

Relativism and Skepticism: A Psychoanalytic Study of Cate Kennedy's *Like a House on Fire*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the exploration of the complexity of human relationships, the underlying motivations and the psychological dynamics that drive the characters' engagement with relativism and skepticism in Cate Kennedy's *Like a House on Fire*. Through a psychoanalytic prism grounded in Erikson's developmental theory, this paper sheds light on the character's internal problems, beliefs and inner reflections, aligning them with the interplay between personal truth and societal influence. All this leads to reflect the Psychosocial challenges of Erikson's four stages of development. This study determines that the characters' relativistic viewpoints and skeptical stances contribute to their psychological evolution, while they keep grappling with their struggles and trauma. The dominant worth of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the role of relativism and skepticism in the intricate phenomenon of human development and the formation of identities.

Key words: Relativism, Skepticism, Psychoanalytic study, Like A House on Fire, Erikson's theory of development.

Introduction Of Like a House on Fire

This research focus on to examine the psychological aspects and development of characters in Cate Kennedy's short story collection, "Like A House on Fire" with a specific focus on the themes of relativism and skepticism. "Like A House on Fire" is an anthology comprised of fifteen short stories. It was published in 2012 this anthology has received wide spread critical acclaim and has been nominated for numerous awards, including the Stella prize, the New south Wales premieres Literary award and the Australian book industry award. Seven short stories has been chosen for the textual analysis for this research by applying the Erikson's theory of Psychosocial development as a framework by using the lens of relativism and skepticism.

Like A House on Fire is a captivating short story collection by Cate Kennedy a highly skilled and acclaimed author. The book presents a tapestry of narratives that explore the complexities of human existence, delving into the themes of love, loss, identity and search for the meaning in everyday life. There is an interconnectivity between the stories while each narrative stands independently, subtle threads and echoes ties them again together. Themes from one story may reappear in another, offering glimpses into their lives beyond the confines of a single narrative. This interconnectivity add depth and texture to this collection, creating a sense of a shared universe and highlighting the interconnected nature of human experiences. "Like A House on Fire" by Cate Kennedy demonstrate Kennedy's adeptness at capturing the subtleties of human emotion and the complexities of intimate relationships. The stories navigate the terrain of love, desire and loss, revealing human connections raw and vulnerable aspects. From the poignant portrayal of a crumbling marriage to the tender exploration of familial bonds, Kennedy's stories evoke many emotions, resonating with readers. Additionally "Like A House on Fire" is a masterfully crafted collection of short stories that showcase the Cate Kennedy's exceptional story telling abilities. Through her compelling characters, evocative prose and universal theme.

Kennedy invites readers to embark on a profound and introspective journey. With its rich narratives and poignant insights, this collection leaves an undeniable mark on the reader's heart and mind, offering a compelling exploration of the complexities of the human spirit. This anthology consists of series of interconnected themes that rooted into the complexities of human relationships, personal struggles, and the search for meaning in every day life.

Through skillful storytelling, Kennedy explores themes such as love, loss, identity, family dynamics and the challenges of modern life. Each story in this collection offers a unique and thought provoking exploration of the human Condition, drawing readers attention into the lives and experience of characters. In this book use of prose is richly descriptive and evocative, capturing the subtleties of human emotions and the intricacies of interpersonal connections. In this book characters are relatable and multidimensional, grappling with inner conflicts, aspirations, and desires (Hume, 2016).

The collection presents diverse narratives, from intimate and introspective tales to more expansive and socially aware stories. Kennedy's keen observations of human behavior and her ability to craft engaging narrative makes "Like A House on Fire" a compelling and immersive reading experience. The title, "Like A House on Fire", is symbolic, suggesting the intensity and transformative power of the stories. It conveys the idea that relationships, emotions, and life can be beautiful and destructive, much like a fire that engulfs a house.

Overall, "Like A House on Fire," represents Cate Kennedy's talent as a storyteller and her ability to capture the complexities of the human experience. It is a collection that invites readers to contemplate the intricacies of human relationship and the myriad ways in which we navigate the challenges of existence. This collection of short stories catalogue moments from the dramatic to the mundane. The collection inspires compassion and considers the impact of time and expectation in our relationship.

