

## AN ANALYSIS OF MISERLINESS IN IGBO, FRENCH AND GERMAN NOVELS

**Okafor, Chioma Evangeline**

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
07033236691

&

**Dr. Ugonna Ezinne Ubah**

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
07032387870

### ABSTRACT

Miserliness is an act of collecting money and not spending for fear of what the future holds. It is a bad trait that prevents an individual from giving either money, emotional support or even encouragement no matter the situation. Psychoanalysis explains miserliness as a trait that arises within the human to reduce his anxiety. This paper highlights the features of a miser as depicted in Igbo, French and German novels in the character of Akubuzo, Harpagon and Herr Unrat respectively. The insight is that miserliness manifests in various forms. This work adopts the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud for the analysis of these characters. The conclusion is that a human vice or weakness is not subject to the limitations of individual localities. Instead, the three characters in their difference geographic and cultural peculiarities still depict a common human factor.

Key words: Miser, miserliness, psychoanalysis.

### INTRODUCTION

Human character defines human expressions in terms of physical, mental and social activity during each stage of life. Its dynamic nature stipulates its relevance at each stage of humanity. Social intelligence, gratitude, meekness, self-control, kindness, optimism, and among other characters traits, are in existence in the human world. These character traits are developed individually, and also they help to modify and re-modify our society. Character trait can be depicted in different dimensions. It is not centered on a particular genre, or a particular nationality, rather it is diversified. Kupperman J. (2001) argued that character traits depict an engraved or a distinctive mark of an individual or a group of people or a locality. According to him, it is a general trait that is acceptable by each region. Every human has its character traits, that which marks an undeniable impact on the individual that possess it. Harman,G. (2009) declared that character traits are individually conceived and according to social psychology, people differ in character traits. He also noted that behavioural character manifest themselves also in counterfactual situations, meaning that character could be expressed based on a given situation or based on a given period under differing conditions. For more clarification of distinctive features of a particular character trait, our work focused on a major character trait, miserliness in a different geographical dimension based on a literary trend.

However, miserliness as a character trait can be seen in different angles. Cognitive, possessive, obsessive and avarious, in terms of cognitive, a miser offers his own immediate or a quick response to a problem rather than waiting following the normal rule of solution. It describes the ability of the human brain to solve problem in a simple way. John Orbell and Robyn M. Davis (2014) described a cognitive miser as an "initial kick" in solving a problem in a society. However, to be a miser in terms of possession is very common because this kind of miserliness as a character trait that doesn't give or share its possession to someone, even in a desperate condition. This also goes with obsessive miserliness; it describes a character trait that adores his possessions more than himself or his family. *Eugene Grandet* of 19<sup>th</sup> century French literature portrayed such trait. Père Grandet adores his gold that he kept in a secret room. Every morning, he pays a visit to his secret room to kiss and adore his gold. Even when his family is in need of finance, he prefers to adore his gold and the financial problem will be left unsolved that is an example of an obsessive miserliness. Avarious miserliness describes a personality that hoards riches; the person is covetous, extreme greed and also means altitude. This kind of character trait portrays an over rated behaviour and it contributes to the ills of the society of today.

