

The Dark Triad and Sensory Marketing: Grace Paley’s “The Pale Pink Roast”

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Abstract

With the commodification of the body image in modern day media and advertising, marketing of the self to gain power over one’s surroundings has become a commonplace phenomenon. Well-adapted individuals are seen to manifest a perfect body image of themselves that give them the power to influence the behavior and decisions of others. From a psychological perspective, this propensity of self-glorification through sensory marketing reveals a narcissistic strain of manipulative behavior which embodies characteristics of “the dark triad.” But for manipulation to occur, the victim must be willing for influence to take place. Through an in-depth analysis of Grace Paley’s “The Pale Pink Roast,” this article looks at how Peter’s personality, infused with traits of the dark triad, appeals to Anna’s sexuality and influences her into behavior that renders her feeling helplessly guilty and confused. From the very beginning of the short story, the sensory experience engages Anna’s perception, clouds her judgment and affects her behavior. Here sensory marketing has been considered as a mechanism of persuasion that powerfully overwhelms Anna into sexual acquiescence and results in her surrendering to a desire that has an unwholesome effect on her sense of self. Through Anna, Paley explores the complexity of female sexuality that the modernized women of her time were facing.

Keywords: desire, persuasion, image, female sexuality, sensory marketing

Introduction

Grace Paley’s literary works reflect a changing scenario in male-female relationships and female agency in the second half of the twentieth century and the first few years of the twenty first. Publishing in the late 1950s just as the second wave of the feminist movement began, Grace Paley (1922-2007) was among the earliest American writers to explore the lives of women in America. She was an American short story writer, poet, teacher, and political activist. She taught creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College and City College of The City University of New York, and was also the first official New York State Author. She received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1961, a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1966, and an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1970. As an activist, Paley was involved in anti-war, feminist, and anti-nuclear movements.

Naturally, these concerns were reflected in Paley’s writing. She saw modern women jeopardizing all that feminist movements stood for by laying down concessions for the behavior of men they were in relationships with. Her stories speak of these “disturbances” that were destabilizing and confusing the purpose of the feminist movement as she



understood it. In an attempt to throw light on the prevailing situation of gender relations, she writes of stories that reveal, as the title of her collection of short stories indicates, *The Little Disturbances of Man*. First published in 1959, the stories in this collection contain small everyday events focusing on the lives of women who are trying to live their lives as best as they can as gender relations are shifting in post-World War America and an awareness of their condition is becoming unsettling for them.

Aware of the “small drops of worried resentment and noble rage ... [that] were secretly, slowly building in the second wave of the women’s movement,” Paley is wary about the role her writings would play: “I didn’t know my small-drop presence or usefulness in this accumulation” (Geyh 94). As it turns out, Paley’s writings created a space for women in ways many writers could not. Marianne Hirsch, in her introduction to an issue of *Contemporary Womens’ Writing* quotes Alice Kates Shulman as saying on National Public Radio, “Paley’s stories changed my life. We women needed to write about our own experience but feared we would be relegated to literary marginality. Now here was Paley, writing about what I lived, and it was recognized as Literature” (124). Paley’s common trait of the storyline “following unexpected paths and revealing irresolvable complexities” (122) shows how even singular spontaneous attempts at agency may complicate even the simplest of situations. Each story brings to light characters and their complex moral situations where men are emotionally detached and women do not know how and when exactly to let go.

In the spirit of her lifelong activism and concern for female emancipation, Paley’s short stories reveal women’s own role in their subjugation. But, in contradiction to her fierce political and social activism, her short stories take a more subtle non-judgmental approach, reflecting a slightly humorous and admmissive portrayal of the reality seen in her New York world of affairs and the relations she saw unfolding around her. In a 1985 “Fresh Air” interview, she told Terry Gross, “When you write, you illuminate what’s hidden, and that’s a political act” (Schwartz). With such a view, she wrote of women allowing themselves to be sexual playmates to men, and then having to lift the complete burden of responsibility alone. Ex-husbands come and go whimsically without taking full responsibility of their children. For example, one of the main characters in *The Little Disturbances of Man* (hereafter, LDM) is Faith Darwin, an alter ego of Paley. When we meet Faith, we also meet her ex, the father of her two young sons, a boastful charmer who has dropped by for a brief visit and expects his seven year old son to have learnt to read fluently, and then he vanishes again.

