

Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Structural Analysis of Personality using Borromean Model in the film 'The Pale Blue Eye'Sarah¹, Nabila Akbar^{*2}, Amina Bashir³**Original Article**

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Abstract

This research targets the movie "The Pale Blue Eye" for the purpose of application of Lacan's Psychoanalysis to all possible characters. Various states of mind have been analyzed in each character on the basis of their actions and behaviors. The effect of the protagonist's behaviors on the states of other characters' minds is also under observation. Lacanian Psychoanalysis along with its all components is explained in this study. The research is completely based on the qualitative approach of analysis and the data has been collected from the original copy wright of the movie. The findings of the research suggest that the character of the protagonist overshadows the behaviors of others.

Keywords: Structural Analysis, Personality Structures, Lacan's theory, psychological thrillers,

Introduction

The theory of psychoanalysis has its origin in the late 19th century, when Sigmund Freud an Austrian neurologist worked on the mental processes and personality structures of humans. Later this theory grew and is supported by many other psychologists and neurologists including Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, and student of Sigmund Freud. But he has some different points of view from Freudian concepts which lead to the ground of Lacanian Psychoanalysis in the mid-20th century. He is also known as "French Freud" because of his re-interpretation of Freudian concepts. The famous phenomenon on which Lacan worked is that the "unconscious is structured like a language" or in other words, the unconscious is made up of chains of repressed signifiers that relate to one another to give different behaviors. Lacan is considered to be the most complex and incoherent psychoanalyst of his times because he has given concepts that are hard to understand. One reason for this is that Lacan's concepts find roots in the philosophy of Hegel, both talk about unconsciousness with reason and rationality. But at the same time, Lacan's theory is the one that is used practically to cure the mental instability of people even in the contemporary age. Especially 'The Mirror Theory' which is used by psychologists to make their patients self-analyze themselves. The personality structure of humans given by Lacan refers to the '**Borromean Model**' because according to him, all the mental states of the human mind are interconnected and serve as inseparable entities just like a Borromean Ring. The rings are interlinked to each other in a way that if one gets separation or breaks, the whole model will shatter. The Pictorial representation of this model is as follows;

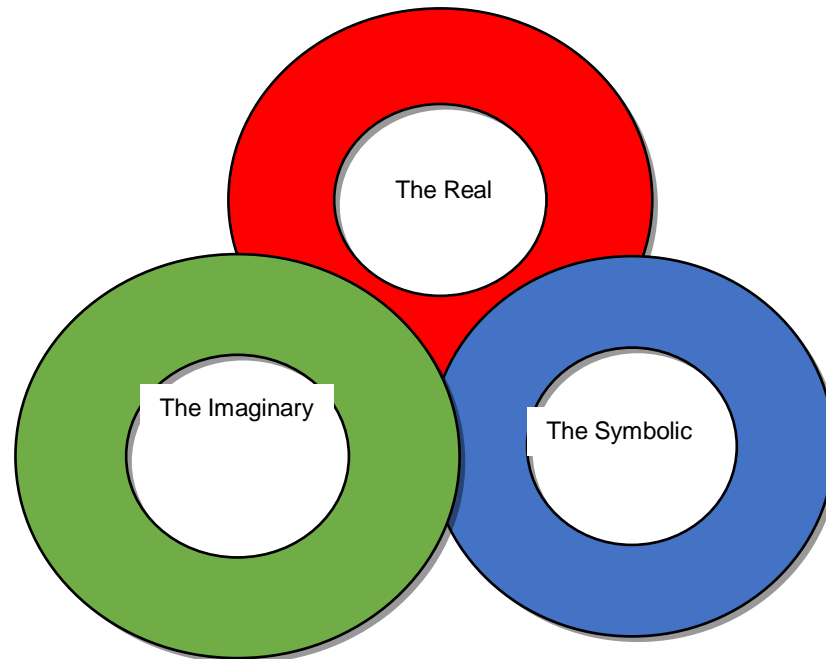


Figure 1.1

This refers to the fact that the unconscious mind is holding the authority of making the personality of a man based on all the stacks of saved memories of the past in it. According to Lacan, there are three registers or states of mind which lead to different behaviors and expressions of humans regarding their relationships and all other things in their lives. These stages are closely related to that of the Freudian concept of personality elements and still have a unique form and structure denying humans as angelic creatures (Superego). The three mental states of the Borromean model are named as:

