



## The Symbolic Order in Steve Toltz's *A Fraction of the Whole*: A Lacanian Treatment

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### Abstract

The present research seeks to read Steve Toltz's novel *A Fraction of the Whole* in terms of the Lacanian three orders. Its central argument is to reveal the affinity between Lacanian three orders that the characters undergo. In the course of *A Fraction of the Whole*, Martin Dean in pursuing his desire to gain power and strength, passes through three stages of Lacanian theory; the Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order, and the Real Order. Both Martin and Jasper in Toltz's novel have problematic relations with their mothers in different ways. Therefore, the Imaginary Order plays a vital role in shaping the characters' subjectivity. To examine Lacan's concepts of subjectivity, desire and Others in the Symbolic are the aims of this study. The main objectives are explaining the role of three Lacanian orders in shaping the identity and subjectivization of the characters. It is concluded that Jasper wanted to have an object of love in the Symbolic Order, so he preferred his own uncle, Terry Dean, over his own father. His father was the dominant figure in the Symbolic Order for Jasper as Martin tried to manipulate his son's mind through words and language. Martin was stuck in a loop of life and death through the Symbolic Order of his life and there was no way out for him and he had turned into a

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traumatic character. Martin's experience of the Real Order was shown as he found out that his own mother wanted to kill him by poisoning Martin.

## Keywords

Desire; Jouissance; The Law of Father; The Imaginary; The Symbolic; The Real

## 1. Introduction

Steve Toltz addresses the common issues of human life in modern times such as identity, love, loneliness, politics, violence, injustice in life, corruption in the educational system and ignoring elites in his novels. His several occupations, including serving as a cameraman, a private investigator, an English teacher, a telemarketer, a security guard, and a screenwriter expanded his horizon of understanding towards mankind and all his dilemmas, complexities and dead-end situations in life which are obviously traceable in his novels.

*A Fraction of the Whole* (2008) was published in more than seven hundred pages that contain all the detailed incidents in the main characters' life which revolve around issues concerning fear of death in life. On the one hand, the length of this book and on the other hand its inclusion in the Man Booker Prize shortlist are indicative of the significance of Toltz' first book as his first appearance in the realm of the modern novel. Toltz's effort led to the creation of his second novel, *Quicksand* (2015), in which the novelist focuses on the fear of life. Hence, the bad-luck character of his first novel reappears in his second novels as an anti-hero. Toltz, a freelance writer, began *A Fraction of the Whole* (2008) as two short stories that he could not stop working on. He notes:

I thought that the story looks like the beginning of something that one looks like the end of something. Now I just have to string them together'. Except the middle took a bit longer than I'd anticipated ... I knew where I was going but I didn't know how to get there. I knew the endpoint, it was just the middle point, to actually get to that point, that was really, I won't say out of control, but it was a surprise for me. If I knew a story page by page before I started writing it I just wouldn't do it. The process of discovery is really important for my own enjoyment. (The Guardian)

The novel was picked out for the 2008 Man Booker Prize, 2008 Guardian First Book Award, New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for People's Choice Award



(2009), and Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize Nominee for the comic fiction finalist (2009).

It is a funny modern epic of loud condemnation of the modern world. Toltz is celebrated for blending philosophical thoughts and aphoristic humor in his writings. As one of the main characters, Martin Dean is a paranoid intelligent man with a philosophical mind who conveys his paranoid thoughts to his son, Jasper Dean. Martin spends four years and four months in a coma in childhood. After waking up, the consequences of absentmindedness and unfamiliarity with the world results in the misanthropy and unsociability he experiences in adulthood. Martin is influenced by his inevitable death and endeavors to leave his mark on the world. However, this ambition creates a chain of 'immortality projects' that unavoidably results in backfiring. Furthermore, his pessimist perspectives towards institutions such as school cause him to teach his son at home and force Jasper to quit school.

Jasper is Martin's illegal son. Jasper's difficulty in relationship with his father constitutes the inner theme of the book, and he passes a mystified childhood due to Martin's constant weird instructions and discourses. Martin is a man who over scrutinizes everything while passing on his self-achieved wisdom to his son. The same as *Hamlet's* dilemmas and doubtful feelings of love mingled with hatred for his mother, Jasper for most of his life cannot come to a conclusion whether to love, hate, pity, or murder his paranoid father. His main conflict is a fear of being the same as his father's feeling, and he often tries to detach himself from his father. Nevertheless, their bonds made of the relationship between the son and the father goes on its own way strangely and turn them to an undetached pair.

Throughout the story, Jasper recalls the incidents that result in Martin's collapse and also his constant losing battle to create a lasting mark on the world. Jasper recollects the events, disgraceful schemes and scandals about his mother, a wired European mother who commits suicide after Jasper's birth meanwhile he discovers the realities about his uncle Terry, a notorious outlaw. This story takes them from Australia to Paris, to Thai jungles and again to Australia. During this journey and all its conflicts, they pass through strip clubs, a mental institution, labyrinths, and criminal dens in addition to experiencing the highs of the first love and the lows of failed ambitions.



The complicated notions of Lacan in an overall discourse lend hand to the formation of a structure. In the 6-18 months, the infant goes through an identification process in which s/he distinguishes himself/herself from the surroundings. This could happen by the child's viewing oneself in a mirror, the mother (caretaker), or even the excretion as it departs the unity of the body. The infant's perceptions help him/her to find out that s/he is not a formless entity without any structure. Indeed, the infant develops a "sense of itself" as a structured whole. Although the unity that the infant feels with the mother or an "other" is not collapsed at this point, the infant discovers the fullness in itself and runs against the former fragmented belief about itself (*Ecrits* 78). The "Mirror Phase" is the ground for the establishment of the first register the child goes through, which is the Imaginary Order.