Flexion :

Flexion begins with the account of town's reaction and spread of news of Frank's accident who is narrator's husband. Her husband who survived later is a harsh, ungrateful man. This story revolves around Frank Slovak a farmer and her wife. The story questions the wife's prospects and whether her desire for independence will significantly change her life. It explores the complexity of relationships, the internal struggles faced by the wife, and the potential Ramifications of her decisions.

Ashes :

"Ashes" by Cate Kennedy is a poignant and reflective short story that delves into the complex dynamics of family relationships, and the struggle with self acceptance, and the weight of unspoken truth. Through the eyes of the protagonist, Chris the narrative explores the lasting impact of denial and the profound longing for understanding and acceptance.

In this story a man named Chris driving his mother to a childhood fishing spot so they can scatter his father's ashes. The protagonist of the novel, Chris, is a 35-year-old man whose father passed away recently. Chris thinks back on his tense relationship with his parents as he and his mother drive to a lake to disperse his father's ashes. Chris is gay, and although having dated a man called Scott at least once, he never told his parents he was gay because they instilled in him a sense of guilt about his gender identity and sexual orientation when he was younger.

Laminex and Mirrors:

Throughout "Laminex and Mirrors," a young woman on the cusp of adulthood feels conflicted about leaving her little village for London and about not being able to perceive her summer job

as anything more than a means to an end. Kennedy's stories are rarely set in a particular place, yet the stories in *Like a House on Fire* evoke a certain kind of rural and suburban narrative characterized by a longing for something else. The narrator of "Laminex and Mirrors" creates this element because of her intense desire to move from her birthplace to London. Since the narrator's main motivation for working at the hospital is to save money for her one-way ticket out, the entire plot revolves on this desire.

Like A House on Fire :

"Like A House on Fire" is another important short story that explores the themes of vulnerability and fragility of a relationship. Through the perspective of unnamed first person narrator the narrative delves into the challenges faced by the protagonist and the potential for healing and connection within a family. The story opens with the narrator's sense of indignity and powerlessness due to his injury. The title, "Like A House on Fire" symbolizes the urgency and necessity of addressing stagnation. The metaphorical house represents the protagonist's life and the potential for it to be consumed by stagnation if not confronted. Ultimately story encourages readers to reflect on their capacity for growth, recognizing the importance of embracing change.

Five Dollar Family:

"Five Dollar Family" is a compelling short story exploring dependency, betrayal, resilience and maternal instinct. Through the experiences of protagonist, Michelle, the narrative examines the challenges she faces with her unreliable boyfriend, named Des and the transformative moments that led her to discover her strength and independence as a mother. The story begins by highlighting Michelle's expectations of Des stepping up and being responsible after the birth of their child. However Des proves to be incompetent and unreliable engaging in infidelity and facing impeding legal issues.

Seventy- Two Derwents:

"Seventy -Two Derwents" centers around the protagonist a Young girl Who find solace and a sense of self through her artistic pursuits. Drawing and creating art becomes a transformative experience for the protagonist. It empowers her to assert her individuality, confront personal struggles, and navigate complex emotions.

Relativism:

An attitude of doubt or disposition to incredulity in general or toward a particular object. The doctrine that actual knowledge or knowledge in a specific area is uncertain. The method of suspended judgment, Systematic doubt, or criticism is characteristic of skeptics. Skepticism is not a central theme in "Like A House on Fire" but it does play a role in some of the stories. Skepticism refers to a questioning or doubting attitude towards beliefs, claims or ideas. In this anthology, skepticism manifests in different ways:

Skepticism towards Society's Expectations :

Some characters in the stories exhibit skepticism towards romantic relationships or the authenticity of connections. They question the longevity of love, doubt the sincerity of their partners, or approach relationships with a guarded mindset due to past experiences.

Skepticism towards society's Expectations:

The collection explores characters questioning and challenging societal expectations. They are skeptical of conforming to societal norms and conventions.

Skepticism towards Self -Identity:

Many characters in the collection grapple with doubt regarding their identities. They question their social roles, purpose, and authentic selves. This skepticism often leads them on a journey of self discovery and exploration.

Skepticism towards Conventional Wisdom:

Some stories delve into characters who exhibit skepticism towards commonly accepted beliefs or wisdom. They challenge established notions and ideologies, questioning the validity and relevance of traditional knowledge in their lives.

While skepticism is not the central focus of the collection, it is woven into the narratives, adding depth and complexity to the character's experiences. By exploring skepticism Cate Kennedy prompts readers to contemplate the uncertainties and doubts that shape human existence and encourages them to question the world around them.

