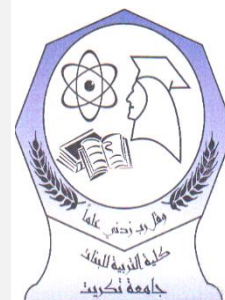




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### Social Isolation and Loneliness: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*

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<b>Keywords:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Jojo Moyes</li><li>- Me Before You</li><li>- romantic comedy</li><li>- isolation</li><li>- psychoanalysis theory</li></ul>	<b>Abstract</b> <p>The current paper investigates the concept of isolation and loneliness in the contemporary novel of Jojo Moyes' <i>Me Before You</i>, which is written in 2012. Embodying the elements of romance and romanticism, the novel is described by many critics as a romantic comedy that narrates a true love story. The study explores the theme of isolation and loneliness by relying on psychoanalysis perspectives to interpret these two concepts. It adopts a framework of psychoanalysis views, particularly Freud's concept of isolation, to study the characters' motives towards isolation and solitude, as well as to reveal the physical and emotional conditions that the characters have encountered in their community. It also points out that the pattern of isolation can be considered as a defense mechanism to protect the characters against their harmful thoughts showing the starkness of their surroundings circumstances. It sheds the light on the reasons of Will's, the major character, thinking about his disability and how he detached himself from the social life as a form of defense, and then attempts to end his life.</p>
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## العزلة الاجتماعية والوحدة: قراءة التحليل النفسي لرواية أنا قبلك للكتابة جوجو مويس

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<p><b>الخلاصة:</b> يتناول البحث مفهوم العزلة والشعور بالوحدة في الرواية المعاصرة لجوجو مويس أنا قبلك 2012. تجسد الرواية عناصر الرومانسية والمدرسة الرومانسية، ووصف النقاد الرواية بواسطة على أنها رواية كوميدية رومانسية تروي قصة حب حقيقية. تستكشف الدراسة موضوع العزلة والشعور بالوحدة من خلال الاعتماد على منظور التحليل النفسي لتفسير هذين المفهومين. يتبنى إطاراً من آراء التحليل النفسي، ولا سيما مفهوم فرويد للعزلة، لدراسة دوافع الشخصيات نحو العزلة والانعزال الاجتماعي، كذلك من أجل كشف عن الظروف الجسدية والعاطفية التي واجهتها الشخصيات في مجتمعهم. كما يشير إلى أن نمط العزلة يمكن اعتباره آلية دفاعية من أجل حماية الشخصيات من أفكارهم الضارة التي تُظهر قسوة الظروف المحيطة بهم. يسلط البحث الضوء على أسباب ويل، وهو الشخصية الرئيسية، والتفكير في إعاقته وكيف عزل نفسه عن الحياة الاجتماعية في اعتباره أحد أشكال الدفاع، ثم محاولته للانتحار.</p>	<p><b>الكلمات الدالة:-</b></p> <p><b>معلومات البحث</b> <b>تاريخ البحث:</b> الاستلام: 2021-2-1 القبول: 2021-3-1 التوفر على النت</p>
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### 1- Introduction

#### 1.1 Isolation as a Defense Mechanism

Isolation can be defined as a defense mechanism in psychoanalytic theory first proposed by Freud, who illustrated the concept as “a defense against harmful thoughts” (Freud 79). Consequently, it prevents the self from allowing these cognitions to become recurrent and possibly damaging to the self-concept. More specifically, it is the experience of being separated from others physically or emotionally away from a community, which could be real or perceived. It can distinguish isolation from other literary terms, such as alienation and loneliness, which is that the condition of detachment from others by many reasons not in control. It is important to recognize that not all who feel isolated is literally alone or isolated; as Mark Conliffe remarks that the condition “depends on the individual of being part of a whole” (3). The isolated person is not necessarily being an outsider or stranger, rather he is part of the group to be identified by his association with his ordinary world. Social isolation is an absence of social relationships which can occur in solitude or in the vicinity of others.

There is an intertwined connection between social relationships and isolation. Irvin Yalom, in his *Existential Psychotherapy*, has classified isolation into three different types listed as follows:

(1) Interpersonal isolation: it refers to a person who is physically isolated from others, even though the relationship is not satisfying for person's relational demands. Besides, it is necessary to be less physically communicating with others, but it is the mode which has a different thing. Although the lonely individuals are depicted physically isolated, they tend to spend more time with strangers rather than being restricted to specific relations with less individuals. Accordingly, it is "the quality of communication rather than the quantity of communication with others that leads to loneliness" (Yalom 18).

