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A Study of The Neurotic Personality Traits and Criminal Behavior in Patricia Highsmith's *Deep Water*

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the complex relationship between neurotic personality traits and criminal behavior as illustrated in *Deep Water*. It examines the protagonist, Vic Van Allen, and his descent into criminality using the social psychological framework of Karen Horney's Theory of Neurotic Personality (1950). Such examination analyzes how his deep insecurities, heightened anxiety, paranoia, and pathological relationship gradually contribute to his involvement in criminological acts. Additionally, it sheds light on how negative external factors and social constraints increase his internal conflicts and trigger his criminological behavior. Amidst these complexities, the protagonist struggles to maintain a façade of self-esteem and an illusion of an ideal suburban life in America, navigating the slight balance between social acceptance and deviant behavior. This study reveals the complex relationship between the neurotic traits and criminal behavior in both literary portrayals and real-world contexts by examining the protagonist's involvement in criminal activities within the framework of marital relations and social interactions.

Keywords: Murder, Criminal behavior, Neurotic, Crime fiction, Self-image.

Criminality in Deep Water

The German psychologist Karen Horney, in her book “The Neurotic Personality of Our Time,” examines neurotic individuals and identifies the primary disruption as character deformations. Horney explains that this deformation is the outcome of a gradual and persistent process, typically beginning in childhood, and affecting different aspects of the personality to varying degrees of intensity (1999a, pp. 30-31). Neurosis refers to a psychological disorder in which fear and worry lead to disturbances in one’s personality, accompanied by defensive mechanisms. She says that the child’s surroundings and parental relationships significantly influence the formation of their personality and the development of their attitudes and behaviors. Exposure to a hostile environment throughout childhood might lead to the emergence of neurotic tendencies in an individual. All the negative factors that provoke insecurity within a child in this environment are “basic evil” (p.80), such as lack of affection, disrespect, frustration, and disapproval. All this indicates that the person will have “basic anxiety”, which refers to the feeling of isolation and powerlessness caused by overwhelming threats in a hostile environment (Horney, 2001, p.41).

Deep Water explores the complex dynamics of Vic’s character and his marriage, exposing him as a neurotic individual in the American society of the 1950s. Carl Jung says that the absence of adequate emotional parenting during a specific developmental stage might serve as the foundation for psychological disorders in an individual, like “anxiety disorders and various character disorders” (Papadopoulos, 2006, p.201). The absence of adequate containment of the child destroys the protection walls the individual constructs to protect himself in the early stages therefore it will be susceptible to have personality disorders. The child will grow up to be insecure and threatened. In order to achieve autonomy and ensure self-protection, the child develops primitive and exaggerated self-defense mechanisms. It results in negative outcomes like social isolation and more difficult functionality in future relationships.

The behavior of adults is closely linked to their upbringing throughout childhood. However, the protagonist's father "had gone through the presence of working all his life... earning a living which he did not need" and was "an extremely polite man, burdened by his sense of financial superiority" (Highsmith, 2003, p.164). The family enjoys a favorable social standing and possesses the means to offer a child a pleasant standard of living. Nevertheless, this parent cannot comprehend the child's psychological requirements. Vic's father lacks understanding of his son's anxiety and fear.

At the age of ten, Vic was on a trip to Europe with his parents. He was frightened by a storm:

The storm had come, advancing over the mountains, which themselves had looked ominously close and black, like an insuperable dark giant of unknown dimensions. And the trees silhouetted on the mountain tops had bent this way and that, as if tortured by the crazy, brooding wind or as if trying to uproot themselves to flee from it. (p.164)

While the father felt excited by the storm, Vic was completely terrified by the thunderous sound of the storm and its darkness that engulfed the entire hotel room. Vic's sudden retreat to the opposite end of the room made his father astonished and disappointed in him. His father forced him to confront the window, yet he was unable to overcome his intense fear of the sight of "lashing trees" (p.165).

Children who live in a hostile environment cannot develop a healthy self-image. Having psychologically unstable parents leads to the development of fundamental hostility and anxiety. The parents abuse the child verbally or physically. They do not provide adequate psychological care for the child. They do not respect their children. They blame them and do not fulfill their promises to their children. Such behaviors cause the child to feel insecure and vulnerable. The child's hostility arises from frustration, fear, and anger. The child is afraid of his parents' abandonment and their apathy. Protesting against a family or one of the parents may not be helpful for the child, particularly if it is directed against a parent with neurotic tendencies. The danger lies not in the confrontation but in repressing it.

Instead of sheltering Vic from his fear, his father wants him to face it. Vic's father is a sadistic man. He subjects his son to emotional abuse. And it "is a component of all forms of abuse" (Sajem & Khalifa, 2011, p.23). This depicts Vic as a casualty of an autocratic environment. His authoritarian father seeks to shape and control his son's behavior and attitude to conform with his behavioral norms. This affected the child's ability to establish self-autonomy. Vic developed a neurotic and fragmented personality, as a result of his father's criticism and humiliation. He suffers from "unseen wound" (Shaalán, 2020, p.113). Karpman (1956) states that neurosis arises from a conflict between instinctive motives and social pressures, and the neurotic person is "a cryptic criminal, whose neurosis [is] a method of protecting himself ... and that the unconscious mental life of neurotics [is] thoroughly tinged with criminality" (p.8). Vic suppresses his hostility towards his father and sets in motion a cycle of anxiety that will stay within him until adulthood. The total eradication of the self in childhood will cause him to have fragile and threatened self-respect and self-esteem. According to Ivimey (1950), the neurotic symptoms and feelings in childhood and adulthood are not identical in the individual's life. This distinction arises due to the fact that the adult world is bigger, and characterized by heightened standards and dynamics in relationships and social interactions. Therefore, the level of hostility is significantly intensified. The emotions experienced by neurotic adults are intense and frightening because of their neurotic tendencies. Aggression has a dual effect on both the person and the society. The progression of neurotic development will ultimately result in self-loathing and self-destruction (p.41).

Vic, a thirty-six-year-old man, resides in Little Wesley, Massachusetts, with his wife Melinda and their six-year-old daughter Trixie. Vic is wealthy. He receives an income advantage due to his family's inherited line. However, he runs Greenspur Press in his hometown. Their marital relationship is deteriorating, and their daughter serves as a link. They are not willing to pursue a divorce to avoid its messiness. Vic adopts a calm attitude, whereas Melinda has a low "self-management" (Tukmagi & Moussa, 2017, p.100). She engages in promiscuous behavior. She openly engages in multiple romantic relationships. She starts a sequence of multiple extramarital affairs. Instead of confronting her, Vic copes with her behavior in an abnormal, unconventional way. As she continues to be unfaithful, Vic's

anxiety escalates both psychologically and socially, leading to his neurotic behavior. Their partnership evolves into a “symbiotic relationship” (Mawer, 2004, p.119). It seems their marriage is based on mutual benefit or advantage. He married her to attain idealness, while Melinda married a financially steady figure.

There are certain needs that every individual needs to develop a normal personality. Horney refers to them as the “neurotic trends” (Horney, 1999b, p.38). These trends are rooted in and developed during childhood due to environmental influence. They are very essential to the neurotic person. Besides all the conflicts and the factors that develop within the person’s character, they are the only way for a neurotic person to cope with life. When these trends are realized, they provide security and stability to the neurotic person.

In her book *Self-Analysis*, Horney identifies certain needs for the neurotic individuals. Failing to satisfy these needs within the neurotic individuals’ environment will worsen their anxiety, leading to a further escalation in hostility and aggression. The needs are highly important to the neurotic, for they will provide him/her stability and demolish any sense of humiliation and inferiority. The first one is “the neurotic need for affection and approval” (1999b, p.54). It is an essential need to be liked and approved and to be accepted by others. The second one is “the neurotic need for a ‘partner’ who will take over one’s life” (p.55). The necessity for a company is crucial, as it reduces the feeling of isolation and the burdens of life, both in times of prosperity and adversity. The neurotic individual requires their partner to prioritize his/her attention and focus on them. Love can resolve all the problems and heal the emotional injuries from his/her childhood. The third one is “the neurotic need for power” (p.56). It has emerged from the fear of helplessness to be in an uncontrollable situation, so he/she exploits and dominates others. The fourth one is “the neurotic need for social recognition or prestige” (p.58), which comes from the fear of social embarrassment and humiliation. The fifth one is “the neurotic need for personal admiration” (p.58). He/she needs to be admired and recognized by others for his/her self-image, the artificial-idealized self he creates. The sixth one is “the neurotic need for perfection” (p.59) to cover self-imperfection and its flaws, fearing to make mistakes, and to be criticized by others. These

needs are very important for the neurotic individual to develop a stable personality. The needs work as a shield against neurotic fears. They provide him/her with a sense of security and protection among others.

