

Affective Value and Novelistic Staying Power in *Stay with Me*

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Abstract

The role of literary devices in literature is well studied from the time of the theorists of antiquity up until the present time. The twentieth century stands out in literary history as a period of massive experimentation with devices of form in all genres of literature. The postmodern period witnessed the use of literary devices by writers to blunt the traditional boundaries which seemed to separate the genres from one another. The crisscrossing of literary boundaries by creative writing using literary devices has had a beneficial effect on literature by deepening reader empathy with character and action in prose fiction. This essay looks at the adroit exportation of the device of melodrama, usually associated with theatre, into a realist novel, *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adébáyò and the implication for related devices of surprise and suspense, and realism.

Keywords: *affective value; melodrama; novelistic staying power; literary devices*

Introduction

The motifs of elaborate parties, unexplainable disappearances (and loud jarring noises to punctuate the “supernatural” disappearances), moral lessons, foolery, and exaggerated histrionics in Nigerian movies have gained both popularity and notoriety in recent times. Nollywood, as the Nigerian movie industry, is described thrives on the sensational and ability to cause a stir. The movies produced receive mixed critical reception because of the dramatic, hyperbolic realisation of characterisation, incident, and setting. These features are not restricted to script writing but have also found expression in the novel genre. Literary texts incorporate theatrical sensationalism and hyperbole. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* (Lola Shoneyin), *Purple Hibiscus* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) and *Stay with Me* (Ayobami Adébáyò).

Film audiences are suitably affected and derive pleasure sometimes despite a lack of cognitive or aesthetic value in some of the country’s filmic art types. By cognitive and aesthetic value is meant the artistry, educational and intellectual stimulation, and aesthetic effect typical of high art or the classics. The criticism of African literature tends to focus on the use of myths, folktales, proverbs, songs, and post-colonial subject-matter in literature. This study is an attempt to evaluate a few narrative strategies which have been adopted by prose fiction from theatre and film. These are devices of exaggeration, bombast, foolery, and melodrama which serve to power pace and sensationalism in prose literature. *Stay With Me* a novel by Ayobami Adébáyò (2017) is the focal point of this study.

Reader Response

A reader soon finds out that *Stay With Me* is an unputdownable read. One reviewer on Goodreads.com observes about the book “believe me, this book will stay with you like a stampede of wild horses in your mind days after you’ve read the final pages. Yes, days...” (Linda 2017:2). *Stay With Me* is memorable. A casual reader of the book and a literary critic will differ on the reason or reasons why the book impresses with so much power. Novels like *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe,

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Devil on the Cross by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Ayi Kwei Armah are remembered for their exposition of colonialism and their presentation of African culture through narrative tools of African proverbs and descriptions of rituals and festivals. *Stay With Me* has some elements of culture and it provides an exposition of the historical and political climate of Nigeria. But unlike the earlier novels, *Stay with me* is engaging because it moves on melodramatic and sensational narrative wheels. The author uses melodramatic elements and sensational details to engage reader interest and sustain it.

The novel is about the marriage of Akin and Yejide and the focus is on Yejide's inability to conceive. The author includes descriptions of the political climate in Nigeria in the 1980s. Admittedly, the main themes of manifestations of love, expectations on childbearing, attitudes towards polygamy, and the consequences of secrecy are not new in the African novel, especially those novels coming out of the Nigerian experience. The themes provide an exciting gateway into Nigerian culture. The novel is divided into four parts. In the first section, Yejide is tortured by her childlessness especially since Akin's relatives are insensitive to her predicament. After four years of visiting fertility doctors, drinking strange teas, and a supernatural encounter on the Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles, Yejide remains infertile. Soon, Akin's relatives convince him to marry a second wife, Funmi, and shortly after, Yejide conceives and gives birth to a child. At the naming ceremony, Funmi dies. In subsequent sections of the novel, Yejide's child, Olamide, also dies along with one other child, Sesan. They both suffered from sickle cell disease. In flashbacks, Akin recollects his obsession with Yejide prior to their marriage as the plot unfolds. The incidents are structured in a way that imbues plot with pace while holding on to the narrative elements of suspense and surprise.