A miser can also be considered to be someone who does not give anything of his to another. This could be in form of goods or services. It describes an extreme ability to withhold rewards to people who deserves to receive the rewards. In our literary world, different authors have analyzed the character trait of miserliness in different perspectives, bringing out its effects to the society at large; and also giving the necessary solution that will help to manage the situation. However, our work centered on three regional perspective of miserliness as reflected in the literary works of Igbo, French and German languages. The igbo novel, *Okpa aku eri eri* depicted by Akubuzo, a handsome young teacher, who does not render any sort of financial help to anyone in other to save his money for overseas travels. *L'Avare*, a 17<sup>th</sup> century French literature, also portrayed a significant dimension of miserliness. Harpagon, the protagonist was a miser of his finances, he was paranoid of his financial states and he safe guards it and makes sure that all his visitors are searched before leaving his apartment. In another geographical entity, the German novel, *Professor Unrat*, portrayed same character of miserliness in another form. Raat, a straitlaced high school teacher, manifested his miser character by not giving his students, their deserved academic reward rather he withholds it and thereby demeans' his students. However, in this work, we shall present the notion of miserliness as analyzed in the three literary works of base, and also we shall look into the effects of miserliness to the miser himself and also to the society at large.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Character trait has been discussed and analyzed by different psychologists. Kupperman, J. (2001) explored on character trait of humans as a specific to different kinds of situation, and it involves real possibilities. He argued in his work that different character trait manifests based on a given situation. Alfano, M (2013) showcased character trait as a moral fiction in the society where we live. He combined character trait alongside with virtue. He said both are social constructs. Alfano made it clear to us those attributions of various character traits to individuals helps to promote the said individuals. Such attributions serve as self –fulfilling prophecies to humanity. This paper is based on the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, particularly on the id, which is a personality component that is illogical and irrational. The id is one of the factors behind the workings of the human mind. Freud claims that these three factors - id, ego and the super ego control the process of human personality and behaviours. However, the id, is the most impulsive and discrete components of the human psyche because it ignites utmost desires and physical needs and pleasures of life. This is the particular factor that triggers certain unimaginable behaviours among humans, thereby making them to act in a strange manner. The character trait of a miser is thereby linked to the 'id' factor.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Hur et al., (2011) stipulated in their work that miserliness is heritable. The trait is constructed through a genetic factor. They also examined the factors associated with miserliness in a Southern Korea society and it was discovered that individual differences in miserliness were attributed to genetic and unique environmental influences. Musiol, P et al (2013) analyzed critically the German novel, *Professor Unrat* of Heinrich. In his thesis, the novel was pictured as a novel that showed the differences between classes of the Berlin in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Musiol P, suggested that the novel was an actual reflection of real events in 20th century of German history. This is to say that the miserliness character of *Professor Unrat* was due to his status in the society. He believed that nobody could challenge his manner of giving scores to his students.

Wolfe, K (2000) not only visualized the character of Harpagon as a miser but also as a comic character. According to him, Moliere's comic dialogue among his characters exposed his sense of actuality with language use and also it coherent his spectators' familiarity with the real events of life. However, our main focus in our work is to portray the different manners of miserliness as depicted in three different languages from three different region of the world.

## CONCEPT OF MISERLINESS IN THE THREE NOVELS

### ***L'AVARE* (1668) BY MOLIÈRE**

With a touch of a comic wand, Molière presented another side of miserliness in the character of his protagonist named Harpagon, a shrewd trader who buried his treasure and refused to disclose the location of the treasure to his family. The complex nature of his miser character was also displayed by him not disclosing to his son Cleante his intention of marrying Mariane, who happens to be his son's fiancée. (Act 1, iv). Harpagon was a whole concept of miser himself, because he often searches his visitors in order to make sure that none of his treasure or money is taken away by them.

### ***OKPA AKU ERI ERI* (1981) BY UDE ODILORA**

*Okpa aku eri eri* was the first novel of Ude Odilora. He depicted the character of miserliness in his protagonist character named Akubuzo, an adorer of wealth that doesn't give his money to anybody. Akubuzo was an unmarried handsome young man who was a secondary school teacher and also a farmer. He only eats what he cultivates and he doesn't buy any food ingredients from the market. However, because of his character of miserliness, he deprives himself from eating a good and healthy food instead he saves his money to enable him travel to abroad with it. He remained unmarried because he does not want a woman to come and enjoy his wealth, he was very stingy and does not render any financial help to anyone. His reason of being a miser was to save money that will take him to overseas, however, at the end he was disappointed that his hard saved money has been eaten up by termites. Akubuzo ended up generating so much money for termites.

### ***PROFESSOR UNRAT* BY HEINRICH MANN (1905)**

Another dimension of the character of miserliness was introduced by Heinrich Mann in his master piece, *Professor Unrat*. The book exposed the character of an autocratic, and a sadist college teacher. Raat was a petty tyrant teacher who hates all his students. He delighted in punishing them unnecessarily and giving them bad grades. He had so much hatred for Lohmann, a student of his who was very smart and intelligent. He never graded him justly. His nickname 'Unrat' (garbage) was given to him by his students, who also described him as a prematurely aged man, and also a failure in everything including his own marital life. Raat was a miser in giving good grades to his students. He was also miserly with his emotions as he never encourages anyone.