Vic met Melinda when she was twenty-two. Vic married her for she “had been odd...or he never would have married her” (Highsmith, 2003, p.29). Vic loved the idea of her untamed nature, and he fell in love with the idea of her, “she had had a certain iconoclasm and imagination in her rebellion that had attracted Vic because it was like his own” (p.29). Vic’s childhood portrays him as being vulnerable to his sadistic father in an authoritarian family. This transformed him into a submissive and masochistic person. Melinda’s promiscuous relationships threaten Vic’s marriage and his needs. Vic’s relationship with Melinda is not simply a marriage or a feeble relationship, but he has developed a unique bond with her. Vic values her for how he imagined her to be when he met her as an odd person like him. Her wildness is what attracted Vic to her. Vic comes to the realization that his spouse is not his soulmate after being married for several years. He cannot separate from her because of the neurotic need for a partner. Moreover, Melinda becomes an extension of Vic’s existence.

Vic’s relationship with Melinda extends beyond the boundaries of romance. His need to have an amplified self-image and to have control over his environment and others is realized through his relationship with Melinda. He chooses to marry someone beneath him in social class. She is a basic product of a “dreary, boring household in Queens” (p.120). He consciously selects her. She is immature and uneducated, looking at Vic’s social class with disdain. His selection stems from the need to be superior to someone underneath him. Melinda is uncomfortable with people who share Vic’s background, like The Mellers. In gatherings, her “buried inferiority would come to the surface, and she would be nervous and unsure of herself” (p.153). He also observes that Melinda does not show any restrictions in her behavior with the lovers she chooses, as they are closer to her social class. Their relationship has been unequal since the beginning because of their background. However, the inferiority that is represented in Melinda becomes essential to fulfill Vic’s desire for superiority. Being the superior in the relationship eliminates the chance of being humiliated. Furthermore, he needs this sense of superiority to demolish the childhood humiliation

inflicted upon him by his father. She serves as a source of his self-assurance but also a possession; “he wanted her to himself” (p.143).

Their marriage continues to be a symbiotic relationship under certain arrangements. While Melinda uses the house for many purposes, including sleeping, Vic occupies a separate room that is located outside the home and can only be accessed through the garage. He lives in isolation. Even his workspace is outside the house in a room he built in the garage. Vic uses this space for work, hobby practice, and experimenting with animals and herbs. He stores his tools, plants, snail aquaria, and bedbugs in it. In his room, he lives intimately with the things that interest him more. The room contains essential items such as a microscope, books, a bed, and a closet. Self-control seems complete at first. Abnormally, he can control his sleeping and his waking up by will. He has full control over his environment and his daily routines. He maintains total control when he deals with people. The scope of control expands to include his own emotions and reactions. Their residence reflects their personalities and their mental and emotional states. His room is tidy, whereas her room is consistently disorganized. Blankets and clothes are scattered on the floor and bed. She is a “chaotic” character (Taha, 2008, p,7). They are incompatible couples. She regards her husband’s interests as strange, boring, and ridiculous. Similar to Melinda, Vic perceives the things that interest her as trivial. She had a passion for dancing, but “he did not dance simply because his wife liked to dance...she was insufferably silly when she danced. She made dancing embarrassing” (p.13).

Melinda’s relationships with other men are her way of humiliating Vic. And now he thinks “of the trees quite often” (p.165). As an adult, anytime the sensation of shame is triggered, Vic recalls this particular image from his childhood memories, which is labeled in his mind as the image of humiliation. This feeling provokes the unconscious image of the sadistic father, the humiliated and frightened child, and fear and anxiety. This displays his insecurities and threatens his self-image. It places him in a humiliating situation with both his father and his wife. Furthermore, this evidence indicates that Vic is unable to escape the oppressive and authoritarian environment of his childhood. He carried the psychological burden throughout his life. However, he becomes submissive to his sadistic

wife, tolerating her behaviors and illicit affairs to protect his sense of self-identity.

Vic shares certain character's attitudes with his father. According to Anne Freud (2018), the child impersonates his abuser by "assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat" (p.121). In order to escape the cycle of helplessness, the vulnerable individual adopts the attributes of their oppressor, creating a superficial character of control and power. Vic adopts his father's external attitude and uses it to acquire autonomy of self-representation. Similar to his father, Vic "usually [tries] to do the right thing in the community" (Highsmith, 2003, p.183). Vic rescues old Carlyle, a sixty-year-old man, from the streets of little Wesley. He offers him employment in his printing press and provides him with sufficient pay to afford a room and live comfortably. Vic feels a sense of fulfillment in knowing that he played a role in improving Carlyle's life by providing a higher quality of life. He gives him a purpose when no one else would have hired him. In addition, he assists Mrs. Podnansky, a widow, with the maintenance of her lawnmowers. He gives Stephen, his assistant a big raise and becomes his best man at his wedding. He helps acquire and fund his residence.

Vic typically shows indifference towards financial matters. He and his father inherit wealth. Furthermore, he perceives himself as being burdened by the money he has inherited. He acknowledges the importance of granting others the right to earn an income. He does not share Melinda's contemptuous attitude towards their less fortunate friends. Despite his financial prosperity, Vic drives an old-fashioned vehicle, described as "an old, well-kept Oldsmobile that was an eye-catcher anyway in a community where most people had much newer cars" (p.46). Vic is an individual who actively seeks attention, as evidenced by his activities, attitudes, and thoughts, which consistently draw attention to him. He publishes eccentric books that have a limited audience to buy. The press operates by using old-fashioned press technology. He receives ten pages every five days due to the slow speeds of the printing process. He is proud to be odd and non-conformist in his community, as everyone else strives to comply.

Vic believes that no man should divorce his wife, as it would lessen the man's responsibility. But it is the wife's right to divorce her husband. Additionally, he wants to prove to the psychiatrist that he is mistaken. Vic looks at it as a challenge, and he meets his criticism with denial and defiance. "He would show the psychiatrist and the world that the situation was not intolerable and that there would be no divorce. Neither was he going to be miserable" (p.31). He wants to prove to him that even though their relationship is in disharmony, Melinda will eventually come over her whim. His perception is very strange and liberal to little Wesley's conservative "ideal society" (Ismael, 2017, p. 62). His tolerance of his wife's affairs gains him a reputation to be "a saint like patience and forbearance which in turn flattered Vic's ego" (p.28).

According to Horney, as a neurotic person, Vic creates "the idealized image" (2001, p.96) for himself. This idealization is driven by the neurotic trends that become a dominant aspect of Vic's neurotic personality. His need for approval and acceptance in his society led him to be a perfectionist. The process of idealization requires "repressing certain aspects of the personality and bringing their opposites to the fore" (p.96). This image causes a detachment from reality and one's real self. The image is fundamentally unrealistic. It gives the person a character quality that he does not have. The actual self does not align with the idealized self. Its function is a self-defense mechanism to conceal the vulnerability and the fragility of the real self. This leads to the alienation of the real self, causing self-hate to his real self. Vic creates the ideal self unconsciously. Being ideal holds great significance to his neuroses; it grants him the acceptance and the approval of his community, as his real self is denied and disapproved by his father. Besides his social contributions, he is careful to prove his existence in a conventional way in his community. He attended every party and club dance in his town. He denies seeking "the approval of the community or particularly craved it, but it's awfully nice to know it's there" (Highsmith, 2003, p.247).

Highsmith portrays her protagonist as a loving parent, faithful spouse, and ambitious businessman. He actively supports and contributes to his suburban community. However, beneath this perfect citizen facade, Vic is a narcissistic and anti-social person. He falls to his dark side, losing his moral compass. His sense of superiority is fed by his generosity. His

devotion to supreme things reveals his contempt for everybody else. He dehumanizes the others; Melinda's boyfriends. He resembles Ralph as "a male insect" (p.33). During a conversation beside the swimming pool, Vic responds to Charley "as a snobbish club member might use to a nonmember" (p.98). Vic addresses Cameron with a tone usually used when speaking to a child. He uses this attitude not just with Melinda's lovers but also with law enforcement staff. When the police officers arrest him, he does not see them as efficiently fit to clean his boots. He also regards Don Wilson, who assisted Melinda in proving Vic's offenses, as "half the people on earth... The ugly birds without wings" (p.271). He even dehumanizes his wife:

He sat beside her on the sofa and fed them to her in small amounts on a fork. Every time the fork approached; she opened her mouth obediently. Her eyes, staring at him all the while, had the look of a wild animal who trusts the human food-bringer just barely enough to accept the food at arm's length, and then only if there is nothing in sight that resembles a trap and if every movement of the food-bringer is slow and gentle. (p.41)

Vic gets self-satisfaction by dehumanizing others. The projection of his inner inferiority onto others is manifested through the use of animalistic imagery. In this way, he can tolerate his wife's rejection of him, favoring lesser people to him. It also grants him guiltless crimes with the absence of conscience toward killing them. On the contrary, Vic's sense of grandiosity depicts himself in his imagination like the French Monarch, King Henri III of France who, after the death of his wife grieves for her in the library, reminiscing about their time together. During the Cowan's costume party, he chooses to dress up as the Roman Emperor Tiberius. These characters were monarchs who governed vast empires across several historical periods. They are powerful elites. This representation illustrates Vic's self-perception of himself and how he wants others to see him. He feels insulted by the fact that Melinda chooses guys who are intellectually and socially inferior to him, showing them more preference.