Melodrama

Usually, melodramatic elements are aesthetic features that are associated more with dramatic literature than they are with prose fiction. But it is also understood that the novel as a form can take on a diversity of aspects depending on the emotional and artistic effect intended by its author. For example, while Joseph Conrad's prose fiction – the short stories and the novels – takes the form of depth psychology wearing a lyrical attire, that of Moteane Melamu's prose fiction is nothing if not dramatic in characterization, plot, and dialogue. So, if there can be short stories and novels that are for effect dramatic, then there can be novels that also qualify in some respects as melodramatic. As a form of literature or, more specifically, drama, melodrama was not respected by literary critics on grounds that it did not engage the intellect much.

Melodrama is a dramatic work meant for the theater and is "characterized by falsity, bombast, and cheapness" (Hamadi 2017:123). Melodrama is believed to be tacky, exaggerated, and sensational as opposed to rational, realistic, and polite. Another reason why melodrama is sidelined is because it violates some of the tenets of decorum enunciated by Roman Horace first century BC, which provided guidelines for literary composition and enjoyed considerable popularity in the Neoclassic Age of literature (1660-1800). However, Brook (1976:13) states, "melodrama as a transgeneric mode that rippled through the nineteenth-century novel" and "with the rise of the novel and of melodrama, we find the entry into literature of a new moral and aesthetic category, that of the "interesting". Brooks explains that melodrama has a historical, moral, and aesthetic bearing on the novel. He provides an entry into the ability to apply melodramatic elements to other works of art apart from drama. Thus, Brooks argues for a more critically welcoming entry point for the melodramatic in the analysis of prose fiction.

The melodramatic element is reliant on excess and intensity to cause sensationalism. For

instance, Nigerian movies like *The Wedding Party* illustrate an excessive display of wealth and tribalism in tone of voice, semantic content of voice, and hyperbolic action which heighten the intensity of the characters, plot, and settings. Hamadi (2017) in “The Main Dramatic “Features of Melodrama: A Dramatic Study of Maria Martin and Sweeney Todd And Their Traces In Modern Soap Operas” elaborates on melodramatic elements. Hamadi describes four melodramatic elements of excessively one-dimensional characters, heightened and dramatic plot twists, reference to the supernatural, unrealistically happy endings, and absolute good and evil. These elements will be adopted in this study for the analysis of *Stay With Me*. They will also serve as parameters of evaluation of the affective power of the novel.

One-dimensional Characterization

Melodrama is characterized by uni-dimensionality and naivety of character portraiture. According to Hamadi(2017:125) “a distinctive feature of melodrama is its prototypes, simplistic, one-dimensional characters, which were composed in terms of romanticized sentimentalism”. Hamadi posits that melodramas feature simplistic and flat characters. The simplicity of the characters is because of their representation of a vice and virtue without the complexity that motive, background, and psychoanalysis create. There is evidence that Adébáyò adopts the simplistic model of characterization present in melodrama. She uses the naïveté of the protagonist to heighten the effect of Akin’s betrayal in *Stay with Me*. The second chapter begins with the arrival of relatives and the first shocking revelation to the narrator who is also the protagonist, Yejide. Yejide highlights her cluelessness when she states, “I believed I had heard it all already anyway and I was sure my husband would feel the same way” (Adébáyò 2017:8). She anticipates the same cycle in the past, which involved the relatives giving advice that she and her husband, Akin, would ignore. They had received surprise visits from relatives in the past and put up a united front that she believed would be repeated. She soon realizes that this visit is not the norm and is shocked to realize that her husband knew about the visit and relatives’ agenda.

