

# TRUST, BETRAYAL AND BLUE FEELINGS IN MARIAN KEYES' CHICK-LIT FICTION: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the themes of trust, betrayal, intimacy, and emotional trauma in selected novels of Marian Keyes, namely *Watermelon*, *Angels*, *Rachel's Holiday*, *Anybody Out There*, and *The Mystery of Mercy Close*. The study analyses how the protagonists experience emotional instability, insecurity, isolation, and psychological distress when intimate relationships collapse. Drawing from Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, and the concept of Betrayal Trauma proposed by Jennifer Freyd, the paper explores the emotional conflicts of chick-lit heroines who simultaneously desire independence and emotional dependence. Marian Keyes presents women who seek love, security, and validation, yet repeatedly encounter betrayal and emotional fragmentation. The paper argues that betrayal destabilises trust and identity, resulting in "blue feelings" manifested through depression, anxiety, delusion, addiction, self-doubt, and emotional isolation. Through the selected novels, Keyes portrays the psychological complexity of modern women and demonstrates how healing ultimately emerges through self-realisation, family support, and emotional resilience.

**Index Terms:** Marian Keyes, chick-lit, betrayal trauma, trust, intimacy, Erik Erikson, psychoanalysis, blue feelings.

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## INTRODUCTION

Chick literature, popularly known as chick-lit, emerged as a literary genre that foregrounds the emotional, personal, and professional lives of contemporary women. The genre often portrays women struggling with insecurities, failed relationships, emotional confusion, career anxieties, and the search for emotional fulfilment. Marian Keyes remains one of the most influential voices in contemporary chick-lit because of her realistic portrayal of emotionally vulnerable women who oscillate between independence and dependence.

The protagonists in Marian Keyes' novels are not idealised heroines. Instead, they are flawed, insecure, emotionally fragile, and deeply human. They seek validation through love and relationships while simultaneously attempting to establish their individuality. Their emotional journeys reveal how trust functions as the foundation of intimate relationships and how betrayal disrupts psychological stability.

The present paper analyses the emotional consequences of betrayal in Keyes' selected novels. The study particularly focuses on how broken trust affects the protagonists psychologically and emotionally, leading them into loneliness, depression, addiction, delusion, emotional instability, and self-destructive behaviour.

As Marian Keyes writes: "You will go on and meet someone else and I'll just be a chapter in your tale, but for me, you were, you are and you always will be, the whole story." (Keyes)

This emotional intensity becomes central to the experiences of Keyes' protagonists.

## CHICK-LIT AND THE SEARCH FOR EMOTIONAL SECURITY

The National Encyclopaedia describes a typical chick-lit protagonist as an independent working woman who places immense pressure on herself regarding career, relationships, and lifestyle choices. Stephanie Harzewski refers to the "Bridget Jones effect," where women anxiously search for "Mr. Right" while simultaneously negotiating social expectations.

The heroines in Marian Keyes' novels embody these characteristics. They crave emotional intimacy, affection, and security while simultaneously desiring freedom and independence. This contradiction creates emotional instability within them.

The protagonists attempt to reconcile these conflicting desires through emotional relationships. Their psychological conflict may be understood through Hegel's concept of "Aufhebung," meaning the resolution of opposing ideas. In Keyes' fiction, the protagonists eventually attempt to resolve the contradiction between emotional dependence and personal autonomy. However, the absence of trust becomes the central cause of emotional fragmentation in these novels.

## TRUST AND INTIMACY: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Trust forms the emotional foundation of all human relationships. According to Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, the earliest stage of development is centred on "Trust vs. Mistrust." When children experience love, care, and security from caregivers, they develop basic trust that later influences adult relationships.

Merriam-Webster defines trust as confidence placed in another person. Carolyn McLeod explains:

Trust in human relationship is both important and dangerous. It is important in the sense that it allows a man to form good relationship with others for his happy coexistence. It becomes dangerous in the sense that it becomes the cause of man losing his self-respect and straining his relationship with others because of betrayal.