Melinda's conduct at the Mellers' party causes Vic a feeling of shame, like her dancing with another man, Joel Nash, a salesman for the Furness-Klein Chemical Company. He observes their bodies tightly

intertwined, with his head buried in his wife's hair. That evening, Vic engages in conversation with him. Nash confronts Vic, deliberately provoking him with his words:

I want to say what a brick I think you are for being so nice about my seeing your wife ... a lot of men would have knocked my block off for less... I wanted to say I think you're awfully sporting. (p.17)

Vic gets affected by Nash's disrespectful words but with a dead calm attitude, stating, " 'I don't waste my time punching people on the nose. If I really don't like somebody, I kill him' " (p.17). The reply is enough to confuse Nash. Moreover, Vic deceitfully fabricates committing a crime. Vic informs him about the homicide of Melinda's former lover, Malcolm McRae. The murder is a mystery, as the killer remains unidentified. In fact, Vic did not commit this crime. However, this deception benefits Vic entirely, achieving the desired result. He will be given additional respect inside his patriarchal society. And Vic has frightened the current lover. He now feels overwhelmed with fear at the chance of experiencing the same unfortunate fate as McRae if he continues to have affairs with his wife. That very evening, Nash departs from the celebration in a state of astonishment, and he permanently abandons Melinda. Vic makes use of this lie as a means of protest against Melinda, resulting in being victorious when Nash leaves.

Vic relies on the power of his imagination. To provide credibility to the threat, he narrates a detailed crime to Nash. He finds it suitable that the murder was committed by a jealous husband. The murder enhances his status as a man both psychologically and socially. However, Vic never views his emotions in a conventional manner. He suppresses any indication of vulnerability. Vic must not only maintain control over his environment but also control his emotions. The revelations of Melinda's affairs caused him serious anxiety. This creates a huge internal conflict within Vic. As the anxiety is intensified within him, his actions become increasingly hostile. Melinda's behavior towards other men in public forces Vic to experience enormous anxiety and stress. Horney (2001) says that individuals develop a means of defense against anxieties. She identifies three ways to function in a stressful environment. The ways would be moving "toward people, against them, or away from them" (p.43).

Any normal individual may successfully use all three of these strategies to handle various situations based on their particular needs. However, in a neurotic personality, one of these strategies becomes dominant while the others are suppressed. The repressed behaviors linger within the neurotic unconscious, creating “basic conflict” (p.35). Due to social and psychological pressure, Vic moves against people. He becomes aggressive and hostile as a means of self-protection in response to his destructive environment. Vic commits a series of homicides, ending in the murder of his wife.

Melinda is used to maneuver invitations of her boyfriends to the community parties. When she and her husband attend as a married couple, the boyfriend accompanies them as the third partner in this relationship. She ignores Vic and devotes her entire time to the third companion she invites along. The reason for his tolerance of her is rooted in his liberal beliefs of 1950s America. She puts him in a challenging situation, but surprisingly, they embrace the fractured relationship pathologically. The couple does not have traditional gender roles; instead, they have reversed roles. In her article, “Patriotic Perversions,” Hesford (2005) describes Vic as “a maid” (p.223). The domestic environment amplifies men’s masculinity by offering a platform to be the family’s leader. It also helps men realize the objectives of patriarchy. Vic does not represent traditional forms of masculinity. Melinda neglects her maternal obligation towards their daughter but shows it to strangers in distress. So, Vic carries out her role by cooking meals for both the family and the guests. Regularly, he cleans and vacuums the house while she is out walking in the town and socializing with a few female acquaintances, but more frequently engaging in activities with her male lovers. Their role shifts show that Vic portrays the feminine aspect of the relationship while she is the masculine one. Furthermore, it reveals that he takes a submissive position while she performs a dominant role within their marriage.

Criticism regarding his indifference to Melinda’s attitude begins to rise. Horace Meller, Vic’s friend, avoids directly criticizing Vic out of consideration for his feelings. However, Horace frequently advises Vic to “put his foot down about Melinda” (Highsmith, 2003, p.25). Horace wants Vic to take action from a masculine perspective. When the rumor about

McRae's murder starts spreading, he thought it is dangerous but accepted. Horace stands for any deterrent action from Vic to " 'straighten Melinda out'. 'I've always said all Melinda needed to straighten herself out was a little firmness from ...Vic' " (p.49). Horace represents the whole of social convictions. Therefore, he reflects the perception of the community toward their relationship. However, Vic admired being an exception in such a domestic society. The criticism evokes a strong emotional response in him. He cannot endure being the cuckold husband. Receiving disapproval over the way he deals with his situation is stressful for him.

Vic's need for approval and acceptance is strongly desired. So, the rejection from society drives him to create a delusional reality. His pathological fancy enables him to live with disapproval and rejection. After he lies about killing Malcolm McRae, he dreams of going to the local church and encountering his friends. "Horace Meller smiled and congratulated him for having murdered Malcolm McRae in defense of his marriage. The whole town of Little Wesley was in church, and everyone smiled at him" (p.39). While, in reality, he is passive, and his life lacks perfection and control, he finds satisfaction in his vivid fantasies. He creates dualistic perspectives about his life.

Vic needs to protect his idealized image that Melinda threatens by her attitude. At the Cowan's costume party, she becomes indecisive about her costume. Her decision swung between Mary Queen of Scots, Greta Garbo, Annie Oakley, Cleopatra, and Scarlett O'Hara. These female characters vary between real and fictional characters, actresses, warriors, and Queens. However, they have a common trait: they are resilient and wild heroines who have established their identities. Vic's costume idea provides insight into his perception of his wife. Unconsciously, he suggests that she embodies Madame Bovary, the heroine of *Madame Bovary*, by the French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880). The narrative matches Melinda's personal experiences. Emma Bovary is a young woman who is dissatisfied with her life or her marriage. She lacks emotional involvement in her marriage. Driven by superficial desires, she indulges in extreme affairs outside of marriage. Vic's idea is completely unintentional. It depicts the suppressed representation of his wife within his psyche.

By losing Nash, Vic knows that his wife will not stop. She will probably engage with another man. Ralph Godson is next in line for Melinda. The twenty-nine-year-old man has been in town for a year. He lives in a rented house twenty miles away from them. He is an artist who is specialized in painting landscapes. He is staying only for the remaining six months. Melinda keeps inviting him to their house several times. He has been in their house twice a week, having meals and spending time. He attempts to initiate a conversation about subjects that interest Vic. However, Vic is disgusted by the hypocrisy, as he is aware that Ralph's intentions are only focused on his wife. He disapproves of her habit of repeatedly inviting her lovers to social events with their friends, parading them over the town and local bar. Vic pretends to take her affairs matters more calmly than he does. Vic is offended by Ralph's audacity to not only stay for dinner but also spend the night in their residence. He observes them dancing and drinking without any consideration of his presence. Every day after leaving the printing, Vic steps "out of the peaceful world into a chaos" (p.87). The same night, he realizes "a strong, primitive antagonism to Mr. Gosden that he had never felt before" (p.38). This antagonism is driven by repressed jealousy. Even the boyfriend knows what a normal reaction from a husband would be that Vic " 'Shoulda thrown me out a long time ago' " (p.43). Vic replies with a clear throat and cold grin, " 'I don't bother throwing people out of the house if they annoy me... If they annoy me in that way--with Melinda... I kill them' " (p.43). He tells the story he previously shared with Joel Nash, in which he confessed to killing Malcolm McRae for becoming overly intimate with Melinda and flirting with her in public. Repeating lies multiple times blurs the distinction between what is real and what is imagined. He smiles when he thinks of his daughter's joyful reaction if he tells her that he killed McRae. He takes satisfaction from imagining the additional respect he would enjoy by taking a restriction action on his wife and maintaining his security and dignity. The fantasies provide him with a sense of self-satisfaction because, in reality, his reaction is disproportionate to his wife's infidelities. Due to everything, it is important to him constantly to view himself as a courteous and civilized host. For the second time, Vic is victorious again, for Ralph responds to his threat. Ralph cowardly retreats from Melinda's company. It becomes a pattern for him to threaten the lovers rather than interact with them in physical violence.

