

Emotional Boundaries in Slavery Experienced By The Main Character in The Novel "The Water Dancer" by Ta-Nehisi Coates

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological dimensions of emotional boundaries depicted in Ta-Nehisi Coates' novel *The Water Dancer*, focusing on the experiences of enslaved individuals. Using qualitative analysis, the research delves into the emotional landscapes of the characters, particularly Hiram Walker, to understand how they navigate trauma, identity, and resilience. Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the analysis highlights the dual role of emotional repression as a survival mechanism and the potential long-term psychological impacts it may entail. The findings reveal the profound psychological complexities faced by Hiram Walker and other enslaved individuals, emphasizing the significance of emotional boundaries as coping mechanisms in dealing with trauma, fear, and oppression. At the same time, the analysis uncovers the conflict between the desire for emotional connection and the need for self-protection. This research aims to provide valuable insights into the psychological impact of slavery, encompassing aspects of trauma, resilience, and identity formation.

Keywords: Emotional Boundaries, Psychological impact, identity.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi dimensi psikologis dari batasan emosional yang digambarkan dalam novel karya Ta-Nehisi Coates berjudul *The Water Dancer*, dengan fokus pada pengalaman individu yang diperbudak. Dengan menggunakan analisis kualitatif, penelitian ini menyelidiki lanskap emosional para tokoh, khususnya Hiram Walker, untuk memahami bagaimana mereka menghadapi trauma, identitas, dan ketahanan. Mengacu pada teori psikoanalitik Freud, analisis ini menyoroti peran ganda represi emosional sebagai mekanisme bertahan hidup dan potensi dampak psikologis jangka panjang yang mungkin ditimbulkannya. Temuan ini mengungkap kompleksitas psikologis mendalam yang dihadapi oleh Hiram Walker dan individu yang diperbudak lainnya, yang menekankan pentingnya batasan emosional sebagai mekanisme penanggulangan dalam menghadapi trauma, ketakutan, dan penindasan. Pada saat yang sama, analisis ini mengungkap konflik antara keinginan untuk terhubung secara emosional dan kebutuhan untuk melindungi diri sendiri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan berharga tentang dampak psikologis perbudakan, yang mencakup aspek trauma, ketahanan, dan pembentukan identitas.

Kata kunci: Batasan Emosional, Dampak psikologis, identitas.

A. INTRODUCTION

Literature represents a psychological phenomenon that showcases the psychological aspects of characters within texts, whether in the form of drama or prose. The relationship between literature and

psychology is closely intertwined, both indirectly and functionally. This indirect connection arises from their shared exploration of human life. Psychology focuses on concrete reality, whereas literature uses imagination to create beautiful works, fulfilling human aesthetic needs and serving as a conduit

for ideas about human life reflected by writers. The object of literary art is the human life experience, particularly within social-cultural, artistic, and intellectual contexts. Literature has two main aspects: content that portrays human life experiences, and form that involves the stylistic delivery through beautiful language. Literature is regarded as creative, fictional, and innovative, producing works that entertain and provide profound insights into the reality of life (Harini, 2020).

Etymologically, the term "literature" originates from Sanskrit, meaning a tool or means for teaching or providing guidance. The creative process in literature is significantly influenced by thoughts that prompt writers to depict the complex and broad spectrum of human life. Literature symbolically depicts the realities of societal life, thereby serving as a reflection of society itself. In reading literature, researchers not only enjoy or appreciate it but also delve into various psychological aspects of its characters, including internal conflicts, behavioral disturbances, and deeper psychological conditions they experience (Susanto, 2011).

In general, the psychology of literature refers to a deep analysis of human psychological aspects within the context of literary works, combining psychological theories with interpretations of literature to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts

and meanings conveyed by authors to readers.

Literary psychology can explore and analyze how literature portrays and influences our understanding of slavery. This includes how literary narratives affect our perceptions of victims, perpetrators, and the psychological impacts of slavery. For example, literature can help us understand trauma, feelings of powerlessness, or even resistance to the system of slavery through complex character perspectives and storylines.

