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Depiction of Narcissistic Motherhood in White Oleander (1999)

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Abstract

Mother is the first figure that a child sees as beings who have been attached from the pregnancy phase. After an infant is born, another attachment to the mother should become even stronger for more time that they spend together. Therefore, those who grow up with attachment, on the other side of their mothers' domination, may likely end up with copying the mothers' characteristics or learnings towards them. In this study, narcissistic motherhood is analyzed towards Astrid Magnussen character in a novel written by Janet Fitch in *White Oleander* (1999). Therefore, this novel is analyzed by using Miller's (1990) theory of narcissist psychoanalysis focusing on narcissistic disturbance that makes a descriptive qualitative approach that fits this study. The study shows that as a result of Ingrid's early narcissistic adaptation towards her daughter, makes Astrid signals narcissistic desires for respect, echoing, understanding, sympathy, and mirroring suffer a very peculiar fate.

Keywords: Narcissistic motherhood, novel analysis, psychoanalysis.

INTRODUCTION

How someone socialize with other people will shape his future life. Whether someone will be a good leader or a bossy leader, whether he will be adored as someone who values other people or someone who is terribly annoying by only focusing on his achievements no matter how dirty the way is, someone's personality is shaped by his experiences starting from his mother's womb. One of the 'annoying personality' can be performed by those who has tendency to own a narcissistic disturbance. Narcissistic disturbance, which is frequently referred to as narcissistic disorder, is a fairly well-known condition today. My own experience leads me to assume that the infant's early development of emotional flexibility is its etiology, according to Miller (1990). The child's narcissistic wants for respect, echoing, understanding, sympathy, and mirroring suffer a very unusual fate as a result of this early adaption.

Therefore, it follows that those closest to a baby have the greatest influence on the way they think. Miller (1990) contends that children's wishes can result in a number of situations where the children later develop a nature that is characterized by some particular behavior. This early adaptation has several significant effects, including the fact that he is unable to consciously experience some feelings as a child or an adult, including jealousy, envy, fury, loneliness, impotence, and concern.

We are dealing with lively people who are particularly capable of experiencing a range of emotions, which makes this situation even more horrible. The fact that we are dealing with vibrant individuals who are particularly capable of nuanced emotions makes this tragedy all the more heartbreaking. This is apparent when they discuss childhood memories that were free of conflict in their assessments. These typically involve outside activities that they can take part in without harming the mother, making her feel anxious, taking away from her authority, or jeopardizing her equilibrium.

It is amazing, however, how these alert, animated, and sensitive kids who, for instance, can recall precisely how they discovered the sunlight in the bright grass when they were four years old, but at the age of eight, might not be able to "notice anything" or to show any curiosity about the pregnant mother, or, similarly, were "not at all" jealous when a sibling was born. One of them could be left alone while soldiers broke down the door and searched the house when she was just two years old since she had "been nice" and endured it silently and without weeping. Since a youngster can only experience his feelings when someone is around who totally welcomes, understands, and supports him, they have all mastered the art of not feeling anything.

If it is absent, if the child must worry about losing the mother's love—or the affection of her replacement—then he cannot feel these emotions in private, "just for himself," and instead fails to feel them at all.

But something is still there. These people unknowingly create circumstances throughout their later lives in which these primitive emotions may surface, but the underlying connection is never made explicit. The "as-if personality" is another different impact. Although not always, it is frequently brought on by giving in to parental demands (Winnicott has described it as the "false self"). Until he enters analysis, one could hardly have guessed how much more this person has to offer, hidden behind this "masked perspective of himself," as his development is such that he only exposes what is expected of him and blends so completely with what he reveals (Habermas, 1970). He is unable to live his "real self," thus he cannot define and develop it.

It continues to exist in a "state of non-communication," as Winnicott put it. These patients' complaints of feeling empty, useless, or homeless are understandable given that the emptiness is genuine. The moment all that was alive and spontaneous in him was severed, a process of emptying, poverty, and partly dying of his potential actually took place. These folks frequently experienced themselves as partially dead in their dreams as children.

Although individuation is something that both partners are interested in, the difficulties that come with experiencing and growing as an individual lead to bond persistence, which is the other effect of narcissistic desires. Because he hasn't been able to form his own structures, the infant depends on his parents both consciously and unconsciously (through the introject). The parents had found the affirmation they were looking for, a replacement for their own missing structures, in their child's false self. He is unable to rely on his emotions because he has not developed the ability to feel them through experience, is unaware of his own actual needs, and feels profoundly alienated from himself. He cannot rely on his own emotions because he has not learned to feel them through trial and error, lacks awareness of his own true needs, and has a profound sense of alienation from himself.

Due to these factors, he is unable to live apart from his parents and, even as an adult, he still needs approval from his partner, various groups, and, most importantly, his own children. The "real self" must be kept hidden from the introjects, who are the parents' heirs, therefore loneliness in the parental house is subsequently followed by solitude within the self. Emotional devotion is not excluded by the mother's narcissistic cathexis of her child. On the contrary, she lavishly adores the child, who serves as her self-object, but not in the way that he requires and only when he puts on his "false self." This is not a barrier to intellectual growth, but it is a barrier to the development of a real emotional life. In this study, the narcissistic motherhood over the Astrid Magnussen

character from Janet Fitch's novel *White Oleander* (1999) is examined. The study focuses on how a narcissistic motherhood that is planted by her mother over and over again shapes Astrid and contributes on her perception towards her mother, towards herself, and towards other people surrounding her. Based on the Identification of the Problems, the question that is formulated is what are depictions of narcissistic motherhood that is performed by Ingrid during her lifespan with her daughter?