Trust allows individuals to become emotionally vulnerable. Betrayal, therefore, becomes psychologically devastating because it destroys emotional safety.

W.H. Auden remarks: "Almost all human relationships begin well but most of them continue as forms of mutual exploitation."

This statement reflects the emotional disillusionment experienced by Keyes' protagonists. The Biblical story of "Doubting Thomas" further illustrates the fragility of trust:

"Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." (John 20:29)

Love and trust become inseparable in intimate relationships. Once betrayal occurs, emotional stability collapses.

## BETRAYAL TRAUMA AND EMOTIONAL FRAGMENTATION IN WATERMELON

In *Watermelon*, Claire Walsh appears emotionally fulfilled after marrying James. She considers him her ideal partner and believes their marriage is secure. Claire confesses: "For all my talk of independence, I was actually a very romantic person at heart." (*Watermelon* 10)

Claire's trust in James deepens because he consistently supports and comforts her. Their intimacy strengthens her emotional dependence upon him. She openly admits her insecurity: "I hated myself for being so insecure and so dependent." (*Watermelon* 168)

Although Claire desires independence, she simultaneously longs for emotional dependence upon her husband. This contradiction reflects the central emotional tension within chick-lit heroines.

The devastating turning point occurs immediately after Claire gives birth when James reveals his affair and demands a divorce: "I've just had my first child two days ago and my husband told me... that he has been having an affair for the past six months." (*Watermelon* 3)

James' betrayal destroys Claire's emotional stability. Betrayal Trauma Theory, proposed by Jennifer Freyd, defines betrayal trauma as psychological trauma caused by violation of trust within close relationships.

Claire experiences hallucinations, emotional breakdowns, anger, and isolation. She becomes psychologically unstable and increasingly aggressive. Freud's concept of the "id" explains her impulsive emotional outbursts and uncontrolled anger.

Claire's trauma intensifies because everyone around her already knows about James' affair: "So everyone knows," I said quietly. (*Watermelon* 19)

This deepens her humiliation and isolation.

Eventually, Claire attempts to escape emotional pain through another relationship with Adam. However, her unresolved attachment to James continues to dominate her emotions. James manipulates Claire emotionally and blames her for his infidelity: "Living with you was a bit like living with a demanding child." (*Watermelon* 384)

Claire initially internalises this blame because of her emotional dependence. Yet through gradual self-realisation, she recognises the manipulation and begins reclaiming her self-worth.

## MISCOMMUNICATION AND EMOTIONAL ISOLATION IN ANGELS

In *Angels*, Maggie and Garv initially share a deeply intimate relationship built upon affection, companionship, and emotional comfort. Maggie feels emotionally secure with Garv: "Whichever one of us went to bed first would get the toothbrush ready for the other person." (*Angels* 203)

However, emotional strain develops after Maggie experiences miscarriages. The trauma creates emotional distance between the couple. Maggie blames herself for the miscarriages and internalises guilt: "It's my fault, it's because I didn't want it." (*Angels* 262)

The emotional disconnection between Maggie and Garv grows silently. Instead of communicating openly, Maggie suppresses her pain and allows suspicion to dominate her thoughts.

George Bernard Shaw observes: "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

This statement accurately reflects Maggie's relationship. She assumes betrayal without directly confronting Garv. Emotional distance gradually transforms into alienation.

Maggie confesses: "My misery was like an ingrowing hair, curling further and further into me." (Angels 14)

Her emotional suffering drives her into reckless behaviour, including casual relationships and identity confusion. She desperately searches for intimacy to escape loneliness. Yet these temporary relationships only deepen her emotional emptiness: "Throughout it all, it was as though a pane of glass separated me from the rest of the human race." (Angels 353)

Keyes portrays emotional alienation as one of the most painful consequences of betrayal and unresolved grief.

