

# Psychic Transition in Jennifer Johnston's *A Sixpenny Song*

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**Abstract:** “If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change”

- Wayne Dyer

*In the contemporary world, literature is intertwined with the lives of human beings. It is a galaxy inscribed with various tales of different people from different ends. Every human have untold stories and secrets which transform their life in an unexpected way. Jennifer Johnston is a prolific writer of the contemporary Irish literature, who is prominent in writing the plights of the individuals on the context of dysfunctional families. Johnston's *A Sixpenny Song* explores the secrets hidden in Annie's life and her attempt to transcend all her troubles from the past. This paper deals with the emotional upheaval of Annie when she unveils the secrets of the past generation and her attempt to redefine her identity with a new psychic transformation.*

**Key Words:** Emotional instability, Identity, Psyche, Transform.

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

The world is continuously changing in which human beings are facing numerous incidents and issues through which their perception towards the society also differs. Since ancient times, literature is closely intertwined with the proceedings of human life. Every human have untold stories and secrets which trigger their life to transit in an unexpected way. Transition means the process of being transformed from one self to the other. Here it implies not only the physical transition but also psychological transition. This transition affects the human psychic's perception on how we see, relate and understand the outer world, which results in radical changes in their behavior, thought and self.

## 2. BRIDGES TRANSITIONAL MODEL :

Transitional phase is a critical junction in one's life. While undergoing this transitional phase, there will be a lot of changes, probabilities and liability which has a great impact in the psychic of the individuals. Transition is an inner psychological process in which human accept and adapt the changes in their and finding a way to cope up with it. In 1991, William Bridges published a book named *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* in which he developed “The Bridges Transition Model”. This model consists of three phases:

- Endings
- The Neutral Zone
- New Beginnings

Jennifer Johnston, an Irish writer is prominent in showing the process of being transformed in the characters of her novels. She is well versed in writing the emotional upheaval of the individuals on the context of dysfunctional families. She explores the secrets hidden in protagonist's life and her attempt to transcend all her troubles from the past. This paper correlates the Bridges Transitional Model with Johnston's *A Sixpenny Song* novel and elucidates the

emotional state of Annie Ross when she unveils the secrets of the past generation and her attempt to redefine her identity with a new psychic transformation.

Johnston introduces Annie Ross as a young girl who is living in London, by working in the bookshop. She enjoys her life in London. To her, London is the place of her freedom, where she can make her own decisions. In reality, she is escaping from the clutches of her father. At every stage of life, human beings undergo some changes whether it is positive or negative. The first change which alters Annie's life is the death of her mother. As a child, she is pampered by her mother. After her mother demises, her father sent her to London for her studies at the age of twelve. She is forced to face the world alone. The separation from her closed ones compels her to withdraw her inner self from her native. This early phase of Annie being relocated from her own place is extremely tough to manage and it turns to be her first step towards her psychic transition.

After completing her higher studies, her father Mr. Ross wants Annie to follow the steps he has drawn for her. She refuses to be a caged bird and moves to London in order to escape from the stuffed ideologies of her father. Soon she becomes a Londoner, life happens to be pleasant with few friends and a stable job. Initially, Johnston portrays Annie as a little girl who is timid to raise her voice in front of her father, later on her transition is clearly seen when she revolts against her father to choose her own path. Here Annie stands as a person Virginia Woolf mentioned her essay 'A Room of One's Own'. Woolf wants women to educate and earn for themselves in order to make their own decision. Annie breaks her father's old fashioned ideology of women as a merger of business families and takes a stand of her own life.

Dublin, her place of birth, is very pleasant to live with her mother, but after her death, Annie transits it as a place of restless. Even though Annie is staying miles apart from her homeland Dublin, she hears a voice reminding her, London is not her home, and she has to return. She ignores it. But in recent times, she is continuously hearing the voice calling her back to Dublin as if indicating something with a note of sad tone.

'This is not home.' It would speak quite clearly, with a Dublin accent. 'You silly girl, you must go home before you forget, before you are forgotten.' She would laugh, of course; in those days voices in the head were to be laughed at. Now they have become more sombre; now they have in them intimations of mortality. (Johnston, 9)

Death plays a vital role in transcending the psychic of Annie. The death of her mother Jude made her to move away from her homeland, but her father's death brings her back to face the reality. Annie remains the same after knowing her father's sudden death, as she has already distanced herself from him. She is not totally unaffected by his death, the very sight of Dublin brings back the memories of the past which made her to cry. She just attends the funeral without seeing the face of the dead as a matter of formality. She wants to remember him as a King who is ordering around. Miriam, Annie's Stepmother takes care of the funeral. An incident is enough to cause a great change in the minds of the children. As a child, Annie starts to hate her father, being the reason of Jude's death. Her abhorrence towards Mr. Ross proclaims the wounded psychic of Annie.

The death of Annie's father and mother is the first transition phase of Annie. According to Bridges, the initial stage of the model is Ending. In this phase, human has to learn to manage their losses and move on from it. By letting go, they can embrace the changes in their life. Annie's transition is evidently seen when she decides to settle in Ireland by letting go her bitter past with her father. She is ready to accept the upcoming changes in her life.

Annie is least expecting anything from the wealth of Mr. Ross. She is an independent working lady of her own, so she does not show any interest to Miriam's disclosure of Ross' will. The house in Dublin is named on her. She requests Mr. O'Brien, Ross' lawyer to oversee the sale of the house and goes back to London to wrap up the things there. She decides to sell the house and open a bookshop in Ireland. While packing, she regrets her decision of moving back to Ireland. She wants to be a Londoner, who lives in forever exile without worrying about the past and the voices. She is confused to choose between happy London and haunting Ireland. The inner psychic of Annie desires to live in London, but the voice of her mother starts to hover around her with her departing word "remember" which made Annie to go Ireland against her own will.