Slavery in the United States is the legal institutionalization of human bondage that existed in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. Slavery was practiced in British colonized North America from the earliest days of colonization, and was recognized in the Thirteen Colonies at the time of the Proclamation of Independence in 1776. When the United States was founded, although some free people of color existed, the status of slaves usually coincided with African descent, creating a system and tradition in which race played a very influential role. Slavery in the United States was legal until the adoption of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865. Slavery dates back to the British colonization of Virginia in 1607, although African slaves had already been brought to Spanish Florida in the 1560s (Cordero, 2021). The experience of slavery left a

lasting emotional impact on the people. The experience of slavery left a deep emotional impact on slaves, including feelings of entrapment, isolation, and loss of identity and self-worth (Gilchrist, 2012). Islam also takes a part to this research as show in the QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6, within as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَنْ تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلَىٰ يَاسًا
Yaaa ayyuhallaziina aamanuuu ing jaaa-akum faasiqum binaba-ing fa tabayyanuuu ang tushiibuu qoumam bijahaalating fa tushbihuu 'alaa maa fa'altum naadimiin

Translation : "you who have believed, if a wicked person comes to you with a report, investigate it fully, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful."

This verse provides guidance for individuals to avoid causing harm or taking actions that may mislead without understanding the context. In the context of emotional boundaries, the verse suggests refraining from impulsive responses to information or events but instead conducting thorough examination. It reflects the principle of controlling emotional reactions, avoiding hasty conclusions, and maintaining emotional stability through knowledge and understanding (Nahar, 2022). In essence, Surah Al-Hujurat (49:6) offers guidance for establishing emotional boundaries by ensuring that our reactions and actions are based on

accurate understanding and are not influenced by uncontrolled emotions. This concept is related to maintaining emotional balance and avoiding errors that may arise from impulsive reactions.

Emotional boundaries in the context of slavery are important because slavery was an emotionally charged economic system (Cordero, 2021). The emotional burden of slavery was felt by both slaves and slave owners (Dawyer, 2021). Slaves experienced a range of emotions, including fear, anger, sadness, and despair (Gent, 2019). Emotional boundaries were necessary for slaves to cope with their experiences and form a sense of agency (Dawyer, 2021). For example, slaves must learn to suppress their emotions to avoid punishment or appear content in front of their masters (William, 2015). Emotional boundaries also played a role in the justification of slavery, as slave owners believed that slaves were emotionally different and less capable of experiencing complex emotions (Dawyer, 2021).

One novel that raises the theme of slavery is "The Water Dancer" by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The novel tells the story of a man named Hiram Walker, a slave who has spiritual abilities that are used to escape and help slaves escape from slavery. The novel depicts the experience of slavery with a focus on the emotional aspects experienced by the slaves.

However, in the experience of slavery, slaves often have to build emotional boundaries to survive. These emotional boundaries can be in the form of suppression of emotions, separation between the internal and external worlds, and the use of imagination as a form of escape from harsh reality. Therefore, it is important to understand the concept of emotional boundaries in the context of the slavery experience told in the novel "The Water Dancer".

This research explores the emotional impact of slavery on slaves, including the feelings of entrapment, isolation, and emotional trauma experienced by them. It could also address how slaves created emotional boundaries to protect themselves from the negative effects of slavery.

Based on the background explanation above, the research question is then formulated: how do the main characters in the novel "The Water Dancer" build emotional boundaries in their experience of slavery?

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The first research was written by (Siregar, 2022) "The Inner Conflict of the Main Character of the Novel Goes by Tere Liye: Literary Psychology Study". the purpose of the research is to describe the inner conflict of the main character in the novel go by Tere Liye. This research is a descriptive research using content analysis method and

using a literary psychology approach. This study uses the theory of Literary Psychology, and the conclusion of the study that can be drawn from the reseacrh is the nove l Go by Tere Liye presents an interesting and inspiring story, because it is supported by interrelated intrinsic elements that make the novel a good novel.

The second research was written by Hayward & Tuckey., (2011) entitled "Emotions in uniform: How nurses regulate emotion at work via emotional boundaries". This research aims to determine the emotional boundary perspective offer possibilities for knowledge development that are not rooted in assumption about the authenticity of emotion or the profesional self but that instead acccount for the dynamic, complex, multi-layered, and adaptive characteistics of emtion management. The method used in this research is a qualitative method with the theories of Gross (1998). The result of this study is indicated the management of emotions at work has been conceptualized in terms of its association with emotional inauthenticity and dissonance. In contrast, the author integrate the idea of emotion regulation at work with basic strategic and adaptive functions of emotion, offering a new way of understanding how emotions can be harnessed for task achievement and personal development.

The third research was written by (Benson, 2003) "The Unthinkable Boundaries of Self: The Role of Negative Emotional Boundaries in the Formation, Maintenance, and Transformation of Identities" The journal discusses how individuals' identities are influenced by their emotional relationships, interactions with others, and personal moral values. It explores the concept of "unthinkable boundaries" in defining individual and group identities, referencing psychological theories on emotions and morality.

