

**PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE PROTAGONIST IN
THE WORKS OF PATRICK WHITE AND MARGARET LAURENCE:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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Abstract

Hurtle Duffield is the protagonist in the novel The Vivisector by Patrick White and Morag Gun is the protagonist in the novel The Diviners by Margaret Laurence. The common feature about these both protagonists is that these both have been portrayed as artists in these novels. Hurtle Duffield is a painter; while Morag Gun is a professional author. These novels interestingly depict the life of an artist from childhood till the death. Development of an artist itself is a creative phenomenon. The ignorant journey started as a child ends at the crest of mature sensibility is a special source for the artistic vision. Suffering is another source for artistic creation between these both protagonists. Their family lives play a very important and significant role in this case. Influence of family relations later on creates lifelong impact on their art as well as artistic lives. Artistic ambition which is the core of artistic development also resembles the sense of loss in

Hurtle as well as in Morag. The same craving leads these artists towards the salvation which they were seeking since their birth.

Keywords: *suffering, artistic ambition, unconscious residue, artistic creation, salvation.*

Patrick White, a Nobel laureate from Australian literature has written the famous novel *The Vivisector*. This is one of the remarkable creative products in the history of world literature. This novel reveals the life and work of artist Hurtle Duffield. Apart from the genre type of *Kunstlerroman* the novel reflects the subjective philosophy behind the mind of an artist. As far as the creative protagonist is concerned there are lots of chances of reflection of autobiographical incidents either in expressive manner or through hidden reflections of several symbols and images. Another novel studied for comparative analysis is *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence. This novel also deals with the life and narrative journey of an artist named Morag Gun. The common element in these novels is the sagacious journey of an artist travelled through several circumstances. This novel also has a very remarkable significance in world literature.

Psychological exploration is the admixture of artistic and subjective experiences which have been reflected through these both characters entitled Hurtle Duffield who is a painter and Morag Gun as a novelist. As mentioned by Sigmund Freud in his work related to creative process, he quotes that, 'A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work.' (Freud 41) Work of art is the result of this wish fulfilment after such a long suffering and craving for the best creation. The artistic journey is the journey of this psychological phenomenon. While achieving their wishes these protagonists undergo several pains in their lives. Regarding these both protagonists; suffering is the main energy behind their creation. This unsatisfied journey trails them to be an artist as well as a human entity in the world to which they belong. The creation is scattered around

several elements. Most of them are the artistic and life experiences depicted by novelists in their novels. However, the comparison of existing life is the common segment for the present comparative study. These artistic protagonists have been elaborated in the above context according to the following views.

Development of Protagonist:

As mentioned earlier, both protagonists in these novels are artists. Hurtle Duffield is a painter and Morag Gun is a novelist. The development is very different. Hurtle has the history of adoption by the Duffield family. Morag's history is slightly different. As an artist their sensibility has been presented at their earlier age. Hurtle introspects society around him as, 'He understood better now, but didn't know you could do anything about human nature: of the people he knew, one half called the other half hopeless.' (White 28). This shows the ability of a child to know about human nature. Due to being adopted Hurtle thinks about the new parenthood burdened on him. The journey of an artist starts with such incidents in his life. However, Morag narrates her experiences in childhood in following way:

I used to think the only clean job in the world was collecting muck. I chose to be the one who'd collect it. But now I see we're all of us rotting in it all the same, myself as well. It was the pride in me that did it. So, I see it now. (Laurence 174)

The remarkable statement is 'we are all rotting in it all the same' where the artistic Pride has been conflicted with childhood sensibility. One can observe the universal aspect of Hurtle about humanity in total. There is a germ of omnipresence reality which the author tries to depict through his character. In the case of Morag, it's much individual centric. Pride is the source of the early instinct of creation. Laurence promotes her protagonist's self-centred life as the real source of creation. However White's protagonist observed humanity in general.

At another position of the novel *The Diviners* it is observed that the pride claimed by Morag Gun is extended in such a way that it becomes more inclusive for further artistic creation of Morag Gun. The element of pride

travels her through the imaginary journey of her life. Mr.Salat observes in this regard that, 'The novels of Margaret Laurence the quest for self and selfhood motif that obtains in large abundance in Canadian novels, often leads to actual or imaginary journey to a lived realities in rural and provincial worlds.' (Salat 122) In contrast; White's protagonists philosophize his struggle into the physical love for the pursuit of truth as below:

Physical love as he saw it now was an exhilarating steeplechase in which almost every rider ended up disqualified for some dishonesty or another. In his aesthetic desires and their consummation, he believed himself to be honest; and in his desire to worship and be renewed by someone else's simplicity of spirit, he was not forsaking the pursuit of truth. (White 315)

This is but the extension of personal and universal thought development of the protagonist. Morag Gun introspects that at personal level while Hurtle Duffield considers that at universal level.