### **MISERLINESS; A PSYCHOANALYTIC TRAIT**

The background of miserliness as a character is impounded in the 'id's concept of Freudian's psychoanalytic theory. According to Freud, the id is found in the human body's sensations and feelings. And miserliness is parts of human's sensation. Everybody is a miser, because it is a sensation but the trait of miserliness is found in different forms in every human being. However, Damasio (2010) captioned such sensational feelings as described by Freud, as a primordial feelings. According to him, the origin of feelings and sensations are based on the framework of the biological construction of consciousness, this notion of consciousness explains that miserliness is a conscious trait, and it happens to be existing in everyone. According to Freud, the id is the only part of the personality that is present at birth. It acts as the driving force of the personality which means that this aspect of the personality does not change as people grow older. It is also not in touch with reality or logic or social norms. It strives only to satisfy an individual most basic needs. This means that the behavior of a miser is the result of mental illness sourced from early childhood. It is believed that misers derive pleasure from the act.

### **EFFECTS OF MISERLINESS ON THE SOCIETY**

Being a miser can be portrayed as both a good and a bad character. It all depends on the dimension it is viewed from. Been described as a good character, miserliness in finances helps to avoid waste of economic resources and it improves the economy. In the other hand, when miserliness is described as a bad trait, it affects human – to human relationship. In *Professor Unrat*, Raat's character of miserliness was described as an ugly trait because his students were affected. The students hated his character and described him as a garbage. The miser character in him affected his marital life and also his relationship with his students. Harpagon in *L'Avare*, is not far from being a bad miser. Not only that he was

clandestinely wooing his son's fiancée, and wanted to take her as a second wife without the consent of his first wife. The safety of his hidden treasures gave him sleepless night. Though he was a rich man, but his miserliness influenced his way of relating with his family and business associates. Akubuzo's miserly character in the Igbo novel, *Okpa aku eri eri*, landed him into a catastrophic condition, that he regretted. Though a single man without a partner, just to save the money he could have used to marry a lady, derogated his marital status in his society. He had a good intention of savings but his realistic attitude of miserliness didn't make him to achieve his goal. The consequences of miserliness is serious that it can affect the relationship between couples and their children. It can also have a negative effect on a nation with miserly leaders.

Is the miserly character to be generalized? No, that is why we used the id a component of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis to analyse the miserly attitude. It is a personality disorder that starts from childhood. Therefore, we can't say all igbo people are Akubuzo, the French are not Harpagon and the Germans are not Unrat.

### CONCLUSION

Material detachment seems to be a very challenging exercise among many people of different cultures and backgrounds. The pursuit of wealth and material possessions is in itself not bad but when it becomes an obsession to the total disregard of the fine virtues and some values of human existence, it invariably leads to tragedy.

It is recommended to detect the case in early childhood and work on it through encouraging children to give and exchange their toys while playing. We also recommend that a person with the miserly traits should visit a psychologist or a therapist for training on new behaviour. One can't be too poor that he or she does not have anything to offer.

### WORKS CITED

- Alfano, Mark. *Character as Moral Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Damasio, A. *Self comes to mind : Constructing the conscious brain*. Pantheon/ Random House, 2010.
- Jon, Sletvold. *The ego and the id revisited Freud and Damasio on the body ego/self*. The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 2013, 94:5, 1019-1032.
- Kupperman, Joel J. "The indispensability of Character". Philosophy, vol. 76, no. 296, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Musiol, P., Moskala, P., & Sitarz, M. (n.d). Der Zeitroman am Beispiel der Romane von Heinrich Mann "Im Schlaraffenland. Ein Roman unter feinen Leuten" und "Professor Unrat", 2013.
- Mann, Heinrich. *Professor Unrat*. Albert Langen, 1905.
- Orbell, John, and Robyn M. Dawes. "A Cognitive Miser' Theory of Cooperators Advantage." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 85, no. 2, 1991, pp. 515-528. doi:10.2307/1963172.
- Ude, Odilora. *Okpa aku eri eri*. Onitsha, Nigeria : University Publishing Co, 1996.
- Wolfe, Kathryn Willis. "Creating Comic Dialogue in Moliere's 'L'Avare': Harpagon and the Economics of Miserly verbal Exchange". Romance Notes, vol. 41, no. 1, 2000, pp. 79-86. JSTOR, [http:// www.jstor.org/stable/43802810](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43802810).