Apart from not knowing her husband anticipated the visit, Yejide’s simplicity is further emphasized with her obliviousness to the fact that her husband has married a second wife. Neither does she know about the presence of her husband’s second wife in her home. The new wife had come into the house and Yejide had not noticed, Yejide states, “I tried to figure out where the yellow woman had come from, wondering for a wild minute if Iya Martha had kept her hidden under her wrapper when she came in” (Adébáyò 2017:8). Yejide’s inability to observe and perceive the progression of events conforms with melodramatic characterization. Yet, the novelist’s characterization of Yejide does not fall flat. Yejide is unbelievably naïve, but she is a dynamic character that evolves. Yejide does not stay simple but becomes perceptive. However, she still maintains naivety till the end. The harmonious link between exaggerated simplicity and the development that occurs adds realism that enhances the intensity of occurrence. Through Yejide’s evolution Adébáyò creates a balance that engages and affects readers.

Yejide’s extreme naivete is illuminated through her lack of knowledge about sex. A climactic point of the melodramatic in *Stay with Me* is hinged on Yejide’s cluelessness and lack of curiosity about sex. Akin’s ability to deceive Yejide in sexual matters borders on absurdity because of her single-mindedness about masculine biology. Yejide states that Akin had claimed, “each penis was different, told me that some got hard, that others never did... I was amazed by the way he did not even need to tell lies in order to deceive me” (Adébáyò 2017:232). Yejide explains how she does not suspect Akin’s impotence and how his simple explanation of the diversity of male genitalia deterred

her from suspecting his inability to perform sexually. Even when other characters in the novel refer to sex and male body parts, Yejide does not pick up on their cues and easily dismisses their description. Her lack of dynamism in sex illustrates the one-dimensional quality of melodramatic characters. Her plainness conforms with the excess simplicity of characters in melodrama.

Apart from Akin, other characters highlight Yejide's simplicity. At Yejide's shop, her customers openly discuss men's body parts with gusto. Aunty Sadia announces unabashedly, "I'm just saying that the hard thing is sweet. *Abi?* Even you, her mother, if it was not sweet, would you have given birth to her?" (Adébáyò 2017:144). Aunty Sadia alludes to the hard state of the male sex organ as a requirement for conception. She describes the male organ explicitly as a "stiff soldier" and expatiates further, "you know when that thing is asleep, just soft like that, you can disrespect it anyhow. But once it stands like this?... Hard like that? I just want to thank the God that made it that way" (Adébáyò 2017:144). Iya Bolu (Adébáyò 2017:144) uses the analogy of a pestle and elaborates "it is that hardness that gives it value and honour, *o jare*". Despite the literal and non-literal descriptions of the male body Yejide is only "uncomfortable" (Adébáyò 2017:145). She can sense that something is wrong and ironically as the owner of a salon, she claims, "I was not the kind of woman who discussed her sex life with women in a salon" (Adébáyò 2017:145). Yejide's inability to intelligently address her curiosity and seek answers confirms her naiveté and heightens the intensity of the novel due to her ignorance.

However, Yejide does change her mind concerning other issues. Coincidentally, this does not contradict the previous point but serves to highlight another element of melodrama. Hamadi posits that melodramatic art thrives on the "unpredictability of the characters", which means that melodramatic characters evolve in unexpected ways, and this produces spectacular effects. Yejide's sojourn on the Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles creates an avenue for the unexpected to occur. Yejide's initial stance and disregard for spiritualists is confirmed when she declares,

I did not believe in prophets who lived on mountains or priests who worshipped beside rivers. That was before I had so many tests done in the hospital and every one of them showed that there was nothing preventing me from getting pregnant... Then I stopped waving aside my mother-in-law's suggestions, stopped thinking that women like her were uncivilized and a little crazy (Adébáyò 2017:39).

Here Yejide herself acknowledges the absurdity of visiting a prophet and she characterizes people that go to mountains or rivers for miracles as "uncivilized and a little crazy". When Yejide changes her tune and she deviates from her initial disbelief, she exemplifies the melodramatic element of unpredictability. Yejide erratically decides to visit the mountain after Funmi (her husband's second wife) is revealed. Yejide states, "I needed a miracle fast. The only way I could save myself from polygamy was to get pregnant before Funmi; that way Akin might let the girl go" (Adébáyò 2017:42). The urgency to get pregnant by any means is heightened through Yejide's shift in belief. Her reorientation and the weirdness of her experience on the mountain of Jaw-dropping Miracles heightens the intensity of Yejide's situation. Even after she is confirmed not to be pregnant by a medical doctor, Yejide retains her belief in Prophet Josiah. Coupled with her unpredictability, her belief in her supernatural experience is excessive, which elicits sympathy from readers.