METHODS

This study focuses on understanding the nature of the particular topic being studied by employing a descriptive qualitative method (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Additionally, the researcher concentrated on the analysis's content and the characters' activities when employing the descriptive qualitative method (Aryangga & Nurmaily, 2017; Farras & Nurmaily, 2020). Because the focus is not on numbers, qualitative analysis differs from quantitative analysis in this regard (Rido, 2015). The information is presented as conversations, images, and scenarios (Istiani & Puspita, 2020). The primary source of data for the analysis is the study subject, on which the researcher focuses (Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019).

For the purposes of this study, a novel written by Janet Fitch entitled *White Oleander* (1999) is considered to be an object. This novel has a strong undercurrent of motherhood narcissistic disturbance that is performed by a mother named Ingrid towards her daughter, Astrid. Miller's (1990) theory of narcissist psychoanalysis focusing on narcissistic disturbance is used in analyzing the object. The goal of the study is to uncover the psychological causes that are left behind by Ingrid to Astrid. This study used a qualitative descriptive methodology. The analysis in this study is presented in the form of an essay.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narcissistic mother may perform her disturbance to her child as she has a lot of time spent with her child. As it was portrayed in the novel, Ingrid was a single parent who raised her only child named Astrid with her principals and most of the time leading to narcissistic disturbance. One of its signs is that a narcissist person tend to have lack of empathy, even to her own child. In the novel it was portrayed as follow, "I remembered the year I came home with a paper angle I made in school, with golden sparkles on tissue paper wings, and she threw it straight into the trash. Did not even wait until I go to bed (Fitch, 1999, p.177)." Even Ingrid knew that her daughter, Astrid, had done her effort in making her own work, when she thought that it did not fulfill her

standards, she threw it away without Astrid's permission. The statement "did not even wait until I go to bed" emphasizes that the event stick deeply Astrid's consciousness and build image of an apatical figure of a mother. In another words, Ingrid indirectly taught Astrid that others' feeling was not necessary to be considered. And that it was okay to not ask for other people's permission above their belongings.

Another depiction of Ingrid's lacking empathy was highlighted from Astrid's dialogue with Michael, that Ingrid told her about never let herself in a more inferior position than other people even if she made mistake. Ingrid also emphasized that Astrid should also not to explain herself or to explain the cause of reason when she made mistake, as doing such action symbolized that she is in a lower position than others. "'... she taught me. Never apologize, never explain'" (Fitch, 1999, p.16). This also signed grandiosity that Ingrid reflected towards her daughter and wished to be mirrored by Astrid. A person with narcissistic disturbance really loves to make herself or himself 'grande'. Ironically when they try to make themselves more superior than others, they do whatever it takes and not rarely manipulate or knock the victims down by sneaky ways. One of its examples was depicted when Ingrid broke into Barry's house and stole data from his computer. "'Do you think it he lost something valuable on that hard disk? Maybe a collection of essays due at the publisher this fall?'" (Fitch, 1999, p.38). This part shows how she actually realized that what she did can cause some else's loss yet she did it with full consciousness. The sentence 'valuable' empasizes that she had no guilt of stealing something important form someone else as long as she can fullfill what she wanted.

It was clear that Ingrid was also a manipulative person. She was also manipulative over Astrid, even after she was separated from her as it was stated, "'You cannot think you will cut yourself free of me easily. I live in you, your bones, the delicate coils in your mind'" (Fitch, 1999, p.357). It was clearly depicted that Ingrid took advantages by being Astrid's biological mother. She thought she had every right upon Astrid. Ironically, she had failed to fullfill her role as a mother of her daughter. She reflected her grandiosity by believing that Astrid was always thought about her as someone precious. On the other hand, Ingrid's statement clearly reflected that she was afraid of losing her belonging, her daughter. She perceived her daughter as an object rather than a human being that she loved (her echo). It was in line with what Miller's opinion "The grandiose person is never really free, first, because he is excessively dependent on admiration from the object, and second, because his self-respect is dependent on qualities, functions, and achievements that can suddenly fail" (Miller, 1990, p. 42). Therefore, in the novel it is clearly portrayed that not only her body was in jail but also her soul. Even if it was tiring to always figure out on how people percieved about her qualities, she could not help it as it was planted in her brain program.

CONCLUSION

Considering those findings, It can be concluded that Ingrid had performed some narcissistic practices upon Astrid including lack of empathy, grandiosity, and manipulative actions. These three mentioned signs leads to a narcissistic disturbance and became impactful (in negative ways) on her daughter. However, Ingrid's narcissistic disturbance was most likely planted from her childhood which was not explained in the story. According to Miller, "Their relationship to their own childhood's emotional world, however, is characterized by lack of respect, compulsion to control, manipulation, and a demand for achievement (Miller, 1990, p. 6)". In other words, Ingrid must have been sculptured not only because of her nature but also her past experiences which then (more or less) inherited to her daughter.

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