

**THE DISGUISED RETURN OF THE REPRESSED IN *RATTLEBONE*  
FAMILY RELATIONS: FROM CHILDHOOD TO THE FORMATION OF  
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**Abstract**

This paper deals with the consequences of childhood experiences for the identity formation of adolescent characters. On the one hand, it unveils the different forms of traumatic experiences to which they are exposed. The socio-economic and psycho-affective conditions surrounding these characters overwhelm their existence. On the other hand, relying on classical Freudian psychoanalysis, this work highlights the far-reaching consequences of past painful event on the characters. Two opposing attitudes emerge in this context. Unresolved traumatic episodes shape negative and antisocial traits in one's own identity. Yet, from an Alderian perspective, other characters strive to develop social skills, humanistic and empowering values.

**Keywords:** Childhood, family, identity, psychoanalysis, traumatic experiences, violence

**LE RETOUR DÉGUISÉ DU REFOULÉ DANS LES RAPPORTS  
FAMILIAUX DANS *RATTLEBONE*: DE L'ENFANCE À LA FORMATION  
DES IDENTITÉS**

**Résumé**

Ce travail aborde les conséquences des expériences passées de l'enfance sur la formation identitaire des personnages adolescents. D'une part, il dévoile les différentes variantes des traumatismes auxquels ils sont exposés. Les conditions socio-économiques et psychoaffectives qui prévalent autour de ces personnages dégradent leur existence. D'autre part, en s'appuyant sur le levier de la psychanalyse Freudienne classique, cet article met en relief les conséquences profondes des expériences traumatisantes sur les personnages. Deux types d'attitudes contradictoires émergent dans ce contexte. Les traumatismes passés non résolus favorisent des comportements destructeurs et hostiles. Cependant, sous l'angle Alderien, certains personnages parviennent à développer des valeurs de savoir-vivre, d'humanité et d'affirmation de soi.

**Mots clés :** Enfance, expériences traumatisantes, famille, identité, psychanalyse, violence

**Introduction**

Published in 1994, *Rattlebone* is a collection of eleven interrelated short stories by Maxine Clair. The actions are set in Rattlebone which is the imaginary

place of the author. This work comprises adolescent characters that face traumatic experiences in their families. To understand the circumstances around these characters development and how they shape identities, we will target the psychological implications of their actions and behaviors. Like a human being, a character is by far a complexity that cannot be understood. To some extent, the impossibility to understand his/her actions is partly due to the fact that he/she is both reachable and unreachable. The human being comprises two dimensions ranging from physical to psychological traits. Although we are primarily governed by this dual concept, some thinkers argue that psychological traits are of a paramount importance. Thus said, understanding human being behavior or the characters' behaviors may require the lens of psychoanalysis. Within the framework of this study, the psychoanalytical approach enables us to explore and capture the inner thoughts of characters that often inform outer thoughts and actions. The focus is on the psychological implications of the characters' attitudes. Maxine Claire's *Rattlebone* includes a complex set of characters whose behavior is the subject of reflection in psychoanalysis. The study aims at exploring the characters' past painful experiences. Resorting to psychoanalysis leads us to ponder on the following questions: How do psychoanalytical motives such as the unconscious, unresolved oedipal attachment, displacement and selective perception inform the text? How do domestic violence, economic suffering and divorce help shape their identities? How does early painful experience help shape characters' identity? Psychoanalysis embodies an enduring theoretical analytical tool that allows the reader, on the one hand, to consider the traumatic experiences during childhood, and, on the other hand, to highlight the impacts of these traumatic experiences on the characters' identities. The current work is mainly grounded on classical psychoanalysis and Alder's theory of individual psychology. In Freudian psychoanalysis, it is assumed that each individual psychological experience originates in early childhood in the family and adolescent and adult behaviors are the legacy of these past experiences (F. Sigmund, 1966). The psychological problems or disorders foster destructive behaviors these are the reasons why psychoanalysis intends to help resolve these dysfunctions. In the meantime, Alder's theory shows that every human being is unique and indivisible. The latter tries to overcome the feeling of inferiority of early childhood through his creative power to change for the better. As a self-conscious being, the individual plans his actions which are anchored in motivating forces in order to reach perfection, self-achievement and superiority (A. Alfred, 1964).

