



BETWEEN THEATRE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: APPROACHES TO STAGE AND UNCONSCIOUS

C.S.Biju Ph.D, Associate Professor, Dept. of English.

St.Thomas' Collge, Thrissur, Kerala, India.

Abstract:

This paper analyses Lacan's major concepts of Mirror Stage, symbolic imaginary and the real orders and the notion of subject. The major facets of Lacan's philosophical expeditions are illustrated through his reading of Sigmund Freud as a literary text and the influence of Alexander Kojev's interpretation of Hegel through a series of seminars in the nineteen thirties are studied in details in this research article. The hidden stage in psycho analysis and its manifestations in theater are the inspiration behind this study.

Key words: Mirror stage, symbolic order, imaginary and the real, French Freud, unconscious, back stage and the plot.

The editor's introductory note on Jacques Lacan in *French Freud*¹ states: "If 'Psychoanalytic Criticism' is an effort to bring analytic categories to bear in the solution of a critical problem, Lacan's text is certainly not an example of that discipline"². By this unusually ambiguous comment, the author hints at Lacan's intention to open up a new kind of textual problem inspire of solving it.

Lacan's reinvention of Freud claims that the unconscious is not merely a source of "primal instincts linked at random to ideas and images"³. According to him, conscious and unconscious are asymmetrically co-present. Lacanian interpretation of Freud draws on the principle of many disciplines such as Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics and Claude Levi-Strauss's efforts which applied structuralism and linguistics to the study of human interaction and culture in order to identify universal laws regulating societies.

Imaginary and the Mirror

His pioneering theoretical construct is the 'mirror stage'⁴; the stade du miroir. It is observed that the original concept

has been derived from Heri Wallon⁵. Lacan developed further the idea with the help of the observations of Charlotte Bihler and Elsa Kohler⁶. During this state of Psychological development an infant whose experience has been one of undifferentiated sensory stimulation begins to perceive itself as a unified entity.

This identification is due to both the infants reflection in a mirror as the mother's gaze and a sense of independence from its mother and the environment. Lacan says: "We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, ...the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image"⁷. "The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly, more constituent than constituted, bu in which it appears to him above all, in a contrasting size that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels, are animating him"⁸.

Lacan speaks of the mythical, literal moment of mirror stage in which the infant makes an imaginary identification with

its reflection in a mirror. At this point, the infants' world comprises a kind of merging of itself and the maternal body, which provides pleasure and satisfaction to the infant. This pre-linguistic pre-oedipal stage is the *Imaginary order*. In this order of ideal completeness, desire slides around an endless array of part objects.

The reflecting image, because it is outside and other, leads the subject to misrecognize it. "Imaginary mis-recognition", says Lacan, "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction"⁹. Hence the imaginary is an alienation of subjectivity because the infant becomes an 'Other' to itself in the act of contemplating its reflected image.

Symbolic and the Other

Lacanian concept of the symbolic¹⁰ is a domain of received social meanings, logic and differentiation in which the infant begins to represent desire and is thus constituted as a subject. He made use of the concept of the symbolic order to show how the human subject comes to be inscribed within a pre-established order which is itself, symbolic in nature. This effort is accomplished partly in a Levi-Straussian fashion¹¹. It also serves the purpose of relating the structure of the unconscious to that of language and to apply to the former, the same methods which proved fruitful in linguistics¹². The symbolic order governs all forms of social organization and it is specified by Lacan as the 'primordial Law'. In contrast to a reductive focus on the immediate family situation, Lacan contends that the function of the father is to enforce a cultural law. The child is not only served from the imaginary fullness of the maternal body, it is now inserted into a structured world of symbolic meaning. For Lacan, language is the fundamental medium in which desire is represented and "through which the subject is constituted to itself and to others"¹³. Language is described as an inter-subjective order of symbolization, an order embedded within patriarchal culture and thus a force that perpetuates, that which he calls the 'law of the father'. Hence, the symbolic order is the matrix of social meanings that every human being is born into. The pattern of relationships has been woven into the entire fabric of human history to which the infant now falls heir as he becomes "subject to" and thereby makes himself a subject of this law.

Lacan refers to it as a 'circuit' into which subject is 'integrated'. This "order of signifiers" – symbolic order law of the father, universal circuit- Lacan designates as 'the Other' the integration of the individual into the 'Other'¹⁴ constitutes the "subjecti-fying" of the subject.

