

Victimhood and control: A comparative review of victim and manipulator perspectives in M C Beaton's Hamish Macbeth novels

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Abstract: This paper examines the dynamics of victimhood and manipulation in M C Beaton's *Hamish Macbeth* series through a comparative conceptual review. A recurrent topic in literary works is the manipulation of interpersonal relationships, which is frequently investigated through the use of control, deceit, and exploitation methods. On the other hand, cosy mystery literature, and Beaton's works in particular, continue to be underexplored in this sense. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the psychological and linguistic aspects of control and submission within the context of small community settings by focussing on how manipulative individuals exert their dominance and how victims react to it.

The study is conducted using a technique that is based on reviews, and it relies solely on secondary sources such as scholarly publications, literary evaluations, and theoretical models. A method known as theme synthesis is utilised in order to recognise, classify, and analyse recurrent concepts that are associated with manipulative strategies, victim vulnerabilities, and narrative framing.

The study focusses on three primary aspects or components. To begin, it is demonstrated that manipulation is a significant factor in both the course of the story and the tension between the characters. Some archetypes, such as the attractive deceiver, the ruthless schemer, or the gossip monger, are used to frame manipulators. These archetypes disclose the hidden motivations of manipulators, which are often related to greed, jealousy, or self-preservation. Second, victims are designed as mirrors of social weakness, and their transitions from innocence to recognition shape both empathy and dramatic tension. This is because victims are reflections of social vulnerability. Third, the Highland community and the norms of the cosy mystery genre increase manipulation by enclosing it in rumours, secrecy, and moral demands rather than in overt acts of violence.

Taking into consideration the data, it appears that manipulation serves not only as a destructive force but also as a narrative glue, ensuring that character development and story resolution are maintained. The study makes a contribution to the academic field of cosy mysteries by including psychological, linguistic, and literary aspects. Additionally, it provides a comparative framework for future research into the interaction between manipulators and victims in literary works.

Keywords: Interpersonal manipulation, victimhood, cosy mystery, M C Beaton, Hamish Macbeth

1. INTRODUCTION

Deception, coercion, and emotional exploitation are examples of psychological strategies that are usually utilised in the process of interpersonal manipulation. Interpersonal manipulation is the strategic exertion of influence by one individual (the manipulator) over another individual (the victim). In the field of literary studies, manipulation serves as more than just a story device; it also serves as a means of investigating power, agency, vulnerability, and moral ambiguity. Deeper tensions in human interactions are reflected in characters who manipulate or are manipulated, which makes this issue a great subject for critical study since it reflects these conflicts.

In order to enhance the analysis, it is helpful to examine manipulation via the comparative prism of victim vs manipulator views. The study of the scheming character alone is insufficient; one must also pay attention to the manner in which victims are produced, how they react, and how power imbalances develop as a result of their interactions. The dual position sheds light not only on the active techniques employed by manipulators, but also on the dynamics of resistance, surrender, and psychological consequence in the individuals who are being manipulated.

Particularly significant is the fact that this conversation is situated inside the realm of cosy mystery novels. In the majority of cases, cosy mysteries take place in tiny, tight-knit communities or villages, where interpersonal interactions and social monitoring play a significant role. It is common for the genre to steer clear of overt acts of violence or terror, opting instead for more subtle techniques of control and intrigue. As opposed to massive conspiracies or psychological horror, manipulation is more likely to be woven into ordinary encounters within this context. Examples of such interactions include gossip, persuasion, rumour, and social pressure.

For this reason, it is necessary to maintain a balanced focus on both manipulative methods and victim vulnerabilities. Understanding the position of the victim, including their psychological condition, social limitations, and moments of agency, is essential to the research of manipulation because it prevents the study from being biased. There is a great deal that can be learnt from literature about how people react to, reject, or internalise manipulation.

Cozy mysteries such as the *Hamish Macbeth* series are underexamined in academic studies of manipulation, which often favor darker genres (thrillers, gothic, noir). Cozy mysteries are rarely exposed to in-depth psychological or power-focused criticism, despite the fact that they are quite popular and have a large readership. As a result of this gap, our understanding of how manipulation operates in "quiet" circumstances and in ordinary social contexts is severely restricted.

