

In complete opposition to any Jungian or romantic conceptions, Lacan described the unconscious as a kind of discourse: the discourse of the Other. Presenting the three interrelated concerns — the child's castration as a decisive point in its becoming a speaking subject; the 'interpretive paradigm' in Freud's texts; and the efficacy of psychoanalytic interpretation as the 'magical' power of the word — Lacan allocated language a great importance in psychoanalytical criticism. According to him, it is only after the child accedes to castration and the Law-of-the-father that it becomes fully competent as a language-speaker within its given social collective order.

From the above assertions, we can deduce the conclusion that, like the later Wittgenstein, Lacan's position is that to learn a language is to learn a set of rules or laws for the use and combination of words. This is virtually a phenomenological concept of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, according to which human consciousness is not the passive recognition that brings the child great pleasure: a subject is to experience the world as a meaningful totality and language is crucial to this capability.

Lacan's innovation in "The Mirror Stage" was to combine the phenomenological distinction between subject and ego with a psychological understanding of the role of images and the constructed nature of the self through the philosophical category of the dialectic. Dialectical thought, as conceived by Hegel, foregrounds the contradictory nature of all things, as all phenomena can be said to contain their opposite; their own notion. Out of this relationship or unity of opposites something new will emerge in an endless process of transformation. It was Hegel's great insight, contends Lacan, to reveal how 'each human being is in the being of the other' (Miller 1988:72).

The mirror image is also known in psychoanalytic terminology as an "ideal ego," a perfect whole 'self' that has no insufficiency. Once this "ideal ego" becomes internalized, we build our sense of "self," our "Identity, by misidentifying ourselves with this ideal ego. By doing this, we imagine a self that has no lack, no notion of absence or incompleteness. The fiction of the stable, whole, unified self that we see in the mirror becomes a compensation for having lost the original oneness with the mother's body.

In short, according to Lacan, we lose our unity with the mother's body once we enter into culture because the child's self-concept, its ego or "Identity" will never match up to its own being. The child's image in the mirror is both smaller and more stable than the child, and is always "other". The child, for the rest of its life, will misrecognize its self as "Other", as the image in the mirror that provides an illusion of self and of master. The mirror stage cements a self or other dichotomy, where the child projects its ideas of self or Other dichotomy, where previously the child had known only "Other," but not "self." For Lacan, the identification of "self" is always in terms of Other.

Lacan uses the term "Other" in a number of ways, which make it even harder to grasp. First, and perhaps the easiest, is in the sense where "other" is the "not-me", but becomes "me" in the mirror stage. Lacan also uses an idea of Other, with a capital "O", to distinguish between the concept of the other and actual others. The image the child sees in the mirror is an Other, and it gives the child the idea of other as a structural possibility, one which makes possible the structural possibility of "I" or self. In other words, the child encounters actual others: its own image, other people and understand the idea

of “Otherness,” things that are not itself. Lacan refers to this loss of object of desire as *objet petit a*, or object small *a* with the letter *a* standing for *autre*, the French word for other. The little other is the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the *Ego*. He is both the counterpart or the other people in whom the subject perceives a visual likeness (*semblable*), and the specular image or the reflection of one’s body in the mirror. In this way the little other is entirely inscribed in The Imaginary order. The big Other designates a radical alterity, an otherness transcending the illusory otherness of the Imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan equates this radical alterity with language and the law: the big Other is inscribed in The Symbolic order, being Symbolic insofar as it is particularized for each subject. We can speak of the Other as a subject in a secondary sense, only when a subject may occupy this position and thereby embody the Other for another subject. When he argues that speech originates not in the *Ego* nor in the subject, but in the Other, Lacan stresses that speech and language are beyond one’s conscious control; they come from another place, outside consciousness, and then ‘the unconscious is the discourse of the Other’. When conceiving the Other as a place, Lacan refers to Freud’s concept of physical locality, in which the unconscious is described as “the other scene”. It is the mother who first occupies the position of the big Other for the child, it is she who receives the child’s primitive cries and retroactively sanctions them as a particular message.

