

Balancing Self-Love: A Dichotomy of Amour Propre and Amour De Soi in *Button Button* by Richard Matheson

Muhammad Javaid Anwar¹, Fazila Saeed²

¹ Yangzhou University, Jiangsu, China. E-mail: raojavid96@gmail.com

² Riphah International University, Lahore, Pakistan. E-mail: fazila.saeed@yahoo.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Button Button, Amour Propre, tragedy, psyche, morality

How to cite:

Anwar, Muhammad Javaid & Saeed, Fazila. (2024). Balancing Self-Love: A Dichotomy of Amour Propre and Amour De Soi in *Button Button* by Richard Matheson. *English Education, Linguistics, and Literature Journal*, 3(2), 89-101.

ABSTRACT

Amour Propre, which is frequently interpreted as self-love or self-esteem is reflected in the intentions and deeds of the characters in literary works. This study examines Richard Matheson's short story *Button Button* through the lens of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concepts of Amour De Soi and Amour-Propre. The purpose of the study is to analyze how the characters of Norma and Arthur embody these concepts with Arthur representing Amour De Soi and Norma exemplifying corrupted Amour-Propre. Utilizing a qualitative analysis approach, the study explores the characters' actions and motivations within the narrative to uncover the implications of their respective forms of self-love. The findings reveal the dangers of allowing Amour-Propre to become excessive or corruptible as seen through Norma's relentless pursuit of material desires leading to tragic consequences. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between self-love and consideration for others highlighting the virtues of a more balanced and self-respecting approach to life as demonstrated by Arthur's contrasting fate.

1. Introduction

In literature, Amour Propre, or self-love, is a concept that often plays a significant role in shaping characters' intentions, actions, and relationships. Characters driven by a strong sense of Amour Propre are often motivated by a desire to preserve their self-esteem, maintain their social standing or satisfy their personal ambitions. This aspect of human nature adds depth to literary works by influencing character development driving plot progression and exploring themes such as identity, morality, and the human condition. The ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Amour De Soi and Amour-Propre offer helpful frameworks for comprehending human motives and behaviors, especially in literary works where the goals and actions of the characters are crucial to the story. Amour-Propre is an excessive or perverted kind of self-love motivated by pride, conceit, and the need for outside approval, whereas Amour De Soi refers to a healthy form of self-love based in self-preservation and sincere care for oneself. The short tale *Button Button* by Richard Matheson is an engaging case study for examining these ideas because it has individuals whose behaviors are greatly impacted by their unique approaches to self-love. The protagonists of

the story, Norma and Arthur represent opposing extremes of self-love; Arthur embodies a more sensible and self-respecting approach (Amour De Soi), while Norma represents an excessive and distorted version of self-love (Amour-Propre).

Although there is a lot of research on Rousseau's theories of Amour De Soi and Amour-Propre, there isn't much written about how to apply them to literary analysis especially when it comes to modern fictions. Although these ideas have been studied in relation to ancient literature in some studies further research is necessary to determine how applicable these ideas are to contemporary stories and characters. Besides, while *Button Button* has been the subject of several analyses that have concentrated on topics like morality and the effects of human greed there hasn't been much research that explicitly examines the motivations and actions of the characters within the prism of Rousseau's ideas about self-love. By filling this gap, this research aims to enhance our comprehension of the ways in which Amour De Soi and Amour-Propre appear in modern literature enhancing our awareness of Rousseau's philosophy as well as the issues of human nature as it is portrayed in fiction.

Characters driven by Amour Propre may exhibit a range of behaviors, from acts of self-preservation and self-promotion to displays of vanity, arrogance, or insecurity (Dent, 1998). For example, a protagonist's relentless pursuit of success and recognition may stem from a deep-seated need for validation and affirmation of their worth reflecting their Amour Propre. A character's fear of rejection or failure may lead them to compromise their values or deceive others to maintain a facade of self-assurance, highlighting the complex interplay between Amour Propre and moral ambiguity (Nurse, 1991). The presence of Amour Propre in literature often serves as a catalyst for conflict, driving characters into moral dilemmas or interpersonal tensions as they navigate the delicate balance between self-interest and ethical considerations. As a result of exploring the obstacles of self-love and its consequences, literature offers readers a deeper understanding of the human psyche and the enduring struggle to reconcile individual desires with broader moral imperatives (Neuhouser, 2010).