(2) Intrapersonal isolation: it refers to a person who is separated from others in a relation that does not lack the most normal criteria of the relationship. When the communication with others may be not satisfying, there are aspects of the self and the potential relationship to others that are concealed, closed, and not authentic. This sort of isolation that happens within always has personal conditions that even the most intimate of human relationships may never witness in a public or shared way. It exists in degrees along the continuum of sharing and secrecy. Each person is to withhold aspects of their self from others, and only slowly "allow progressively more aspects to be revealed with growing intimacy" (Jones 34).

(3) Existential isolation: it refers to a person who has no way to escape from his own consciousness and subjectivity, no matter what he does. Thus, one cannot ever experience the subjectivity of other human beings because it is simply a fundamental feature of human limitation. In existential psychotherapy, acceptance and awareness are a kind of isolation and limitation which is "recognized to contribute in the growth and understanding" (Jones 18). Like the issues of death and freedom, what this method comes down to is not some particular answer or approach, but rather the exploration of awareness and the acceptance of existential isolation.

Social isolation can be a reason for the emotional isolation when someone is unable or unwilling to share his emotions with others, or reluctant to discuss anything with others. Therefore, emotional isolation is a condition of isolation where one has a functioning social network, but he still feels emotionally alienated from others. Those isolated people cannot confide in their partners, and they are less likely to appear strong, alert, calm, energetic and happy. Instead, they are "more likely to feel depressed, tired, sad, and worn out" (Helgason 98). Though they have strong and social bond, but they are still emotionally alienated and unable to relate to others. Emotional isolation can occur when persons lack any close confidant or intimate partner. They keep their feelings completely to themselves, and are unable to receive emotional support from others.

Additionally, emotional isolation can occur within an intimate relationship because they may feel lonely in their relationship instead of supporting each other. It can be represented as a defense mechanism used by the isolated to protect themselves from emotional distress and the negative feelings and thoughts. Another kind of the emotional isolation is the social withdrawal when people avoid some activities or sharing opinions or ideas. Sometimes a cycle of life can be developed when people

spend several times alone, they feel less understanding with people around them. Though the relationships are necessary for our well-being, they can trigger negative feelings and thoughts. Hence, the emotional alienation can be considered a defense mechanism to defend an individual in the adversity. As Freud expressed it in his book *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, that the isolation is a:

“Defense mechanism in which emotion is detached from an idea and rendered unconscious, leaving the idea bland and emotionally flat. It is especially important in obsessive-compulsive disorder, and in non-disordered people it most often occurs following a traumatic experience. The mechanisms by which the detachment is effected include repetitive intrusive thoughts and ritualistic behaviour” (77)

“The great source of terror in infancy is solitude” (James 418). From the psychoanalytic standpoint, the social isolation and detachment from the community leads consequently to the painful experience of loneliness and solitude. Evangelia Galanaki, a psychoanalysis researcher, has defined solitude as a “retreat in front of the pain inherent in human relations” (85). Though separation and loneliness are different stages of life, they may occur at the same time. It is recognized that both loneliness and isolation are harmful to mental and physical health as other psychological disorders. The lack of social connection heightens the sense of loneliness and threatens the mental and cognitive health profoundly.

Through their research, many psychologists maintain that the social connection is considered an essential human need and central factor to both survival and well-being. Any social detachment results in a state of torturous loneliness. They further assure that loneliness is not the same meaning of solitude or isolation. Rather, loneliness expresses and addresses people’s standards of satisfaction with their social lives, or their apparent social isolation. In addition, loneliness contributes to raise “the grades of stress, depression or anxiety, impede sleep and, in turn, harm the body and mind”( Mushtaq and Others 11)

In the domain of psychoanalysis, the complicated relationship between “the inner and the outer realm of human experience is the essence of solitude” ( Galanaki 72). Loneliness, as Freud defines, the painful longing for the missing object or for the missing of the love of the object. Furthermore, Freud talks about the idea of the ‘voluntary isolation’ asserting that there are sources of sadness, the external world, the body, and the human relations (the interaction between the inner and the external sphere which is the essential source of pain and suffering). It is that we are “never so defenseless against suffering as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love” (Freud 82). People often choose withdrawal from the social life and would prefer to isolate themselves to avoid suffering and negative feedbacks. Therefore, this withdrawal policy becomes a form of defense and self-protection against the harmful social relationships. There is a distinction between withdrawal (isolation) and loneliness:

“Withdrawal is a defense against persecution fear or anxiety and against a potential danger of losing identification with that from which one withdraws. Benign aloneness reflects the tolerance of ambivalence and the ability to share solitude, that is, the ability to

be alone in the presence of another person who is also alone and perceived to be alone.” (Galanaki 82)

In order to cope with such painful feeling of loneliness and solitude, the individual, who detaches socially from the community fearing negative feedbacks that influence the self-esteem and self-assertion, needs help, encouragement, and inspiration from the family, and from expanding circle of friends and colleagues. Even Freud believes that it is better to be member of the community instead of detaching and disconnect from the social world due to the negative and disastrous effects of isolation on the human beings, as Jojo Moyes' *Me before You* tackles and embodies this issue clearly in the case of Will, the major character, who prefers isolation after a motorcycle accident.

