

A Polemic of *Mannerpunk* in the Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

Adewale Ezekiel Adejumo

Department of English and Literary Studies, Ladoko Akintola University of Technology,
Ogbomoso, Nigeria.

Dennis Adebayo Akindutire

Department of English, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Akintunde Olaoluwa Akintaro

Department of English and Literary Studies, Ladoko Akintola University of Technology,
Ogbomoso, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Literature has been a work of imagination with little attention paid to Mannerpunk as a sub-genre in prose fiction that suggests status, conversation, ethics, aesthetics and adherence to moral standards that are otherwise known as etiquette or principle of decorum which are the set rules for any society to live peacefully which Africans are inclusive, loving to live life devoid of dystopia. Previous scholarly interests in Nawal El-Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero have viewed the novel from the prism of different variants of feminism, ranging from pure feminism, womanism, and radical African feminism. Therefore, this paper views it as mannerpunk or as a novel that challenges lack of manners and standards in the family and society in Africa with the aim to correcting people to live their life with little or less problems. This paper benefits from psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud explored by Stephane Michaud, and Mambrol Nasrullah who posit that the actions of man are controlled by id, ego, superego and defense mechanism. Hence, this paper considered Nawal El- Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero, discussing the plight of Firdaus, the protagonist and El-Saadawi as an author-narrator. It re-defines manner, and discusses lack of manners in the family and among the religious leaders such as Firdaus' uncle who always have sex with his niece, Firdaus. This paper suggests solutions that Africans should charge themselves reminding African society the core Africans' wits and standards for family, society, and Africans to live peacefully.*

Keywords: *Mannerpunk, El-Saadawi, Woman at Point Zero, Firdaus, Sigmund Freud*

INTRODUCTION

Mannerpunk as a genre is a subgenre in Science Fiction. Misha Grifka Wander (2022) expounds it as the term that focuses on conversation, status, etiquette, and intrigue. She argues further that as a genre it makes a person to relate with new social world that are totally new to someone but must devoid of unfortunate situation and history. According to her, *Mannerpunk* makes character to know world from the inside and have thorough negotiation and meetings. However, the concept makes character to reason and engage in series of meetings and discussions for the betterment of individual and society. It is obvious that *Mannerpunk* is a genre in fiction that can be used to explore manners and ethics in the world of Literature. It is no doubt that *Mannerpunk* is relevant to African Literature which El- Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* is explored discussing the ill-treatment of the female characters in the text including the writer's experience presenting the novel as self-writing and writing about others. The paper explores the ill-treatment of the character by families and the so-called clergymen, and excesses of the government against humanity.

Review of Relevant Literature

The relevant literature used in this paper treats new genre in science fiction that are essential to expound the stand of the researcher in this paper. Donald G. Keller (1991) explains comedy of manners as the fictional work that takes place in an urban area with hierarchical and social structure. The stance of Keller proves the concept as a term that characters face social structure and hierarchy, not a word to joke with. In other words, it is a genre that discusses characters in metropolitan city with many struggles from the leaders or government of the day. Ellen Kushner (1980) coined the term fantasy of manners to describe that which is similar to the position of *Mannerpunk*. Kushner posits that fantasy of manner is a genre that is full of actions with 'the plenty of dark secrets' that can be inferred to be horror and cataclysms faced by humanity.

Alexander Rowland (2017) coined the term *Hopepunk* that he utters the three words 'pass it on'. He believes that, in Literature, one must keep fighting and applying different approaches that may susceptibly yield positivity. Addison Catherine (2015) explores Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* as African radical feminism expounds radicalism in the writing for presenting herself and other characters in the text. Catherine suggests radicalism to deal with any wicked and unbearable laws, or acts of any leadership. Wilany Eka (2017) analyses El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* as feminism novel that discusses the prison experiences of the characters visited by El-Saadawi herself. The position of Eka is contrary to Catherine who proposes radicalism to eschew wrong treatment of women in the society.

Theoretical Framework

This paper benefits from psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud propounded in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It started as psychological theory where Freud writes his work titled

Interpretation of Dream in 1899, where he coined ‘Oedipus Complex’. This reveals that Freud enjoys reading and linking Literature with psychology in his research. There are scholars who have worked tirelessly in the discipline as theory of literary criticism such as Jacques Lacan and Carl Gustav Jung. However, the positions and allusions of Sigmund Freud by Michaud Stephane, and Nasrullah Mambrol (2016) are explored in this paper. Michaud Stephane (2007) views psychoanalysis as a discipline that centres on the study of human’s psyche with the aim to cure diseases of soul. The position of Michaud reveals that psychoanalysis as a theory of Literature focuses on the thinking and emotional troubles disturbing souls and how to curb this horror or trauma called ‘disease of soul’. She further argues and quotes the genesis of Freud’s inspiration to psychoanalysis. She expounds:

Dreams and fantasies appeared to him as a language to translate and interpret. He had a passion for archeology, a discipline that reconstructs past civilisations on the basis of excavated fragments.