Family Life:

These both novels *Vivisector* and *The Diviners* depict the life and work of two artistic characters named Hurtle Duffield and Morag Gun respectively. That's why these novels have been categorized under the genre of *Kunstlerromans*. Making of an artist is exposed through these novels. Artistic life is specially designed in such a way that their life itself should become the main source of creation in later parts of the novel. Like common masses, in the life of artists also their families play a very important role. Suffering of beloved ones and craving for them has also become the main source of their creation. Pique is the daughter of Morag. She has craved for her father since the beginning of the novel. Pique's story is a little bit different. She considers her absence of father as the fault of her mother due to her own dominance over him. This loss and pain of trust is elaborated by Morag. She evokes her husband's absence and who was responsible for the destruction of the family, she contemplates as, 'But I can't play that game anymore, because I'm not the same as I was. He taught me a lot, Jules-that was real enough. But we were living each other's fantasy, somehow, and if that sounds smartass.' (Laurence 292)

Such helplessness due to being a woman is elaborated through the words of Morag. She celebrates each other's absence as a fantasy in life. She does not symbolize herself as craving for her husband, but she enjoys his absence and celebrates that without making him responsible for what has done with her. In contrast to the above, Hurtle Duffield's life and suffering is very different. He was adopted by Duffield's family. His loss is the loss of childhood, absence of biological partners and celebration of a new adopted world gifted for him. He revises the memories of his past parents:

This was his family. He should have loved them. He did of course: riding with Pa on the cartload of slippery bottles; Mumma's smell of warm ironing; the exasperating hands of younger, sticky children; in bed with Will; Lena giving him suck of a bull's eye. Hot and wet from her own mouth. All this was a family, a terrible muddle, which he loved, but should have loved; better.... if he loved something he had inside him that was different. (White 69)

The world of a child revolves around the centre of nostalgia. He criticises poverty despite the suffering of loss which Morag has experienced. The word *terrible muddle* is the significant phrase for his family. Somewhere an artist was discriminating between life which was gifted and life which diminished only due to fortune. Hurtle's life is bound within these two ends one past another present. As Sato says, 'White portrays the body of the painter and his paintings as a milieu where two opposite vectors are in conflict, i.e., dissection and creation, like two faces of God.' (Qtd in. Ahmad44) His life bears these two ends only. Later on, there appears an image of the mother of Hurtle. This time there appears a very cruel and dispassionate image of mother. This is a dream image of Hurtle's blood mother. She talks with him:

I am your blood mother. I am only helping it to die to save it from the Vivisector. Her white neck was all freckled with blood. I know Hurtle (sic.) you would split my head open to see what there is inside. Her hair had parted wider than the parting and the skull was beginning to split. (White 101)

She haunts like the departed ghost from his own bloodline. This unconsciousness is also reflected in the later part of the novel. Her helpless cry is about helping his image of poverty to die, to save it from the vivisection by

'The Vivisector' who is considered as an epitome of suffering in the life of Hurtle Duffield. Such a cruel image de sympathises Hurtle for the future painting which revisits the devastated world around him through his paintings.

The role played by the blood mother repeatedly appears in Morag's life as her daughter Pique. She contrasts her as an epitome of her suffering. Morag is also helpless, she pleads as, 'Time is running out. Is that what is really going on, with me, now, with her? Pique, harbinger of my death, continuer of life.' (Laurence 314) Thus She resembles her daughter as the harbinger of her life. In such while comparing these artists it is observed that the lost family creates a sensible suffering in Hurtle Duffield's life, which is equally repeated in Morag's life. The lost family has been replaced by only her beloved daughter Pique. Thus, suffering is the unconscious which is the main source of their creation. Artistic life is supposed to have suffered. That is the main source of the great creation which these authors depict.

In the later age the desire of salvation got increased in the lives of the protagonists. They start to crave for escape from the world which they have celebrated so far. Morag contemplates her middle age as the source of her further consciousness as, 'One of the disconcerting aspects of middle age was the realization that most of the crises which happened to other people also ultimately happened to you.' (Laurence 56) She craves for the indistinct world of lofty idealism which life has gifted her due to the absence of the centre. This is a common aspect about the life of an artist. The centralized creation has the source of a decentred universe around the artist. That's why at the end of the journey this creative journey got philosophized by the artistic mind like a metaphysical love.

It is mentioned as 'every rider ended up disqualified for some dishonesty or another'. Lifelong artistic search of Morag and Hurtle results in the pride which they had reshaped in their unconscious and through their conscious artworks. However, at the end of their lives and contemplation their art remains only as an incomplete pursuit of truth.