This comparative research crosses the fields of psychology (personality, susceptibility, power dynamics), linguistics (speech actions, persuasion, discourse), and literary criticism (narrative structure, character depiction) from the point of view of an interdisciplinary approach. By demonstrating that manipulation is not simply a literary cliché but also resonates with real-world interpersonal interactions, it has the potential to strengthen all three of these professions.

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing interest among academics in the theories of power asymmetries, victimology, and control within narratives. The field of narrative victimology, for instance, investigates the ways in which stories portray victims, their agency, and the culpability of society (Pemberton, 2019). Studies in discourse and pragmatics examine how covert manipulative techniques (such as implicit persuasion or linguistic coercion) operate in fictional dialogue (Ovshieva, 2022).

It is common to find depictions of manipulators and victims in popular culture and the media. For example, you may conceive of television programs or novels in which psychological control, gaslighting, or betrayal are the driving forces behind the story. The cultural understandings of manipulation are mirrored and shaped by these portrayals simultaneously.

There are several analogies to the real world. A variety of manipulative strategies are utilised in the following contexts: bullying, emotional abuse, gaslighting in relationships, and political propaganda. Through the use of a fictional lens, readers and academics are able to investigate these relationships inside a regulated setting, which reflects modern issues like trust, autonomy, and influence.

There is a paucity of systematic investigation of how manipulation occurs across both victim and manipulator viewpoints in the *Hamish Macbeth* series, despite the fact that manipulation is a rich topic area. Although Beaton's novels have been analysed for their setting, humour, and

investigative mechanics, psychological control has only seldom been considered as a lens through which to examine them.

Furthermore, comparative studies that cover both sides of the manipulation dynamic—how the victim is formed, how the manipulator acts, and how each impacts the other—are notably lacking in cosy mystery study. This is because the research on cosy mysteries focusses mostly on fiction. Our comprehension of the relationship dynamics that are present in genre literature is hindered by this imbalance.

The aim of this paper is to analyze and compare the dynamics of victimhood and manipulation in M C Beaton's *Hamish Macbeth* novels. The interpretation of literary depiction will be accomplished by drawing on psychological and linguistic frameworks. This will allow for the disclosure of the ways in which control, resistance, and power interact within the texts under question. Within the framework of cosy mysteries, the purpose of this study is to provide light on the techniques employed by manipulators as well as the weaknesses or responses of victims. This will be accomplished by a comprehensive comparison reading of chosen publications.

The research for this topic was carried out only using secondary sources. A variety of scientific papers, theme criticisms, literary assessments, and theoretical models from the fields of psychology, linguistics, and narrative studies were utilised in its construction. There was no attempt made to gather primary data, do quantitative analysis, or conduct qualitative fieldwork. Instead, I utilised a method known as thematic synthesis. This method entails the collection of pertinent texts, the identification of repeating motifs and arguments, the categorisation of these texts under conceptual topics related to the *Hamish Macbeth* series (victim dynamics, manipulative methods, narrative framing), and the interpretation of the significance of these texts to the series. The use of this strategy made it possible to include a wide range of scholarly perspectives into a cohesive comparative framework.

2. DUAL PERSPECTIVE APPROACH: VICTIM VS. MANIPULATOR

Victim Perspective

Trust, ignorance, and emotional openness are some of the characteristics that are frequently used to build victims of manipulation in literary works. These victims are generally portrayed as figures of fragility. The reader is able to empathise with them because of these attributes, yet they are also vulnerable to being used. Literary psychologists have observed that characters

who are shown as being extremely trusting or socially naive are commonly targeted by manipulative persons. This creates dramatic tension while also exposing the precarious nature of trusting relationships with other people (Tzanetakis, 2019).

Being subjected to manipulation comes with significant impact on one's mental health. When victims in fiction are manipulated, they frequently suffer a decrease in their self-confidence, a distortion of their views of reality, or social isolation. These experiences are similar to the established impacts of manipulation in real-world situations, such as bullying or emotional abuse (Sweet, 2019). Socially, victims may suffer reputational damage, exclusion, or fractured relationships, all of which reinforce their dependency on manipulative figures.