The three studies share a common focus on exploring various aspects of human psychology, including the interactions between emotions, identity, and behavior. Each study adopts a thorough psychological approach in its analysis, els to the emotional regulation strategies employed by nurses in the workplace, to the influence of negative emotions on individual identity formation.

Additionally, differences are apparent in the research methods employed, ranging from content analysis to qualitative approaches that involve integrating various humanities disciplines. Lastly, the studies utilize different psychological theories to support their analyses, encompassing theories such as Literary Psychology, emotion regulation theory, and theories on identity and emotion in self-formation. Thus, while there are similarities in their approaches and

research focuses, significant differences exist in the subjects studied, research methods employed, and theories utilized, highlighting the diverse approaches within the field of applied psychology.

Previous study was conducted to identify previous studies related to the novel "The Water Dancer" by Ta-Nehisi Coates. This literature review was obtained from several sources, including books supporting the field of psychological literature, some thesis references, and also from the internet in the form of journals.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is literary criticism or literary theory whose concepts, methods and forms are influenced by the psychoanalytic tradition.

Sigmund Freud was the first psychologist to investigate aspects of the unconscious in the human psyche. Born in Moravia on May 6, 1856, Freud likened human consciousness to an iceberg, with only a small portion visible above the surface representing awareness. Within this expansive unconscious realm lie drives, desires, ideas, and suppressed feelings—a vast world that exerts significant control over human thoughts and actions (Hall dan Gardner, 1993:60).

This unconscious plays a pivotal role; the majority of psychic life remains

unacknowledged, with only a small fraction surfacing into consciousness (Kartono, 1996:128). Continuous impulses and primal energies unfold within this unconscious. Freud's teachings, commonly referred to as psychoanalysis in the field of psychology, emphasize the investigation of psychological processes within human unconsciousness (Fitria, 2013).

The structure of personality consists of three systems: id (das es), ego (das ich), and superego (das ueber ich). Human behavior essentially results from interactions among these components—id, ego, and superego—working in concert, with minimal possibility of any one operating independently or being detached.

The id represents the biological aspect and the most fundamental layer of the psyche. It contains innate instincts (sexual and aggressive) and repressed desires, functioning as psychic energy that propels both ego and superego. The id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking gratification of instinctual desires without regard for rational laws, ethics, or morals. For instance, when hungry or thirsty, one immediately feels the urge to eat or drink, which is crucial for satisfying basic human needs from birth onwards.

The ego is a psychological aspect of personality that arises from the individual's need to relate effectively to

the real world. It helps individuals assess whether they can fulfill their desires without causing personal distress. The ego acts as the executive aspect of personality, controlling decisions, selecting needs that can be met, and determining appropriate methods for satisfaction. A weakened ego may lead to internal conflicts expressed through pathological or abnormal behaviors. For example, during an important meeting when feeling hungry, the ego might urge restraint until an appropriate time to eat.

The superego represents the sociological aspect of personality. Its primary function is to dictate right from wrong or the morality of actions based on societal norms. It serves as the moral aspect of personality, guiding decisions on whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate according to prevailing societal morality. The superego's main function is to inhibit id impulses, particularly those of a sexual or aggressive nature conflicting with societal norms, thereby urging the ego toward morally driven pursuits rather than purely realistic ones. For instance, if tempted to steal a friend's food unnoticed, the superego restrains such impulses by recognizing theft as morally wrong.

In summary, Sigmund Freud's psychological theory, known as psychoanalysis, examines the psyche's unconscious processes and structures of

personality—id, ego, and superego—as fundamental elements influencing human behavior and decision-making.

Psychology of literature involves the analysis of how psychological elements, including emotional constraints of characters, are presented and understood in literary works such as novels. In this context, emotional constraints refer to the limitations, internal conflicts, or emotional struggles experienced by characters within the story. Literary psychology aids in understanding how authors construct the emotional complexity of characters through narration, dialogue, and their behavior. This may involve tracing the character's background, motivations, past traumas, or environmental influences on their emotions. By comprehending these emotional constraints, readers can engage more deeply with the characters' emotional journeys and the themes explored in the novel.

Emotional Boundaries

Emotional boundaries are limits you place on the energy and emotions you will both give and are willing to receive in relationships. Emotional boundaries pertain to one's feelings, thoughts, and emotional well-being. Individuals may establish limits on sharing personal information, managing criticism, or dealing with the emotional needs of others. Setting emotional boundaries means separating your emotions from others' emotions, and being clear with

yourself about what you are willing to give and accept from others and what you offer in return (Joanne, 2024).