Elaborating on the mirror stage, Maleki and Sadjadi argue that "It is in the Mirror Stage, as Lacan calls it, between six and eight months, that the infant for the first time recognizes itself in the actual mirror and as a result regards itself as a unified whole and identifies with it" (135). The mirror stage comprises the early stages of psychological development. Likewise, the infant perceives both the environment and its body as a fragmented and shapeless entity. The Mirror stage takes the child into a world about which the child is then able to have a vague definition. Lacanian three orders, the Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order, and the Real Order, are interlocking in a way that cannot be considered with definite borders. Against the popular belief, taken from the word "order", that these registers are consequent, they are located and scattered in different realms of the psychic, social, and physical life.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholarly and academic researches previously carried out on the case study of the present research will be examined in this section of the article in order to draw the required line between the present study and other studies conducted on this topic. Due to the date of the novel and its lengthiness, only a few types of research could be found related to the novel. The most significant readings of the novel are presented as the review of literature. Among the reviewed studies, there are some newspapers and magazine articles. The researcher of the present paper has attempted to analyze and distinguish the previous readings from the reading presented in the current study.



Globalization has been reflected in the early twenty-first century writers' works. Steve Toltz is one of those writers who applied this trend in his two artistic novels. *A Fraction of the Whole* has attained an impressive success in this regard with its reflection of modern human life. In "Ordinary Novels", Merritt Moseley introduces this novel as Toltz's industry or invention. She believes that although *A Fraction of the Whole* is Toltz's first novel, it is not autobiographical, unlike many other authors' first novels. She states that the features of the picturesque genre have not been thoroughly included in this novel, for it is a matter of spirit rather than the extreme aggregation of strange people and unpredictable events for them to do (154).

Rashmi Mathur states in "*Turbulence of Globalization in Rising Metropolis- A Case study of Toltz's A Fraction of the Whole and Adiga's The White Tiger*" that Toltz's novel begins in a rural setting, and then gradually expands in a metropolitan setting. He attempts, Mathur argues, to define the facets of the modern globalized society of his country through shattering the pattern of the stereotypical image of rural life as a pure innocence to show it as retrogressive, trivial, humiliating and intimidating (5). Rashmi Mathur remarks that *A Fraction of the Whole* is a family epic covering four generations of a family in 700 pages that address the modern metropolitan chaos and its pressure on human psyche. Martin intends to get rid of his apartment, a disgusted urban hole in which he used to live, in order to move and build himself a home in a labyrinth outside the city to show his hostility of being cramped up in an apartment. (6)

Rashmi Mathur surveys these two novels and concludes that chaos has been successfully represented in both of them. Both of these novels highlight suffering, frustration, inferiority and black misery that are hidden behind the global, impressive urban spectacle. Comparing the two writers, Rashmi Mathur comes to this point that both of them reveal the suppression of individual aspirations and dreams under huge social strictures and anxieties. Mathur maintains that these two novels are fantastic pictures of life in globalizing nations where the speed of life seems to be accelerating while the ethical system and human values and moralities seems to be declining and set for a descending spiral towards chaos (7). Rashmi Mathur holds that Toltz's and Adiga's novels portray uncontrolled capitalism during the past decade and highlight



the apparently marvelous economic development while accurately emphasizes injustice in society and corruption in morality. (7)

Richard Rayner in “Daddy Dearest” describes *A Fraction of the Whole* as an intentionally misanthropic and comic book that reveals the way sons and family are influenced by fathers. He argues that not only Mum and Dad do screw you up but also siblings do the same. Rayner states that Toltz’s novel revolves around the story of a father and his son and the humor, incidents, and reminiscence they deal with. Toltz’s style in writing is acquainted with Charles Dickens and John Irving’s style. He states that the novel is a funny and meanwhile misanthropic book. According to him, Toltz is a competent author and a brilliant phrasemaker whose novel has a clever, compelling structure, and it flies as quickly as a rocket. (*Los Angeles Times*)

Frank Cottrell Boyce remarks in “*A Fraction of the Whole* Review” that this novel is a shining entrance for Steve Toltz to the realm of the modern novel in which good intentions lead to disastrous results. Cottrell states that the incidents of this novel resembles a stone skimming across the water that leaves out from the story to rant and bombast in a brilliant way. The section depicting a maze around Martin’s house reminds Borges’ writing, the part written on lottery reminds Vonnegut’s, and the section about Martin’s strange illness in childhood echoes Garcia Marquez. The inevitability of ruin and tragedy in the story is painful and heartbreaking, and in this regard, it has a resemblance to modern Arabian Nights. (*The Guardian*)

Tom Chiarella refers to the novel in a review “*A Fraction of the Whole: Big Important Book of the Month*” as a bizarre adventure and the most unique lengthy which is worth reading. He declares that *A Fraction of the Whole* initiates in a prison rebellion while the closing stages are on a plane to a one-way trip, and all episodes are unforgettable. The story goes on in a comically dark and appealing setting that absorbs the reader to stick to the story (*Esquire*).

