

Psychopathic Personality of Amy Dunne: A Psychoanalytic Study in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the psychopathic personality of the female protagonist of Gillian Flynn's novel, *Gone Girl*. The novel is based on the marriage dysfunction of the main characters. It also discusses the factors which affects the psychology of the female protagonist.

In most of the novels, female characters are exposed as soft and humble, but Gillian Flynn has broken the stereotype by creating an aggressive woman. Thus the novel highlights the personality disorder of the female character in psychoanalytic perspective.

Keywords: Psychopathic Personality, Marriage Dysfunction, Aggressive Woman, Psychoanalysis.

Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* focuses on the fractured marriage and the succeeding suspicion cast on a husband on his wife's disappearance. It was published in June 2012. The novel was widely praised in many popular magazines. In 2012, the novel won the Good Reads Choice Awards for Best Mystery and Thriller. A Reader's Digest view notes that the book is "more than just a crime novel".

It goes on to describe *Gone Girl* as "masterful psychological thriller" which offers "an astute and thought-provoking look into two complex personalities". psychoanalytic theory was founded by the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud. Peter Barry is of the view that, "psychoanalytic criticism is a method of literary blame which uses some of the practices of psychoanalysis in the explanation of literature" (Beginning Theory 92).

Psychoanalysis is a type of therapy which aims at curing mental illnesses by investigating the boundary of the conscious and the unconscious mind. This practice is based on how the mind, the instincts and the sexuality work. Most of Freud's work depends upon the notion of the unconscious mind, which has a strong impact upon our actions.

This is linked with the idea of 'repression' which is the forgetting of vague conflicts, unadmitted desires or disturbing past events so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and connected into the realm of unconscious mind. A similar process of repression is 'sublimation', where the repressed thought is promoted into something grander or disguised as noble.

The novel, *Gone Girl* begins in the morning of Nick Dunne's fifth wedding anniversary, when his wife dissolves from their home in North Carthage, Missouri. As they lost their jobs in Missouri, Nick decided to move to his hometown to support his mother, who is diagnosed with cancer. One day, Nick receives a phone call from his neighbour. When he reaches his home, he found his wife is missing. He informs it to the police.

Nick becomes the suspect for Amy's disappearance. As an evidence, the detectives found a diary written by Amy, which shows Nick as an arrogant man. She has also left clues which confirm the detectives' suspicion. Later Nick learns that it is Amy who is framing him for her murder. On seeing an interview of Nick, Amy decides to return to Nick.

She returns to Nick, but when she learns that Nick is going to reveal her real story to the world, she undergoes fertility treatment and becomes pregnant. Finally, at the end of the unusual, Nick destroys his memoir for the sake of his own child. It is very clear in the novel that Amy is a suicidal psychopath who decides to take revenge against her enemies.

Psychopathy is defined as a character disorder which is characterized by antisocial behaviour, bold and egotistical traits. In *Mental Disorders*, Dean Haycock mentions the symptoms of the psychopath, which includes, "lack of a conscience or sense of guilt, lack of empathy, self-regard, pathological lying, repeated violations of social norms, and disregard for the law, shallow emotions and a history of oppressing others".

People with psychopathy uses charm, deceit and violence to get what they want. Amy Dunne has many characteristic features which shows her as a psychopath. Amy Dunne is a writer. She loves to write personality quizzes. She is invited to a writer's party, where she meets Nick who impresses her at the first sight. She learns that Nick expects his girl to be very cool. So, she hides her real personality and fakes her personality as a Cool Girl.

Nick loves Amy a lot, because he feels that Amy was very cool. Amy explains the Cool Girl concept as: "That night at the Brooklyn party, I was playing the girl who was in style, the girl a man like Nick wants: the Cool Girl....Cool Girls never get angry: they only smile in a irked, tender manner and let their men do whatever they want"(251).

Amy fakes herself as a Cool Girl only for the sake of her husband, Nick. But she finds it hard to pretend to be a girl who does not exist. So, she decides to show her real personality. When she gives up on being the Cool Amy, their marriage life starts to collapse. Amy loves Nick a lot. It disturbs her mentally when Nick starts avoiding her after knowing the real Amy.

She expresses her inner feeling as, "I hated Nick for being surprised when I became me"(253). Amy is not happy with her in-laws. She loves Nick, but not his family. But, after Nick changes his attitude towards her, she starts to pretend that she loves Nick's mom and dad. She takes care of them. Amy is a master manipulator and an practiced at mind games. Nick, after knowing Amy's real personality, started avoiding her.

He had affair with his young student, Andie which infuriates Amy. She decides to take profit on Nick. So, she leaves her home and makes everyone believe that she was killed by her husband Nick. She leaves some strong evidences to prove Nick as a murderer. One of the strongest evidence is her diary entries. The diary entries show Nick as a rude man who beats Amy often.

Amy writes in her diary that “He promised to take care of me, and yet I feel afraid” (115). So, she buys a gun to protect herself from the harsh behaviour of Nick. Only at the second part of the novel, it is made clear that the Diary entries are not real. It was created by Amy to prove Nick guilty. Amy confesses it as: I thought the entries turned out nicely, and it wasn’t simple.