## **1. Traumatic Experience During Childhood**

In psychoanalysis, a trauma can be defined as a mental condition caused by a severe shock. In the context of this analysis, we must emphasize that the harmful effects of such experience are long-lasting. At this level, we highlight the traumatic experience of the characters that emerge from the novel under consideration. To D.

Hook (2004, p.117), it if we are looking for the cause of neurotic disturbances, one must always look to the childhood history of the individual. The symptoms of neurosis are always linked to a kind of psychical trauma, which lends them their individual character. In *Rattlebone*, Maxine Clair tells the story of a female adolescent, Irene, raised in a rather unstable family. The family environment that surrounds Irene affects and infects her life. Irene goes through unpleasant experiences. Her character's development is molded by the legacy of violence, divorce, rigid or suffocating domestic atmosphere.

In the chapter entitled *Water Seeks Its Own Level*, Maxine Clair depicts how flooding threatens the inhabitants of Rattlebone. Irene's father, James, volunteers to help the other men pile sandbags in the Civil Defense Team. Thomas, Wes and James are having a conversation about the latest news from their town and how the James Wilson managed to come with the other men. As a matter of fact, James asked for permission with his wife Pearlean, before joining the other volunteers. This conversation emphasizes the idea that the poses and respectful attitudes James adopts toward his wife are considered as signs of fear in a patriarchal society. In a male dominated society, showing respect or/ and being a loving husband is a sign of weakness.

He crossed over to the Texaco station [...] He dropped a time in the slot. He would call and tell her [Pearlean]. He'd be late.

"you mean Pearlean's gonna let you go out to river tonight? Thomas said and winked at Wes. [...]" "so yo going out there with us ? Wes asked him.

"what does it look like? James asked

"Aw, so now, all of a sudden, you the man wes, Wes jocked

"I saw you calling up to get permission. (C. Maxine, 1994, pp.44-45).

Irene is growing up in a patriarchal society wherein the male characters burden their wives' life conditions. Subconsciously, the adepts of patriarchy, namely Wes and Thomas, urge James to change his respectful attitude towards his wife. In the long run, James would later act accordingly. The blatant oppression women are faced with is the legacy of the racial discrimination black men experience in the society. Under these circumstances, the frustrated husband shifts to insensitive and bitter behavior toward his wife. The latter, in that case, becomes hostile toward her daughter, Irene. Therefore, a double process of displacement emerges from this scene. Irene's father, like his counterparts are frustrated because they live in poor economic conditions characterized by unemployment. Given that James is powerless in front of white domination and that of his fellow black men, he transfers his anger and frustration onto his wife who cannot fight black or hurt him as badly as the people with whom he is angry. As a result, his wife becomes increasingly bitter and frustrated. In this case, according to B. Jacques (1999) when someone is subjected to frustration that situation generates an emotional state that prepares the frustrated victim for future aggressive attitude. The unconscious is not a passive storehouse of painful experiences and emotions. It is a dynamic entity

that engages the individual deeply. Pearlean tries to expunge from her consciousness the unhappy psychological events she has experienced. However, repressing the repressed does not eliminate her trauma. Rather, this denial enforces them by making the traumatic experiences the organizers of her current behavior. Irene's mother plays out her daughter in a distorted way. Frustrated, she transfers her anger out on her daughter. Irene is embarked in a cycle of domestic problems stemming from the male domination within her family. In order to grasp what is actually at stake in Irene's household, psychoanalysis criticism prompts the reader to comprehend the outer thoughts and actions in the light of repressed trauma of the main character's parents. In this context, the evident violent attitude of Shorty James toward his wife has a far-reaching impact on Irene. Maxine Clair alludes to the flood as a force of nature that can threaten the stability of the community. In particular, this natural disaster can be considered as a means of mediation between the unconscious and the conscious, superiority and inferiority. The power of water reveals the inner thoughts of the male characters' that echo their supremacy within their families. Such a male domination can darken the bond of love in a couple. Beyond the effects of patriarchal system on fragile members of the family, psycho-affective problem also emerges from the novel