Paley’s women are unsure of how to express and engage with their sexuality without demeaning themselves and losing self-respect in the process. She rewrites maternal characters with a sexuality that is easily targeted by predatory male behavior and negatively impacts their decisions. Even though all the male characters in her stories walk away from marriages and responsibilities, the women always seem to find excuses for those actions and are seen to cover up for their meanness. Her women cannot resist the temptation of giving in to their newly acknowledged desires. Unfortunately, they are shown to admire in men all that feminists were fighting against: control, recklessness, possessiveness, disrespect for

others, irresponsibility, neglect of the family, etc.

This article examines the characters in Paley's short story "The Pale Pink Roast," from an interdisciplinary psychological perspective with emphasis on the dark triad of personality traits and sensory marketing of the self-embodied by Peter, the ex-husband, that influences decision making in others, in this case, Anna. The discussion leads to an analysis of how and why Peter, the ex-husband, has so much influence over Anna's actions and reactions. This article moves forward by introducing various relevant terms such as the dark triad, sensory marketing, and desire whilst linking these discussion points to relevant parts of Paley's story as the conclusion, in this regard, is ultimately drawn.

The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad of personality is Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy. As mentioned by Jonasen et al., the characteristics that define each of these personality traits of the Dark Triad are "vanity and self-centeredness (i.e., narcissism), manipulation and cynicism (Machiavellianism), callous social attitudes and impulsivity (i.e., psychopathy)" (102). Individuals who embody these traits can be seen commonly in fictional texts in the form of antiheroes, Byronic heroes, or dark heroes (Jonason et al.). Jonason et al. claim that those who embody traits of the dark triad are all around us, whether we are willing to admit it or not. Kaufman et al. also develop this idea when they refer to the "emerging consensus that the dark core (or so called heart of darkness) of these dark traits consists of an antagonistic social strategy characterized by high levels of interpersonal manipulation and callous behavior (Jones and Figueredo, 2013; Marcus et al., 2018; Mashagen et al., 2018)" (1).

Paley's presentation of Peter in "The Pale Pink Roast" has significant worth in showing how, through the dark triad, an insidious marketing of the self occurs and a sexually charged image is created. Peter is like most other men in Paley's works: he shies away from responsibility and divorces Anna even after having a child with her. A similar situation is referred to by Mary Colleen Ubel with regards to "A Woman, Young and Old," where the husband revokes his attention from the family and the narrator informs that "her parents 'were deeply and irrevocably in love till Joanna and I revoked everything for them.' The father sums up his point of view in this way, '... a wife,' he said, 'is a beloved mistress until the children come and then ...,' making clear the importance he places on a spontaneous sexual relationship" (17). Similarly, Anna, as ex-wife, is to Peter a site of spontaneous sexual gratification with no strings attached.

Peter clearly demonstrates the presence of the dark triad through his behavior and interaction with Anna. His character is a perfect embodiment of the dark triad that enables him to successfully market an image of his self and a corresponding lifestyle in order to manipulate those around him without any scruples. He actively builds his image with full awareness, reflects a strong sense of self-fulfillment in his attitude, and purveys a sensory aura that affects his surroundings in a way that allows for the fulfillment of his own egoistic needs. Narcissism is clearly evident from his sensory marketing of his self. His Machiavellianism is clear from the way he takes sexual advantage of his ex-wife, and Psychopathy is clear from

his total disregard of her feelings and the blame he lays on her as he confidently, without a single grain of guilt “easy and impervious, in full control, he cartwheeled eastward into the source of the night” (Paley 99). Fully at the expense of Anna who, under his influence, willingly returns to the active male/ passive female dichotomy.

The following sections with examples from the text that display his interaction with Anna support the assumption that the dark triad is embodied in Peter’s character.