Vic has always protested against her choice of men. Their characters lack intelligence and depth. The attractive aspect of them is their physical appearance. Their characters lack natural and fundamental qualities. He expresses his boredom with them. He is bored of the disrespect and lack of manners. They come to his house to enjoy fine food and beverages and remain until late hours. He resents them for mocking him, presuming that he does not know nor care about their intention with her. However, Vic needs Melinda in his life. Having a partner for a neurotic person provides security. He will continue his pursuit to win her affection and earn her approval. He does not want to be a “dog in manger” (p.48). He does not want to restrain her from expressing her true nature. To maintain a harmonious relationship with her and tame her wildness, he uses reverse tactics. His technique is to manipulate her through reverse psychology. He is aware that forbidding her will make her more determined to follow them out of stubbornness and contrariness. His strategy involves allowing her to participate in irrational behavior, as this behavior is the specific target for elimination. He manipulates her paradoxically. However, he always sees her affairs as a whim that will end whenever the glamour fades.

The humorless, new inhabitant of the town, Don Wilson, is a detective story writer who takes the murder story seriously. He begins a rumor campaign targeting Vic, befriending Ralph Godson. Vic’s anxiety and stress escalate when Melinda finds a substitute in Lord Chesterfield’s bar pianist, Charles De Lisle. Vic matches his figures to be like an “Italian Crook” (p.71) even though it is “an insult to the Italian race” (p.85). Vic knows what is coming; like the previous ones, Melinda will make him attend every social gathering their friends host. For Vic, “the shame of endorsing socially a guttersnipe like Charley De Lisle seemed more than he could bear” (p.78). By this time, the police identified the real murderer in McRae’s case, and it was not Vic. His lie is exposed, concealed by his humor as a joke. This affects his reputation and self-esteem as it reveals to everyone that he is a powerless cuckold. The lie indicates that he is not indifferent, but rather, he has made an effort to put off his wife. His manly ego will be destroyed, and she will jeopardize their public image.

As Vic expects when they attend the Cowan’s custom party, Melinda will bring De Lisle as a musical entertainer. Melinda is proud of his talent,

like a mother showing off her prodigy son. “Everybody would certainly know [about them] after the Cowan party, which was why Vic dreaded it” (p.86). He is aware that everyone at the party is fully focusing on them. Vic is furious; De Lisle is a criminal. His crime is stealing Vic’s wife and house, threatening his ideal life. He despises the way he is treated at parties when sympathetic hostesses persistently bring him food or remain by his side because he looks like a neglected child. A moment later, everybody at the party is aware that Melinda and her boyfriend have locked themselves in the coat room together. He “felt a tingle of fear--or disgust, or panic, what was it? --creeping up his bare legs under the toga” (p.95). The notion of his wife being taken by a lesser man and the futuristic scorn and pity to endure from the community terrified him deeply. It threatens his self-respect and self-control. At the party, everyone else enters the home, leaving only him and De Lisle alone in the Cowan’s pool. Driven by fear and fury, he grabs De Lisle by the throat and drowns him in the deep water. After the guests have discovered the body, “it seemed unreal that he had drowned De Lisle, seemed like something he had imagined rather than done” (p.103). As usual, Vic struggles to accept his reality. He strongly internalizes the idea of being a liberal, civilized man. Hence, he cannot accept the savageness of his deed. Vic’s mental condition develops to be psychotic. According to Bangwal et al. (2020), definition psychosis is a mental disorder characterized by “disconnection from reality ... delusion and hallucination” (p.163). For him, killing De Lisle is a dreamlike act; it feels like he is joking with him. His fantasy dominates his thoughts whenever he feels insulted. Yahya et al. (2018) define the health-related quality of life as the “impact of an illness or treatment on an individual’s physical, social, psychological, and general well-being” (p. 103). In the novel, it is obvious that the Vic’s mental illness has a negative impact on various aspects of his life and is a catalyst for his criminal behavior.

Melinda reacts hysterically, accusing her husband by stating, “ ‘Vic killed him. I know he did!’ ” (p.106). Her voice is loud enough to be heard by the whole neighborhood. But she is always the unstable wife, so the incident was marginalized and of no importance. The death report indicates that De Lisle died from an attack of cramps. From his side, Vic realizes “something... must be holding back his reactions of guilt and horror at what he had done” (p.110). Instead of feeling guilty, a happy memory from his

childhood flashed into his mind. When he won a prize in geography class, it made him feel secure and proud. He shows a significant delay in emotional as well as physical reactions. He struggles to connect the reaction with its cause in an accurate way. “He had deliberately hidden everything he felt... he had succeeded in concealing [his true emotion and reaction] ... He didn't react with the normal jealousy, and something was going to give” (p.60). Vic strongly seeks to create a civilized, idealized image in his community to obtain approval. To show concern about Melinda's behavior would undermine his dignity. This creation comes with a cost. The external civilized image gets to be internalized. Therefore, it pushes the real self to the unconsciousness. Primitiveness emerges as a direct opposite of civilization. He represses his instinctual emotions like fear, anger, and jealousy. These emotions transport him back to his childhood when he felt rejected and insecure. He consciously suppresses them, yet they are lurking in the unconscious. His neurotic conflict comes from unfolding his unconscious element against the conscious. He always fails to deny his hostility. And for his strange reaction, Mary Meller, in her party, tells him, “You're like somebody waiting very patiently and one day--you'll do something” (p.60).

Vic responds to his action with pleasantness and satisfaction simply because he will not allow himself to feel a harmful emotion:

De Lisle's murder was like a caesura in his experience, and it was strangely hard to remember, emotionally, before that time. He remembered a knot, a dark, hard knot of repressions and resentments in himself, and it was as if his murdering De Lisle had untied the knot. He was more relaxed now and, to be perfectly honest, happier. (p.143)

His opponent got eliminated in a guiltless crime. He discharges a deeply suppressed hatred and repositions himself in the community again. Vic understands that it is more helpful to release toxic emotions gradually rather than allowing them to build up until they reach a breaking point. This brings a sense of relief and becomes his new perspective to solve his psychological problems. “He could imagine many things, but he could not imagine himself very angry” (p.143). Vic struggles to accept his instinctual emotions. He is

unable to fathom any emotions except what perfects him. His psychological conflict remains unresolved. The repressed feeling will persist, surfacing in his fantasies. Vic's notes swing between sentimental concern and hostility during an argument with Melinda. And "he imagined knocking ashtrays off tables... because of a lack of control" (p.163) that never happened.

Most people neglect the circumstances behind De Lisle's death. Vic dedicates additional attention to pursuing his neurotic needs. Vic gets the sympathy and trust of his community, especially those who know him or think they know him. Evelyn Cowan telephones him to warn and inform him about Don Wilson's intentions. He is doing an investigation on Vic, and there will likely be some rumors. Vic becomes amazed "at the human capacity for self-deception. [like him] It had become so much a habit for their friends to ignore, to wink at Melinda's behavior they could almost believe now that there was nothing to wink at" (p.111). Because of Melinda's ongoing accusations to him of De Lisle's murder and her collaboration with Don Wilson to condemn him, Vic feels something is hardening in him against her. He does not sympathize with her grief for her lover: "She had got what she deserved, and she was powerless to do anything against him" (p.120).

The snails that Vic raises in the garage are significant to the novel's psychological narrative. Snails have a symbolic aspect of Vic's character's depth. Their presence and his treatment of them throughout the book reflect his personal feelings and the structure of his character:

The snails loved the rain. He bent over one aquarium, watching the snails he called Edgar and Hortense as they slowly approached each other, lifted their heads, kissed, and glided on...They mated about once every week, and they were genuinely in love, Vic thought, because Edgar had eyes for no other snail but Hortense and Hortense never responded to the attempt of another snail to kiss her...They were quite considerate of each other as to which had the burden of eggs laying--a twenty-four-hour procedure at least--and it was only Vic's opinion that Hortense laid more often than Edgar, which was why he had given her the feminine name. *That was true love, Vic thought, [emphasis added] even if they were only gastropoda.* (p.120)

These creatures are sensitive, patient, and slow in progress. They are hermaphrodites, meaning they possess both male and female reproductive organs. During mating, one of them must emerge as the dominant and gain control and authority over the other. They symbolize Vic's hidden desire for power and control and the couple's sexual unconventionality. He strives to control his entire environment and manipulate those around him. The hard shell protects their delicate and vulnerable body. The shell serves as their protective fortress. Like the protective shell, Vic's idealized image protects him from threats. Moreover, the role of the snail in the narrative serves as a depiction of his marital relationship. They constantly engage in an endless process of domination and control, one over the other.

Highsmith frequently used animals as vessels for human emotions in her narratives. The scenes of snail's mating rituals have a romantic tone in the novel. It is an aesthetic projection of the true love concept to Vic. His romanticizing perception of snails and robins reveals his hidden need and longing for love and affection. Edgar and Hortense, the pair of snails, represent a domestic ideal couple, unlike him and Melinda. They are loyal and devoted to each other. So, his view of the animals compensates him for the lack of feelings from the people around him. In his world of creation, he sees the ideal love embodied in animals' behavior only:

[It] can be understood as simulated enactments of displaced human needs to care, love, receive and give affection, to have friendship. Of course, relations with animals were only one form of simulation of these human relationships, but animals are particularly good signifiers and receptacles of human emotions. (Franklin, 1999, p.195)

Despite Vic's belief in being modern and civilized, he provokes quarrels and attacks with every male from his wife's side, including friends or boyfriends. The core of his inner and external conflict revolves around masculinity. His actions indicate his desire for attention from his wife and a need to assert his territory. He derives pleasure from singing songs that Melinda dislikes, annoying her further by encouraging Trixie to join him. Killing her lover implies the same aim. In reality, he and his wife experience a lack of affection and love in their relationship.