I had to maintain an affable if somewhat naïve persona, a woman who loved her husband and could see some of his flaws (otherwise she’d be too much of a sap) but was sincerely devoted to him—all the while leading the reader (in this case, the cops, I am so eager for them to find it) toward the conclusion that Nick was indeed planning to kill me”. (266) She becomes successful in doing that.

The cops believed the diary entries to be true, but Nick somehow finds that Amy is framing him for her murder. Amy uses Noelle Hawthorne to make people believe that Nick has killed his wife. Noelle Hawthorne was an innocent woman who falls in the trick of Amy. She does not know that Amy was using her for her own purpose. Noelle feels that she is Amy’s best friend and she weeps after knowing that Amy was missing.

Amy makes Noelle believe that Nick married Amy for her money and Amy was scared of Nick’s temper. Amy also manipulates her to make everyone believe that Amy is pregnant. She keeps on asking Nick, “Where is she? What have you done with Amy? What have you done with your wife?” (218). Amy succeeds in this plan and Noelle successfully makes everyone believe that Nick was a murderer. Shawna Kelly is the other woman, who makes Amy’s plans to be successful.

Nick converts the prime distrustful for Amy’s disappearance. So, all his activities and actions were noted by the means and the police officers. It was at this time, Shawna Kelly arrives. She flirts behind Nick and always concerns about his health. She asks him to have his food and sleep earlier. But, Nick is not happy with her presence. Once, she takes a snap with Nick where he smiled robotically. This snap becomes a strong evidence for the investigation.

Shawna Kelly attends an interview where she blames Nick as a flirty guy. Every evidence proves Nick as a guilty guy. He has no evidences to justify himself. The other evidence which caught the gentleness of the detectives is the credit cards. The detective informs Nick that two hundred and twelve thousand dollars are taken in the credit cards.

Nick is unaware of this incident and so he says that it should be an ‘identity theft’. But, the detectives suspects Nick. Only at the end, it is revealed that Amy is the one who draws

money and creates a situation which proves Nick guilty. Amy succeeded in manipulating things which creates a strong evidence to prove Nick as a rude, cruel murderer.

One of the chief characteristic features in Amy's personality disorder is her compulsive lying. The second part of the novel shows that Amy has lied in many situations to frame Nick for her death. She has lied to everyone around her that she has blood phobia. But, Amy herself revealed the truth that she was not afraid of blood.

She says it as, "Amy is fearful of blood, the chronicle readers will say...No, I'm not, not a bit; but for the earlier year I've been saying I am" (247). Amy has also lied about the personality of Nick. She shows him as a Gruff, peeved and angry man. Similarly, she has written in her diaries that Nick rejects the idea of having kids. She says that Nick's situation forces him to take such a decision.

But it was a lie, because Nick loves kids and he longs for a boy baby. Amy also portrays Nick as a cruel man who attacks her often, which scared her the most. Her words describes the scene as: "He shoved me. Hard. Two days ago, he hove me, and I fell and walloped my head against the kitchen island and I couldn't see for three seconds" (220).

The biggest lie uttered by Amy is about her pregnancy. She plays with Nick's emotions by saying such a lie. She knows that Nick longs for a kid. Even then, she lies. When Nick learns that the pregnancy was also a lie, he is deeply wounded. The pain can be seen through his lines: "The baby was a lie. It was the most forsaken part for me. My wife as a murderer was frightening, repulsive, but the baby as a lie was almost impossible to bear" (434).

The person with personality disorder will have the lack of guilt. This can be seen through Amy's character. She does everything to take payback on her husband. She plays with the emotions of innocent beings by showing a false love towards them. She helps her parents in their troubled situation. She should feel proud to be a decent daughter. But, instead, she decides to ask her parents to return her the money with interest. Amy plays with the emotions of Nick.

Even after she knows that Nick finds her plans, she does not feel any sense of guilt. Nick does not want to live with such a frightening person. So, he decides to reveal her real identity to the world by writing a memoir. When Amy knows about this, she becomes pregnant by undergoing fertility treatment. She threatens him to destroy the manuscript.

Nick does it for the sake of his child, because Nick knows that "My wife, the very fun, beautiful murderess, will do me harm if I displease her"(452). Amy has a criminal mind. Nick, being a husband, finds it difficult to sense what is running in her mind. Nick talks about it as, "I think of that, too: her observance. Her brain, all those coils, and her thoughts shuttling through those coils like fast, frantic centipedes" (3).

Nick also feels that Amy is contrast to the character of Cool Girl. She gets angry

often. Sometimes she is ready to hurt anyone. This proves when we learn that Amy after finding Nick's affair with Andie, decides to take revenge on Nick. Amy is not happy, so she does not want her husband to be happy. Her jealousy is revealed, when she says, "He ended up happier than ever. No.