The insertion/constitution process is a process of division also. The subject after his insertion into the symbolic order appears in the signifying chain as a signifier not as a being. The subject is formed through its alienation as a signifier just as the formation of the ego by alienation in an image. The originating division of the subject is modeled on the split between the subject of the statement and subject of the enunciation. Anika Lemaire points out: "The subjects' insertion, through the Oedipal phase, into the symbolic order which underpins social organization, is simultaneous with the division into the 'I' of existence and the 'I' of meaning"¹⁵.

The Subject

The 'subject' is born in the field of the Other as the signifier emerges. "But by this very fact, what formerly was nothing but a subject-to-come congeals in a signifier"¹⁶. To signalize this in writing, Lacan designates the subject by a capital 'S' and then puts a bar through it to indicate its radical division(\$): "We symbolize by the based subject(\$) the subject in so far as it is constituted as subsequent to its relation to the signifier"¹⁷ : Lacan explains. In this radical cleavage of the subject through insertion into the Other, Lacan places primary repression".

Since the subject is suspended from the sequence of signifiers, it recedes behind each of the signifiers that sustains it. This receding Lacan refers to as the "fading" of the subject behind the signifier¹⁹. The unconscious vanishes as it appears in fluctuating, vacillating way²⁰. The subject is the subject of the unconscious, which is "eccentric to the ego, it can speak and infiltrate the articulating I"²¹. The unconscious is ultimately conceivable only as the reality of the division between subject and the Other. There are two domains of subject and Other, and 'The unconscious is the act of the break between them.

Desire

The subject of the unconscious is above all the desiring subject. Desire split off both from physical need from

linguistically formulated demands. All speech is demand; it presupposes the Other to whom it is addressed, whose very signifiers it takes over in its formulation²². What is coming from the Other is treated as a response to an appeal, a gift, a token of love. There is no adequation between the need and the demand that conveys it; indeed, it is the gap between them that constitutes desire²³. Desire is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation. It is essentially eccentrically and insatiable.

Lacan's analysis of Edgar Allen Poe's story²⁴ reveals, to a large extent the psychoanalytic procedure latent in the study of a work of art. It discusses variously a glance, a look, open a illusory interpretations. The letter in Poes' story is something what is not seen or seen differently. Each time, the letter is appropriated; the subject is caught by the signifier; for which the real letter stands. It is "a metaphor of desire".

The uncanny repetitive movements in the story are structured by these glances. It signifies that the character is captured out by a look of desire. Desire is lodged to some degree in all that that is seen and since the unconscious is inscribed in that desire, there will always be a mis-seeing; a mis-recognition. Elizabeth Wright writes in this regard: "unconscious and repression, desire and lack this dialectical opposition is present in every visual recognition."²⁵ An exhibitionist and a voyeur find their desire and its confirmation in the assumed desire of the Other and his own look respectively. Lacan's concept of 'Scopic drive', illustrates the lodging of desire in looking. It is the search of a subject for a fantasy that represents for him the lost phallus. The Object around which this fantasy pivots; is called 'Object petit a'²⁶.

Eye; one of the modes of access for libido to explore the world, become instruments of the scopic drive in visual arts. A drive is not merely pleasure seeking, but is caught up in the signifying system, characterized by the subject's first entry into it. Hence the eye is caught up in the symbolic order. However the gaze is something that pursues a narcissistic of the eye and the gaze²⁷. This dialectic is caused by the conflict between the Imaginary fantasy and the demands of the Other; the symbolic.

Lacan speaks of the in mixings of Otherness is surrealist

painting, taking into consideration Rene Magritte's picture 'The Rape'²⁸. There is a face in the picture, framed in what is clearly a woman's hair. It turns out that the eyes are nipples, the nose a navel, and the mouth public hair. "The face, framed for culture by the hair, becomes fully sexual, a metaphor for desire being operative in everything"²⁹.

"Art combines a lure of the gaze and a taming of it"³⁰ observes Lacan. There is a taming of the gaze, because it claims down the spectator by the turning of his gaze into another look which include simultaneous awareness of desire and lack. A precise description of the lure and taming of the n be seen in the story of rivalry between two ancient painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasios¹³. Zeuxis painted some life like grapes and Parrhasios a curtain. Zeuxis wanted to see what was painted before it. He was not taken in by the veil as representation; his gaze was lured into searching for the fantasy by the fascination of presence beyond absence.

