

Analysis on the Freudism in David Lynch's Film *Blue Velvet*

Zhu Yuzhou

Hangzhou Foreign Languages School, Hangzhou, China, 31000
Author's Email: Zyz217675510@163.com

ABSTRACT

Director David Lynch is a representative of contemporary American non-mainstream cinema. His films stand out for their gorgeous, dark, and eerie style that uses black humor. He often uses Freud's psychoanalysis to show the mental symptoms of anxiety and depression in people. This article mainly devotes to analyzing the application of Freudism in David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, concentrating on how psychoanalytic criticism influences the world of arts.

Keywords: *Freudism, Blue velvet, Psychoanalysis, David Lynch*

1. INTRODUCTION

Lynch's wandering between reality and surrealism, the bold portrayal of violence and sex, avant-garde expression, extremely influential visual add to the unique personal charm of his work. In *Blue Velvet*, released in 1986 by De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, through depicting a boy, the protagonist Jeffery, from dripping his toe into the society to utterly captured by the adult world, David Lynch orchestrates psychological elements, successfully portraying a world with a frantic dark side and this boy's psycho stage from superego to id. In this article, the author will examine the use of Freudian theory in David Lynch's film— This article analyzes the three stages of psycho applied in the film, reflection of the reality, oedipus complex applied in the film, and how David Lynch manages to incorporate these theories into *Blue Velvet*

2. THREE STAGES OF PSYCHO APPLIED IN THE FILM: ID, EGO, AND SUPER EGO

The film begins with a series of dream-like footage: the red roses swinging under the blue sky, a smiling fireman waving his hand on a fire truck, and a group of kids walking across the road. David Lynch creates a mirage of a comfortable and beautiful morning. Suddenly, a man, the protagonist's father, becomes paralyzed while hosing his garden. A dog begins to bark and a baby wanders by. These elements in the frame bring an uneasy to the audience. "Tragedy and comedy merge,

as do reality and fantasy, to create suspense and elevate curiosity as well as uncertainty." [1] The camera penetrates the grass, revealing the crawling dark bugs beneath the lawn. These bugs are magnified by the camera, producing rattling sounds and making the audience feel uneasy and restless. David Lynch shows the negative and devilish things beneath the fake perfection of the town, which also fits in Freud's theory. According to this theory, Freud states the psyche can be divided into three parts: id, ego, and superego. These three parts work together to form complex human behaviors. On one hand, "The superego holds the internalized moral standards and ideals that we acquire from our parents and society." [2] The superego is the tip of the iceberg floating on the water, similar to the comfortable facade of the society in the *Blue Velvet*. On the other hand, id is the opposite side of the superego. "The id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants, and needs." [2] According to the glacial effects, Id is normally submerged and hidden in the deep side of the "glacial", similar to the devil essence, and the negation of the harmony at the beginning of the film.

3. REFLECTION OF REALITY

Where is ego in *Blue Velvet*? "It develops from the id and ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world." [3] In *Blue Velvet*, the protagonist Jeffery Beaumont is the personification of the ego. With the story unfolding, Jeffery keeps dealing with a series of his impulses. The arc of the character changes from a naive boy living in the shelter of parents to a man who realizes the existence of

the devil essence of the society and the existence of his id.

After visiting his paralyzing father in the hospital, Jeffery wanders around and finds an unsearchable severed ear dropped on the ground. He brings that to the local police office and gives that to detective Williams. Jeffery's mother has little interest in taking care of that event. When night falls, the curiosity drives Jeffery to visit the detective in detective's home. Lynch cuts in magic footage, a zoom into the ear, as shown in figure 1, leading the audience to explore the inner psychological world of Jeffery with camera's perspective. The footage begins with that mysterious ear, then the camera gradually zooms into the hole of the ear left the audience the total darkness. The audience may interpret the hole of the ear represents a channel into the mind, and a single person's mind is similar to the essence of a society, that is devil inside, the total darkness and decent outside—a normal ear. Accidentally Jeffery meets detective's daughter, Sandy Williams. Jeffery falls in love with Sandy who leads him a way to the apartment of a mysterious bar singer, Dorothy Vallens. They interpret she may get related to that ear. The curiosity keeps driving Jeffery to investigate the answer to the myth of the ear. Sneaking and stealing the extra key of the apartment, Jeffery pretends to be a pest controller. The pest controller is relevant to the crawling bugs in the beginning, which means now Jeffery's ego is still resisting himself from the dark side of the society, and his negative impulses, id, are still in control.



Figure 1: The ear, from *Blue Velvet*, 1986, released by De Laurentiis Entertainment Group.