It is obvious in the excerpt above those archeological evidences inspired Sigmund Freud for, it assisted Freud to interpret both the dream and fantasies together with archeological artifacts with the assistance of language for human consumption of the benefits of society as well as scholarship.

Again, she submits that Freud believes in the personal experience and serious questioning of self for everyone especially those that followed him. Michaud’s position of Psychoanalytical theory points to personal experience as paraphernalia to cure creative poverty and any emotional problem. She admits that the solution to overcome psychological problems and to study human behaviour or attitude is the engagement of in-depth questioning, reasoning and thinking outside the box.

Nasrullah Mambrol (2016) perceives the nexus between psychoanalysis and literary criticism as the projection of sexual language or language of discussion about sex and gender difference. Mambrol’s submission is that psychoanalysis and literary criticism have gender in-between them as ‘subject’ that requires hermeneutic stand in/of any literary engagement that requires the exploration of psychoanalytic criticism. He further expounds the contribution of psychoanalysis to Reader-Response theory (criticism). He points out the engagement and importance of psychological experience of the reader to analysis of a text. The argument of Mambrol reveals the logic of psychoanalytic theory in Literature as the critical theory that is essential and covers Carl Gustav Jung archetypal theory (or criticism) that goes beyond personality but character’s environment as contributor to character’s thought, images, human race and way of life which Jung calls ‘collective unconscious’.

He further expounds the submission of Freud’s position of man’s everyday experience and activities that are susceptible to occur frequently. He references Freud:

A well-known example of this is the Freudian slip,

which Freud himself called the 'parapraxi' whereby repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, pen or unintended actions.

Mambrol's quotation of Freud reveals man as he is. *Parapraxi* and other unconscious actions happen to man every day which could be conscious (deliberate), or unconscious. According to Mambrol, *parapraxi* by Freud could be a slip of tongue, a mistake while writing and unplanned or accidental mistakes that are necessary in everyday activities.

He states the position of man's tripartite nature as opined by Sigmund Freud. Mambrol expounds Freud's the concept of ego. He expresses:

Freud suggested a tripartite model of the psyche dividing it into *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. The *id*, being entirely in the unconscious is the most inaccessible and obscure part of our personality...It is entirely without rationality and has a tremendous amorphous kind of vitality.

The point being made here sees *id* as a drive in man that is unconscious without being rationality. In other words, the act is unexplainable by man. Mambrol (2016) explains the second aspect or phase of man according to Freud's position. He reminds the meaning of *ego* as posited by Freud. Ego, according to Mambrol, is a critical force in man that governs and controls that reveals reality and true existence and essence of being in man. He further projects that it is the area of man's reasoning and reminiscence that brings man's past and present together to form the total and complete being in man. Mambrol references Freud on the meaning of the third phase of man called *superego*. He points out what *superego* does in a real being. The *superego*, according to him, is part of man that is bold to take decision and believes in the principle of morality; it guides man to separate left from right, right from wrong, bad from good and inside from outside as it is conspicuous to common man.

He finally submits that classical Freudian mechanism is essential and should be understood as he points out that the meaning of a true defense mechanism. Mambrol concludes that psychoanalytic reading includes defense mechanism as a tenet and instrument to avert painful admission, or recognition. This defense mechanism is not explicit by Mambrol because it could be lying as a tool to avoid attack. Defense mechanism can even be killing the attacker who attempts to kill someone who would have been a victim. However, Mambrol contributes to psychoanalysis theory in Literature using the lens of Sigmund Freud projecting the theory to search man's mind and the working of the mind in every man.

Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* as a Text of Mannerpunk

Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* is a text from the soil of Africa, North Africa to be precise. The text calls for manner towards humanity especially love and justice towards women to avert cataclysm, internal and psychological trauma against women, family, and the African society. In the forward of the text, it is revealed that the heroine as an orphan experiences sexual abuse from her uncle. The story reads:

The psychiatrist has wanted to meet Firdaus for weeks but the prisoner has consistently refused. Then, on her last night on earth she decides to tell her story. Slowly at first and then faster and more urgently, Firdaus recounts a lifetime of betrayal and abuse. She is an orphan who passed from one abusive guardian to another, and her tale shows how trust is tested (p ix).

According to the excerpt, it reveals the lack of manner exhibited by the guardian Firdaus lives with as an orphan. As an orphan who is not distant to the family that housed her, she supposed to be treated like a true African girl without wrong advance from some of her guardians who had sex with her and make advantage of her being an orphan who has no choice or fate of what her future is like.