Narcissism

Narcissism finds expression in vanity and self-centeredness. From the moment Peter enters the park he flaunts his presence. Anna sees him: “straddling the daffodils,” kicking “aside the disappointed acorns,” as he “endowed a grand admiring grin to two young girls” (Paley 94). The verbs used here, “straddle,” “kick,” and “endow” in the description of his behavior, indicate an attitude of disregard and vanity. This is intensified by the words, “Look at me, I’m a real outdoorski these days” as he tells Anna to observe him as he turns around “singing like a summer bird” (Paley 94). And when he convinces Anna to take him to see her new apartment he takes her arm as he makes his way through a crowd of unfamiliar men and boys proudly saying, “Going, going, gone,” and “So long, fellows” (Paley 94). His vanity is obvious here as he shows off his accomplishment of getting Anna to walk arm in arm in plain view as if she were his prize possession. Peter realizes that a lot of his ability to get things into his favor depends on the way he looks and carries himself. He boasts, therefore, of the way he looks after himself: “I take care of myself, Anna. That’s why. Vegetables, high proteins. I’m not the night owl I was. Grapefruits, sunlight, oh sunlight, that’s my dear love now.” With intentions of convincing Anna that he is a changed man he says that, he is no longer “egocentric and selfish, the way I used to be” (Paley 47). Such a boastful glorification of himself invites Anna to consider him differently and think of him as a changed person.

Machiavellianism

The clear traits of Machiavellianism also noticed in Peter are manipulation and cynicism. The way he addresses others reveals a cynicism connected to his sense of vanity. He calls to Louie: “Hey, you glass-eyed louse, c’mere” (Paley 45); refers to his grandpa as “that old jerk”; and, has an obvious disregard for Anna. As for his manipulation, he gradually pulls Anna towards doing a sexual act that she would regret. He knows how to manipulate her emotions: “She was faint and leaden, a sure sign in Anna, if he remembered correctly, of passion. ‘Shall we dance?’ he asked softly, a family joke” (Paley 50). He shows a tenderness towards her that is not genuine, as he carefully scrutinizes every moment and every reaction Anna has to his advances as he seeks the level of opportunity he may take advantage of, only to accuse her of initiating and deceiving him into the sexual encounter they have.

Psychopathy

The traits of Psychopathy find expression in callous social attitudes and impulsiveness. Peter has a repulsive side to him that is hidden behind an image of positivity and confidence. As a father he has certain social responsibilities that he is unwilling to perform. His daughter Judy obviously loves him and is ecstatic to see him but after a temporary show of affection

as he refers to her as a fluffy cat he continues: "But you'd better keep your claws in or I'll drop you right into the Hudson River" (Paley 44). This is a terrible image to give one's child. Again, when Anna requests him to take Judy for the weekend, he sighs in bitterness and exclaims: "Come in peace, go in peace. Of course I'll take her. I like her. She's my kid" (Paley 44). Responsibility as a father is not a matter of whether the child is likeable or not. That he does not care about Judy much and considers her an obstacle to his self-fulfillment is clear from his proposition to Anna: "Let's ditch the kid. I'm not your enemy" (Paley 45). At the end of the story as an obvious indication of his callous attitude towards socially acceptable behavior and preference for impulsivity, he leaves Anna guilt-ridden, in doubt, and in tears as he himself happily, "in full control" cartwheels into the night (Paley 52).

From the analysis above, clearly the characteristics displayed through Peter's character weave a portrait of the type of man who controls the world around him through mechanisms of the dark triad. These devices leave him insensitive to others' needs as he "swirls" his way through life, leaving the pressure of responsibility and taking advantage of those who, entrapped by the illusory image of happiness he portrays through sensory marketing, are willing to sacrifice their time and agency to build up his ego.

Sensory Marketing

Aradhna Krishna defines sensory marketing as "marketing that engages the consumer's senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior" (2). From the beginning of the short story in question, Peter is marketing his self and newly adopted lifestyle in a way that enwraps Anna in the false narrative of his sense of self. Bertil Hultén identifies three personal driving forces through which, "as a lifestyle, individualization expresses the culture and zeitgeist of contemporary society" (261). He continues his description of those forces in the same section of his essay as follows:

The first one, image building, is linked to the consumption of brands and experiences, which give individuals an opportunity to create their own unique identity and image. ... (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

The second one, self-fulfillment, is linked to quality of life and welfare, in terms of changing consumption patterns. ... The transition from low-value to high-value service activities emphasizes the importance of the personal value of the experience, and service-related time use emphasizes the self and self-fulfillment (Gershuny, 2000).