Artistic Ambition:

Hurtle Duffield portrayed by Patrick White and Morag Gun portrayed by Margaret Laurence are the inborn artists. Hurtle is a painter and Morag Gun is an author. There is development of artists from childhood till death. The creation of an artist is represented through these both characters. It is a well-known fact that artists should have ambition. As mentioned by Jung, 'A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never equivocal.' (Jung 187). The work of art submerges the life of the artist into itself to such extent that the artist loses himself in this creative journey. The dedication and persistence overlapped on the ambition will be resulted into the real and exceptional life of an artist. In these protagonists one can find this creation of artistic ambition in a very much heightened way. Morag Gun in her earlier childhood days creates her ambition to become a successful person. Her mature mind directs her to do hard work and promotes to become somebody significant. She convinces herself as:

But if you work, really-really work, and get educated, something will come of it, maybe. Like being able to get out of Manwaka and never come back. Morag listens at night to the long wailing of the trains crossing the prairies, their voices like the spooky voice of giant owls. She always feels warm and good at the sound, because he knows something which nobody else in this world knows, which is that one day she will be on one of those trains going to the city. (Laurence 129)

The dream of the city actually symbolizes the prosperity which she was expecting in her childhood. There is a hidden development of an artistic personality. The madness to become something is the hunger which becomes the fuel for artistic vision. Even if the sound of the train mentioned above is quite regular, she compares that sound like a symbolic call of her dream which she wants to achieve.

Hurtle Duffield is more sensitive than Morag Gun. His establishment as an artist is more complex than Morag Gun. His creative ideas are the results of deep unconscious sufferings and characters residing in his mind. He explores:

The ideas in his head were still too hectic and fragmented. He either saw in colours, and the architecture eluded him, or else he was obsessed by forms: Nance's yellow cheeses; suddenly out of the past Rhoda's Cranach figure standing beside the iron legged bidet. In desperation he almost settled for the self-portrait he had been for same time considering.... reaching his nadir, he lay full length and buried his face in brown water, gulping at it, watching it laps around the picture of his distorted features. (White 227)

The feminine images are beautiful i.e. Nance's yellow cheeses and another drastic image Rhoda's Cranach symbolizes the hidden unconscious which promotes painter within him. His unconscious is more distorted which results in well-organized painting. These all complexities become the source of his creative paintings. Thus, Morag is inspired by the beauty of the world, glamour of the world. Hurtle is promoted for his artistic ambitions due to the artistic past which his mind has been residing in for long years.

Artistic ambition is the platform for salvation. Sometimes it becomes sceptic about the artist himself and what she, he has achieved. As far as subjective thought is considered, one can peek into the artistic salvation for which both Morag and Hurtle are seeking. Salvation is but the answer that these artists try to find after achieving success in their lives. The dilemma created in their lives is the result of their loneliness. Mr.Dutton notes that, 'Hurtle's Dilemma as an artist is that he must accept loneliness in order to bring out what is inside him, yet he needs people as a vivisector needs animals or God human beings in order to further his design.' (Dutton 22) Such kind of scepticism invites Hurtle towards the door of salvation. Morag rethinks about her own creation as the contrast which she herself created despite her lonely suffering, she asks:

What about me.? Do I only pretend to see, in writing...? What did I ever say about you, Christie, until it was too late...? I told my child a tale about you, while the living you was there alone in that that mouldering house. (Laurence 444)

She asks her own creation 'Christies' what she has pretended to the world through her character and what she herself being creator is experiencing about. The burden of creation has returned into the self-questioning

philosophy of life. Morag could create the legend of her character, but somewhere the reality of life distorted from her bruised soul. The achievement for Hurtle Duffield is also the same as Morag has. Being a well-known painter, he still seeks recognition. He contemplates:

he had felt the need for recognition, and the most puritanical artist is unable to resist loving himself a little in the mirrors offered by his own paintings. (White, 535)

Hurtle attempts to search for himself in the mirrors offered by his own paintings. He tries to search out himself for recognition. In the crowd of all achievements somewhere he thinks that he has lost his own self, being fully submerged in the art which was recognized by the people beyond the lost artist.

Thus, the artistic ambition at the end concludes in self-existence. Art for Morag and Hurtle is the only clothes which they wore and later on they recognized that their 'self' remained naked within. Bharati observes this process as, 'Patrick White and Margaret Laurence depict their characters within male-dominated societies. Though the female protagonists undertake quests for identities beyond those defined by familial or social roles, the fundamental thrust is not on "power politics" but on the spiritual/psychological quests to identify the self for oneself.' (Bharathi 6) This self transcends artists towards their own stigma about the superficial achievements after the great fame which they enjoyed with lifelong suffering.

Conclusion:

The life of an artist itself is an odyssey. Morag, an author created by Laurence and Hurtle, a painter created by White both explore these journeys. Their development is like a seed which has been sown properly but which faces several uncongenial disasters in its growth. It is totally influenced by the family members and glimpses of early childhood which are kept reserved in the artistic mind. Laurence herself mentions it as, 'Art in fact is never life. It is never as paradoxical, chaotic, complex or as alive as life.' (Laurence 16) At the end of this odyssey; like all common men and women these artists also experience the span of self-questioning. Thus, it is depicted that the subjective

approach of Margaret Laurence through Morag Gun and Patrick White through Hurtle Duffield explore the different journeys of two different minds which carry the seeds of unsatisfied desires into the creative garden of their own souls.

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