A study of the Lacanian mirror stage reveals that this stage marks the child’s first recognition or understanding of lack or absence and its search for the moment of the distinction between *self* and *other*. It also provides the grounds for the ego ideal, the image of the ego, derived from others, which the ego strives to achieve or live up to. Besides, the mirror stage initiates the child into the two-person structure of imaginary identifications, orienting it forever towards identification with dependence on images and representations for its own forms or outline. As Lacan rewrites this process, the child passes through the three orders or states of human mental disposition: the imaginary order, the symbolic order, and the real (Habib 2008:91).

The Imaginary Order

The imaginary order is a pre-oedipal phase where an infant is yet to distinguish itself from its mother’s body or to recognize the lines of demarcation between itself and the objects in the world; indeed, it does not yet know itself as a coherent entity or self. Hence, as elaborated by Habib:

The imaginary phase is one of unity (between the child and its), as well as of immediate possession (of mother and objects), a condition of reassuring of plenitude, a world consisting wholly of images (hence “imaginary”) that is not fragmented or mediated by difference, by categories, in a word, by language and signs (Habib 2008:91).

During this period, the child acquires language, and experiences a change that, for Lacan, is of paramount importance because the child’s acquisition of language means a number of important things, including its initiation into the symbolic order; for language is first and foremost a symbolic system of signification. Our entrance into the symbolic order involves the experience of separation from others, and the biggest separation is the separation from the intimate union we experienced with our mother during our

immersions in the imaginary order. For Lacan, this separation constitutes our most important experience of loss, and it is one that will haunt us all our lives.

A study of the Lacanian concept of the *Imaginary* indicates that this stage is equated to the child's first entry into the social life where it gradually understands its difference from mother which turns out to be the base of its own individual identity, an identity which is fundamentally alienated. The symbolic, marked by the concept of desire, represents adulthood or the structure of language or the discourse of law that we have to enter into in order to become speaking subject or normal subjects of the society.

Language is empty because it is an endless process of difference and absence: instead of being able to possess anything in its fullness, the child simply moves from one to another, along a linguistic chain which is potentially infinite. One signifier implies another and that another, and so on *ad infinitum*: the 'metaphorical' world of the mirror has yielded ground to the metonymic chain of signifiers, meanings, or signifieds which will be produced; but no object or person can ever be fully 'present' in this chain. This endless movement from one signifier to another is what Lacan means by *desire*. All desire springs from lack, which it strives continually to fill. Human language works by such lack: the absence of the real objects designated by signs point to the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others. To enter language, then, is to become a prey to desire: language, Lacan remarks, is 'what hollows being into desire'.

The Symbolic

Tyson very rightly points out that "in entering the Symbolic Order—the world of language— we're entering a world of loss and lack"(Tyson 2006:30). It is not therefore surprising then, that according to Lacan the Symbolic Order marks the replacement of the mother with the Name-of-the-Father. For it is through language that we are socially programmed, that we learn the rules and prohibitions of our society, and those rules and prohibitions were and still are authored by the Father, that is, by men in authority past and present"(Tyson 2006:31).

Tyson adds further:

Our desires, beliefs, biases, and so forth are constructed for us as a result of our immersion in the Symbolic Order, especially as that immersion is carried out by our parents and influenced by their own responses to the Symbolic Order. This is what Lacan means by his claim that "desire is always the desire of the other" (See, Seminar Bk. XI: 235).

However, we desire what we are taught to desire. In other words, the Symbolic Order consists of society's ideologies: its beliefs, values, and biases; its system of government, laws, educational practices, religious tenets, and the like. And it is our responses to our society's ideologies that make us what / who we are. That is what Lacan means when he capitalizes the word Other while discussing the symbolic order. Other refers to anything that contributes to the creation of our subjectivity, or what we commonly refer to as our "selfhood". The Symbolic Order dominates human culture and social order, for to remain solely in the Imaginary Order is to render one incapable of functioning in the society.