Relativism:

An interpretation of a literary work is under determined by authorial will and internal evidence. If arrangements are constructs that are ontologically located in the eye of the reader, then this does imply some form of relativism. Relativism, the belief that truth and knowledge are subjective and vary from person to person or culture to culture, is a prominent theme in "Like A House on Fire" by Cate Kennedy. The collection does touch on aspects that can be related to relativism.

The Subjectivity of Experience:

The stories in the collection often explore the subjective nature of human experiences. Each character's perspective, emotions and reactions to events are unique and shaped by their backgrounds, beliefs and personal histories. This highlights that truth and meaning can be subjective and vary far from person to person.

Cultural Difference:

Some stories delve into cultural differences and how they shape individual's perception and interpretations of the world. These narratives suggest that cultural context can influence one's understanding of truth, morality, and social norms, hinting at relativism concerning cultural diversity.

Moral Ambiguity:

Several stories present morally ambiguous situations where characters face difficult choices and conflicting values. The collection does not offer clear-cut moral judgement but explores the complexities and nuances of ethical dilemmas. This ambiguity reflects that moral judgements can be subjective and dependent on individual perspective. While relativism is not explicitly explored as a central theme, elements of subjectivity, cultural diversity and moral ambiguity in "Like a House on Fire" touch upon the notion of relativism, encouraging readers to contemplate the multifaceted nature of truth and interpretation. This research invites reflection on the idea that different perspectives and experiences can shape one's understanding of reality and challenge the notion of absolute truth.

Research objectives :

There are following objects of the research:

- To explore the psychological effects of humiliation and masculinity, the protagonist faced in "Like A House on Fire".
- To reveal the nature of intimate relationships and implies intimacy, communication, and humor in Like A House on Fire.

Research Questions:

- ❖ What are the psychological effects of humiliation and masculinity the protagonist faced in the anthology “ Like A House on Fire ”?
- ❖ How is love often used as an instrument through which the characters can heal and grow from their physical or spiritual pain in Like A House on Fire ?
- ❖ How does the anthology Center on the concept of family, as both dramatic events unfold directly, and the intimacy other characters pass in Like A House on Fire ?

Significance of the Study :

- This research focuses on the psychoanalytic exploration of relativism and skepticism in “Like A House on Fire ” by Cate Kennedy
- It aims to uncover the underlying psychological and philosophical dimensions within the stories.
- This research provides insights into the character’s inner lives , motivations , and struggles .
- It examines the broader implications of relativism and skepticism on the characters ‘s experiences.
- By employing a psychoanalytic lens, the research aims to understand human nature more deeply .

It explores the inner conflicts arising from relativism and skepticism in the collection. This study contributes to the exploration of philosophical concepts in the context of literature and enhances our understanding of the human condition in relation to relativism and skepticism.

Methodology of Research:

- The research is conducted by using descriptive qualitative research method.
- The research approach involves gathering data, describing and analyzing it using a close reading method .
- The aim is to explain emotional and political betrayals in the anthology “ Like A House on Fire ” by Cate Kennedy.
- The study utilizes a descriptive technique and applies psychoanalytic theory, specifically Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory.
- The research is qualitative and interpretative in nature , examining Like A House on Fire by Cate Kennedy through Erik Erikson’s psychosocial development theory.
- The analysis incorporates four stages of development based on Erikson’s theory.
- Erikson’s theory encompasses aspects such as social interactions, identity formation, and challenge faced at different life stages.
- The application of Erikson’s theory involves identifying and analyzing how the characters in the short stories navigate and experience the psychosocial challenges specific to each stage of development.

Theoretical Framework applied to the present Research:

Erik Erikson’s psychosocial development theory:

- Personality develops through eight psychosocial conflicts or stages.
- Each stage involves a psychological crisis that must be resolved for healthy development.
- Successful resolution of each stage leads to a sense of competence and unhealthy sense of self .
- Failure to resolve stages can result in feelings of inadequacy and unhealthy sense of self .

- Each stage builds upon the previous one and the development process is influenced by societal expectations.
- Stage 1 “Trust VS Mistrust ”.
- Stage 2 “Autonomy VS Shame”.
- Stage 3 “Initiative Vs Guilt”.
- Stage 4 “industry VS illusion”.
- Stage 5 “Identity VS confusion ”.
- Stage 6 “Intimacy Vs Isolation ”.
- Stage 7 “Generativity VS Stagnation ”.
- Stage 8 “integrity VS Despair ”.

