



## TRANSFORMATION OF DESIRE: FREUD'S SUBLIMATION IN HAMAYUN MASAUD'S SHORT STORY *THIRST*

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### Abstract

The current paper aims to investigate the psychological interpretation of Zarin, the central character in Hamayun Masaud's short story "Thirst," using a Freudian defence mechanism called sublimation. After spending a year of loneliness, Zarin seeks to gratify his unfulfilled desires through a vulnerable girl in distress. The current study argues that his carnal urges are redirected towards empathy and protection for the helpless girl. This abrupt transformation of his initial fleshy urges into sublime feelings demonstrate how socially unacceptable urges can transform into something socially and culturally valued and acceptable, illustrating sublimation as a mature way to attain psychological equanimity. The present research employs a qualitative interpretive approach, hence focusing on exploring hidden meanings and also analysing cognitive workings of Zarin. The study aims to interpret the story to unveil the psychological mechanisms of Zarin and the ultimate sublimation of his primal impulses.

**Keywords:** *Defence Mechanisms, Freudian Psychoanalysis, Hamayun Masaud, Psychological Transformation, Sublimation, Thirst*

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## 1. Introduction

Human mind keeps on taming and ultimately balancing its innermost desires by lining them up with societal expectations. Works and theories written and formulated by Sigmund Freud help researchers across and space comprehend these internal commotions rising up inside human psyche; especially through the concept of what are known as the defense mechanisms. Sublimation is an exceptional mechanism; for through this, the human mind metamorphoses raw, unacceptable and untamed urges into positive, acceptable and beneficial acts of behaviour. The present paper strives to explore how *Zarin*, the main character in *Thirst* – a short story anthologized in Hamayun Masaud’s short story collection *Relations* (2024) – sublimates his intense cardinal desires into genuine care and fatherly compassion for a girl in distress.

Sigmund Freud theories that human actions are fueled by libido – the assortment of basic human instincts, especially human sexual desires. He believes and thus suggests that this converged energy can be channeled into positive and acceptable social acts. Instead of seeking direct and sometimes unforbidden fulfilling, this energy can be contained and redirected towards healthy and socially acceptable activities (Freud, 1905). *Sublimation*, in short, is more than just suppressing and curbing a desire; rather, it is transformation of its purpose and even its nature. Later on, Freud equally applied this alchemy to aggressive impulses, arguing that the human progress both in art and science, owes substantially to the mental capacity of man to channel these forbidden energies constructively (Freud, 2015). Dissimilar to other defence mechanisms, which are prone to creating problems, *Sublimation* has been observed as a healthy mechanism to aptly handle an emotionally volatile situation, thus benefiting both the individual and the society (Vaillant, 1993).

*Sublimation* is distinct from other major defence mechanisms. *Repression*, for instance, suppress unwanted thoughts but, like *Sublimation*, does not redirect them, and thus lies inert yet potentially lethal. Likewise, *Displacement* transits anger at a different and weaker target, lacking retaliation. *Sublimation*, as said earlier, changes the purpose and nature of the sexual impulses, hence, leading to genuine satisfaction in a fresh and socially acceptable form (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2018; Freud, 2015). Comparatively recent psychoanalysts such as Otto Kernberg (1995) have argued how the ego mechanism utilises *Sublimation* for matured function, thus, turning lethal and harmful impulses into positive and constructive efforts (Fonagy & Target, 2003).

The application of Freudian ideas and theories to literary works has now been usual. These theories have been highly rewarding in understanding characters’ hidden motives working out actions, the symbolic significance of actions, and the psychological

dynamics in narratives (Wright, 2013). Masaud's short story *Thirst* illustrates these points rigorously, as the character of *Zarin* clearly deals with strong impulses which ultimately undergo profound change, thus aligning with the Freudian concept of *Sublimation*.