The third one, sensory experience, is linked to an individual's striving for identity and image, as well as for self-fulfillment. In this regard, individualization is dependent on cognitive, emotional and value-based elements, which explain why most individuals should be seen as active, participative, and creative actors. ... (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2000). (cited in Hultén 261)

As mentioned in the extract above, a lifestyle is made to appeal to an individual through image building, self-fulfillment, and sensory experience. In this case, Anna, under the influence of the sensory marketing of Peter's projected image, makes love to him even though

she is no longer his wife and she has already married someone else. After this unexpected act she is in tears as she tries to justify her actions to Peter as well as to herself while, on the other hand, Peter, ego-satisfied by her confession that she “did it for love,” blames her and then happily leaves the apartment. Such narratives are distressing, considering the fact that the feminist movement was meant to raise the self-esteem of women and free them from life decisions that would induce a guilt-ridden existence.

Desire and Female Sexuality

With its roots in the philosophical ideas of Plato, where desire is seen as an imaginative yearning for something that one does not have, desire as lack has been linked to understanding the development of the self through the writings of many including the prominent psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In its simplest form, it can be said that in his “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I,” he discusses the fulfillment of the desire to be as having its basis in reference to an external image (the mirror image as I or not I). From this concept, Graeber generalizes the object of desire as always being an image of perfection, an imaginary completion for one’s ruptured self (*Anthropological* 257-258). Thus, desire is distinguished “from needs, urges or intentions” because “desire a) is always rooted in imagination and b) tends to direct itself toward some kind of social relation, and that social relation entails a desire for some kind of recognition” (Graeber, “Consumption” 494).

In 1920s America, a recognizable shift in subjectivity occurred as desire or rather the creation of it became a fundamental aspect of the self. Kathy L. Peiss documents an interesting aspect of desire in the socio-economic atmosphere in America in her essay “American Women and the Making of Modern Consumer Culture.” According to Peiss, “Modern American consumer culture arose after 1890 as an outcome of a synergy of economic and cultural forces. ... the modern ad agency promised to create a national market of consumers, indeed, to systematize desire.” Her claim that consumer culture aimed to “systematize desire” implies that desire can be created and manipulated in accordance with the type of consumption consumer culture would encourage. As consumerism flourished there was a growing sense that consumption involved not only the purchase of goods but an entire way of life. Peiss continues, the woman consumer was stereotyped as being “emotional and impulsive,” and being driven by “inarticulate longings” and “dormant desires.” They could be thus easily manipulated into making decisions that may even go against their self-interest. She further points out that the making of the female into voyeuristic pleasure objects was not and is not limited to male manipulation. Female advertisers are also “easily submerged in the celebration of female beauty,” found it to be “an end in itself” and “conventional notions of women—in terms of beauty, frivolity, and romance—resurfaced.” Feminists found themselves caught in contradictory impulses. Profound insecurities regarding the beauty of the average woman lead her to feel insignificant and out of fashion if somehow lacking in the latest craze in clothes, cosmetics, and accessories. Thereby, influenced by a consumer culture and images of consumption, individuals are encouraged to view themselves as desiring subjects that cannot live without pleasure, entertainment, acquisition, and euphoria. Individuals in such a consumer culture that forsakes positive moral undertones allow themselves to be manipulated in self-destructive ways.

As desire took center stage, self-control was replaced with self-gratification. Emilio and Freedman aptly observe that, "An ethic that encouraged the purchase of consumer products also fostered an acceptance of pleasure, self-gratification, and personal satisfaction, a perspective easily translated to the province of sex (234). This change in socio-cultural values affects the moral aspects of the American worldview. Psychologically drawn to the fantasy of the constructed body-image, both women and men yearn for bodily perfection that will evoke sexual responses. Interestingly, the simulated image becomes more real than real and ultimately displaces true identity. As a result, subjects in a consumer society feel psychologically and emotionally insecure when comparing their physical properties to these impossible-to-attain images. It is out of this insecurity and feeling of dissatisfaction that consumerism creates dependency on products outside the self. In the case of Anna, this dependency manifests itself in her need to be acknowledged by Peter as an object of desire.

