

# A Thematic Analysis of the Novel *Open Secrets* from Psychoanalysis Perspective

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Alice Munro, the first short story writer in Canada to receive the Nobel Prize laureate in 2013, applies the unconscious to the portrayal of characters and the construction of engrossing stories. Based on the unconscious theory of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, this article focuses on one of Alice Munro's short stories, *Open Secrets*, by analyzing the unconscious of representative characters, to explore their power conversion through the conflicts triggered by their unconscious mind. Via uncovering their unique personalities and values, as well as displaying their power against each other through conflict, this article reveals that the relationship between characters is sophisticated and changeable, and their power against each other has been a state of change in continuous conflicts. Behind the unconscious displays a thoroughly different comparison of forces: the strong who behaves violently and arrogantly actually shows weakness; in turn, the obedience and endurance of the weak strongly manifest a tenacious resistance.

*Keywords:* *Open Secrets*, psychoanalysis, unconscious, thematic analysis

## Introduction

Alice Munro (1931-), a brilliant Canadian short story writer, whose work features outstanding psychological description and is effective in shaping the characters, developing the plot and uncovering the theme. The concept is masterfully utilized in her novel *Open Secrets*, showcasing its full potential. Her receiving of the Nobel Prize in 2013 sets off a trend of study, while research angles are mainly limited in narrative strategy, feminism, realistic writing, textual research, Gothic and literary geography, etc. Engagement within psychology is also found in discussions of Alice Munro's work, while it is limited in psychological realism, which is adopted to convey a fatalistic view where characters are bound by an objective and rational order, depicted through psychological realism, that dictates their inevitable life trajectories (Liu, 2014, p. 175). The research on the relationship between characters' unconscious mind and the theme in her works has been ignored. Psychoanalysis, one of the main schools of western modern psychology and medical psychology, expanded to philosophy, humanities and social sciences, developing into an all-encompassing philosophy of life by the 1920s, focusing on the discussion of the unconscious, lust, motivation, personality and other deeper content, which is quite discrepant from attention, feeling, perception, thinking and other conscious mentality in the study of traditional psychology (Freud, 2010, p. 29). The unconscious, the basis of psychoanalysis, refers to

the individual's instinct impulse, repressed desire and the substitutes such as dream and hysteria. It contains individuals' underlying personality and hidden values, which can be told through emotion, language, behavior, dreams and fantasies (Freud, 2004, p. 9). Further, individual development is shaped by early childhood experiences, which are often forgotten, rather than solely by genetic factors. Human actions and thoughts are significantly influenced by unconscious instinctual drives, which can emerge into consciousness, causing resistance through defense mechanisms, particularly repression. The conflict between conscious and unconscious elements can result in mental disorders such as neurosis, neurotic traits, anxiety, and depression (Fromm, 1992, pp. 12-13). The application of the unconscious in literature helps to polish a vivid character in a multidimensional way.

*Open Secrets*, one of the pieces in a collection of Alice Munro's short stories, tells a mystery in 1960s about a disappearing girl living in a small town called Carstairs in Ontario. The story induces a chain of relevant events behind different characters, simultaneously exploring their values of love, marriage, interpersonal relationships and depicting various lifestyles in town. Having endured poverty in teenage years, encountered love and separation, become a mother of three daughters, devoted herself to constant writing and received glorious awards and honors, Alice Munro comprehensively stitched her observation, emotions, insights, and sensibility into every page of her work and kept on digging into familiar topics, as is shown in *Open Secrets*. Most of the characters in the story appear in pairs, whose power against each other varies through conflict. To consummate the work, which means to successfully polish every detail of characters, plots and themes, psychological description undoubtedly stands out in this story. The characterization of unconscious contained in language, behavior, emotion, dream and fantasy implies characters' underlying personality and values so as to uncover their struggle against something offensive such as the stereotype in family or society.

Since Alice Munro applied abundant description of the unconscious to construct characters' sophisticated relationship and polish their diverse personalities in *Open Secrets*, this article will give a detailed analysis of their different forms of unconscious mind contained in language, behavior and fantasy to explore their power against each other as well as their diversified values towards love, marriage and life. Three distinctive pairs are discussed in this article: Maureen and her husband Mr. Stephens; Mary Johnstone and the girls; the Stephens and the Theos.