Vic will commit another murder. Melinda's last boyfriend is Vic's second murder. His inner schism is widening. For a period of three weeks following Charley's death, everyone neglects her hysterical accusation towards her husband. The community shows Vic solidarity and trust. Vic is aware that his wife "seemed to be brewing some retaliation against him, and Vic did not know what form it would take" (p.123). He gallantly and sympathetically minimizes her behavior to their friends. He defends her when they criticize her, for she is pathologically an extension of his existence. Once more, Horace appeals to Vic's masculine pride to restrain Melinda's action because her accusation will harm him.

Vic successfully handles the situation. Despite his equanimity and placidity, his psychological schism starts to come to the surface:

He felt a steely hardness, a not entirely unpleasant tenseness whose components he did not really know. Hatred? Resentment? Fear? Guilt? Or was it simply pride and satisfaction?... Another question was, had it always been in him or was it something new? (p.125)

Consciously, he is unable to understand his feelings toward the things surrounding him. As a way of distraction, he resumes his daily routine. He uses domestic tasks to escape the psychological conflict. Meanwhile, Melinda does not abandon her endeavors to prove him to be the murderer. She keeps her distance from him. With assistance from Don Wilson, she hires the services of Harold Carpenter, a private detective from Manhattan. The situation changes when Vic discovers Carpenter's matter. Vic starts to discover the reality along with his suppressed self. Uncomfortably, he realizes "that he was leading two lives and that the friendships he now enjoyed with Horace and Phil, for instance, existed because they did not know the truth about him" (p.142). Carpenter being around threatens him, and he cannot afford to risk his reputation. Moreover, he is disappointed and frustrated by Melinda's behavior when she allies with his enemies.

Vic cannot see himself as a criminal or a psychopath. And he cannot risk the detective exposing his real self and primitivity. The detective's outcome would be that De Lisel got murdered due to Vic's repressed jealousy. It portrays him as an insecure, vulnerable, and fragile man. The reason for condemnation will humiliate him. However, Vic considers the

period after the homicide to be his happiest time. Through murder, Vic asserts his masculine domination and secures the source provider for his neurotic needs, Melinda. His fancy works again as a coping mechanism for anxiety and stress. He consoles himself by justifying the murder that any other man under similar circumstances would have committed. So, Vic starts to investigate and test Carpenter, who introduced himself as a psychotherapist from Kennington Institute, when his suspicion against him arises. Horace Meller confirms his suspicion, asserting that Carpenter remains unknown to everyone at Columbia University, where the newcomers are continuing their psychiatric training. Vic invites their friends and Carpenter to Melinda's birthday party. At the gathering, his predicaments become more evident. Vic is conscious of his disgust from his false and despicable expressions, which is the reality he unconsciously concealed in the past. He usually wears a face mask, but he intentionally conceals his emotions this time. After the party, he slips into sleep where the:

Antagonism rose slowly in him against Melinda, almost involuntarily, wraithlike, groping like a wrestler for a hold. It rose in him as something habitual might force its way to the surface... It was as if she wore a label, 'My Enemy,' in his mind, and his enemy she was, beyond the reach of reason or imagination of change. The wraithlike antagonism in his mind found an imaginary grip and tightened. (p.161)

His enemy is always Melinda. He becomes aware of this only when he lets himself comprehend the danger she is able to put him through. Instead of being the partner that ensures security for the neurotic person, she fails to meet his neurotic demands, threatening his perfectionism and social idealism, which worsens his condition. So, for "all these years he had played a game of seeming calm and indifferent to whatever Melinda did. He had deliberately hidden everything he felt" (p.60). She provokes him to split his self, causing a conflict and self-disgust in his suppressed self. He uses lies as a means of unconscious defense only to feel self-satisfaction and to gain approval. It made his repressed emotions come to the surface in unconscious censures. This accurately describes the pool event, which he denies. To him, she is condemned for jeopardizing their marriage and their peace, and for conspiring against him with Don Wilson and Ralph Godson. The hatred is

irreversible toward her, but he must fulfill his role in the domestic façade. He cancels Carpenter's services because she has been paying from their mutual bank account.

Vic takes a stand in a confrontational conversation with Melinda. But it seems as if he were talking to himself. They lack any communication. They are disharmonious couple. Two distinct emotional connections characterize their relationship: loathing and devotion. It is a pathological relationship. So, they both behave in a detached way with their reality. The world becomes unclear, creating a tremendous amount of anxiety leading them to lose their identity. He offers Melinda a divorce because he finally becomes aware of the logical fact, “ ‘you [Melinda] hate me. You treat me as an enemy. You get a detective after me’ ” (p.173). The divorce settlement is that he gives her income and whatever she wants except Trixie, his little wonder and the smaller version of himself. Melinda would have the money to do whatever she likes and to have a life free of wife/mother responsibility. For her, it is a tempting offer, but their problem at this stage of their marriage is deeper. She is aware of Vic's narcissistic personality trait. She has become vengeful as a result of De Lisle's murder. So, she resists his divorce temptation in favor of a further dominant feeling: revenge. Melinda responds: “ ‘I'd like to destroy you. I'd like to smash you...I'd like to smash your lousy ego!’ ” (p.174). Vic denies having an ego; once more, Vic refuses to acknowledge the emotional aspect of himself. In a machine-like voice, he declares that he does not live on ego but “the pieces of myself that I can put together again and hold on together- by force of will. Will power” (p.174). He gives the credit to his force of will for living through everything. This shows he always needs to show himself in control. Similar to his obsession with Melinda, he is obsessed with self-control. He does not give her the satisfaction of witnessing him helpless and being shattered emotionally. His response serves as a self-deception strategy to protect himself from a harmful emotion.

When Melinda enters into a relationship with another man, Cameron, the decline of their marriage becomes inevitable. By this time, Vic's primitive feelings have intensified. Cameron's presence fuels Vic's masculine instinct to maintain control and dominance over his female partner. It becomes a contest between two males over a female. The conflict

becomes instinctive and animalistic at its core. What fuels Vic's hostility more is the look of inferiority to Melinda's boyfriends. It is considered an insult to Vic that Tony can take his wife since he considers himself superior to him and an alpha. Again, he struggles with the psychological schism between his true identity and the persona he desires to present. As usual, Melinda brings Cameron home, imposing him on her family. He enjoys meals, drinks, musical sessions, and staying till late hours. Vic plays the role of a civilized and gentle host. However, Cameron is a lowlife invader in Vic's territory. Furthermore, Cameron does not keep his presence through Melinda's part of the house but intrudes on Vic's personal area of the house, the garage where the sails are stored. During a delicate cleaning of the snails' aquarium, Cameron crashes in:

‘Look like they’d be good to eat’, Mr. Cameron remarked... He [Vic] looked over at Mr. Cameron and said ‘I wish you wouldn’t take the screen off, if you don’t mind. They crawl out very easily’ Mr. Cameron straightened up and slid the screen top back with a carelessness that made Vic wince, because he felt sure that a baby snail or two must have been crushed. Mr. Cameron probably hadn’t even seen the tiny baby snails. His eyes didn’t focus that small. (p.190)

Cameron violates the snails' house and Vic's personal space, the place where Vic finds genuine love. His bond with the snails takes the place of his connections with people, such as his wife. While Vic treats them delicately, Cameron treats them carelessly. Vic flinches because he crashes them; he does not pay enough attention to minor details. Vic's hostility and anxiety are increased throughout the novel. With Cameron's appearance, the vagueness of the psychological and emotional side is dismissed. The civilized façade image is no longer displayed; it starts fading. He assumed the role of modern host to his wife's boyfriends for a long time. However, he expresses his desire not to have Cameron in his territory. He informs Melinda, stating, “ ‘I don’t want to ask him [Cameron] in’ ” (p.189). Vic's reaction surprises Melinda. He always thinks of Cameron “like a small boy trying to impress a girl by flourishing a knife or by setting a kerosene-soaked cat on fire” (p.191). She views him as a “real guy” (p. 192). who makes her laugh, whereas he sees him as a small boy playing about with his wife. Vic

becomes furious by the fact that she finds his stories highly amusing. He feels jealous. They were flirting all over around his house, Cameron lacks morality. Vic demonstrates to Cameron that he is unwelcome, yet Cameron continues being:

Friendly and open to Vic, glancing at him every few moments to include him in his audience, with a condescension that showed that he considered Vic just a household companion of Melinda's, just an old uncle or a bachelor brother. He was still performing for Melinda. (p.193)

This passage summarizes the vivid picture of their marriage dynamic. Cameron's regular glances toward Vic indicate his vigilance in watching him. The boyfriend is dominating the scene. He considers Vic as inferior and less significant in terms of value. The boyfriend feels intimidated by Vic's presence because Cameron is aware of the trance passing over his territory, Melinda. Cameron is reducing Vic's value in social status. Moreover, Cameron denies Vic's marital rights. Vic is referred to as a household companion, an old uncle, and a bachelor brother, which marginalizes Vic's role as the husband with no recognition or consideration of his status as the spouse. It shows that Melinda and her formal and current lovers deny Vic's personal and social identity. The above passage highlights the psychological dynamics built into partnerships involving three individuals.