Desire in the text

The influence of classical Freudian psychoanalysis has an obsessive effect upon psychoanalytic approach to theatre. Even a slight familiarity with Freudian psychoanalytic techniques reveals the extent to which Freud was above all, fascinated by the exegetic nature of tales and plots. These is an impulse in psychoanalysis to discover and identify the charged values scripted in dramas. Such critics tend to address what is represented in the discourse of the literature of drama.

To Freud, the contents of the unconscious are quite in accessible and dreamy and images themselves are only representations of the real forces giving rise to them. These forces are constitutionally repressed when a psychoanalyst is working on the analysand's dream, he is working on the representation of a representation; i.e., on the verbal manifestation of a dream. This is precisely what makes his work similar to that of a critic. Dreams, dream reports, and art work never succeed in presenting what is by definition repressed. Instead they create a substitute for it.

To signify this, one need only recall that the name for the most typical and profound dream report is borrowed from literature. This exchange between literature and psychoanalysis goes both ways. Critics of drama trace the plots and characters of the plays they study with the aid of

psychoanalytic technique.

It seems that in literary analysis, psychoanalytic approach often disregards the question of textuality in favour of the typical Freudian motifs inscribed in the deep structure. In such situations, Marlow would notoriously be represented as the son who interrupts the primal scene of paternal intercourse³². The pendulum in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" can be the Father's hanging penis³³. The psychoanalytic criticism "displace the object of analysis from the text to some person"³⁴, observes Peter Brooks.

The most provocative attempt in this is made by Ernest Jones in his *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949), Which follows the Freudian thesis that Hamlet is unable to avenge his father's death because he unconsciously identifies himself with the villain³⁵. Jones endorses this interpretation; but suggests that Hamlet's hesitation is a symptom of his wish to kill his mother, which stymies his attempt to kill his uncle³⁶ Gertrude herself confirms this suspicion that Hamlet is a matricidal tragedy, closer to the Oresteia than to Oedipus: she is terrified that Hamlet means to murder her when he invades her closet.

Ernest Jones's approach to Hamlet makes the fundamental error of treating Hamlet as a real person, vexed by unconscious impulses unfathomable even to the text itself. Hamlet cannot contradict his analyst-critic. Where literature is concerned, Ernest Jones makes greater claims than Freud himself for the efficacy of the psychoanalytic method of interpretation.

Jones's or Freud's attempt is a highly elaborated version of a common project in criticism in that it seeks the psychological complexes underlying and motivating the arrangement of events and the behaviors of character's action in drama. In so far as their motives can be said to exist at all, they reside in the aesthetic of an 'other' who is not available at the analyst's table. It is misleading for critics to treat a clearly secondary discourse as though it were a dream or a primary datum of the unconscious. The critical attitude above mentioned amounts to a substantial advance over that crasser Freudian view, holding dramatic form to be for mere pleasure preparing the way for the unspeakable impact of unconscious wishes.

The Textual Unconscious

The temptation of the Freudians to conflate all dramatic action and characters under the Oedipal rubric emerges only because the events in the theatre involve certain essential psychic features.

Theatrical action is fueled by and satisfies to varying degrees the unconscious drives of its audience. This issue is prior to the incidental one that certain plots and characters represent or replicate some basic psychoanalytic situation. Hence, desire represented in the text is a specialized subject of another pervasive thrust, the desire of the text.

This approach owes much to Lacan and his reinventing of Freud. To consider theatrical action as mechanisms of desire is to involve directly in an element from oblivion- The spectator. Apart from the analysis and interpretation of motifs, we can explore the way any theatrical experience creates dams and detours and sustains special identifications, twists and commotion, the alert spectator is taken through a dark realm, yet confident to return satisfied and unharmed.

This crisis emerges in to the focus, as far as the modes of experimentation in drama are concerned. Modern plays, such as Pinter's or Buckett's nonetheless, partake of certain universal patterns. What is an 'other' designed to mean or do is inconsequential, for the structural semblances of language and unconscious are already established by Lacan³⁷, then even a banal use of theatrical technique will exemplify the thrust, repression and detours of meaning. The theatrical movements assault the spectator with the force of primary processes.

The play is a constructed representation whose discursive properties address spectators in a highly mediated way. Whenever he theatrical discourse overruns what it represents, the spectator becomes actively involved in building the meaning of the play. Hence the theatrical experience as discourse operates in some degree of force to meaning. The force originates from the cauldron of the unconscious and meaning persists in the conscious constructs of culture.