1. The Real
2. The Imaginary
3. The Symbolic

In his text, "The Insistence of the Letter" first delivered in 1957, Lacan defines the Real as the sense of self that emerges in the unconscious in which there is no distinction between self and other and there is an idealized identification with the mother. This sense is developed innately till the age of six months. Then comes the Imaginary state of mind which develops at the age of six months and eighteen months, in which the child recognizes his existence and considers himself separate from the rest of the world. At this stage, the child enters into the language system and is the beginning of socialization, with its prohibitions and restraints associated with the figure of the father. The new order in which the child enters after the Imaginary is called the Symbolic. The distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic has been used in literary studies, in terms of the literary polarization between the realist and anti-realist text. The Symbolic realm is found in the anti-realist text or literature in which there is a world of patriarchal order or logic.

Cinema and psychoanalytic theories have a deep relation which makes the audience feel the film or series is more relatable to their conditions. According to Allen (1999), applied psychoanalysis has two broader kinds for cinema; the first one is for the visual properties of cinema while the second goes with the qualities of cinema fiction. In the undertaken paper, the second kind is under observation to analyze the personality structure of characters of the film *The*

Pale Blue Eye. Cinema is the most relevant and strategical option for the audience to do catharsis and understand others by having visual interpretations of thoughts and expressions in the characters they are watching. The cinema changed its direction in the urban-industrial society in the 19th century, when psychological thrillers were being introduced. These are often regarded as the subgenre of thrillers that reveal characters with unstable personalities or states of mind. The main themes that psychological thrillers deal with are crime, psychopathy, dreams, mental trauma and unstableness, morality, multiple realities or relativism, and murders. Some of these thrillers are adaptations of different books or novels while some of them are based on true stories that happened in society especially those which are related to serial killers.

The Pale Blue Eye is an American psychological, horror, and mysterious thriller which is an adaptation of the historic murder fiction of the same name written by Louis Bayard in 2003. This film is directed by Scott Cooper and the protagonist of the film is Christian Bale who performed a mysterious character as Augustus Landor. The film shooting is done in the military academy and revolves around the protagonist detective to find the criminals, the case study of the murders of two young cadets. The investigation is completed with the assistance of a young cadet named Edgar Allan Poe who will gradually get to become a famous poet. This character is performed by an American actor Harry Melling. The name of the film is of symbolic significance because the phrase 'The Pale Blue Eye' refers to the eyes of the woman who is on the brink of death, just as the character of Lea is.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is that it will provide a detailed analysis of the personalities of both major and minor characters. Some of them have undergone all the psychoanalytic states proposed by Jacques Lacan while some of them have shown only one side or aspect of their personality throughout the film. There is no other work being done on this undertaken film especially Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To find out the role of the dominant unconscious state of mind in building the personality structure of an individual
2. To explore the effect of conflict in Landor's state of mind on other characters
3. To investigate the interpretation of internal states of mind in humans from their behavioral patterns
4. To dig out the justification for emotions to overmaster unusual behaviors.

This research will construe the following interrogations:

Overarching Questions

1. What is the role of the dominant unconscious state of mind in building the personality structure of an individual?
2. How does conflict in Landor's states of mind affect the personality structure of other characters?

Subsidiary Questions

1. How do behavioral patterns interpret the internal states of mind in humans?
2. Do the unusual behaviors overmastered by emotions can be justified?

Literature Review

Tampubolon & Arianto (2022), have analyzed the protagonist of the psychological thriller 'Joker' directed by Todd Phillip using the personality structure proposed by Jacques Lacan. This analysis has highlighted that the undertaken character has shown all three personality structures in his actions i.e., the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic expressed by his destructive and unusual behavioral characteristics. This research is a descriptive analysis of Lacanian Psychoanalysis by practically implying it on the mental states of a character.