Vic hates to think of Cameron's naivety. He seems to think it is appropriate to go out on a leisurely eight-hour stroll through the town with another man's wife. Currently, Vic's obsession with Melinda has reached its highest point. While enjoying any ordinary activity, like sniffing the aroma of nice things, Melinda suddenly appears in his mind. He lets himself realize that she spends nearly most of the day with Cameron. He has noticed that his thoughts are occupied by the thoughts of Melinda and Cameron. His thoughts involuntarily follow this sequence: "What were their friends going to say about this? When were they going to start talking? Had Cameron and Melinda had an affair yet?" (p.196). The questions expose his primary fears and anxieties: social reputation and emotional damage. He is concerned about the social judgment of himself. The negative judgment will exclude him from the community. He will lose the approval and respect, and so will

his wife. The gossip about Melinda's affair with another man is going to put Vic in a humiliated position. The doubt and speculation expressed in the second question have cognitive and emotional consequences for him. It fuels his anxiety and hostility. The high anxiety of Vic's neurotic personality can only be dealt with and discharged through aggression because Melinda's action provokes Vic's insecurities.

The Mellers invite the couple over to a barbecue party. As usual, Melinda thinks she could sneak Cameron to the party, but Vic stops her. It is his first time, he strongly objects when she tries to ignore him, so he intervenes not only verbally but also physically. "Vic caught her arm and jerked her back. He closed the swinging kitchen door behind him. " "Oh, no, you won't. The Mellers don't care for him and that's that. They've asked us' ... he heard his voice shake with anger" (p.198). The confrontation implies the escalation of the underlying conflict in their relationship. The physicality of the scene suggests heightened emotion. Vic reflects frustration and anger in his actions. Seizing her arm in a controlling gesture shows his attempt for authority and dominance over her. He cannot put up with being a cuckolded husband anymore.

They know what to expect from each other. She acts according to her desires while he avoids intervening but instead tolerates her. Vic decides not to attend Horace's party, but Melinda has already dressed. Because Vic stubbornly refuses to change his mind, Cameron accompanies her to the Mellers' party. After they have left, Vic thinks how immature he is to refuse to go. It will be more immature now to follow them to the party. The next thing to happen is that he is going to have a stressful and awkward conversation with his friend, Horace Meller. Vic always feels anxiety when he confronts criticism, knowing it is to be true. The conversation would be cruel to highlight Vic's flaws in controlling his wife in a traditional society. The following day, Vic feels ashamed. Horace points out that Vic's wife was with another man attending local invitations. Vic felt "stabs of shame" (p.200) when Horace accuses him of not caring about his wife's behavior and being cowardly submissive. Horace starts recalling the events that happened the previous night. Melinda got drunk at the party, revealing a few things. She has informed their acquaintances that Cameron is the answer to her prayers. And Cameron is taking her away to Mexico. Vic is astonished

by this piece of information from his friend. Cameron expresses his intentions toward Vic's wife, saying he is taking her with him. He has already booked two airplane tickets for themselves. The revelation is shocking because Vic knew nothing about this, and Melinda willingly accompanies Cameron to escape. Horace tells him, " 'You're partly to blame, Vic. What real effort have you made to get back with Melinda on any kind of basis after the De Lisle affair?' Vic's mind teetered on the two meanings of the word 'affair' " (p.201). Vic becomes alarmed as Horace relates the deterioration of Vic's marriage to Vic instead of Melinda. He still lives in isolation in the garage, which indicates the couple has a nonsexual and unromantic life. Horace finally makes Vic confront his reality, which is " 'you may lose [her] to Cameron' " (p.201). Vic's insecurity is currently threatened due to the need for social validation. Vic "was panicky lest Horace alter his opinion of him in any way, lower his estimation of him" (p.202). He is afraid of being judged negatively and being socially compared with Cameron.

Horace firmly requests his friend to change his attitude in dealing with Melinda because it is wrong. Vic tries to lighten the atmosphere with a smile, telling him that he is exaggerating, indicating his denial stage. Horace comes with even harsh criticism; " 'Vic, why're you so damned aloof? What's the purpose?' " (p.202). Vic denies being indifferent toward his marriage. Before leaving, Horace asks Vic to consider this man's matter seriously. When Vic becomes alone, a strange sensation comes over him: fear. He is about to lose his friend's approval and admiration. Furthermore, he accuses him of being a surrenderer. He struggles to rearrange himself and acknowledges that "Horace had pointed a finger at a fire burning right at his feet, a fire he had chosen to ignore" (p.202). Cameron is unlike other lovers who will be gone a few weeks later. He is the man who will take Melinda away from him. Vic does not allow himself to see him as Melinda's type of man because he excludes her loving: "That bluntness, that primitiveness, that really outdid her own! And that pachydermal naiveté!" (p.203). The revelation is overwhelming to him. She has chosen a despicable man over him. She will abandon him, and this will be a humiliating scandal.

Vic's attitude proves to be ineffective. It leads to produce a paradoxical result. It intensifies the psychological conflict, increasing anxiety

and stress. He lost control over his life. He is dealing with issues challenging his masculinity and self-image. Vic is declining socially and psychologically. His respect and position with his business acquaintances are declining. The poet Brian Ryder is a young man who was rejected many times by different publishers. He is a poet of nature; many of his poems are about flowers and plants. Vic thinks his writings are very effective, and he has agreed to be his publisher.

Vic introduces Brian to Melinda. She keeps staring at him in a way that reminds Vic of his daughter Trixie when she stares at a new man whom her mother brings home. In most of the descriptive narratives about Melinda, Vic portrays her as an animal or a child. He only portrays her as a blond, seductive woman when she is preparing for other men. These unconscious similarities validate his need to control and restrain her. It makes him appear as a parental figure. In the evening, Melinda brings Cameron to dinner. Vic considers their behavior disrespectful and without any consideration for his feelings. Brian dedicates his time to observing them. Cameron assists Melinda with dinner preparation and table arrangements as “if he lived there” (p.204). Vic feels embarrassed and irritated, so he attempts to catch Brian’s attention by engaging him in a discussion regarding their publishing business. He wants to give Brian no chance to ask embarrassing questions. It is futile because Melinda and Cameron’s behavior has got Brian’s eyes. Vic remembers Horace’s conversation. Talking with Melinda about anything is useless, for she does not listen to him.

Brian shockingly tells Vic, “ ‘your wife’s a very attractive woman... Do you sleep here?’ ” (p.205). The question shocked and embarrassed him. It got deeply embedded in his psyche, hurting his self-esteem. Vic hopes Melinda might behave better, but she gets drunk and engages with Brian, too. Vic got completely ignored in the shadow of her. Remaining silent in the face of her obvious violations makes him submissive. He suffers from an emotional deformation. His true self and emotion are always repressed. This is a mechanism to cope with anxieties. The consequences of his strategies are frustrating on the psychological and social levels.

During the morning, Melinda informs Vic of her desire to end their marriage by stating, “I want the divorce” (p.207). He experiences a sensation

of “the cool terror again along his spine” (p.207). She intends to start the divorce proceedings and wants the huge alimony he promised her once. She is leaving him in favor of what she describes as a “real man” (p.208). Due to the long publishing process, Brian is in town for some time. And attention has shifted from Vic to Melinda. Melinda and her two suitors are currently surrounding Vic. He is trapped by anxiety attacks and unwanted feelings of fear and anger.

Vic’s evenings are currently filled with enemies, male rivals, and uncomfortable emotions. While he continues repressing emotion, the hostility and aggression escalate consciously. Melinda encourages Cameron to ask Vic about the possibility of preparing some of his snails to be eaten:

“The snails are not for eating”, Vic said.

Cameron’s face fell a little. “Oh. Well—what the hell are they for?” he

asked, laughing. “Melinda said—”

“I don’t use them for anything. They are useless”, Vic said, spitting the words out with a particular bitterness...

“Go out and get some, Tony,” Melinda said. She was on the way to being drunk. (p.210)

The snails are emotional containers to Vic. They have significant emotional values and sentiments for him, but they want to convert them into consumable food. The suggestion of eating the snails metaphorically represents consuming Vic’s feelings. On her persistence, Vic reacts physically, “Vic had clenched his hand into fists” (p.211). It is easy now to provoke Vic. He reacts violently to any situation due to long-time repressed emotions. These emotions are coming to the surface because of the disrespectful situation he is trapped in.