### **ADDICTION, INFERIORITY AND SELF-BETRAYAL IN RACHEL'S HOLIDAY**

In Rachel's Holiday, Rachel Walsh suffers from low self-esteem and emotional neglect within her family. She constantly compares herself to her sisters and develops deep insecurity regarding her appearance: "I was often described as strong. It really pissed me off." (Rachel's Holiday 1-2)

Rachel eventually finds emotional validation through Luke Costello, whose affection provides her with security and care: "Luke must have loved me." (Rachel's Holiday 474)

However, Rachel's desire for acceptance pushes her towards substance abuse. Drugs become her means of escaping insecurity and emotional emptiness. Despite Luke's support, Rachel repeatedly sabotages her relationship through reckless behaviour. Her addiction ultimately destroys their intimacy: "You're not the person I thought you were." (Rachel's Holiday 12)

Luke's rejection devastates Rachel because she relied emotionally upon his unconditional love. Rachel's addiction reflects another form of betrayal: self-betrayal. She betrays her own emotional well-being and destroys the relationships that once sustained her.

During rehabilitation, Rachel realises that her childhood feelings of emotional neglect shaped her insecurities. She falsely believed she caused her parents' unhappiness: "It was all my fault." (Rachel's Holiday 322)

Her distorted self-perception reveals how childhood mistrust influences adult emotional instability. Rachel's emotional recovery begins only when she accepts responsibility for her addiction and recognises her own worth beyond external validation.

### **GRIEF, DENIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISOLATION IN ANYBODY OUT THERE**

Anybody Out There presents betrayal through death rather than infidelity. Anna Walsh shares an intensely intimate relationship with her husband Aidan. Their emotional bond represents safety, affection, and companionship. Following Aidan's sudden death in a road accident, Anna experiences profound psychological collapse. She refuses to accept reality and remains trapped within denial:

"I dream that he was dead." (Anybody Out There 206)

Anna continues emailing Aidan, calling his phone, and imagining his presence:

"I still spoke to him in my head." (Anybody Out There 221)

Her grief isolates her emotionally from family and friends. She becomes increasingly detached from reality because accepting Aidan's death would mean accepting unbearable loneliness. Anna's emotional dependence upon Aidan leaves her psychologically shattered after his death. She retreats into memories and imagination to preserve intimacy. Keyes portrays grief as a form of emotional betrayal by fate itself. Anna feels abandoned by life, love, and destiny.

### **TRUST, LONELINESS AND EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY IN THE MYSTERY OF MERCY CLOSE**

In The Mystery of Mercy Close, Helen Walsh initially appears emotionally stronger than her sisters. She is confident, fearless, and professionally independent. Yet beneath this confidence lies emotional loneliness. Helen deeply values emotional bonds despite her outward toughness. Her strongest emotional connection is with her sister Anna: "For a long time my sister Anna had been my best friend." (The Mystery of Mercy Close 79)

Helen's emotional instability emerges through depression, loneliness, and her inability to maintain healthy emotional relationships. Trust remains central to her emotional survival. As psychologist Sabrina Romanoff explains: "Trust is the foundation of relationships because it allows you to be vulnerable and open up to the person."

Helen's emotional struggles reveal that even the most independent individuals remain psychologically dependent upon emotional intimacy and human connection.

### **CONCLUSION**

Marian Keyes' novels explore the emotional realities of modern women through themes of trust, intimacy, betrayal, addiction, grief, and emotional recovery. The protagonists seek emotional security through relationships, but betrayal destabilises their psychological balance and identity.

Using Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, and Betrayal Trauma Theory, this paper demonstrates how broken trust creates emotional fragmentation in Keyes' heroines. The protagonists experience depression, delusion, insecurity, addiction, anger, and emotional isolation when intimacy collapses.

Despite these emotional struggles, Keyes' fiction ultimately presents resilience and healing. Her protagonists gradually learn self-worth, emotional independence, and acceptance. Family support, self-awareness, and emotional honesty help them reconstruct their shattered identities.

Thus, Marian Keyes transforms chick-lit from light entertainment into a powerful exploration of women's psychological realities. Her novels reveal that betrayal not only destroys relationships but also challenges identity, trust, and emotional survival itself.

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