For this Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an influential philosopher of the Enlightenment era had complex views on the concept of property. In his works, particularly in "The Social Contract" and "Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men," Rousseau examined the idea of property in its various forms (Lovejoy, 1923). Rousseau theorized that there are two types of inequality: natural or physical inequality and moral or political inequality. Natural inequality refers to differences in physical attributes and abilities, which are inherent and unalterable. Moral or political inequality, on the other hand, is rooted in the development of society and institutions. Rousseau's concept of property starts with the state of nature, a hypothetical pre-societal condition in which humans lived independently. In this state, there was no private property in the modern sense. Property consisted of personal possessions necessary for survival, and property rights were not well-defined (Bertram, 2010).

According to Rousseau, as societies developed, moral inequality emerged driven by the establishment of private property and the introduction of laws and institutions. The possession of property especially land led to power imbalances and social hierarchies. Rousseau saw the emergence of private property as a source of conflict and inequality. He argued that the introduction of property led to competition and disputes as those who had

more property gained greater influence and control over the less fortunate. Rousseau believed that to address the inequalities caused by the development of property and society individuals had to enter into a social contract. This contract involved individuals surrendering some of their natural freedom in exchange for the benefits of an organized society. Through the social contract property rights could be regulated for the common good (Shklar, 1978).

Rousseau's concept of the ('*General Will*'), played a crucial role in regulating property rights. The general will represent the collective will of the people and aims to promote the common good. Property rights according to Rousseau should be subordinated to the general will to ensure that they do not lead to extreme inequalities or harm the social fabric. Rousseau distinguished between positive liberty (freedom within the bounds of the law) and negative liberty (freedom from external constraints). He believed that property should be constrained by the law to prevent the negative consequences of unchecked economic inequality (Thompson, 2017). Jean-Jacques Rousseau's views on property are deeply rooted in his understanding of the development of societal inequalities. He saw property especially when it led to extreme economic disparities, as a source of conflict and injustice. To address this, he proposed the idea of a social contract and the subordination of property rights to the general will in order to promote the common good and mitigate the negative effects of property ownership (Sreenivasan, 2000).

Richard Burton Matheson was born on February 20, 1926 in Allendale, New Jersey, USA. He showed an early interest in writing and began crafting stories in his youth. After graduating from high school, Matheson served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Following his military service, he attended the University of Missouri, where he studied journalism. Matheson's career as a writer took off in the 1950s, during which he gained recognition for his work in the fantasy horror, and science fiction genres. He is perhaps best known for his 1954 novel "I Am Legend," a groundbreaking work in the realm of science fiction horror. The novel has since become a classic and has been adapted into films multiple times. Throughout his career, Matheson penned numerous short stories, novels, and screenplays that left a lasting impact on popular culture. Some of his other notable works include "The Shrinking Man," "Hell House," and "What Dreams May Come." His writing often delved into themes of existentialism, human psychology, and the supernatural. Matheson's talent extended beyond literature, as he also worked extensively in television and film. He wrote for iconic TV series like "The Twilight Zone" and "Star Trek," contributing to some of their most memorable episodes. Additionally, his novels and short stories served as the basis for several successful films and television adaptations. Richard Matheson passed away on June 23, 2013, in Los Angeles, California, leaving behind a legacy as one of the most influential writers in the realms of fantasy, horror, and science fiction. His works continue to captivate audiences and inspire writers across generations (Ransom, 2018).