In the seventh chapter: *The Great War* of her collection of short stories, Maxine Clair tells the story of Pearlean's misfortune. She is portrayed as an abandoned wife who tries to convince herself that her husband will return to her. To comfort herself, Pearlean develops the idea that true lovers are never apart but always connected by their bond of love. However, her husband does not have a deep feeling for her. The author illustrates his idea with these words "what good is love when you sit alone and wait?" (C. Maxine, 1994, p. 117) is one of her strong ideas about love. Powerlessness, in the face of a partner's infidelity causes emotional trauma in the victim. This leads to problems in the relationship. The following passage is an illustration:

Sure she waited. Because the woman she heard he was going with was pretty. Smarter than the two of them put together, really. She waited because he belonged to her, because the woman probably didn't want him any away, because no man can keep a woman and wife happy at the same time, [...] because what else could she do but wait. (C. Maxime, 1994, p. 117)

It is obvious that infidelity can have a major impact on the stability of the couple. If we consider Pearlean's attitude, in this scene, through the lens of psychoanalysis, we can argue that she is deeply affected by her husband's indifference towards her that is why she resorts to defenses strategies to solve her problem. Defenses are the processes by which the content of our unconscious are kept stored or repressed into the unconscious. Infantile traumas and the formation of the personality are interrelated. These traumas shape the oppressed individual's psychology. As D. Hook (2004, p.118) notes "such traumas are expelled from the conscious mind as means of saving the neurotic from great suffering". That

neglected wife's attitude can be grasped through two major motives mainly the selective perception and the fear of abandonment. In the underscored passage, the author uses twice the verb "waited". Despite the visible clues showing that her husband is dating another woman, she still believes that her man will return to her. She convinces herself that James belongs to her. Her certainty is a distorted sense of the reality she cannot accept. She uses a selective perception strategy to convince herself that she has not been rejected yet. This selective perception represents a distorted form of her fear of abandonment. She denies her rejection because she doesn't want her husband to leave her. When she finally realized that her couple was falling apart, she became increasingly bitter and frustrated. J. Dollard, N.E. Miller *et al* (1939) point out that frustration is the impossibility due to an obstacle to achieve a goal. For one to speak of frustration, the individual must expect certain actions. And actions formulated through expectation do not occur. Consequently, Pearlean relocates her anger and frustration onto her daughter, Irene. In addition to the psycho-affective problem that stems from the indifference one partner to another, the economic issue permeates the characters' existence.

Economic problem often infects the atmosphere in a couple. Household expenditure may sometimes create conflict in a family if it is mismanaged. Disagreement over the priority of household expenditure breaks family harmony. In the chapter entitled *October Brown*, the narrator, Irene, witnesses her parent's quarrelling over a financial problem. Such a quarrel crystallizes the mood of tensions that characterizes her parents' relationship. The text reads: "By a happenstance unclear to me then, my mother had steadily grown a baby inside her, aggravating my mother in the process [...] whenever they talked, they talked about the baby whenever they didn't talk, it was about the baby too. For me they had only silence." (C. Maxine, 1994, pp.6-7) Similar to another couple mentioned in the collection of short stories which is Pemberton's one, Irene's parents are going through a difficult relationship due to financial reasons. Given that these characters evolve in a capitalist society, it can be assumed that there is a relation between familial harmony and purchasing power. The economic suffering James endures in the society is the legacy of Blacks' unemployment. He considers his wife's pregnancy more as a burden than as a blessing. In any way, the stress deriving from the lack money is not properly handled by James. His stress-inducing attitude informs both the mood of their house and the communication with Pearlean. He hardly communicates with his wife. The silence in their couple is a metaphor of the strong wall that is emerging and thus separating them. The lack of proper verbal interaction, in this context, is a sign of tension in the couple. James' destructive behavior lies in unconscious drives. James lives in a society in which his socio-economic situation is dependent on the social structure imposed by white hegemony. Like the male child who is deprived of the love of his mother, James does not enjoy the economic advantages of American society. He is frustrated. This traumatic situation is poorly resolved by James. Consequently, he is bitter and

transfers his frustration on his family. Clearly, his destructive behavior hurts his wife in particular and his family in general. Like poverty, physical violence can account for the traumatic experiences.