Waiting until the night falls, Jeffery sneaks into Dorothy's apartment, tries to find the evidence linked

with the ear. However, Dorothy suddenly came back. Jeffery has no time to escape, so he hides in the wardrobe. He spying the Dorothy begins to undress. With a series of footage of male gazing from Jeffery, Lynch portrays Jeffery's id starts to reel and represses his sex-impulses. He is found by Dorothy, frankly stating his purposes why he came to Dorothy's apartment. He says his real name when Dorothy asks him, which also reflects his innocence. His integrity is the result of his Superego running, but totally changed by Dorothy. She fondles Jeffery, leading to Jeffery's sex enlightenment. But a criminal, Frank Booth, the leader of a crime group which kidnaps the son of Dorothy, suddenly intrudes in. Jeffery has to hide back into the wardrobe. He is focused to witness that Dorothy is raped by Frank. The violent sexual encounter accelerates the growing speed of Jeffery's id. After Frank leaves, Jeffery holds Dorothy in his arms, emphasizing her situation and inevitably falls in love with her. Dorothy asks Jeffery to hit her while they have sex, but Jeffery refuses and leaves. Dorothy's apartment represents an adult society filled with violence and sexes. When Jeffery ventures into the apartment, he is forced to observe the vice of adulthood unveiling to him. His innocence is gradually overcome by the vice of adulthood and his awareness of id is awakening. After Jeffery leaves Dorothy and comes back home, he is full of loneliness and pain. It is a sign of growth.

Increasingly tainted by the dark side of society, Jeffery lost his innocence and integrity. He takes Sandy from her original boyfriend Mick, cheating on Sandy in order to continue to visit Dorothy. On the contrary, Sandy is on the opposite side of Dorothy. Sandy is pure and filled with the fantasy of the kids. In this relationship, Jeffery has to repress his own id, in order to achieve a dream-like love, "thousands of robins flew down and brought this blinding light of love", Sandy said. But the growing id leads the ego of Jeffery to cheat on Sandy, Jeffery visits Dorothy's apartment repeatedly, driven by his impulses and desires. Jeffery has transferred his love from his mother into Dorothy, caused by the imperfection of his original family: his father is lying in the hospital and his mother takes little care of Jeffery.

4. TRANSFERENCE EMOTIONS

According to the definition of the transference that the phenomenon whereby the patient under analysis redirects the emotions recalled in analysis towards the psychoanalyst[4], in *Blue Velvet*, Lynch may lead Jeffery to transfer his emotion from his own family to Dorothy and Frank—transferring the mother role from his original mother to Dorothy and transferring the father role from his original father to Frank. Then, Lynch applies Oedipus complex in *Blue Velvet*. The definition of Oedipus complex on the Webster's Dictionary is the positive libidinal feelings of a child toward the parent of

the opposite sex and hostile or jealous feelings toward the parent of the same sex.[4]

In *Blue Velvet*, Oedipus complex naturally organizes the relationship of Jeffery, Dorothy, and Frank, as shown in figure 2. Jeffery wants to eliminate Frank and has sex with Dorothy. After the second time Jeffery came to Dorothy's apartment, driven by his desire, Jeffery starts to spy on Frank. It is the procession of Jeffery gradually to dive deep into the adult world and develop his personality. As Jeffery comes to Dorothy's apartment the third time, during his sequent visits when Dorothy tells Jeffery to hit her, Jeffery eventually does that. "As he hits Dorothy, the audience can hear the sound of a roaring animal and see a burning flame, both present at the time of Frank's climax when he raped Dorothy. Jeffery solidifies the identification to Frank." [1] Lynch using this signal represents Jeffery's id has totally surpassed his superego, indicating Jeffery has mentally accepted the dark world of adulthood, further demonstrating Jeffery has taken the place of his "father".



Figure 2: Frank and Dorothy, *from Blue Velvet*, 1986, released by De Laurentiis Entertainment Group.

5. ODEPIUS COMPLEX APPLIED IN THE FILM

However, when Jeffery is leaving, he is caught by Frank who is suddenly dropping by. Desires to the same woman spark the generation conflict between the "son" and "father". Frank took Dorothy and Jeffery to a wired brothel, namely "pussy heaven". On the way to "pussy heaven", Frank and his gang members keep laughing at and threatening Jeffery. Lynch sets a fixed close-up on Jeffery's face, filled with guilt and fear, similar to the situation when a father blames his child. In the following scene, Frank wears red lipstick, kissing Jeffery. Lynch uses this action to represent Jeffery starts to develop his sexuality and further differentiate his sexual preference

in the procession of the oral stage. Then, Jeffery is beaten and left in the wild field. As Jeffery lonely wanders back home, he constantly emerges flashbacks of sexuality. According to the Freud statement in his essay "beyond the pleasure principle": "...as so easily happens with the repressed sex-impulses, in fighting their way through along circuitous routes to a direct or a substitutive gratification, this success, which might otherwise have brought pleasure, is experienced by the ego as "pain".'[5] The growing pain leads Jeffery to be a mature man, coming back to the normal side of society.