The concept of having emotional boundaries is basically understanding that your feelings and experiences are yours alone, and that other people's feelings and experiences are theirs alone. At any given moment, even when two of us are together and doing the same thing, our bodies, souls, emotions, and experiences are unique to each of us. We all perceive things differently. Having emotional boundaries means that we have learned to understand this, and that we can usually differentiate our feelings and motivations from other people's feelings and motivations. We learn how to stay secure in ourselves when in positive or negative relationships and interactions with others. We learn when to step in, and when to step back, when to be helpful, when to protect ourselves, and how to allow others to be themselves. Emotional boundaries develop and mature over our lifetimes. We begin literally as part of another human being, and from then on, little by little, day by day for ever and ever, we learn that we are a separate person, a whole person, who also needs to connect with other whole people. Needless to say, this can be one of the trickiest and most important parts of our maturity to master, because it impacts our most important relationships (Bradford, 2021).

Emotional boundaries, in essence, are psychological safeguards. Emotional boundaries define the separation between your emotions and those of others. They are vital for maintaining emotional health and well-being. Healthy emotional boundaries enable you to differentiate between your feelings and the feelings of others, preventing emotional enmeshment.

In your daily life, emotional boundaries determine how you react to external influences. For example, they allow you to empathize with a friend's sadness without absorbing their emotions, ultimately preventing emotional burnout. In relationships, emotional boundaries provide the space for self-expression, allowing individuals to communicate their feelings honestly and assertively without feeling guilty or responsible for the emotions of others (Nakhlé, 2021).

It is important to note that emotional boundaries are not absolute or fixed. They can change over time and can be influenced by various factors. Some people may seek to expand their emotional boundaries by developing self-awareness and skills in managing emotions, while others may feel more comfortable with more draining boundaries.

Synopsis of the Novel

"The Water Dancer," by Ta-Nehisi Coates, is a novel that tells the

emotional journey of a man named Hiram Walker, who was born into slavery but has the special ability to remember everything perfectly, a power that then leads him on a journey to uncover his family's secrets and achieve true freedom, while he struggles against the pain and injustice closely associated with the system of slavery, exploring stories of bitterness, trauma, and love that transcend boundaries. Explores stories of pain, trauma, and love that transcend physical boundaries and move readers to contemplate the cost of humanity and vulnerability, presenting a profound emotional landscape, from unspoken loss to inspiring courage, and with his skillful writing, Coates creates a narrative that shakes the soul and opens the door to an urgent social dialogue to explore the emotional boundaries of human beings in the context of this history full of suffering and struggle. *The Water Dancer* (2019) is the debut novel by African-American journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates. In this remarkable first work, Coates employs a magical realism style through a supernatural power called Conduction possessed by the main character. This power allows one to transform stories into bridges that can span vast distances. Hiram Walker, the protagonist, has had the Conduction ability since birth. Hiram was not only enslaved in the physical sense but also immersed himself in an enduring system that led to internalization of racial oppression. In the Institutional and Cultural phases, he was compelled

to live according to colonial values that subjugated black people. Hiram internalized the oppression imposed by those of higher status, notably his own father, a benefactor. This caused him to forsake the mnemonic socialization from his family in the early stages of Harro's model. However, after positioning himself within the Underground Railroad and witnessing the abolitionist struggle, Hiram rediscovered mnemonic socialization in the Action phase of natural mnemonic, which formed the basis for community resistance and aligned with the values once imparted by his family. Ultimately, by finding himself within the collective memory of the Underground Railroad community and employing memory types, flashbulb and generational memories helped counter epidermalization and find a path to freedom. This was achieved through Hiram Walker's storytelling using his Conduction power to transform his narratives into bridges, guiding himself and his loved ones toward freedom in the North.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative literary analysis method to examine how slavery is portrayed in Ta-Nehisi Coates' novel 'The Water Dancer', focusing particularly on the emotional boundaries experienced by the characters. Data will be gathered from the text, including quotes and passages,

which will then be interpreted by the researcher. Source Of Data

The source of data in research is the subject from which data can be obtained. Can be obtained. Data sources are classified into two categories, among others:

Primary Data

The primary data of this research is text sourced from the novel "The Water Dancer" by Ta-Nehisi Coates published on September 24, 2019, by Random House under the imprint of One World in the United States.