### **Maureen and Her Husband Mr. Stephens**

The relationship between the couple in *Open Secrets*, Maureen and her husband Mr. Stephens, is the epitome of Canadian couples from middle class in 1960s. The life of the wife, Maureen, is marked by two significant identity shifts: from a rebellious girl to a woman embracing societal roles, and then to a wife. Initially, she challenged gender norms, but later, she adopted a more traditional stance, especially after marriage. The inability to have children due to an accident and her subsequent loss of fertility deeply affected her self-esteem. Mr. Stephens, a respected lawyer, was bound by professional and social standards on which he imposed his family. His stroke, which left him unable to speak, was a devastating blow to his identity and led to increased control over Maureen.

Their marriage, at first, had been twisted by some rumors. Even though Maureen stepped into the wedding hall with deep affection to the man, neighbors' misunderstanding of her intention as marrying for money still

troubled her. Mary Johnstone even satirized her by calling her “Mrs. Stephens”, with a tone of mockery and sully. Besides, Maureen and Mr. Stephens raised no children of their own, which was quite fatal to a marriage at that time and remained a clash in their relationship. Due to Maureen’s infertility, which was believed to deprive her of the chance to become a mother, she saw herself the inferior in the marriage, not to mention what Mr. Stephens thought about. Gradually, the gap between Maureen and Mr. Stephens emerged and widened, which not only resulted from age and physical conditions, but also their interest, personality and values. Maureen had the tendency to living an ordinary, peaceful and romantic life, while Mr. Stephens was inclined to one that was superior, respectable while restricted; Maureen was kind, sensitive and tough, while Mr. Stephens tended to be mean, emotionless and weak; Maureen expected an equal relationship between husband and wife, while Mr. Stephens, undoubtedly, was a man whose beliefs and behavior showed that he thought men were naturally superior to women, which could be told through his comment on Maureen’s aide as “chores” (Munro, 1994, p. 132), his disdain for her ability and even worse, his insult to Maureen’s body.

Thus, married life didn’t bring Maureen any sense of security but that of dullness, indifference and grievance. For Mr. Stephens, he took advantage of the marriage to vent his frustration and discontent, making Maureen a tool to satisfy his abnormal mentality.

In this marriage, Maureen is the victim of the male-dominated society, showing compromise to her husband and the unfair system. However, through the unconscious hidden in her behavior and fantasy, Maureen’s spirit of feminism sprouts, displaying her endeavor to fight against the unfairness. On the contrary, Mr. Stephens’ abnormal behavior manifests his weakness.

As for Mr. Stephens, his obsessiveness to abnormal sex mainly reflects his unconscious mind.

There was nothing now of the rather clumsy ceremony, the formal fondness, of their early times together. Now his eyes would cloud over and his face would seem weighed down. He would speak to her in a curt and menacing way and sometimes push and prod her, even trying to jam his fingers into her from behind. (Munro, 1994, p. 153)

In his theory of contrary sexual feelings, Freud points out that if a person has experienced some kind of stimulus or big changes in life, nerve stimulation may reflect on sexuality, further contributing to sadism. In the process, aggressiveness has been strengthened and it leads the sexuality through displacement. The purpose of it is to show initiative and aggressiveness to the object, and the same time, to receive satisfaction of humiliating and abusing.

As it is mentioned above, Mr. Stephens was a man with an honorable career and a strong sense of responsibility. With the high standard of his career and much expectation from the public, he developed a system of strict self-discipline to control and regulate himself even within his sexual life. Therefore, his desires had been piled and compressed without a vent in an extreme way, where his id, ego and superego intermingles, having a fierce fight against each other. The constant struggle of performing the social morality and freeing inner intent resulted in abnormal development of his mind to some extent. After getting used to a distinguished life, the sudden change—stroke, which devastates his pride—his ability of speaking, fiercely assaulted on his last barrier in mind. The respect, admiration, and recognition, which constructed his swollen vanity in the past, suddenly crumbled. The absent sense of accomplishment and security blanked his mind, making him engrossed

in seeking for substitutes. Consequently, the previous desires like libido once had been compressed and twisted in mind now sprout in an exaggerating way and developed uncontrollably.

To sum up, Mr. Stephens' abnormal treatment to Maureen is a way to show his weakness in mentality, which represents his incomplete defense mechanism and avoidance of the reality.

The unconscious of Maureen primarily contained in her fantasy, which revealed a mixture of negative runaway and positive response, reflecting her compromising personality. In this excerpt, she fancied herself living a totally different life to escape from the reality, where she strengthened two images—"the parcels" and "the cherries".

