



Subjectivity Construction through Familial Discourse Represented in Film: A Case Study of Alyosha's Identity in Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Loveless*

Sajed Hosseini,¹ (Corresponding Author)

Graduate Student of English Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran

Erfan Rajabi,²

Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran

DOI

<https://www.doi.org/10.34785/J014.2019.168>

Article Info

Received Date: 19 April 2019

Reviewed Date: 11 June 2019

Accepted Date: 26 August 2019

Suggested Citation

Hosseini, S. and Rajabi, E. "Subjectivity Construction through Familial Discourse Represented in Film: A Case Study of Alyosha's Identity in Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Loveless*." *Critical Literary Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2019, pp. 73-97.

¹ sajed.hosseini@gmail.com

² rajabi.e.sh@gmail.com



Abstract

This paper aims to study the process of identity shaping of a teenager in a family from the perspective of Subjectivity theories. The process of identity formation has been one of the main concerns for various critical approaches in human sciences in general, and the psychoanalytical and Marxist approaches in particular. The case study of the present research is the character of Alyosha from Andrey Zvyagintsev's film, *Loveless* (2017). Since there is no particular theory for the contentual analysis of Film, critics in the analysis of the films' content, take advantage of various literary, sociological and psychoanalysis theories. Therefore, the Conceptual Framework of the present study concentrates on the critical approaches of Structural psychoanalysis and Structural Marxism; particularly definitions of the Unconscious, Repressed Desire, the Name of the Father by Lacan, the Ideology, ISAs, RSAs by Althusser, and the Žižekian concept of Lack of Language. This investigation in the process of identity formation can play a significant role in demonstrating the covert motives of the character's suicidal act. It will illustrate the way Alyosha as a subject inherits his parents' repressed desires and lack of language caused by ideology. The application of considering concepts indicates the central role and inevitable impact of the familial discourse at the emergence of subjectivity within the family.

Keywords

The Unconscious, Language, Family, Subjectivity, Ideology, Other



1. Introduction

The case study of this paper would be the screenplay of the *Loveless*,¹ produced by Andrey Zvyagintsev. The significant invisible aspects of family influences on the shaping of the subject's identity, constructs the main theme of *Loveless*. Zvyagintsev devotes most of his energy producing films picturing the underlying aspects of characters' psyche made through familial discourse. He attempts to dedicate particular codes to merely every acts of characters as if he is trying to represent a particular demonstrated dream for psychoanalysts. Due to the contemporary cultural theories, family, apart from its importance in the social, cultural and religious discourses, is one of the most prominent influential institution in the process and development of human subjectivity.

For instance, the family has a prosperous position in the late Marxist cultural theory. Louis Althusser, French Structural-Marxism thinker in the 1960s and 1970s, labeled family as the first "ideological apparatus." He believes that the human subject will be thrown into a constructed structure that existed before his/her birth; the family includes and generates the ideological precepts of that structure. Due to his observation, people in the family are "always already subjects," (Althusser, 1971: 116). Thus, family is the first unavoidable social context of human subjectivity.

The family status is significant not only in various fields of social sciences but also in the theories of psychology and psychoanalysis. Approaches of the social sciences are concerned with the functionality of family in the social discourses; however, psychoanalytical readings are concerned with the family structure impacts on individual subjectivity. Structural psychoanalysis goes through the analysis of Family taking with having eyes on the two noticeable Lacanian concepts: the Unconscious and the Mirror Stage. Lacan's interpretation of the Unconscious at the primary stages of the social life and what his elaboration on the Mirror Stage, which is the regulation of the unconscious mind in its first attendance in a social discourse, built the main vision of structural psychoanalysis toward family.

As an instance, the subject's path from pre-social and asocial stages to the social life stage provides studies of the mental mechanisms. Lacanian psychoanalytic

¹ Russian: *Нелюбовь*, Translit. *Nelyubov*



approach defines this process as the entrance of the subject into imaginary order and symbolic order. A more detailed exploration of the Lacanian process occurs to the subject while learning his/her “Mother tongue” demonstrates differences of Freudian and Lacanian approaches. “Family and school as two significant ISAs, provide the contexts where ideological languages function in order to construct the identity of the subject” (Sadjadi, 2002: 192) thus this article briefly illustrates the notions of teens subjectivity in a familial discourse.

The case study of this paper would be the screenplay of the *Loveless*, produced by Andrey Zvyagintsev. The significant invisible aspects of family influences on the shaping of the subject’s identity, constructs the main theme of *Loveless*. Zvyagintsev devotes most of his energy producing films picturing the underlying aspects of characters’ psyche made through familial discourse. He attempts to dedicate particular codes to merely every acts of characters as if he is trying to represent a particular demonstrated dream for psychoanalysts.

Andrey Zvyagintsev adopted *Loveless*’ story, from a Russian short story composed by Oleg Negin. Later in a cooperation, they wrote the original screenplay for a film in Russian language. Then they both themselves translated the screenplay into English at the same year of the film production. Thus, the researchers of the present article will reference to the translated screenplay of *Loveless* and put their emphasis on the English version of *Loveless*’ screenplay. They will not only observe the dialogues among characters but also the scenes and cameras directory mentioned in the screenplay as evidence.

After providing a general introduction, the researchers focus on the possible studies and researches carried out about *Loveless*. Then researchers present the Conceptual Framework including critical reading of Lacan’s, Althusser’s, and Žižek’s theories of subjectivity. Next, the plot’s significance and features of the film as the case study of this article are presented. The central part of the paper is the Discussion, which deals with the theoretical reading of the case study. The final section of the paper addressed as Conclusion, deals with the identity-shaping process of Alyosha’s as a teen subject through a familial discourse.

