hollowed-out shape.... (37)

This was the pathetic situation of the young Abigail and this affected her psychological disposition and made her somewhat abnormal. She began to do weird things as a child. There was an incident when she took a catapult and stones collected on her mother’s grave and shot six birds from the sky. She was ready to bury them. She dressed the six birds in a lace cloth torn from her mother’s wedding dress. She placed the lace-wrapped birds on funeral pyres and held burning candle over each of them like a sentinel until they filled everywhere with the scent of roasted meat. She burnt the birds and the lace and roasted them with the candle. Then she took seven photographs of her mother from the family album, tore the faces out and turned them upside down with seven candles on them while she muttered an incantation over the torn faces. All the while she was doing all these; her father stood watching through the window but made no attempt to restrain her. She then took the candles off the

photo fragments, picked up the fragments, and held the severed photos of her mother's face up to the light before cramming them into her mouth. That was when her father knew that something was wrong with her and came to her rescue (30). She was taken to a psychiatrist but the psychiatrist could not do much. She only prescribed some sweet-tasting children's aspirin and sent them home. The father took her to a local witch. The witch only exploited the father and later told him to buy a heavy silver bracelet and earrings to match which the old woman slipped on Abigail. But all that did not solve Abigail's problem. She was not disturbed by any marine spirit or evil spirit, her problem was a psychological one, the pains and enormity of the task of becoming her mother whom her father wanted her to be like at all cost. This affected her greatly even her sexual life. At the age of ten, her fifteen year old cousin, Edwin had disvirgined her and warned her not to tell anyone or he would kill her but all those things never bothered the young girl like the task of trying to be her real self, her own Abigail separate from the mother's this also affected her sexual passion as all the men she slept with in the past were always in a hurry to leave her after their love making and she made no effort to stop them. She was just giving and was not interested in receiving any fulfillment from them. Her sexual life was in a mess as a result of this childhood unrepressed desires of becoming Abigail. Once she had written on her body with flat noodles burned into her skin by cashew sap with needle and cigarette tips. The fire never burnt her nor the cashew sap or the needle. If it did, Abigail never felt any physical hurt as she wrote on her body these emotion-laden words:

Not Abigail. My Abigail. Her Abigail? Ghosts. Death.

Me. Me. Me. Not. Nobody. She stared at them.

This burning wasn't immolation. Not combustion. But an exorcism. Cauterization.
Permanence even... (26)

Abigail was portrayed as the writer as one with great psychological issues. She behaved so weird and absurd the one is forced to appraise her character all over and over again. But a deeper inquire into her character will reveal that she was not born that way. She was born like every other normal child but she grew up to realize as early as she did that her father somehow despised her. He doesn't despise her for being a girl but he secretly despised her and blamed her for the death of her mother whom he loved so much. She died giving birth to her. Abigail realized how much she has a role thrust upon her, the role to be Abigail, her dead mother if she will ever please her father and her society. Such was the situation, the desire and happenstances that drove her almost to insanity. Abigail while growing up may have obviously had her own little dreams, her fantasies and her charms. She must have had a mind of her own about what she wants from life, the choice of a career, a boyfriend, a way of life and so many other things she may have figured out and she dreamt of them. All these fantasies and dreams were crushed by the constant pressure on her to abandon her own desires, career and feelings and become her mother, Abigail. This destroyed her fantasies and the psychological trauma that followed is what replete the novel. We recall that Sigmund Freud was greatly bothered on the causes of neurosis in his patients and was able to prove that so many childhood unfulfilled dreams and desires, fantasies and longings could drive a patient mad. So many unrepressed emotions and feelings are the causes of neurotic problems in his patients. This is the case of Abigail in the novel as the novelist carefully exemplified a real psychological problem rather than social, economic problems or otherwise. The case of Abigail was the case of repressed and unfulfilled desires to be herself as she was forced and propelled to step into the shoes of her mother. As early as novelist could remember, Abigail was already behaving like a mad girl. She does things in the extreme. She had decapitated all her dolls as a child and recreated a funeral for them. These were her attempts to bury permanently the haunting ghost of her mother and reclaim her true self, the real Abigail, herself. She had shot six birds and buried them on funeral pyres. When she could not bury this haunting ghost, she decided to accept it and the situation made her a walking corpse, a ghost as she continues to shuttle between her dead mother's Abigail and her own Abigail. In all these, her father, another great 'psycho' watched in silence without any inclination to help and rescue her. He only continued to propel her to be her mother in every little opportunity he has to do so. The father always descends on her and reminds her much of the disparity existing between the living Abigail and her dead Abigail and this bleeds the heart of the young girl. A good example of such is recreated by the writer thus:

"... Hey baby, can I get you anything?" He asked

"No, Dad, I just wanted to talk..."

"About my period", Abigail began "About being a woman". He looked away uncomfortably,

"Abigail". How can you bring that up eh? I was about to ask you to make dinner."

"But Dad,"

"Your mother would never have talked like this, you know? She knew the right ways to conduct herself", He said. Then, nothing her hair for the first time, he let out a long sigh.

"What have you done to your hair? What have I done to deserve this? And why are you wearing all that make up?"

"What do you care!"

“Abigail!”
“Which one, Dad?”
“What do you mean?”
“This is me, Dad, me!”

“I know that. How could I not?” he asked. “You look just like your mother. (39)

This was the plight of the little girl that drives her insane, the desires to be her true self and not her dead mother. She had dyed her hair in the colours of her mother’s to please her father but she still wished to reclaim her personhood. The product of this was near insanity, care-free attitude to life. She started seeing images, haunting images perhaps of her mother’s and she ends up breaking things in the process which the father continued to remind her were her mother’s best marriage dishes. Her father, a “psycho”, a man whose ego has lost control over the superego was another sorry story. The man’s ego was supposed to put a balance between his id and superego but the loss of his wife broke his ego and the superego became uncontrollable. He unleashed if that he grieved for his wife to a point of tragedy. His grief for his dead wife destroyed him and his only daughter Abigail. As expected, when the man could no longer bear the pains of his lost, he had taken a rope and committed suicide. The novelist reports thus:

This was how she found her father. Hanging. The week she was to leave with Peter. Hanging from the hook where the ceiling fan had been. And now a cruel breeze blew in and he swayed in the raveling and unraveling of the hemp rope. Round. And round. Like a lazy Christian ornament. And down one life and pooling on the floor, his reluctance. Yellow. And in the heat, putrid, rank with him. His life, His loss and she didn’t cry. Didn’t seem shocked know. Always knew. It was more a matter of when. And how. (77)

The father allowed his superego to drive him to his death which was one of the issues posited by Freud. Whenever the ego loses control over the id and superego, one is bound to take over and the effect could be disastrous as seen clearly in the life of Abigail’s father. Abigail on her was already aware of her father’s imminent destruction. She knew his sanity was in jeopardy, just like hers too. That was why she did not cry or show any sign of shock when she saw her dead. Before her father died, he had consented that Peter his in-law should take her back with him to London where the father believes Abigail would fare better.

Peter was another character that was a story of his own. Just like Abigail’s father, he too lost his control over his ego, but unlike Abigail’s father, it was his id that took over him, his lustful and libidinous desire. He is a man highly controlled by sexual passion and pleasure to a point of abnormality. He is a true conformation of Sigmund Freud’s position that all humans are controlled by unconscious sexual desires. His id was his only driving force. He seeks out pleasure, sexual pleasure and nothing more. Peter was married to Abigail’s cousin Mary. Abigail never trusted Peter. He has always grown suspicious of him. At the age of twelve, Peter had cornered her in her bathroom where she had gone to urinate. Abigail on her own part did not show surprise but continued to squat and urinate. The id, the sexual passion took over Peter and surprised at her fearlessness, he kissed her and his finger explored the whole of her private part. Even when he was back at Mary’s side, his wife, Abigail saw him she surfing his finger occasionally with some animal display all over him (56). It was years ago but that desire stayed in Peter’s mind refusing to fade away. The opportunity to unleash the sexual passion buried years away inside him came when he was asked to take Abigail to London. It was in London that Peter displayed his beastly nature. Peter was only controlled by the id that nothing could come between him and his sexual desires, not even Mary his wife, Abigail’s cousin. Peter turned her into a prostitute. He brings men to the house to sleep with Abigail with the instruction that they should “fuck her, fuck her hard” (85). One would think Peter does this in the absence of his wife Mary, but Mary was fully aware of all that Peter was doing with Abigail and all her pleas to stop him and change his mind fell on deaf ears. The id was already at the peak of gratifying all his chained pleasure. When Abigail resisted by kicking the men he brought for her. He had tied her like a dog, peed all over her saying:

“This is what we do to dogs”.
“... That’s my dirty dog”,
“... That’s my dirty dog”, he said “Dirty dog. (86)

Peter was indeed a devilish character. He comes twice a day to feed Abigail with water, rancid water, and sometimes his piss. Sometimes he feeds her with rotting food and any other thing. The girl lay tied to the chains bleeding and surrounding by dirt. Peter was described by the writer as a psychopathic character that shuttles between the boundaries of insanity. The author, in the form of the story told to Abigail by an illusionary Angel that visited her in her solitary, when had to the chains narrated how Peter beats and molest Mary often and how he killed Mary’s dead daughter. Mary had given birth to a child but Peter wanted a boy and in view of this, when the girl was just months old, Peter continued to beat Mary till that fateful night when he throw her down the stairs. She had fallen on the baby she was holding and the child died. At the end the case was discharged as accidental. Mary was as helpless as she appeared. All she could do was to cry and continue to love her husband.

The most she could do for Abigail was to wrap her in a blanket which the writer said that she was wrapping the blanket 'around a girl slowly becoming a dog'. Abigail, one night, unable to control Peter's abuses and molestations, screamed loudly, invoking the spirit of Abigail, and in that frenzy and 'madness' with her teeth, she tore off Peter's penis. Abigail had run away with the penis in her hand and blood all over her. She had run into the police. All effort to trace the owner of the penis, even Abigail's identity were in vain because Peter brought her into the country with fake identity. The name Abigail Tansi does not exist anywhere confirming her dead which is synonymous to her life as the ghost of Abigail. As a result of Mary's sincere pleas and her tears the first night Abigail was killed, she refused to tell the police where to find Peter because of what Mary will pass through afterwards. Once again, after the episode, Abigail was recommended to a psychiatric hospital for the second time in her life but Derek, a social worker refused the idea. He didn't believe she was crazy. It was Derek's pity that brought him close to Abigail. Derek was another character under the dictates of the id. He was married but the sexual and lustful desires in him ruined him. Like other characters, he too has lost control of his ego, and his id was in total control of his actions. But unlike Peter's, the feelings between Abigail and Derek was mutual. They both loved each other and desired each other. Their libido was in control of their actions and Derek threw caution in the wind and began to bring Abigail back to his matrimonial home. While his wife sleeps comfortably in the bedroom, he stays in the living room making love to Abigail. The writer described Abigail's response as not just making love but a psychological way of reclaiming back her true self which she lost as a child. She saw that love feat as a way of reclaiming her identity and burying the ghost of her mother. For the first time in her life, she was not giving as she has done in the past while making love to other men. She was taking in and was not just giving. It was indeed a psychological display from a psychopathic character. The writer paints her and her lustful psychological redefinition of herself thus:

Later that night, in Derek's home, while his wife slept in that floral wall papered bedroom under the warmth of bedclothes, they made love on the sofa. And Abigail was giving. For the first time, she wasn't taken. And she wept for her joy and for the loss of Derek's wife upstairs dreaming the dreams of love... Abigail, this Abigail, only this Abigail, even in this moment of taking... (46)

That same night she did so many weird things in Derek's kitchen like using his wife's needle and held it over the naked flame of the gas range. With the hot needle, she burned two points onto her breasts, one on each. The marking was extended to her stomach, and on each thigh. She did the same on her knees and ankles and finally her buttocks. The hotness of the needle did not hurt her like it never did to her while she was still a child. Only an insane person is capable of such absurd and weird act. While she performed the act, she cried at the same time and licked her tears. She had made to the living room with the strokes of hot needles all over her to the astonishment of Derek. But with merriment, ease and uncontrolled happiness she described the symbolism of her act and what each holes signify:

"This one" she said, touching the ones on each breast, first one, then other." This one is you, this, me... Here and she was down on her stomach, "is my hunger, my need, mine, not my mother's and here, and here and here and here, here, here, here, me, me, me. Don't you see?... "This is my mother", she was saying "This is my mother. Words. And words. And words. But me? These dots. Me, Abigail. (48)

The young girl is indeed insane one can argue as her actions points towards that direction. But on a deeper level, her actions are consequences or her childhood repressed feelings that desire to be her real self taken over by that of her mother's character. She was only living out Sigmund Freud's findings about the human mind and the causes of neuroses. In the end, the young girl was happy, she saw herself in the journey of reclaiming herself, a situation made possible by her sacrificing of her ego, and surrounding to the dictates of the id, the pleasure seeker. Once would wish such happiness could last forever for the young crazy Abigail. One would wish Derek to restore her sanity, give her her lost identity and help her regain herself and cure the madness in her head. This healing comes with sexual pleasure and even though Derek is married one would wish her had helped to restore the real Abigail but the killing of Derek's wife spoilt everything for them. Molly, Derek's wife had caught them making love and perhaps as women would do, she had tried to save the situation and Abigail stabbed her in the process. But funny as it seems, while the stabbing and the dying was taking place, Derek was still making love to Abigail. This is a portrayal of the level these characters have fallen to the control of the id, the pleasure seeker. Derek even seeing his wife falling in pool of blood, continued to thrust his penis inside Abigail until he exploded. Not even his dying wife could brief the electrifying current of the pleasure in his head. The writer describes thus:

.... Derek turning seeing his wife falling, even as his hips still jerked their urgent need. Then his mouth opened to call her name, screamed "Abigail!" instead, as he exploded into her before he could pull up his trousers. Molly was gone. (108)

That was the end of Derek. He was found guilty of abuse on Abigail; she was not allowed to speak the truth that she too wanted Derek and had followed him willingly. Derek was imprisoned and his destruction destroyed the remains of her life. She had wondered if her mother knew such pain like her and that moment she realized how

she was becoming herself, her own Abigail, in her own awkward and painful way. She was becoming herself which involves a different experience with her mother and the novel ended with such realization. She saw darkness and followed it, perhaps to no way, just escaping the realities of her destiny as Abigail.

Conclusive Remarks

To this end, we conclude that the novel, *Becoming Abigail* makes an interesting reading in psychoanalysis and showed how the psychological postulations of Sigmund Freud have influenced literary writers greatly. First is the character of almost insane Abigail who was the ghost of her mother. Then his superego controlled father. Again we have the obsessed and psychopathic villainous Peter, the near silly over loving. Mary. Then we have the id controlled and gentle Derek and all the characters are best understood from their psychological point of view. The study of the novel from a psychoanalytical point of view has being able to demonstrate how the writer created characters under the workings of many unconscious elements beyond their control. The knowledge and understating of the characters and events in the story from this perspective in many ways aids our better understanding of our human environment. It helps us to come to terms with the intricacies and complexities of human lives. This knowledge and realization invariably helps us to adjust and continue to adapt fittingly in our alien environment as we will always give room for that unconscious and uncontrolled part of the human psyche as well as the actions and inactions it could elicit. The study has clearly shown how the writer created characters that are under the dictates of the unconscious part of their human psyche. We see their actions and inactions, failures and achievements, fears and aspirations tied to their individual psyches. From the knowledge gleaned from the lives of these fictive characters, we can enlarge and enrich our understanding of life which in so many ways could help us in the quest to build a cohesive and adaptable society of our dreams. Indeed, we end that a novelist, literarily, has no need for a psychiatrist for he will only be paying for what he should be paid for as he too is a psychiatrist who create and handles the complexities of lives of human characters.

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