Incongruous Structure of Incidents

Melodrama thrives on unexpected revelations and/or plot twists that provide sensationalism for each event, section, scene, or act. Hamadi (2017:126) asserts that "melodramatic plots with heightened emotionalism and sentimentality [are] carried out by the excessive use of various effects", which is

an additional melodramatic element. The plot of a melodramatic work may employ the devices that the typical work would have. However, such effects are exaggerated. Effects that contribute towards the enjoyment of a text like suspense, flashback, foreshadowing, and coincidence are employed in an unbridled and extravagant manner. The plot of *Stay With Me* progresses with the use of effects like flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, and the seemingly never ending rising action that function as elements of the sensationalism characteristic of melodrama. For instance, *Stay With Me* does not have the typical plot triangle. Rather, Adébáyò ensures that the reader is shocked or surprised by the dramatic and climactic series of events in every chapter. Every chapter unravels a complex turn of events.

There is the use of narrative technique or plot items of foreshadowing and flashback. Foreshadowing refers to moments in the progression of events that are interrupted by occurrences in the future that usually are instigated or affected by the present. Flashback is the direct opposite. It refers to an interruption in the sequence of events to address an occurrence or incident in the past. These effects are used for emphasis to provide context, and to heighten suspense. The use of flashback and foreshadowing heightens the suspense and impacts the sensation of urgency the reader feels to be able to discover what the resolution of the plot will be. The revelation of shocking events in the past raises questions about each character's sanity, motive, and action. Through flashback Akin's lust and love for Yejide are revealed. Akin reminisces and states "Yejide was created on a Saturday. When God had ample time to paint her a perfect ebony. No doubt about it. The finished work is living proof...I was gawking at her, enthralled, already thinking about the words that would convince her to go out with me" (Adébáyò 2017:17). Akin's fascination with Yejide is beautiful to read. His attraction for her and initial impression about her heightens the angst at his betrayal of her in getting a second wife. The intensity of Akin's emotions illustrates "heightened emotionalism and sentimentality" typical of melodrama. Akin goes on to mention, "I spent the first month after I met her driving two hours every day to be with her" (Adébáyò 2017:20). Akin obviously pursues Yejide, which alludes to the intensity of his attraction for her. Hence, his betrayal of Yejide is unbelievable in contrast with his initial infatuation and love for her. Then Akin reveals through flashback, the reason behind his marriage to Funmi. Akin says, "When my mother threatened that she would start visiting my wife each week with a new woman if I didn't choose one within a month, I had to make a decision" (Adébáyò 2017:19). This proves that Akin's intense feelings for Yejide are still present although misdirected. Akin's love for Yejide is emphasized when he recalls and illuminates that his motive for marrying Funmi is ultimately to protect Yejide from heartache. Thus, the intensity of Akin's betrayal and the complication it engendered elevates the tension in the novel. The revelation is explosive in the intensity of the novelistic impact.

Along with flashback and foreshadowing, coincidence is another effect employed to create a stir. Improbable occurrences happen based on chance or coincidence in *Stay With Me*. This is because the unpredictability of the characters creates opportunities for coincidence. Coincidence is used to elevate the intensity of plot progressions. According to Martha Vicinus (1981:127) "the unpredictability of the characters intensifies the exaggerated expressions of right or wrong, and many remarkable and improbable coincidences, spectacular effects, and plot complications." Character's unpredictability escalates the difference between right and wrong. Also, the unpredictability of the characters leads to coincidence and plot complications. Akin's visit to Funmi during Yejide's false pregnancy is tempered with him divulging the "improbable coincidence" of marrying Yejide. He states, "I was sure that a perfect moment would present itself for me to divorce Funmi, just as one had presented itself for me to marry Yejide in '81" (Ayobami 2017:81). Here, Akin relies on Fate to

solve the problem that Fummi (his second wife) represents. Akin's recollection of the past adds to the intensity of his seemingly villainous character at the outset (beginning) of part two of *Stay With Me*. First, he marries a second wife without his wife knowing and then he plans to get rid of the second wife soon after.