Family squabbles, in a violent-oriented attitude, may sometimes have a tragic denouement. To put it another way, unresolved problems in a couple can be more and more degrading for the family harmony. In *Rattlebone*, women are faced with male domination. They are victims of physical violence. The first-person narrator, Irene, recounts how Dorla Wooten suffered from her mother's death. As Irene shares the setting of the novel with other characters, she narrates how Dorla has become a motherless girl as her father committed a crime of passion out of jealousy. Through regression, she returned to her painful experience. This adolescent female character is therefore an embodiment of the idea that living amidst cruelty leads to alienation and despair. The following passage is worth mentioning:

She [Dorla Wooten] was so brave, so calm in her suffering. I wanted us to be best friends. But what could I say to a motherless girl whose father had ruined her life? It had happened in the summer. The story—with the details about how her father had gone berserk over another man how he had hidden her mother's body in the back of his truck under trash he hauled to the dump. (C. Maxine, 1994, p. 96).

Death is a core issue, for many psychoanalytic theorists, which is difficult to comprehend. Dorla Wooten is traumatized by her mother's death. Dealing with the issue of death, T. Lois (2006, p.22) argues "death is the ultimate abandonment: no matter how close we are to our loved ones, no matter how important we are in our communities, when we die, we die alone." That deeply private experience can have psychological impacts. Irene's mother death creates an overwhelming feeling of a loss which is the feeling of abandonment. The death of Dorla's mother corresponds to an abandonment process. That motherless girl is alone. For this reason, she retreats into absolute silence. She is distant from her schoolmates. She hardly socializes with them. She is overwhelmed by a feeling that emotional closeness destroys her, and she can remain emotionally safe only by staying away from others. Thus said, Irene's distant attitude refers to the consequences of the fear of intimacy. When the adolescent loses her mother through domestic physical violence, the subsequent feeling of loss generates a feeling of abandonment. She is so affected by her mother's death that she refused the opportunity of being close to Irene. She refused to love too deeply anymore or get too close to anyone. Furthermore, her mother's death triggered her guilt feeling. She might be responsible to some extent that is why she is punished that way. To put it simply, the intense psychological pain caused by death acutely affects the female character.

In addition to the physical violence that permeates the lives of women in their marital relationships, they also face psychological oppression in *Rattlebone*. Irene's father, James, always uses degrading and demeaning words to talk to his wife. The latter is therefore subjected to verbal violence. This idea

operates in the dialogue between James and Irene's mother. The first-person narrator, Irene, dexterously indicates that her mother suffers emotional trauma. The intensity of her pain mirrors the tears in her eyes whenever she is insulted. Chiefly, the more one partner, in a couple, is subjected to psychological violence, the greater the distance between them becomes. As an illustration, Irene describes the scene of the oppressor and his victim:

He was impatient with Junie - [...] or careless with my mother's felling – "you look like who'da thought-it in that dress". Or he was absent, playing whist somewhere late at night with people my mother called God-knows who [...] she'd stay behind her bedroom door for hours, and come out with her eyes puffy she cried, she cried. (C. Maxine, 1994, p.13)

This episode crystallizes the psychological violence that is at stake in Irene's family. Here, psychological violence refers to a specific form of non-violent abuse characterized by an aggressive verbal attitude toward a given person. In Maxine's work, this form of violence unveils the circumstances around female characters. Pearlean is subjected to verbal attacks, slurs, and mockery on behalf of her husband. After all, in couples, adults often use dining, insulting words toward one another but apologizes follow to set the trouble. In the case of psychological violence, the oppressor aims at hurting and destabilizing the oppressed. James, unconsciously, tries to control and submit his wife by aggressive means. He reinforces his superiority and domination in his couple. Nearly, the focus is on two types of psychological violence that emerge from this episode. On the one hand, James always belittles his wife. He takes a perverse pleasure in looking Pearlean down in front of their children. On the other hand, James humiliates her wife as he makes fun of her dressing code. This form of violence can lead to isolation and anxiety. Pearlean is dumbfounded by despair and sorrow because she relies on her husband to be loved, cherished, and protected. However, her husband acts foolishly. The neglected wife is hurled into a neurotic situation. Identical to religious people who depend on divine love and protection, she depends on her husband to feel happy. When the latter doesn't act as she expected, it affects her identity and her child, Irene. From physical to psychological violence, a deteriorating force of familial unity prevails in *Rattlebone*.