To conclude, Conceptual Framework of the present paper will offer a structural interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalytical principles with an eye on Althusserian



sociological terminology merged by Slavoj Žižek. This provides a reading of *Loveless* regarding social pathology under the shadow of a structural psychoanalysis that improves the style and attitudes of families regarding young subjects. Moreover, as the methodology of the present paper, researchers adopt a qualitative literature based approach throughout the research.

2. Review of the Literature

Due to the medium of the case study, most critic analysed *Loveless* in form of film reviews that mostly demonstrate the cinematic aspect of the production. These modes of treatment do not reveal much about the plot significance. As Tarvainen, Westman, and Oittine assert, “[f]ilm is essentially an affective art form” (2015: 254) thus as Structuralism and Russian formalism believe ‘form’ and ‘content’ in an art work “do not acquiesce in any sort of separability” (Mishra, 2011: 158). In this section, authors tempt to have a critical reading of reviews, which generally illustrate the form-content relation in this *Loveless*.

Rotten Tomatoes’ critical consensus states, “*Loveless* uses its riveting portrait of a family in crisis to offer thought-provoking commentary on modern life in Russia—and the world beyond its borders” (8 July 2018). In this review the social aspect of the subjects as the character of the film come to be of importance, yet it underestimates their personal psychological aspect. Justin Chang, Los Angeles Times critic, also emphasizes on the social premises of the film and calls it “a withering snapshot of contemporary Russian malaise” (30 November 2017). Chang analyzes the subject matter of the film in a general sense and does not pay attention to the different way of subjectivization of the character in *Loveless*.

The chief film critic at *The Guardian*, Peter Bradshaw, describes *Loveless*’ story as “stark, mysterious and terrifying” (17 May 2017) however Russian critic Andrei Plakhov talks of “poetry” and “grief” in *Loveless* (2 June 2017). Cinematic form reliance on the narration paves a way for director as an author to put on his/her literature. As Simonton mentions, “[i]t is significant that the dramatic cluster contributes far more to aesthetic impact [...] than do the visual, technical, and musical clusters” (2009 :414). In other words, narration shapes both aesthetic and dramatic cluster in a film.



The Literature Review section illustrates two considerable points; first, that *Loveless* is a significant work of art –to some extend a work of literature– and, secondly, given its literary and cinematic complexities and sophistications, the film necessities more analyses. Previous studies and reviews generally concentrate on one of the multi aspects of the loveless thus they do not provide a clear detailed rational beyond the film. Additionally, the reviewer, according to the lack of enough space in their work, do not point the the underlying code of a film. Contrary to the given review and analyses, present study firstly adopts a multidimensional view toward the film, then it tempts to elaborates more visual codes inserted in the film. It also paves a way for further researches in the field film under the shadow of the cultural studies.

3. Critical Reading of Subjectivity in Lacan, Althusser, and Žižek

Through decade, the belief that Freudian Psychoanalysis neglects social life as one of the human existential aspect motivated critics to reinterpret Freud. Among these thinkers, Linguistic-structure reinterpretation of the unconscious by Jacques Lacan have caused a revolutionary movement in psychoanalysis. Later on, Louis Althusser's *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan* (1970) introduced a sociological reading of Lacan. He magnifies the significant position of Lacanian theory in modern theories of subjectivity. In past decades, coverage of the Lacanian and Althusserian theories of subjectivity leads philosophers like Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, and Fredrick Jameson towards a "Lacanian-Althusserian Paradigm" (Sadjadi, 2002: 29).

Among these thinkers, Slavoj Žižek's adopts a new methodology regarding this paradigm. He inserts Hegelism as the third component of this approach. In other words, he builds his radical negativity of "Hegelian-Lacanian" subject (Žižek, 1992: 50-52; 1993: 21; 1994: 145; 1996: 78; 1997: 8-10; 1999: 29-30; 2006: 44) that leads to a sociological interpretation of Structural psychoanalysis. He uses Hegelism as a methodology to merge psychoanalysis and sociology. (Badiou, 2010:4) In a sense for Žižek, unification of two primarily component occurs only through a Hegelian dialect.

After Freud, Lacan pioneered a new structure for consciousness. Considering the primary features of structuralism, Lacan introduced a new definition for Freudian



unconscious. As Antony Easthope puts, "Freud's account of the unconscious is essentially an analysis of *meaning*. Under the impact of contemporary linguistics, particularly the work of Saussure and Jakobson, Lacan undertook to follow Freud by rethinking the unconscious in relation to language" (1999: 40). Lacan adopts famous structuralism formula of *sign* = *signified/signifier* illustrating functions and notions of unconscious. Moreover, in Lacanian way of interpreting sign, it is significantly noticeable that "the nature of the bond between the two components of a sign is irrelevant, a symbol is a particular category of sign, where the relationship between its object and interpretant is arbitrary." (Tarighatbin and Sadati, 2019: 46). This perspective caused Lacan to present various definition of the unconscious generally based on its functionality.

Freud's misunderstanding drives his followers to treat unconscious as a biological function. Lacan's first tempts in defining unconscious rejects reductionist views of Freud's followers who observed unconscious as a set of instincts (Lacan, 1977: 147). He believes in unconscious as a process of subjectivity rather than an existing biological feature of Man. In *Écrits: A Selection*, Lacan asserts, "The Unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual" (1977: 170). He pointed to the periodical process of unconscious formation in subjects psyche. Lacan supports his claim taking advantage of defining unconscious in four major forms of Language, Discourse, Memory, and Knowledge.