The first description that the reader gets of Peter as compared to Anna is, "A year ago, in plain view, Anna had begun to decline into withering years, just as he swelled to the maximum of manhood, spitting pipe smoke, patched with tweed, an advertisement of a lover who startled men and detained the ladies" (Paley 43). This could be read as an indication that women in a marriage are usually pulled into a world of responsibility and self-denial in comparison to men who bloom into adulthood and yet retain their adolescent personalities. For such men, profusely appearing in Paley's stories, it is ok to be so – because women like Anna still admire and find something to love about their personalities.

Anna, in Paley's "The Pale Pink Roast," represents the paradoxical situation "modern" women were in. She is gradually aroused by Peter's physique and from the moment she sees him his appearance becomes a source of sexual excitement. Mary Colleen Ubel quite rightly comments on the effect of visual cues on Paley's women, "This physical weakness for men is common to Paley's women. Both Ginny and Faith are drawn to their husbands' physical attractiveness" (16). What Anna feels and acknowledges with a passing remark – "Peter, you're the one who really looks wonderful. You look just—well—healthy" (Paley 47) – Ginny openly declares, "Once I met my husband with his winking looks, he was my only interest" (Paley 93). Like Ginny and Faith, Anna is absorbed in the image of perfection Peter displays. When Peter takes off his shirt she cannot but admire his physique. She succumbs to his sexual appeal.

But as she stares at Peter, she thinks of what she had read somewhere, i.e., "cannibals, tasting man, saw him thereafter as the great pig, the pale pink roast" (Paley 48). Anna, like most other female characters in Paley's short story collections, swings between admiration and disgust in her attitude towards men. She attempts to deny and suppress the desire she feels for Peter by objectifying him as a "pale pink roast"(48). On the one hand, this signifies her attempt to deny the high level of attraction that she feels towards him. On the other hand, this cannibalistic image shows her wish to consume him. In an attempt to establish agency she mentally conjures up the image of the "pale pink roast." Interesting to note at this point is Graeber's observation about food consumption, "Eating is indeed the

perfect idiom for destroying something while literally incorporating it” (“Consumption” 505). So, symbolically, Anna’s image of Peter is one that reflects her urge to destroy and yet incorporate him. Thereby, she equates the image of cannibalism with her carnal desire and the equivocal meaning presented by the metaphor of the pale pink roast exposes the contradiction she feels within herself.

Peter is like a model “for an advertisement of a lover” (Paley 43). His sensory marketing of himself affects Anna because it creates subconscious triggers that redefine her perceptions of him. The simulated image of him as a changed man deceives her into believing that Peter could be a new and changed version of himself, despite all that she knows to be true about him. Judging from Peter’s flirtatious and carefree nature, and the fact that he unhesitatingly leaves his child, Judy, with a girl who apparently helped him take care of her the year Anne was working, even though he was meeting his daughter after quite a long time, clearly suggests the role he plays as a father is not exactly perfect. Thus, the question to be asked is: why did Anna expose herself to such meanness and allow a sexual event to take place despite knowing that Peter was an egocentric, selfish playboy? If Anna was bold enough to go through with a divorce, why did she subject herself to the degrading accusation, by Peter, of seducing him?

You’re great, Anna. Man, you’re great. You wiggle your ass. You make a donkey out of me and him both. You could’ve said no. (Paley 51)

Though the sexual act was initiated by Peter, with Anna giving in to his direct and indirect advances, he easily lays full blame on Anna for the events that lead to the situation. The reader too asks, why indeed, did she not say no to Peter whom she already knows is unwilling to shoulder the responsibility of a sincere relationship? Peter’s intentions are obvious from his comment, “You know, we could have had some pretty good times together every now and then if you weren’t so damn resentful” (Paley 51). Peter’s words reveal his inherent tendency to exploit Anna and escape responsibility especially through the phrases “every now and then” as he accuses her of being resentful and unwilling to have “some pretty good times.”