Secondary data

To strengthen the data, researchers collect secondary data from libraries related to this type of literary research. Procedure of data collection

In the data collection procedure, the steps that researchers use are as follows without changing their meaning:

- 1) The researcher read the text of the novel The Water Dancer.
- 2) The researcher read the text many times to understand more deeply what would be researched.
- 3) The researcher identified every conversation or story presented in the novel related to emotional boundaries.
- 4) The researcher records all the things obtained after identifying the texts of the novel.
- 5) The researcher explains the identification results in the results section and describes them in detail.

Technique of data analysis

In collecting data, the researcher focused on the emotional conditions experienced and the impact of these emotions in the novel. In collecting data, the researcher used the theory of Sigmund Freud about psychoanalysis, Then. The researcher draws conclusion based on the data analysis.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Emotional Constraints. Freud's psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the influence of the unconscious mind on behavior. According to Freud, the mind is structured into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification of desires, while the superego enforces moral standards. The ego, which functions as a mediator, operates on the reality principle, balancing the demands of the id and superego while taking into account the constraints of the external world.

Freud also introduced the concept of defense mechanisms, which are unconscious strategies the ego uses to protect itself from anxiety and emotional distress. These mechanisms include repression, denial, and displacement, which help individuals cope with traumatic experience (Khendy, 2020). In the context of

slavery, these defense mechanisms can be seen in the emotional constraints that Hiram sets to survive the extreme psychological distress caused by his

circumstances.

1. Hiram Walker's Emotional Limits: Repression and Survival

In *The Water Dancer*, Hiram experiences severe emotional and psychological trauma as a result of his slavery. Freud's theory of repression is particularly relevant in understanding how Hiram deals with his painful past and present. Repression involves pushing distressing thoughts, feelings, and memories into the unconscious to avoid the pain associated with them.

"The pain of memory, my memory so sharp and clear, was more than could bear, so that this one time, I forgot, though I forgot nothing else. I forgot my mother's name, forgot my justice, forgot the power of Santi Bess, of Mami Wata, and turned my eyes to the great house of Lockless." (*The Water Dancer*. Page: 351)

This quote shows how Hiram has repressed memories of his mother and the people around her, a mechanism that is in line with Freud's theory of repression. He feels a deep sense of loss, but cannot recall any clear details, because the memories are too painful to access.

Throughout the novel, Hiram suppresses many of his emotions, especially anger, sadness, and fear. This suppression allows him to maintain a facade of obedience and emotional control, which is essential to his survival as a slave.

Imagination and Emotional Escape: Freud's Concept of Fantasy

Another aspect of Hiram's emotional limitations is his use of imagination and fantasy as a coping mechanism. Freud believed that individuals often turn to fantasy to fulfill unfulfilled desires and to escape harsh realities. For Hiram, his memories of his mother and the act of "conduction" (a form of spiritual transportation in the novel) represent his unconscious attempts to reconnect with a sense of freedom and belonging.

"But here we are now. And we have forgotten the old song and so much of our story. There's so much. So much I can't remember. And I can't remember how or when I had lost it." (The Water Dancer. Page: 247).

This shows that Hiram feels like something is missing from his life, but he can't quite put his finger on what it is. This illustrates the repression of traumatic memories, where the pain is too much to deal with, so the memories are pushed into the subconscious.

Hiram's ability to "act out" serves as both a literal and symbolic means of escape from the horrors of slavery. This ability reflects an unconscious desire to transcend the physical and emotional limitations imposed upon him. Freud's theory states that fantasy allows individuals to experience emotional relief from repressed desires. Hiram's emotional limitations, in this case, are his ability to escape mentally and spiritually even while physically restricted by the system of slavery.

1. Defense Mechanisms and Emotional Detachment

Freud's defense mechanisms also explain Hiram's emotional detachment from the suffering around him. Emotional detachment, a form of isolation, is another survival strategy. Hiram suppresses his deep sorrow and detaches himself from the pain of witnessing other slaves suffer. In doing so, he creates psychological distance from the unbearable emotions that arise from his environment.

For example, Hiram's relationship with Sophia, another slave, shows his struggle to maintain emotional boundaries. He wants to connect with Sophia on a deep emotional level, but also realizes that forming such an attachment can lead to vulnerability and suffering. Proven in the quote:

"I could not give her what she asked of me, not because I did not love her, but because love itself had become something to fear, something that could be taken away at any moment." (The Water Dancer. Page : 328).

This shows that even though Hiram has deep feelings for Sophia, the fear of losing her makes him keep his distance and maintain emotional boundaries.

This internal conflict reflects Freud's concept of ambivalence, in which Hiram is torn between a desire to connect and a fear of emotional pain. His defense mechanisms protect him from fully experiencing the emotional intensity of his situation.