Language appears the most elegant aspect of the unconscious for Lacan. Lacan's presentation of unconscious structure as language starts a movement that leads to later readings of his theory in terms of Linguistic discourse. In one of his seminar, Lacan asserts, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (1993: 167). This statement draws attention on the both sides of a coin. Akin to process of Language formation, the statement clarifies temporality of unconscious. Lacan believes that like language learning, which starts from a certain days and ends in particular day, subjectivity formation occurs over a span of one's life in one's life.

That is the reason why Lacan is highly concerned about the mother tongue and the name of the father (*Nom du Père*). The very first social communication of a child happens with his/her mother. Thus, mother tongue shapes the addressed structure of the unconsciousness in order to construct the child's identity process. On the other



hand, the name of the father, through language, provides structure for the subjectivity construction of the child. With an eye on the numerous rules of society, fathers are apt to teach children about initials of life and family rules in order to prepare them for compromises in personal and social stages of life.

Lacan also discusses unconscious in term of discourse. Lacan in *Écrits* contends that “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other [big other]” (1977: 16). His statement delves into the concept of ‘Other’ that delineates the influential presence of a higher structure on the unconscious structure of subjects. Lacan highly stresses the produced ‘objet petit à’ for a subject, as a product of the presence of the ‘Other.’ He believes, although subjects’ feelings regarding ‘Other’ are invalid, they always look forward for ‘Other.’ (Lacan, 1987: 83-85) Thus in Lacanian theory the unconscious is dependent on ‘Other’ as Language process that only happens with the presence of family or society.

In a comparative vision, both Lacan and Freud believe in inevitable return of drives. Freud in practical attempts tempted to analyze the unconscious through dreams. Freud constructs methods by which the repressed drives return to conscious experiences in hidden ways. According to Freud, repressed drives, as the major constituent of unconscious, represent itself during a dream. Lacan, however, takes memory to be as a representation of the unconscious. He claims, “[w]hat we teach the subject to recognize as his unconscious is his history” (1977: 52). This statement comes from the point that memories are dependent to other.

In term of knowledge, unconscious for Lacan stands as the unreal self-knowledge of the subject (1977: 306). Since in Lacanian theory, the knowledge regarding subjectivity comes from misunderstanding, misrecognition (*Méconnaissance*), and a fantasy of self-mastery and unity (Lacan, 1953: 12), The Real remains untouchable under a veil of illusion for the subject. Linearly, the subject never comes to understand the truth of his/her existence. This idea caused a pessimistic vision that led to the establishment of following structuralism theories regarding subject, subjectivity, and subjecthood.

As Easthope maintains, Lacan “wants to explain how we are constructed by society to see our social world as so natural and obvious we would not want to change it” (1999:144). In other word, ‘Other,’ for Lacan is the source of a child’s self-



awareness. In fact, the only path to becoming a self-aware existence for a child goes through the subjectivization; the Other defines truths of being for a child. Therefore, through a Hegelian view, Lacanian theory observes subject as a synthesis of 'Other' as antithesis countering individual as thesis. Louis Althusser tempted to have a more precise reading of Lacanian Subject. He introduces the concept of interpellation to draw the map of subject formation in a society.

Following Hegelian dialect, Althusser added particular Marxism terminology to Lacanian theory in order to achieve a more comprehensive subject theory. His widely used Marxist concept, 'Ideology,' stands as Lacanian 'Other.' He firmly discussed the notion of Ideology with reference to human unconscious. The Marxist notion of Althusserian theory however caused him to observe every part of society in an Ideological discourse. "Unlike Lacan who distinguishes between the 'I' and the 'subject', Althusser collapses both concepts into one" (Callari and Ruccio, 1996: 79). For Althusser the only possible 'Other,' haunting individual, is 'Ideology' for the only true living matter outside of an individual is 'Ideology.'

Althusser in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" asserts:

I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning. (1971: 116)

For Althusser ideology stands as an antithesis against individual as a thesis. This struggle ends in subject as synthesis. He later discusses the point that 'Individual' as a product of an 'Ideological Institution' –family- cannot exist as an independent component in this dialect; thus, one of component in Hegelian dialect will be omitted inevitably. As it appears, the relation comes to be a one-to-one relation. Considering Althusser's explanation of interpellation, we find that "you and I are always already subjects" (1971: 11). This radical claim makes way into both later psychoanalysis and New Left theories.



The Žižekian theory of subjectivity mostly involves “big other,” “desire” (Watson 2013: 9), “reality,” and “subjectivity” (Turner, 2017: 1). Žižek takes advantage of literature and cinema for his critical discussion because he believes that “beyond the fiction of reality, there is the reality of the fiction” (Žižek, 2012: 4). This statement, in a Hegelian negativity, demonstrates that what people consider as reality of world is nothing rather than an unreliable fiction contrary to a fiction which presents reality through an art work. It clarifies the Hegelian negativity facing reality; “there is no reality” (Žižek, 2005: 229; 354).

Similar to Lacanian stage ordering which never ends in real order, Žižekian theory never contains pure real principles. On the other hand, like Althusserian definition of subject, Žižekian description of individual rejects any agency in human life. As a result, lack of freedom becomes a motif in Žižekian theory of subject. He highly asserts, “we ‘feel free’ because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom” (2002: 2). Žižek as a Lacanian psychoanalyst denies the reality of freedom for it just exists in the realm of symbolic order. Ideology for Žižek is an always-present aspect of the modern world. Due to the Althusserian observation of ideology, he also believes that there is no root for freedom in ideological societies. In other words, we ‘feel free’ because that is what ideology wants us to feel and it cannot be real for its dependence on ideology as an ‘Other.’