Peter praises Anna’s choice in pricey clothes, her salon fixed hair, “classy tv,” and “fabulous desk” (Paley 51). His attraction towards her is not because of any genuine emotion or care. All that he mentions is superficial items: clothes, hair, and furniture. What is obvious here is that Anna does not matter to him as his ex-wife, the mother of his child, or even as a human being. To him she is just another opportunity to satisfy his male ego.

For Anna, the attraction she feels is not at all related to ego satisfaction. Anna’s desire for Peter is fueled by his sensory marketing of his self and carefree lifestyle that feeds on Anna’s insecurities derived from womanhood bound by responsibilities which make her feel less a subject of adoration and more a subject bound by responsibilities towards others. Noticeable here is that her present husband is also absent (as he is building up his business) and here too she has already started defending him. In her words, “He’s a lovely person. He’s moving his business. It takes time. Peter, please. He’ll be here in a couple of days

(Paley 51). Yet, interestingly, there seems to be an emotional distance between Anna and her present husband. To feel wanted and secure she needs the approval of a man and even a man as unreliable as Peter will do.

Evidently, though she has divorced Peter, she still has not been able to fully let go. She succumbs to his advances. We are told that Peter suddenly kisses her "(l)ike a good and happy man increasing his virtue" and as he "tipped her chin to look and measure opportunity," he notices that she did not move away from him. Remaining in the "embrace of his right arm, her face nuzzling his shoulder, her eyes remained closed." She was seemingly transported to an alternate reality, into Peter's sensual world, for "she could not open her eyes" (Paley 50). Peter took this as a positive sign to advance:

She was faint and leaden, a sure sign in Anna, if he remembered correctly, of passion. "Shall we dance?" he asked softly, a family joke. (Paley 50)

Anna's ontological reality is momentarily disrupted. Her closed eyes consume time and space, allowing Peter to transport her to a time before they were separated, a time when a common joke could be mutually understood. Taken out of context, this may seem like a romantic gesture of fondness but Peter is there for the fulfillment of his own desire. And, as easily as he temporarily steps back into Anna's life, he inevitably will remove himself again.

Anna realizes her own weakness towards Peter's appearance and gestures. So, from the very beginning of the story, we find her struggling to retain composure. This struggle within her finds expression in the bitterness and sarcasm she initially shows towards him. There is a trail of sarcastic comments. For example, she refers to him as "Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater" (Paley 48), which indirectly suggests the second line of this nursery rhyme: "had a wife and couldn't keep her." As such, she seems to experience what, according to Thapan is the feeling of "an unfulfilled femininity" which "women who have terminated a relationship perceive in themselves" (WS77). From a set of case studies of divorced women in India, Thapan also argues that women "experience the cynicism and bitterness that is part of a deteriorating or terminated marital relationship" (WS77). Interestingly, Anna is shown to experience the same as is revealed by her ironically sarcastic remark that she did indeed call Peter to become her lover and Peter's exclamatory response that she should not be so bitter.

When he accuses her of cheating on her husband, Anna is in tears. Peter responds coldly, placing all the responsibility and shame on her shoulders. It is only when she surrenders to his accusations and says she did it for "love" that he "smiled. He was embarrassed but happy" (Paley 51-52). He realizes he is in full control of her emotions and the situation and, thus, one of his parting comments is, "Oh, Anna, then good night, You're a good kid" (Paley 52). To him, she is just a "kid," not a woman!

In Anna's character portrayal, the reader notices a sense of self that is confused, contradictory, self-victimizing, and self-destructive. Anna is in torment both emotionally and psychologically because of a lapse of judgment on her part. By giving in to her sexual fantasy she has put herself in an uncertain situation. Indications that this momentary sexual encounter with Peter will inevitably lead her to deceive her present husband with

lies and destroy her own peace are obvious in the tears she is already shedding. All of the misgivings and helplessness are present because she looks for self-worth not in her own self but standards that depend on the opinion of someone from outside her self. She is not able to let go of the fantasy of being wanted and appreciated by a man.