Main Tenants :

1. Descriptive Qualitative Research:

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative research approach, which involves gathering data and analyzing it through a close reading method. This approach allows for a detailed description and interpretation of the emotional and social betrayals in the anthology.

2. Application of psychoanalytic theory, Specifically Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory As a framework for analysis. This theory helps in understanding the psychological and social development of the characters in the novel and how it relates to the experience of betrayal.

3. Examination of “Like A House on Fire ”(2012):

The study focuses on the analyzing anthology “Like A House on Fire ”by cate Kennedy, with a specific emphasis on the portrayal of characters either it’s men or women and exploration of emotional state . This research examines the characters and their relationships within the context of Erikson’s Psychosocial theory, shedding light on the themes and dynamics present in different short stories throughout the Anthology.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis with themes:

First story which is analyzed in this research is anthology. It is first short story in this anthology . The story revolves around Frank Slovak , a curmudgeonly farmer , and his wife . This study explores power dynamics , vulnerability, and the shifting balance within a troubled marriage. By analyzing the narrative elements and character dynamics, we gain insights into the protagonist’s transformation and the consequences of a sudden power shift.

Power Dynamics and Domineering Relationships:

The story’s primal focus is Frank Slovak who is a ungrateful and unkind person especially towards his wife . It is abundantly clear that Frank is authoritative and ungenerous in the marriage. His accident where he turns his tractor over , introduces a significant shift in power dynamics. This research delves into the consequences of this shift and its impacts on characters transformation to provide insights into the characters inner lives , motivations and struggles with in their relationship.

The Awakening of the wife’s Desires:

The wife’s realization of her husband’s critical condition brings forth a complex range of emotions. As the narrative unfolds , the wife begins to question her life and realizes the potential freedom that could come from her husband’s death . This awakening highlights the depths of her unhappiness and the desire for a life taking away from his presence.

Vulnerability and Dependency:

As Frank potentially recovers, the wife realizes his unpleasantness will be multiplied by his newfound vulnerability and dependence on her. This reversal of roles adds an intriguing layer to the story the consequences and challenge of care. The wife must confront her feelings of responsibility and consider the implications of her husband's continued dependence.

Trust Vs Mistrust:

In this research this story is analyzed by the psychoanalytic lens and application of first stage of Erikson's Theory Trust vs mistrust. The research focus on how the dynamics of a troubled marriage changes exploring the characters' struggles with trust, resilience, and the consequences of a changed power balance in the both husband and wife's relationship. From the starting of this story the narration of this story portrays a relationship with characterized by mistrust. Frank Slovak's negative personality, creates an environment of tension and negativity, fostering a deep sense of mistrust with their marriage. The wife's experience of this strained environment sets the stage for exploring the theme of Trust vs mistrust.

The Impact of Trauma on Trust :

Frank's accident and subsequent critical condition catalyze examining trust in the story. The wife's initial concerns for his well being reveals a glimmer of faith amidst the marital discord.

Contemplating Freedom and Autonomy:

The wife grapples with conflicting emotions as Frank's recovery progresses. She finds difficulty to suppress the wish of freedom and autonomy that may come from if her husband's condition gets worse or he dies. This internal struggle showcases the challenge of rebuilding trust and finding a sense of self within a strained relationship.

Uncertainty and the Resolution of Trust:

The story ends in an intimate scene between Frank and his wife. Frank breaks down in reluctant tears from pain. His wife hesitates to reach for his hand. Internally, she relates her hesitation to the lack of control Frank has over his limbs after the accident. Kennedy compares Frank's wife's momentary inability to lift her hand to take Frank's hand to Frank's paralysis; ultimately, she does grasp his hand, and is surprised to feel his hand squeezing hers back.

The story concludes with not a very clear resolution, leaving the reader kind of uncertain about the fate of the characters' trust and ability to reconcile their differences. The ambiguity prompts reflection on the long term effects of mistrust and the potential for personal growth and transformation within the story's context. Flexion offers a nuanced exploration of Trust vs mistrust within a troubled marriage. The story's open ended conclusion invites readers to reflect on the resolution of trust, the consequences of mistrust, and the potential growth and transformation within a troubled marriage.

