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## FREUD IN W.S MAUGHAM'S 'KITE' AND 'RAIN': PRESENCE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS IN MAUGHAM'S WRITINGS

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### Abstract

The following article focuses on the influence of the Freudian psychoanalytic theories in the riveting writings of William Somerset Maugham. This article will narrow down its focus on the two enthralling short stories by Maugham, namely 'The Kite' and 'Rain'. Somerset Maugham and Sigmund Freud's lives intersected in the early years of twenty-first century. They were both fascinated by human relationships and the building blocks of human bonds. Freud approached the issue as a psychoanalyst and as a clinician; while Maugham delved deep into the psyche and behavior of human beings whom he met and watched and interacted with. This article aims to critically evaluate the compelling characters of Maugham's short stories and to establish the ascendancy of the theories of psychoanalysis as propounded by Freud in them.

**Keywords:** Freud, Psychoanalysis, Kite, Rain, Maugham

### INTRODUCTION

A well-composed short story can often be a little difficult to peruse for much is hidden and awaits unfolding. William Somerset Maugham's are no different, they are mostly saturated with autobiographical elements. With an innate ability of narration and refined storytelling, he has been able to sustain his readers' interest till the end. In Dr. Sudha Sai's words, "Most of his short stories are characterized by a clear, unadorned style cosmopolitan settings and a shrewd understanding of human nature". Maugham's characters are imbued with human complexities. What makes his characters so versatile, and fascinating is his personal touch while constructing them. With his empathetic eyes and commiserate outlook,

Maugham was able to jot every little intricate detail while building the characters in his short stories. Hence W.S Maugham's deft portrayals of human conditions are a delight in both content and in form. Very few authors have been praised as highly as Maugham and as W.O Ross points out, "A recent critic enthusiastically says that today Maugham is the most creative talent in the field of English novel". Most of Maugham's stories appears to be so vivid and true to life that the readers are sometimes compelled to think that most of his works perhaps has its roots somewhere in his own personal experiences, maybe those experiences in his life led him to dwell on his imagination which he incorporates in his novels and short stories. According to W.O Ross, "the events which animated him must

have occurred very early, for they are reflected almost from the beginning of his career as a writer". Freud and his theories had a pronounced effect on Maugham, he could somewhere relate to Freud's words. Maugham heavily portrayed his characters in accordance with the psychoanalytic concepts that were put forward by Freud and even Carl Jung. W. O. Ross further mentions that one major characteristic of Maugham's works is "that the response of his characters are always extreme, even perverse". It must have been difficult for the nineteenth century to accept these characters as they are. Had it not been for Freud's psychoanalytic theories, understanding Maugham's characters would have stayed undeciphered. As W.O. Ross rightly states, "The twentieth century owes its willingness to believe in Sigmund Freud and his successors, who have directed attention to a wide variety of perverse responses and explained them by reference to the unconscious mind".

#### **FREUD'S PRESENCE IN "RAIN"**

The conception of the story happened when Maugham was on his trip to the South Seas. The brief lines he set down in his journal later got published in "A Writer's Notebook", where he fittingly constructed the story. The story revolves around a missionary who claims to be self-righteous but later surrenders to his subconscious desires. He ends up persecuting a prostitute, Miss Sadie Thompson, until suddenly a taste of forbidden fruit which no one suspected him of entertaining gets the better of him. Mr. Davidson was strictly against any form of amusement or pleasure, a customary attribute that was shared among the Puritan and missionaries' community. His 'superego' prevented him from indulging into any form of merriment but that does not mean that his 'id' too, hated these. According to him, The Holy Bible considers any form of entertainment as blasphemy, and he tries to teach Miss Sadie the ways of Christianity. He was determined to turn the prostitute into a believer and make forsake her sinful occupation, but he, in turn, got enwrapped in his suppressed carnal desires and ultimately surrenders to his wild yearning to take Sadie for himself. His repressed sexual desires surfaces as he tries to force himself on Sadie. He was later found dead with his throat cut open, perhaps