In M C Beaton's *Death of a Gossip* (1985), The harmful force of rumour draws attention to the fact that vulnerability is emphasised. Characters whose reputations have been damaged are considered to be victims. This can result in strained relationships and a lower social status for the victimised characters. In a similar vein, the characters in *Death of a Cad* (1987) are utilised for manipulative purposes by means of misguided confidence, so exposing how emotional openness may become a liability. The following examples exemplify how Beaton's fiction incorporates psychological vulnerability with community-based repercussions, highlighting the interweaving of personal and communal costs associated with manipulation.

Manipulator Perspective

On the other hand, manipulators are produced via the utilisation of control techniques that are purposeful in nature. One of the most popular strategies is deception, which enables characters to conceal their motivations and steer others in the wrong direction. Manipulators are able to exercise influence indirectly by moulding the perceptions of the community through the use of gossip, which is another tactic that is used repeatedly. When it comes to tiny groups, where personal connections and reputational capital play a significant role in social life, the use of trust and the ability to persuade are particularly powerful mechanisms (Dentith, 2020).

Common psychological motives, such as greed, envy, the quest of power, or the need to protect one's own interests, are frequently the source of the motivations of manipulators. These motivations are consistent with what psychologists refer to as "instrumental manipulation," which is a form of manipulation in which the purpose of the manipulator is not always the

accomplishment of personal goals but rather the advancement of personal goals (Jonason & Webster, 2012).

The absence of sorrow or regret that literary manipulators exhibit is a characteristic that is consistent with them. In Beaton's stories, the protagonists almost never face the ethical repercussions of their manipulative activities; rather, they rationalise or ignore the damage that they have created. This emotional detachment is consistent with larger stereotypes of manipulative characters that are found in a variety of literary traditions. In these archetypes, the absence of guilt emphasises the role that manipulative figures play as sources of dispute (Furnham et al., 2013).

Comparative Analysis

The major tensions of Beaton's works are driven by the interaction between those who are manipulated and those who are manipulators. The weaknesses of the victims create the opening through which manipulators may impose control, while the techniques employed by the manipulators produce the suspense that drives the story along. When victims are able to recognise manipulation, reject it, or expose it, they are able to display agency, which adds levels of complexity to the story. At the end of the day, the relationship between the manipulator and the victim is symbiotic. Neither can exist narratively without the other, since both roles are necessary for the construction of conflict, resolution, and the thematic investigation of power and control.

3. LITERARY CONSTRUCTION OF CONTROL AND SUBMISSION

Language and Discourse

When it comes to literature, language is one of the most potent instruments that can be used to manipulate and influence the reader. The use of silence, for example, may be employed as a weapon to generate ambiguity and help retain authority. When it comes to narrative settings, withholding information or refusing to reply can destabilise victims, leaving them bewildered and susceptible (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2019). This influence is further extended by the use of innuendo and suggestion, which enables manipulators to throw doubt or direct suspicion without making statements that are explicitly accusatory. Another kind of discursive control is gossip, which is especially effective in smaller groups. Rumours and hearsay are used to shape reputations and impose indirect pressure (Eckert, 2020).

The narrative voice also plays a role in the way both manipulators and victims are regarded, since it provides a framework for the story. It is possible to view manipulators with ambivalence when the narrator emphasises the sneaky humour or cunning of manipulators. These characters may be praised for their creativity, but their acts may be considered questionable from a moral standpoint. On the other hand, victims are frequently portrayed with compassion, with their emotional states being highlighted in order to emphasise the presence of exploitation. Through the use of this framing, readers are given the opportunity to engage in the evaluation of morality and power, which further integrates manipulation into the reading experience (Fludernik, 2022).

Psychological Insights

Psychological theories provide a framework for understanding how manipulation functions in literary settings. Concepts like gaslighting demonstrate how manipulators distort reality to disorient victims, making them doubt their perceptions and memories (Sweet, 2019). The use of coercion, whether it be overt or covert, is an example of how pressure may deprive someone of their autonomy and force them to comply, even when resistance is deliberately sought. Emotional manipulation, which includes taking advantage of victims' feelings of remorse or empathy, reshapes the psychological landscapes of victims, so encouraging reliance and weakening their confidence (Láng & Bóthe, 2021).

