

# Dombey's lack of compassion



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BUSTER**

Narcissism, defined as extreme selfishness combined with a lack of empathy for others, is the exact trait which Dombey exhibits in the short story.

Immediately after his wife has given birth to their son, he displays his indifference towards her by solely focusing on his son who must follow his legacy. Viewing his son as a tool for future business deals rather than caressing his new born and enjoying his moment of birth, further validates his own selfish agenda. In the excerpt, the author displays his disapproval of Dombey's self-centered nature as well as his pity towards Dombey's son and wife through a variety of figurative devices.

The author insures the reader is aware of their distaste of Dombey throughout the excerpt of the story. The passage begins with the a description of the setting in which Dombey, the son, and the Mrs. Dombey are relaxing. While " Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room...Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead." The reader can immediately recognize the tension in the room as well as the indifference from the father, Dombey, who distanced himself from his newly born child. Usually a new parent will smother their infant with attention and love, however Dombey appears to be completely uninterested by the presence of his new child. The author also makes note to title the son of Mr. and Mrs. Dombey's in the same manner which Dombey himself addresses him, as just ' Son.' His detached diction through the use of ' Son' rather than ' my baby,' ' my son,' or even addressing him by his name, displays his lack of empathy and compassion. His lack of empathy is further displayed when attempting to lovingly address his wife. While attempting to discuss plans of Son's baptism " he appended a term of endearment to Mrs. Dombey's name (though not without some

hesitation, as being a man but little used to that form of address. Again, Dombey struggles with even expressing signs of compassion through terms of endearment towards no other than his own wife. In addition to his inability to address Mrs. Dombey as his 'dear', he also plans the life between him and his son, as if she will not be present in their future. Dombey repeatedly repeats the phrase "Dombey and Son" without any regard to the feelings of his ill wife.

The author feels immense sympathy towards Son throughout the excerpt due to Dombey's selfishness and having to be raised by an uncompassionate father who has already planned his life out. Immediately after birth, Son is already being linked to his father Dombey, as an indication of Dombey's expectation of Son to be just like him. The author links their ages with a clever, "Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes." The age comparison foreshadows Dombey's constant control over Son's new life and the chain that Son must be forced to wear by his father's pre-planned future for him. Son's defiance to his own chained future with Dombey are displayed through his innocent-like actions. The author describes as "Son...seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly." While his actions may be perceived as harmless and normal, the author seems to foreshadow a strained relationship between Son and Dombey. Furthermore, the author reinforces Son's Dombey-controlled life by portraying the perfect life which he imagines for them together. Son's life has already been predetermined by Dombey who believes "the earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and the moon were made to give them light."

Mrs. Dombey is also portrayed as a victim to Dombey's selfish and apathetic nature. The introduction of Mrs. Dombey's character is critical to the pity the author feels towards her within the story. After lengthy descriptions of Dombey and Son, Mrs. Dombey is finally and only introduced when Dombey addresses a plan he has for Son. In fact, while Dombey and Son are both given illustrative descriptions, the reader is only left with the fact that Mrs. Dombey actually does exist and is ill because she has just given birth to Son. The author purposely left out descriptions of Mrs. Dombey to further portray Dombey's selfishness for taking up the majority of the excerpt and to evoke a sense of pity that as a result, not much is known about her. Mrs. Dombey's lack of love received is displayed in response to Dombey's difficult attempt to display a hint of affection towards his wife. She displays " a transient flush of faint surprise" at Dombey's task of addressing her as ' dear.' Her surprise at the affection alludes to her deprivation of compassion from her partner as a whole, which further directs the reader to imitate the author's feelings of pity towards Mrs. Dombey. The manner in which Mrs. Dombey responds to her husband's idea of baptizing Son further alarms the reader as " she feebly echoed, ' Of course,' or rather expressed it by the motion of her lips." Not only does she barely receive love or compassion from her partner, but the author also reveals that she is weak and ill, most likely from recently giving birth.

The author's use of detached and worrying diction to describe the three characters as well as missing and emphasized critical details, efficiently directs the reader to perceive Dombey as self-centered and apathetic as well as feel pity towards Son and Mrs. Dombey. Dombey isolates himself and Son

from Mrs. Dombey through their plans for future life, and is enamored with the sound of 'Dombey and Son.' While his ideas may portray him to be an efficient and loving father, the manner in which he treats both Son and Mrs. Dombey prove otherwise. In fact, his inability to express love to his own wife while in pain, proves that he won't be able to nurture his son at all.