

## Dissecting the Concept of Antisocial Personality Disorder in Houghton's The Dear Departed

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### Abstract

*Antisocial personality disorder is a mental illness that provokes a being to show a kind of disrespect for right and wrong and indifferences for others. It also includes lying, lack of remorse, callousness, glibness, and many more emotions of such relevancy. The present study aims to explore antisocial personality disorder in the play The Dear Departed. These include the Response Modulation theory of psychopathy (Newman and Lorenz, 2003) and the Fearlessness (Low-Fear) hypothesis (Lykken, 1957; Sylvers et al., 2011). The study is qualitative in nature. The close reading method is used for the selection of the text for analysis; further, textual analysis has been done to explore the psychopathic elements in the text of the play and more specifically to highlight the factors that trigger the major character of the play, Mrs. Slater to become a psychopath. The study explores that there are lying, manipulating, cunning, exploiting, arrogance, low levels of self-control, lack of moral values, irresponsibility, a lack of empathy and remorse major factors that show antisocial personality disorder in the play; and these factors also play a vital role to make Mrs. Slaters a psychopath.*

**Keywords:** Antisocial, Mental illness, Psychopathy, Textual Analysis, psychopath.

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## Introduction

The present study aims to analyze and discuss anti-personality disorder in the play *The Dear Departed*. People with this disorder constantly show that they don't care about what's right or wrong or those around them. People with antisocial personality disorder want to control other people, even if it means making them angry or upset on purpose, and they also want to hate or not care about other people all the time. They do not feel guilt or regret for their conduct in any way. People who have antisocial personality disorder often break societal norms and values, and they do not care to give regard to ethical concerns. They may tell lies, engage in aggressive or impulsive behavior, and struggle with a variety of issues that are prevalent in the culture. They have trouble completing their commitments regularly, whether those responsibilities are connected to a job, education, or family (Mulay, A. L., & Cain, N. M., 2020).

The current work is an effort to analyze the idea of anti-psychopathy in the study of *The Dear Departed* authored by Houghton. The emotions, sentiments, feelings, actions, dishonesty, irresponsibility, and lack of guilt were all brought to the surface as a result of this research. The two adult children of Mrs. Slater, who passed away not long ago, are at the center of this narrative. They make the shocking discovery that their mother's will has been changed in such a way as to disinherit them and transfer all of their mother's possessions to their aunt Elizabeth. In the process of confronting their aunt and coming to grips with their mother's passing, they are also forced to face the truth about their connections with their mother and with each other, as well as the reality about their ties with their aunt.

## Statement of the Problem

Literature is the reflection of society and all the characters in any piece of the literary genre are related to real-life examples and we find many issues in this real-life situation. Similarly, this study deals with the Psychopathic disorder (Cooke, D. J. (2018) of the personality in the ONE-ACT play *The Dear Departed* (1963) by Houghton.

## Research Objectives

The following are the objectives to pursue

- To find out the anti-social psychopathic symptoms in Houghton's *The Dear Departed*
- To dig out the factors that trigger the main character, Mrs. Slaters to become psychopath.

## Research Questions

1. What are the anti-social psychopathic symptoms in Houghton's *The Dear Departed*?
2. What are the inclinations that make Mrs. Slaters become a psychopath?

## Significance of the Study

This research is important because it focuses on the social problems associated with antisocial psychopathy, and it does so specifically concerning a work of literature known as "*The Dear Departed*." In addition, this research is interesting from a theoretical standpoint since it focuses on psychological concepts as well as literary texts. As a result of how it externalizes the social behavior of the characters, it will forge a connection between the fields of literary studies and psychology. The play is considered to be among the most significant creations in the annals of British theatre history. It is one of

the most prominent plays that addresses the behaviors that are connected with antisocial personality. The majority of the characters in the play are victims of the kinds of behaviors that are characteristic of psychopaths. The story of the play starts with a mourning scene, the dead body of Mrs. Slaters' father lying in the house, and ends with that the father is alive. Such ironic situations show the mental condition of the all characters of the story particularly Mrs. Salters. This study aims to find analyze and dissect such personality orders in the play *The Dear Departed*.