I couldn't allow that" (263). In order to take revenge on her husband, Amy decides to frame Nick as a murderer. She stages every situation perfectly that no one doubted about the entire setting. Nick develops the prime suspect of the investigation. Nick lied in front of the media that he loves Amy and he wishes her to come back. He confesses all his mistakes and asks for forgiveness.

Amy trusted him and decides to yield to him. She kills DesiCollings, because she knew that he won't let her to yield to Nick. Even after committing such a crime, she is not punished, because she cooked up a new story that she killed Desi as a self-defense. Nick fears to stay with Amy. His fears are expressed through his words: "I am a great husband because I am very afraid she may kill me" (452).

Similarly, Amy makes everyone believe that Hilary Handy was obsessed with her. But, it was Amy who created a bad impression about Hilary. Amy was proud about being the central character in the Amazing Amy series. Amy becomes close with Hilary. But once, a guy invites Hilary Handy for a party, ignoring Amy. This creates a sense of hatred towards Hilary. Amy complains bad about her parents to Hilary.

Amy uses Hilary to create a bad impression on herself. Once a bad impression was created on Hilary, Amy started distancing herself from her. Once, Amy falls down from the stairs and she informs everyone that it is Hilary who pushed her down. This shows Amy as a dominating and controlling character. Sexual promiscuity is the another characteristic features of the person with personality disorder. They feel that they are perfect with charming qualities.

They will sexually attract the opposite sex. Amy is also seen as such a character. Amy had several sexual partners other than Nick. Tommy O' Hara is one such character, whom she meets at a party and falls in love with him. After dating few months with Amy, Tommy feels that Amy is not the girl of his type. So, he distances himself from her.

After knowing that Tommy has started finding another girl, she comes to his home and has sex with him. It is also noted that she is the one who initiated it. He explains the situation to Nick very clearly. After this incidents, Amy files a rape case on Tommy. By narrating this story, Tommy warns Nick to make Amy happy. Because, if Amy is not happy, she will doles out punishment. Another victim to this situation is Desi Collings. He is the high school friend of Amy whom she loves.

He treat her like a princess. He was Amy's first love but Desi was very possessive with Amy.

Amy breaks up her relationship with Desi and she marries Nick. Desi is also disturbed on hearing the disappearance of Amy. Nick meets Desi to know whether he knows anything about Amy's disappearance. But, Desi does not know anything and he blames Nick that he is not reacting to the disappearance of Amy. When Amy's money has been stolen by Jeff and Greta, she needs someone to take care of her. So, she depends on Desi.

She lies to him that Nick is being rude to her and she does not want to return to Nick. So, Desi decides to give her accommodation in his Lake House and makes her feel comfortable in the Lakehouse. Amy sees an interview of Nick in the TV, where Nick confesses as, 'I cheated. I disrespected my wife' (392).

Nick also asks for her forgiveness and asks her to come back home. Amy decides to return to Nick, but DesiCollings is obsessed with her. DesiCollings does not want to let Amy to go back to Nick. He has not given any keys to her. So, she plans to kill him. Amy feels a sense of disgust towards DesiCollings. She makes him drink hard. When he feels sleepy, she seduces him and murdered him.

Even after his death she uses his name to escape from the punishment. This can be seen through Jacqueline's words: "She manipulated and lies and finally murdered him, and now, even after he's dead, she's still using him -" (429). Amy confesses about the murder to Nick. Nick fears after hearing the confession. He feels that it is not safe to live along with his murderous wife, Amy Dunne.

People with psychopath characteristic features will not have a successful married life. It can be seen through the broken marriage of Amy and Nick. Theirs marriage is a love marriage. But there are lot of lies, betrayals and dishonesty in their married life. Amy loves Nick and she expresses her love by remembering every minute details of their togetherness. She expects Nick to reciprocate the same towards her.

Nick explains this to Amy as, "Amy, I don't get why I need to attest my love to you by memory the exact same things you do, the rigorous same way you do. It doesn't mean I don't love our life together"(22). When Nick finds some changes in the attitude of Amy, he develops an affair with his student, Andie. Amy does not like this. So, she decides to take requite on him. She does many things to trap Nick in the case of Amy's disappearance.

Even at the end, she does not return with a good heart. She still does many criminal activities to have Nick. She does not want to lose Nick, so she becomes pregnant by undergoing fertility treatment and threatens him with it. It is not sure whether Nick will be happy with Amy. He calls Amy as, "She is my forever antagonist"(461).

Thus, in this novel *Gone Girl*, Gillian Flynn has succeeded in creating Amy Dunne as a psychopath character. Amy has all the characteristics of a psychopath. She was brought up as a spoiled kid who has not been taught any moral values. From her childhood she gets

everything she wishes to have. So when she finds that her marriage life is going out of her control, she takes initiative to protect it, but in a negative way.

All her suppressed emotions comes out in the form of revenge which forced her to become violent. Thus, Gillian Flynn has beautifully portrayed the psychopathic characteristic traits and the aggressive mindset of the female protagonist, Amy. It also emphasizes the idea that women will take violence and revenge as her weapon whenever they feel their life is in danger.

Amy would have cured from this personality disorder if she was loved by her husband.