Button Button by Richard Matheson follows the story of Arthur and Norma Lewis, a couple facing financial difficulties who receive a mysterious box with a button on top. A stranger named Mr. Steward explains that if they press the button, someone they don't know will die, and they will receive \$200,000. Initially skeptical, they discard the box but later retrieve it. Norma, overwhelmed by curiosity and financial desperation, ultimately presses the button. The next day, Mr. Steward returns with the promised money, revealing that the button will be passed on to another unsuspecting person. The story explores themes of

morality, temptation, and the consequences of one's actions in the face of extreme circumstances. The research gap in this study lies in the absence of a comprehensive examination that directly applies Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of *Amour Propre* to the character development of Norma in Richard Matheson's "Button, Button." While literature often explores characters' motivations and actions in relation to self-love, there is a lack of focused analysis that specifically utilizes Rousseau's philosophical framework to understand Norma's transformation from innocence to chaos. Existing studies may have explored Norma's character from various perspectives, but there is a notable gap in research that directly integrates Rousseau's notion of *Amour Propre* with her narrative arc.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Textual Review

The research conducted by Rabia Ashraf et al. (2019) offers a compelling analysis of Richard Matheson's short story "Button, Button" through the lenses of Baudillard's theory of hyper consumerism and Lorenz's two deadly sins: "Man's Race Against Himself" and "Entropy of Feeling." The study unveils a fresh perspective on the symbolic representation of the mysterious box in the story, interpreting it not only as a tool for temptation but also as a manifestation of the "system of needs" generated by capitalist societies, as proposed by Baudillard. The analysis delves into the character of Norma, highlighting her embodiment of modern consumerist desires and the relentless pursuit of materialistic comforts. Norma's yearning for an elevated lifestyle, driven by her own "neophilia," is depicted as a competition with herself, ultimately leading her to make a morally reprehensible decision—pressing the button to fulfill her desires at the expense of someone else's life (Scott-Smith, 2016). The research sheds light on the dysfunctional relationship between Norma and her husband, Arthur, revealing a profound sense of alienation and communication gap between them. Despite their seemingly contented marriage, Norma's actions unveil a stark reality—she never truly knew her husband. This aspect underscores the corrosive impact of consumerism on interpersonal relationships and individual psyche, leading to a loss of peace and connection (Ashraf et al., 2019).

The paper authored by Syed et al. (2021) published in the *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Explorer (IJMRE)*, offers a psychoanalytical examination of Norma's character in Richard Matheson's short story *Button Button*. Through a detailed analysis, the authors illuminate the complexities of Norma's psyche and her descent into moral ambiguity and ultimately, tragedy. The authors paint a picture of Norma's discontent and unfulfilled desires, juxtaposed with her husband Arthur's apparent contentment. Norma's longing for a luxurious lifestyle and her dissatisfaction with their financial situation serve as catalysts for her susceptibility to Mr. Steward's offer, which promises material wealth in exchange for a sinister act. As the story unfolds, Norma's suppressed emotions are unleashed, revealing her moral vacuity and single-minded pursuit of monetary gain. They argue that Norma's acceptance of the offer represents a psychological breaking point, where her desires override her conscience, leading her to commit a heinous act. The repetition of the word "button" in the title serves as a symbolic representation of the pivotal role it plays in Norma's downfall, emphasizing the power of temptation and greed in shaping her fate (Syed et al., 2021).

Nawaz's research article, published in 2017 in "Research on Humanities and Social Sciences," presents a thorough analysis of Richard Matheson's use of speech acts in the short story "Button, Button." Through a speech acts lens, Nawaz explores how Matheson utilizes language not only to describe events or interactions but also to perform actions and shape characters' identities and interactions. It highlights Matheson's adeptness in employing speech acts techniques to achieve various narrative objectives. Rather than merely describing events, Matheson employs performative utterances to drive the plot forward and imbue characters with depth and complexity. It underscores how Matheson's use of speech acts serves to convey characters' emotions, desires, and motivations, thereby enriching the textual experience for readers. By delving into characters' inner worlds and interpersonal dynamics through speech acts, Matheson is able to create a multi-layered narrative that engages readers on literal, societal, and psychological levels (Nawaz, 2017).