In African setting, it is morally right for any sensible man not to promise a woman he is planning to woo all in the name of marriage. Surprise along the line makes the man a respected man or a man of wisdom. Firdaus pours her mind that she hates any man bragging to make her a better woman before marriage that most of them are liars. According to her, she hates men that say they want to make her life better (p.96). It is against African culture mainly to promise someone ahead especially to give precision on what to give because it will neither attract respect nor honour because the person promised would have heavily relied on it. That is why, Yoruba says 'Bi aba ti fenun funni ni ookan, ki ookan tode, ookan kii niyi mo.' Although to make her life better is sarcasm to her because of her prostitution business that making her life better is to pay her service rendered which is even against the standard and moral in Africa to be a prostitute and even be proud of it.

Mannerpunk comes to play when a government official takes advantage of Firdaus as a prostitute, threatening her with prison and lying that if she refuses to honour him with sex it may affect the bond between his country and Firdaus' country as a head of state of another country. It is pertinent for African government and leaders to educate and re-educate one another concerning morality and etiquette of living that will project the aesthetics of Africa. She narrates, 'One day a very important personality from a foreign state heard about me...Once he offered me money. On another occasion he threatened me with prison (pp.97-98). This reveals that African leaders are

unable to control their orgasm which makes them to threaten the disadvantaged or the regular people or citizen on the street.

The impression of Marzouk as a pimp contracting prostitutes for men around is against African moral. Marzouk as Pimp threatens Firdaus that if she refuses to sleep with him which eventually leads to his death that Firdaus uses *defense mechanism* by snatching a knife from him and stabs him in the throat. She narrates that, 'I raised the knife and buried it deep in his neck, pulled it out of his neck and then thrust it deep into his chest (104). Although killing is against moral standard in Africa but the case of Firdaus and Pimp (Marzouk) is quite different because Pimp aimed to take Firdaus life but Firdaus is fortunate to stab him first using defense mechanism.

It is even a good manner to be obstinate against the government and leaders that have no respect for justice, manner and truthfulness in the society. The obstinacy of Firdaus as the protagonist of the novel makes her a true heroine that needs to be emulated by African women who are being oppressed and thrown into the dark because of their poverty state or inexperience conditions in the society. She decides to send most people coming to her in the prison away and not ready to give anyone audience. Her behaviour towards visitor to her in the prison:

I shall try to persuade her to speak to you for a while, he said.
She might agree if I explain you are a psychiatrist, and not one of the Public Prosecutor's assistants. She refuses to answer my questions. She even refused to sign an appeal to the president so that her sentence might be commuted to imprisonment for life (pp.1-2).

It is evident in the attitude of Firdaus that stubbornness she exhibits not to talk with anybody because of the ill-treatment of wicked and heartless family and society. This reveals to any reader of the text to learn not to be influenced by anybody in the face of maltreatment and injustice and wickedness on one in the society.

Again, it is pertinent in the extract below that obstinacy is a moral in some instances which Firdaus demonstrates each time people especially government officials come to visit her in the gaol as an accused considered to have killed a man. She even refuses to speak with El-Saadawi as a psychiatrist:

A question kept turning round and round in my mind
Increasingly: what sort of woman was she? Since she
had dejected me, did that mean she was a better
person than me? But then, she had also refused to
send an appeal to the President asking him to protect
her from the gallows. Could that signify that she was

better than the Head of State? (p.4)

It is ethical in Africa to keep mute when someone is being treated unjustly and such even shows that the person is being conscious of not being questioned the more. But when refused to speak, quoting him or her for any slander would be difficult because it is hard to quote a silent man or woman. It could be deduced from the quote above that silence is a manner and accords respect to be above all. Therefore, the bad manner and moral of the wicked can be corrected by silence of the 'accused' which is considered to be a 'weapon of silence' to intelligently put wickedness and the wicked to flight and confusion. The expression of Firdaus reveals she is proud which could lead to lack of manner. In Africa, it is an aberration to feel that one is better than those at the helm of affairs of leadership because leadership is respected in African scenes. Firdaus expresses her ego:

The journey to a place unknown to everybody on this
earth fills me with pride. All my life I have been searching
for something that would feel me with pride, make me feel
superior to everyone else, including kings, princes and rulers (p.9).

The pride of Firdaus is obvious in her speech as an African woman. Her attitude goes against the culture and way of life of genuine Africans. Even, as a woman she has to humble herself to have fruitful family and society despite condition(s) around her. Ruminating and pondering to be better than leaders around her makes her end like nobody or 'nothingness'.

The narration of Firdaus serves as a revealer; she tells the secret of North African men who steal people's crops on the field and beat their wives at the same time. She exposes:

My father, a poor peasant farmer, who could neither read nor
write, knew very few things in life. How to grow crops, how to
sell a buffalo poisoned by his enemy before it died, how to
exchange his virgin daughter for a dowry when there was still time,
how to be quicker than his neighbor in stealing from the fields
once the crop was ripe (p.10).

