Lacanian concepts – Their Relevance to Literary Analysis and Interpretation: A Post Structural Reading

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Introduction

For understanding the major Lacanian concepts such as the development of the infant, the function of ego, the treatment of unconscious and other related issues and their relevance to literary analysis and interpretation, it is essential to note that his greatest contribution to literary studies is the way he reinterpreted Sigmund Freud and reformulated Freudian theories so as to make them compatible for literary studies. The credit of establishing Psychoanalysis as a distinctive field of study, as is well known, ultimately goes to Freud, the real originator of Psychoanalysis, whose study of psyche is primarily based on the principle of causality and determinism (Homer 2005:4). M.A.R. Habib rightly points out:

> Freud opens up a number of literary critical avenues: the linking of a creative work to an in-depth study of an author's psychology, using a vastly altered conception of human subjectivity; the tracing in art of primal psychological tendencies and conflicts; and the understanding of art and literature as integrally recurring human obsessions, fear, and anxieties (Habib 2008:89).

While accepting the tenets of nineteenth century science with its metaphors of mechanism and impersonal forces, Freud developed a language for his newly established science with the objective of interpreting man and society. His reading of the unconscious shows that it is primarily the storehouse of instinctual desires, needs, childhood wishes, unsolved conflicts, painful experiences and emotions, fears and memories. He says that once anything enters mental life, it never perishes. He even shows that unconscious comes into existence when we are very young through repression, expunging from consciousness unhappy psychological events. In fact, the concept of the 'unconscious' formulated by him and later modified by Lacan made it the most vital and debatable subject matter of psychoanalysis.

Prior to Freud, the working of the mind was taken mostly as a conscious phenomenon but Freud devised the typographical divisions of the mind into the conscious, the unconscious and the preconscious. Later, he named them as the *id* (forming the reservoir of libido or psychic energy), the *ego* (representing conscious life) and the *superego* (functioning as the voice of conscience and censorship). Freud stated:

> That the ego represents the organized part of the psyche in contrast to the unorganized elements of the unconscious (the *id*) and argues: the *ego* is that part of the *id* that has been modified by direct influence of the external world…. The *ego* represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the *id*, which contains the passions (see Donald E. Hall. *Subjectivity*: 61)

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> In this sense, the ego is related to consciousness but is also in constant tension with the demands of the unconscious and the imperatives of the superego. The function of the ego, therefore, is defensive insofar as it mediates between the unconscious (the id) and the demands of external reality (the superego). The truth of this conceptualization, as Lacan comments in "Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis", is evident in infantile transitivity: that phenomenon wherein one infant hit by another proclaims: 'I hit him!', and vice-versa (Freud 1966)
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> Similarly, while describing his theory of the psychological development of the infant, Freud discusses the three stages in infants — *the oral, the anal,* and *the phallic* — arguing that it is the Oedipus and Castration complex that end polymorphous perversity and create "adult" beings. Against this, Lacan creates different categories to explain a similar trajectory from "infant" to "adult." He formulates three newly devised concepts – *need*, *demand*, and *desire* – which roughly correspond to the three phases of development or three fields in which humans develop or grow: *the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real*.

It must be, however, pointed out that Lacan reinterpreted Freud in the light of Structuralist and Post Structuralist theories and thus changed psychoanalysis from an essentially humanist philosophy or theory to a Post Structuralist one. One of the basic premises of humanism was the notion of a stable self with free will and self-determination that Freud's notion of the *unconscious* questioned and destabilized. By bringing the contents of the *unconscious* into consciousness, he could minimize repression and neurosis. Freud's goal was to strengthen the ego, the "I" self, the conscious or rational identity, so it would be more powerful than the *unconscious.*

Main Argument

In his approach, Lacan broadened undoubtedly the scope of *Unconscious* saying that *the unconscious* is always at work and the being of everything. The distinctive feature of Lacanian theory, however, is its emphasis on language and his contention that the Unconscious is structured like a Language, an assertion that needs to be viewed in the broader perspective according to which the *unconscious* comes into existence only with the individual's access to or entry into language. In other words, a child learns its mother tongue from its sense of how the world is and how it experiences its biological body. The unconscious is also structured like a language in another way: the operations of the unconscious resemble two very common processes of language: Metaphor and Metonymy, an opposition of two figures first discussed by linguist Roman Jakobson (Vice 1996:116). Lacan suggests that the *unconscious* works in the same way that language does, 'along the two axes of Metaphor and Metonymy which generate the signified'. Metaphor works by linking two concepts to each other and Metonymy works by association or closeness rather than likeness, particularly through synecdoche, in which a part is taken to stand for the whole. In terms of how the unconscious works, its metaphoric structure involves moving from one signifier to another found with it; metonymically, it slides from one to another that is similar. According to Tyson:

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> Both metaphor and metonymy involve an absence, a kind of loss or lack: they're both stand-ins for something being pushed aside, so to speak (Tyson 2006:10).