By exploring Hiram's emotional limitations, this analysis highlights the resilience of the human spirit in the face of extreme adversity. Freud's theory offers a framework for understanding how individuals, like Hiram, construct emotional barriers to protect themselves from overwhelming emotional pain, a theme that is woven deeply into the fabric of *The Water Dancer*.

The ability to control one's emotional responses is closely tied to a sense of agency and self-determination. As Hiram learns to control his emotions, he gradually regains aspects of his agency, illustrating the interplay between emotional health and personal autonomy.

2. Depressed Expectation

Through the depiction of Hiram's character, we can feel the inner conflict he experiences regarding his desire for freedom, but also his deep fear of the consequences that could arise if he dares to voice his dreams.

"I wanted freedom. I dreamed of it. But I was too afraid. Too afraid to even whisper it aloud, for fear that even the mention of it would invite disaster." (The Water Dancer. Page : 320).

In this sentence, Hiram expresses his desire for freedom, which is a fundamental human drive to live free from oppression and constraints, especially in the context of slavery. Psychologically, we can observe the dynamics of the three aspects of the psyche based on Freud's theory.

In this context, we see that although there is a moral and instinctive drive for freedom, social realities and the fear of retaliation trap Hiram in a state of "depressed expectation." He longs for freedom, but he does not even dare to dream or speak of it because his fear is too overwhelming.

3. The Avoidance Of Painful Memories

This sentence is taken from the novel *The Water Dancer* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, which describes Hiram's emotional journey as he confronts traumatic memories of the past. This

sentence captures the moment where Hiram feels that he has been freed from the emotional burden of the past, but the memories come back unsolicited, urging him to confront. In this context, we see a psychological conflict between the desire to forget the trauma and the need to face it.

"I had thought myself free of those memories, but they came back to me now, unbidden. I did not want to remember, but the memories insisted on being heard." (The Water Dancer. Page : 363).

Through the lens of Freud's theory, Hiram's inner conflict can be analyzed through three psychological aspects: Id, Ego, and Superego.

This sentence describes the struggle between the desire to forget the trauma and the need to deal with it, which is ultimately part of the healing process. The conflict between the Id, the Ego, and the Superego reflects a dilemma often faced by traumatized people—where the desire to forget is confronted with the need to confront and understand past wounds. Although Hiram wanted to suppress those memories, in the end, they resurfaced, urging him to be understood and addressed as part of his emotional and mental growth.

4. Inability to Cope With the Past

A novel that depicts the emotional and spiritual journey of the

main character, Hiram, as she confronts her painful past. Here, Hiram admits that even though he is aware of not being able to go back in time, he still longs for something that has been lost and longs for the opportunity to erase all the pain and suffering he has ever experienced. This sentence reflects the struggle between the desire to change the past and the fact that he has to move forward.

"I knew I could not go back, but still I longed for what was lost. There was a part of me that wanted to undo everything, to somehow erase all the pain and suffering I had experienced." (The Water Dancer. Page : 93).

This sentence reveals the inner conflict that Hiram experienced between the desire to erase the suffering of the past and the fact that he could not go back or change what had already happened. Psychologically, this is an example of the struggle between Id, who wants to escape the pain, and Ego, who admits that the past cannot be repeated. The superego may add a moral dimension, evoking a sense of responsibility or regret for the past. Ultimately, it reflects an emotional journey to accept reality and strive to move forward despite a sense of loss and suffering.

5. Emotional Destruction

Hiram chose to suppress hopes and feelings because of a deep fear of disappointment and loss. This is an

emotional survival strategy formed from his past trauma. Through the perspective of Freud's theory, we can understand the conflict between basic instincts, self-defense mechanisms, and moral pressures involved handling emotional pain.

"I had learned to expect nothing, to hope for nothing, because hope was too dangerous, too easily shattered. Better to feel nothing at all than to risk the pain of losing everything once again." (The Water Dancer. Page : 283).

In this sentence, we can analyzed Hiram's psychological state through three main aspects of Freud's theory:

This quote describes Hiram's fear of hope and disappointment, as well as how he suppressed his feelings as a self-protection mechanism. The conflict between Id, Ego, and Superego is very clear here. Id wants to avoid suffering by avoiding feelings completely, while Ego logically tries to protect Hiram from emotional disappointment. The superego may realize there is a moral price to pay to suppress emotions, but fear of suffering makes Hiram choose not to hope. This reflects the complex dynamics.