he took his life for the guilt of his sinful deed was too much for him to bear. He was indeed a healthy man with a suppressed fire. While he was on his mission to transform Sadie, he consciously or unconsciously ignited his hidden or "suppressed" desires. An example of his repressed lascivious desires was when he dreamt of the 'mountains of Nebraska' which, for him, appeared to be shaped like a women's breasts. Freud's understanding of such suppressed desires or repression "is the psychological attempt to direct one's own desires and impulses towards pleasurable instincts by excluding them from one's consciousness or holding or subduing them in the unconsciousness". All the repressed thoughts and impulses poured out when Mr. Davidson started to view Sadie as a licentious woman rather than his pupil whom he wanted to transform. When he realized what he did, he was perhaps filled with fear which eventually compelled him to commit suicide. From a Freudian point of view, it can be observed that maybe Mr. Davidson's 'superego' tried to keep his 'id' from taking over for a long time, but after he met Sadie, started to correspond with her, her feminine warmth might have managed to permeate through the barrier put up by Mr. Davidson's 'superego'. His 'id' gradually had the better of him and all his repressed libidinous desires erupted as he tries to involve himself in coitus with Sadie. Ultimately the pride of a successful win over his repression is obstructed by the triumph of his moral barrier or 'superego', which finally drives him to suicide, "The trader pushed him forwards. Then he saw, lying half in the water and half out, a dreadful object, the body of Davidson". It is also worth noting that Sadie was too trying to fight off her salacious desires when she was trying to live by the rules of Christianity as was laid out for her by Mr. Davidson, but his death triggers her inner self, and she eventually returns to her old ways. She was scornful, she perhaps has understood that disguise and facades are short lived, it is just matter of time before one's deep embedded crude 'id' takes over. she called out the men in our society "You men! You filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!"

Timothy Sexton deftly quotes, "Rain is a powerful piece of fiction that really does not belong

to its time. Maugham was well ahead of the curve of 1921". The story of Sadie Thompson and her influence on the virtuous and highly principled missionary looks forward to a post-World War II era. The era which saw the true value of Freudian psychology.

Rain is possibly the first enormously popular short story by a famous writer of the early twentieth century to reject moral instruction in favor of a detached amoral examination of lust and violence from a Freudian perspective of repressed desires rising to the surface of the conscious mind. Freud adapted repression to the defensive inhibition of "unbearable mental contents". Repression could be both conscious and unconscious. The priest in Rain, in denying the admission of sexual pleasure as a part of life, by repressing the experience even as a married man and connecting pleasure with guilt fits Freud's definition of repression: "The essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping out of consciousness". What he does is "inhibit the idea of sexual pleasure and disassociates it from his consciousness" which leads him to seek out Miss Thompson, the prostitute, under the guise of priestly duties, to rape her and make her the receptacle of his suppressed male economy.

#### **FREUD'S PRESENCE IN "KITE"**

"The Kite" by William Somerset Maugham is saturated with psychological implications. On reading the short story, one may find a plethora of psychological inferences, but I would like to narrow my study down to two of the main Freudian theories, "the tripartite structure of personality" and "Oedipal Complex".

This short story is a thorough study of specific psychological theories with reference to certain characters. 'Oedipal complex' serves as the primary theme of the plot, and it has been scrutinized in all its ramifications. The story revolves around the primeval relationship that shared between a mother and her child.

Mrs. Beatrice Sunbury happens to be an over-possessive mother employing a detrimental influence on the emotional growth and development of Herbert, her son. From a very early