Confidence can be considered as the cornerstone of any sustainable relationship. Disagreement and heartbreak in couples are the far-reaching consequences of the psychological and physical violence women face. Maxine Clair skillfully enlightens the idea that frustration in a couple can be conducive to divorce. The main character parents' disagreement is mostly due to her father's infidelity. From *October Brown* to *Secret Love*, the prospective reader notices a meticulous description of the slow process of separation that is operating in Irene's family. Such a covert process of rupture is the result of covert frustration her mother has been enduring. To put it differently, long-term impact of infidelity is

divorce. Irene remembers the solemn announcement of Pearlean and James Wilson's separation:

We all went to the front room. My father sat down on the sofa and rubbed his hands together. We sat down too. I know that in the next moment some sweet part of our lives was going to turn sour. My father looked first at my mother, then at us, then sailed right through it.

"Me and you mamma decided we'd like to live apart from now on, so I'm going to be living up over the cleaners and she's going to be staying here with y'all".(C. Maxine, 1994, p. 207).

The first-person narrator recounts how, in a rather unusual meeting, her father told them that he would live far away from home. She realizes that both her mother and father are about to end their marriage. This break is the consequence of a long pattern of frustration and infidelity. Both parents are unaware that their decision to end their relationship may have some consequences for their children. The long suffering and indignation that have been endured so far by James's wife has brought her into a blindspot wherein she only perceives her self-fulfillment. She has resisted in vain. Talking about resistance, P.D. Karen (2010, p. 562) writes it overlooks how the oppressed, in the wake of greater waves of domination, can acquire small freedoms that create the illusion of increasing power in the sea of oppression. Irene can guess that this meeting has a dramatic tone. She was convinced that 'some sweet part of our lives was going to turn sour'. The separation of her parents is a major trauma for her. Maxine Clair's characters experience different forms of trauma. All in all, adolescent characters are influenced by social, psycho-affective, and economic realities around them. This set of traumatic experiences has far-reaching implications for the characters' identity formation.

## **2. Long-term Effects of Familial Problems on Characters' Identity**

If we share the assumption that one's identity is influenced by a series of past events, understanding characters' identities in *Rattlebone* prompts us to focus on childhood experiences. From Dorla Wooten to Irene, young female characters go through decisive episodes in their childhood. But the reader must be aware that familial problems affect also adults given that identity is dynamic. Thus, the study stresses the different emotions that characters show in their interaction. The consequences of traumatic experiences comprise a binary dimension; on the one hand, they can help shape positive attitudes. On the other hand, they can foster negative attitudes in the characters' interaction.

The fact of being raised in a violent familial setting foretells the plight one is subjected to. A child who witnesses domestic violent scenes between his/her parents can hardly grow self-confident and full-blown. In the sixth chapter of C. Maxine's novel: *A Most Serene Girl*, as the title suggests, the third-person narrator tells the story of the domestic violence that permeates an adolescent girl existence.