2.2. Research Gap

In synthesizing the existing literature on Richard Matheson's *Button Button*, it becomes evident that various scholars have approached the analysis of the story from different theoretical perspectives. While Rabia Ashraf et al. offer a compelling exploration of hyper consumerism, and Ali Furqan Syed et al. provide valuable insights into Norma's character through psychoanalysis, Naveed Nawaz's examination of speech acts enriches our understanding of the narrative's linguistic dimensions. However, there remains a notable research gap in the literature concerning the application of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of *Amour Propre* to the character of Norma in *Button Button*. While previous studies have probed into aspects of societal influences and psychological motivations, there is an opportunity to further explore how Norma's actions and decisions can be understood through the lens of *Amour Propre*. By bridging this research gap future scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Norma's character development and the underlying themes of self-love and identity within Matheson's narrative.

3. Research Methodology

The present study employs a social and cultural interpretive approach to analyze Norma's character in Richard Matheson's *Button Button*. The research methodology centers on the theoretical framework of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of *Amour Propre*, which serves as a guiding principle for understanding Norma's psychological and behavioral transformation. Drawing on Rousseau's philosophy, the study examines the trajectory of Norma's character development from a state of innocence to one influenced by external factors such as self-interest and societal norms.

3.1. Data Collection Method

To conduct this analysis the study employs a qualitative research methodology focusing on theoretical analysis and textual interpretation. Primary data is derived from a close reading of Matheson's short story supplemented by scholarly literature on psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and Rousseauian philosophy. The researcher utilizes thematic coding to identify key aspects of Norma's character and behavior mapping her journey against the theoretical framework of *Amour Propre*. This study incorporates textual evidence and quotes from *Button Button* to support its arguments and interpretations. The analysis is contextualized within the broader cultural and educational context, noting the inclusion of the short story

in the syllabus of Intermediated Part-I, Punjab Textbook. This contextualization provides insight into the relevance and significance of studying Norma's character within the academic curriculum.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's perspective on human nature and social interaction revolves around the concepts of *Amour De Soi* and *amour-propre*. *Amour De Soi*, or self-love, is characterized as a natural form of love that is inherent to human beings. Rousseau posits that individuals naturally possess a sense of affection towards themselves and instinctively prioritize their own well-being and interests. This form of self-love is independent of others and is rooted in individuals' innate drive for self-preservation and self-care. In contrast, *amour-propre*, or self-esteem, is a more complex and socially constructed form of self-love. It arises from the comparisons individuals make between themselves and others within society. *Amour-propre* involves evaluating one's worth and identity based on external factors such as social status, wealth, and recognition. Unlike *Amour De Soi*, which is natural and innate, *amour-propre* is relational and dependent on societal interactions and perceptions.

Rousseau suggests that while *amour-propre* has the potential to contribute positively to human freedom and virtue by fostering competition and ambition, it is also inherently dangerous. When *amour-propre* becomes "inflamed," or excessively inflated, it leads individuals to seek validation and superiority over others at any cost. This corrupted form of self-love results in vice, misery, and moral degradation, as individuals prioritize their own interests and egoistic desires over ethical principles and the well-being of others. The paradox of human socialization lies in the tension between *Amour De Soi* and *amour-propre*. While individuals possess a natural inclination towards self-love and self-preservation, their interactions within society often give rise to a competitive and comparative mindset fueled by *amour-propre*. Thus, while *amour-propre* may enable individuals to transcend the state of nature and engage in complex social relations, its corruptibility poses significant challenges to human morality and social harmony (Rousseau, 1985).

4. Findings

In exploring Richard Matheson's *Button Button* through the lens of Rousseau's concept of *Amour-Propre* and *Amour De Soi* this study is invited to explore into the details of human nature and social interaction as depicted in the narrative. Rousseau's notion of self-love distinguishes between two fundamental forms: *Amour De Soi*, a natural and intrinsic love for oneself, and *amour-propre*, a relational and potentially corruptible form of self-love. In the context of *Button Button*, the analysis centers on how the characters' actions and motivations align with Rousseau's concepts of *Amour-Propre* and *Amour De Soi*, emphasizing their innate tendencies towards self-preservation and self-interest. By examining how the characters navigate moral dilemmas and societal pressures within the narrative, this study can gain insights into the difficulties of human nature and the challenges of maintaining genuine self-love in a world influenced by external validation and comparison.

