

Truman capote: a child's true nature in "miriam"

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Two people, one name: an inconspicuous, plain woman versus a poised young girl. A line is drawn between imagination and reality, but that line is blurred. In "Miriam" by Truman Capote, symbolism is incorporated to show that Mrs. Miller is living through the past in the present. A mere child is used to represent the haunting, distorted forces of human nature, and the exposure of one's true instinct is brought out through realization and confrontation. In multiple aspects, Miriam's distinctive character symbolizes the rising of a mental illness, schizophrenia, that leads to the destruction of Mrs. Miller's subconscious mind.

To start, Miriam's appearance separates her from the typical children. She has silver-white hair and dresses in a "tailored plum-velvet coat", complementing the elegance in how she is positioned (Capote 3). Her eyes are "hazel, steady, lacking any childlike quality whatsoever", presenting a confident, strong-willed character (Capote 7). At the same time, this demeanor also suggests a loss of purity and innocence, because experience may have withdrawn the bright gleaming that was once in her eyes. She demonstrates a large vocabulary and speaks as though she possesses the mind of an adult; this points out the unrealistic qualities of Miriam. From another standpoint, Miriam can also be a trace of the old Mrs. Miller, back when she was not alone. In the process of maturity, Mrs. Miller has to cope with withdrawal from the real world, where she is actually just punishing herself. This aspect of the story represents a "kid's imagined revenge upon maturity" (Fielder 61). The young figure of Mrs. Miller is getting back at the past because it has been overwhelming her all this time, yet she still refrains

from hallucinating. Presented here are the real signs of her schizophrenia, as related to the trouble of Miriam.

In this story, the figure of a child symbolizes the irresistible forces of evil and distortedness, as Mrs. Miller is not able to escape the grasp of the little girl. At first, Miriam arrives at Mrs. Miller's doorstep in the middle of the night in a white silk dress (Capote 9). The timing creates a mysterious, eerie atmosphere, and her visit serves as a parallel to the arrival of darkness. Gradually, Mrs. Miller's schizophrenic nature comes alive and she imagines that Miriam is taking over her life. The young apparition serves as a "primal alter ego to Mrs. Miller: an extension of her destructive, unconscious instinct" (Whissen 56). Although the illness has not surfaced, the woman can be seen as falling for the trap that Miriam set. Not being able to avoid Miriam or even confront her, Mrs. Miller is letting the force take over. If Mr. Miller were still around, Miriam would not have been conjured up; his absence is the main downfall to Mrs. Miller's life. Therefore, the replacement by Miriam stands as a reminder that Mrs. Miller cannot live without human interactions.

Another unrealistic aspect of the little girl, Miriam, is her background. She makes a trip to the movie theatre alone and asks Mrs. Miller to purchase a ticket for her instead of having a parent do it. In addition, she wanders around at midnight and even makes a trip to Mrs. Miller's house, which is not found in the address book. When she is asked, "Your mother knows where you are, right?" she does not respond (Capote 7). This statement indicates that Miriam is just an image for Mrs. Miller, and only for Mrs. Miller, to see. She is the part of her that is unknown, yet lurking around and slowly taking over her mind. Miriam "has no last name and is not seen by others", but her <https://assignbuster.com/truman-capote-a-childs-true-nature-in-miriam/>

presence is acknowledged by the old lady because of her hallucinations (Larsen 79). Slowly, Mrs. Miller's house and life are apparently being taken over by Miriam, but in reality, the schizophrenia is setting in.

Only enhancing her mature and mysterious character, Miriam has the ability to manipulate Mrs. Miller's temper and constantly make demands. For instance, she sees a brooch that was a gift from Mr. Miller and says, " But it's beautiful and I want it. Give it to me" (Capote 10). This makes Mrs. Miller uncomfortable, and it takes some time to persuade Miriam to leave the memento alone. Upon the second visit, Miriam decides to move into the house, which complements her moving into the woman's life and impacting the flow of things. Her " intrusion into Mrs. Miller's life begins gently", until she is driven to insanity (Nance 31). For a period of time, the widow had been disconnecting herself from the world, but now Mrs. Miller has to make adjustments to Miriam's presence, such as unconsciously buying food and dealing with her demanding attitude. Without realizing until the very end, Mrs. Miller is being dominated by the true nature of her mental illness.

The use of a Doppelganger such as Miriam is a common factor in many imaginative short stories. During their first meeting, Mrs. Miller makes note that she and Miriam have the same name: " Why, isn't that funny— my name's Miriam too" (Capote 5). There is a major distinction between the gentle, kind Mrs. Miller and the sensible, insistent Miriam, but Miriam is actually a representation of her a personality. This suppressed stage of the schizophrenia is a " terrifying encounter with a repressed and stunted self" that can no longer be controlled (Larsen 79). Its occurrence brings Mrs. Miller's life to an end when she finally makes sense of her situation. Capote's <https://assignbuster.com/truman-capote-a-childs-true-nature-in-miriam/>

usage of double nature leads to the final scene, when the schizophrenia definitively strikes.

In "Miriam," imaginative characters come to reality. In Mrs. Miller's fight against her own nature, she is overpowered by hallucinations and mental outbreaks. Multiple symbols regarding Miriam's character are used to hint to the reader that she is unreal: indeed, the differentiation between a typical child and Miriam creates great vastness that can only be brought to life in the stages of a schizophrenic person. Because Miriam is the last person Mrs. Miller interacts with, she brings with her the last stage of the illness. The last "Hello" welcomes Mrs. Miller to the realization of the depths of evil and distortion within herself. Unfortunately, at this point there is no turning back for her, only self-destruction.