

## **CHILD ABUSE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER IN *MISTRESS MASHAM'S REPOSE***

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to elaborate on the effects of child abuse and its relationship to the development of the characters in T.H. White's *Mistress Masham's Repose* using Miller's theory. The data were collected from the text of *Mistress Masham's Repose* by T.H. White. Descriptive-qualitative analysis was employed in this research. The analysis focuses on the main character's responses to manipulation to meet adults' needs, and the behaviour shown by the main character such as repressed feelings, destructive actions and also the influence of a helping witness on children.

**Keywords:** Child Abuse, Psychoanalysis, Child Development

### **INTRODUCTION**

Psychoanalysis focuses on human beings in conflict with their surroundings (Paris, 1997). Literature is the imitation aspect of the universe that portrays the reality of human being and their society Abrams (Abrams, 1971). Therefore, analyzing literary work using psychoanalysis is a decent way to understand human beings' behaviour. Emir (2016) states that understanding the influence of social conditions and emotions is the aim of a psychological based study of literature.

Child psychology is one of the interesting topics that could be discussed in literary analysis. It can be seen in newspapers, tv, and social media that there is an increasing number of victims of child abuse. In 2011 alone, the Commission of Indonesia (KPAI) reported 2,275 cases of violence against 2,275 children, including 887 cases of sexual violence. As many as 1,028 incidents of child abuse occurred in the 2012 year of child violence, of which 3,871 are cases of child sexual violence. In 2013, nearly 48 per cent of the 2,637 cases of child abuse (1,266) were sexual violence against children (Ridho, 2016).

In investigating the effect of child abuse on children, many psychological approaches could be used, one of them is the psychoanalysis theory by Alice Miller. Jewish-born psychologist Alice Miller (2002) in her book *For Your Own Good* reflects her effort to increase society's awareness of the impact of sanctioned child abuse

Alice Miller's work provides a theoretical framework to assess the effect of child abuse and its relationship to the development of creativity, hatred, and violence in the novel *Mistress Masham's Repose*. The analysis focuses on the extent to which children are manipulated to meet the needs of adults, the presence of behaviour such as repression of feelings and memories, the expression of repressed feelings in destructive acts, and the identification of a helping witness as predictors for the actions and outcomes in this story.

Children's literature can be used as an object to investigate a child's character using Miller's theory. One of the reputable authors is T.H. White. T. H. White had gained a considerable reputation as an accomplished writer of humorous historical fantasies long before the publication of *Mistress Masham's Repose*,

including the remarkable *The Sword in the Stone* (1938, the first book of *The Once and Future King*, 1958), which remains his most celebrated novel.

Mistress Masham's *Repose* was chosen for this analysis because it describes the growing process of children. This novel depicts the troubles and adventures of Maria, a ten-year-old orphan who is abused and circumscribed by a pair of vicious protectors: Mr Hater, the vicar, and Miss Brown, her governess. Her parents died in an accident and she doesn't seem to have any friends of her generation. The chef, who is the sole retainer at Malplaquet, and an old, absent-minded professor who lives in a small cottage on the grounds, are Maria's two companions.

The conflict begins when Maria visits his small island, on which is an ornamental temple nicknamed Mistress Masham's *Repose*, while exploring the Quincunx, one of several lakes not far from the palace. The novel elucidates how Maria develops her strength and finds her inner self despite all the oppression that she experiences in her childhood.

Investigating Maria's development in the novel using Miller's theory provides a new perspective for the readers regarding the interrelationship between childhood abuse and the psychological development of children. It also aims to promote awareness of child abuse and how to prevent it.

## **ALICE MILLER'S PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Alice Miller (12 January 1923-14 April 2010), a Polish-Swiss psychologist, psychoanalyst and philosopher of Jewish descent, her books on parental child abuse have been translated into many languages. She was a renowned public intellectual as well.

Alice Miller's work has been applied to analyze a character in literary work. One of them is a research conducted by Gross (2006) which analyzes child abuse and the development of heroes in *Ender's Game*. Although her approach has not been applied widely to analyze a character in literary works, her notion of the impact of child abuse on the

development of children could be a good starting point to understanding how children behave according to how adults treat them.

*The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Miller's first book, was published in Germany in 1979. His three brief essays, first titled *Prisoners of Childhood*, explained how parents project their thoughts, ideas, and dreams on their children. An infant learns to obey live and be loved. The child stifles attempts to be herself or himself by repressing his or her feelings (Miller, *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness*, 1991). More books followed quickly: *Your Own Good* (2002) and *Thou Shalt Not Be* (1984) *Conscious* continued to concentrate on the infant but went into more in-depth studies of child violence, child-rearing attitudes, psychological theory, and care.

In her book, *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness* (1991), Alice Miller portrays neglected and silenced children who become harmful to themselves and others later on. Adolf Hitler was such a kid, says Miller. Constantly mistreated by his father, and emotionally abandoned by his mother, he learned only cruelty; with unquestioning obedience, he learned to be obedient and embrace regular punishments. He took vengeance after years.