### Literature Review

Antisocial personality disorder was first classified as psychopathy and sociopathy before being designated with its present name. In the field of psychiatry, the phrase "antisocial personality disorder" did not make its debut until the release of the DSM-III in the year 1980. Because both psychopathy and sociopathy appear to depict a person as having no remorse, it is typical for individuals to use these words interchangeably when they are talking to one another. Although psychopathy and sociopathy have significant similarities, psychiatrists and other mental health experts continue to debate the significance of several key distinctions that give rise to two distinct diagnoses and diseases as opposed to just one (Raine, A., 2011).

Researchers and psychiatrists now have the ability to investigate the genetic distinctions between psychopathic and sociopathic disorders have been made available to them as a result of recent advancements in both medicine and technology. Psychopaths are those beings who lack moral values and empathy. On the other side, sociopaths are characterized by their moral rectitude and the presence of a conscience; nonetheless, their ideas are in direct opposition to those of the society in which they live. (Pemment, 2013). Even though many people advocate for psychopathy and sociopathy to be reclassified

as independent diagnoses or at the very least to be regarded as two entirely distinct diseases, both conditions are now grouped under the umbrella of antisocial personality disorder (Copley, J. J., 2008).

Psychopathy, as explained by Abigail Marsh, a psychologist and neuroscientist who specializes in studying psychopathy and is a co-founder of PsychopathyIs, an organization dedicated to raising awareness and supporting families affected by the condition, is a psychological disorder that leads individuals to engage in behaviors that diminish our capacity for empathy. Consequently, there is a reluctance to allocate resources for its treatment. Marsh is a specialist researcher who specializes in the assessment of psychopathy. But as a scientific community, we need to admit that psychopathy has all the symptoms of a real condition, and that we would all be better off if we treated it correctly. It is crucial to recognize that psychopathy has all the defining features of a legitimate condition, and that its treatment would be advantageous for society as a whole if we approached it with due seriousness (Widiger, T. A., Crego, C., & Oltmanns, J. R., 2015).

Psychopathy, a personality disorder, is an amalgamation of emotional, interpersonal, and behavioral attributes. These traits include surface-level charm, deception, lack of guilt, irresponsibility, and anti-social conduct (Hare, 2003). Psychopathy is a very debilitating personality disorder. Psychopathy may be detected by observing an individual's social interactions, as well as their attitudes and behaviors towards others. Psychopathy may be detected by observing an individual's interpersonal interactions, as well as their attitudes and behaviors towards others. Due to the significant impact of the disorder on society, extensive efforts have been made to get a better understanding of the circumstances that contributed to the syndrome's genesis. Hare (1970) and Tillem et al. (2018) are among the many research that have investigated the distinctive

psychophysiological functioning of psychopathic individuals. A study, conducted in a community mental health hospital, revealed that psychopathy, a mental disorder, is defined by several symptoms, including a notable deficiency in the capacity to empathy with others (Campos, C., et al., 2022).

Cleckley's research suggests that psychopaths consistently exhibit a lack of emotional responsiveness and are unable to really experience basic emotions (Crego, C., & Widiger, T. A., 2016). In addition, psychopaths consistently exhibit a general lack of emotional responsiveness, despite their outwardly nice behavior. Studies on spectra provide support to the idea of psychopathy, which posits that persons with psychopathy have a certain level of cognitive flexibility and a notable deficiency in emotional capacity. Calzada-Reyes et al. (2013) discovered that an augmentation in the quantity of beta waves might serve as proof of a brain correlation linked to increased activity.