Akin describes the coincidental occurrence that led to their marriage by recounting the events of a protest. He describes the excitement, the fear, and the emotional high of the moment. By alluding to the coincidence of an impromptu protest, Akin exemplifies the presence of the melodramatic feature of "improbable coincidence", which progresses into a "plot complication". Akin recounts the moment that led to his proposal:

I said nothing until the next day, when we learned that three students had died in the protest. "Marry me now," I said. "Life is short, why should we wait until you finish your degree? I'll give you my car, you can drive from Ilesa; you can even stay in the hostel if you want. But let's tell your father that we are ready."

I knew she would say yes, because it was the right moment. At any other time, she would have insisted that she didn't want to be a married student. But that day in June, she held my hand and nodded (Ayobami 2017:83-84).

Akin links the heightened emotions surrounding the protest and the death of students to Yejide's agreement to marry him. He believes that the urgency to live life to the fullest and waste no time was increased due to the energy surrounding the protest and the deaths of students like them.

Hence, the improbability of a protest leading to a marriage proposal is beyond the occurrences of normal day to day activities and heightens the sensationalism of Yejide and Akin's romance. The fact that Yejide and Akin hardly seem to be making a practical decision to get married, creates a prime opportunity for plot complications. Thus, the coincidental protest that leads to their irrational decision to get married conforms with melodrama.

Magical Realism

Another melodramatic element is the presence of and reference to supernatural entities. African and specifically Nigerian art frequently annexes cultural or traditional materials in the shape of shamanistic consultations of babaalawos or sangomas. This inevitably leads to rituals and the use of charms and incantations, the involvement of ghosts, apparitions, and supernatural occurrences. Melodramatic texts feature the supernatural to amplify the emotions evoked by the characters and the plot progression. According to Hamadi (2017:127) "another important feature in many melodramas and plays a role in intensifying the dramatic situations or fabricating an end to the story, is reference to dreams and ghosts". Hamadi states that melodramatic texts have ghosts, dreams, and the supernatural situated within them to increase the intensity of the plot and the reader's experience of the novel. Akin's betrayal in marrying another wife and Yejide's barrenness is amplified when Yejide goes to the Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles.

Yejide's meeting with Prophet Josiah at the top of the mountain is a shocking experience. She is told to fast and drag an unblemished white goat up the mountain. When Yejide gets to the top of the mountain she is surrounded by bearded men who "begin to moan and tremble as though from some unseen stimulation" (Ayobami 2017:44). The bearded men and their behaviour alarm Yejide as she realizes the potential danger she is in. Her panic causes the reader to anticipate an attack on the protagonist. However, the situation takes a bizarre turn when Prophet Josiah tells her to breastfeed

the goat she has brought up the mountain with her. In an uncharacteristic moment, Yejide complies and breastfeeds the goat. The improbability of Yejide's actions in her obedience to Prophet Josiah's command to feed the goat intensifies Yejide's experience and elicits an affective reaction from the reader. The oxymoronic shift from Yejide's disbelief in the supernatural to her undertaking an unpredictable journey to the mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles intensifies Yejide's situation. It creates a jaw dropping dramatic situation. Her encounter corresponds with the supernatural elements typical of a melodrama.