Ashes:

The symbolism of Ashes:

Ashes is the second story in this research paper to be analyzed. The ashes of Chris's father served as a potent symbol within the narrative. They represent the remnants of a complex and unresolved relationship, depicting the past and the weight of Chris's unexpressed emotions. The journey to scatter the ashes at the childhood fishing spot which reminds Chris the awkward fishing trips becomes a metaphorical exploration of Chris's struggle to face his father's passing, the unspoken truths surrounding their father-son relationship, and the unresolved grief that still exists. Ashes is a thought-provoking and emotionally charged short story that digs deeper into the intricate web of family dynamics, repressed sexuality, regret, and the longing for acceptance. Through Chris's perspective, the narrative highlights the consequences of denial and the

immense impact of unspoken truths on individual identity and familial relationship. This research invites readers to reflect on the importance of authenticity, communication, and empathy within the family and our loved ones. This research invites readers to consider the complexities of intimacy and the impact of isolation on the protagonist's psychological and emotional well being. It underscores the importance of navigating these challenges to forge meaningful relationship and find a sense of belonging and connection

Intimacy vs isolation:

In this study the analysis of "Ashes" conducted through the lens of intimacy vs isolation sixth stage of Erikson's theory. The analysis of "Ashes" through the lens of intimacy vs isolation highlights the protagonist's struggle to form close, meaningful relationship in the face of personal loss and societal constraints. This research serves as a poignant exploration of the complexities of intimacy and the psychological effects of isolation during the adulthood stage of development. This research further focuses on the consequences of emotional isolation, the longing for genuine connection, and the potential growth and fulfillment through intimacy.

Emotional isolation and False Narratives:

Enervating, to be in her presence like this. Despite all his resolve to stay pleasant and attentive, today of all days, something has nevertheless turned a tap on inside him and his energy is draining away. Later he'll feel the same guilt as ever, but right now, sitting with a coffee listening to his mother complaining about the fake whipped cream on her scones, he feels all that evaporating.

"Ashes," Narrator, p. 17

Here, Kennedy sets the stage for the mother-son drama of "Ashes." In this sentence, in the opening paragraph, Kennedy lays out the main and persistent tension of the story, which is Chris's effort to keep his emotions bottled up and concealed from his mother, which is, ironically, a major contributing factor to his disdain for her: this very need for secrecy.

The story depicts emotional isolation of Chris resulting from fear of his parents refusal to acknowledge his true self. Her mother especially creates a delusional made up narrative about Chris's relationship with his father and also his identity.. which creates a sense of isolation and disconnection within Chris. Chris feels trapped and helpless. Chris's fear of rejection and his struggle for self acceptance contribute to his experience of isolation. The fear of his parents potential intolerance caused a great deal of internal conflict while dealing with his repressed sexuality and his fear of coming out to his parents. This fear prevent Chris from forming a genuine connection with his parents. This research touch upon Chris's guilt and the missed opportunities for intimacy within his family. Chris throughout the story reflects on the moments when he could have filled emotional gaps with his parents, expressing his true self. The unexpressed emotions and withhold truth becomes sources of regret. This uncertainty is addressed through a memory Chris has of the last time he saw his father at the hospital. His father said to him, **"Your mother's always been proud of you, Chris. In her own way. ... You obviously ... you've got to live the way you see fit. ... But there's no need to ... well ... throw it in her face. It would kill her"** (26). Chris reflects on the irony that he's inherited his father's instinct toward secrecy. It seems, at this point, that Chris's parents are vaguely aware that he is gay, but that he has not come out to them, and they would prefer it if he didn't. Kennedy suggests that Chris's secrecy and unwillingness to be open about their relationship ultimately drove Scott his boyfriend away. They drive on, and Chris continues to silently seethe at his mother's shameless revisionist portrayals of his father and his relationship with him. By delving into

Chris's experiences, this research prompts readers to reflect on their relationship and significance of intimacy in fostering personal growth, understanding, and fulfilment.