The ‘lack of language’ in Žižekian theory refers to the lack of un-ideological language. In *How to read Lacan* (2007) Žižek asserts, “[f]or Lacan, language is a gift as dangerous to humanity as the horse was to the Trojans: it offers itself to our use free of charge, but once we accept it, it colonizes us” (11-12). Language in Žižekian theory is a weapon for a cold-blooded executioner; roots of language are implanted in ideology. Language as a cultural mean starts to take over of the social subject forcing him/her to act in the ideologically required way. Thus, Žižek’s crucial metaphor of ‘colonizer’ appears true for ideology taking advantage of social subjects to keep the system’s power at its height.

In this research, these terms will be used as cooperative theories in order to delineate the relation among the subjects. The subjectivities of Alyosha’s parents will be analyzed through an Althusserian point of view. Then, considering Lacanian terminologies, the reading will highlights the influences of these ideological subjects



-parents- on Alyosha's unconsciousness. Afterwards, Lack of Language in Žižekian theory will identify the interaction of the shattered unconscious of Alyosha and the process of subjectivity construction through family, as a reason beyond his suicidal act.

4. Case Study

4.1 Significance of the Medium

The practicality and roots of other studies and researches that has been done in the domain of symptomology of suicide are different from the present study's practicality. On one hand, according to the medium of the case study, this research delves in dominant parental personality of a modern family from an outer point of view. On the other hand, gaining advantages from this type of medium –Screenplay-, due to its unique details, prevents any conscious negative involvement of characters or authorities. Therefore, more reliable and sincere results are expected in this study. Loveless' form as a cooperative aspect to its content portrays the underlying criteria of an institution, for instance family.

4.2. Plot Summary

Loveless is the story of broken couple at the edge of their divorce. Boris and Zhenya both trap in another relation that appears to be stranger than their present relation with each other is. Masha, Boris' young Lover, gets pregnant which means another failure for Boris. Zhenya also, concerns with her consumerism, enters into a relationship with a middle-age wealthy man named Anton through a software. The couple who still live in a same apartment but hardly talk together through the story. They try hard to sell their place in order to make a short way in their divorcing process. They are at the end of their journey and Alyosha, their only child, is completely aware of this situation. He is a twelve-years-old boy who appears to be hopeless hence he escape from home and never comes back. The film does not attempt to use Alyosha's escape as a means for his parents' reunion; rather it pictures Alyosha as the only victim of this familial crisis.

4.3 Representation of Characters through Interior Struggles



Despite the pure realism that pictures the outer conflicts among characters, the *Loveless* is concerned with inner struggles and psychic conflicts of the characters. There are scenes containing no words; these scenes draw audience's attention toward the personal aspects of the characters' life. As a result, the audience gains a more clear vision of the characters subjectivities. Although they are normal people, each of them bears a sort of complexity in her/his subjectivity. Characters' interior struggles come from different subjectivity construction process that they have been through, thus a psychoanalytical reading of characters demonstrates the pattern of subjectivity construction. The protagonist and antagonists of the film are antifamily and antisocial characters, the film tends to represent their real subjectivities

5. Discussion: Alyosha's Paralyzed Subjectivity

Apparently, the *Loveless* is a film concerning Boris and Zhenya's loveless relation, but it is significant how their relation make Alyosha paralyzed. He finds himself in a Hamlet situation regarding his parents' divorce for he is incapable in taking action. He interprets the abstract concepts and observes the visual signs of the worlds in a philosophical gesture. For instance, as the first sequence of the film starts, Alyosha and his friend leave their school the get separated with and strange handshaking.

ALYOSHA SLEPTSOV (12) and MISHA KUZNETSOV (12), obviously pals, leave the school, carrying their backpacks. They reach the edge of a large wooded ravine that splits the area into two and take leave of each other with a complicated handshake that includes finger signs and fist bumps, and culminates with the boys poking each other in the shoulder. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 2)

The two diverged roads illustrate the differences in the boys' familial situations; however, the film never mentions the differences directly. They represent their own world with signs that appear meaningless for audience. Additionally in *Looking Awry*, Žižek asserts "fantasy space functions as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desires" (1991: 8) hence, the type of fantastical handshaking releases the underlying complexity of these two school kids' psyches. On the other hand, their attitude stands as a representative of all modern kids, at least in Russia.



The complexity of the modern kids cast a shadow over the film. In the film, Nature stands against the modern civil features in order to picture the split subjectivity of Alyosha. The kid focuses on “the street lights and benches standing next to trash cans” (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 2) while passing the wooded path toward home. In *Écrits*, Lacan adopts a semiotic method in interpreting the signs related to the subject (1977: 66; 71; 140; 445; 511); thus, this bumbling picture can be interpreted as an image of Alyosha’s distraught unconsciousness. This sharp contrast between modernity and nature continues through film. The boldest presence of this motif happens with a view from the Alyosha’s bedroom window.

Below the seventh-floor window, woods stretch as far as the eye can see under a dirty sky. A large satellite communication antenna looms over the forest in the center of the shot, its dish angled straight up, ‘observing’ the sky. The clouds above reflect the red light atop the antenna. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 2)

‘Woods’ against ‘dirty sky’, ‘Satellite’ over the ‘forest,’ and ‘the red light’ from the ‘clouds’ all emphasize the clash of modernity and the nature. Alyosha is sitting in his room gazing at an unknown spot in the horizon. This scene appears as if he stands out of his psyche, watching his own subjectivity. As a child, he expects to face the true family love; though modern relations corrupt this love. The corruption happening through his father’s job or his mother’s cellphone reveals the monstrous aspects of the modernity to Alyosha.