### Research Methodology

The researcher has decided to use a qualitative approach for the study, and textual analysis has been the method that is utilized to evaluate the text of Stanley Houghton's *The Dear Departed* (1963). Multiple theoretical views have been proposed to explain psychopathy, but two theories have garnered significant attention in recent years and have been chosen as the theoretical frameworks for the research. These theories include the Response Modulation theory of psychopathy (Newman and Lorenz, 2003) and the Fearlessness (Low-Fear) hypothesis (Lykken, 1957; Sylvers et al., 2011). According to Response Modulation, persons with strong psychopathic inclinations have problems paying attention to peripheral information. Following the activation of a dominant response set, the psychopath's attention

becomes more focused, which hinders the ability to properly comprehend following stimuli. The theory has undergone modifications and expansions throughout time. Punishment is not just associated with Bencic Hamilton and Newman (2018) and Patterson and Newman (1993). The Fearlessness (Low-Fear) paradigm posits that the sickness originates from a deficiency in fear. According to Lykken (1957), psychopathic people have an insufficient fear response, which leads to grandiosity, superficial charm, guiltlessness, and risk-taking.

### Data Analysis

This section has few excerpts for analysis that have been examined using the textual analysis methodology. The analysis is done to dissect and identify the psychopathic elements in the play; and the causes that provoke Mrs. Slaters' transformation into a psychopath.

### Psychopathic Elements in *The Dear Departed*

There are a variety of features that are connected with a person who has a personality disorder. These include lying, manipulating, scheming, illusion, poor self-control, disrespect, irresponsibility and callousness. This person is known as a sociopath. Such a person may have a very high propensity for aggressive and criminal acts. The researcher also aims to find out psychopathic elements in the play *The Dear Departed*.

*“When the curtain rises  
Mrs. Slater is seen laying  
the table...into the street.”*

The above text highlights that the very first scene of the play *The Dear Departed* shows the psychopathic elements as the curtain is

pulled back on the stage, and the following scene is shown to the audience. A modest home's living room looks out over the front yard. The home is located in a traditional town in a neighborhood where the vast majority of residents are of a middle-class socioeconomic status. The author wishes to draw attention to certain characteristics that are associated with families that belong to the middle class. They are also dated in their thinking. The children often disregard their elderly parents and develop a gluttonous desire for their possessions.

*"I'm amazed at you,  
Victoria; I really am.....  
you in colours."*

Amelia's reprimanding of Victoria and her statement by saying her sarcastically how wonderful it is looking that you have worn beautiful outfit and wandering joyfully in the street while the body of her grandfather was lying in the house are examples of anti-social behavior, which is another example of psychopathic behavior that can be seen in the words that have been presented above.

*"That's grandpa's clock.  
MRS. SLATER: Chut! Be  
quit...the clock and the  
bureau"*

The development of antisocial behavior may also occur as a result of social interaction within the context of the family. It has a continual impact on a child's temperament negatively as they cannot work together to find solutions of the problems they face in their life. In addition, many individuals refer to as "anti-social" behavior which is believed to be in opposition to the prevalent standards for social conduct. Elements such as these may be seen in the lines that were discussed earlier in which Amelia (Mrs. Slater) told her

daughter to keep her mouth shut. She said that the clock would now belong to them. She gave Victoria strict instructions not to let her aunt Elizabeth know the truth.

*"What are they coming  
for?...he was dead. (A  
noise is heard.)"*

Untruthfulness, which refers to the act of not stating the truth or being dishonest as Mrs. Slater is lying to her daughter, is investigated as a psychopathic component of the play in the preceding passage, which can be found above. Amelia said that the reason for their visit was to talk about the things that belonged to Victoria's grandpa, who had passed away, such as his property and valuables. Amelia's husband had informed them of his passing through telegraph as soon as they learned that he had passed away after they had found that he had passed away. Suddenly, shouted and Amelia began to speculate that her sister and her husband had come and began to feel anxious as a result of her speculations. To mislead another person, may require lying to them, misleading them, or keeping facts from them. Telling lies may destroy trust and credibility, which might eventually result in unfavorable results. To have successful relationships that are deep and meaningful, as well as to be successful in one's personal and professional activities, it is essential to show a kind of honesty and uprightness life.

