

ABSTRACT

“One day... I’m going to commit suicide... and people will wonder why”:
A Psychoanalytic Reading of Edgar Mittelholzer’s Autobiographical and Fictional Texts

Shala Melanie Alert

Edgar Mittelholzer’s novels and memoir betray a preoccupation with inferiority, seen in the perspectives of individual characters. In the memoir, for example, he depicts attempts by family and society to marginalise him because his “black blood” supposedly makes him inferior (*A Swarthy Boy* 11). To some extent, there is evidence that Mittelholzer may have tried to deny any personal sense of inferiority, seen in how he depicts instances where he literally fought against this categorisation, among others. His insistence, however, suggests a behavioural pattern that psychoanalysis identifies as compensation, that is, an overreaction to internalised inferiority feelings.

In this study, I have examined possible connections between the author-subject and his characters, and also possible attempts by Mittelholzer to extirpate his inferiority feelings. I have also considered representations of certain psychopathological behaviours and referred to psychoanalysis to interpret them. Adler’s inferiority theory, Fanon’s conceptualisation of compensatory activities among postcolonial black males, Lacan’s concepts of misrecognition and a lack-of-being, and also several of Freud’s hypotheses regarding neurotic behaviour are also explored in relation to Mittelholzer’s men. Any claim that Mittelholzer’s art imitates his life is problematic. However, the similarities cannot be ignored, and I have explored them in order to tease out possible connections between the authorial character of Mittelholzer and his fictional characters. The psychoanalytic perspective allows for this kind of interpretation; it assumes that any autobiographical account produced by an individual is fictional. It is the fictional Mittelholzer that emerges from his words that is compared to characters in the novels.