Brian becomes a source of negative pressure on Vic’s mental and emotional situation. He feels uncomfortable around him. In this evening, he discovered why:

Brian was displaying some of the forwardness of Cameron toward Melinda. Vic knew that Brian thought her attractive, but the way he smiled at her, the way he helped her take her apron off, suggested that, consciously or unconsciously, he had taken his *_cue_* from Cameron that Melinda was fair game for anybody and so meant to enjoy a part of her himself. Vic realized that Brian would also have had to take his cue from his own tolerance of Cameron, and Vic, very definitely, felt that he had lost face with Brian Ryder. He imagined, from the snail altercation onward that Sunday evening, that Brian treated him with less respect. (p.212)

Vic demonstrates an increased level of consciousness in this paragraph. Brian's actions are motivated by his tolerance towards Cameron and Melinda. Melinda is a fair game to any man, not only the lover she chooses but also people associated with Vic. Vic lost his reputation. As a husband, his wife makes his presence meaningless. No man will respect his position as Melinda's husband because he is sitting and doing nothing to stop these men. "The sordidness of the scene affected him as much as any mental pain he had ever borne" (p.213). Vic makes a torturous effort to endure the night. When Brian says his goodbyes to them for the night, "The 'sir' and the 'Mr. Van Allen' and the 'Melinda' went around in Vic's head stupidly for a few seconds" (p.213). The term 'sir' is employed not as a sign of respect but as an expression of formality. Addressing his wife by her name suggests a level of informality, implying that he has already developed an intimacy with her. This is considered unusual behavior from a person who has no ties with her but is a co-businessman with her husband. On the next morning, Vic transports Brian to the train station. He removed Brian, so it is Cameron's turn.

Vic's narcissistic personality prevents him from accepting Melinda's desire to divorce. His obsession with her is beyond the point of reducing her to an object. He possesses her. Yet, she is harmful to the limits of causing him to look bad in their society's eyes. He cannot solve his dilemma because of his most dominant neurotic need for a partner. To minimize the anxiety she participates in its creation, Vic acts aggressively with her boyfriends, but he does not harm her. In this way, he satisfies his need for control and manages emotions. Melinda consults a psychiatrist, who diagnoses Vic with

“a borderline case of schizophrenia” (p.170). He never responds with the right expression or attitude. He has always been detached from his reality. He represses his primitive instinctual emotion to a built ideal self, constructing an imaginative world where negative feelings are consciously denied. Also, he usually adopts untraditional opinions for his time, which emerges from the need for a perfect self-image, to be non-conformist, and a hunger for approval from Melinda and his community. Vic ends up having a dualistic nature in one body. It creates an inner conflict. Unconsciously, insisting on keeping his façade image for selfish reasons creates a schism in his psychology. The result is two kinds of life: he is a helplessly submissive figure and a homicidal husband.

In recent days, Vic’s anxiety, hostility, and violence have been intensified by the offensive talks and events. So, he intends to reduce the stress and regain his balance by murdering Cameron. His main psychological goal is catharsis and discharging his dark knots of repressed emotion. Cameron’s murder is unlike De Lisel’s murder. Vic is determined to kill Cameron. Vic possesses a clear understanding of his aims and the actions he desires to take against his rival. Vic invites Cameron to enter his car for a brief conversation. He picks him up from the town center in the daylight, “he had decided to take Mr. Cameron to the quarry” (p.219). The quarry is an abandoned place outside the town. The road leading to it is uneven and rugged. This location provides an ideal hiding place for Vic to conceal his criminal activities, and it holds an emotional value. Vic gets nostalgic, telling Cameron that the spot they were standing on is where Vic, Melinda, and Trixie used to enjoy picnics in the past. The area not only offers an ideal setting for the murderer but also contains deep personal and emotional meaning for him. It is as if Vic wanted to justify the murder with this memory of the little family he once had and which he wants to reclaim.

A precautionary action is taken. He hides his car between the woods and the abyss of the quarry. While Cameron inspected the place and its surroundings, Vic inspected the rocks and the stones. He picks up a head-size off-white rock, aiming at Cameron’s head, and snipes his head with it. He failed to hit him with the first shot. Then, he picks up another rock twice the size of the first one. He runs a step or two and launches it on Cameron. It catches Cameron in the legs. Cameron falls over the edge, landing on a flat

stone near the bottom. Vic goes to his car for a rope or a similar item. He finds a chain. He chains the body to a heavy rock and dumps it into the water. The body sinks into three feet under the water. From Vic's eyesight, the corpse disappears into the water.

Vic's pathological need for approval and validation develops to get beyond human approval. His neuroses developed to project these requirements and feelings onto animals. After his social approval is threatened when Horace rejects his behavior, the animal becomes the source of it. He is denied the positive interactions and approval by humans. So, he seeks positive interactions and security with animals. This indicates the development of his neurotic needs:

Roger was barking gaily. He slid his forefeet to the edge of the stone, stuck his muzzle into the water, then drew back again, shaking his head and wagging his tail. He looked at Vic, grinning as much as a boxer could grin, and wagging his stub of a tail as if to say, "Well done!". (p.223)

He is interacting with the dog's actions based on his neurotic condition. He seeks the animal's affirmation for killing Cameron because, in human reality and logic, crime is a destructive action. Vic's interpretation of the animal's behavior is a form of psychological reinforcement. Killing is a primitive action that has no place in a civilized society. So, Vic sought approval from the primitive animal world for his dark, primitive, and instinctive self. Vic is satisfied with his crime when he envisions the dog expressing approval with the words 'well done'. Therefore, he is free of guilt. His immediate action after the crime proves that a burdened conscience does not haunt him.

He leaves the quarry, heading to his daughter's school. He attends his daughter's concert, enjoying the children's performance with the other parents. The children's chorus is singing The Swan song by Saint-Saëns. Trixie sings, "The swan-like mist has gone-with the light-the light... It seemed to him that she was singing in joyous celebration of Cameron's disappearance, instead of the swan's" (p.225). Vic is degrading into being completely psychotic. He loses touch with his reality. He fancies his daughter singing happily to Cameron's murder. And he interprets the dog's movements into affirming his deed.

The last chapters are staged around discovering Cameron's place. Melinda rejects Vic's notion that Cameron has deliberately left her. Because Cameron's car was left unlocked in Little Wesley, she communicates with Don Wilson and Ralph Godson about Cameron's disappearance, asking for their assistance. Cameron's company hires detective Pete Havermal to investigate the mysterious disappearance. According to Vic, they are "the enemy camp" (p.228). Melinda suspects that Vic has done something suspicious to Cameron. His new happy mood bothers her. A confrontation arises again between them on a rainy night, " 'Did you kill him? Did you kill him, too? ... I'm going to tell -everybody-right now!' " (p.231). She is drunk, rushing to her car, and wants to leave the house. He has some guesses about her destination; more likely, she will meet Don Wilson to denounce Vic. Vic becomes mentally unhinged and loses control of his emotions over her. He is restraining her physically, holding her arm, and pinning her to bed. He is shouting, forbidding her from driving. She manages to maneuver him, freeing herself. She forcefully pushed him into an object, resulting in a head injury. The wound looks like a smiling mouth in his hair, requiring stitches. The couple's conflict has escalated to becoming physical. The aggression stems from deeply suppressed emotions that have accumulated for a long time. Their marriage is deformed and unrepairable. Due to an absence of communication, they never participated in discussions regarding their issue.

Vic is no longer in an emotionally suppressing condition. He has lost control over himself and cannot handle his emotions or responses. The repression starts to explode. When Havermal is investigating with Vic, he gets controlled by anger and jealousy. Melinda does not tell the detective the full runaway story, sharing only the part that incriminates Vic. Vic provides an explanation for his refusal to acknowledge having seen Cameron on the day he went missing:

I try to be polite-most of the time. Mr. Cameron has been a frequent guest at our house, you know. Perhaps my wife told you that. If you want to know why I denied having seen Cameron Monday, it was because I was sick of him, and because he'd stood my wife up on a date they'd had that evening. (p.237)

This represents Vic's emotional confession. Melinda's running away with Cameron is a triggering event to Vic's emotions. Also, Vic manages to manipulate the detective. The detective discovers that Melinda intends to wed a man whom she has been acquainted with for just a month, leaving her long-time husband and daughter. Her behavior resembles an insane schoolgirl. Everyone in town turns the detective down. Unwilling to condemn Vic, "[The] nicer guy in town" (p.245). Havermal closes the case and leaves the town due to the lack of evidence. "The whole town seemed to give a sigh of relief, ... People on the streets seemed to smile more, to smile at each other, as if to say that their solidarity had defeated one more detested outsider" (p.248). Again, Vic's fancy interprets this visualized image as "community loyalty" (p.248) , assuring himself and reinforcing his security and affirmation.

