



Trauma and Attachment in Ana Huang's "Twisted Love": A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Ana Huang's *Twisted Love* is examined in this study, with an emphasis on how language shapes gender relations, power dynamics, and emotional vulnerabilities in the story. Discourse analysis may be found in *Twisted Love*, a modern romance novel that explores issues of emotional pain, personal development, and complicated relationships. The study examines how deeper socio-cultural factors, like patriarchal influences and power disparities in love relationships, are revealed through the protagonists' conversations and internal monologues through the lens of CDA. The study looks at how language reflects cultural norms of forgiveness and love, negotiates conflict, and develops an identity. This study clarifies the underlying ideologies present in the narrative by examining textual components such as metaphors, pronoun usage, and conversational patterns. This helps readers have a better understanding of how contemporary romantic novels address important societal concerns. The goal of this work is to increase knowledge of narrative discourse as a means of both promoting and questioning social norms. This paper address the following research questions:

1. How do the language and discourse in *Twisted Love* portray the power dynamics in romantic relationships?
2. How does gender ideology impact the way Alex Volkov and Ava Chen communicate?
3. Thirdly, how does the protagonists' emotional and relational growth impact the trauma discourse?
4. How can Critical Discourse Analysis reveal the novel's rhetorical and structural ideologies?

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1. Introduction

1.1. Analysis of Critical Discourse (CDA)

An interdisciplinary method for examining how language both reflects and shapes power, ideology, and social activities within particular socio-cultural contexts is called critical discourse analysis, or CDA. It looks at how language use, or discourse, relates to the social systems it reproduces and expresses. Beyond linguistic characteristics, CDA focuses on how language both reflects and perpetuates social inequalities, power relations, and cultural ideologies.

2. CDA Principles

2.1. Language as a Practice in Society

CDA views language as a tool for social action as well as a means of communication. It is based on the idea that social settings both influence and are influenced by discourse (Fairclough, 1995) ^[6].

2.2. Ideology and Power in Conversation

CDA focuses on how ideologies and power systems are reflected in language. Power dynamics like dominance and control are embedded in common language and discourse, according to Van Dijk (1993) ^[15].

2.3. Contextual Examination

In addition to looking at linguistic components (such as pronouns, metaphors, and sentence structures), the analysis also considers larger social, cultural, and political settings (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) ^[18].

3. Psychological Novel

As Mark Turner (2005) ^[14] writes in *"The Material Culture of the Victorian Novel"*:

Now, novels, more often than not, are based on actuality. A writer with a limited experience of life will write a restricted book, whereas one who has touched pleasure and pain at many points will have more material, more memories, on which to draw. (The life of a novelist is always worth reading for its own sake, but it will throw much light on the character of his books). One reason these novels live on today is because they speak to us, in many different ways, about the present, and the relationship between the past and present, not because they are museum pieces.

The novel allows us not only to detect people other than ourselves but also to enter their mental bubbles. It enables us to notice what it feels like to be these people and to face their life circumstances. Thus, Realistic novels are not only 'real' depictions of characters and events but also of 'real' limitations, fears, weaknesses and prejudices (Sen, 2020, p.3) ^[13]. Moreover, In his *Theory of Fiction*, Henry James states that a reader of a novel "likes to live the life of others" and considers it as "a valuable aid to clinical training or personal growth" (Sen, 2020, p.3) ^[13].

An important type of novel is a psychological novel, known also as "psychological realism". It is a fiction in which the characters' motivations, feelings, and thoughts are more important than the external action. It dives deeper into the characters' minds than other types of novels. In such type, events may not be presented in chronological order but according to the characters' minds, feelings, and memories (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2016, p.2564) ^[1].

The first who used psychological novels were Eliot and Meredith, who were among a group of novelists in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Henry James and Arthur Miller are the two significant funders of psychological realism in American literature. Henry James shows his readers the mind state of his characters facing diverse, and complex social circumstances. (Ahmed, & Ahmed, 2016, p.2564; Chen, n.d, p.77) ^[1].

Wang and Han (2017, p. 457) ^[17] state that psychological realism is "the realistic writing that probes deeply into the complexities of characters' thoughts and motivations". Moreover, realism is a method of writing that gives the feeling of 'reflecting' or recording authentically the actual

way of life. Thus, the term "realism" refers to a literary method created with full accuracy in portraying actual life problems (Wang, & Han, 2017, p. 457; Marcus, 1986) ^[17, 11].