The psychological characteristics of victims are frequently portrayed as undergoing change. When manipulation is carried out, characters who are initially trusting or naive may eventually develop feelings of doubt, remorse, or shame inside themselves. This adjustment not only adds dramatic dimension to the story, but it also exemplifies the long-term psychological toll that comes with being dominated. These depictions bring to light the relational aspect of manipulation, which is that it is not a fixed act but rather a dynamic process that leaves enduring impressions on the identities and relationships of victims.

Community and Power

There is a rich backdrop for dominance and submission dynamics in Beaton's Scottish Highlands because of the social context that exists there. Because members in small groups are depending on one another and reputations are delicate, the impacts of manipulation are amplified in these societies. A single rumour has the potential to separate a victim from the

community or to strengthen the power of a manipulator (Milroy & Gordon, 2019). Gossip functions as a tool for the control of the community. Also playing a crucial part is the concept of information as power, which is highlighted by the fact that characters may use information that is kept concealed in order to exercise influence over other situations.

The morality that exists within these societies serves as an additional instrument of control. In order to persuade other people into complying with their demands, characters frequently use appeals to societal conventions, respectability, or obligation. Conformity is reinforced by the moral demands of the Highland community, which leaves little room for opposition without the risk of social repercussions. Not only does this relationship highlight how power acts between people, but it also demonstrates how power operates within larger cultural and societal systems. Therefore, manipulation is not a standalone phenomenon but rather is ingrained within social practices of control and submission. As a result, Beaton's setting is an essential component in comprehending the thematic importance of manipulation.

4. CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MANIPULATIVE EXCHANGES

Manipulator Development

Characters that are manipulative frequently develop via the use of recognisable tropes. The attractive deceiver use wit and charisma to conceal their own self-centred motives, whilst the ruthless schemer adopts premeditated techniques for the purpose of gaining individual advantage. By using rumour as a source of social power, the gossip monger, who is typical in circumstances that include tiny communities, is able to prosper. It is possible for readers to predict certain behaviours by utilising these archetypes, which are prominent throughout literature. This allows readers to still engage with the uniqueness of particular character arcs (Rimmon-Kenan, 2020).

Manipulation also exposes the inner motivations and flaws of these characters. By observing their tactics, readers gain insight into desires for control, insecurities, or underlying fears. For example, manipulators in Beaton's *Hamish Macbeth* series reveal greed or jealousy not through grand confessions but through subtle acts of persuasion or gossip. This not only deepens characterization but also aligns with the cozy mystery tradition, where psychological depth replaces overt violence (Miller, 2021).

Victim Development

On the other hand, victims act as reflections of the societal vulnerability that exists. As an illustration of the unstable nature of trust and the interconnectedness of communities, their exploitation stands out. When victims exhibit characteristics like as naivety, overconfidence, or excessive openness, they bring attention to the precarious nature of social ties. The narrative role that they serve is not one of passivity; rather, they reveal the manipulative milieu in which they are immersed (Boulton, 2019).

Throughout the course of the story, a great number of victims experience transformations in their consciousness. In the beginning, individuals may not be aware of manipulative strategies; nevertheless, with time, they may become aware of dishonesty and reevaluate their trust. The readers are able to see the blossoming of realisation and the possibility for resistance, which contributes to the dramatic tension that is added by this shift. These narrative arcs demonstrate the psychological process of victimisation, which takes victims from a state of disorientation and dependence to one of recognition and, in some cases, freedom (Hoffman, 2020).

Empathy and narrative tension are also produced as a result of victimisation. Many times, readers are able to empathise with the problems that victims are going through, which increases their emotional connection with the tale. A feature of Beaton's narrative approach is the contrast of empathy for victims and fascination with the skill of manipulators. This combination maintains suspense and moral complexity throughout the story (Hanson, 2022).

Interpersonal Drama as Plot Device

The books written by Hamish Macbeth contain a number of manipulative encounters that serve as triggers for conflict. In the absence of manipulation, rumour, and deceit, a significant number of the conflicts and crimes that occur inside the society would be devoid of the required tension to move the narrative. The escalation of conflict is determined by the responses of victims, whereas manipulators are responsible for setting events in motion.