As a matter of fact, Dorla Wooten is a witness when her father stabs her mother. The cruelty of the scene is relevant. Physical violence is so compelling in Dorla's family that it represents the idea that the cruelty of a scene can drive a teenager or even an adult to retreat into absolute silence. In other words, domestic violence sets a destructive pattern for vulnerable family members. The following passage sheds light on her mother's murder circumstances: "Her father had gone berserk over another man, how he had hidden her mother's body in the back of his truck under trash he hauled to the dump, then broke down and confessed." (C. Maxine, 1994, p.98)

In C. Maxine's work, certain traumatic experiences are crucial in the lives of the characters that go through them. In the case of Dorla Wooten, the episode of her mother's murder definitely shapes her identity. The consequences of the aggressive attitude on the young female characters are three-fold. First, Dorla is so traumatized that she is too introverted. She separates herself socially from other students. Irene portrays Dorla with these words: "She had no friends she was so brave, so calm in her suffering. I wanted us to be best friends" (C. Maxine, 1994, p.96) From this excerpt, Dorla is portrayed as a lonely girl who can hardly socialize with classmates at Lincoln Junior High. Next, domestic violence affects her academic performance. She is shocked by the cruelty of her mother's death that she is unable to concentrate during class activities. The poor victim of family violence is not enthusiastic about participating in the classroom tasks. Violence becomes an obstacle of intellectual empowerment. Finally, domestic violence fosters a set of psychologically destructive behaviors. Dorla is subjected to a feeling of shame and solitude. The tragic homicide in her family is probably the subject of conversation in her community. She is so shocked that she has developed a low self-esteem. Defining the concept of low self-esteem, T. Lois (2006, p.16) writes that it is the belief that we are less worthy than other people and they don't deserve attention, love or any other of life's rewards. After, we believe that we deserve to be punished by life in some way. In short, domestic violence can cause withdrawal, poor academic performances, and a low self-esteem.

Like Dorla Wooten, Irene also experiences a traumatic situation in her family. Instead of being overwhelmed by negative thoughts and destructive behaviors, she takes advantage of her past painful experiences to develop humanistic and empowerment values. In the words of A. Alfred (1978, p. 119), a human being is motivated by his expectations of the future compared to past experiences. On one side, Irene grew up in a household wherein the atmosphere contrasts with happiness. The silence between both parents sharpens the lack of communication and communion. But Irene seeks contact with other particularly weak children. That's why she wants to be friend with Dorla. On the other hand, Irene resorts to school performance as an outlet to escape the negative effects of painful childhood experiences and her social conditions. Due to segregation, she is denied the right to take part in the Contest though she is good at poetry oral

performance. As she determined to improve her social condition through learning, she would later apply and win a scholarship with the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority to pursue her studies. Either it is natural or human's action, death is a relevant issue in any character's life.

Death is the opposite of life. Human beings are helplessly compelled to accept their fate toward death. Some days, he who ever lives shall die. But the circumstances around one's relative's death can have a lasting impact on the bereaved. By the same token, some past painful experiences often hold ambivalent consequences in *Rattlebone*. While his wife was growing bitter, Pemberton becomes more nurturing and protective towards lonely women. He is the embodiment of the idea that living amid cruelty and indifference towards other people's plights constitutes an irreversible process of dehumanization. Pemberton and his wife Lydia have unsuccessfully tried for a child after losing their first baby. That traumatic experience has shaped both characters' identities. A binary opposition structures their relationship. On the one hand, Lydia is bitter and severe with October Brown. On the other hand, Pemberton seems tolerant. That is why he energetically pleads for October Brown. He thinks that the pregnant lady should not be evicted. Pemberton insisted: "we ain't going to put her out yet. She's going to stay here till the summertime, unless she gets married or goes back to Ohio on something. We can't kick her out into the street. It ain't right". (C. Maxine, 1994, p.88).

Pemberton and Lydia's reactions to the young pregnant woman, October Brown, contrast. Lydia has tried, in vain, to have another baby. She is frustrated that even her Heavenly Father could not help her. Better still, instead of giving a baby to a married woman like her it is an unmarried young lady who gets pregnant from a lustful affair. She transfers her frustration onto October Brown. Lydia insists on evicting that pregnant primary school teacher from their convent. Lydia's traumatic experience can account for her reaction toward October Brown's pregnancy. Because she to reproduce, she cannot be tolerant of a woman "who doesn't deserve it". This pregnancy reminds her of her sense of incompleteness. On balance, unresolved experience can shape one's identity by developing negative traits. However, Pemberton is protective toward that pregnant lady. To understand Pemberton's attitude rationale, the critic can resort to A. Alfred's theory of "Individual psychology". Starting from classical psychoanalytical criticism, the theorist puts forth some new perspectives on psychoanalysis. Pemberton's drive is the "social inferiority feeling". This sort of feeling occurs when person experiences solitude and isolation or he is unable to reach a goal. Unsuccessfully, Pemberton fails to have a baby. He feels lonely and resents the need to be with others especially those who are about to give birth. The death of his new-born baby triggered his guilt feeling because "when the baby came here dead [...]. He blamed himself. Guess God was punishing him". (C. Maxine, 1994, p.74) Unconsciously, Pemberton is eager to protect weak and lonely pregnant or childbearing women for