Jacques Lacan in his analysis of Hamlet observes the tragedy of Hamlet as "the tragedy of desire"³⁸. "Here we have a number of clues,and where do they point?, to the relationship of the drama of desire to mourning and its demands"³⁹. Precisely, for Lacan, the difference between the

tragedies of Oedipus, Hamlet lies elsewhere. Unlike Oedipus, Hamlet has no selfhood of his own. He is haunted to the core by the undiscoverable secrets of his father⁴⁰.

Lacanian psychoanalytic approach goes further by bringing desire to the focal point. The arena of desire is not restricted to the foreclosure of theatre. The theatre and the theatrical experience of the spectator, share a 'dialogics' of desire. So the desire of the text always points to the Centrality of the spectatorial desire in theatrical experience. This movement is one not towards the textuality of the unconscious but to the unconscious of the text.

The Spectator –Subject

The theatre positions the spectator as an infant child excluded from the knowledge of its genesis. He is always tempted to interpret the defamiliarized action on the stage. The spectator, alienated from drama is only able to interpret the meanings from the actor's speech and actions. Andre Green's suggestion: "The art of theatre is the art of the misheard and the misunderstood"⁴² hints at the fundamental misrecognition takes place in the spectator which designates only a divided and fragmentary knowledge of the situation. Even an intensely realistic theatrical action doesn't fully points to the spectator subject's identifications. For instance there is a sense of absolute realism prevails throughout Harold Pinter's plays. This implies not merely the total identification of the spectator but we are tempted to compare the texture of dramatic representation with the texture of dream and phantasy; to which realistic action is pitted against. The reason is that the edge of the stage materially presents the line of separation or a break. Green observes that the "theatre may be situated between drama and phantasy"⁴³.

Drama is performed through the exchange of languages, the exchange of gestures, actions and bare statements without proper commentaries. It does not give any crystal-clear explanation for the state of mind of the characters and the physical setting. The spectator is forced to interpret every things from the language of the stage.

This situation has a close resemblance to the infants' comprehension of the drama of day-t-day life. For him there is nothing except the gestures, actions and statements to

apprehend the connection between physical world of realities and language. Hence the spectator in the theatre is like an infant in the world. "Every theatrical work", says Green, "Like every work of art, is an enigma, but an enigma expressed in speech, articulated, spoken and heard, without any alien medium filling its gaps. That is why the art of the theatre is the art of the *maletendy*, the misheard and the misunderstand."⁴⁴

The Stage and Beyond

Theatre is a predefined space which invites the spectator to take up a number of positions. The theatrical space is maintained between its wall by the study pressure of the space of the world. The space of the world is the limit of the theatre and it is invisible and so excluded from the spectator's consciousness. In the space of the world, familiarity is constituted by means of a relation of the otherness. In the theatrical space this relation is replaced by another relation of otherness between the spectator subject and the spectacle; the object of his gaze.

The stage has two versions. The visible theatrical space and the invisible theatrical space: The stage and the offstage. These two versions of the stage are antithetical in their appearance and objectives.

There is an immediate confrontation between the visible stage and the invisible stage. This is the offshoot of the projection of the relationship between theatrical space and the space of the world. The invisible theatrical space- the offstage- is a place of mystery; a place where illusion and false consciousness is fabricated.

The division between visible and invisible theatrical spaces interfere in the process of viewing as the latter signifies the space of "The plot, the enigma, the secret"⁴⁵, where the off stage is a place of manipulation, suspicion and plotting.

The hidden part of the stage (off-stage) always provokes the spectators transgressing gaze. But it remains opaque to the spectator's gaze. This can be considered as a paradigm of the hallucinations of the unsaid of the stage.

The offstage promotes the "negative hallucinations of the unsaid"⁴⁶ on the stage where all the said is inscribed. Hence the illusion of the representation is established specifically by the offstage. The stage appears more or less as an empty space and the entire dramatic representation seems to be an

instigation from the offstage.