*"MRS. SLATER: (from  
upstairs) Victoria, if that's  
your aunt and uncle you're  
not to open the door."*

Here in the above text, Mrs. Slater once again shouted out to Victoria from the upper floor and instructed her not to open the door if it were her aunt and uncle on the other side of the door. Amelia issued a second command to

Victoria, telling her not to open the door until after they had down the steps. The knock at the door occurred once more before continuing. She suggested that they may come again later if there was no response to their knock. When they relocated the bureau, there was a loud sound of banging that could be heard. Amelia cautioned Henry to move the bureau with extreme caution to avoid colliding with the next wall. Both Henry and Amelia seemed agitated as they stumbled into the room carrying the bureau, which included a lockable desk. They positioned it in the space formerly occupied by the chest of drawers and put the decorations on top of it. The knock was heard at the door once again and again.

“(VICTORIA  
appears....MRS. SLATER:  
I'm busy; get your father to  
do it.”

The above text shows another psychopathic element irresponsibility, which refers to a lack of accountability or the inability to execute one's responsibilities and obligations, is another trait associated with psychopathic individuals, as the above passage demonstrates. It is the antithesis of responsibility, which is an individual accepting ownership of their actions and carrying out what is needed of them or what is expected of them. In this manner, Mrs. Slater (Amelia) is playing the part of an irresponsible mother, as shown by the findings of the researcher who discovered that Mrs. Slater (Amelia) is not completing her tasks as she stated that she would instruct her father to put her frock up as she is very busy. It should also be noted that reckless conduct of this sort may have harmful repercussions not just for individuals but also for companies and society as a whole. It may result in

accidents, injuries to oneself or others, monetary losses, and a stain on one's character. Irresponsible conduct may be shown by, among other things, the failure to meet one's professional or familial commitments, the participation in risky or hazardous activities, the disobedience of regulations or laws, and the avoidance of accepting personal responsibility for one's actions. It is vital to be conscious of one's commitments and to perform them to the best of one's ability to avoid becoming irresponsible. In addition to this, it entails accepting responsibility for one's actions, admitting to having made errors and working to rectify them, as well as drawing wisdom from one's experiences to avoid making such errors in the future. Accepting responsibility is a factor that, when present, increases the likelihood of achieving success and enjoying favorable results in all aspects of life.

“MRS. SLATER: Never  
mind the plaster....I always  
fancy, 'A loving husband, a  
kind father, and a faithful  
friend'.”

Lack of remorse is another psychopathic element that can be found in the play. This refers to a person's inability or unwillingness to feel or express regret or guilt for their actions, even when those actions have caused harm or hurt to others. This kind of psychopathic problem can be seen in Mrs. Slater's character when she says things like "we're all in half-mourning," yet she doesn't feel any sorrow for her acts, which leads to her disregarding other people. This conduct may be an indication of a specific personality disorder, such as psychopathy or sociopathy, in which the individual lacks empathy and has a disdain for the emotions and well-being of other people. It's possible that a person who

displays a lack of regret also displays other indicators of problematic conduct, such as lying, manipulating, or acting in a way that's impulsive or irresponsible. It's possible that they won't own responsibility for their acts or make any attempts to repair the damage they've done. This conduct may have severe repercussions not just for the person but also for others in their immediate environment. It may result in broken relationships, troubles in the legal system, and concerns with one's mental health. It is essential for those who don't seem to feel any regret to get professional counseling to address the issues with their conduct and focus on improving their capacity for empathy and taking responsibility for their deeds.

### **Factors that Triggers Mrs. Slaters to Become Psychopath**

There are a number of factors that contribute to Mrs. Slaters' deterioration into a psychopath. The researcher has found the factors in the following textual examples:

*“They’re coming to talk  
over poor grandpa’s  
aéairs.... Good gracious,  
that’s never them.”*

The lines show that Amelia (Mrs. Slaters) is a skeptical and manipulated lady as speculations lead her to be a psychopath as says that the reason for their visit was to talk about the things that belonged to Victoria's grandpa, who had passed away, such as his property and valuables. Amelia's husband had informed them of his passing through telegraph as soon as they learned that he had passed away after they had found that he had passed away.