In many cases, Hamish's ability to recognise deceitful techniques is what ultimately leads to resolution. Hamish, in his role as the primary investigative character, reveals dishonesty and brings the society back to a state of equilibrium. As a result of his position, the genre's focus on moral order is brought to light: manipulation may result in disorder, but it is finally revealed and regulated.

At the end of the day, manipulation serves as both a destructive force and a narrative glue. In spite of the fact that it creates psychological suffering, shatters relationships, and has a distorting effect on reputations, it also brings together the many story strands, maintains tension, and increases character development. By depicting manipulation as a relational exchange, Beaton's books illustrate how individual defects and weaknesses are intertwined with the dynamics of the community to determine character arcs and the structure of the story.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Following the findings of this study, it was determined that manipulation had a significant role in the development of character conflict as well as the overall narrative drive in the Hamish Macbeth series. Whether it was through gossip, persuasion, or silence, the study indicated that manipulative behaviour acted as a fundamental mechanism that was responsible for the introduction of tension, the escalation of disputes, and the final settlement of conflicts.

Additionally, it was discovered that an individual's susceptibility was the primary factor that had moulded them. Because of their trustworthiness, openness, and naiveté, characters frequently find themselves in precarious situations that make them vulnerable to external manipulation. On the other hand, manipulators were characterised by their absence of emotional attachment, their capacity to take advantage of social institutions, and their drive to exert control over others. By maintaining this level of detachment, they were able to act without feeling any guilt, which resulted in a significant imbalance between the two parties.

The norms of the cosy mystery genre, along with the setting in the Highlands, intensified these dynamics. Within the context of the small-community setting, an atmosphere was created in which reputations, secrecy, and gossip were powerful instruments of manipulation. Beaton's stories were characterised by a subtle sort of manipulation that was woven into the mundane rhythms of everyday life. This is in contrast to darker genres, when manipulation might take on overt or violent forms. The unique way in which the series was framed brought to light the fact that manipulation served not only as a damaging social practice but also as a literary device that served to anchor the storytelling.

Contributions

Through this study, the area of scholarship on cosy mysteries was broadened. Cosy mysteries are a genre that has been read by a large number of people but has been relatively underexplored in literary criticism. The approach introduced a layer of complexity to scholarly understandings of how cosy mysteries reflect interpersonal and community dynamics. This was accomplished by recognising manipulation as a significant subject of investigation within the genre.

Additionally, an integration of psychological, linguistic, and literary viewpoints was included. Through the application of frameworks of language usage, power asymmetries, and psychological control, this interdisciplinary approach demonstrated how manipulation might be analysed. As a result, the conversation between literary studies and the social sciences was enriched.

In conclusion, the study offered a comparative framework that may be utilised for further research. The symbiotic link that makes manipulation so successful in both narrative structure and theme development was uncovered by analysing the views of both the victim and the manipulator side by side. When seen via this dual lens, not only may Beaton's works be interpreted more deeply, but also other literary traditions in which manipulation plays a significant part can be interpreted more profoundly.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings, many recommendations were developed. To begin, it is recommended that future study broaden the scope of this approach to include additional authors of cosy mysteries in order to ascertain whether or not comparable patterns of victimisation and control are present across the genre. It would be possible to determine, through comparative study, if the dynamics that are detected in Beaton's work are singular or whether they are part of larger patterns.

Second, it is important to make comparisons across different genres. In order to shed light on how genre traditions influence the presentation of control and submission, it is possible to compare and contrast the depiction of manipulation in cosy mysteries with its depiction in gothic or psychological thrillers. The distinctive contribution that cosy mysteries provide to

the greater literary world may be better understood with the assistance of analogies of this kind.

Third, it is important for future research to investigate how well literary portrayals of manipulation reflect the power and control dynamics that are present in current society. As a result of the fact that issues such as workplace politics, internet disinformation, and emotional abuse might all be related to fictional depictions, the importance of literature to real-world difficulties is highlighted.

In conclusion, the findings could have some educational significance. In order to bring attention to the intersections of psychology, sociology, and literature, cosy mysteries, which have narratives that are easily understandable and psychological insights that are multifaceted, might be utilised in interdisciplinary education instruction. Students would be better able to focus on both the joy of reading and the critical comprehension of human behaviour if they were given this opportunity.

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