

Chapter IV

Narcissism in *Traveler in the Dark*

Guides the traveler in the dark

Though I know not what you are

Twinkle, twinkle little star. (2. 271)

Traveler in the Dark tackles a more philosophical debate—a discussion between science and religion, and its effect on Sam—a world-famous surgeon. The failure of his surgery on his long-time nurse and childhood sweetheart, Mavis, stirs a new crisis into his soul and opens the way in front of his repressed emotions to come to light; Sam feels betrayed and deserted by everything he absorbingly believes in—religion, medicine, the power of intellect, and himself (Kane 18). He is unable to gain victory over death. Hence, *Traveler* not only shows a developing understanding and realization of the protagonist and his crisis of faith, but also lights dawn on his human weaknesses and his atheism through various counteracts with his wife, Glory, his son, Stephen, and his father, Everett.

Sam's state of melancholia and his intentions of isolation and separation appear at first glance to be a reaction to the death of his long-time friend, but his return to Everett's house assures that Sam's condition is deeper than it comes into sight. His belief in intellect, his mind, and what makes sense is not innate in his character, but is an escape and inability to deal with his loss of his mother. The death of Mary causes his loss of faith in God and imagination. He no longer believes in religion—Christianity; and his long prayers have died away because of its incapability of saving the soul of his beloved mother, and his sense of

God's betrayal. Sam's denial of his loss of his mother enforces him to lose his faith in spirituality. He directs his faith to science and medicine. In addition, his intelligence, and his exceptional and miraculous faculties motivate his identification with his own ego, and his narcissistic dispositions come to light. His inability to bear the unendurable pain of life in this world and its consequences turns him into a monster that pays no attention to any person, or thing, and other's needs, except to his peerless mind. The other's weak mind does not enable him to deal with such a smart mentality.

However, Mavis' death is the straw that breaks Sam's power, and projects his distant sense of loss and his inability to get over his emotional upheaval as well as a turning point in our recognition of his dilemma and deep pain. His faith in medicine fades away in front of his helplessness and impotence to rescue her from a fatal and deadly cancer. His incapacity puts an end to his power sense of intellect as well as his own glory and pride in spite of his international reputation. As a result, this modern crisis of faith destroys him, and escalates his aggressive attitude towards his wife, his son, and his father. It also stirs his inclination to escape from his own context on the whole. His intentional hurt to Glory, his strong determination to consider Stephen an adult despite the damage such a behavior may cause, and his continuous disregard and neglect to Everett throw light upon his psychological trouble, and pathological dispositions and complicated impulses. Sam is a stark representation of a narcissist and of an intricate Oedipus complex.

Therefore, *Traveler* comes to be in two acts; the first is an exposition of the protagonist whole condition and his relations, and the second appears to be a resolution of his difficulties, reconciliation with himself and his family, and an acceptance of his humanity and

weaknesses in comparable to God and the mystery and wisdom of His actions. The play sets in the garden—Mother’s garden—of the house of Sam’s family. A place he does not call at for years:

*The play takes place in the overgrown garden of a country
preacher’s house. There are stone animals, including one
large*

*goose, stone benches, a crumbling stone wall and a small
pond.*

*Various objects are impeded in the wall—toys, mainly, but also
such*

*household objects as cups and saucers. . . . the less
impressive this*

*garden appears, the better. It is Sam’s connection to the
garden*

*that is important, not ours. (1. 224)*¹

This setting is a place of imagination; it projects Sam’s childhood of magic, rituals, and faith. He is the son of an eminent preacher and a mother who lives on fancy and fairy tales. Sam’s being present in Mary’s garden—a place where he and his mother spend much time—incites his envy and angry with his father; he regards Everett as his rival in his mother’s affection, and then Mavis’s. Moreover, he maltreats his father, and is prejudiced against him, regardless his old age and weakness. Sam’s lack of empathy, inability to preserve healthy interpersonal relations, and

¹ These lines are originally italicized by the author, and all the subsequent
quoted play lines.

a tendency for making use of others for the sake of self-aggrandizement draw his narcissistic personality disorder, besides his Oedipal intricate situation:

SAM. This place is a mess. Dad never did like this garden.

He said

Mother should save her knees for church.

.....

SAM. Mavis loved Dad. (1. 224-225)

Also, his inordinate appreciation of his own importance, solitary characteristics, capabilities for success and superiority force him to exploit others and over rely on their admiration without any sense of gratitude. His relations with Mavis, Glory, and Stephen are emotionally lacking depth. Such an attitude is described by Freud as megalomania. This state of carelessness and indifference comes to light in his-and-Glory discussion about Mavis' death and how to make it easy for their son:

GLORY. Stephen needs you to explain this to him, Sam. . . .

You've got to tell him something that will make him feel better.

.....

SAM. There isn't anything to say. Mavis waited too long to have

herself checked. I did the operation. She died. Stephen knows all

of that already.

GLORY. But he doesn't know what it means.

SAM. It doesn't mean anything. It's just . . . bad luck. (*He takes the*

stone rabbit from her and replaces it in the wall.) (1. 225)

His narcissism not only leads him to feel the meaninglessness of life and death, but also exceeds his delusions. Mavis' funeral is the cause behind Sam's being around people and his family from one hand. The matter results in his interaction with opposing forces, as representative in Glory's "softness" (Weals: 'A Long Way', 1), father's spirituality, and Stephen's sense of hope and ongoing life, on the other hand. A counteract he needs to face past and recent troubles, regain illumination, and think about his relations:

STEPHEN. They're strange books, Dad. I didn't see a single one

I'd ever seen before.

SAM. I know. Your books . . . make sense. (1. 226)

His pathological self-love prevents him from giving his son choices and provides him with different channels to make his own mind. He considers his son an extension of his existence as well as way of life.

Glory's reading of a *Mother Goose* nursery rhyme provokes Sam's sense of damage and his likeness to the egg-shaped character that falls off a wall and becomes irreparable. Mary's death brings about his destruction and deviation from what is right. It also produces his devoid of his sense of life, his being at a loss, and confusion:

SAM. His . . . mother . . . laid him there. . . . She told him he was a

man. See? She dressed him up in a little man's suit. He didn't

know he could fall. He didn't know he could break. He
didn't

know he was an egg. (1. 227)