Kyle Smith holds that *A Fraction of the Whole* is Toltz’s madly funny first manifestation in the realm of novel. He states that in comparison to other first novels that dare not to go too far, this novel is an extraordinary novel in which trivial subjects such as a neat whisper or an ironical murmur have been deal with. The novel is a crazy and funny novel that could not be easily disregarded. It is a chaotic long piece



of writing full of metaphysical queries, rude jokes, and weird incidences that make it a kind of Voltaire-Meets-Vonnegut tale. (*The Wall Street Journal*)

John Freeman in “Daddy Issues” notes that future literary historians will consider the present generation of novelists as strongly influenced by the first person. As a result, most of today’s novels are attractive enough to absorb different people regardless of their ages. In accordance with Freeman, although the voice of the writer is behind all voices in the story, Toltz does not intend to teach the reader in his novels. In *A Fraction of the Whole*, the transformation of events and characters happens through a story. Anouk, a housekeeper, and later Martin’s beloved, becomes the richest woman in Australia. Toltz portrays the characters’ process of changing and maturity in such a way that invites the reader readers to ponder over the notion of life. (2008)

Justine Jordan, in “*Quicksand* by Steve Toltz Review – Brilliantly Dark,” declares that Toltz’s second novel, *Quicksand*, is partly the same as his first one. He argues that it is a tragicomic story emphasizing the idea of the absurdity of existence and physical suffering, which is an inseparable part of human existence. Toltz delineates that suffering cures nothing. In this regard, *Quicksand* has been compared to Beckett’s *Endgame* where Hamm says “you are on earth; there is no cure for that”. Toltz’s company with Beckett’s ideas reflects Beckettian elements in his novel. (2015)

The researches previously conducted lack a firm theoretical framework. Moreover, they mostly avoid the detailed analysis of the text or the characters that appear in the novel. Although some studies highlight the significant role played by fathers, none of them attempt to provide a thorough investigation of the term. The novel as a modern literary work provides data and sends codes that can help researches go through the subjectivity of the characters. Hence, the distinction between the current study and the previous studies lays down on the theory that adopted the roadmap. The characters convert their situation throughout the novel as a replacement for the lost union with their mothers to compensate their lack. In this regard, the second aim of the present research is to discover the reason for the main characters’ traumatic feelings concerning the Lacanian concept of the Real Order. It could be said that the findings of the present research benefit the students of literature and potential researchers for further studies.



### 3. Conceptual Framework

Since “psychoanalytic concepts have become part of our everyday lives,” psychoanalysis has received greater attention in recent decades (Tyson 11). However, there have been a lot of changes in this movement and “during the last decade and a half, psychoanalytic theory has undergone dramatic changes” (Elliott and Frosh 1). Different methods and fields have contributed to this movement and have altered the course of psychoanalysis. As Elliott and Frosh remark

The Freudian theoretical tradition has become revitalized and examined with new interest; the predominance of the post-structural psychoanalytic approach developed by Lacan has come under fire in many quarters of the social sciences; and approaches in the object-relational school, especially the Kleinian, have diversified and in turn, given rise to a plurality of methodological positions. (1)

Psychoanalysis is concerned with the science of psychology. However, other fields contribute to this subject inasmuch as “in recent years, psychoanalytic theory has witnessed an extraordinary revival as a means of interdisciplinary research in gender and social theory”. Sexuality is one of the most significant subcategories of psychoanalysis because “psychoanalysis highlights questions of embodiment and sexual differences that have often been neglected by other theoretical approaches” (Shepherdson 1).

Psychoanalysis always deal with subjectivity of the subject or in other words “what makes psychoanalysis so attractive under cultural conditions of this kind is the remarkable fluidity of its encounter with subjectivity” (Shepherdson 3). Moreover, psychoanalysis seeks to find the motivation and forces behind the behavior, and it does not judge these deeds. Lear writes that “by contrast, psychoanalysis seeks to provide an interpretation of people, show them as acting in certain motivated ways and achieving certain gratifications – without thereby rationalizing the acts” (Shepherdson 6).

#### 3.1. Psychoanalytic Approach to Literature

As a creative area which is related to work of mind, literature is directly related to psychoanalysis as it is argued that “any counts of literature and culture have turned to psychoanalysis as a way of breaking the impasse between general, socio-historical modes of analysis, and approaches that seek to specify subjectivity more precisely” (Shepherdson 6). In the field of literary criticism, psychoanalysis is significantly





pleasant. “Modern literary criticism has been particularly influenced by psychoanalysis” (2). One of the most significant components of literature is the language from which it could not be separated. Moreover, language and psychoanalysis are linked together which make psychoanalysis a valid theory for literature. Shepherdson refers to Freud’s famous remark that says “I thus expected that psychoanalysis as a whole would be a theory of the peculiar intersection between the organism and language—the vital domain and the signifier” (5).

The link between psychoanalysis and literary criticism cannot be denied since “psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary criticism both pose one of the largest general questions the human race ever attempts to consider: ‘Who am I?’ (Wolfreys 98). Likewise, this method could be used to trace back the origin of the identity of a person and what other factors such as “‘How did I become that?’ and ‘What price am I paying to be that?’” (Wolfreys 98). Answering these questions could solve the complexities of the theme of a literary text to some extent.

Psychoanalysis starts to change its nature and turns into a theory in which the culture of people and their nature were not the only reference points. Shepherdson notes that “it was thus no longer a question of regarding psychoanalysis as an arena in which nature and culture would overlap, but rather of considering psychoanalysis as a theoretical development in which these other two domains, as they are commonly understood, no longer function as the absolute points of reference” (7). Hence, it has been fixed as a theory to study other fields and to explain them because “the place of psychoanalysis in relation to other forms of knowledge; the historical challenge that psychoanalytic theory presents to inherited modes of explanation” (8).

Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism that uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to recognize mental disorders and illnesses through examining the mutual relationship between conscious and unconscious forces in the mind. This method requires the subject to talk freely, in such a way “that the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining ‘buried’ in the unconscious” (Barry 70). This practice is based upon specific theories of how the mind, the instincts, and sexuality work. However, there is a disagreement about the limitation of the



therapeutic value of the method. Nevertheless, Freud remains a major cultural force, and his impact on how we think about ourselves has been incalculable. It should be noted that psychoanalysis is not related merely to literature. Rather, it could be regarded for every context in which the subjects live. Regarding this matter, Thurchwell writes that

Putting psychoanalysis in context theoretically and historically will allow us to understand better why when we look around us, psychoanalytic ideas are pervasive, not only in university bookshops and psychiatric offices but also in newspapers, movies, modern art exhibits, romantic fiction, self-help books and TV talk shows – in short, everywhere where we find our culture reflecting images of ourselves. (153)

Hence, it is better to use this method beside other methods to overcome their shortcomings as it has been claimed that “the interpretive craftsman must often use other tools such as the formalist approach for proper rendering of the lines themselves” (Guerin et al. 153).

### 3.2. Towards a Lacanian Criticism

Lacan devoted his seminars to a systematic reading of Freud's major texts. According to Lacan, Freud's radical discovery was a theory of subjectivity that was distinct from previous theories of the individual or the ego. Traditionally, the ego has been associated with consciousness and the notion of a unique, individual, and irreducible experience. The individual was seen as the sum of his or her own uniquely personal experiences. Psychoanalysis reveals “an experience of the subject and the formation of the ‘I’ in opposition to all philosophies issuing from the cogito”. (Murray 700). The subject, as a series of events within language, is distinct from the ego, and neither subject nor ego are entities in themselves, objects that could be filled with qualities or properties. They are, rather, functions. Psychoanalysis teaches us that there is always something beyond the individual, something that eludes the certainties by which “man” recognizes himself; that is, the unconscious (Murray 700).

Jacques Lacan is arguably the most influential psychoanalyst after Freud. His work has transformed the world of psychoanalysis institutionally, theoretically, and as a clinical practice. Lacan's influence on a wide range of academic disciplines beyond the narrow confines of the consulting room and analyst's couch is unsurpassed among modern psychoanalytic thinkers. Lacanianism is a common form of criticism that now pervades the “disciplines of literary and film studies, women's studies, and



social theory and has been applied to such diverse fields as education, legal studies, and international relations” (Edgar and Sedgwick 128). Lacan worked on the theory of the human subject and unconscious desires as socially and culturally made concepts.

According to Lacan, who inserts self into a culture, identity is shaped by the Symbolic Order into which we are born, an order that determines our gender identity and our place in our families. “Lacan argued lack is engendered when the subject encounters the other in both the mirror stage and language acquisition phases. Negativity for Lacan emerges upon the entry of the subject into the Imaginary and, particularly, the Symbolic” (Sadjadi, “Language and Ideology” 7). In our unconscious mind, we separate from our ambient childhood world of objects and achieve independent selfhood that is experienced as a loss. That lack could never be filled, and all human desires circulate it, yearning to return to the lost unity. Lacan calls such yearning and the kind of consciousness it provokes the Imaginary. It is the narcissistic part of the mind that defines ego activities. Lacan placed great emphasis on Freud’s idea that the ego deludes itself into thinking it controls the mind:

Lacan returned to Freud’s earlier conception of the ego as the site of narcissistic self-idealization and hence misrecognition. In his account of the mirror stage, he claimed that before the child has achieved motor control it identifies with an image of unity and completeness, an ideal which it anticipates but which it will never embody. As no human being can ever fully coincide with an ideal, in so far as the child imagines it coincides with this ideal it is lost to misrecognition: the child’s ‘self-understanding’ is actually a form of misunderstanding. (Malpas and Wake 72)

What the ego cannot realize is the Real Order which is the site of the drives, the instincts, and the unconscious processes that construct the self but that cannot be discovered by the mind. The personality is then split between the conscious self and repressed desires. Lacan describes the earlier state of being, when the child is unaware of any distinctions between the subject and the object, as the ‘imaginary’. Then, there is the ‘mirror phase’ when the child starts to become aware of itself as an individual and identifies this self. It produces something identifiable as an ego. When it becomes aware of the father’s restrictions, it enters the ‘symbolic’ world and becomes aware of binary oppositions.



The general effect of Lacan's theories has led to the uncertainty of language to express anything with certainty. For Lacan, the whole human life is like a narrative in which significance constantly eludes people. Consciousness starts with a sense of loss and we are constantly driven by a desire to find substitutes for this lost object. All narratives could be understood in terms of a search for a lost completion. Another important concept in Lacanian thought is that of 'The Other'. This refers to the developing of the individual's awareness of other beings, which are also necessary for defining the individual's identity. 'The Other' is clearly a general concept for the entire social order. As the social context of every individual's life is constantly changing, so is the individual's sense of identity.

### 3.3. Lacanian Terminology on Subjectivity Construction Process

As a devote structuralism thinker, Lacan observes the subject more classified and more structure-based rather than Freud. He argues that the subject is constructed by and within the language. Lacan explains the structure within one's subjectivity taking advantage of the Saussurean structural definition of language (Hosseini and Rajabi 79). In accordance with Tim Daen, "for Lacan, there is no subject without an Other, his theory of subjectivity de-individualizes our understanding of the subject, shows how the subject is far more than a synonym for person" (249). Since the subject is formed and structured in the Symbolic Order, language determines the subject. Lacan maintains that the subject is "an effect of language" (708). Moreover, he classifies the subjectivity process in three major orders that classify psychological states of the subject. They include the Imaginary Order, The Symbolic Order, and the Real Order.