age, Mrs. Sunbury exercised an unhealthy influence where she wished to be the center of his son's world. She made her presence felt in Herbert's life and tried dictating his every move. Herbert was conditioned to obey every order and allow himself to be controlled by his mother. Mrs. Sunbury imprinted herself on her son and taught Herbert the ways which she thought to be correct. She even taught him the right way to drink tea, "that's how it's done. It shows you know what's what". Mrs. Sunbury made her disapproval of Herbert's desire to get married pronounced for the thought of sharing her son induced fear in him, "Marry indeed! He's got more sense than that .... I don't hold with a man marrying till he knows his own mind....and a man doesn't know his own mind till he's thirty-five". Such negative response is indicative of a jealous mother unwilling to share his son with a wife. A child of such a mother is expected to do away with all intrinsic desires for personal agency and to be willing to entertain all maternal demands. Herbert too, shares an intimate and faithful bond with his mother, he idolizes her, and his mother becomes the very center of his universe, the very axis and pole of his life. This bond strengthens further when they indulge in the activity of flying kites, almost in a ritualistic manner every Saturday. Herbert becomes so much invested in the activity with his mother that he ends up denying any other attractions. 'Oedipal complex' as delineated by Sigmund Freud, is a state where a child shows excessive affection and attraction to the parent of opposite sex and gradually grows distant from others. Herbert does not necessarily show any hostility towards Mr. Sunbury but does show an immoderate attraction towards his mother. Majority of his life is administered by these subconscious desires, over which he has no control. Herbert ends up falling for a girl, namely Betty, who shares a striking resemblance to his mother which confirms the oedipal complexities in him, "Betty Beavan looked very much as Mrs. Sunbury have looked at her age, she had the same sharp features"

Herbert has always been instructed to by his mother on how to conduct himself from his very childhood. She taught Herbert things in accordance to what she wanted Herbert to learn, from how to "sit up at table and not put his elbow on it" to

"stretch out his little finger when he took his teacup to drink". Mrs. Sunbury almost became the 'superego' that suppressed the 'id' and the 'ego' of Herbert by wrapping him around with traditionalist rules.

Another interesting observation here is that Herbert perhaps wanted to carve out his own individuality, his obsession with the kite might have a symbolic significance for it only when he flies the kite, that he sees himself free while soaring high up. According to the French psychologist Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, something that fascinates a child transform into an object of idealism for him, he wants to be like it, hence the kite becomes the object of fascination for Herbert because the kite was the only thing that he could control.

Herbert's love for Betty and his decision to tie the knot with her perhaps was an attempt on his part to escape the excessive attachment, but he could not replace his mother with Betty, he failed to step out of his comfort zone and ends up spending much time with his parents even after his marriage which eventually gave rise to a conflicting situation between Herbert and Betty owing to Betty's insecurity. Mrs. Sunbury never wanted her son to get involved with any other woman. To talk Herbert out of his decision to get married, she dilated on Betty's flaws "pretty my foot. All that paint and powder. You take my word for it; she'd look very different with her face washed and without a perm. Common, that's what she is, common as dirt". Both Betty and Mrs. Sunbury needed Herbert to survive. A mother wanted to have his son all to himself while a wife needed her husband for financial stability.

Mrs. Sunbury, taking advantage of the passion Herbert had for kites, started manipulating him in order to get him back from Betty since Betty had strong opinions regarding her husband's obsession with flying kites. It was Mrs. Sunbury's constraint and vindication that compelled Herbert to distant himself from Betty. Betty considered this mother-son activity as childish and apprise Herbert to keep himself from such activities. Betty's words fell on deaf ears and Herbert continued with his act of flying kites every Saturday with his parents, religiously. Betty, out of pure agitation, mutilated his

kite, assuming that it was the reason behind the tension between her and Herbert. For Herbert, the kite not only symbolized the bond that he had with his mother, but it also represented his individuality. Herbert equates the smashing of his kite by Betty as matricide which he cannot forbear. Now, with no 'superego', his 'id' takes over him and as a form of revenge, Herbert refused to pay for Betty's furniture which were in turn ear to her. Her pain delighted him beyond words, he said "I can see her face when they take the furniture away". Herbert welcomed jailed rather than to pay Betty alimony. With his repressed 'id' taking the better of him, he firmly chooses his individuality. The kite was his maternal assurance and when it was destroyed, his dormant anger exploded and brought ruination.

Maugham explored and studied the relationships from a different angle in the story. The entire complication can thus be examined under the lens of Freud.

#### **CONCLUSION**

An astute and perfect observer who never missed a beat and saw right through the complexities and undercurrents in human beings, Maugham and his stories are an abiding force that reveals a universe buried in the workings of the human heart and for his vast array of readers scattered through decades, he might be a literary genius with the unique combination of a psychoanalytical mind and a compassionate eye.

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