*“I’m not satisfêed.... so  
we’ll outshine them there*

*till our new black’s ready-  
till a new dress of  
mourning is ready”*

Glibness is another characteristic that made her, Mrs. Slater, who is a psychopath, is making preparations to purchase new mourning attire for herself and her family. She has devised this strategy in the hopes that it would allow her to shine brighter than the Jordan's, who will not be wearing new mourning attire. This demonstrates that she is competitive and possessive of others' success.

*“She’ll come fast enough  
after her share of what  
grandfather’s left.... I  
can’t tell.”*

General lack of empathy and remorse is also Mrs. Slaters' personality's drawback as once their father passed away, Amelia promised that she would return to claim her portion of the possessions that their father had left behind. She continued by saying that Elizabeth was not always easy to deal with in some situations. She couldn't help but wonder where she got this peculiar characteristic from.

Disregard for morality and arrogance are the ingredients that make her psychopath as in a response, Amelia said that they were snoozing in the kitchen. Her remarks also show a kind of disrespect for morality after seeing her father's belongings were strewn around the home. These were things that her father had used in the past but would have no need for in the future since he had passed away. Moreover, exploiting others and heedlessness are also found in Mrs. Slaters' personality as Victoria raised her hand and said that the clock belonged to her grandpa. Amelia exploited and commanded her to be quiet and

she complied. She said that it was currently in their possession.

Lying is a prominent drawback of psychopaths and the researcher found time and again in the text of the play that Mrs. Slater is mostly telling a lie to others and even incites her daughter to lie as she yells down to Victoria from the second floor and advises her that she was not allowed to answer the door if it turned out to be her aunt and uncle. The researcher also found that she justified her actions by lying and pointing out that by the standards of the medical profession, a doctor would continue to care for patient after he had passed away.

Callousness in her nature made her a psychopath as her father passed away and they were planning to have tea and preparing the list of his belongings. Mrs. Slater rose and addressed the situation in a businesslike way, asking her siblings whether or not they would want to have some tea or go upstairs to see the remains of their deceased father. Elizabeth put a stop to the discussion by stating that they would decide on the matter after they had some tea. In addition to this, they would investigate the things that belonged to their father and make a list of them. She said that he had a lot of furniture in his room, which she stated was kept there. Abel said that that was the reason for them to wear black dresses as they were mourning his death. They had thought that he was dead. He laughed and said that they had made a big mistake. He sat and started drinking tea again.

*“MRS. SLATER: (sobbing)  
Grandfather, you’ll not be  
hard on me.”*

In the end, all is topsy-turvy, it discloses that Mrs. Slaters’ father is alive and she

immediately begins sobbing and pleads with her father to treat her more compassionately. Because of the things that she had done, she was afraid that he would not offer her anything.

### Conclusion

*The Dear Departed* one-act play revolves around the family esteems that are diminishing quickly in the general public. The researcher concluded that the central theme of the play is antisocial personality disorder. Those who have this disease, like Mrs. Slaters', often are unable to perform the duties that come with their family, their jobs, and their roles in society. Some of the indications and symptoms of antisocial personality disorder include the following: Using one's charisma or wit to exert influence on other people to achieve one's personal goals or satisfactions. Having an air of arrogance, feeling superior to others, and having strong opinions are all signs of arrogance. Those who have antisocial personality disorder typically lack empathy and tend to be callous, cynical, and dismissive of the emotions, rights, and sufferings of others. These characteristics are common in people who have the disease. Towards the end of the play, after things have settled down, the father explains his stance to the other characters in the group. After making the statement, "I will create a new will, giving all my pieces of stuff to whomever I'm living with when I die," he all of a sudden becomes an appealing person to be around. Because of this, the two ladies end up competing against one another to earn their father's trust when it comes to choosing a location to spend the remainder of his life. Both of the girls go to their father and ask for forgiveness for their behavior.



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