Based on Miller's notion about childhood trauma and its relationship to the development of children's lives, it can be concluded that parents or adults play important roles in shaping the child's character. Children whose feeling is not respected tend to show their feeling or emotion through destructive or negative acts. However, the influence of "helping witness" will help the children who support and understand children's needs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper employed descriptive-qualitative research (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019; Hasyim et al., 2020). In this research, the writer applied qualitative research since the data are taken from the text, and the analysis

will be based on text interpretation. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009, p. 7) stated that in qualitative research, a researcher produces a narrative or textual description of the phenomena under study. Thus, the analysis of this study was presented in words rather than in numbers.

The data were collected from text and analyzed it using the psychoanalysis theory by Alice Miller. The researcher collected the data by doing a close reading of the novel *Mistress Masham's Repose*.

After reading the novel, the researcher highlighted the data related to child abuse and development. The researchers then divided the data into several categories based on Miller's Theory. The analysis covers four aspects derived from Miller's theory, which are the need of adults comes first, repressed feelings, expression through destructive acts and the power of helping witnesses.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

After analyzing Maria's character using Miller's theory, the researcher identifies several aspects discussed below:

### **Prioritizing Adult's Need**

Alice Miller claims that in the first month of life the child is defenceless to anything except embracing the way they are treated. Because of this restriction, kids learn early on to recognize that adults govern their lives. What occurs in their early lives also suppresses trauma that cannot be articulated afterwards. (Miller, *The untouched key: Tracing Childhood trauma in creativity and destructiveness*, 1991)

When Maria's parents died in a car accident, she have no companion besides her two evil guardians, Mr Hater and Miss Brown. Maria's day became miserable because her guardian always harassed and abused her. Because Maria has no choice, she has to follow every rule of Miss Brown and Mr Hater. as described by White (1973) that "*children are under dreadful disadvantage compared with their elders*"

The rules are strict and if Maria disobeys them, Miss Brown will beat her. Miss Brown does not allow Maria to leave Malplaquet. She has to stay in the house under Miss Brown's supervision, which is boring for a child of Maria's age. However, to satisfy them and avoid getting harassed, Maria follows all the rules.

### **Repressed Feeling**

According to Miller, children who have not been allowed for expressing their feeling, less respected learn to conceal their feeling to repress traumatizing events (Miller, *The untouched key: Tracing Childhood trauma in creativity and destructiveness*, 1991).

In the initial part of this novel, Maria seems to be a lonely girl that could not express their thought, feeling, and anger. Living with strict ridiculous rules is a limitation for Maria. She could have done many things that she wanted, but sadly, Miss Brown does not allow her to express herself.

The mistreatment experienced by Maria is the cause of her inability to manifest her feeling. In some parts of the story, Maria only cries in her room every time she feels bad. In chapter XV, Maria decided to be punished because she could not defend herself for sneaking the Lilliputians into her room and hiding it from Miss Brown. She could have defended her choice since the palace is her house and Miss Brown has no authority to ban her. However, she has less power compared to Miss Brown because she is an orphan.

### **Expression through destructive acts**

Miller explains that though individuals may not remember their anger, helplessness and despair, longing and anxiety, and pain, they will express them in destructive acts directed towards themselves and others. (Miller, *The untouched key: Tracing Childhood trauma in creativity and destructiveness*, 1991)

The result of Maria's mistreatment can be seen when Maria mistreated the Lilliputians. Instead of treating the Lilliputians as her friends, Maria handles them like her property. Consequently, Maria never had a companion, unexpectedly it is a huge challenge for her to

discover a whole culture she can build relationships with.

### **The power of helping witness**

In her analysis of several well-known figures such as Picasso Nietzsche and Stalin, Miller (1991) argues the difference result due from the presence of a “helping witness” in the child's life. The helping witness is someone who supports the child and understands his or her feeling.

The presence of Mrs Noakes, the Cook, The Professor and the Lilliputians in Maria's life helps her to overcome her difficulties. The Professor is the one who always accompanies Maria every time she feels lonely. He also becomes her partner in discussing a lot of interesting things. Unlike Mr Hater and Miss Brown, the Professor let Maria show her true self, expressing her idea and sometimes lecturing Maria when she did a bad thing to others.

Lilliputians also play important role in shaping Maria's character. The leader of the Lilliputians taught Maria about leadership and morality that the colony of Lilliputians embodied during their adventure in finding new places.

Another important character in Maria's life is the cook or Mrs Noakes. Mrs Noakes is the only one in the residence who treats Maria well. She always responds to Maria's crisis and helps her every time she gets punishment from Miss Brown.

Life lessons that Maria got from the Professor, the Lilliputians, and Mrs Noakes have influenced Maria's way of thinking. Maria finally develops her character to cope with difficulties, avoid selfishness and respect other creatures.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is a correlation between child abuse and the psychological development of children. In Mistress Masham's Repose, the main character, Maria experiences abuse and struggle in her residence by her two villainous guardians. By using Miller's theory, the

researcher elaborates on several aspects according to Miller's presence when children are abused and harassed. There are four aspects found in Maria's journey which are prioritizing adult's needs, repressed feelings, expression through destructive acts, and the power of helping witness. Maria's life which is controlled by her guardians makes her always prioritize their will. This situation caused Maria always repressed her feeling and the result of this oppression caused Maria sometimes express herself in destructive acts. However, as Miller observes, the presence of a helping witness helps Maria solve her life problems and strengthen her character.

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