4.1. Norma and Arthur are an Embodiment of Amour-Propre and Amour De Soi

"Norma put the button unit beside her on the couch. She reread the typed note, smiling. A few moments later, she went back into the kitchen to make the salad. The doorbell rang at eight o'clock. "I'll get it," Norma called from the kitchen. Arthur was in the living room, reading" (Matheson, 2005).

In the quote from "Button, Button," Norma's actions and demeanor reveal a deep-seated desire for personal gain, suggesting a manifestation of amour-propre, or relational self-love, rather than Amour De Soi, the natural form of self-love. Norma's smile while rereading Mr. Steward's note indicates her anticipation of the promised surprise likely monetary gain, highlighting her self-interest and desire for material wealth. Her eagerness to answer the doorbell despite her husband being present illustrates her singular focus on the potential reward from Mr. Steward, disregarding the presence and involvement of others including her husband Arthur. This behavior reflects an orientation towards self-preservation and self-interest characteristic of amour-propre rather than an innate sense of self-love independent of external validation or comparison. Norma's actions exemplify the dangers associated with inflamed amour-propre. While humans possess a natural inclination towards self-love and self-preservation (Amour De Soi), the introduction of relational self-love (amour-propre) introduces a comparative and competitive mindset that can lead to corruptibility and moral degradation.

"I'm Mr. Steward. Oh, yes. Norma repressed¹ a smile. She was sure now it was a sales pitch" (Matheson, 2005).

In this quote from "Button, Button," Norma's reaction to Mr. Steward's introduction provides further insight into her mindset and motivations particularly in relation to the concept of amour-propre. Norma's immediate suspicion and assumption that Mr. Steward's visit is a sales pitch reveal her preoccupation with financial gain and material possessions highlighting her relational self-love, or amour-propre. Her readiness to interpret the situation as an opportunity for monetary benefit suggests a mindset focused on self-interest and comparison with others. Moreover, this quote underscores the dangers associated with inflamed amour-propre, as described by Rousseau. Norma's assumption that Mr. Steward's visit is solely motivated by a sales pitch reflects a mindset driven by self-interest and a desire for personal gain. This distorted form of self-love leads individuals to prioritize their own desires and interests over ethical considerations and interpersonal relationships ultimately contributing to moral degradation and vice. Norma's immediate suspicion and focus on financial gain underscore the challenges posed by amour-propre and highlight the importance of Rousseau's warnings regarding the dangers of inflamed self-love.

"It could prove very valuable, he told her. "Monetarily?" she challenged. Mr. Steward nodded. Monetarily, he said." (Matheson, 2005).

In this quote from "Button, Button," Norma's immediate focus on the monetary value of Mr. Steward's proposition reveals her underlying greed and preoccupation with material wealth. When Mr. Steward mentions that the proposition could prove "very valuable," Norma's immediate response is to inquire if this value is monetary. Her insistence on clarifying the financial aspect highlights her singular focus on personal gain indicative of amour-propre or relational self-love as described by Rousseau. Norma's fixation on money as the primary measure of value suggests a mindset driven by self-interest and comparison with others.

Rather than considering other potential forms of value, such as emotional fulfillment or moral integrity, Norma's immediate concern is with financial gain and material possessions. This narrow perspective reflects a distorted form of self-love wherein individuals prioritize their own desires and interests over ethical considerations and interpersonal relationships. Her relentless pursuit of monetary gain at the expense of other values highlights the corruptible nature of relational self-love and its potential to lead individuals astray from virtuous behavior and genuine human connection.

"I think you'd better leave, Arthur said, standing. Mr. Steward rose. Of course. And take your button unit with you." (Matheson, 2005).