Stealing from someone's fields and beating one's wife is against the etiquette of a good society in Africa. The text justifies *Mannerpunk*. Beating wives in Africa is an aberration, or taboo which affects the relationships and homes in general. Stealing as well makes people less human and proves accused as people of low stature who lack manner.

The treatment and nurturing of children in the text proves good manner of Africans especially in the issue of house chores and agriculture as sustenance of society and humanity.

I cried all night. Next morning my mother did not send me to fields. She usually made me carry a load of manure on my head and take it to the field, I preferred to go to the fields rather than stay in the hut (p.12).

Firdaus's family and their manner and attitude to work especially agriculture is narrated in the above excerpt. Agriculture as an instrument to sustain humanity is treated with seriousness by Firdaus's family. It is obvious in the statement of Firdaus that she is industrious and could be inferred to be character of good manner that truly represents Africans.

Another instance of ill-manner occurs in some of the male characters especially abuse of the heroine sexually in the text. These characters are Firdaus' uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, and Bayoumi. She narrates how Sheikh Mahmoud beats her:

On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoe.
My face and body became swollen and bruised.
So I left the house and went to my uncle. But my
uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and
my uncle was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the
teachings of religion, and he, therefore, not possibly
be in the habit of beating his wife (p.46).

The positions of Firdaus's uncle, his wife, and Sheikh Mahmoud are absurd and at the same time lack manner for submitting that beating wives is Islamically right. According to Firdaus uncle, all men beat their wives. His submission is not logical. Firdaus' uncle and his wife use lying as 'moral' or tactics to make Firdaus stay in the house of Sheikh Mahmoud to continue receiving beating in the hand of Sheikh Mahmoud. Deceit and lie in the above conversation of the three characters reveals the lack of moral and manner as the core belief that Africans frown at.

The position that women must not lead in any ideal society is clear as crystal in the statement of Firdaus during her traumatic period. She projects:

I knew that women did not become heads of states,
but I felt that I was not like other woman, nor like
the other girls around me who kept talking about
love, or about men. For these were subjects I never
mentioned (p.25).

The above stance of Firdaus reveals that African governments need to have a re-definition of who women are by including them into some key posts in Africa because women also have quota to contribute to the success of the society. Firdaus' last statement in the above quote shows that she does not wish to offend or go against her terrain by discussing men which may likely land her into

problem in the society. This could be termed to be *mannerpunk*, or *mannerpure* or *mannermoral*; it is a justification of being cultured, demonstrated by Firdaus.

Parental negligence is another pertinent issue that is conspicuous in the treatment of Firdaus father towards his children. He does eat before going to bed while the children sleep with hunger.

Firdaus narrates the experience.

My father never went to bed without supper, no matter what happened. Sometimes when there was no food at home we would all go to bed with empty stomachs (pp.17-18).

The attitude of Firdaus' father shows the lack of manner treating his children as slaves which could be considered as wickedness as a parent in African setting. In Africa, responsible parents deny themselves food and some other things for the purpose of satisfying their children but Firdaus father denies his children food. The act of Firdaus's father goes against moral in African context.

Societal conditions make almost all the female characters in the text turn wayward especially the instances can be seen in the lives of Sharifa and Firdaus that explain this. Firdaus opens her eyes and sees Sharifa beside her in the dark where she lies naked with Fawzy on the corner of her room cheating on her (p.65).

Sharifa as Firdaus' confidant who has been advising Firdaus that men are unreliable and should be handled with wisdom is now a victim in the hands of men especially Fawzy. The intercourse between the two makes Firdaus to run away and continues her usual prostitution. It is explicit from the action that lack of manner or moral contributes more to lack of manner. In other words, ill-manner begets ill-manner but good manner begets good manner that makes society more habitable.

CONCLUSION

This paper discusses *Mannerpunk* in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* especially the inability of male characters to control their manhood which leads to traumatic condition of the protagonist, Firdaus. Again, it is morally correct in African settings that any responsible and sane man must not beat his wife, or woman but the case of male characters like Sheikh Mahmoud, Bayoumi, and Fawzy is different. They mercilessly beat women and wives around them without considering the consequences of killing the society by causing trauma and psychosis among the women which lands most women into prison. In spite of ups and downs facing African women, it has never been in the African culture for women to disrespect and disregard men and everything that has to do with men. Therefore, African governments, families, and individuals are encouraged to treat women as humans not as animals on the street that receive beating at a slightest provocation. African men should to give themselves to continuous teachings and lectures on men

and women relationship and how to control temperament to manage a house to become a home, and a ruptured society to a well-cultured society.

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