Emotional Separation

The following quote shows where Hiram reveals his decision to close himself off from the outside world and turn off his feelings in order to avoid emotional pain that he can no

longer bear. This reflects the survival mechanisms he built to protect himself from further trauma. Using Freud's theory, we can understand how Hiram suppressed feelings in order to maintain his psychological balance, even though this had an impact on his ability to function socially and morally.

"I had shut myself off from the world. I could not allow myself to feel, because feeling meant pain, and pain was something I could no longer endure." (The Water Dancer. Page : 150).

This sentence can be analyzed using Freud's concept, which divides the soul into three main aspects.

This sentence describes how Hiram suppresses his feelings to protect himself from pain that he can no longer bear. In the context of Freud's theory, this is an example of the conflict between the Id, who wants to escape suffering, and the Ego, which seeks to protect Hiram's emotional balance by suppressing feelings. The superego may realize that there are negative consequences of closing yourself off completely, especially when it comes to moral and social responsibility. However, Hiram's fear of pain makes him choose to close himself off from feelings and the outside world. It reflects a deep dilemma between the need to protect oneself from pain and the consequences of being emotionally and socially isolated.

6. Fear of Hope

This quote from Ta-Nehisi Coates' *The Water Dancer* highlights how Hiram views hope as something dangerous. In the context of slavery and the trauma she experienced, hope became something that was not only fragile, but could also be a source of deeper suffering. This sentence captures the emotional tension between the desire to keep hoping and the fear of repeated disappointments. Through Freud's theory, we can understand how Hiram struggled to face hope with psychological defense mechanisms aimed at protecting herself from disappointment and pain.

"Hope was dangerous. It was the thing that made you believe in a better life, only to have that hope ripped away from you again and again." (*The Water Dancer*. Page : 191).

This sentence reflects Hiram's fear of hope, which he sees as something that is not only risky, but can also cause greater suffering. In the context of Freud's theory, we see a conflict between an Id who desires hope, an Ego who tries to protect Hiram from disappointment by suppressing hope, and a Superego who may emphasize that while hope is morally important, in a situation like slavery, hope can feel like an emotional trap. It shows the human dilemma between the need to hope and the fear of the pain caused by unrealized hope.

7. Indescribable Pain

The following quote describes Hiram's struggle to express his feelings and express the words that are in him. Hiram feels that silence is the safest way to survive in an emotionally stressful situation. In this context, we can explore Hiram's psychological conflict through the lens of Freud's theory, which provides insight into how defense mechanisms, instinctual impulses, and moral pressure contributed to his experience.

"I had words, but I could not speak them. I had feelings, but I could not express them. I had learned that silence was safer, that keeping everything inside was the only way to survive." (*The Water Dancer*. Page : 352).

This sentence shows Hiram's emotional dilemma between the need to express his feelings and the pressure to remain silent for the sake of emotional safety. In the context of Freud's theory, we see an interaction between the Id, which encourages emotional expression, the Ego, which protects Hiram from risk by suppressing feelings, and the Superego, which exerts moral pressure not to show weakness. The result is a situation in which Hiram feels trapped in silence, sacrificing self-expression and emotional support for protection from the pain and disappointment that may arise. It illustrates the complexity of the human experience in dealing with

trauma and the difficulty of navigating hopes and fears.

These sentences continue to show the tension between the id, the ego, and the superego in Hiram's inner life. Id often encourages him to run away from pain, seek freedom, and experience emotional connection, but the ego seeks to protect Hiram from further suffering by suppressing those desires and emotions. The superego adds layers of moral, social, and emotional responsibility, which sometimes reinforce ego repression or create a conflict between Hiram's basic desires and social expectations.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of Hiram Walker's emotional boundaries in *The Water Dancer* reveal intricate layers of psychological complexity that not only highlight individual resilience but also reflect broader themes of trauma, identity, and agency within the context of slavery. This discussion synthesizes these findings, exploring their implications and connections to the psychological experience of enslaved individuals.

The Nature of Emotional Boundaries, Emotional boundaries serve as crucial psychological tools for coping with the trauma of slavery. Hiram's repression of emotions, illustrated through Freud's psychoanalytic concepts, underscores the necessity of these boundaries for survival in an environment

characterized by violence and dehumanization. This repression, while protective, raises questions about the long-term effects on Hiram's mental health and sense of self. The struggle between the need for emotional control and the desire for authentic emotional expression reveals a central conflict faced by enslaved individuals, reflecting a broader human experience of grappling with vulnerability in oppressive situations.