Lacan bases his concept on Freud's account of the two main mechanisms — condensation and displacement — which are essentially linguistic phenomena, where meaning is either condensed (in metaphor) or displaced (in metonymy). Metaphor, according to Lacan, is akin to the unconscious process called condensation (both processes bring dissimilar things together) and metonymy is akin to the unconscious process of displacement (both processes substitute a person or object for another). He believes that Freud's theories and concepts such as dream analysis and most of his analysis of the unconscious symbolism depend on word play, puns, associations which are chiefly verbal. Accordingly the contents of the unconscious are invariably acutely aware of language, particularly of the structure of language. While saying so, Lacan seems to have modified the ideas and concepts of Ferdinand de Saussure who talked about the relations between signifier and signified that form a sign. Following Saussure, Lacan insisted that the structure of language is the negative relation among signs. While focusing on relations between signifiers, he argues that the elements in the unconscious — wishes, desires, and images — form signifier and these signifiers form a *signifying chain*: one signifier has meaning only because it is not some other signifier. Like other Post-structural theoreticians, he stated that there are no signifieds; there is nothing that a signifier ultimately refers to. If there were, then the meaning of any particular signifier would be relatively stable: there would be, in Saussure's terms, a relation of signification between signifier and signified, and that relation would create or guarantee some kind of meaning. Lacan believes that the relations of signification don't exist rather; there are only the negative relations, relations of value, where one signifies what it is because it is not something else. Because of this lack of signifieds, he says, the chain of signifiers (See, Lacan's *Seminar XI*) is constantly sliding and shifting and circulating. There is no anchor, nothing that ultimately gives meaning or stability to the whole system.

The reader is often reminded of Jacques Derrida according to whom meaning is only the mental *trace* left behind by the play of signifiers, and that trace consists of the differences by which we define a word. Hence, meaning resides in words (or in things) only when we distinguish their *difference* from other words (or things). It is clear that Derrida believes in Language having two important features: one, its play of signifiers continually defers, postpones, meaning and the other the meaning it seems to have is the result of the differences by which we distinguish one signifier from another (Tyson, Lois 2006: 253). Michel Foucault says that no discourse by itself can adequately explain the complex dynamics of social power because there is a dynamic, unstable, interplay among discourses as they are invariably in flux, overlapping and competing with one another every moment.

It is also important to note that Freud's psychoanalysis focuses on the author and or the characters in the literary work, Lacan following the structuralist and post-structuralist approaches focuses on the language of the text. In his *Ecrits*, Lacan, while reinterpreting Freud in the light of structuralist and post structuralist theories of discourse, challenges some of the traditional and orthodox interpretation of his main tenets and doctrines. Orthodox

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Freudian doctrine views the unconscious as chaotic, primordial, instinctual, and pre-verbal while as Lacan believes that the *Unconscious* is like a continually circulating chain or multiple chains of signifiers, with no anchor, or to use Derrida's terms, no *centre*. He argues that the process of becoming "self" is the process of trying to fix, to stabilize, and to stop the chain of signifiers so that the stable meaning – including the meaning of "I" — becomes possible. According to Lacan the signifying chain has a life of its own which cannot be securely anchored to a world of things because there is a perpetual sliding and slipperiness of the signified 'under the signifier'. Accordingly, he argues, meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to another meaning.

Lacan even effectively reformulates in linguistic terms Freud's account of the Oedipus complex. Freud had posited that the infant's desire for its mother is prohibited by the father who threatens the infant with castration. Faced with this threat, the infant represses his desire, thereby opening up the dimension of the unconscious, which is for Lacan not a "place" but a relation to the social world of law, morality religion and conscience. According to Freud, the child internalizes through the father's commands the appropriate standards of socially acceptable thought and behaviour.