Sensational Terminus

The ending of *Stay with Me* is unforgettable. It heightens another shocking revelation, since there are multiple shocking revelations in Yejide and Akin's marriage. Hamadi (2017:27) explains that "intensifying the dramatic situations or fabricating an end to the story" is to be expected of melodramatic work. The ending of *Stay with Me* is heightened by the disclosure that Akin had kept secrets and orchestrated his brother, Dotun's, seduction of Yejide. Right from the outset of their marriage, Akin had claimed "each penis was different, told [Yejide] that some got hard, that others never did" (Ayobami 2017:232). Furthermore, the fact that Funmi knew about Akin's impotence is revealed when Akin recollects Funmi's question, "tell me how a penis that has never been hard makes a woman pregnant?" (Ayobami 2017:223). Apart from the revelation of Funmi's knowledge of Akin's impotence, there is the fact that Akin caused Funmi's death. Akin's reflections reveal his part in her death. Akin confesses "And my palm did touch her face, cover her mouth for a fleeting moment before she staggered, fell backwards, and tumbled down the stairs" (Ayobami 2017:223). Akin is responsible for the death of Funmi who tumbles down the stairs shortly after he thinks about getting rid of her. Akin also plans Dotun (his brother's) seduction of Yejide without Yejide's consent or knowledge. He discloses "the master plan was to have four children: two boys, two girls. Once every year, Dotun was supposed to spend a weekend with us, get my wife pregnant, and go back to Lagos" (Ayobami 2017:192). Akin's "master plan" is executed without Yejide's knowledge and in a bid to hide his impotence from his wife and relatives. Akin's deplorable actions and the fact that they are revealed in the final part of the novel exemplify the intense endings typical of a melodramatic work.

The disclosures in the conclusion of the novel produce an intensity that enables an elucidation of extreme good and evil. This is an archetype of melodrama. In the final part of *Stay With Me*, Akin is exposed as a villainous character who killed his second wife, convinced his brother to seduce his wife, and yet refuses to confess his actions. Akin's behaviour is not out of the scope of melodrama. Hamadi (2017:124) explains that melodramas maintain "conflict between virtue and vice". Also, melodramas demonstrate "absolute good and absolute evil" (Hamadi 2017:125). The last few pages confirm Akin's evil ways which did not end when Yejide left him. Soon after Yejide discovers Akin's secrets, she leaves him. More so when she suspects that her child, Rotimi, is dead. Yejide relocates to Jos but feels the need to return years later. Yejide returns to Ilesha after over a decade because she "wants to know where she [Rotimi] is buried... [Yejide] must see [her] daughter's grave" (Ayobami 2017:252). Shockingly, the reader is soon apprised of the fact that Rotimi, Timi, is alive and Akin kept this information from Yejide for 15 years. Yet again, *Stay with Me* conforms with melodrama with respect to the feature of "irrational happy ending" (Ayobami 2017:132). Yejide and Rotimi seem to forget the years lost and take to one another almost immediately. Yejide claims that Rotimi's saying "You're here now" serves as "an absolution for the lost years" (Ayobami 2017:260). Akin's betrayal is forgotten and mother and daughter are elated at their reunion with no evidence of awkwardness or resentment even though they are practically strangers. The intensity of Akin's betrayal makes the

improbable happy ending sufficient. Readers commemorate with Yejide and agree that she deserves some happiness. It reinforces the affective aspect of *Stay with Me*.

Melodrama + *Affect* = Aesthetic Value

Affect is described in terms of the ability for an action, emotion, or art to evoke a reaction from the recipients, viewers, or readers. Thus, *affect* is the way art affects an audience and has evolved as a concept that is used to explain joy, sadness, and desire. Art, especially tragic drama, since Aristotle, is believed to be capable of producing a cathartic effect on an audience. However, in my opinion *affect* goes beyond catharsis and accounts for the reaction to art that is beyond logic. Thus, *affect* “emphasizes the role of nonlinguistic and non- or para cognitive forces.” (Schaefer 2019:1). This means that *affect* highlights an engagement with art that is not based on rationality, realism, or logic. Rather, *affect* enables the ability to perceive art as successful based on the ability to elicit emotions like joy, sadness, and desire. *Affect* enables critics to go beyond art that elicits and illuminates feelings and into the exhibition of an intensity of emotion that should transfer according to Shouse (2005) and become the experience of the audience or reader. Thus, based on the exhibition of an intensity of emotion, a sentimentality transfers from the art and becomes the experience of the audience.