Hiram's use of imagination and fantasy as coping mechanisms highlights the power of creativity in reclaiming agency. His ability to "conduct" symbolizes a spiritual escape from the physical and emotional confines of slavery, showcasing how imagination can serve as a form of resistance. This discussion points to the significance of creative expression as a survival strategy, suggesting that literature and art can be vital means of coping with trauma and asserting individuality. The act of imagining freedom becomes a powerful counter-narrative to the imposed realities of enslavement, emphasizing the importance of hope and aspiration in the darkest of circumstances.

The shared experience of trauma among enslaved individuals is evident in Hiram's interactions with other characters. The emotional boundaries they construct reveal a complex dynamic between individual coping and collective healing. While these boundaries may provide necessary protection, they can also impede

communal solidarity and support. This discussion underscores the importance of

addressing collective trauma in the context of healing, emphasizing the need for community connection in recovering from shared histories of violence and oppression. Recognizing the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences can inform contemporary understandings of resilience in marginalized communities.

Hiram's emotional boundaries are shaped by the cultural and historical context of slavery, which imposes specific expectations on emotional expression, particularly for Black individuals. The pressure to appear strong and stoic can result in the internalization of pain and the reinforcement of emotional boundaries. This discussion highlights the cultural dimensions of emotional health, emphasizing the need to examine how societal norms influence emotional behavior. Understanding these cultural influences can inform contemporary discussions about mental health within marginalized communities, as they navigate the legacies of oppression and the quest for authenticity. The evolution of Hiram's emotional boundaries throughout the narrative reflects the fluidity of psychological coping mechanisms. As he confronts new experiences and relationships, his boundaries shift, allowing for greater emotional engagement and vulnerability. This discussion emphasizes that emotional boundaries

are not static but dynamic, shaped by personal growth and changing circumstances. Recognizing the potential for growth in emotional expression can encourage individuals to explore their emotional landscapes more openly, fostering resilience and healing.

In the novel *The Water Dancer*, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory works through key concepts such as repression, the unconscious, and self-defense mechanisms. This theory is relevant in analyzing how the main character, Hiram Walker, builds emotional boundaries to overcome the trauma of slavery.

Repression: One of the main ways Hiram builds emotional boundaries is through repression or suppression of unconscious feelings. Freud argued that repression is a defense mechanism that individuals use to hide painful feelings or memories from consciousness. In the novel, Hiram suppresses his emotions in order to survive, especially in the presence of his master or situations that could threaten his life. For example, Hiram does not express his anger or sadness openly because he realizes that showing these emotions can harm him.

Separation and Reality (Dissociation): To protect oneself from the mental stress of slavery, Hiram establishes an emotional distance with others and the reality around them. It also includes Hiram's ability to conduct which can be understood as a symbolic manifestation of the separation between

the inner and outer reality, where he creates a mental space to escape his suffering.

1. Abuse of Imagination (Sublimation): Hiram uses imagination, primarily through his conduction abilities, as a form of escape from physical and emotional bondage. Through sublimation, emotions that were difficult for him to express were directly transformed into spiritual power and rebellion.

2. Self-Control and Identity : By establishing emotional boundaries through self-control and determining when he will express his emotions, Hiram seeks to maintain his identity as a valued individual, even though society considers him to be only a property.

From this analysis, it is clear that the formulation of the problem can be answered well, in which Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a solid foundation for understanding how Hiram Walker builds and maintains his emotional boundaries in the face of the trauma of slavery.

E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our discussion of emotional constraints in *The Water Dancer* reveals the profound psychological complexities faced by Hiram Walker and, by extension, all enslaved individuals. By examining these constraints through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, we gain valuable insights into the interplay of trauma, resilience, and identity in the

context of slavery. This analysis not only deepens our understanding of Hiram's character but also contributes to a broader discussion of the psychological impact of systemic oppression, highlighting the importance of emotional health, community support, and the transformative power of imagination in the journey toward healing and self-affirmation.

The findings illustrate that Hiram's use of repression, imagination, and emotional detachment served as important survival strategies, allowing him to maintain a sense of identity amidst the inhumane conditions of slavery. However, these boundaries also highlight an internal conflict between the desire to connect and the need for emotional protection. The research suggests that emotional

boundaries, while necessary for coping, can complicate personal relationships and hinder collective healing.

Furthermore, this analysis emphasizes the importance of cultural and historical context in shaping emotional expression and coping mechanisms among enslaved individuals. Hiram's journey reveals the dynamic nature of emotional boundaries, suggesting that they can evolve in response to personal growth and new experiences.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of slavery, highlighting the complexities of resilience, trauma, and identity formation. By examining the emotional limitations in *The Water Dancer*, we

gain valuable insights into the human capacity for survival and the enduring legacy of oppression.

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