Like Freud, Lacan's infant initiates as something inseparable from its mother: that is, the child, having no sense of 'self' or 'individuated identity', is not conscious of its body as a coherent unified whole and can hardly differentiate between *self* and *other*, between itself and mother. In other words, the most crucial factor for the baby is feeding which mother gratifies and it feels as though it and she are only one entity or individual. At this stage, therefore, the baby is driven by *Need* — it needs food, comfort, safety, to be changed, etc. All these needs are satisfiable by an object because it gets a breast or a bottle when it feels hunger and gets hugged when it needs safety.

After passing through the phase of needs, the child normally switches over to the phase of demands where it has to separate itself from its mother in order to form its own identity: a pre-requisite for entry into civilization and culture. In other words, when the child feels the discrepancy between its inner needs and the outer satisfaction of those needs, it learns that our own world is not the whole world. It finds that it is not autonomous but there is an outside something, an 'Other' who feeds it or more generally, on whom it is dependent.

Keeping these things in view, it becomes obvious that the demands of the baby are not satisfiable with objects because a demand is always a demand for recognition or love from another. This awareness of separation, or the fact of otherness, creates an anxiety, a sense of loss. The baby then demands a reunion, a return to that original sense of fullness and non- separation that it had earlier. However, all this seems to be impossible because once the baby 'knows' and its knowledge shifts from an unconscious level to a higher awareness level it comes to realize that the idea of an "Other" exists. Hence, demand is the demand for the fullness and the completeness which is impossible, because that lack, or absence, the sense of "otherness", is the condition for the baby to become or emerge as an independent self or subject. This is where Lacan's *Mirror Stage* exists.

Lacan's *désir* follows Freud's concept of *Wunsch* and it is central to Lacanian theories because the aim of the talking cure — psychoanalysis — is

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precisely to lead the analysand to uncover the truth about their desire, though this is only possible if that desire is articulated or spoken. Lacan says that desire is named in the presence of the other. He believes that the subject should come to recognize and to name his/her desire because that is the efficacious action of analysis. But it is not a question of recognizing something which would be entirely given. In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world. Therefore, what is important is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring desire into existence.

Although the truth about desire is somehow present in discourse, discourse can never articulate the whole truth about desire: whenever discourse attempts to articulate desire, there is always a leftover, a surplus. On the basis of this fundamental understanding, Lacan maintained throughout his career that desire is the desire of the Other.

Lacanian theory, as analysed above, does not deny that infants are always born into the world with basic biological needs that require constant or periodic satisfaction. Lacan's stress, however, is that, from a very early age, the child's attempts to satisfy these needs become caught up in the dialectics of its exchanges with others. Because its sense of self is only ever garnered from identifying with the images of these others, Lacan argues that it demonstrably belongs to humans to desire- directly- as or through another or others.

The Mirror Stage

It remains "one of the most frequently anthologized and referenced of Lacan's texts" and is concerned with the formation of the ego through the identification with an image of the self. It describes the formation of the *Ego* via the process of objectification: the *Ego* being the result of feeling dissention between one's perceived visual appearance and one's perceived emotional reality. The moment of identification is to Lacan a moment of jubilation since it leads to an imaginary sense of mastery, yet the jubilation may also be accompanied by a depressive reaction, when the infant compares his own precarious sense of mastery with the omnipotence of the mother. This identification also involves the ideal ego which functions as a promise of future wholeness sustaining the Ego in anticipation. For Lacan, this 'jubilation' is a testimony to how, in the recognition of its mirror- image, the child is having its first anticipation of itself as a unified and separate individual. Before this time, Lacan contends, the child is little more than a 'body in bits and pieces', unable to clearly separate 'I' and 'Other', and wholly dependant for its survival upon its first nurturers. The implications of this observation on the mirror stage, in Lacan's reckoning, are far-reaching.

It is an established fact that an individual's attempt to speak and think in the second or third person is a permanent possibility of adult human experience. What is decisive in these phenomena, according to Lacan, is that the ego is at base an object: an artificial projection of subjective unity modelled on the visual images of objects and others that the individual confronts in the world. Identification with the ego, Lacan maintains, is what underlies the unavoidable component of aggressivity in human behaviour especially evident amongst infants, and which Freud recognized in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* when he stressed the primordial ambivalence of children towards their love objects.

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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

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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

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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

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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".

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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 ones '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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