She might catch herself sitting on stone steps eating cherries and watching a man coming up the steps carrying a parcel. She has never seen those steps or that man, but for an instant they seem to be part of another life that she is leading, a life just as long and complicated and strange and dull as this one. (Munro, 1994, p. 157)

Maureen used to be enthusiastic and imaginative, with a feminist expectation of her career and marriage. Nevertheless, she was forced to abandon the ideology when faced with the reality in a marriage. Her ability to manage matters was seen as a bonus, akin to a nice addition, but ultimately deemed not crucial or essential. She had to go back to family and engage in the affairs that she once tried to avoid, which left trauma in her mind. At this time, she was still confident that the married life would cater for her willing even if she had already made the concession at the beginning. However, the second strike came quickly. Due to huge gap of their age, personality and more importantly, their values towards gender, marriage and love, Maureen began to realize she was trapped in a jail which was rife with ill-disposed satire, unequal relationship as well as physical and mental agony, locking her in a circle of endless self-questioning. At the same time, the feeling of repression and humiliation kept her on the brink of fear and confusion. She was afraid to speak honestly about her psychological stress. As a way of runaway from this disgusting life, Maureen began to immerse herself in the fantasy of an apparently different life, which seemed to be long, complicated, strange and dull but peaceful and free.

Meanwhile, Maureen applied fantasy as a way to fight against the reality as well. After being maltreated by his husband, a weird scene emerged as her ordinary routine kept on.

What she sees now isn't in any life of her own. She sees one of those thick fingered hands that pressed into her tablecloth and that had worked among the feathers, and it is pressed down, unresistingly, but by somebody else's will—it is pressed down on the open burner of the stove where she is stirring the custard in the double boiler, and held there just for a second or two, just long enough to scorch the flesh on the red coil, to scorch but not to maim. (Munro, 1994, p. 157)

Maureen cost a heavy price in physical and mental humiliation for maintaining a virtually unhappy marriage, where the appearance of a "happy" life and the stunning secrets hidden in it gave her a great deal of stress. Since avoidance gradually developed into a degenerated way to cope with the alienation, agony, resentment in mind, another strong defense mechanism grew and replaced the former one. Maureen described the fantasy as "a brief and barbaric and necessary act" (Munro, 1994, p. 157), which showed her firm decision to fight back and implement punishment. The instrument of torture was a stove, from which flames burst, causing an unbearable agony and constant pain. It implied her id wakened and dominated her mentality, implying that her silence and obedience had converted into resistance and defiance.

In conclusion, Mr. Stephens, the one who has strong power over his wife in age, gender and status, fails to behave strong in coping with mental collapse. While Maureen learns to struggle and fight against the offensive, developing a way out for her repressed mind and conveying her strong personality.

### **Mary Johnstone and the Girls**

Besides the power conversion between the husband and the wife, kids and adults' different attitudes towards life also show power alteration. Mary Johnstone, the leader of an annual hike of the C.G.I.T. (Canadian Girls in Training), had been engaged in this part-time job for years. She was a type of person "who made too much of herself" (Munro, 1994, p. 129). The polio she contracted as a teenager twisted her stature and impaired her ability of living a normal life. Thus, she did not have a chance to get married and become a mother, which twisted her mentality. In a description of her encounter with Maureen, it can be evidently told. She named Maureen as "Mrs. Stephens" on purpose, with a sense of envy and bitterness coming from Maureen's lucky marriage and healthy body, as an outlet for her hatred towards the unfairness of fate.

All of this misery of being isolated from the society directly motivated her to work desperately and win respect from others. Although she managed to get a job in the office at Douds Factory, seeming rather decent for her, and was labeled as being "wonderful" by neighbors, discrimination never faded away and she did know it. Actually, a man with physical disability in a so-called healthy group is more conspicuous than what he or she thinks since people are used to uniformity and wary of divergence. They may avoid showing direct disdain in case of being rude or ungracious and even in some cases they behave rather caring, but it's difficult for them to regard the disabled as the same with them and they've already had a definition of defect. Therefore, discrimination may soften its form and be changed into compassion, which barely means equality and respect. Mary Johnstone had a clear understanding of it, of which she was extremely afraid as well. Thus, she pretended to perform strong and forced herself to be a model: being disabled while strong-willed as a way of runaway and also a cloth of covering her self-abasement. When a girl's disappearance aroused great wave of public opinion, she tried to pull herself out of the mire since this event hurt her image. She desperately endeavored to contact the local newspaper to tell the so-called truth in her eyes over and over again, though not only the editor and the police but also all of the villagers shared no interest in this event. Meanwhile, as she saw that there was no chance to receive equal respect from her peers and their hypocritical recognition couldn't bring her comfort and cater to her dignity, she devoted her spare time to hiking with girls, who were perfect receivers for her inspiring stories and satisfying shelter from her anxiety and fear in the name of education, since she believed girls were easier to be controlled. In the activity, it was her endless and boring presentation occupied most of the time, which contained her shattering sagas and exaggerated model effect as well as numerous questions to grasp the girls' attention.