Alyosha’s subjectivity is neither fully constructed by artificial and categorized aspects of modern life as Althusser believed, nor it fully comes from the untamed natural sources as Freud maintained. A semiotic interpretation of sentences and visionary sight, represented as Alyosha’s unconsciousness, illustrates the split subjectivity of the character. When some people come to buy their apartment, he first closes his bedroom door instead of cleaning it for guests then, by the entrance of buyers, he “ignores them studiously, leaning over his desk and writing in his notebook, his tongue sticking out with the effort” (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 5). He recognizes his own situation related to the society’s general condition, therefore he stands against it with antisocial acts.



Right after Alyosha's impolite action, he faces his mother's anger and punishment. Zhenya works as an Other along with the anger and punishment that represent the Althusserian concept of ideology. She, treating such, emphasizes Alyosha's subjectivity in the family and his unfreedom as an individual. Meanwhile, the businessman attempts to conceal the struggle, however, his attempt has diverse effect and adds more intensity to Zhenya and her son contention. The kid escapes from the fighting scene. Mother as the representation of the ideological institution forced her power on the child as a subject. This is what exactly ideology tends to do with its subjected; it tames the subject or omits it. In this case, the chance of omitting process is much bigger, for the director prefers to picture the exercising mom rather than the escaped son.

Boris' first appearance in the film happens in an ironic situation. He enters the apartment while “[a] TV atop the fridge is playing a reality show, with the sound turned down low. ZHENYA is sitting at the table with a glass of wine in her hand, scrolling through her iPhone 4.” (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 5). In Althusserian idea, TV is one of the premium means for ideology in the way of producing subject; thus, it stands in relation to a bigger ideological discourse. “The subject, Althusser argues, is constituted by ideology which constitutes the individual as a subject” (Youdell, 2006: 11). Thus, TV is playing a ‘reality show,’ in fact eposes the false awareness to the subject through presenting a fakes real. This causes what Lacan addresses as the Real illustrates remains under a veil of illusion for Zhenya.

The film also magnifies the idea of the fake reality through picturing the wife drinking ‘wine.’ Although Zhenya is not drunkard through the scene, the point that she tends to drink wine during the day proves her addiction to alcoholic drinks. The alcoholic drinks paralyses the repressive system of the psyche or what is known as super ego, thus, the unconsciousness takes over the subject’s acts. The act of drinking in a retroactive observation is an act of returning to the pre-social stage where Freudian id as the pleasure seeker exists. The pleasure principles in a subject raise causes him/her to be detached from Lacanian The Real. (Freud, 1989: 105; Lacan, 1978: 28) Zhenya as a modern subject is apt to identify reality ‘scrolling through her iPhone 4.’ The device and cyberspace offered by the system, as Althusser claimed, are just there to reproduce the ideology. Therefore, Zhenya is an



ideological subject drown in her false consciousness due to her pleasure seeking attitude.

With the Boris' entrance, Zhenya and he start a conversation around the apartment issue, and then shift their subject to Alyosha in a careless way. The priority of the subjects delineates their state of subjectivity. They are generally worried about their own life even at the time they discuss Alyosha's situation. They in fact attempt to take care of themselves against "Juvy officers, social workers, I don't know, child psychologists... Protective services" (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 7); that means their mind is only set for their own life rather than their son. Boris blames his wife for not being enough a mother and wants his son to be gone to a summer camp. On the other hand, Zhenya blames Boris for not devoting enough time and consideration to Alyosha.

Through conversation on Alyosha's situation, Zhenya and Boris both reveal facts about their mothers. It appears that they are unable to communicate with their mother (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 8). Zhenya humiliates Boris' dead mother yet she does not want even to talk about her own mother. The three members of the family are incapable in communicating with their mothers through language. As Lacan asserts that the unconscious is based on the linguistic structure (1978: 21), hence, a mother, as the first Other in a subject's life, must offer the primary linguistic features to a child. This draws attentions towards the incomplete condition of the Mother tongue as one of the Lacan's concept regarding subjectivity and language. The collapsing mother-child relation as a motif in this film stresses the significant role of a mother in constructing a child's identity. Regarding the unshaped lingual condition of the subjects in *Loveless*, all of them in family are the fragmented subjects.

Boris is more concern with his job rather than his son. He works for a company ruled by an orthodox Christian boss. He is aware that the company will fire him when the boss comes to know about his family. The conversation arrives at its peak when Zhenya understands this reason.

Ah, so that's what you're so afraid of! Silly me, I thought you were worried about your child. Would be a hoot, though, if they canned you from your precious job. I bet they would, too. For sending your own son to the orphanage. How un- Christian of you. How un-Orthodox. The Beard will never stand for it. That'll be hilarious! (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 8)



Zhenya tries to act in a destructive way while responding to Boris; however, Alyosha does not concern for Zhenya, too. Her attitude is a revenge against her husband. She keeps this strategy all through the film. In other words, every single weak point in Boris' personality appears to strengthen her.