Stay with Me elicits *affect* and engages readers because of the heightened emotions and occurrences—melodrama—in the novel that cause a reaction and similar emotions for the reader. Rather than rationalize the logic and plausibility of Yejide’s naivete, the presence of supernatural effects, Akin’s duplicity and the exaggerated and sensational plot twists, readers are affected by the relatability of the story. Readers recollect their own naiveté, dramatic periods in their lives, and the inconclusive ending that reflects the inconclusiveness of the readers relationships, endeavours, and life. It is the reason *Stay with Me* has received favourable reviews by literary critics despite the obvious applications of melodramatic elements. On goodreads.com, *Stay With Me* has been reviewed by 38,031 readers and 4,929 reviewers have left detailed comments on their experience reading the novel. The majority of these reviewers have alluded to being immersed in *Stay With Me*. Thus, they have been affected by the novel. For instance, Diane (2017) states on goodreads.com:

Written in so earnest a voice, so very real, I found myself consumed by this story. A very meaningful one. There were things happening behind the scenes that we are not privy to until later in the story. The book contained many small surprises and does end with a measure of hope and happiness. This author is a new writer and one that is very talented. Can’t wait to see what she does next.

Diane is affected by the occurrences behind the scenes and can probably draw on her experiences of a similar time or occurrence in her life. Also, the feature of happy endings is alluded to when Diane states that the book “does end with a measure of hope and happiness”. The “many small surprises” that Diane refers to are the sensational elements that cause her to be “consumed” by the story. Diane evidently was transported into the world of Yejide, which may be interpreted as her being affected by the novel. This is what has made *Stay With Me* an exceptional read for her.

Another reviewer, Debbie (2017) had a similar experience with *Stay With Me*. Debbie is engrossed and clearly affected by *Stay With Me*, she states:

I get so squirmy happy when I think of this book! The story is as close to perfection as you get. A class act. Yes, this is a quadruple WOW, with tears flowing as the story ends. (Believe

me, it takes a lot to turn me into a crybaby reader.) It's one big Joy Jar. It's heavy on the drama, and there's this freshness to the drama and the dialogue, with unusual plot turns that kept me riveted...

It's magic the way the author made me care about what happened to Yejide and Akin. The author's art is gorgeously sneaky; I can't quite put my finger on why it had the power to pull me into the story so completely, but believe me, it did.... This may be an exaggeration because I am so in love with the book, but the content seemed a little Shakespearean.

Debbie believes that *Stay With Me* is the perfect novel based on the intense drama present in the novel and the emotions elicited in her. Debbie indicates that the novel is rich in drama and dialogue and has "unusual plot turns". Inadvertently, Debbie highlights melodramatic elements and makes the connection between melodrama and *affect*. She admits feeling sadness "with tears flowing as the story ends", joy "it's one big Joy Jar", and being "riveted" by the intense plot complications. Debbie goes so far as to state that she is "in love with the book". She also claims that *Stay With Me* is Shakespearean, which can be understood in terms of the novel's "power to pull [one] into the story completely".

Thus, gauging the aesthetic value of melodramatic texts based on sensational novelistic devices highlights the affective value of the text. Hunting (2006:166) summarizes my main points in the statement, "'melodramatic address does not principally enlist our powers of reflection, it issues rather the proximity and immediacy of what is felt: it announces the urgent, it promises happiness.'" Here, Hunting posits that the intensity and extremes in melodrama assure happiness. As a melodramatic novel, *Stay With Me* definitely enraptures. It elicits enjoyment and happiness, and mixed emotions with elevated aesthetic value.

Conclusion

The aesthetic value of *Stay With Me* is in large part owing to melodramatic affects. The novel fulfills the main criteria that assure reader engagement and impact. It is a product of sensational twists and turns and coincidence. Flashbacks and foreshadowing propel the action. The supernatural and other narrative effects in the novel create an aesthetic intensity that is usually ascribed to melodrama. Melodramatic novels tend to be faulted on grounds of banality and illogicality; but these elements have been co-opted impressively by modernist and postmodernist writers. Melodramatic characterization involves a deployment by the novelist of cardboard or flat characters. This is not necessarily a fault because it is well-known that novelists like Charles Dickens have used flat characters to good effect in their works; and so can any other skilled novelist. The absurd aspect of the melodramatic novel adds to the sensational power and the affective quality of the novel, hence the unforgettability of *Stay With Me*.

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