The symbolic order, or the world known through language, ushers in the world of lack. Hence, the Symbolic order, as a result of the experience of

lack, marks the split into conscious and unconscious mind. It is repression that first creates the unconscious. Indeed, Lacan's famous statement that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Miller 1992: 12) implies among other things, "the way in which unconscious desire is always seeking our lost object of desire, the fantasy mother of our preverbal experience, just as language is always seeking ways to put into words the world of objects we inhabit as adults that didn't need words when we felt as preverbal infants, one with them" (Tyson 2006:30). It is only in the absence of a desired object that language becomes necessary, and through the use of language that a self comes into existence. The form of that existence is both desiring and linguistic.

The Symbolic and the Imaginary are overlapping, as there is no clear marker *or* division between the two. In fact, in some respects they always coexist because the Symbolic order is the structure of language itself and we have to enter into it in order to emerge as speaking subjects, and to designate ourselves by "I." The foundation for having a self lies in the Imaginary projection of the self onto the specular image; the other in the mirror and having a self is expressed in saying "I," which can only occur within the Symbolic. The Imaginary is structured by the Symbolic order: in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan argues how the visual field is structured by symbolic laws. Thus, the Imaginary involves a linguistic dimension. If the signifier is the foundation of the Symbolic, the signified and signification are part of the Imaginary order. Language has Symbolic and Imaginary connotations; in its Imaginary aspect, language is itself the "wall of language" which inverts and distorts the discourse of the Other. On the other hand, the Imaginary is rooted in the subject's relationship with its own body (the image of the body). In *Fetishism: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real*, Lacan argues that in the sexual plane the Imaginary appears as sexual display and courtship love. He accuses major psychoanalytic schools of reducing the practice of psychoanalysis to the Imaginary order by making identification with the analyst the objective of analysis. He proposes the use of the Symbolic as the way to dislodge the disabling fixations of the Imaginary: the analyst transforms the images into words.

In his *Seminar IV*, "La relation d'objet", Lacan asserts that the concepts of Law and Structure are unthinkable without language: thus the Symbolic is a linguistic dimension. Yet, he does not simply equate this order with language since language involves the Imaginary and the Real as well. The dimension proper of language in the Symbolic is that of the signifier, that is a dimension in which elements have no positive existence but which are constituted by virtue of their mutual differences. The Symbolic is also the field of radical alterity, that is the Other: the unconscious is the discourse of this Other. Besides, it is the realm of the Law which regulates desire in the Oedipus complex.

Lacan even questions Saussure's assumption (Lodge with Wood 2007) that there is nothing problematic about the bond between the signified and the signifier in the verbal sign by pointing out that the two signifiers, 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' may refer to the same signified (a WC), or be interpreted in a certain context as apparently contradictory place names. In short, language, the signifying chain, has a life of its own which cannot be securely anchored to a world of things. 'There is a perpetual sliding of the signified 'under the

signifier'. No meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to another meaning'. Such dicta were to have major repercussions on the theory and practice of interpretation.

The Real Order

Lacan traces the origin of the Real in Aristotle's '*Tuche*' which means 'search for cause'. According to Lacan the 'real' is a state in which an individual is free from all desires and demands as he /she is hardly affected by the worldly attractions. In other words, this phase is a liberalized state which can't be confined to any linguistic domain, as it is pre-linguistic. It is a place beyond language, and hence *unrepresentable* in language. The Real entiated elements, signifiers, the Real in itself is undifferentiated, it bears no fissure. The Symbolic introduces "a cut in the real", in the process of signification: "it is the world of words that creates the world of things— things originally confused in the "here and now" of the all in the process of coming into being.

Thus, the Real is that which is outside language, resisting symbolization absolutely. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan defines the Real as "the impossible" because it is impossible to imagine and impossible to integrate into the Symbolic, being impossibly attainable. It is this resistance to symbolization that lends the Real its traumatic quality.

The Lacanian concept of the 'Real' is certainly a difficult concept and as such beyond the comprehension of meaning of an average reader because it lies almost outside the world created by ideologies, which our societies generally use in order to explain 'existence'. According to Tyson:

One way to think of the Real is as that which is beyond all meaning — making systems that which lie outside the world created by the ideologies society uses to explain existence (Tyson 2006:32).

