Psychoanalytic Study of “The Confession” by Guy de Maupassant

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\textbf{Abstract}

The Following research is an attempt to investigate the short story in the traditional psychoanalytic framework; there are some unconscious motives like emotional ambivalence, scopophilic instinct, eros and thenatos which are fully explored in the present research.

\textbf{Keywords}

Psychoanalytic, Psychoanalytic framework, Guy de Maupassant, Emotional ambivalence.

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Introduction:

The confession is one of the finest short stories written by the father of modern short story writer, Guy De Mau Passant. This short story contains within it a perspective that is psychoanalytic but this perspective is not obvious to a non-psychoanalytic reader. Therefore, it is the responsibility of a psychoanalytic reader to unfold the short story in the frame of psychoanalysis. The task of psychoanalytic reader is basically to restore the latent version of the text and also to highlight those motives which play an important role in the psychic development of a fictional character. Thus, this research article is simply an attempt to unveil some of the underlying deeper unconscious motives of a female character who is at her death bed and confesses that she did a real wrong to her sister by robbing away her sister’s love. By giving him a poison mixed in the food and then living together with her sister for the rest of her life. Now, these are the surface details or in other words unanalyzed. Now, let us run the horses of psychoanalytic war. As the title suggests that short story is a confession of a dying person. Now, if we just look at the title which means sinner’s admittance of his or her crime, depth psychology or in another words Freudian psychology tells us that human beings by nature are

Wild and untamed and possess the tendency to commits in or in the language of law what we call Crime. Now this is exactly the situation in this short story from where the sinful nature of an apparently young girl is shown who is very innocent and loving as her sister thought about her. However, in the depths of her being she was no less than an untamed beast. Thus, the contradictory nature of a female character is shown to us by a literary writer that human nature is inherently barbarous and that is exactly the nature of unconscious mind of which Oedipus Rex, the play by Sophocles, is the best example so far as literature is concerned in this regard. All the greatest literature of the world whether German, French, English, Latin, and Greek have portrayed the paradoxical nature of human beings that is to say, containing both good and evil. Literary writers like Shakespeare and Sophocles in their plays have also portrayed, rather made visible the sinful nature of human beings. Thus, this short story is again another attempt, this time not by an English or Greek writer but by a French writer to deplore the baser side of human nature of which she, the confessor, is the subject.

Literature Review:

After reviewing the long literature that is written on Freud and his theoretical framework named psychoanalysis, following were the reviews of the different critics and literary theorists. Lionell Trilling says that Freudian psychology is the only systematic account to investigate the human mind and is the psychology on which poet has always exercised his art. Freud’s impact upon literature is reciprocal. He influenced and was influenced by literature. Anthony Starr says that Virginia Wolf, James Joice and D.H Lawrence were highly inspired by Freud. Freud in his own autobiography writes that he was inclined to look upon surrealists who had taken Freud as their pattern saint. Freud’s articles upon Leonardo De Vinci and Dostoevsky are an example of how to investigate a writer and work of art. Freud’s psychoanalysis is basically a broader term in which there is almost an analytical pattern available for every human endeavor.
**Research Methodology:**

The present research will be investigated in the light of psychoanalysis which is also a research technique for the investigation of the underlying motives behind any work of art and the underlying reason behind the character’s behavior in any work of art.

**Theoretical framework:**

The present research is an attempt to see Maupassant’s short story and to investigate it in the light of emotional ambivalence, scopophilic instinct and sadomasochism. All the above stated terminologies have been taken from the longer corpus of Sigmund Freud in the light of which one can solve several complex issues.

**Objectives of the study:**

To investigate the short story in the light of psychoanalysis to unfold the inner working of the character’s mind.

**Statement of the problem:**

What are these unconscious motives that are making the deeper regions of the confessor’s mind in the short story “The Confession”

**Limitations of the study:**

The first limitation that is attached to the present research is that it is investigating the work that is originally written in French and then translated into English. Therefore, it is an investigation not upon the original work rather upon the translation of the original work and that is what makes its study limited.