In Moyes' *Me before You*, isolation has a great impact upon the life of characters. Will, the protagonist of the novel, dissociates and isolates himself away from others. He attempts to separate himself from the people's common thoughts and feelings, acts on his own accord, and finds his consolation. He suffers from the difficult circumstances that have occurred after the accident. Therefore, he chooses to avoid the external world because he is not assured to encounter his friends. Accordingly, Moyes attempts to present to her readers such important themes of isolation, depression, loneliness, and prosaically behaviour in the difficult times in life. She permits her readers to sink into the psychological inner state of her main characters, Will and Louisa. The novel describes various states of human psyche and decisions which are considered turning points in the lives of the characters. It explains how Will goes through depression and bears the conflicts; then finally he makes decisions for his horrific life to end.

## **2.1 Isolation and Loneliness in *Me before You***

### **Discussion**

*Me Before You* is a romantic novel that depicts, in an amazing narrative style, the meaning of life and true love. A broad definition of the romantic novel is as a work of prose fiction that “tells the story of courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (Kamble 1). Its major concentration is on the inner personality and human individuality, emotions, psychology, inner world and intimacy. This intimacy is “the consciousness of the Romantic period which became accustomed to the inner antagonism, simultaneous contrast of values, as well as to recurrence and redundancy” (Golban 129). In literature, the romantic relationship is related to the fulfillment of dreams or goals. The narrative pattern focuses not only on achieving love relationship, but rather it discloses how the protagonist confronts the social circumstances whether he or she succeeds or fails in achieving the goals in the environment where he lives.

It is common for a Romantic Comedy to have elements of nostalgia, inner struggles between two worlds, solitude, loneliness which leads to depression and then suicide. In the tragic destiny, as Richards-Gustafson declares, the protagonist starts in a desirable state but he ends up in one that's undesirable, then consequently, it leads to his tragic fate which usually comes in the form of isolation. While the reader foresees alternative options for the protagonist, he only considers the option that ends in misfortune because of his isolation. These elements of the romantic comedy

distinguish *Me before You*, which has been written in the contemporary age; an age that is colored by its dark realism and struggles.

Yet Moyes treats the romantic tendency in a particular way in which she describes *Me Before You* as romantic comedy. It can be defined as a subgenre of comedy that presents a realistic portrayal of life which focuses on “lighthearted and humorous narrative lines concentrated on the romantic thoughts, such as how real love is able to transcend the obstacles” (Johnson 64). It refers to a distinguishing feature which narrates a love story of two sympathetic lovers who are united and reconciled, even though they are kept away from the difficult and complicating circumstances (for example, class differences, foregoing relationships, parental interference) till, “overwhelmed all obstacles, they are finally united” (Simpson 36). More specifically, Moyes employs the romantic comedy presenting some elements of humor to balance the delightful and depressed moments that profoundly influenced the characters. The obvious reason for introducing these humorous situations is to reduce the light-hearted tension between Louisa and Will in spite of their inherent differences.

On the other hand, *Me before You* displays the difficult circumstances in Will's life, and how his accident not only drastically changes his life, but it isolates him from the life of those who love him. It attempts to establish within the reader a sense of empathy towards the plight of an individual that community does not fully perceive. It depicts a transportation of Will's life, who was a wealthy young man, into a life battling infections, immobility, and most difficultly. It describes the struggle of a disabled person who is incapable of even doing the most tasks with autonomy. How embarrassed would the individual feel to pitiful sympathy? Moyes explores the shattered pieces of Will's suffering what is truly like to live a life where you are a prisoner in your own body which portrays the emotional trauma he has endured since his accident. Louisa describes his status:

“And as the days went by and I realized that his condition was not just a matter of being stuck in that chair, of the loss of physical freedom, but a never-ending litany of indignities and health problems, of risks and discomforts, I decided that if I were Will, I would probably be pretty miserable too” (*Me Before You* 124).