The Imaginary Order in Lacanian psychoanalytical theories is always associated with illusion, misrecognition, and fascination. Referring to the Imaginary Order as the state of unification with the mother, Maleki and Sadjadi maintain that the Imaginary Order is the "state of unification with her mother. It is in such occasions that she feels she has been endowed with the power of controlling the world. This sense of having the world under control originates in the sense of wholeness in the Mirror Stage" (135). *Fifty Key Literary Theorists* by Richard J. Lane has defined this notion as the stage in which "a pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal infant, whose subjectivity is formless, shapeless, and otherwise fragmented identifies with her self-reflection and in the



process gains an idealized image of self-unity”(193). This concept is consistent with the mirror stage in which the child imagines itself as a coherent and self-governing unit. In this stage, as a narcissistic stage, “Ideal-I” or “ideal ego” forms (Maleki and Sadjadi 136). As an infant begins to distinguish its body as a separate unit from the world and its mother, the feeling of alienation emerges. The feelings of loss and shortage are shaped in the infant with the impossibility of fulfillment of its demand. Richard J. Lane has defined this notion in *Fifty Key Literary Theorists* as the phase in which “a pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal infant, whose subjectivity is formless, shapeless, and otherwise fragmented identifies with her self-reflection and in the process gains an idealized image of self-unity” (193).

The Symbolic Order is one of the most influential stages in the process of identity formation. The Symbolic is where the child is introduced to the society, to the Law of the Father, and language. He is made to separate from the mother to become a speaking subject in the realm of the father. Lane also defines the Symbolic Order in his *Fifty Key Literary Theorists* as the time when “the desire for the mother is replaced by the law of the father” (195). Lacan’s concept of the Symbolic Order is formed under the influence of the dominant structuralism thinking like Jakobson and Saussure. In comparison to the Imaginary Order that focuses on images and identifications, in the Symbolic Order, the emphasis is on language. According to Lacan, language forms the unconscious of the subject. The Symbolic Order could be mentioned as the institutions, customs, laws, norms, practices, rituals, rules, traditions, or anything that ties subject to language.

As one of the three orders of Lacanian theories, the Real Order is the one particularly different from the other two orders. Evans Dylan remarks in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* that “the real emerges as that which is outside language and inassimilable to symbolization [...] The real is the impossible because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way”(163-164). The Real could not be expressed in and by language. According to Lacan, it is opposed to the imaginary, which seems to locate it in the realm of being, beyond appearances (85). Hence, the child’s need could not be fulfilled, this demand will stay unfulfilled everlastingly. There is always something left over. While the Symbolic is a status in which there is nothing



but the need which is associated with a search for fulfillment, the Real is not the object that satisfies the need, it is the need itself. The real could not be symbolized and be expressed in and by language. In the Seminar XI, Lacan describes the Real as “the impossible” because it is impossible to imagine, and impossible to attain. This resistance to symbolization gives the Real a traumatic quality.

Lacan provide an illuminating definition of the terms including desire, *jouissance*, name of the father, and *objet petit a* for further elaboration on the subjectivity construction process. Desire is the central term in psychoanalytic studies and especially in the Lacanian viewpoint. Lacan focuses on the unconscious desire which has no way to be known except through articulation via language. However, unlike the need, desire could not be articulated fully. Desire is an unconscious wish which is never satisfied and only transcends to another desire. Lacan affirms that “desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second” (287). It is thus the demand’s remaining which is called desire. Desire is not a link to an object. Rather, it is a link to lack. *Objet petit a* is the reason and the root of desire. It is not a particular object but still it is an object that the subject assumes as his desired object. Sean Homer argues that “the desire of the Other always exceeds or escapes the subject, there nevertheless remains something that the subject can recover and thus sustain ‘him or herself in being, as a desiring subject’” (102). What remains unachievable is the *objet petit a* or the object-cause of desire.

*Jouissance* means ‘pleasure’ or ‘enjoyment’ in French. However, it has legal connotations to property and rights, lost in translation, referring to the right to enjoy. The word has come to be used in psychoanalytic and feminist theories to mean more particularly pleasures associated with sensuous and sexual gratification, or orgasm. As such, it refers to a fulfillment that is merely temporary, and that must therefore always be sought anew (Rabate 59). The recurrent required feeling of completion in the subject’s unconscious through life, lasting permanently, could be regarded to this Lacanian problematic concept.

As a socially constructed subject, the human subject is dependent on communication. In this regard, the very first social communication of a child happens through the family. As Hosseini and Rajabi note, “the name of the father, through



language, provides a structure for the subjectivity construction of the child” (80). The name of the father introduces the child into the world of empty references, into the “Symbolic Order” which Lacan also calls “the law.” The child learns that our desires and needs are not always fulfilled right away, and that “desire” can be for infinitely removed objects. (Schmitz 203)

#### 4. Jasper’s Survival in *A Fraction of the Whole*

##### 4.1. Jasper’s Struggle: the Absence of the Imaginary Order

From the very beginning of the story, it could be observed that the past has a great effect on the characters. They are deeply related to the past as if it is past which is living the present. In other words, it is a kind of reincarnation which is taking place. Everything appears familiar and experienced. Essentially, the whole plot portrays the parental relationship that could be studied from a Lacanian critical perspective. The novel revolves around two main characters, namely Martin and his son, Jasper. Although their relations are based on loving and care, this relationship is filled with conflicts and troubles that signify the problematic role of the father within the Symbolic Order. Jasper’s main obsession is to avoid to be the same as his father. Likewise, he endeavors through the story to detach himself from his father. In fact, this refers to the domination of the father in the Symbolic aspect. Consequently, Jasper mentions that