It is the uninterpretable dimension of existence; an existence without the filters and buffers of our signifying or meaning-making systems. It is the experience of an individual, may be even only for a moment, to feel that there is no purpose or meaning in life; and religions as well as other rules that govern society are hoaxes or mistakes or the mere results of chance.

In other words, it is a realization that 'ideology' is not a set of timeless values or eternal truths but only a curtain that is embroidered and makes everything bleak. The 'existence' behind the curtain is the Real, but it is beyond the competence of every individual to see or experience the truth of reality which Lacan calls the *trauma of the Real*. According to him, it gives us only the realization that the reality, hidden beneath the ideologies society has created, is beyond our capacity to control:

The trauma of the Real gives us only the realization that the reality hidden beneath the ideologies society has created is a reality beyond our capacity to know and explain and therefore certainly beyond our capacity to control (Tyson 2006:32).

For Lacan, the real is impossible: that which occurs beyond the entire framework of signification. The real is a sign of its own absence, pointing to itself as merely signifier. Not only opposed to the Imaginary, the Real is also located outside the Symbolic. Unlike the latter which is constituted in terms of oppositions, i.e. presence/absence, "there is no absence in the Real." Whereas the Symbolic opposition presence/absence implies the possibility that something may be missing from the Symbolic, "the Real is always in its place".

The Lacanian concept of the Mirror Phase, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real imply that an individual's sense of individuation can in no way develop merely due to one's 'inner wealth' or 'innate potential'. The mirror phase marks the point at which this comforting imaginary condition breaks down, pushing the child into the symbolic order, which is the world of predefined social roles and gender differences, the world of subjects and objects, the world of language. This is why Lacan calls it the phase of demand and *the mirror stage* or the realm of the Imaginary. For Lacan, it is a condition in which: we lack any defined centre of identity. Lacan believes that ego or self or identity is always on some level a Fantasy, identification with an external image, and not an internal sense of separate whole identity. In fact, the image the child sees in the mirror is in this sense an alienated one: the child misrecognizes itself in it and finds in the image a pleasing unity which does not actually experience in its own body. Hence, the imaginary for Lacan, is precisely this realm of images in which we make identifications but in the very act of doing so we are led to misperceive and misrecognise ourselves. As the child grows up, it continues to make such imaginary identifications with objects, and this is how its ego is built up.

For Lacan, the ego is just the narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify 'self'. Lacan's theory teaches that our ability to gain definite access to the essence of things is possible only through language. Being humans, we are trapped within the universe of discourse, and it is impossible to conceive or articulate or express whatever is outside without articulating it within the discursive field in one of its forms like desire. It is now evident that meaning is constantly shifting despite the fact that language always carries meaning; it is incapable of fixating it. As human beings, it is always our desire to articulate our demands in a well-formed language but our desires never get materialized because of the slippery nature of language which makes us persistently conscious of our 'lack' or 'failure' to communicate. We continuously search for this lost-impossible real but the search ends in failure because our attempts prove meaningless, futile for neutralizing this lack. In this way, Lacanian theory is but another version of social constructionism.

According to Lois Tyson (Tyson 2006:33) the most reliable way to interpret a literary work through a Lacanian lens is to explore the ways in which the text might be structured by some of the Lacanian concepts and see what this exploration can reveal. Such an exploration shall focus on the following: (i.) Do any characters, events, or episodes in the narrative seem to embody the Imaginary Order, in which case they would involve some kind of private and either fantasy or delusional world? (ii.) What parts of the text seem formed by the Symbolic Order? That is, where do we see ideology and social norms in control of characters' behaviour and narrative events? & (iii.) Does any part of the text seem to operate as a representative of the Real, of that dimension of existence that remains so terrifyingly beyond our ability to comprehend it that our impulse is to flee it, to repress and deny it?

Taking a clue from Lois Tyson, one can think of analyzing & interpreting the major literary artifacts from 'Lacanian Perspective' in order to search for newer meanings or explore modern dimensions which have so far otherwise remained unexplored or untouched in the literary artifacts.

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