**Analysis:**

In the opening scene of the short story what we see is that Marguisette is in the state of dreadful shivering and there are convulsions upon her face and her eyes are reflecting a deep terrifying fear. Now, if we see the opening lines in the light of psychoanalysis, that is to say, if we analyze the character in the light of psychoanalysis that is the unconscious guilt in her for what she did, dragging an innocent man to death, is actually displaced by the unconscious psyche that appears in the conscious mind, the convulsions, dreadful shivering and harassment in the eyes. We can compare this same situation with the character of Hamlet whose indecisiveness is actually rooted in Oedipus complex, that Hamlet unconsciously identified himself with the character of Claudius. What Claudius did was actually the realization of Hamlet’s own childhood wishes and thus at the conscious level that unconscious guilt is displaced and as a result what appears on the conscious level are the scruples of the conscience. Hamlet did nothing yet he was guilty why? Because Claudius was the incarnation of Hamlet’s own unfulfilled childhood wishes. Now, what we see in this short story is that the guilt in her is displaced and what remains are the shivering and convulsions on the face. As the very title suggests, The Confession, it becomes obvious after certain reflections, that Marguirette definitely did a crime which was thus displaced by the horror in her eyes. The task of the psychoanalytic reader of the text is to restore the latent version of the text.
Had the story not been explained in the later pages to come, the psychoanalytic reader would still be in a position after reading the very first paragraph which is the reflection of displaced unconscious guilt which is making the character tremble. Now, if we just see the relationship of the two sisters then it becomes very obvious that there is this typical sibling rivalry phenomena which is at work in the mind of the little sister Marguirette who considers her elder sister unconsciously as an enemy and thus destroys, her own dreams. Now, the unconscious hatred for the elder sister is again thus displaced onto the guy with whom she was in love. Thus instead of dragging her, that is to say, her elder sister to death, she dragged her boyfriend to death. So the unconscious hatred in her was thus displaced and what became visible were the love and the promise of living together forever. We haven’t exhausted our analysis yet. Let’s see which of the major instincts were at work in the unconscious mind of Marguirette. So the first instinct that was at work in the mind of Marguirette was the scopophilic instinct which means the yearning to see the genitals of the animals and observing the people when they change their clothes. As it becomes obvious from the words of the character herself that she used to observe the varnished boots of that guy whom she killed and she also used to observe him riding the horse. She says, “when I saw him I was completely carried away and I found him so beautiful, and I used to stand in the corner and I used to look at him with all my eyes with all my soul”. So looking, observing and watching is what captures the essence of scopophilic instinct. So, she used to observe the two lovers especially in their love making. In a way, the unconscious hatred for the elder sister was thus displaced by the love for that guy she killed by adding poison in the cakes.

One can understand the intensity of love in her and at the same time the play of scopophilic instinct from the following lines; “but one night ten days before the contract, thou tookest a walk front the chateau by moonlight and thou under the fire and kissed thee and holding thee in his two arms for so long, thou remembrest? I had seen you two, I was there in the shrubbery. I was angry if I could, I should have killed you both”. Now, this sentence I should have killed you both is actually referring to two things, one is the reflection of thenatos and also it is referring to the emotional ambivalence which we have mentioned in our theoretical framework, which simply means loving and hating the same thing at the same time. As George Groddeck beautifully explained, “you will never go wrong in concluding that a man has once loved deeply whatever he hates, and loves it yet; that he once admired and still admires what he scorces, that he once greedily desired what now disgusts him”. Both the instincts Eros and Thenatos are simultaneously active. Eros is the life instinct and thenatos is the death instinct. She wanted to embrace the guy and she desired of embracing him and kissing him this was Eros but when she killed him this was thenatos; death instinct. So, here again we are reminded of Freud who said that there are in human beings two instincts, the life instinct, and the death instinct. Life instinct is the instinct of preservation which Freud called Eros and there is another of preservation which Freud called Eros and there is another destructive instinct which was equally at work in the character of Marguirette, which becomes obvious from this phrase, “I should have killed you both” and thus she did kill at least one of the two.

So, to conclude the analysis, we can safely say that we have converted the short story in the technical terminology of psychoanalysis but neither we nor any other writer, critic or researcher has ever said that this is so, and there is nothing further, rather as long as we are
researchers we have to believe in the words of Hamlet who says to Horatio, “There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt in your philosophy.”

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