Husna & Samanik (2022), unearths the symbols present in the novel *Butterfly* by Dot Hutchinson, applying Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis and the effect of those symbols on the undertaken character to observe how different factors lead her towards a feminist approach. The confusion and turmoil present in the character propose her personality structure that how linguistic and cultural patterns affected her. It has been concluded in this article that psychological disorders are present in the main character which ultimately leads to the concept of feminism in the novel. Also, the stylistic choices of the novel's author about the interpretation of symbols are appreciable.

Dall'Aglio (2019) has analyzed the concepts of Lacan in terms of neuroscience. He explained that the Right Cortical Hemisphere of the brain is responsible for the Imaginary state of an individual because it holds the abstract thinking of the mind. While the Left Cortical Hemisphere is responsible for the Symbolic state of a human because it controls processes of reasoning and problem-solving; along with the help of Frontal Lobes the right hemisphere controls social and self-reflective states of the mind. The Real state of mind is dominated by the Subcortical Affective and Motivational Structures.

Barry (2017) states in his book the essays of Lacan about the psychoanalysis perspective and explains that this theory is more of a philosophy than a theory of psychology. He explains the whole journey of Lacan and the references from his seminars that his work is a combination of linguists and psychologists. The two major big names that served as a base for Lacan's theory are Saussure and Freud.

Hake (2011) has analyzed different cinematic works by applying the Imaginary and the Symbolic stage given by Lacan along with the theory of Julia Kristeva and Zizek. It has been concluded in this research that psychoanalysis and clinical psychology share the same ground but psychoanalysis refers to a philosophy. And as a philosophy, it accepts all the psychological disorders of the human mind in the same way as one experiences them and lives with them. This research has been done by using the actual textual references from the films and their characters have been first organized and then diagnosed with different traumas and mental issues which leads the researcher to find differences or similarities between clinical psychology and psychoanalytical theories.

Gabbard (1997), states that the film speaks to the unconscious and psychoanalysis conjoint each other because movies are the crystal-clear picture of the culture and mindsets of people and they relate themselves with characters in the way they are doing their part.

Lechte (1990), suggests about Lacan as an eyewitness that Lacan has the talent to present his point in a spicy manner and as an actor from the Royal Shakespeare Company. He fascinates others with his impressive language which takes place an important part in the recognition of his theory because Lacan does not analyze, he associates, and has the impression for his students to speak to them in a coded manner.

Methodology

The Pale Blue Eye directed by Scott Cooper has been analyzed from the aspect of Lacanian Psychoanalysis. It is qualitative research and data taken for this research will be discussed and analyzed according to the Borromean Model presented by Jacques Lacan in his essay *The Insistence of the Letter* taken from his book, *Ecrits* (1957). Authentic sources are used for theoretical purposes i.e., books. The dialogues are considered as the data for textual reference dialogues taken from the movie. The psychoanalytic elements present in this movie are discussed in the analysis given below.

Analysis and Discussion

Augustus Landor

Augustus Landor is the protagonist of the film and is also played as an antagonist, as he is the detective and a murderer of the same case. The whole story revolves around his character performed by Christian Bale. His behaviors influence the stories of other characters in the film. All three mental states are shown in his character. Each of them is discussed below along with the pieces of evidence from the film.

The Real

The Real state of mind is observed in this character when he went to the Military Academy and his personality, his achievements, his works, his competence, and his loyalty to his duty were mentioned by the Colonel. It happens at the very start of the film when Augustus Landor arrived as a detective in the academy.

When Landor entered the Bar, his bodily desire for alcohol shows the perspective of hunger and thirst which comes under the state of The Real. At that moment, he shows a dominance of desire and pleasure over other states of mind. For him, alcohol and its very glimpse make his blood warm to have the drink at once.

When Poe encountered Landor in the last scenes of the film, Landor was overmastered by his emotions. He was in a state of deadly grief and confessed that whatever he has done without telling anyone was because he thought that he could never be '*comforted*' about this particular subject of his daughter's death and her rapists. So, he murdered them in a heartless manner.