In this quote from the text, Arthur's response to Mr. Steward's visit highlights a fundamental difference in values between him and his wife, Norma, particularly in relation to money and self-love. Arthur's straightforward request for Mr. Steward to leave and take the button unit with him suggests that he prioritizes integrity and ethical considerations over potential financial gain. His refusal to entertain Mr. Steward's proposition indicates a lack of interest in monetary incentives and a commitment to moral principles, aligning with Rousseau's concept of *Amour De Soi*. *Amour De Soi*, as described by Rousseau, involves a healthy sense of self-worth and self-respect that is not reliant on external validation or comparison with others. Arthur's actions reflect this positive and virtuous form of self-love, as he demonstrates a steadfast adherence to his own values and principles, irrespective of external pressures or temptations. By contrast, Norma's eagerness to engage with Mr. Steward's proposition and her focus on potential monetary gain exemplify a different mindset, one that may be more aligned with *amour-propre*, or relational self-love. *Amour-propre*, while not inherently negative, can become problematic when individuals prioritize external validation and comparison over their own ethical principles and well-being.

"Norma closed her eyes. Fifty thousand dollars, she thought." (Matheson, 2005).

In this quote from the text, Norma's internal dialogue reveals her singular focus on monetary gain and highlights her preoccupation with material wealth, reflecting a state of *amour-propre*. Norma's immediate response to the mention of fifty thousand dollars is indicative of her prioritization of financial gain over other considerations. Her closed eyes suggest a moment of intense contemplation, during which she fixates solely on the monetary value presented by Mr. Steward. This moment encapsulates Norma's self-love in the form of *amour-propre* characterized by a relational sense of worth that is influenced by external factors such as wealth and status. Norma's fixation on the monetary amount demonstrates her desire for validation and recognition through material possessions, aligning with the concept of *amour-propre* as described by Rousseau. Norma's exclusive focus on the monetary value neglects other potential consequences or ethical considerations associated with Mr. Steward's proposition. Her immediate association of the sum with her own self-worth reflects a mindset driven by comparison with others and a desire for external validation, rather than intrinsic values or ethical principles.

"I'm curious... For \$50,000," Norma said." (Matheson, 2005).

In this quote from the text, Norma's expression of curiosity towards Mr. Steward's proposition of \$50,000 reflects her strong inclination towards wealth and material gain, illustrating the influence of self-love or *amour-propre*. Norma's curiosity about the monetary offer demonstrates her preoccupation with financial incentives and her

willingness to entertain the possibility of acquiring wealth. Her immediate focus on the monetary value suggests that she views the proposition primarily through the lens of personal gain, prioritizing her own interests over other considerations. This quote highlights Norma's relational self-love, as described by Rousseau, wherein individuals derive their sense of worth and validation from external factors such as wealth and status. Norma's curiosity about the monetary offer indicates her desire for recognition and validation through material possessions, rather than intrinsic values or ethical considerations.

"The point is, Norma broke in, if it's someone you've never seen in your life and never will see, someone whose death you don't even have to know about, you still wouldn't push the button? Arthur stared at her, appalled. You mean you would? Fifty thousand dollars, Arthur. What has the amount —?"(Matheson, 2005).

In this exchange between Norma and Arthur, their contrasting responses to Mr. Steward's proposition highlight the fundamental difference between *amour-propre* and *Amour De Soi*. Norma's assertion that the identity of the person affected by pressing the button is irrelevant if the monetary reward is significant demonstrates her inclination towards *amour-propre*. She prioritizes external validation and material gain, indicating a relational self-love that is influenced by societal norms and expectations. Norma's willingness to consider pushing the button solely for financial gain reflects her self-centered perspective and her willingness to prioritize personal interests over ethical considerations. On the other hand, Arthur's appalled reaction to Norma's suggestion underscores his adherence to *Amour De Soi*. He expresses moral outrage at the idea of sacrificing someone's life for financial gain, emphasizing the intrinsic value of human life and ethical principles over material wealth. Arthur's response reflects a sense of self-worth that is rooted in personal integrity and moral values, independent of external validation or societal pressures. This exchange highlights the difference between the two forms of self-love outlined by Rousseau. While Norma embodies *amour-propre* by prioritizing external validation and material gain, Arthur exemplifies *Amour De Soi* through his commitment to moral integrity and ethical principles. Their contrasting responses underscore the complex interplay between self-love and ethical decision-making, revealing the inherent tensions between personal interests and moral considerations in human behavior.

