



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Addiction As A Response To Betrayal Trauma In Marian Keyes' Chick-Lit Fiction

Dr. Princy A. T.

Assistant Professor

Department of English

AJK College of Arts and Science

Coimbatore.

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4305-6114>

Abstract: This paper examines addiction as a psychological response to betrayal, loneliness, emotional neglect, and isolation in selected novels of Marian Keyes, namely *Watermelon*, *Rachel's Holiday*, *Anybody Out There*, *Angels*, and *The Mystery of Mercy Close*. Drawing upon Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Attachment Theory, and Jennifer Freyd's Betrayal Trauma Theory, the study explores how emotional instability and fractured intimacy lead the protagonists towards both substance and behavioural addictions. Marian Keyes portrays addiction not merely as a habit, but as an emotional refuge adopted by women struggling with abandonment, insecurity, depression, grief, and shattered trust. The paper argues that the protagonists employ alcohol, drugs, shopping, anti-depressants, and superstitious rituals as coping mechanisms to suppress emotional pain and reclaim temporary emotional stability. However, these addictions gradually intensify their psychological suffering, alienation, and identity crises. Through her emotionally layered narratives, Keyes transforms chick-lit into a serious psychological exploration of trauma, vulnerability, and female emotional survival.

Index Terms: Marian Keyes, addiction, betrayal trauma, chick-lit, psychosocial development, behavioural addiction, substance abuse, emotional isolation.

Introduction

"For an addict, it's a situation." (*Rachel's Holiday* 300)

"Drugs take you to hell, disguised as heaven."

— Donald Lyn Frost

Addiction emerges from the intersection of emotional vulnerability, psychological trauma, and the desperate human longing for relief. It is often born not from pleasure alone, but from unbearable pain seeking temporary silence. Marian Keyes' fiction repeatedly explores this fragile emotional terrain where loneliness, betrayal, grief, and insecurity push individuals towards compulsive dependence on substances and behaviours that momentarily numb suffering.

In literary and cultural history, addiction has consistently functioned both as escape and destruction. Ancient mythologies associated intoxication with celebration, transcendence, and liberation. Greek mythology revered Dionysus, the God of wine and ecstasy, while Roman culture celebrated Bacchus as the embodiment of intoxicated freedom. Similarly, the "Lotos-eaters" in Alfred Tennyson's *The Lotos-Eaters* portray addiction as seductive oblivion where individuals abandon reality for temporary comfort.

Religious texts equally warn against destructive indulgence. The Bible states: "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character." (1 Corinthians 15:33) Likewise, Romans 7:18-20 describes addiction-like compulsions where individuals knowingly continue destructive behaviour despite moral awareness.

Psychologically, addiction represents compulsive dependence upon substances or behaviours despite harmful consequences. The National Institute on Drug Abuse defines addiction as the inability to control substance use despite its negative effects. Addiction may manifest as substance abuse involving alcohol, drugs, or medication, or behavioural addiction involving shopping, gambling, rituals, obsessive beliefs, or compulsive emotional dependence.

In Marian Keyes' novels, addiction functions as an emotional substitute for intimacy, security, affection, and emotional validation. Betrayal and emotional abandonment destabilise the protagonists psychologically, compelling them towards self-destructive coping mechanisms. The protagonists seek emotional refuge through addiction because reality becomes emotionally unbearable.

This paper analyses addiction as an outcome of betrayal trauma in Marian Keyes' selected novels through the frameworks of Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Attachment Theory, and Jennifer Freyd's Betrayal Trauma Theory.

Addiction, Betrayal Trauma and Psychosocial Development

Jennifer Freyd defines betrayal trauma as the psychological distress experienced when trusted individuals violate emotional safety and intimacy. Betrayal within intimate relationships destabilises emotional security and disrupts trust, resulting in profound loneliness, depression, anger, and emotional confusion.

Similarly, Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory argues that disrupted emotional development contributes to identity crises, insecurity, and emotional instability. Erikson's stage of "Intimacy versus Isolation" particularly highlights the human need for meaningful emotional relationships. When intimacy collapses, individuals often experience emotional isolation and seek substitute forms of comfort.

Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, further explains how insecure emotional attachments influence adult coping mechanisms. Individuals deprived of emotional reassurance often develop maladaptive strategies to cope with abandonment and insecurity.

In Marian Keyes' fiction, betrayal becomes the catalyst that pushes the protagonists towards addiction. Their emotional dependence upon romantic relationships leaves them psychologically vulnerable when intimacy collapses.

Alcoholism and Emotional Escape in Watermelon

In *Watermelon*, Claire Walsh experiences profound emotional devastation after her husband James abandons her immediately after childbirth. The betrayal destroys her emotional stability and intensifies her feelings of loneliness and humiliation.

Unable to cope with emotional trauma, Claire turns increasingly towards alcohol:

"I really felt as if I needed a drink... I felt so unbearably lonely." (*Watermelon* 56)

Initially, alcohol serves as temporary relief from emotional suffering. However, repeated dependence gradually develops into alcoholism. Claire herself acknowledges:

"I was kind of half-drunk most of the time. I thought that I'd numb the pain and anger by getting drunk. But it didn't help." (*Watermelon* 105-106)

Claire's addiction reflects Erikson's observation that emotional insecurity and identity confusion increase vulnerability to substance abuse. Alcohol becomes a substitute for emotional intimacy and psychological stability.