Jeffery starts to rethink his life. He gains more attention from his original mother, visits his paralyzing father frequently, and takes the relationship with Sandy seriously. One night, when he drives Sandy home, their car is followed by Mike, Sandy's original boyfriend. When the conflict is going to happen, Dorothy, naked and bruised, popped up and put an end to the quarrel. As they arrive the Detective William's house, Dorothy holds Jeffery tightly. They send Dorothy to the hospital. Nevertheless, Sandy realizes Jeffery was cheating on her and Jeffery has amour with Dorothy. Sandy's superego, purity and kindness is suddenly broken down, crying like a child. Sandy's baby-crying appearance reinforced her breakdown in discovering the dark side of society.

The obsession to discover the truth of the ear motivates Jeffery to visit Dorothy's apartment once again. When he enters the room, he sees that the yellow-jacket officer is standing but has died, and another man is dying on a chair with a blue-velvet belt stuck in his mouth. Lynch makes this scenery weird and confusing. When Jeffery decides to leave, he sees that Frank is approaching, so Jeffery takes the gun from the dead yellow-jacket officer and retreats to the wardrobe in Dorothy's room where he hid before. As Frank opens the wardrobe, Jeffery shoots him dead. This action presents the end of the Oedipus complex: "son" finally eliminates his father. Once the Oedipus complex has been achieved, while everything seems to be settled and the audiences are waiting for a happy ending, David Lynch presents us with a perfect last scene for his film.

6. THE LAST SCENE

As Jeffery safely comes out of the apartment, Jeffery holds the Sandy. With kissing, the camera dollies out from the ear hole of Jeffery lying on a deck chair in the garden, which means Jeffery has pulled out from his unconsciousness deep in his mind and starts to live in the beautiful facade of society. With a sequence of footage, the town seems to return to its original harmony. A fireman stands on the fire truck waving his hand. Dorothy reunites with her child. Sandy, Jeffery, and Jeffery's mother see a robin in their garden. However, the robin is abnormal and moves oddly like a robot, holding a black bug in its beak. Lynch intends to create an illusion of beauty, but the emergence of that abnormal robin may

illustrate that the dark side of society remains, representing the id is hiding in people's unconsciousness.

Besides, the main character Jeffery has fully been aware of his inner devilish desire and impulses. His personality and psychology have been fully developed by eliminating his "father" Frank. This unsayable evilness has been imprinted in Jeffery's inner heart, transferring from generation to generation and will forever remain in the unconsciousness.

7. CONCLUSION

Human self-perception is so unfathomable, and every experience is so complex, with so many faces, that it is far beyond the reach of words. David Lynch's work--*Blue Velvet*--through the medium of films, presents a vivid depiction of a manic world and takes us into the abyss of humanity. David Lynch, a man with his featured hair cut and high-pitched voice, is the most brilliant guide to our inner mental world. The world may be simple and beautiful from the perspective of a child. But as he or she grows up, stepping out of his or her parents' protection, there will always be a lot of troubles and painful things around him. Danger is everywhere in the jungle of adult society, triggering us to fully discover our inner id, the evil side of ourselves. Even though no one immerses with the darkness, wishing to be naive and pure, the world would lure us until getting totally captured.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special Thanks to Prof. Wang offer me instruction in modifying this essay and providing me the knowledge to access to psychological analysis and patiently revise my paper over and over again. Sincerely thanks to Ms. Sung is you teach me how to write essays, helping me until this work gets done. Your supports mean a lot to me and I will never forget it.

REFERENCES

- [1] Danielle Knafo & Kenneth Feiner (2002) Film review essay *BlueVelvet*: David Lynch's primal scene, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. <https://doi.org/10.1516/4RMY-CTP8-WP77-6ET2>
- [2] Boag S. Ego, drives, and the dynamics of internal objects. *Front. Psychol.*, 01 July 2014. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00666>
- [3] Pulcu E. An evolutionary perspective on gradual formation of superego in the primal horde. *Front Psychol.* 2014;5:8. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00008
- [4] Beginning theory: An Introduction to literary and cltural theory, Peter Barry, page 98-101

- [5] Sigma Freud Beyond The Plesure Principle The International Psycho-Analytical Libery No. 4 page 10-12