"The point is, Norma, he continued, what's the difference whom you kill? It's still murder." (Matheson, 2005).

In this quote, Arthur's assertion that the identity of the person affected by pressing the button is irrelevant underscores his commitment to ethical principles and moral integrity, reflecting his embodiment of *Amour De Soi*. Arthur's refusal to justify or condone the act of murder, regardless of the potential monetary reward, demonstrates his prioritization of intrinsic values over external incentives. By emphasizing the inherent wrongness of taking someone's life for personal gain, Arthur upholds the sanctity of human life and underscores his adherence to ethical principles. This quote highlights the positive nature of *Amour De Soi*, as described by Rousseau, wherein individuals derive their sense of self-worth and validation from intrinsic values and moral integrity. Arthur's refusal to compromise his ethical principles for personal gain reflects a healthy and virtuous form of self-love that prioritizes the well-being of others and upholds moral principles. This quote illustrates the difference between *Amour De Soi* and other-oriented forms of self-love, emphasizing the

importance of ethical integrity and moral principles in guiding human behavior and decision-making.

“(Norma Said) A chance to take that trip to Europe we’ve always talked about. (Arthur said) Norma, no. A chance to buy that cottage on the island. Norma, no. His face was white.” (Matheson, 2005).

In this quotation from the short story, Norma's desires for a trip to Europe and a cottage on the island represent her pursuit of personal fulfillment and satisfaction, which align with Rousseau's concept of *amour-propre*, or self-love. Norma's desires reflect her attachment to material possessions and her sense of self-worth being tied to them. On the other hand, Arthur's response of "Norma, no" and his pale face suggest his reluctance or perhaps even opposition to these desires. His reaction could be interpreted as a reflection of his concern for their well-being or his realization of the potential consequences of prioritizing material possessions over other aspects of life. This conflict between Norma's pursuit of personal desires and Arthur's apprehension or resistance sets the stage for a tragic outcome, as it highlights the tension between individual desires and communal harmony, echoing Rousseau's ideas about the corrupting influence of property and self-love.

“She felt unreal as the voice informed her of the subway accident — the shoving crowd, Arthur pushed from the platform in front of the train. She was conscious of shaking her head but couldn’t stop.” (Matheson, 2005).

In this passage, Norma's reaction to the news of Arthur's death reflects the tragic consequences of corrupted *amour-propre*, as described by Rousseau. Norma's preoccupation with material wealth and the fulfillment of her desires, as evidenced by her earlier longing for a trip to Europe and a cottage on the island, illustrates the influence of self-love on her actions and priorities. This self-love, when corrupted by excessive attachment to material possessions and status, leads to vice and misery, according to Rousseau. The subway accident, resulting in Arthur being pushed from the platform in front of the train, serves as a direct consequence of Norma's pursuit of personal desires at the expense of communal well-being or the well-being of her loved ones. The tragedy that befalls Arthur can be seen as a manifestation of the negative repercussions of prioritizing individual desires over the greater good. Norma's feeling of unreality and inability to stop shaking her head suggest her shock and disbelief at the tragic outcome of her actions or desires. This reaction highlights the profound impact of corrupted *amour-propre* on both individual lives and the broader societal fabric, as it can lead to irreversible harm and sorrow. Thus, this passage serves as a poignant illustration of Rousseau's concept of *amour-propre* and its potential to bring about tragic consequences when left unchecked.

“My dear lady, Mr. Steward said. Do you really think you knew your husband?” (Matheson, 2005).

Mr. Steward's ironic remark at the end of the story, "Do you really think you knew your husband?" serves as a poignant reflection of Norma's state of *amour-propre* and its consequences. Through this statement, Mr. Steward suggests that Norma's understanding of her husband may have been clouded by her own self-centered desires and pursuits. Norma's relentless pursuit of her own material desires highlights her preoccupation with her own satisfaction and fulfillment. This self-love, when corrupted by excessive attachment to material possessions and status, can blind one to the true needs and desires of others, including one's own spouse. Mr. Steward's words imply that Norma's focus on her own

desires may have prevented her from truly knowing her husband on a deeper level. Instead of considering his well-being and desires, Norma's actions were driven by her own selfish motives, leading to tragic consequences for Arthur.

