

Seeing v/s Being: Coping Mechanism in Cecelia Ahern's *If You Could See Me Now*

Aswathy Krishna

Guest Lecturer

M G University

Kottayam, Kerala

Abstract

Coping mechanism are strategies adopted by individuals to deal with stress, pain and natural changes in life. The paper studies how imagination and fantasy act as a coping mechanism in Cecelia Ahern's *If You Could See Me Now*. The central character Elizabeth, an introvert suffering from frustration and depression is transformed to a lively enthusiastic person in the end. The angel Luke is a construct of her unconscious mind to tackle her problems in life.

Key Words: Coping Mechanism, Fantasy, Bibliotherapy, Direct aggression, Stress, Abnormal fixation, Frustration

Philip Sydney the English Renaissance poet pointed out that the enjoyment of reading literature encourage people to continue reading and instruct the humanity to lead a superior life. It teaches human beings about how to live in this world. The world has taken great leaps in the paths of progress ignoring the values of life. Now a days we witness an increase in dehumanization of society, economic development at the expense of others, more reliance on technology and craving for material goods. It is at this point, the relevance of humanity arises and literature, a discipline of humanities acquires importance. It claims an artistic beauty that is absent in other disciplines, that move people deeply and even change their lives in a positive way. It sets the example both in content and in style for the finest communication. The genre fantasy is popular with children as well as adults in its ability to transport us into an imaginative world. "Fantasy is escapist and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape... if we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us, we can. (J R R Tolkien)

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Literature has a major role in the day today life and it is gaining importance as a great aid in healing people as in the case of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is extended by Carolene Shrodes in 1950's based on the premise that people are greatly identified by characters they identify within stories. Many works are prescribed by psychologists in order to relieve the patients out of stress. It is reported that reading *P.S I Love You* by Cecelia Ahern has helped many women to cope with the loss of their beloved. *If You Could See Me Now* is Cecelia's third book published in the year 2005 which has an imaginative twist since one of the major characters is an invisible angel that breathes distinctiveness into the tale. Her characters are epitomes of incredible human spirit who have endured difficulties in life. Central theme of most of her books is the vulnerable, lost, lonely individuals in a worse situation but in the end overcomes it with their strong belief in oneself. Her works resonate with positivity motivating the readers to rekindle their hope.. The central character of the novel Elizabeth, sees an angel who acts as a companion throughout the novel encouraging her to solve all the complex problems of her life. It is a coping mechanism adopted by her mind to resolve the issues that haunted her.

Motives in our lives are not always satisfied. Life involves various struggles where various circumstances inevitably place our personality under strain, though we have many resources for coping with our problems. Problems present themselves in the path of our lives that need to be solved. There are obstacles to be overcome. A frustrating event is one in which goal directed activity is blocked, slowed up or otherwise interfered with, Psychologists and laymen use the term "frustration" to a state instead of event. It is an unpleasant emotion or thwarting situation which involves problem creating barrier to our state of satisfaction. Frustration has both immediate and remote consequences. The consequences involve restlessness and tension, direct aggression displaced aggression apathy, fantasy, stereotyping, regression etc.

In the case of direct aggression, frustration leads to aggression directed against the individual or object that is the source of the frustration. While in displaced aggression, the frustrated individual cannot satisfactorily express his aggression against the source of frustration. While a common response to frustration is active aggression, human beings may respond in opposite that is they may show apathy, indifference, inactivity, inattentiveness depending up

on the situation. Another consequence of frustration is stereotypy in behaviour that is a tendency to act in a blind repetitive fixated manner where the flexibility of ordinary problem solving skill is lost. It is called an “abnormal fixation” since stereotyped habit once adopted is resistant to change.

Stress is a many faceted process that occurs in reaction to stressors. It involves wide range of psychological reactions that differ from people to people. Prolonged stress increases risk of mental disorders in particular anxiety disorders and depression. We adopt coping mechanism to reduce stress and tension. Coping mechanism are ways in which stress is managed adapted or acted upon. There are over hundreds of coping strategies identified. It is based on conscious or unconscious choice. Positive coping strategies are essential in our life to be happy and successful. Empirical research demonstrates that optimistic thinking has beneficial effects on motivation and cognition. It is associated with increased persistence in the phase of difficulties, heightened creativity, better problem solving, less fear of failure, more effective coping, more pro social and caring behaviour and higher aspirations.

Fantasy is regarded as a coping mechanism which may affect positively or negatively. When problems become too much for us we seek solution through escaping into an imaginary world. In positive fantasy, a person may colour the future experience more brightly and joyfully than reality as they experience future experience ahead of time. In everyday life, people often find their thoughts pursue fantasies in search of better outcomes in life. Illusions that we create helps us to tackle our problems. Unconscious create imaginary fantasies that may seem magical as a solution to our problems. Elizabeth’s situation prior to her encounter with Ivan was miserable, desperately seeking a relief from all her pains.

She was crushed and weighed down by her sorrows. “O help”, she cried softly, covering her face in her hands. “Help...” she whispered through her sobs.” (Aherns,145) it is at this crucial period Ivan appears. Ivan is her self’s creation to tackle her problems. It is a method to resolve all the inner conflict. Pressure s and stresses of the pessimistic world creates a coping mechanism through the aid of fantasy. Ivan, an angel motivates and supports her to realize the true value of life and happiness in everything she does, is a construct of her mind, a coping mechanism to regulate and save her life from slow deterioration. As we analyze the novel, Ivan appears at the most crucial points of her life where she was perishing slowly without her knowledge. Contempt to everything she does and frustration consolidating inside her to emerge as a huge disaster was prevented by the play of her own psychic forces.

Elizabeth's unconscious mind creates Ivan as a means to overcome all the confusing dilemmas of life. It is only Luke and Elizabeth who could sense the presence of Angel in the novel. Both the characters are exhausted with their life and are desperately in need of magic to heal all the wounds inflicted by harsh realities of the world. Ivan in the end disappears after all the problems being resolved in the life of Luke and Elizabeth. . It enables us to adapt with worse situations in life. The loss of dear ones, chronic diseases appearing in our life all on a sudden , family problems may stuck life with full force leading us to great pain and agony .It may drain all the happiness and colour from individuals .Adaptive coping mechanism helps us to adapt to such hopeless situation in an effective manner.

In the beginning of the novel Elizabeth was frustrated with her life, maintained distance from social life. "She had been conditioned to walk away when polite conversations was started, knowing she would pay for any unnecessary time spent away from the farm with sullen words and disapproving glares. (20)"

Gradually Elizabeth learns how to laugh and to live life to the fullest, treasuring every precious moments. Ivan helps her to fulfill all her dreams. In the end Elizabeth is able to enjoy life to its fullest accepting all its limitations. She is capable of enjoying happiness in doing simple things in life. Through coping mechanism she achieves transformation in herself in a positive way.

The readers of Cecelia's works reports that they felt a positive energy journeying through the lives of her characters. A woman claimed that she felt the presence of an angel after reading . *If You Could See Me Now* influencing her in a positive way. The book offers possibilities to explore new facets of life, enabling the readers as well as the characters of her novels to cope with the drab realities and enjoy life to its fullest.

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