I have lost my freedom, and found myself in this strange prison, where the trickiest adjustment, other than getting used to not having anything in my pockets and being treated like a dog that pissed in a sacred temple, is the boredom. I can handle the enthusiastic brutality of the guards, the wasted erections, even the suffocating heat. (Toltz 5)

The issue that Jasper describes here is the Symbolic aspect of life in which there is no freedom. Jasper thinks that the Symbolic is cruel and suffocating. The reason denotes rules and laws. Jasper is limited by language and the structure of the symbolic law that influence the freedom he used to have in the Imaginary Order. This explanation illustrates the significance of linguistic roles in a social context and upon learning that he is like a captive who elves into depression through language. Language signifies the domination of social rules and the departure from the Imaginary Order. Since throughout the Imaginary Order Jasper does not need



language to satisfy his needs and it is his mother's responsibility to do so, Jasper's feeling of satisfaction is accessible. However, once he picks up language, it would be the end of his happiness and delight since there would be no one to satisfy Jasper's needs. Such a bond with his past and the role of language and words are so strong for him that Jasper turns out to be a new person and obtains a new identity.

In such a situation, past and present merge and the boundary between them disappears. Jasper experiences this condition, and he feels the boundary between different stages of his life that would vanish. Regarding what Julian Wolfreys mentions in *Introducing Literary Theories*, it could be realized that Jasper's recognition of himself "is a misrecognition of an image, not a fact" (111). Jasper is floating among the images that he has acquired from himself in this boundary as Lacan claims that "the Mirror Stage initiates what he calls the Imaginary Order, by which he means the world of images. This is not the world of the imagination, but a world of perception" (27).

#### 4.2. Jasper's Desire: Martin or Terry Dean?

Martin always wants to be the center of Jasper's life, and he manages to dominate it. Hence, he dismisses Jasper from different educational classes. Martin's choice of system signifies the fact that he does not want Jasper's unity with his mother. It has been said that "the imaginary is the figure for a representation of the notions of freedom, freedom of choice, happiness, hope, belief in a better future" (Leupin 15). In other words, for Jasper who is associated with the level of the Imaginary Order, there is no attachment to the law of the Symbolic. For this reason, Jasper does not have a fixed idea about his father. He states how his father used to train him through his education. Based on what Lacan mentions due to the Symbolic process, Jasper's subject is always split between a conscious side, an accessible mind, an unconscious side, and a series of drives and forces which remain hidden and inaccessible.

Jasper talks about a character who thought to be a hero during his childhood. Terry Dean was a famous Australian robber with whom children desire to identify. In fact, throughout the Symbolic stage of their life, children desire to be like him during their games. Hence, the children could be influenced by him. Although Jasper's last name is Dean, he does not know who Terry Dean is. It is Martin who later tells Jasper





about his uncle. Jasper reacts surprisingly: “My what? My uncle? I have an uncle?” I asked, incredulous. “And he’s a famous bank robber?” “Was. He’s dead,” Dad said, before adding, “He was my brother” (Toltz 25). Jasper knows that there has been something missing from him; however, he does not know what that object is. When Martin says that it was his uncle, he wonders if Terry would be the lost object of desire or Jasper. Lacan argues that “the unconscious is as much a product of signifying systems, and indeed is itself as much a signifying system, as the conscious mind” (590). This means that language and the words imposed on the people have great effects on shaping their subjectivity.

Having read this novel, it could be understood that the characters are all affected by the role of language and their unconscious shapes throughout language which is not the Real:

First I asked my classmates, but I received answers that differed from each other so wildly, I just had to discount them all. Then I examined the measly collection of family photographs that I had seen only fleetingly before, the ones that lay in the green shoebox stuffed into the hall closet... I made photocopies and pasted them to the walls of my bedroom, and at night I fantasized that I was my uncle, the fiercest criminal ever to hide a body in the soil and wait for it to grow. (Toltz 26-27)

In fact, the fantasy and identification that he feels refer to the sense of creativity within Jasper’s mentality. The Imaginary Order is the main reason of creativity. Jasper’s concept of the surrounding world is a different one. As Cock, Rehn, and Berry mention, “the imaginary now has to be considered as a potential source of creativity and freedom” (155). This indicates Jasper’s desire for returning to the imaginary order, and for living beyond the limitations caused by his father and living in the Symbolic Order. He looks for an image to reconnect and identify his freedom in the imaginary order.

Since in the mirror stage the subject sees his reflection in the mirror and identifies with it, Jasper is obsessed with the image of his uncle. This form of identification refers to “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image” (*Ecrits* 76). When Jasper identifies himself with his uncle, he assumes the characteristics of his uncle, and in his imagination transforms to be Terry Dean that he honors. For Jasper, this results to have a better understanding of the self. Consequently, Terry Dean is the little other for Jasper’s identification. He is the



desired object that comes from the reflection of the ego. In Lacan's words, the little other is "one's fellow man, he who is given in the relationship that is half rooted in the naturalness of the mirror stage" (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book III* 229). At school, Jasper uses the image of his uncle to enhance his popularity because the image of Terry gives him power and confidence through the Symbolic Order.