Laminex and Mirrors :

“Laminex and mirror ” Is a short story explores the personal growth, compassion, and defiance in the face of societal expectations. Through the unnamed first person narrator's journey, the narrative in this short story highlights the transformative power of human connection and the willingness to challenge the established norms .The tittle ,“Laminex and Mirrors ” symbolically represents the contrast between the narrator's desire for something new and polished (mirrors) and the reality of her current circumstances (Laminex a type of wood veneer).It underscores the theme of disillusionment and protagonist 'search for authenticity and self discovery. Laminex and Mirrors is a powerful and evocative short story which mainly focuses on the personal growth, connection ,and the defiance of societal norms .The story serves as reminder to embrace the present, challenge the status quo,and find moments of triumph admits the condition of daily life.

Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt:

In this research analysis of this short story has been conducted by applying the second stage of Erickson's theory Autonomy vs Shame and doubt .This research delves into the protagonist 's growth as she navigates her desire for being independent defies societal expectations, and embraces a personal autonomy in the face of potential shame and doubt .The story begins with a narrator's longing for autonomy and escapes from the hometown. She yearns for a different life in London, associating it with sophistication and cultural enrichment. This desire reflects the developmental stage of autonomy where individuals strive to their independence and establish their separate identity separate from societal influences. As the story progresses ,the protagonist challenges social norms and defies the shame . Despite facing disapproval and scolding from medical staff for “fraternizing ”with Mr. Morton she persists in forming relationship with him .This defiance illustrates her willingness to confront potential shame and disregard societal expectations that attempt to confine her actions and choices . The narrator experiences personal growth and overcomes her self doubt through her interaction with Mr. Morton . Initially driven to save money for London trip ,she discovers the transformative power of genuine human connection. This journey allows her to shed self doubt and embrace her capacity for compassion and empathy, breaking free from the constraints imposed by societal norms . The story's climax showcases the triumph of autonomy and the willingness to take risks. The narrator deliberately arrives at the hospital early to provide Mr. Moreton with a hot bath and a cigarette, even if it jeopardizes her job .This recklessness represents her unwavering commitment to autonomy and her rejection of shame and doubt .

Mr. Moreton feels it, I know he does, because I hear him start humming “It's a Long Way to Tipperary,” which dissolves in a hoot of laughter then a coughing fit, and I reach down and grab his frail hand till it's over. Then we push on, both of us smothering laughter, and this moment is the one I remember most clearly from the year I turned eighteen: the two of us content, just for this perfect moment, to believe we can go on humming, and that this path before us will stretch on forever.

“Laminex and Mirrors,” Narrator, p.

This gorgeous, momentous ending to “Laminex and Mirrors” demonstrates the protagonist's growth over the course of working at the hospital. Whereas at the beginning, the “unvarying stretch” before patients and cleaning staff is a decidedly negative quality of life as she sees it at

the hospital, here, “the path before them ... stretching forever” is a life-affirming moment, and in fact turns out to be the most important moment of her eighteenth year.

Like A House on Fire :

“Like A House on Fire ”by Cate Kennedy is a short story that explores the themes of relationship, vulnerability , family dynamics and the fragility of relationships .This story also begins with the perspective of an unidentified first person narrator who suffers from a debilitating injury, this research focus on the challenges faced by the protagonist and the potential for healing and connection within family.

Like a House on Fire,” Cate Kennedy tells the story of an ordinary man whose whole life is turned upside down when he has an accident at work. Suffering daily from the excruciating pain of his back injury, the unnamed narrator is unable to work and can barely move. After nearly sixteen weeks confined at home, he spends his days watching his family from the living room floor where he lies to rest his back. The story begins with a description of the humiliation the narrator experiences as he watches his wife and children drag their newly purchased Christmas tree to the car. The narrator is unable to help but be embarrassed by his own useless

“I just can’t stand all this... chaos I can’t do anything about”

The story opens with the narrator’s sense of indignity and powerlessness due to his injury. The Christmas tree scene highlights his embarrassment at being unable to perform simple tasks and relying on his family for support. This portrayal of vulnerability sets the stage for exploring the narrator’s emotional state and its impact on the family dynamics.

Symbolism of the House on Fire :

The title “Like A House on Fire ” is a metaphor for the fragile nature of the family unit .The narrator’s injury represents the fire that threatens the stability of house , while the subsequent moments of tenderness symbolize the extinguishing of the flames and the potential for the renewal and growth. The story portrays the emotional impact of narrator’s injury on his family, highlighting the challenges they face and strain it places on their bond . However, through moments of tenderness and connection, the storyline offers hope for reconciliation and emphasizes the resilience of the family unit . Ultimately, this research reflects on the power of compassion, understanding, and vulnerability in fostering healing and strengthening the family relationships.