There were seven young girls joining in Miss Johnstone's expedition, among which Heather Bell was the protagonist of the disappearing event. These energetic girls were naive but rebellious, with the spirit of adventure, full of vitality, resembling any generation could be called the teenager. They followed the instructions from Miss Johnstone while they never shared the absolute obedience. Most of them sometimes deliberately disobeyed Miss Johnstone and even changed the lyrics of her song into "For the sight of Miss Johnstone's bum, Waddling down the County Road. We are the morons singing this song—Doesn't she look

just like a toad?" (Munro, 1994, p. 126). Thus, the girls didn't appreciate or respect Miss Johnstone at all. On the contrary, they saw her as a nagging and tiresome biddy, stuffed with cliches. This can be regularly seen as an epitome of a girl's self-construction process, when she develops from a girl to an adult. At the period, girls' perception of the world and their values gradually form, by a way that is chaotic and confusing, leading to their awareness of rebellion especially towards adults, who represent the obstacles in their searching of an innovative way.

Seemingly, Miss Johnstone had superiority to the girls in age and power as she was capable of controlling their physical movement and drumming her ideology into them through endless babbling of platitude. However, the description of Miss Johnstone's unconscious mind in language and behavior displayed her lowliness and ingratiating.

In daily communication, Miss Johnstone frequently showed the white feather in front of the girls through words. When Heather Bell asked her for a leave to fetch her sweater, she agreed with "Yes, but hurry. Hurry and catch up" (Munro, 1994, p. 130). Here, she unconsciously applied the repetition of "hurry" with two sentences and it seemed that the former sentence failed to convey her full meaning so the latter followed quickly. "Hurry and catch up" (Munro, 1994, p. 130), with a sense of oppression, exactly manifested Miss Johnstone's anxiety. For one thing, she didn't mean to give Heather Bell the green light at all because she still believed that the girl was totally controlled by her and everything must be on the track with her instructions. Unexpectedly, the girl's request was like a lightning, tearing apart the authoritative world established by Miss Johnstone, triggering her uneasiness of losing the power over these girls. For another, she also feared that being too mean may arouse the girls' discontent so as to impair the popularity of her hiking, which meant she would lose the haven where she placed her hidden self-abasement. Thus, she had to lower her profile and curried favor with them.

There was a representative excerpt vividly displaying her weakness in conflict with the girls when Heather Bell had disappeared for some time. At first, she seemed to be calm to lure the girl by pointing what kind of food she had and how tasty they were by applying "Pancakes and coffee!" or "Yummy!" (Munro, 1994, p. 130), and then, with a higher and more exaggeratedly childish tone, she called out the hidden girl (she believes) more frequently like "Aren't these the best pancakes you ever did eat? Heather better hurry up or there won't be one left. Heather? Are you listening? Not one left!" (Munro, 1994, p. 130). Next, her satire towards a girl suddenly appeared in a fog regardless of violating the image she maintained and giving a big hit to the girl as: "Dishes first, my lady," Miss Johnstone said, "Even if you never do pick up a dishrag around home" (Munro, 1994, p. 131) This excerpt described Miss Johnstone's attitude towards Heather Bell's disappearance. It seemed that Miss Johnstone was insouciant about the girl's missing since she simply recognized it as a childish trick by naming Heather Bell "Miss Mischief" (Munro, 1994, p. 130). She had been engaged in the activity for years and no one was more professional than her in leading a group of girls for an excursion. Thus, she was highly confident about accurately catching Heather Bell's intention to show her strong leadership. However, the way she put those words was rather exaggerating than words themselves, which exposed her inner anxiety and fear. First, she raised her voice and shout dramatically, implying that she hoped to receive response, which was ostensibly from Heather, as well as the girls in fact. Meanwhile, she shouted to impose her optimism about Heather's missing on those girls and received comfort for her own mind. Second, she constantly raised

questions, applying automatic speaking to hide her anxiety. Third, she became sensitive and uncontrollably conveyed her acerbity to the girls. For example, when another girl asked Miss Johnstone to look for Heather, she satirized her by defining her as a spoiled child brought up from a wealthy family.