#### 4.3. The Power of Language: Jasper's Subjection to the Symbolic Order

Jasper points out the significance of words as his father tells the story of his brother. When his father finishes talking, Jasper feels as though he has traveled through his father's mind and come out "somehow diminished, just slightly less sure of my identity than when I went in. I think, to do justice to his unstoppable monologue, it'd be better if you heard it in his own words—the words he bequeathed me which have become my own, the words I've never forgotten" (Toltz 34). Jasper is under the influence of the effects of words used by his father, Martin. In the story Martin narrates too much, and the role of language is so powerful that Jasper admits its effect on his mind. Martin's words are signifiers that can shape Jasper's identity through manipulation. Jasper remembers the words and believes that listening to them has been like a journey into his father's mentality.

As the father and the element of domination in the Symbolic Order, Martin must influence Jasper's unconscious and alter the love of an object for him. Once after Martin's story telling regarding his own childhood, Jasper's feeling of anxiety initiates with regard to the truth of Martin's story. Jasper is struggling to believe the language of the Symbolic Order used by his father. Jasper states that

After all, the memory may be the only thing on earth we can truly manipulate to serve us, so we don't have to look back at ourselves in the receding past and think, what an asshole! But Dad was not one to airbrush his memories. He liked to preserve everything in its natural state, from his hair to his past. That's how I knew every word he said was true, and why I still feel sick when I remember the shocking revelation that came after this one, the crazy bombshell about the most important woman who was never in my life: my mother. (Toltz 309-310)

Throughout the act of narrating the story, Jasper is sent back to the mirror stage to find the real picture and image to identify his subjectivity. The Mirror Stage is associated with a narcissistic relationship that could be made with bodily parts. Throughout this process, Jasper's ego might be shaped. As a matter of fact, he



attempts to process the life of his father and locate himself within that picture. However, it is not satisfying for Jasper to identify his image with his father, as Tyson points out that “in entering the symbolic order — the world of language — we’re entering a world of loss and lack” (30).

The memories that Jasper’s father transmits to his son signify the significance of the past. Like his father, Jasper cannot deny the role of his mother and the Imaginary Order. Although Martin is trying to fix his role as the element of domination, Jasper still seeks an image of love and his own other. Likewise, it is not surprising that according to Lacan, the Symbolic Order marks the replacement of the mother with the Name-of-the Father. For it is through language that Jasper might be socially programmed and learn the rules and prohibitions of his society, those rules and prohibitions were and still are authored “by the Father, that is, by men in authority past and present” (Tyson 31). As it has been emphasized, this order is represented through lack and regret.

#### 4.4. Jasper’s the Real Order

There are different moments in Jasper’s life when he feels the Real Order. The Lacanian concept of the real is certainly a difficult notion because it is beyond the comprehension of meaning. The real order’s meaning lies almost outside the world created by ideologies, which the societies generally employ in order to explain the notion of existence. According to Tyson, one way to think of the Real is that which is beyond all meaning-making systems, that which lie outside the world created by the ideologies society used to explain the existence” (32). This order is the uninterrupted dimension of existence as Jasper’s words imply; an existence without signifying or meaning-making systems. This experience for Jasper may occur just for a while to feel that there is no purpose or meaning in life. The rules that govern the society are mistakes or the mere results of chance. Jasper recalls that

We were cut off and had only the natural sounds of the bush to placate, stimulate, and terrify us. The air here was different, and I surprised myself: I loved the quiet (as opposed to Dad, who developed the habit of leaving the radio on all the time). For the first time, I felt the truth that the sky begins a quarter of an inch from the ground. In the mornings the bush smelled like the best underarm deodorant you ever smelled, and I quickly got used to the mysterious movements of the trees, which heaved rhythmically as a man chloroformed. (Toltz 483)



Jasper describes a realm which is different from what he has been through. The place and the moment that he refers to as the land of meaninglessness is free from ideologies and limitations of the Symbolic Order. For Jasper, the Real is impossible which occurs beyond the entire rules of signification. This is the place where his fantasies and everything originates from. Jasper can experience the mystery of this order in which he knows that there is something but he does not know what that thing is and how it functions. It is the traumatic nature of the Real. Here it seems that it is his first encounter with this part of his life.

## 5. Martin's Subjectivity and His Survival in *A Fraction of the Whole*

### 5.1. The Break from the Imaginary Order

Prior to Terry's birth, Martin's life is dominated by illness. It is shocking for him how little he knows about his conditions, and how little he likes to know. Martin recalls the symptoms of his disease that were "violent stomach pains, muscle aches, nausea, dizziness" (Toltz 36). The source of his illness is unclear for doctors and remains unclear forever. He cannot have a true interpretation or understanding of the conditions of his own body, and some people believe that his disease could kill other people. He also adds the doctors had some assumptions regarding his disease but they are not exactly able to decide on the type of his problem.

They tend to interpret it as "muscle abnormality," "disorder of the nervous system," or "euthanasia," that make no sense to him at that time. Martin is suffering from the pain inflicted by "needles and force-fed pills the size and shape of swollen thumbs. I remember that when they took X-rays, the doctors ducked out of the way very quickly as if they'd just set off a firework". This part of Martin's life could be realized and seen metaphorically. His physical problems could be interpreted as signs of being departed from the Imaginary Order and her mother. Martin is in the process of fragmentation (Toltz 36).

There is no gap between a wish and its satisfaction in the Imaginary Order for a child like Martin. This false idea emerges for the first time when Martin sees his image as a disunities image in the mirror and the feeling of unity with his mother vanishes forever. This symbolic looking into the mirror is reminded by Martin himself as he mentions that "with my bare feet trailing behind, my father dragged me into the bathroom to look at myself in a mirror. It was a crushing spectacle" (37).