Generativity vs stagnation:

The psychoanalytic analysis of this short story in this research paper has been done by applying seventh stage of Erikson’s theory which is called generativity vs stagnation. This research explores the theme of generativity through the lens of unnamed first person narrator. The narrative delves into the protagonist struggle to find a sense of purpose and fulfilment while navigating the challenges of family life, emphasizing the consequences of stagnation and the potential for generative growth.

The Story introduces the narrator at a point of stagnation resulting from his incapacitating injury . Unable to carry out his usual responsibilities and to feel powerless ,the narrator experiences a loss of purpose and productivity. The stagnation creates a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction, highlighting the psychological toll it takes on his we’ll being. Once when his wife Claire gets home, the narrator shares a brief moment of laughter with his wife about the nativity set, but it is obvious that she was tired and frustrated. When the narrator complains to her about the mess in the house, she snaps, telling him to get over his obsessive need for control, and reminding him that he should have recovered by now. The narrator bemoans the distance and

tension growing between him and his wife, as he remembers how happy they were before his injury. He reflects on how their marriage is “like a house on fire”—in danger of going up in flames at any minute.

Listening to the two of us, you’d never believe that we used to get on like a house on fire, that even after we had the kids, occasionally we’d stay up late, just talking. But now that I think of it, a house on fire is a perfect description for what seems to be happening now: these flickering small resentments licking their way up into the wall cavities; this faint, acrid smell of smoke.

“Like a House on Fire,” Narrator

The narrator’s stagnation impacts his relationship with his wife , Claire especially. As he increasingly relies on her for support, a strain emerges in their personal relationship. Despite the challenges, the narrator’s underlying desire for generative growth keep growing. His yearning to mend the fissures caused by his injury and strengthen his relationships catalyzes change. Finally a tender moment shared with Claire on Christmas morning represent a glimmer of hope , suggesting the potential for generativity and healing within the family unit .

Five Dollar Family:

Another short story of “Like A House on Fire “ taking place predominantly in a health-care setting, “Five-Dollar Family” describes the days following the birth of Jason, during which his mother, Michelle, struggles to get him to breastfeed. Feeding Jason is just one among Michelle’s many challenges, including her realization that her boyfriend, the baby’s father Des, is cheating on her, and that even if she forgives him for that, he’s wholly unprepared to help raise Jason. But she may not even have the luxury of deciding whether or not she wants Des in Jason’s life, because Des has to face a judge for aggravated assault mere days after Jason is born. With his priors, she knows Des will likely go to jail. In the face of disappointment, of growth, independence, and the sublimity of motherhood“ Five Dollar family” Is another compelling short story exploring dependency, ,the resilience and maternal instinct.

Industry vs illusion:

In this study this short story has been analyzed by applying the fourth stage of Erikson’s theory by psychoanalytic lens . Michelle strives to create stability in her life but faces disappointment from her unreliable boyfriend. Michelle’s feelings of inferiority and illusion of his boy friend becoming a better person and father hinder her personal growth towards her personal growth.

Industry and Personal Accomplishment:

The story introduces the concept of the industry as Michelle strives to create a sense of accomplishment and stability in her life . Initially ,she relies on Des , expecting him to contribute and provide support as a responsible partner and father . However ,as Des disappoints her and fails to meet her expectations Michelle experiences including breastfeeding issues contribute her feeling of inferiority. She perceives herself as a inadequate, questioning her ability to meet societal standards and fulfill her role as a mother.

The turning point in the story occurs when Michelle decides to have a family portrait taken before Des goes to jail . This act demonstrate her determination to control the narrative and overcome the feeling of inferiority. Michelle ‘s decision to defy medical advise and feed her son publically showcase her resilience and desire to assert independence, challenging societal expectations and judgements. The transformative moment during the family portrait session , where Michelle feeds Jason despite Des disbelief, signifies her personal growth and self

validation. This act of empowerment allows her to reject feelings of inferiority and assert her capabilities as a mother.

Seventy Two Derwents :

The seventy two Derwents pencils in the story represent the protagonist 's artistic identity and creative potential. Seventy-Two Derwents is the last story in a larger collection of short stories called Like a House on Fire, which won the Steele Rudd Award and was shortlisted for the Stella Prize.