Miss Johnstone's subconscious mind seems to be hinting that she has an inkling something has happened to Heather, even though she is not consciously aware of it. Consequently, in the matter of Heather's disappearance, Miss Johnstone's influence is perceived as less significant when compared to that of the genuinely sincere girls.

### **The Stephens and the Theos**

The Stephens—Maureen and Mr. Stephens shared nothing in common with Marian Hubbert and Slater Theo—the Theos, while both of them were involved in the event of the missing girl, contributing to a dramatic meeting which implied astonishing truth in the mystery. Interestingly, their power against each other altered concerned different situation.

Maureen and Mr. Stephens, as introduced earlier, was an exemplary couple from middle class who received good education, respectable occupation and wealth. They kept strict discipline and insisted on social morality, winning admiration and respect. In spite of Mr. Stephens' stroke, villagers had got used to asking him for advice. "Go and ask Lawyer Stephens. Go and ask about the Law" (Munro, 1994, p. 136) seemed to be their creeds, which manifested the couple's high status in the village. As for the Theos, the husband—Slater Theo, a thin and tender man, was got from an advertisement by his wife Marian—the owner of a farmhouse, rambunctious and bossy, sometimes worked on the corsets business which was seen as a despised job. They were the most ordinary people living in the bottom of the society, apparently, being inferior to the Stephens in family background, education, occupation, wealth and social status, labeled by "the smell of shaving soap, paste de-odorant, and a cheap drugstore cologne" (Munro, 1994, p. 136). Most importantly, this couple carried a secret about the disappearance of Heather Bell who might be murdered by the husband Theo, the one who even hosted the girls and Miss. Johnstone in the morning of the day when they had the excursion. Actually, the two distinctive families had their own thoughts about each other like any of a rich family or a poor family: the latter stealthily envied and resented the former; while the former buried their contempt in hypocritical and indifferent rituals.

Unexpectedly, the two families had an unplanned and formal conversation concerned the disappearing girl as the Theos claimed that they had some clues, which was virtually their way to put out feelers and fabricate a charge against their poor neighbor, Mr. Siddicup. Therefore, with respective demands of asking for advice or being an authoritative instructor, they could finally seat around a table and talked. Seemingly, the rich family always felt superior to the poor one—treating them in appropriate courtesy while intermingling with contempt to show their strong power. In a different scenario, a distinct outcome emerged. Though the Theos knew full well that they killed someone, they still had the upper hand in the conversation thanks to the wife's activity with an arrogant air, making endless speeches and exaggerated performance without any lack of confidence, while the Stephens got rare chance to have their say and were completely duped by the couple of concealment.

With deeper exploration of the Stephens' unconscious mind, it could be detected that the disgrace contained in the language and behavior maximized their weakness. On account of Mr. Stephens' unconscious

behaviour and words, he didn't treat the Theos seriously at all, with an inborn superiority over them. At the beginning, he did not come out to meet the Theos until Maureen called him a second time and the couple's visit was apparently not serious enough to interrupt his breakfast. This careless slight implied a deep contempt for the couple as Mr. Stephens took it for granted. Besides, it was not respectful that the listener Mr. Stephens spared no glance for the teller, Marian's enthusiastic expression and laborious performance, except for mentioning her husband's work at the new Atomic Energy Station. He merely offered a quick glance in her direction, just "a brief look up" (Munro, 1994, p. 140). In fact, it seemed to be the only way for the Stephens to oppress them by judging through the externality like occupation and wealth instead of the inner part includes ideology and virtues. In the end, the Stephens were no saints with adorable morality but mere mortals wrapped in stereotypes. Whenever they tried to show their superiority, it is a depression of their satisfied vanity.

However, as for the Theos, even though they had a better understanding of the status difference between the Stephens and themselves, they still kept everything in normality and were confident enough to express their thoughts and feelings. In other words, they refused to receive such a kind of meanness stigmatized on their body and identity, which exactly uncovered their strength to struggle against discrimination in class and stereotype in society. For example, Marian held her heavy and determined face to convey her seriousness confronted with the Stephens. "But everywhere Marian went, as now in Maureen's dining room, she would present herself as if she had absolute rights" (Munro, 1994, p. 138).