5. Discussion

"As is well known, Rousseau believed that there are two different types of self-love that drive human behavior: amour de soi, which is a benign concern for one's own survival and well-being, and amour-propre, which is a malevolent concern to stand above other people and take pleasure in their misfortune" (Chazan, 1993).

An analysis of *Button, Button* in the context of Rousseau's concepts of Amour De Soi and amour-propre provides a compelling framework for understanding the characters of Norma and Arthur and the broader themes of the story. Rousseau's concepts provide a rich theoretical lens through which to interpret the characters and their actions. By identifying Arthur as embodying Amour De Soi and Norma as emblematic of corrupted amour-propre you offer a nuanced understanding of their motivations and behaviors. This interpretation deepens our appreciation of the story's exploration of human nature and morality. The findings underscore the importance of striking a balance between self-love (Amour De Soi) and consideration for others in leading a fulfilling life. Arthur's more balanced approach to self-love allows him to resist the temptation of the button's offer while Norma's excessive amour-propre leads her down a destructive path. This balance resonates with broader philosophical and ethical discussions about the tension between individual desires and communal well-being. This analysis highlights the story's cautionary message about the dangers of prioritizing material desires over deeper values and relationships. Norma's relentless pursuit of wealth and status serves as a warning against the corrosive effects of consumerism and the hollow pursuit of external validation. This theme holds practical significance in contemporary society, where consumer culture often promotes materialism at the expense of genuine fulfillment.

"Rousseau introduced the idea of amour-propre, or self-love. When one's self-worth is based on the opinions of others, this is known as amour-propre. A counterpart to amour-propre is amour de soi, or love of self, which is the recognition and appreciation of one's own value regardless of the views of others" (Baczko, 1988).

The discussion of Arthur's tragic fate prompts reflection on the ethical implications of personal choices and their impact on oneself and others. Norma's decision to push the button not only leads to her own demise but also implicates Arthur in her downfall. This raises ethical questions about individual responsibility and the interconnectedness of our actions within society. Lastly, this analysis invites consideration of virtue and moral development in the face of moral dilemmas. Arthur's steadfast refusal to compromise his principles despite temptation reflects moral strength and integrity. Conversely, Norma's moral decline underscores the dangers of ethical compromise and the erosion of moral character. This research offers valuable insights into the thematic richness of "Button, Button" and its implications for understanding human nature, morality, and societal values. By framing the analysis within Rousseau's philosophical framework, this study deepens our understanding of the story's enduring relevance and sheds light on timeless questions about the nature of self-love, ethics, and the human condition.

6. Conclusion

In *Button Button*, the characters of Norma and Arthur serve as embodiments of Rousseau's concepts of Amour De Soi and Amour-Propre, respectively. Arthur exemplifies Amour De Soi representing a more natural inclination towards self-love and preservation that is not dependent on external validation or comparison with others. His reluctance to prioritize material desires over other aspects of life suggests a healthier sense of self-worth and self-respect. On the other hand, Norma embodies the dangers of corrupted Amour-Propre, where self-love becomes excessive and driven by external influences such as wealth and status. Her relentless pursuit of material desires ultimately leads to tragic consequences highlighting the negative repercussions of listing personal gratification over communal well-being or the well-being of loved ones. The story serves as a cautionary tale about the potential dangers of allowing amour-propre to become excessive or corruptible. While amour-propre is not inherently negative, it can lead to harmful outcomes when it eclipses more virtuous forms of self-love, such as Amour De Soi. In short, *Button Button* highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between self-love and consideration for others as well as the dangers of allowing external influences to corrupt one's sense of self-worth and priorities. Arthur's tragic fate serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of unchecked amour-propre while also highlighting the virtues of a more balanced and self-respecting approach to life.

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