The state of guilt felt by Landor also comes under the state of The Real, because this state of mind deals with emotions too. Landor saw his daughter in a dream, he saw her happy and dancing but then in a vulnerable condition after she got raped; he shed tears for her as he missed her so badly and wished that she was there with him. This was his guilt actually what he was repressing all the time and its presence in the unconscious mind made him see such a dream.

When Landor murdered Leroy Fry the passion for revenge ruled over his mind and he killed Fry instead of handing him over to the court or justice. He said;

"I had to cut his heart out. Had to make it look like the work of Satanists."

Not only he murdered Fry but he projected his deed on Satanists so nobody can ever accuse him of those murders of Cadets. The reason he did not make the rapists to be arrested by the Army was Landor's desire to avenge them directly and to make them suffer the way they made his daughter suffer. His dominance of desire is explicit in this dialogue;

"I did not want them to confess. I wanted them to die."

At the very last of the film, Landor confessed his desire for his daughter in front of Poe, that he wishes his daughter should have fallen for Poe instead of Fry. Here, his desire to make

Poe his family member is also clear to see. Because in his opinion, Poe is the right person for his daughter, Mattie, rather than Leroy Fry.

As a father, he was under the influence of deep agony and revenge, but his deeds cannot be justified by giving the accusers punishment on his own. All these actions of Landor, directly influence other characters such as Mathilde (Landor's daughter), Poe, Fry, Fry's mother, etc. he gave the Chiefs proofs for the case he was investigating, but actually, he was covering himself so that none can reach him, he diverted their thoughts towards other characters.

The Imaginary

The Imaginary state is also very clear and explicit in Landor's character as he thinks of everything with its all causes and effects. Being a detective, he has a talent to use words to convince the other person or to trap the next person in the web of words. When he met Poe in the bar, he explained his situation in a way that Poe did not understand but at that moment he said the truth that *"the suspect will often interrogate himself."* These words refer to Landor himself because he was interrogating every suspected person in the Academy, knowing the fact that nobody could ever be able to accuse him. He has a pang of guilt but still, he justified his impulsiveness by his own words.

Landor usually appears to be an observant and thoughtful person as a detective but in actuality, his behavioral patterns are under the influence of his emotions and intrusive thoughts. He murdered two people because of his anger and revenge and then appears as an intellect detective for the same cases. This shows the conflict in his personality which directly affected the people around him.

In the last few minutes of the film, Poe became able to crack down on the whole situation and he found himself a victim because he was the only person who was so close to Landor. He felt deceived and stabbed in the back. He said to Landor in the condition of great agony;

"Nor shall I forget how you played the rest of us as fools. Fools. But I was your prize fool."

Here, Poe targeted the playful use of words and mind games played by Landor, and how skillfully he manipulated everyone throughout the investigation.

The Symbolic

The Symbolic state of mind in Landor's character is visible in the words that he wrote as a death note for Leroy Fry. When analyzed by Poe, the linguistic patterns seem to indicate that the use of primitive black capitals in the letter depicts that the sender wants to disguise his identity. This camouflage in the character of the murderer, Landor, is revealed at the end which also proves that the transcription of the letter done by Poe was entirely correct.

At another moment in the movie, Landor questions the standardization of the Military Academy for which he has been hired as a detective. This shows the symbolic state of this character because this involves the cultural and societal aspects through language. Landor, when he talked with Dr. Marquis and the Chief of the Army, he questioned the regulations of the Army regarding its training. He criticized the way this profession brings rigidity in the character of trainees, according to Landor, the academy vanishes the self-will of a person and enclosed his mind within the walls of its rules and regulations. He says that

"...it makes a person less human."

Landor masked himself as a detective and studied the cases of men he had killed himself. This shows his societal status as an investigator which he maintained till the end of the movie just

because he did not have enough courage to face the truth. And in the state of denial, he carried out the investigation very keenly and professionally and gave the most probable and expected suspects in the case.