Whereas, from the perspective of the truth related to the missing girl, all of Theos' confidence or arrogance, different behavior and odd reactions compared with those in usual turned out to cover up their unease—the weakness, which derived from the murder they tried to conceal.

The couple did imply that they had harbored something really incredible as they acted extremely unnaturally from the beginning by paying a visit to the Stephens in the very early morning, when the host they expected to see was not equipped with a clear mind yet, and knocking at the door but not ringing the bell, conveying a sense of solemnity. Besides, the discrepancy between their behaviors was too weird: the wife tried to be swank while the husband deliberately kept a low profile. The dressing came first. Marian Hubbert was too-much dressed up with a heavy blue suit, brown cloth gloves and a feathers-made hat, decorated with unsuitable make-up, smelled of perfume, trying to attract everyone's attention to her, which was quite different from the casual style she preferred in daily life. While Slater Theo intended to avoid any watchful eye by wearing an unimpressive cream-colored jacket, but the wet comb on his head made him a freak. Also, their behaviors are in abnormality. When Maureen politely refused their early visit, Marian Hubbert unexpectedly stepped in and even made Maureen backwards like there's an emergency. Moreover, to tell the story, Marian applied stunning while superfluous performance. "Here Marian pushed back her chair so abruptly that it almost fell over. She got up and began to show them just what Mr. Siddicup had done. She lurched and crouched and banged her hands to her head, though she did not dislodge her hat" (Munro, 1994, p. 143). While Slater Theo followed his wife with a modest and apologetic attitude like he had done something wrong, with a sense of tolerance and repression—"Something flashed in his face—a tic, a nerve jumping in one cheek" (Munro, 1994, p. 143). Although he finally gave some words at the end of the conversation, he unconsciously "had both hands on the table, fingers spread, pressed down, pulling at the cloth" (Munro, 1994, p. 148). Finally, secrets are concealed in their languages. Usually, Marian Hubbert intended to enjoy a "rambunctious manner with a loud voice" (Munro, 1994, p. 137), while she lowered down her tone and arranged

words explicitly and logically this time. Also, she prepared a long and elaborate story, with every detail clearly illustrated from a terrible boil on her neck to his dog Bounder, and then to her unverified encounter with Mr. Siddicup, as if she was eager to demonstrate her rationality to make her words more convincing. Slater, unexceptionally, spoke in a low voice, but was even lack of confident this time, murmuring the same words or phrases like apologies and acknowledgements unconsciously—“He said please and thank you as often as possible. He said, Thank you very much, please. Thank you. The same for me. Thank you” (Munro, 1994, p. 139). All of these eccentric actions virtually represented for a swindle of the couple: the wife endeavored to shield her husband from the crime of murder at the cost of others’ innocence. Therefore, their unconscious exaggeration and over-detailed expressions uncovered their nervousness and a guilty conscience behind the attempt to twist the truth.

In conclusion, the relationship between the Stephens and the Theos remains the most complicated and their power against each other varies as the unconscious mind can be interpreted in different situations. In daily interaction, the Theos are a notch above the Stephens because of their confidence and tenacity. While in front of the girl’s death, they are at a disadvantage to the Stephens due to their underlying anxiety and fear.

### Conclusion

This article explores Alice Munro’s artistic thoughts on Freud’s psychoanalysis in one of her most renowned short stories *Open Secrets*. It mainly probes into the different forms of characters’ unconscious mind to reveal their underlying thoughts, personalities and values, displaying the conversion of their power against each other—“strong” and “weak” embodied in characters’ relationship. By analyzing characters’ featured language, abnormal behavior and various fantasies where the unconscious lies, secrets behind the most ordinary relationship can be detected: the savage husband maltreats his wife as a way to settle his frustration and vanity, while the strong wife fights back through the punishment in fantasies; the unkind adults show their strictness to the youth in order to hide their self-abasement, while the rebellious teenagers bravely struggle against the authority; the arrogance of the poor is a sign to demonstrate their strength to the contempt from the rich, while that of a murder just turns out to be a way to harbour his anxiety and anger. It can be concluded that the relationship between characters is sophisticated and changeable and the power between each other bears no invariability but alters frequently in conflicts as their psychology is influenced by previously long-held belief, social stereotype, trauma and stimuli hidden in the unconscious. Therefore, a person being oppressed in a relationship does not mean he or she will always remain weak, and vice versa. Every individual fights against things that disobey their intent through all kinds of ways that are obvious or underlying.

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