Boris' state of mind, as a modern subject, is also revealed in this scene. His life is on the edge of being ruined yet he still is up to think about his job rather than his family. Regarding structural Marxism theory, Boris' action comes from the point that a person is opt to choose productivity through their job rather than their individual wills. "It is through this recognition that the subject is recruited"—subjecthood is freely taken and subjection is freely accepted by the good subject" (Youdell, 2006: 11). This way of acting is born through modern social convention, ideology in particular. The subject is always afraid from being useless. The fear proposed by system haunts the subject threatening it with the punishment of losing its position in social context. The same exact process here happens to Boris as an ideological subject. That is why he is more worry about his work rather than his family.

It demonstrates that both Zhenya and Boris are self-devoted subjects. Their sights of life interlock with the notion of ideology. Meanwhile, Zhenya and Boris as parents are incapable of communicating with Alyosha, thus, they leave the kid in ambiguous condition and try to make him another subject that is able to continue his life in the system. Alyosha was "standing there [Behind the hallway door] all through his parents' conversation. His face is streaming with tears; he seems to be shrinking into the wall" (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 9). This type of parenting bothers the kid, particularly an early teenage kid who is to experience new aspects of his life.

Boris and Alyosha never have a direct conversation through the film and Boris usually does not come home at nights. Alyosha never grows as other teenage boys for the father or even the father figure is always absent in his life. He suffers from the lack of the name of the father, as he has nobody to direct him through his life. On the other hand, Alyosha also does not experience his mother presence; for him the mother figure is turned to a pervert woman who is always involved with the way she looks. Zhenya must be the first female love for her son, yet she never offer any love with him. As psychoanalysis theory explains, children's unfulfilled desires will be



haunt them in their adulthood. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that Alyosha grows to be a subject with various primary repressed drives.

After all Alyosha goes back to his room and his parents' conversation ends with two more sarcastic sentences. Then Zhenya goes to her bedroom and leaves Boris Alone. "BORIS turns off the kitchen light, walks down the hallway, and disappears into the living room. [...] A short time later, he turns off the light and lies down on the couch" (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 9). This scene pictures the subjects' loneliness throughout this family. All the three members of the family are alone although they are in a same tiny apartment. This incapability in coping with situation illustrates the failure of the familial discourse as the first social institution. Althusser mentions, "*the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject*" (1971: 169 original emphasis). It means the 'subject' is always forward to the 'Subject.' Linearly, Alyosha as a 'subject' faces two different incompatible subjectivity models regarding his parents as the 'Subjects' in the family. The result of this paradoxical condition is a shattered subjectivity of Alyosha.

The same failing process continues the next morning. Firstly, the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) hunts Zhenya through "kitchen TV," "makeup," and "iPhone." ISAs are representatives of ideological ideas, outlooks, and beliefs proposed by system, as a truth or at least as 'distortions' of a scientifically accessible 'real.' (1971: 153) Secondly, the father figure cannot be find due to Boris' absence. Thirdly, Alyosha fails again to communicate with his mother on the breakfast table. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 9-10) Hereafter, the son leaves the family and never comes back although his parents come to understand this fact two days later that is an evidence for their carelessness regarding their son.

In following scenes, film delves into Boris and Zhenya's personal hobbies during the two next days. The second sequence of the film represents a vast range of repetitive information regarding Boris and Zhenya. The information might appears unnecessary while they are required there in order to visualize the true-subjected aspect of the individuals in the film. Boris lies to everybody at the work about his relationship with his family. He who is a worker for a capitalism system is alienated from his work yet still he wants to continue it. Additionally, Masha is pregnant with



Boris child, yet their relation also appears unsteady like Boris and Zhenya's relation. He is unable to talk with Masha who is a much younger girl. Masha feels stress and is worried about their relationship all the time, yet Boris tempts to calm her down in an artificial treatment with mechanical words. They try to talk about Masha's mother who is not much liked by Boris. The presence of mother figure is absent in this relation too.

On the other side, Zhenya sadistically waste her time on "Cosmetologist," "Yoga," and "Stylist" which reveals her egoist attitude. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 11-26) Egoism occurs when "the sexual object attracts a portion of the ego's narcissism to itself, and this becomes noticeable as what is known as the 'sexual overvaluation' of the object" (Freud, 1919: 418). In this account, Zhenya talks to everybody about her affairs with Anton. However, her enthusiasm for Anton only happens regarding his wealth rather than his personality. The others observe her as a happy and easygoing woman. As she never really succeeds anything in her life, others' approval of her acts appears to her as a success. Zhenya's new relation also appears uncertain because, Anton and she are only limited to having love affair. The language fails to shape conversations between Boris and Masha or Zhenya and Anton. In Lacanian theory, the 'alienation in language' relegates the subject in his/her everyday life (Chiesa, 2007: 41). Therefore, as both Boris and Zhenya are linguistically alienated, they lose their position as parents at the end of the film.

Zhenya who is terrified of Alyosha's runaway firstly calls her husband at his works. He disappoints her for he does not take the matter seriously and just blames her for the son's absence. Then she calls the cops, where the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) also enters the story. RSAs is term for Marxist concept of State Apparatuses introduced by Althusser that contains 'the Courts,' 'the Police,' 'the Prisons,' and 'the Army.' (Sadjadi, 2012: 88) In other word, RSAs are the material representation of Ideology in society. The conversation between Detective and the mother demonstrates the general overview of modern parents.

DETECTIVE: Well, what can I tell you... I see no evidence of criminal activity.

ZHENYA: What do you mean, "criminal activity"?

DETECTIVE: Well, you know, sometimes parents will do away with their kid, then file a missing person's report. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 29)



Detective's statement illustrates the catastrophic situation of parenting in the modern society of Russia. The detective as a representation of the RSA tries to routinize the "criminal activity" of parents due to their children. At the same time, he attempts to relate these types of activities to the parents rather than the system. This implies that the system wants its subjects to feel guilty instead of becoming aware of systems methodology in making subjects.