Edgar Allan Poe

Poe is the most sensitive and innocent cadet in this movie, performed by Harry Melling. This part and character of the movie is a true-based story character of the famous English poet, Edgar Allan Poe. He has a great interest in poetry and he knows so much about language and emotions. Since he is a poet, so his use of playful words is more significant. He is the person who assisted Landor in the investigation and is the only character who came to know the reality of the latter, not knowing that he would become the world's most famous author.

The Real

In the scene at a bar, when Landor joined Poe for a drink, the Real state of mind or feeling of pleasure is shown in Poe's character when he said that wine or alcohol is the thing that helps us to vanish all the sadness or gloominess from mind till its effect is in the body. Here, alcohol refers to a desirous thing to eradicate all the pain.

When Poe saw Lea Marquis for the first time in his life, in that scene he got attracted by her with all his heart and appreciates her beauty that he has never seen "*a beautiful creature*" more than her. Here, his feelings of sexual pleasure and Freudian Id are dominated, because he felt pleasure in his eyes when he came to see Lea.

Love feelings and emotions also come under the state of mind, The Real. This state of mind seems dominant in Poe's state of mind when he calls Lea his heart's desire after getting beaten by Ballinger. Also, the emotional instincts of Poe have been shown in the movie when he went to Lea and confesses his love for her and says I can do anything for you because you are the love of my life.

When Landor confronted Poe just to find out whether anyone in the academy has the clue of truth or not, he said to Poe in a harsh tone that to tell him if he has murdered Ballinger or Fry. This accusation made Poe so emotional and he shared all the traumas that he had experienced in the academy or before this training. He showed his repressed unconscious and bullying experiences in front of Landor. He said that if he is the one who killed any cadet then there would be less than a dozen cadets remaining in the academy because he said;

"I've been a figure of fun from my very first day here. My manner, my age, my person, my aesthetics."

He said that if he was given a thousand lifetimes still, he would not be able to address all the injuries that have been done to him either physically, mentally, or emotionally. This explicitly depicts the Real state of mind because of the discussion of his past wounds and repressed emotions which make house in the unconscious.

The Imaginary

When the case study of Fry's murder was started, Landor investigated different cadets and guards. During this investigation, an active and innocent cadet, Poe, was their first interaction, and the former told Landor that he had given a thought process to this murder case and concluded that the killer must be a poet. This divulsion of conclusion refers to the Imaginary state of mind of Poe. After that, to explain his conclusion, Poe used playful and tricky words which also come under the mind state of Imaginary of a human. As Landor hanged Fry but Lea and his brother Artemus cut out his heart brutally, so this surprised Landor that who is after Fry other than him. This cutting out of the heart has importance in the explanation of Poe for suggesting the murderer

as a poet. According to him, the heart is just a symbol, if we take away the symbol nothing will be left and the remaining will just be a muscle; he says that to remove the heart is to deal with a symbol, and who better practiced for such labor than a poet? Then he referred to Lord Suckling's charming song which portrays the different points of view regarding the symbol of heart using unique linguistic narratives.

"I prithee send me back my heart since I cannot have thine."

Here, it is clear that he is using these words to give worth to his arguments to convince the next person to him. To have its literal meaning will elaborate as if there is a trade of hearts between two persons but in poetry it holds the entire power of a symbol mentioned through the chain of words interlinked tightly.

On the morning of Leroy Fry's death, Poe says maybe it was the sight of a woman in his dream that made him get up, and when he woke up, he recited the opening lines of his uncompleted poem on which he was working. This represents his thoughts and involvement of both conscious and unconscious states of mind together and somehow the psyche of dreams too.

Being a poet, embellished language is part of Poe's personality to appeal to his words. Every time he recites a poem it shows his Imaginary state of mind. When he recited a poem for Lea in which he used the phrase "*The Pale Blue Eye*" to refer to Lea that this means a woman who is on the verge to die and in the movie that woman is her. Also, his imaginary state is involved in his character when he decoded the death note of Fry again at the last of the movie and got to know that Mathilde, daughter of Landor, had committed suicide and revealed all the truths about Landor and confronted him with closure.