the sake of redemption. His attempt to help October Brown embodies a hidden catharsis action. In contrast to Lydia, the traumatic experience of his marriage has a positive impact on Pemberton. He has become more human and tolerant.

Physical violence, under its various forms, affects family members especially children and women. However, this form of violence is given so much emphasis by some critics that emotional trauma is rarely brought to the spotlight. In her attempt to unveil all the aspects that overwhelmed the fragile family members, especially the teenagers, Maxine Clair stresses the emotional violence that affects the characters. In fact, psychological violence is a set of violent behaviors aimed at hurting the emotions of the victim. It is characterized by behaviors, which can generate psychological shock that the victim can hardly withstand the impact. As a rule, aggressive verbal interactions are considered as the main layer of psychological violence. However, given that children often portray their parents as models, unintentional parental actions can be psychologically damaging. In *Rattlebone*, the narrator describes the tension and the uncontrollable process of separation of her parents. This situation is a source of violence that affects Irene deeply. The text reads:

And so I was unprepared. My first reaction to the clutter of clothes and shoes in our front room was that my father had been laid off and was packing to find work in Olathe or Sedalia again. Then my mother appeared carrying one of their bureau drawers full of his underclothes. [...] Upstairs everything had been shifted and mixed. Greater upheavals were to come. (C. Maxine, 1994; 27).

The clutter of clothes embodies a metaphor of chaos in Irene's family. It announces fiercely the separation between James and Pearlean. The author highlights the effects of parents' separation on children. Here, the overt process of separation harms Irene. As a rule, divorce destroys children's ideals of a family where both the father and the mother live in a peaceful and loving atmosphere while interacting with their offspring. The destruction of this conception of what a family should be constitutes a trauma. The process of divorce and its subsequent effects on Irene can be stressful. As a result, this familial crisis can cause health problem. In *Rattlebone*, Irene's fragile health is the legacy of the crisis in her family. She can hardly sleep and is overwhelmed by anxiety. This suggests that children who experience parental separation are more likely to feel sick. Irene is also in a depressive mood and mental distress because of the impending separation. To conclude, the destruction of 'the perfect world' of children and depression provoked an insecure sense of self. Irene is unable to maintain a personal identity. With this in mind, the loving affair in a couple is another familial problem that influences the whole family

Infidelity crystallizes the crisis and the discomfort that married people go through in Maxine's work. A neglected partner is victim of his / her counterpart who lacks fulfillment. Therefore, that partner tends to look for satisfaction with another person. Such an attitude may lead to adultery. The author cleverly

underlines how adulterous relationship, in a family, can be degrading and damaging to familial harmony and children. Maxine satirizes Irene's parents' adulterous attitude. Her parents' marriage is falling apart. Love affairs underline the crisis they are faced with. Irene faces a double layer of adulterous situations that burdens her life. As a result, she is all the more frustrated that she feels nothing but hatred for her unfaithful mother. Suffering silently, she takes refuge in absolute silence because she feels very depressed about the future of her family's unity. Irene talks implicitly about her feeling toward her mother. She grew bitter ever since she saw her mother through a keyhole in a hotel with her lover. The text reads: "IN THOSE FIRST few days afterward, I couldn't bring myself to look at my mother." (C. Maxine, 1994, p.104)