Apparently, Anna is so fascinated by the image of power and carefree indulgence that Peter shows that she is deluded into thinking that by making him happy she will be fulfilled too. She is willing to forget what she knows about him and submit to his physical charm. She forgets that her past experience with Peter must not have been perfect or it would not have ended in divorce. Consequently, she is in denial about the fact that the stability she opted for in her present husband comes with its own price. Stability in a relationship comes with a strong sense of responsibility towards all those involved. She is so engrossed with the image Peter projects that she forgets that recklessness, spontaneity, carefree living, and disregard for consequences and social norms is not part of the equation for the stable family life that Anna so desperately desires.

Like Paley's other women, Anna has not been able to rise above her fear of falling short of expectations, her need to please, her need of validation and approval by men, in this case, Peter, thereby letting power and control fall into his hands. As a woman, Anna is unable to rise above thinking of herself as an object of consumption which exists for the satisfaction of others and, therefore, commits herself to a sexual affair which she later regrets. The fact that she wants to know how good she made Peter feel: "Did you have a real good time, Petey?" (Paley 50) makes it evident that, although she is a modern woman, her mind is still colonized by patriarchy and the expectations weighing her down. The psychological bearing of comparing and weighing one's value against unreachable imaginary standards raises a sense of doubt and dissatisfaction which, in turn, creates stress and anxiety in relation to one's subjectivity. The same is noticed as Anna, against her better judgment and her past experience with Peter, is immersed in the image he projects. Matched with his good looks is his projected image of confidence, certainty, control, and of course, his verbal admission of how he has changed: "I mean it's not egocentric and selfish, the way I used to be" (Paley 47). Anna is transported into Peter's self-narrative. In the case of such transportation, "while the person is immersed in the story, he or she may be less aware of real-world facts that contradict assertions made in the narrative" (Green and Brock 702). Against her better judgment, Anna plays into Peter's arms just as he expects her to.

Another possible explanation as to why Anna allowed herself to be pulled into a sexual act which she later regrets may lie in a claim made by Gerald Zaltman who claims that sensory cues are "hardwired into the brain's limbic system, the seat of emotions, and stimulate vivid recollections (177). Anna easily responds to Peter's self-narrative because this romantic side of him is familiar to her. They must have been in love at one time, otherwise there would have been no marriage or child, especially in the context of the then America. Fond memories accompanying her experience of life together would obviously play a role in her reaction towards his advances. Thus, instead of using her thought and reason as the basis of morality and behavior, she bases her actions and submissiveness to his sexual appeal on

the assumptive and imaginary bias of her emotional response.

Conclusion

The discussion above reveals how Paley's short stories gently advance her political agenda of raising awareness as each story she writes questions prevailing gender relations. Her stories collide with life head on. The perspectives she shows bring out realities that reveal the psychological and emotional worlds of women who are conflicted in their dealings with men. Paley was one of those women. Through her writing she was revealing authentic feelings of helplessness. She was, "the recovering daddy's girl who had always pleased men and been pleased by them" (Arcana 205). Anna's struggle was her struggle too. From her own experience she realized how much the feminist movement was suffering because of women being unable to hold on to their focus in such matters by submitting to sexual manipulation that find ground in insecurities that flourish in a commodified, consumer culture.

Paley's portrayals of dominating male characters, such as Peter whose personality reflects traits of the dark triad, also work as critiques of patriarchy. Even though men have been portrayed in such a negative light, Paley has never been criticized by men for her writing, neither have men been defensive in reading her stories. Judith Arcana gives a reason for this in the words of Paley's brother Victor. In his view, Paley is not a feminist. The women she portrays are "sad sacks" who have no direction in life: "They're getting kicked around by men. They seem to be making the same mistakes over and over again. One man leaves them and they move in with another man" (Arcana 213).

Such character-portrayals of men and women cut both ways: against men as power entitled beings governed by the dark triad who convincingly and powerfully apply sensory marketing through which they project themselves as desirable and fully in control (especially in their public dealings and social relations) yet somehow are able to escape corresponding responsibilities without any guilt or concern; and, also against women who are easily influenced by those types of personalities and, therefore, participate in their own victimization.

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