As a critical lens, the concept of *Sublimation* has extensively been applied by researchers to various works of literature to explore how characters and, of course, authors sublimate their basic instincts in creative and constructive ways. For instance, Jones, (1953) in his study of Thomas Mann's novel *Death in Venice* (1912), interprets the aesthetic obsession that the protagonist displays as the *Sublimation* of a forbidden desire into a work of art. The same concept is replicated with certain modifications in Kohut's (1957) research work on the same novel, i.e., *Death in Venice*, where he studies the novel from Freudian concept of *Sublimation*, concluding that the entire fabric of the novel stands on the sublimation of the inner conflicts of the author, Thomas Mann. Likewise, Ellmann (2010) and Kenner (1962) have interpreted the creative career of Stephen Dedalus, the main character of James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) as the transformation of the repressed sexual energy of the novelist into intellectual and artistic work. Marcus (1987) and Showalter (1990), in their separate research works argue that Virginia Woolf in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway* sublimates Novelis's emotional and psychological conflicts through her main character, Clarissa Dalloway's holding social rituals. Similarly, Kafka in his book *The Metamorphosis* represents *Sublimation* through the way Gregor Samsa metamorphoses, thus displacement of the sense of guilt into a work of art (Sokel, 1996; Deleuze, 1986). Ambitious research work has been carried out on DH Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913) by Burack (1997) where the researcher argues that DH Lawrence has sublimated his Oedipal anxieties into art and ambition through the novel. Similarly, TS Eliot's magnum opus *The Waste Land* (1922), according to the research work done by Miller (1992), is a poetic act of *Sublimation*, as an act of converting postwar depression and sexual frustration into a fragmented modernist art. Critics like Rosenblatt (2018) and Gill (2008) have observed that in *The Bell Jar* (1963) Sylvia Plath has sublimated her individual trauma and suppressed emotion into creativity. Even Albert Camus' famous existentialist novel *The Stranger* has psychoanalytically been read and detachment of Meursault, the main character, has been pronounced as *Sublimation* of the existentialist anxiety and the repressed emotions of the writer (Bronner, 2009; Judt, 1998).

The afore given list of works confirms the notion that Freudian concept of *Sublimation* still remains significant as a valuable technique in understanding how authors, through literature, directs their own or their characters' intellectual impulses into creativity, morality and meaning.

Since the short story *Thirst* has recently been published, no substantial research work, till the composition of the current article, from the proposed or any angle has been observed.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

1. To investigate *Zarin*'s initial impulses that reflect Freud's concept of the *Id* and role of the *Superego* in his moral conflict.
2. To investigate *Zarin*'s transformation and external and internal factors that trigger this psychological shift.

### 1.2. Research Questions

1. How does *Zarin*'s initial impulses reflect Freud's concept of the *Id* and what role does the *Superego* play in his moral conflict?
2. How does *Zarin*'s transformation exemplify *sublimation* and what external and internal factors trigger this psychological shift?

## 2. Methodology and Conceptual Framework

To explore the inner impulses of *Zarin*, the main character in Hamayun Masaud's short story, *Thirst* (2024), the current qualitative study utilizes Sigmund Freud's concept of *Sublimation* – a defence mechanism (Freud, 1905; Freud, 2015; Vaillant, 1993). This study is done with the aim to trace the *Sublimation* of the same impulses into something socially accepted and positive acts in the character of *Zarin*. Through this method, the researchers explore the psychological conflicts and the ultimate *Sublimation* of *Zarin*. The current study hence identifies *Zarin*'s impulses with Sigmund Freud's ideas of *Id*, *Ego* and *Superego* and, at the same time, shows how *Sublimation* works.

To understand the psychological development of *Zarin*, the highly recommended technique – the close reading technique has been used. The subsequent analysis involves the careful examination of the short story *Thirst* to find specific details therein; like *Zarin*'s thoughts, words, and actions which help the researchers trace his psychological states and changes.

The main source of data is the short story *Thirst* by Hamayun Masaud, anthologized in his short story collection "*Relations*" (2024). To address the research questions the researchers have examined the extracted sections of the texts. In order to obtain reliable findings of the study, the secondary data has painstakingly been collected from pertinent and authentic sources like reliable research journals and papers/articles, research theses, books and interviews. Much care has been taken to attribute each work to its author/s and researcher/s, thus, observing the academic citation standards. To maintain scholarly integrity, no unauthentic or poor references have been used throughout the paper.

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

*Sublimation*, as a Freudian concept, means the transference of the unconscious desires or instincts, especially sexual or violent impulses, into creative and culturally and socially acceptable or even admirable acts (Freud, 1905).

This section examines how *Zarin*, the central character in Hamayun Masaud's short story *Thirst*, develops socially acceptable and productive behaviour after sublimating socially unacceptable, lethal sexual and/or aggressive drives. The researchers trace the impulses from their crude and violent presence to their new and socially refined forms, like empathy and care and protection.

#### 3.1. *Zarin's Sublimation: Journey from Loneliness to a New Path*

*Zarin* is presented as a well-off man, in the short story "*Thirst*," who is deeply saddened and affected by a year of "agonizing loneliness" and "deprivation" (Masaud, 2024, p.56) after the untimely death of his wife, Zeba. This devastating incident functions as a fuel for his "deepest longing" for "the intimacy of a woman" (ibid, p. 56), a clear indication of a desire for physical connection and satisfaction. The ravaging inner thoughts reveal a scuffle between his conscience and his base desires and impulses, as he wonders if his pricking conscience serves any purpose if it toils to stop him from fulfilling his "bodily desires" (ibid, p.57). He is shown driven by *id* – the strong, primitive urges.