The narrative is taken from the journal of a young Australian girl named Tyler who is in Grade 6. She explains that she received the journal from her schoolteacher, Mrs Carlyle, who gave them out to the class to encourage the students to practice writing about themselves. She briefly describes Mrs Carlyle's pet budgies and mentions that her teacher promised to give her a bird of her own should one of the birds lay some eggs.

Tyler lives with her mother and her older sister Ellie, but her mother's boyfriend, Shane, is around a lot and even showers at their house. When Tyler's mother asks her what she thinks of Shane, Tyler flashes back into the past, recalling a time when she asked her mother for money to get a McDonald's hamburger, but her mother insisted that she sit in the kitchen and wait for her to prepare a burger from scratch. Once the burger was done, Tyler's mother demanded that Tyler confirm that her burger tasted far better than a McDonald's burger. Tyler writes in her journal that she's learned to always say whatever her mother wants to hear.

Initiative vs Guilt:

For textual analysis of this short story third stage of Erikson's theory has been applied. This textual analysis explores the theme of initiative vs guilt. The protagonist's journey of self discovery through her artistic initiative and the challenges she faces provide insights into the developmental stage of initiative vs guilt as purposed by Erikson. By examining the protagonist's actions, motivations and internal struggles, this analysis sheds light on the between taking the initiative and experiencing guilt. The protagonist's passion for art and commitment to exploring her artistic potential represent her initiative. She takes active steps to express herself through drawings, embracing her creative impulses, and investing time and effort in mastering her skills with the seventy two Derwent pencil.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the psychoanalytic study of "Like A House on Fire" by Kate Kennedy through the lenses of relativism and skepticism has shed light on the intricate interplay between literature, psychology and human experience. By delving into psychological theory of Erik Erikson we have gained valuable insights into the character's motivation, conflicts and personal growth within the narratives of short stories.

The exploration of relativism Within the collection reveals the subjective nature of human experiences, perspective and truths. Through the characters 's journeys we witness the relativity of their beliefs, values, and judgements highlighting the diverse and often conflicting interpretations of reality. Relativism serves as a lens through which we can understand human existence's complex and multifaceted nature, challenging our preconceived notions of absolute truths and encouraging empathy and understanding.

Moreover, skepticism emerges as a powerful theme throughout the stories, prompting us to question the validity of knowledge, beliefs, and societal constructs. The character's doubt challenges conventional wisdom, social norms, and the authority of established systems. This

skepticism invites critical inquiry and self -reflection, allowing for personal growth and exploring alternatives perspectives .

By employing a psychoanalytic approach, we have examined the character' s psychological development, identity formation and interpersonal relationships within Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory framework . Through Erikson's eight stage of development, we have gained more profound insights into the character's struggle, conflicts and quests for meaning and self discovery. The exploration of characters ' s psychosocial development within the narratives has provided a rich understanding of their psychological growth and impact of their experiences on their identities. Overall the psychoanalytic study of "Like A House on Fire " through the lenses of relativism and skepticism has unveiled the intricate psychological dimensions of the characters and their experiences. It has challenged our assumptions, encouraged critical thinking, and provided a deeper appreciation of the complexities of the human Condition. By bridging the gap between literature and psychology, this study offers a valuable insights into the universal aspects of human existence and invites further exploration of the interplay between the self , society and the construction of meaning.

Future study Areas suggestions:

- On the basis of present research there are few suggestions for future researches.
- Conduct a comparative and contrast portrayal of other literary works exploring relativism and skepticism themes. Compare and contrast the portrayal of these themes in different cultural contexts or across different periods to gain a deeper understanding of their variations and implications.
- Investigate the readers response to the themes of relativism and skepticism in "Like A House on Fire ".conduct qualitative research or surveys to explore how readers interpret and engage with these themes , examining the impact on their perspective, beliefs and personal growth.
- Apply other psychoanalytic theories or frameworks to analyze the characters and themes in "Like A House on Fire". Explore the work of other influential psychoanalysts to gain alternative insights into psychological dynamics.
- Examine the critical reception of "Like A House on Fire " within the literary community. Analyze the reviews, scholarly articles, and critical discussions surrounding the collection to gain insights into the different interpretation and perspective on relativism and skepticism.

These suggestions provides avenue for further explanation of themes of skepticism and relativism in "Like A House on Fire " and their implications for literature, psychology and cultural understanding.

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