Detective's further elaboration on the present situation pictures the laid down bureaucracy in the system. In structural Marxism bureaucracy is one the ISAs institution which constructing subjects. He states,

Here's how the system works: first, we conduct a preliminary inquiry, which includes interviews with the parents, relatives, friends, possible witnesses, and so forth. We are short on resources, plus we have other cases to investigate: murders, rapes, assaults, robberies, and so forth. So the preliminary inquiry could take a few days. [...] then we open a missing person's case. Then, if the case investigation presents more grounds, meaning more evidence [...] it becomes a criminal case. But that's up to the Investigative Committee. You can imagine how long that takes and the mountain of paperwork it requires. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 30)

The mechanical way of system's working delves into the subjects' psyches. The "paperwork" in fact is a process of fixing ideology in subjects' psyches systematically. "Bureaucracies are users of ideologies, aimed at target groups for the purpose of energizing these groups toward acting in the interest of the bureaucracy and groups who are in a position to use it for their own ends" (1968:129). In a bureaucratic process of life, the structure of system shape one to one relations with individuals' unconscious structure in order to take advantage of a subject's tendencies.

This justification indirectly points to other social crimes; "murders, rapes, assaults, robberies, and so forth." The massive existence of these crimes in the society is an evidence for the system's incapability in constructing ideological subjects. Each of the discourses in a society is a field for system in the way of producing ideological subjects. The familial discourse in this path plays a significant role. Generally, because of familial discourse failure, the subjectivity of the social members of a system becomes fragmented. The failure also effects other discourses like educational and religious discourses.



The husband and wife during the fourth sequence of the film –particularly in the way to the house of Zhenya’s mother for they think Alyosha might be hide there- still fight with each another, blames each other for what happened, and are careless to the fact of their son absence. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 38) The film goes on in the path to the finding Alyosha. Contrary to general theme of modern cinema, Zvyagintsev does not take advantage of this journey to reconstruct Boris and Zhenya’s shattered relation. Instead he pictures the truth that modern subjects with lack of language for communication never overcome their failure.

They start to struggle on their hidden relations which is the first time happening in the story. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 39-40) They express their feeling in sarcastic tone and stand against each other with their acts. These acts are complaints to their interlocked condition that cause both of them to be unfree. They are unable to talk for they think they are independent to each other or in a sense free, however the truth lays beyond their lack of language to express their ‘unfreedom.’ This delineates the point that already all the hopes for both Alyosha and his parents relation are nothing but rather than a fake expecting reality. They cannot find Alyosha at her grandmother’s house thus leave there just with argument around various unrelated matters.

The next sequence is a kind of falling action for the plot, particularly the next day when at the “[e]arly morning. Walking in a dense line, the search team is combing the ravine that splits the Sleptsovs’ neighborhood in two. A fog is creeping over the river” (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 46). The fog as a representative of human unconscious –as Žižek devotes his book *Looking Awry* to this topic- pictures the unclear and the gloomy side of the modern subjects’ psyche. The fog also as a natural phenomenon that blurs the eyesight represents the unclear reality of the film. This code pokes the point that the finding process is a failure and the search team cannot find Alyosha because the reality they know is not real.

Again, the careless parents motif occurs in the film. At the private detective office where Boris and Zhenya tend to check streets and buildings’ cameras, Boris has a conversion full of lies with Masha. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 48-49) Then in the next scene, Zhenya wakes up from Anton’s bed in the morning. (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 50) Their attitude appears as if with Alyosha’s gone they found



more privacy and got rid from one of their problem. This illustrates the subjects hanged from their *objet petit à*. It unconsciously draws them to itself where they think their happiness and calmness are laid. However as Lacan maintains these are just desire that never will fulfilled.

The private detective finally finds Alyosha and his friends' hidden base on the wood and traces some related evidence but not Alyosha himself. On the other hand, Zhenya and Anton's find a missing twelve years old boy in a hospital but again not Alyosha. After all searching attempts a few days later the camera pictures in the hallway of a morgue. "The COORDINATOR marches briskly down a long hallway inconsistently lit with fluorescent lights. BORIS follows him, then ZHENYA a few steps back, with ANTON lagging behind considerably" (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 50). They check dead body of a twelve-years old boy who is not Alyosha. The identification scene deeply influences both Zhenya and Boris.

The last sequence pictures the old apartment undergoing major renovations, particularly Alyosha's bedroom. Then it records Boris and Masha in their home with their two years old child "BORIS is watching the report from the couch in front of the TV, eating chips right out of the bag. He has a beard and a different haircut" (Negin and Zvyagintsev, 2017: 64). After that, the camera shows Zhenya with new "haircut," "iPhone," and "TV" sitting on the other side of the couch, where Anton is sitting. There is no word between any of the couples. They drown in despair and still lack the language to confess to their subjection to life.

6. Findings and Conclusion

The unconscious for Lacan is a structure existing system. Thus, his definition of the unconscious is much different from that of Freud where it is a chaotic. Lacan reminds subject to the point that not only the unconscious shapes by language but also the language force the subject to act due to the language. Bruce Fink asserts, "[I]ack and desire are coextensive for Lacan" (1995: 54). This elaborates Boris and Zhenya's situation in the film. They both suffer from lack of language and a desire for love. In fact, this is Boris and Zhenya's unconscious which shapes Alyosha's unconsciousness. This shaping process must stand in the same path with subject's



identity process. In Alyosha case, the shattered unconsciousness leads to a ticklish identity.