In fact, Louisa believes that Will only separates himself in the bedroom without doing anything, just thinking about everything happening to him after the accident. Louisa describes how Will detaches himself even from his close friend, Ruppert, and from his ex-girlfriend, Alicia:

“there was no way I could carry on with my job ‘No. Nor the apartment, the holidays, the life ... I believe you met my ex-girlfriend.’ The break in his voice couldn't disguise the bitterness. ‘But I should apparently be grateful, as for some time they didn't think I was going to live at all” (*Me Before You* 106)

This indicates that Will deliberately becomes away from his ex-girlfriend because he does not want others to know more about this relationship. Louisa

recognizes Will's passionate feelings, and how he chooses to be isolated due to his physical and psychic condition which leads him to be disable of doing anything.

However, Will suffers from severe complications because of his disability. When Will becomes paralyzed on a wheelchair, he feels the disability to perform any duties. Such Traumatic conditions experienced in Will's life that lead him to think of many repeated suicide attempts. He suffers from severe depression and loneliness, thus he isolates himself from social life after the dramatic change in his life. Will explains to Louisa that the accident comes to darken and shadow his life, therefore he cannot continue his life. Will describes:

“When I nodded, he closed his eyes again.  
‘Motorbike accident. Not mine. I was an innocent pedestrian.’ ‘I thought it would be skiing or bungee jumping or something.’ ‘Everyone does. God’s little joke. I was crossing the road outside my home. Not this place,’ he said. ‘My London home.’” (*Me Before You* 105-106)

Will cannot do his duties and activities because of his physical restrictions. He experiences severe traumatic conditions, subsequently he believes that his life has no sense anymore. Moreover, Will feels so miserable and depressed on his condition, as he clarifies “I get really, really scared of how this is going to go [...] I could end up not being able to breathe by myself, not being able to talk” (*Me Before You* 237). Will feels that he loses his independence and capability to practice the duties he loves, but he also has to encounter the prospect in which it is only going to become worse. He says “I don’t do anything, Miss Clark. I can’t do anything anymore but sit. I just about exist” (*Me Before You* 122). The trauma makes Will encounter troubles because it eliminates his ability to do the matters he enjoys, then it will be traumatic and miserable. It leads us to recognize that Will's trauma causes his isolation, loneliness, and depression. Because of the accident he experienced, he feels disabled and isolated. Moreover, there are symptoms of depression that Will experienced, such as, abandonment, self-centeredness, and attempting suicide. These signs suggest that he suffers from depression, alienation, and isolation.

After the accident, Will endeavors to discover the meaning of life to escape from his thinking in the isolation and suicide. Will chooses to isolate himself away from others because he thinks that people will look at him as a pathetic person. One reason that Will thinks of ending his life is that he is incapable of bearing living especially after the marriage of his ex-girlfriend. Another reason of his attempt to commit suicide is the responsibility of his choice to complete his life with Louisa. Although Will’s life becomes better when Louisa comes, he thinks to sacrifice his feelings and love to Louisa. The readers can perceive that Will thinking that he will be stumbling block for Louisa to attain her dreams. He becomes conscious that if he stays alive, Louisa will always bound with him, with his medical appointment. Will does not want to be a burden on Louisa though his life becomes better with her.

Individuals find themselves cut off from others because they strive to keep their individuality as apart as possible, and wish to secure the greatest possible fullness of life. Isolation is not limited only to Will, there is a different kind of isolation that Moyes conveys in Louisa’s vacuum during her searching to find the

meaning of life. Louisa faces many troubles and difficulties which leave a great shift upon her personality. It leads to her isolation because of the fear of the past traumatic incidents. Seven years ago, when Louisa had a good life at the age of twenty, she had a good job and she had no financial problems and responsibilities; she declares

“I can tell you the exact day I stopped being fearless. I was twenty and would meet Patrick in less than three months. We were enjoying one of those rare summers of utter freedom- no financial responsibility, no debts, no time owing to anybody” (*Me Before You* 201).

One day Louisa thinks to make a party with her colleagues, and she becomes drunk and goes to the castle. In the maze of the Stortford Castle, Louisa was exposed by a group of men in a sexual harassment. She explains:

“There you go,” one of them said as his hand grappled my arm. “Come and give me a kiss and I’ll show you the way out.” His voice was soft and drawling. “I just... I just want you to show me how to get out” My voice sounded pathetic, even to me. “Just one.” (*Me Before You* 322)

Afterwards Louisa cannot reconcile with her normal life and she is haunted by the worries and suspicions that occupy her mind. This sexual harassment will be the reason to lead Louisa to a meaningless life that retains her secure and productive.

