

Demargo Cox

Exploratory Essay

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The Eight Bites That Did Not Satisfy

“Eight Bites” by Machado, Carmen Maria tells a story through the eyes of an unnamed narrator; the narrator struggles with self-acceptance, individuality, and acceptance of her daughter. She fancies a slim body; this desired body is everything to her while her own is unwanted. As a result, the narrator goes through gastric bypass surgery, with the hopes of changing her whole life, but her previous body is personified and begins to live in her house. These struggles can be deeply related to psychoanalytic concepts presented by Sigmund Freud; Sigmund Freud is well known as the Father of Psychoanalysis, which is a study on psychopathology. In Freud's “5 Lectures on Psychoanalysis”, he discusses key terms such as displacement and repression; these terms can be directly related to the Narrator in “Eight Bites” because of her repressive like tendencies taken against her daughter and displaced emotion on her personified flesh.

At the Beginning of “Eight Bites”, we see the narrator describing how all of her sisters have gone through gastric bypass surgery, however, she mentions this surgery as if it was needed for their bodies. “Who knows where we got it from, though—the bodies that needed the surgery”(Machado). The narrator further begins to discuss her mother and how she views her

mother's body as “normal”, “not hearty” or “curvy” or “Rubenesque” or “voluptuous”, just “normal” (Machado). This feeling of the narrator’s mother having the perfect body coincides with her struggle to accept her own body. The narrator also states her mother only consumed eight bites to keep her body slim and fit. Unfortunately, when the narrator tried this she failed, this created a weak link between the narrator and her mother. The narrator's goal is to be like her mother, however, she had none of her mother's qualities, none of her restraint, and not even her body type. Displeased with herself the narrator begins to push down her self-disgust to avoid fighting it head-on. This process applies to Freud's theory of repression; repression is defined as an individual who cannot recall a memory and it may still be affecting them subconsciously, and that these memories can emerge later into the consciousness (Freud 2212). This act of repression then takes form with the narrator's behavior towards her daughter named Cal.

The narrator's daughter Cal can be seen as a complete oppositional force to the narrator; she has a body similar to the narrator before surgery however Cal sees no issue with her body, unlike the narrator. Moreover, since Cal also shares a similar body type to her mother before surgery, the narrator's decision to renounce her body is also an offensive charge towards Cal. Cal asks the narrator if “she hates her body,” the narrator does not answer and insist that she loves her; Cal asks if she “Loves every part of me” and the narrator hangs up (Machado). As a result of the narrator's inability to see she is unsatisfied with her body because of her idolization of her mother; she creates the same barrier and disconnects found between her and her mother, with her and Cal. The Freudian concept of repression is applied here again because the narrator is unconscious of her reasoning behind her resentment for Cal; she views a thin body as the only “good” body type because of her institutionalized belief from her mother and even her sisters.

The narrator sisters in “Eight Bites” are constantly held as a comparison to the narrator; she feels as if because her sisters have all gotten the surgery and resemble their mother she must do it as well. When the narrator goes through with the surgery she starts to experience haunting by her previous body; the body at first is just a presence then grows in personified being. The body also resembles her daughter's body as well, however, the narrator proceeds to get into a fight with the being. She tells her body she is unwanted, violently kicking her, yet wishing she, “would fight back” (Machado). The narrator is in a fight with herself and even her daughter in a sense, she took all her repressed anger out on this personified being. This is also related to Freud's idea of displacement; displacement is defined as when a person shifts his/her impulses from an unacceptable target to a more acceptable or less threatening target(Freud 2223). The narrator is taking her hatred for Cal's body and her own body and physically beating on this figure as a result of displacement.

After viewing “ Eight Bites” by Machado and “5 Lectures on Psychoanalysis” By Freud, it is clear the psychoanalytic terms displacement and repression take form in this short story. The narrator's deep resentment for her daughter is caused by repression from her desire to be like her mother, a slim woman. She also displaces her anger and disgust for her body and her daughters onto her personified flesh after her gastric surgery. The narrator fails to realize these unconscious actions throughout the story until her death.

Works Cited

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