At the Petersons' party, Vic is the guest of honor. The Petersons are the parents of Trixie's best friend. At the party, Vic observes a noticeable change in Melinda's behavior. She smiles more at him, and she is more interested in him. Melinda is showing a radical change. She has become tamed and gentle with him. This makes him confused. However, he maintains showing his façade. She presents him with three gifts on his birthday, which amazes him. She is behaving in a manner conflicting with her usual personality.

She was acting, just as he had used to act, deliberately displaying an emotion or an attitude that was unlike the emotion or attitude he felt within himself. He and Melinda had essentially exchanged attitudes, Vic felt, since now he believed that his behavior was truer to what he really felt than he had allowed it to be in years, and that Melinda was pretending her good will. (p. 254)

She starts to act strangely. She invites him to spend the night in her room. His thoughts are entirely occupied with the reason behind her friendly behavior towards him. However, he used to desire her love, affection, and loyalty. Once she offers them, it makes him afraid. His long-time neurotic condition makes him paranoid; he fears swallowing her "bait" (p.256). He is sure she is "playing some kind of game" (p.250). He loathes her touches and becomes fearful and anxious around her. She is indeed playing a game of

deception by pretending to repent of her past. She confuses him enough that he asks, “Melinda, what’re you up to?” (p.258).

She handles his temper enough to persuade him to attend a Sunday picnic at the quarry, the place where he killed Cameron. Arriving at the quarry, she ambushes him, stating, “ ‘You know, Vic, I think you killed Charley and Tony, too-so why not admit it to me? I can take it’ ” (p.262). He responds with a smug grin characteristic of a psychopathic serial killer. His suspicions are confirmed. Melinda is deceiving him, and all this behavior change is to make him believe she is on his side. Vic denies any responsibility for the homicides of the lovers, but he gets furious. Her act of false affection towards him, when she invited him to her room, damages him. She explodes one of his insecurities against him. He feels angry because of her deceitful statement of love. The anger drives him to look down the quarry’s edge, searching for Cameron’s corpse. The chain has come off the dead body.

The following day, Vic returns to the quarry to conceal Cameron’s corpus. He goes down to the water and discovers that he saw a roll of soaked pulp paper tied up in two. However, he was burdened with overwhelming emotions of fear, anger, and disappointment. So, it affected his mind, evoking fearful images like that of Cameron’s floating corpse. Melinda’s presence has worsened the situation, increasing the pressure on him. His stressful mind tricked him; all he saw was an illusion. The realization makes him angry. Climbing up, he is surprised by Don Wilson following him. Vic is terrorized. Wilson spots the bloodstain on the rocks. Wilson promises to inform the authorities to inspect the water to find Cameron’s dead body. It makes Vic feel exposed, “naked and vulnerable” (p.267). As a neurotic person, Vic has a tendency to be a perfectionist. He believes he is flawless, and the blood trace is “the only careless, stupid thing he had ever done in his life--to leave a trace” (p.243). He is relying on how the police know Wilson as a troublemaker to falsify him. Wilson will tell the police, Cameron’s company, and even Detective Havermal about Vic’s crime.

Vic returns home to confront Melinda. After all, she is involved in the enemy camp with Wilson. He finds her ending a phone call in a hurry with Wilson. Her facial expression is victorious and terrified. He is

exploding with rage. He forcefully pulls the two telephone wires, causing their boxes to detach from the wall. She stands in terror, staring at him, while her open mouth is “drawn down at the corners like a mask of tragedy. Medea, Mangler of children and castrator of husbands” (p.269). Medea is a negative character in the Greek mythology. She kills her husband and her two children only for vengeance. Melinda, to Vic, is an evil entity. She wronged him with adultery, and he knows she is seeking revenge on him with Wilson. She ruined their peaceful house with her destructive force.

Vic repeatedly hits her head. She informs him that Wilson is coming, causing Vic to become even more furious. She “always cry[ies] to other people!” (p.270). The last barrier that holds his repressed emotion collapses, and he strangles her with his bare hands. When Wilson shows up with the police car, Melinda is dead. When they arrest him, he is smiling. He went completely psychotic. “He saw Trixie romping up the lawn and stopping in surprise as she saw him with the policeman, but frowning at the lawn, Vic could see that she wasn’t really there” (p.270). He becomes entirely detached from reality. He imagines seeing his daughter, but it is all in his head. And he is now empty, “ ‘Melinda is dead and so am I ’ ” (p.271). She was always an extension of him. Vic killed everything with her. She was always the main source of his anxiety. She used to fill him with it. He is empty because “he had left his life in the house behind him, his guilt and his shame, his achievements and failures, the failure of his experiment, and his final, brutal gesture of petulant revenge” (p. 271). He feels empty of emotions and purpose since he has abandoned his previous life. He announces his metaphorical death with Melinda’s physical death.

Vic, as a child, was raised in an abusive environment, which caused anxiety and personality disorder. Highsmith explores the consequences of anxiety in the protagonist’s adult life. As a neurotic person, he carries his childhood personality deformation. Neurotic disorder develops when there is no appropriate containment environment. Internal problems of a psychological and mental kind arise. The individual with neurotic tendencies faces challenges in achieving stability. Aggression and violence emerge when there is pressure on the individual socially, culturally, and psychologically. And his criminal activities are his desperate attempts to satisfy and fulfill the neurotic needs. Through violence, he tries to preserve

his self-image and keeps his environment under control. Relentlessly he seeks social acceptance, and it aligns with Horney's neurotic need for approval and affection. Because he was denied by his authoritarian father the acceptance as a child, his reactions and emotions were disapproved, which caused self-suppression. This kind of case could have been improved not only in therapy but by considering different factors. According to Ali et al. (2017), "Factors other than the treatment may have a role such as lifestyle, emotional status" (p. 6). A therapy's efficacy or effect depends on more than just the treatment itself. Instead, examining diverse factors is important to the individual's anatomy. But his lifestyle and relationships were the most impeding factors in improving his psychological health.

Conclusion

The novel explores how crime is motivated by human emotions and societal norms. According to Fiona Peters, *Deep Water* "focuses on the domestic hell that society inflicts on the individual, exemplified by the shackles and social habits of the domestic suburb" (2018, p.14). The novelist dives into the darker, hidden part of the human psyche under the pressure of domestic society. It exposes the secret and dark aspects of domestic life that occur within the walls of an individual's home. The novel shows domestic violence "as family abuse... It can take the forms of being physical, verbal, economic or emotional" (Jawad, 2020, p.25). With the assessment of Karen Horney's Neurotic Theory, the psychological analysis of the protagonist's character reveals how criminal activity directly results from neurotic anxieties. Crime can be viewed as a means of self-preservation. Vic's criminal motivation stems from his resentfulness of being humiliated and not being acknowledged as the powerful, intellectual, and superior individual he perceives himself to be.

Highsmith's narrative shifts between the first and the third-person perspective. Through the first-person narrative, the novelist shows a subjective perception of Vic's interpretation of the event. Throughout this kind of style, she provides the readers with an insights to the thoughts and the motives of the protagonist. Highsmith's narrative compels her reader to sympathize with her neurotic villain. She chooses an ordinary man and makes him a criminal. In her novel, Highsmith presents a complex human

case, showing struggles with abusive parents, anxiety, social expectations, and marital problems and their consequences.

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دراسة لصفات الشخصية العصابية والسلوك الإجرامي في رواية باتريشيا هايسميث "المياه العميقة"

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المستخلص:

تركز الدراسة الحالية على العلاقة المعقدة بين سمات الشخصية العصابية والسلوك الإجرامي كما هو موضح في رواية المياه العميقة حيث تدرس بطل الرواية، فيك فان ألين، وانحداره إلى الإجرام باستخدام الإطار النفسي الاجتماعي لنظرية كارين هورني للشخصية العصابية (1950). تحلل مثل هذه الدراسة كيف يساهم شعوره العميق بالنقص وقلقه المتزايد وارتياحه وعلاقته المرضية تدريجياً في تورطه في أعمال إجرامية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على كيفية زيادة العوامل الخارجية السلبية والقيود الاجتماعية لصراعاته الداخلية وإثارة سلوكه الإجرامي. وسط هذه التعقيدات، يكافح بطل الرواية للحفاظ على مظهر زائف من تقدير الذات ووهم الحياة المثالية في ضواحي أمريكا، مجرداً في التوازن الطفيف بين القبول الاجتماعي والسلوك المنحرف. تكشف هذه الدراسة عن العلاقة المعقدة بين السمات العصابية والسلوك الإجرامي في كل من الصور الأدبية

وسياقات العالم الحقيقي من خلال دراسة تورط بطل الرواية في الأنشطة الإجرامية في إطار العلاقات الزوجية والتفاعلات الاجتماعية.

الكلمات الدالة: القتل، السلوك الإجرامي، العصا، ادب الجريمة، صورة ذاتية.