“I filled it with their laughter, their bodies and their words. I filled it with my own humiliation. I saw their faces every time I went anywhere beyond the town, and Patrick and Mum and Dad and my small life had been just fine for me, with all their problems and limitation. They had let me feel safe.” (*Me Before You* 325-326)

Another sign to indicate Louisa's isolation and her meaningless life is when Louisa cannot grasp a full understanding of the quality of life. Louisa, who is a young woman of twenty-six years old, should have recognized the type of life that she need to live and fit her desires. In this story, she is depicted as a woman who cannot understand the life that she lives, “I was twenty-six years old and I wasn’t really sure what I was” (*Me Before You* 23). It refers that Louisa does not realize herself well because she cannot express herself or give her opinion in a single word. A different sign that symbolizes Louisa’s isolation is represented from the short dialogues between Camilla Traynor, Will's mother, and Louisa Clark in Louisa’s first day at work.

“Do you have aspirations for a career? Would this be a stepping stone to something else? Do you have a professional dream that you wish to pursue?” I looked at her blankly. Was this some kind of trick question? “I ... I haven’t really thought that far. Since I lost my job. I just –” I swallowed. “I just want to work again.” It sounded feeble. What kind of person came to an interview without even knowing



what she wanted to do? Mrs Traynor's expression suggested she thought the same thing" (*Me Before You* 29).

It is important to recognize that Louisa has no way in her life. She gets no answer when Camila Traynor attempts to ask her about the goals in her life. The sentence "I haven't really thought that far. Then I lost my job. I just' I swallowed" (Moyes 29). It refers that she has continued in her life well by working hard, but underneath it all, she has no significant purposes behind all these effort.

The Loneliness and isolation of Louisa is expressed in her attempts to practice some particular activities in her life. It is clarified in the conversation that happens between Louisa and Traynor at the Granta House:

I tried to think. "I don't really have any hobbies. I read a bit. I like clothes." "Handy," he said, dryly. "You asked. I'm not really a hobby person." My voice had become strangely defensive. "I don't do much, okay? I work and then I go home". (*Me Before You* 85)

Louisa's lack to achieve the goals of her life throughout her attempts in order to fill her isolation, since she has no passion in life and wastes her life by doing nothing important. In one of the interviews, Moyes declares that Louisa is drawn to be a character who lives on the periphery, and "endure some emotional, physical, and economical circumstances" (*Beckerman 2015*). Louisa is one of those who suffer from the tension that comes from people not quite fitting with their surroundings, or do not fit happily into a group and fulfill their lives. She struggles to get somewhere in a society that increasingly tells them they can't overcome the difficulties easily, where the odds are stacked against them. Louisa sustains to remind everyone that no matter what opportunities that life gives, instead one has to make the most of them as best as he could. Love might not conquer everything, but it certainly does a good job for making the challenges in life more endurable.

Although Moyes' writings are running through the contemporary romantic novels, she attempts to add an extra layer by presenting a thematic prose style. This novel is not just about the beloved company when Louisa, who "tries to change Will's mind, but it is about the capacity of imposing her own feelings upon his decision" (Interview with Jojo Moye 2019 : 2). How much does she have the right to tell him how his life should be lived and to help him to escape his isolation. It is of high importance to note that the romantic comedies attempt to present the effect of life circumstances surrounding the characters which show their failure to communicate effectively. They invite readers to know their needs without telling them. This novel shows a correlation of how readers expect to know the needs without even uttering the terms of the sufferings and isolation.

## **Conclusion**

*Me Before You* presents a passionate love relationship between two characters to sustain the notion of how they challenge the circumstances and hardships of disability by love and support to each other. The study's major focus is on investigating the concept of isolation and loneliness and showing how Moyes depicts them in a unique way. It attempts to reflect upon the reasons and motives that lead to the isolation, such as disability, suicide, contempt, insult, loneliness, suffering, and trauma. It adopts a psychoanalytic approach to explore the theme of isolation of the main character, Will, which leads him to his depression and loneliness. This approach reveals and analyzes the inner conflicts and sufferings of the main characters, Will

and Louisa. She discloses the reader with the matter-of-fact language of Louisa and Will's conversations and thoughts which reflect the characters' difficulties that encountered in the surrounding environment. Unlike loneliness or alienation, the concept of isolation is described as it is outside man's control which leads to emotional troubles and difficulties in the relations with other people. The individual may feel detached even though he lives in the vicinity of community. Will's thinking of his bitterness and resentment over being disabled causes depression and loneliness that can be seen in his preference of isolation. Consequently, it leads him to think of committing suicide. Though he attempts to transcend his depression by protecting the love relations, he still feels loneliness, and thinks in the self-centeredness that leads him to commit suicide as he feels that life is full of pain, misery, indignities, and limits after the accident.

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