'I will never go over there again.' She said inside her head. 'I will stay with John, Johnny and Sean forever. I will buy myself a sweet little house in Notting Hill, with window boxes and bright red door and settle myself there for life.'  
'Remember.'

Quite clearly she hears Jude's voice in her ear. Just the one word. 'Remember.' She always used to say it. 'Remember.'(4)

The second phase of transition is the neutral zone. It is an in-between zone which is experienced by the individuals after letting go of the past. It is a critical time between accepting the past emotions and adapting to the new scenario. Annie is disturbed by the old memories of her childhood and also confused by the new findings of the past.

Dublin brings back the buried memories of the past. Her interactions with her father and mother start to flow along with the clipping sound of electric clippers of Kevin. She only witnesses the quarrel between Jude and Ross. As a child, she is pampered by them separately. She has no memory of happy family but only a dysfunctional family. Even the death of Jude is not clear to her. She is prohibited to see Jude by Ross, as it is not good for a child to witness the dead body of her mother. The past is being revisiting Annie when she entered her house. Everything seems to go smoothly until her meeting with Kevin. He is an odd man doing all the odd stuff, hired by Miriam to look after the house. Kevin and his aunt Miss Dundas are acquaintances of Jude. He probes her about the death of Jude which triggers the curiosity in Annie. She wants to find the real reason behind the death of her mother. Until now, she thinks that her mother passed away due to some illness. But Kevin's words disturb her mind. She decides to meet Miss Dundas to know more about her mother's death.

In this transitional phase, Annie is already worried to live in Dublin. Being translocated from London to Dublin, she has to face her past with new dimension. She is unaware of her mother's suicide until Kevin revealed to her. Ross is not bothered to reveal the reason behind Jude's death and also he does not want to talk about Jude's very existence with Annie. This gives her a chance of suspicion on her father and his intention in hiding the truth to her. She thinks that she is freed from her father when she moved out of Dublin. Later on, she realizes that behind his every action, there is some cunningness in it. Through his will, he brings her back to Ireland as a way to make her what he wants her to be. Her whole life turns to be sheer lie under the shadow of her father. She wants to find the happenings of the past in order to know what her life stands for.

Annie's only way to learn about the past is Miss Dundas, friend of her mother. Through Kevin, She meets Miss Dundas and gets to know about the portrait of Jude painted by Miss Dundas. The little conversation with his aunt helps Annie to know the estranged relationship between her father and mother. Initially, Ross and Jude seem to be happily married couple. Their ecstasy is momentary amidst the jealous ladies. They sow the seeds of discord in the mind of Jude and spoil the bond with Ross. After Annie's birth, Jude distances herself from Ross and stays in a different room. Her conversation with Ross is shortened day by day. Her behavior is totally changed towards her husband. Annie is the only existing connection between them. When Miss Dundas reveals the visit of Jude, the day before her suicide, Annie is outraged at Miss Dundas for not attempting to change the mind of Jude from her gloomy thoughts. If only she had succeeded in changing Jude's mind, Annie would have been happy with her mother. This transition in the relationship of Ross and Jude affects the life of Annie in an irreversible way.

After exiting from Miss Dundas' home, Kevin accompanies and befriends her. The revelation of Kevin being the lover of Jude for four years and impregnated by him is quite shocking to Annie. It does not take much time to process the truth laid before her. She is not evaluating or judging her mother's life. Simply, she does not want her mother to someone else.

'Lovers?'

He nodded again.

Annie felt sick. She didn't want her mother to have been anybody's lover. She didn't mind the whole world loving Jude, but she wanted to have been the only person that Jude really loved. Childish? Yes, of course. Pretty bloody childish. (45)

Diary entries of Mr. Ross are another side of disclosure from her father. In his entries, he registers all the important events and untold emotions of his life such as his father's death, vacation with Miriam to Monaco, Christmas card of Annie and his love life with Jude. The birth of Annie and his joy in holding his child in his arms for the first time are detailed written in the diary. In one of the entries, he is saddened by the growing distance in his married life. He is shocked at the fact of his broken marriage. The sudden death of Jude affects him so much. The fact that she betrayed him makes him so devastated. He starts to ignore all the things which remind her existence. Even though he loves his daughter, he keeps her at distance in order to avoid the reminiscence of her mother.

The final phase in the model is New Beginnings. By letting go the past and undergoing the emotional turmoil, it is time to create new identity in a new direction. Annie is confused by two types of revelation. She is perplexed at how her life is entangled with secrets of her past generation. Ireland is so unsettling to Annie, her idea of opening a bookshop in native changes. She is not interested to keep any relation with the place filled with the memories of unhappy people. Such dramatic change is referred as Quantum change by William Miller in his book "Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Insights Transform Ordinary Lives". William Miller brings out Quantum Change as a sudden dramatic metamorphosis which changes the lives of ordinary people. Annie undergoes the quantum change. Her total behavior is changed. She wants to live her own life instead of digging the mistakes of the past generation. Even though London is a foreign land, she is confident to create her identity.

### 3. CONCLUSION :

Johnston depicts the emotional upheaval of an individual from the dysfunctional family through the character of Annie. She represents Annie as an example of those children who are suffering because of their parent's mistakes. Only few have the courage to manage to withstand these issues, but the future of the distressed children is still a question mark. By incorporating Bridge Transition Model, the psychic transition of Annie is clearly seen in the novel. Through Annie, Johnston sets a new paradigm to the society.

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