## 5.2. Martin's Wish for Death in the Real Order

Death forms the psychology of a subject. "In fact, our relationship to death, whether or not we are traumatized by it in childhood, is a principal organizer of our psychological experience" (Tyson 21). This drive is so influential in Martin's psyche that it could be compared to other instincts which help and motivate him to live. Jonathan Lear holds that "Freud now argues for the existence of a distinct primordial drive, which he calls the death drive;" therefore, "the fact that we are driven to repeat indicates 'a drive is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon, under the pressure of external disturbing forces'" (160). As the name suggests, this drive leads people in their deterioration which gives pleasure. Hence, it could be claimed that people enjoy pleasure within themselves.

Realistically, what could be notified in Martin's behavior is the matter of his masochistic behavior. This refers to the fact that the Symbolic Order which is filled with the fragmentation of identity is accompanied by masochistic symptoms that lead the character into the Real Order. Masochism, which is a term originated from death drive "emphasizes the pleasure in pain and cruelty, whereas the terms selected by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, place the pleasure secured in all kinds of humility and submission in the foreground" (25). The subject enjoys being molested sexually and physically.

On the other hand, sadism is the concept which emphasizes pleasure that arises out of molesting other people. Sadism is always accompanied by a feeling of aggression and could be reflected in sexual behaviors. Although these sexual molestations are not precisely seen within Martin's personality, his leading passion towards death and pain signifies the fact that Martin is triggered with death drive in the Real Order. Lacan and Freud share similar ideas regarding the object of love and external forces that influence and shape the desires of a subject. In Lacan's idea, once Martin realizes his separation from his mother, he directs his love towards his body as the 'other'. However, Martin realizes that his body could not satisfy his needs and he gets frustrated by his disabled body. Consequently, his passion for death grows.



### 5.3. Martin's Experience of Coma: A Journey into the Real Order

Martin's experience of the real order could be frequently observed in events of his life. It is known that the impossibility of the Real results in the symbolic order. Martin is stuck in a loop of life and death through the symbolic order, and there is no way out for him. He turns into a traumatic character. Dylan Evans asserts that the Lacanian traumatic real is, "the missed encounter with this real object which presents itself in the form of trauma" (163).

Martin wants to experience the promised *jouissance* which has been unconsciously inserted in his mind in the Imaginary Order. However, he is deprived of pleasure, and the experience of coma refers to the experience of reality. The moment as Martin describes is traumatic: "I didn't die. But I didn't live either. Quite by accident, I took the third option: I slipped into a coma. Bye-bye world, bye-bye consciousness, ye-bye light, too bad death, hello ether". The Real is "a hell of a thing. I was hiding right in between death's open arms and life's folded ones. I was nowhere, absolutely nowhere at all. Honestly, you can't even get to limbo from a coma". In this description, Martin has no idea where he is and what he is doing. Hence, it could not be put into words and any system of signification could not describe it which suggests the Real Order. (Toltz 43)

This is the place of impossible as Martin is engaged with the act of repetition of a traumatic event. Martin is associated with the impossibility of any meanings and signifiers of the Symbolic Realm. Martin is shocked and frightened by this limbo. However, it is filled with other elements that Martin experiences. Fear and profound exultation could not have any articulation in language by Martin as they are located in the realm of the Real. It is known that anything that exceeds language or goes beyond the Symbolic Order is the Real, or as Lacan puts it "the real is the impossible" (*Ecrits* 280) and Martin is in this part of his life.

### 5.4. Martin's Mother: Positioned in the Imaginary or the Symbolic?

Moreover, Martin refers to the sense of unity with his mother as she takes care of Martin. The fact is that there is a direct relationship between mother-child relations, and the existence of both subjects relies on each other. With regard to Lacan's argument, it could be contended that Martin's mother wants to attract his love and become the other through Martin's coma or the Real Order. To do so, Martin's mother



has to equip “herself with an imaginary phallus” (319). Martin’s mother has become his other, and to satisfy her desire, she needs Martin’s need, something which is called the “desire of the mother” (210). Lacan maintains that “his love for her offspring has exactly the same characteristic of pre-established harmony on the primitive plane of need” (210). Consequently, Martin’s feeling for his mother is converted into a positive idea.

Martin recalls his other role once he is in a coma. He informs his son that as he has realized, he was not going to die and might get stuck in this Order forever. Martin hears different voices but the voices gradually diminish until he could just hear one voice, which is his mother’s sound. The other people do not believe in Martin’s well-being, but his mother keeps on reading for him. Since the native language of Martin’s mother is not English, she has never read any English book in her life. Nevertheless, she is able to read a handful of books for Martin at that time. Martin’s mother fills his mind “with words, thoughts, ideas, and sensations, she did as much to her own. It was as though great big trucks filled with words drove up to our heads and dumped their contents directly into our brains” (Toltz 50). Martin’s memory of his mother signifies the fact that his mind and identity are under the direct influence of his mother which stands for Martin’s unity with his mother.

## 6. Findings and Conclusion

Having read *A Fraction of the Whole*, the present research demonstrated that the characters are shaped in parallel lines with what Lacan argues for in his proposed model of identity formation. The characters, Jasper and Martin, are unconsciously deeply influenced deeply by their past. They have a unique bond with their past. Jasper’s father is obsessed with his own past life that he used to have. Hence, his current situation and the identity that he tries to develop depend on this past. Martin feels this closeness to his family and he cannot escape and avoid it, and it always haunts him. The past does not feel pleasant for Martin, and his identity shapes mostly due to his past. The role of language in shaping the identity and unconscious particularly in his character is completely obvious. Throughout the novel, it is the language that shapes his unconscious in different situations. For him, the words are so powerful that shape his identity.



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