Her addiction further deteriorates her emotional and familial relationships. She isolates herself, neglects maternal responsibilities, and increasingly loses control over her behaviour. Marian Keyes portrays alcoholism not simply as moral weakness but as emotional desperation born from betrayal trauma.

Drug Addiction and Identity Crisis in Rachel's Holiday

Rachel Walsh in *Rachel's Holiday* suffers from deep-rooted insecurity and emotional neglect. Her strained relationship with her family contributes to her poor self-esteem and emotional instability.

Rachel seeks validation through social acceptance, glamour, and romantic relationships. Her movement towards addiction begins gradually through parties, alcohol consumption, and social experimentation before intensifying into severe drug dependency.

Luke describes the extent of her addiction: "If it's a drug, Rachel will have taken it." (*Rachel's Holiday* 449)

Rachel falsely believes drugs provide confidence, courage, and emotional liberation. Drug consumption temporarily suppresses her insecurities and loneliness. However, addiction eventually consumes her identity, relationships, and professional life.

Her addiction also reflects self-betrayal. Even after recognising the destructive consequences, Rachel repeatedly returns to drugs because emotional pain becomes unbearable: "I stared at the innocent-looking white powder... Was it worth continuing? Yes!" (*Rachel's Holiday* 553)

Keyes portrays addiction here as both emotional escape and emotional imprisonment. Rachel seeks comfort through substances but becomes increasingly isolated and psychologically fragmented.

Behavioural Addiction and Shopping Bulimia in Angels

Unlike Claire and Rachel, Maggie in *Angels* experiences behavioural addiction rather than substance addiction. Following repeated miscarriages and emotional estrangement from her husband Garv, Maggie experiences profound loneliness and emotional emptiness.

Unable to recover emotional intimacy, she turns towards impulsive shopping as psychological compensation: "I suspected I had a mild problem with another form of bulimia – shopping bulimia." (*Angels* 26)

Shopping becomes an emotional substitute for affection and reassurance. The temporary pleasure of purchasing objects offers momentary relief from emotional distress.

Maggie's compulsive behaviour reflects behavioural addiction, where dopamine-driven pleasure temporarily distracts individuals from psychological suffering. However, like substance addiction, behavioural addiction ultimately intensifies emotional emptiness rather than resolving it.

Superstitious Obsession and Grief in Anybody Out There

In *Anybody Out There*, Anna Walsh develops behavioural addiction through obsessive spiritual rituals following her husband Aidan's death.

Unable to accept his absence, Anna compulsively emails him, reads his horoscope, and seeks psychic mediums to communicate with him: "Somewhere out there is a real psychic who'll put me in touch with you." (*Anybody Out There* 239)

Her compulsive rituals function as emotional survival mechanisms. Through these behaviours, Anna attempts to preserve intimacy and deny emotional separation.

However, her obsession gradually isolates her further from reality. Keyes portrays grief itself as capable of producing addictive emotional behaviours when individuals cannot emotionally process loss.

Anti-Depressant Dependency in The Mystery of Mercy Close

Helen Walsh in *The Mystery of Mercy Close* experiences addiction through dependence on anti-depressants and sleeping pills.

Professional stress, emotional loneliness, and unresolved trauma intensify her psychological instability. Helen increasingly relies on medication to maintain emotional balance: "I'd really like some sleeping tablets." (*The Mystery of Mercy Close* 148)

The medication initially functions therapeutically but gradually transforms into dependency. Helen experiences hallucinations, emotional instability, and compulsive cravings for stronger medication.

Her addiction reflects the psychological dangers of unresolved emotional trauma combined with emotional isolation.

Conclusion

Marian Keyes presents addiction as a deeply psychological and emotional phenomenon rooted in betrayal, grief, emotional neglect, and loneliness. Through her protagonists, Keyes demonstrates how women struggling with emotional trauma seek temporary relief through substances and compulsive behaviours.

Using Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Attachment Theory, and Betrayal Trauma Theory, this paper establishes that addiction in Keyes' fiction is not merely individual weakness but a symptom of emotional fragmentation and disrupted intimacy.

Alcohol, drugs, shopping, anti-depressants, and obsessive rituals become substitutes for love, trust, security, and belonging. However, instead of healing emotional wounds, these addictions deepen psychological suffering and intensify emotional isolation.

Ultimately, Marian Keyes transforms chick-lit into a powerful psychological discourse on emotional vulnerability, trauma, and female survival in contemporary society. Her protagonists reveal that addiction often begins where emotional security ends.

References

- [1] Ainsworth, Mary. *Patterns of Attachment*. Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978.
- [2] Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss*. Basic Books, 1969.
- [3] Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. Norton, 1950.
- [4] Freyd, Jennifer. *Betrayal Trauma*. Harvard UP, 1996.
- [5] Frone, Michael. *Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use in the Workforce*. APA, 2013.
- [6] Keyes, Marian. *Angels*. Penguin, 2002.
- [7] ---. *Anybody Out There*. Penguin, 2006.
- [8] ---. *Rachel's Holiday*. Penguin, 1998.
- [9] ---. *The Mystery of Mercy Close*. Penguin, 2012.
- [10] ---. *Watermelon*. Penguin, 1995.
- [11] Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "The Lotos-Eaters."
- [12] The Holy Bible. 1 Corinthians 15:33.
- [13] The Holy Bible. Romans 7:18-20.
- [14] National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).