The Symbolic

The decoding of the death note done by Poe also involves the Symbolic state because he expected all the possible linguistic patterns and lexical features and concluded that the death note says;

"Don't be late.

Come soon."

This death note has an important role because it was torn apart in the victim's hand which may lead the investigator to a clue. And during the whole investigation, Landor beautifully covered his dark side and fulfilled all the parameters that are to be followed in a murder case study. In this torn note every word holds its own significance to create suspense in the movie.

The Symbolic state of mind of Poe is also visible when he showed his inclined interest towards his parental standards. For him, every good thing he possesses either his personality, his passion, his mind, all he has got from her mother. This shows the psyche of the innate love of a son for his mother considering that this woman is good all the time no matter what.

When he recited a poem for Lea Marquis at the dinner, he had with Landor at Marquis' house his symbolic state was also in action because he used 'the pale blue eye' as a symbol of distress and death in Lea's life.

"A conclusion to what is... oppressing you."

Here, the weird condition of Lea throughout the whole movie is justified that there is something pinching her from inside and she tried her best to suppress or mask that traumatic feeling. These behaviors of Lea affected Poe directly but she, herself is indirectly affected by Landor's investigation.

Dr. Marquis**The Real**

The real state of mind of Dr. Marquis is shown in his character when he feels sad and grieved for his sick daughter and tells Landor that he could never understand how it feels to have the feeling of insecurity whether your child will live the night or not.

His real state is also dominant when he denies the reality that his children are Satanists and let his emotions overpower him by giving a justification for his children's unusual behaviors and rituals. According to him, as a father he has tried everything to save her daughter, and being a doctor, his profession has disappointed him because his daughter has not recovered yet. So, he thinks that if his children do something odd, they have the right because being a failure as a father and a doctor how can he object them from doing things that give them pleasure?

"My own art had failed me... so how can I then object to her finding a cure elsewhere?"

The Imaginary

The Imaginary state of Dr. Marquis has been seen in the film when he appears in the scene of dissecting Ballinger's heart. He takes a pause here and suspects that something is fishy but could not comprehend and find the right words to explain his thoughts.

"Mr. Ballinger's dissection... suggesting it was performed by different hands. As for castration... Well, I'm..."

Here, in this dialogue, a big reality of the film has been revealed partially that there is suspicion of the involvement of more than one person in these consecutive murder cases.

Lea Marquis**The Real**

Throughout the film, the real state of mind is dominant in the character of Lea Marquis. She is the daughter of Dr. Marquis and the sister of Artemus. Her Real states can be easily observed every time she plays piano because she feels pleasure doing it as well as she uses her art as an escape or to shut her thoughts up. The essence of the piano gives her peace and she gets overwhelmed by it feeling at ease.

When Lea confesses her love or attraction for Poe while having a walk with him to the cemetery, the dominance of her feelings is observed which leads towards the real state of her mind.

Lea's father, Marquis, when talks about his daughter's past traumas and her physical appearance, counts under the real of Lea. As her father says:

"Yes, she's had a rough go of it, since she was a pup, really. A ghastly illness seizing her when no one is looking, stopping her brain and shaking her like a ground. Beautiful Child."

This illness of Lea has inherited to her from her grandfather who was a Satanist and now his grandchildren are suffering to fulfill the needs of their prayers and sacrifices.

The Symbolic

The Symbolic state of mind of Lea is observed when she kills Poe to take his heart as a sacrifice for her God and says:

"Sacrifice is the ultimate expression of love."

This shows her character fulfilling all the parameters to make her god happy and also knowing all the things about love that love needs what or wants what.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that all the main characters possess a very strong mental role in the terms of their serious actions. The mind states and their behaviors go hand in hand and are interdependent on each other. Landor's character being the protagonist and antagonist as well, affects the life of each and every other character throughout the movie. Lacan suggests that there is no presence of Super Ego or angelic features in the personality of an individual and this phenomenon is also seen in this study through Landor's character.

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