One day when driving, he happens to see a frightened girl running, *Zarin* decides to act on the impulses which have been ravaging in him for a year now. He succumbs to his "demonic mind" that instigates him to "first frighten her and then manipulate and exploit her" (ibid, p.61). *Zarin* even justifies himself and his intended actions by thinking that the girl has most probably "shattered her father's and/or husband/s honour" (ibid, p 61). Working on his desires and plans, *Zarin* cleverly brings the girl to his isolated bungalow, pretending to be a well-wisher and helper, while secretly planning to satiate his thirst and "carnal desires" (ibid, p. 63). His preparations like using perfume clearly testifies to his intensions to the helpless girl.

#### 3.2. The Turning Point: From Apathy to Empathy

The most crucial psychological shift in *Zarin* occurs when he observes the young woman asleep in a bed at his bungalow. Instead of seeing her as a satisfying object for his carnal desires, he begins to see her pathetic and, thus, vulnerable condition. The entire situation is thus described:

*"In her sleep, her body seemed to radiate even more. She carefully draped her Chadar around her body, but her face remained uncovered, revealing a strange and natural innocence. He didn't know her name or anything about her past ... Yet he*

*understood that this was a world dominated by men, where any woman attempting to stand on equal ground with men was surely destined to lose her footing. However, he couldn't help but think that if life were filled with wickedness, goodness also exists. His heart overflowed with sympathy for her"* (Masaud, 2024, p.64).

This is that specific moment when he feels something sublime is happening in his entire being. These happenings are in fact, as the later events would prove, the beginning of a psychological transformation – *Sublimation*. He feels her “strange and natural innocence” cuts through his lust and soon after awakens his fatherly empathy for her. His “fervor and wicked plans” start to “diminish” and the “wolf within [him] now lies sleeping, devoid of life” (ibid, p. 59).

Crucially, *Zarin's* strong, unfulfilled desires do not just diminish and then disappear. Instead, they redirect themselves to higher purpose. The same urge, which a short while ago drove him towards exploitation of the vulnerable young woman, now transform into a desire to protect her and care for her.

*Zarin's* psychological change is evident in his subsequent actions, like ordering food, reassuring her, and allowing her to sleep peacefully. His “hunger of his bodily desires” (ibid, p. 57) now finds a new, ethical and admirable outlet in the form of compassion. He questions himself if his “upbringing and inherent nature align with such exploitation?” (ibid, p.64). The answer to this question is definitely “No.” This question is indicative of the fact that his raw impulse has already been transforming and been redirected and channeled into a socially and ethically positive act.

### **3.3. Sublimation: the Force Behind *Zarin's* Psychological Transformation**

Behind *Zarin's* psychological transformation lies the power of Freud's concept of *sublimation*. *Zarin* had been a mature person, running a successful business, which suggests that he had been channeling his drives most productively. However, the year of loneliness pushed him towards less healthy and socially unacceptable ways of coping with his current circumstances. The story powerfully depicts how difficult and emotionally trying experiences can prove challenging even for a strong mind like *Zarin's*.

*Zarin's* psychological change was brought about by the vulnerability of the girl and a moment of quiet reflection on his part. Her innocence circumvented his predatory thoughts and reoriented him with his innate capacity for empathy. This suggests that though unconscious, *sublimation* can be helped out by deliberate and conscious thoughts and situations that challenge and ultimately transform the current way of thinking. Though the story shows the beginning of this change and not entire and complete change, it still depicts the power *sublimation* may effect. The events of the story demonstrate that the effect of

the original desires diminishes, not completely vanishes; however, their energy is successfully redirected. *Zarin's* newly felt "sympathy" and the fading of his "wicked plans" (Masaud, 2024, p. 64) vividly indicate that the wicked and aggressive energy is now aimed at good and ethical emotions like empathy and care.

#### 4. Findings and Conclusion

The current paper aims to analyse Hamayun Masaud's short story "*Thirst*" (2024) from Freudian concept of *sublimation* in order to trace and record the psychological change of *Zarin*, the protagonist of the story from the unacceptable lustful desires for a young girl in distress to socially, culturally and ethically acceptable emotions of empathy, care and protection.

The study clarifies that sublimation can be actuated only by conscious and deliberate thoughts and actions to challenge and hence change the prevailing line of thinking. It is also known that the change may only become permanent only if conscious and deliberate attempts are made during such situations.

Such situations like the one faced by *Zarin* arise in actual life where the carnal desires overwhelm one, yet, instead of succumbing to them, one can cope with them with reflection and deliberate and sincere efforts.

In modern times, man has been enslaved by his carnal desires and have turned him to potential threat to the overall well-being of the society. By analysing such literary works like "*Thirst*" we can highlight the malady and its remedy in a more informed and scientific way.

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