Family as the first social institution, through concepts like the name of the father, Mother tongue, and Other [big other], plays a significant role in subjectivity construction of a child. This causes familial discourse to be the first ground of subject's interaction with social life. The absence of the name of the father, the incapable mother tongue, and the loveless Others in the film leads to the unhealthy interaction of the subject with the modern society. These all cause Alyosha to feel both lack and desire like his parents; lack of a well-shaped identity and desire for an identity. Therefore, the reasons behind Alyosha's scape all lay in the epistemes of his familial discourse.

Alyosha's subjectivity construction is completely under the influence of the familial discourse in a much different way from other children. He attempts to break the bonds of dependency to his family. What he does not know is, as Jean-Paul Sartre states, "Long before our birth, even before we are conceived, our parents have decided who we will be" (1966: 57). He thinks that he would be free in this way however, the truth is something else. As a subject he needs to stay in the system and this remaining at its first steps requires the familial discourse.



References

- Althusser, L. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Badiou, A. "The Idea of Communism." in *The Idea of Communism*. Costas Douzinas & Slavoj Žižek (eds.), London & New York: Verso, 2010.
- Bradshaw, P. (17 May 2017). "Loveless review - eerie thriller of hypnotic, mysterious intensity from Leviathan director." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. Archived from the original on 26 May 2017. [Retrieved 31 May 2019]
- Callari, A. and Ruccio, D. F. *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996.
- Chang, J. (30 November 2017). "Andrey Zvyagintsev's missing-child drama 'Loveless' is a shattering portrait of Russian social malaise." *Los Angeles Times*. Archived from the original on 3 December 2017. [Retrieved 31 May 2019]
- Chiesa, L. *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.
- Easthope, A. *The Unconscious*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Fink, B. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Freud, S. Strachey, J. and Richards, A. *Introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*. London: Penguin, 1991.
- Freud, S. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. James Strachey (ed). New York: W. W. Norton, 1989.
- Krause, A. E. Functions of a Bureaucratic Ideology: "Citizen Participation", *Social Problems*, Volume 16, Issue 2, 1968, pp. 129–143. [DOI: 10.2307/799999](https://doi.org/10.2307/799999)
- Lacan, J. "Some Reflections on the Ego." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 34, 1953, pp. 11-17.
- Lacan, J. "The Seminar. Book III." *The Psychoses*, 1955-56. trans. Russell Grigg. London: Routledge, 1993.



- Lacan, J. *Écrits: A Selection*. trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock Publications, 1977.
- Lacan, J. (1978) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of the Psychoanalysis*. Jacques-Alain Miller (ed), Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W.Norton.
- Lacan, J. and Mehlman, J. "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar." *October*, Vol. 40, 1987, pp. 81–95.
- "Loveless (Nelyubov) (2017)." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Fandango Media. [Retrieved 31 May 2019]
- Mishra R. K. "A study of form and content." *Journal of English and Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 7, 2011, pp. 157-160.
- Negin, O. and Zvyagintsev, A. *Loveless*. Available Online at www.sonyclassics.com. [Retrieved 7 March 2019]
- Plakhov, A. (2 June 2017). "От нелюбви не зарекайся." *Kommersant* (in English). Archived from the original on 5 July 2018. [Retrieved 31 May 2019]
- Sadjadi, Seyed Bakhtiar. *Investigating the Subject's Identity: The Critical Treatment of the Lacanian-Althusserian Dialectic and Subjectivity Formation in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Exeter University, 2010
- Sartre, J. *Being and Nothingness*. trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1966.
- Simonton, D. K. "Cinematic success criteria and their predictors: The art and business of the film industry." *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 26, No. 5, 2009, pp. 400-420. DOI:10.1002/mar.20280
- Tarighatbin, M. and Sadati S. S. "Semiotic and Cultural Analysis of English and Persian Advertising Slogans." *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2019, pp. 39-61.
- Tarvainen, J., Westman, S. and Oittinen P. "The Way Films Feel: Aesthetic Features and Mood in Film." *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, Vol. 8, No. 5, 2015, pp. 279-286. DOI: 10.1037/a0039432
- Turner, K. "Lacan's Fantasy: The Birth of the Clinical Concept." *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2017, pp. 1-18.



- Watson, C. "Identification and desire: Lacan and Althusser versus Deleuze and Guattari? A short note with an intercession from Slavoj Žižek." *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2017, pp. 1-16.
- Youdell, D. "Subjectivation and Performative Politics: Butler Thinking Althusser and Foucault: Intelligibility, Agency and the Raced-Nationed-Religioned Subjects of Education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2006, pp. 511-528.
- Žižek, S. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.
- Žižek, S. *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out*. Revised Edition, New York/London: Routledge, 1992.
- Žižek, S. *Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Žižek, S. *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality*. London: Verso, 1994.
- Žižek, S. *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*. London: Verso, 1996.
- Žižek, S. and F. W. J. von Schelling. *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World. An Essay by Slavoj Žižek with the text of Schelling's Die Weltalter* (second draft, 1813), trans. Judith Norman, Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Žižek, S. "Schelling-in-itself". Elizabeth Wright & Edmond Wright (Eds.) *The Žižek Reader*, London: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 249-267.
- Žižek, S. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* London: Verso, 2002.
- Žižek, S. *Interrogating the Real*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2005.
- Žižek, S. *The Parallax View*. MIT Press, Cambridge, London: England, 2006.
- Žižek, S. *How to Read Lacan*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007.
- Žižek, S. *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso, 2012.