1. Mehlman, Jeffrey .ed. *French Freud*. "Yale French Studies", No.48, Kraus Reprint C. 1972.
2. Ibid p. 38
3. Wright, Elizabeth. *Psychoanalytic Criticism : Theory in practice*. London.1984. p. 107
4. Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits-A Selection tr. Aha Sheridan*. Tavistock London. 1985. A detailed analysis of Mirror stage is in the first chapter; The Mirror stage as Formative of the Function of the I. p. 1-7
5. Wilden, Anthony. *Language of the Self* by-Jacques Lacan. The John Hopkins University press, Londdon, 1973. P. 1-7
6. Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits-A Selection tr. Alan Sheridan*. p. I.
7. Ibid p. 2.
8. Ibid p. 2.
9. Ibid p. 2. 'Agency' stands for Lacan's French term 'instance' which is the equivalent of Freud's German term 'Instanz'. Freud refers to the three agencies of id, ego and superego. Alan Sheridan says the Lacanian term suggest 'acting upon' or 'insistence'
10. The term 'Symbolic order' was first used in the Rome Speech *Ecrits- A Selection*; p. 64 to define the preexisting transindividual matrix of signification on which man is fundamentally dependent.
11. "Levi-Strauss extends and transposes structuralist conceptions to the study of cultural realms in which not only the transmission of signs is at stake. I-Ie characterizes the structures studied by the term Symbolic Systems: "Every Culture can be considered as ' being a set of symbolic systems, the most important of which are marriage rules, economic relations, art, science and religion"_ Laplanche; Jean and Pontails; J.B., in the Appendices to 'French Freud'; *Yale French Studies* No.48, p. 201 "The subject, in Lacan's sense is himself an effect of the symbolic__ According to Lacan, a distinction must be drawn between what belongs inexperience to the order of the symbolic and what belongs to the imaginary-Sheridan, Alan in his Translators note to *Ecrits-A Selection* p. ix.
12. The idea of a symbolic order structuring inter human activity has been advanced by Levi- Strauss, based on the model of structural linguistics resulting from the work of F. De Saussure. For Saussure, the linguistic signifier has no internal link with the signified; the signifier is invested with meaning only because is integrated in to a meaningful system characterized by differential oppositions.
13. Elliott, Anthony. *Psychoanalysis An Introduction Blackwell*, London. 1993. p. 92.
14. Lacan, J. *Ecrits -A Selection* p. 199.
15. Lemaire, Anika. *jacques Lacan* Rout ledge & Kegan Paul. Boston. 1977. p. 157.
16. Lacan, J. *EcritsA Selection*. p. 199.
17. Ibid P. 199
18. 'a-phanisis' is a term introduced by Ernest Jones to suggest the disappearance of sexual desire. The word originates from the Greek a-phaino meaning 'disappear'.
19. Lacan, J. *Ecrits/I Selection*. p. 189~210. '
20. Ibid P. 28,32.
21. Translated and quoted by William J. Richardson in *Lacan and the Subject of Psychoanalysis*. Originally it is from *Seminar II* of Lacan Paris: Scuilil. 1978. p. 16.
22. Lacan, J. *Feminine Sexuality*. ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jaqueline Rose. Pantheon Books, NewYork.
23. Ibid. p. 34.
24. Lacan, J. Seminar on ' The Purloined Letter' in *Yale French Studies* No.48 p. 39-71
25. Wright, E. *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p. 107.
26. Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* tr. Alan Sheridan, London. 1977.
27. Ibid p. 102.
28. Wright, Elizabeth. *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p. 118.
29. Ibid. p. 118.
30. Lacan, J. *Four Fundamental Concepts*. p. 111.

31. Ibid. p. 111-112
32. Crews, Frederick. Conrad's Uneasiness- and Ours in Out of My system: Psychoanalysis, Ideology and Critical Method. Oxford University Press, New York. 1975 p. 56.
33. Bonaparte, Marie. The Life and Works of Edgar/lllan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation tr. John Rodker. Imago, London.1933. p. 590.
34. Brooks, Peter. The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism, in Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature. ed. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. Methuen, London.1987. p. 2.
35. Freud, Sigmand. The Moses of Michel angelo. The Freud Reader. ed. Peter Gay. Vintage, London. 1995. and Freud, Interpretation of dreams 1900. Standard Edition IV. p. 265.
36. Jones, Ernest. Hamlet and Oedipus. 1949.
37. Lacan, J. Ecrits-A Selection tr. Alan Sheridan. p. 234.
38. Lacan, J. On Hamlet in Literature and Psychoanalysis ed. Shoshanna Felmann, Baltimore, London. 1982. p. 39.
39. Ibid p. 41.
40. Ellmann, Maud. ed. Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism. Longman, NewYork.1994. p. 17
41. Selden, Raman ed. The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Vol.8. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1995. p. 208.
42. Green, Andre. T7112 Psychoanalytic Reading of Tragedy tr. Alan Sheridan. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1979. Reproduced in Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism ed. Maud Ellmann Longman, London. 1994. p. 40.
43. Ibid. p. 40
44. Ibid. p. 41
45. Ibid. p. 42
46. Ibid. p. 44