4. Applying Psychological Analysis and CDA to Ana Huang's "Twisted Love"

In this section, the researcher is going to study all the psychological aspects of Ana Huang's novel "Twisted Love".

4.1. The Role of Trauma in the Dynamics of Alex and Ava's Relationship

"Twisted Love" by Ana Huang paints a striking picture of trauma and how it affects relationships and one's sense of self. Because of his upbringing, which was influenced by the tragic deaths of his family members, Alex Volkov develops emotional barriers and uses coping techniques like control and retaliation. Psychologically speaking, Alex exhibits the avoidant attachment type, which frequently arises as a result of emotional trauma experienced early in life. According to attachment theory, people who have an avoidant attachment style may struggle to form meaningful relationships because they naturally dislike intimacy and see it as a danger to their autonomy. This is strongly reflected in Alex's character, as his desire for vengeance and his reluctance to be emotionally vulnerable prevent him from fully allowing Ava to enter his life.

Ava, on the other hand, has an anxious attachment style as a result of her painful experiences and emotions of abandonment, which makes her put the harmony of her relationships before her own needs. As stated by psychologists, people who are struggling with attachment and has problem in communicate her feelings fairly just like Ava's character. She tries so hard to please everyone. Thus, this affects her self-esteem and makes her continuously uncertain about her value in Alex's life.

The relationship between Alex and Ava is similar to the "anxious-avoidant trap," which is a loop in which tension is maintained by one partner's desire for intimacy (Ava) and the other's resistance to it (Alex). This interaction is a major source of conflict in "Twisted Love", as Ava's desire tests Alex's dread of vulnerability for emotional connection.

4.2. The impact of childhood trauma on romantic relationships and self-esteem

A major theme that emerges during the analysis of Love Twisted's portrayal of the psychology of love is how the stability of a relationship is affected by one's sense of self-worth. The two main characters struggle with deep-seated issues with self-worth that date back to their early years and manifest themselves in very different ways. Alex has low self-esteem, which he tries to hide by his accurately planned life and accomplishments. Psychologists call this case "narcissistic defense mechanisms", in which emotionally wounded people tend to put great dreams and achieve these dreams to protect themselves from feelings of insufficiency. Thus, Alex standards power, achievement and control and avoids emotional connections because he has no control over it, and that what isolates him from Ava and other people.

As a result of her childhood trauma, Eva believes that being loved by someone required from her constant scarifies. This is a reflection of her low self-esteem that pushes her to work hard to get accepted and loved by others. Throughout the novel, Ava slowly started to understand this pattern and

begins to set boundaries, which is sign for emotional development.

4.3. In-Depth character development

Psychological realism emphasises the creation of well-rounded characters, each with their own distinctive personalities, fears, desires, and emotional complexities. Authors employ detailed character sketches to showcase the depth and authenticity of their characters.

4.3.1. Alex

Changing from a boy who has his entire family killed in front of him to a man who owns a lot of companies in Washington is a clear representation of character development for Alex. His uncle describes this development and reaching his ambition as "You're one step closer to world domination" (Huang, 2021, p.113) ^[9].

4.3.2. Eva

The story starts with the twenty-three-year-old Ava, who is working as a photographer while she is a junior in college. Ava has only one brother, Josh, who lives with her in the same building. She had lost her mother when she was a child. From the first pages, she has panic attacks. Because her mother pushed her in the lack of trying to kill her. Thus, Eva has a phobia of water. She can't come close to water without having a panic attack. She can travel because she is afraid of flying over the ocean: "My fear of water...The thought of flying over an ocean still made me sick to my stomach" (Huang, 2021, p.127) ^[9]. However, the novel ends with Eva changing herself and swimming by herself after taking a lot of swimming classes with Alex. "I wouldn't win an Olympic medal anytime soon, but I could move my body from one point to another in the pool" (Huang, 2021, p.127) ^[9]. Thus, her self-development is by challenging her own past, fear, and panic.