It is obvious that Irene's mother infidelity harms her. Infidelity, in a couple, can have effects on children. But it should be emphasized that before Irene discovers her mother in the hotel with another man, she was already aware of her father's affair with October Brown. To these two cheating parents, Irene reacts differently. She has an ambivalent attitude toward her parents. Irene doesn't rebuke her father for his infidelity. Rather, she blames her mother. She unconsciously re-establishes an unresolved oedipal attachment. Oedipal fixation is a dysfunctional bond with a parent of the opposite sex. As she "competes" with her mother for her father's love, she twists and clings to her repressed pain and jealousy to rebuke Pearlean. She constructs a depreciative picture of her mother. As she tries to be loyal to her father, she assumes that Pearlean has betrayed her whole family. Irene, in this context, might feel abandoned. The feeling of abandonment leads to mistrust. The adolescent considers her mother as an untrustworthy person. Incidentally, Irene realizes how unpredictable and unstable her own identity is.

Identity crisis often emerges from a set of traumatic experiences. The mood of a child's familial setting is important for the individual growth and development. In *Rattlebone*, Irene is depicted as a psychologically missing student in class during pedagogical interaction due to family traumatic incidents. Through this situation, the author highlights how adults' problems can have far-reaching and degrading consequences on children. Irene's work at school decreases as time goes by. She seems to be less interested in school. The following dialogue between Irene and her teacher, October Brown, is illustrative:

But if you had seen the overgrown girl that I was, standing dump at the blackboard one day, sucking a stick of chalk, it might have seemed peculiar.

"Irene, what is wrong with you? Are you ill? Don't hunch your shoulders, answer yes or no," Miss Brown said. I couldn't answer. "if nothing is wrong, write your sums and be seated," she said. (C. Maxine, 1994, p.7).

This passage underlines how the family tensions affect Irene's academic performance. The reader notices that this female adolescent has lost interest in academic tasks. The more Irene is beset by familial problems, the more likely she won't be able to concentrate in class; she is mentally absent. Her lack of

concentration can be associated with the oppressive family environment. In short, her academic difficulties stem from the instability in her parents' couple. Irene manages to overcome this situation. In fact, the binary opposition, between education and ignorance, superiority and inferiority, success and failure prompts oneself to operate a choice between these dual concepts. Given that "human beings are driven by the need to overcome their inferiority and are attracted by the desire to be superior (A. Alfred, 1978, pp.121-122). Irene generously overcomes her painful experiences. She strives for knowledge and self-achievement. In doing so, she is the embodiment of reckless and courageous people who turn the effects of their painful past experiences into opportunities for empowerment. The fact that Irene got a scholarship in the end of the novel foretells her bright career in higher education.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, from Irene's to Dorla's family, adults and adolescent characters evolve in socio-economic and psycho-affective environments not suitable for self-development and happiness. In a male-dominated context, provided that Pearlean is frustrated by her husband in return she would transfer her anger on Irene. Financial problems affect James' couple. That husband's stress-inducing attitude both alters the mood and the communication process in his house. Because of this, his children are living in a suffocating environment that fosters self-destructive behaviors. In *Rattlebone*, adolescent characters wrestle with the effect of unresolved conflicts that have their roots in childhood. The blatant physical violence in Dorla's house demonstrates that living amidst brutality is conducive to alienation and despair. She is overwhelmed by ambivalent thoughts which range from feeling of loss, abandonment, guilt to self-loathing. Accordingly, psychological violence is another family problem that has an impact on children. Overall, divorce embodies the worst form of family problem from a children-centered perspective. Parents' separation is a traumatic experience for adolescent characters. All things considered, the traumatic experiences in the family have far-reaching effects on the formation of the characters' identities. Domestic physical violence causes destructive behaviors for vulnerable members. It prevents intellectual empowerment. Unfriendly attitude toward classmates and low self-esteem often result from this form of violence. Victims of painful past experiences, Irene and Dorla seem unable to develop and maintain a stable identity. Here, identity crisis is embedded in traumatic experiences. These experiences negatively shape the identities of some characters. Nevertheless, characters may have ambivalent attitudes after traumatic events. In contrast to Lydia, Pemberton has become more tolerant and protective vis-à-vis the fragile pregnant woman. Irene also strives to develop life skills and empowerment traits to improve her living conditions.

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