On the emotional level, Alex and Eva change greatly. The entire novel depicts how they change from people who hardly know each other to become so close to each other. For Eva, Alex was "The man was harder to read than a Latin textbook in the dark" (Huang, 2021, p.129) ^[9]. To the man who cares about her, "you know I'd do anything for you" (Huang, 2021, p.229) ^[9]. Trying to protect her in a way, "touch what was mine, and for that, I'd make him beg for something as sweet as death" (Huang, 2021, p.233) ^[9]. Alex believes that he "destroys everything beautiful that comes" into his life (Huang, 2021, p.131) ^[9]. Thus, trying to protect her from his many enemies after she has been kidnapped by his uncle. Alex pushes Ava away, and after great suffering for both, he tries to win her back, knowing that he can not be away from her.

4.4. Stream of Consciousness

One of the hallmark techniques of psychological realism is the use of the stream-of-consciousness narrative style. This technique delves into a character's internal monologue, providing readers with insights into their thoughts and emotions in real time. This allows for a more profound exploration of the character's psyche.

Our dreams and nightmares reflect a lot of our psychological issues. Eva's psychological traumas are a clear reflection of her childhood trauma. When she first slept at Alex's house after watching movies. Alex suddenly woke up hearing Eva's

crying, realising that she had a "night terror". He was unable to help her in any way as he knew that "I knew better than anyone that no one can fight our mental battles for us" (Huang, 2021, p.68) ^[9]. He was there for her till her episode passed.

The same can be said about Alex; his harsh childhood caused him to be so cold and heartless. However, Eva believes that, under his icy character, there is a heart of gold. He even acts like he does not care about anyone, yet when he is alive, he is going to love the hardest. "Those who bottle up their emotions every day feel the strongest and love the hardest" (Huang, 2021, p.107) ^[9].

A common feeling for all humans is fear. The majority of people do not fear people more than fearing feelings. Ironically, some people are afraid to feel attached to other people, especially those who have been traumatised from early childhood or passed through a harsh breakup. Alex is so harsh and strong, yet he is afraid of being attached to someone. "Everyone fears something; it's what makes us human" (Huang, 2021, p.109) ^[9].

4.5. Interiority

The Author depicts Alex and Eva's feelings in detail. Eva's fear of water, which limits her ability even to travel abroad: "my fear of water, but I could think about it now without having a panic attack. The thought of flying over an ocean still made me sick to my stomach" (Huang, 2021, p.127) ^[9]. When Eva throws a birthday party for Alex. She was surprised to know that Alex never had a birthday party since his parent's death. That makes her realise how lonely he is with no relative and only one friend: "My heart ached for him...because he could no longer celebrate with his family. For the first time, I realised how lonely Alex must be with no relatives left in the world" (Huang, 2021, p.130) ^[9].

4.6. Symbolic Language and Metaphors

Huang uses rich metaphors to enhance the story's emotional impact.

The Sun and Ice Metaphor: Alex is frequently referred to as "ice" or "frost," while Ava is commonly called "sunshine." Ava is positioned in this duality as a life-giving and warm energy who must "melt" Alex's emotional walls.

CDA Insight: These metaphors offer a framework for examining the potential for reciprocal transformation while simultaneously reinforcing the conventional romantic clichés of males as emotionally closed and women as nurturing.

Resolution of Interpersonal Conflict

Alex's drive for control and Ava's opposition are frequently the source of conflict between the main characters. For example:

Conflict Dialogue: Ava replies, "I don't need your protection; I need your trust," in response to Alex's statement, "I did this to protect you."

A major topic of the book is the conflict between stifling control and protective affection, which is highlighted in this discussion. According to CDA, language in these kinds of disputes acts as a battlefield for readjusting the balance of power in the partnership.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Although *Twisted Love* makes use of conventional romance clichés, it subtly questions them as well. Although Ava's

eventual role as Alex's emotional support system reinforces the idea that women are healers, her development into a more forceful character presents a critique of gendered power disparities.

The psychological intricacies of trauma, attachment patterns, self-worth, and the significance of vulnerability in love and healing are all expertly shown in Ana Huang's *Twisted Love*. The journey of Alex and Ava is proof of the significant influence that early life events have on adult relationships and the necessity for both partners to face their own anxieties and insecurities in order for there to be true love. The characters transform from damaged persons into stronger, more self-aware partners via introspection, acceptance, and the bravery to show vulnerability. This development emphasises the need for personal recovery as a basis for sincere connection in addition to the therapeutic value of relationships.

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