

Zeliha IŞIK* 

THE GAZE AND EGO: A LACANIAN ANALYSIS OF D. H. LAWRENCE'S "THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER"

ABSTRACT

This article examines how the maternal gaze, interpreted through Lacanian psychoanalysis, shapes ego formation and desire in D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner". Focusing on the child's attempt to satisfy the desire of the Other, it argues that this pursuit produces compulsive behavior and self-destruction. Through close reading, the study analyzes the gaze embodied by Hester, whose emotional inconsistency and fixation on wealth deny symbolic affirmation. Paul becomes acutely aware of this lack and attempts to compensate through phantasy, believing that money and luck will secure maternal love. His obsessive betting functions as an effort to align his ego with the desire of the Other and to repair emotional absence through material success. The analysis shows, however, that such alignment is structurally impossible, since the desire of the Other remains unattainable within the symbolic order. Paul's repeated efforts, therefore, trap him in a cycle of repetition, loss, and alienation that culminates in self-destruction. The article contributes to Lawrence scholarship by demonstrating how maternal desire, mediated through the gaze, produces a destructive psychic economy. By foregrounding the gaze as a central Lacanian mechanism, it highlights the value of psychoanalytic theory for understanding childhood subjectivity, desire, and trauma in modernist literature studies.

Keywords: Desire, ego, gaze, phantasy, The Rocking-Horse Winner

BAKIŞ VE EGO: D. H. LAWRENCE'İN "TAHTA ATLA KAZANAN" ÇOCUK ADLI ESERİNİN LACANCI ANALİZİ

ÖZET

Bu makale, Lacancı psikanaliz çerçevesinde yorumlanan anne bakışının D. H. Lawrence'ın "Tahta Atla Kazanan Çocuk" adlı hikâyesinde benlik oluşumunu ve arzuyu nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Çocuğun Büyük Öteki'nin arzusunu tatmin etme çabasına odaklanan çalışma, bu yönelimin kompulsif davranışlara ve öz-yıkıma yol açtığını savunur. Yakın okuma tekniğiyle, anne Hester'de nesneleşen bakış analiz edilir; annenin duygusal tutarsızlığı ve zenginliğe olan saplantısı simgesel onayın eksikliğini üretir. Paul bu eksikliği keskin biçimde hisseder ve para ve şansa sahip olmanın annesinin sevgisini kazanacağına inanır. Hissettiği eksikliği bu fantezi yoluyla telafi etmeye çalışır. Onun takıntılı bahis davranışı, benliğini Büyük Öteki'nin arzusuyla hizalama ve duygusal yoksunluğu maddi başarıyla onarma girişimi olarak işlev görür. Ancak analiz, bu tür bir uyumun yapısal olarak imkânsız olduğunu gösterir; çünkü Büyük Öteki'nin arzusu simgesel düzende her zaman erişilemezdir. Paul'un tekrar eden çabaları onu yineleme, kayıp ve yabancılaşma döngüsüne hapseder ve sonunda özyıkıma sürükler. Makale, anne arzusunun bakış aracılığıyla yıkıcı bir ruhsal ekonomi ürettiğini göstererek Lawrence çalışmalarına katkıda bulunur. Bakışı merkezi bir Lacancı mekanizma olarak öne çıkararak, modern edebiyatta çocukluk öznelliği, arzu ve travmanın anlaşılmasında psikanalitik kuramın önemini vurgular.

Anahtar kelimeler: Arzu, ego, bakış, fantezi, Tahta Atla Kazanan Çocuk

* Karabük University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Western Languages and Literatures, e-mail: isikzeliha1@gmail.com

Introduction

In this article, I explore how the author illustrates the influence of the gaze of the Other on Paul's ego formation, with this gaze being embodied by his mother, Hester, the ordering and structuring authority in the household. Hester's symbolic gaze places Paul in constant tension between lack and desire, playing a pivotal role in shaping his identity within the family dynamic. More specifically, I argue that Hester's unloving gaze is a key determinant in the formation of Paul's Ideal-I, or ego, which leaves him stranded between desire and lack. This tension drives Paul to construct a phantasy as a means of coping with the absence of mirroring and emotional support.

This study prioritizes a deep-tissue analysis of Lawrence's 'The Rocking-Horse Winner' over a broader textual survey, under the premise that depth of interpretation yields greater theoretical insight than variety of sampling. As a singular site of analysis, the text provides a sufficiently complex semiotic structure to fully interrogate Lacanian registers, specifically the mechanics of desire, the constitutive lack, subject formation, and the operation of the Gaze. Through this analysis, I offer a more comprehensive and elucidative interpretation of Paul's ego formation, focusing on the significance of the gaze and mirroring in his development, and its relationship with the Other.

Critical analyses of the story are primarily preoccupied with the dynamics of the relationship between mother and child, offering a range of interpretations from different scholarly angles. For example, Umar Shehzad (2020) analyses the story from an attachment perspective and asserts that "the story moves between the inner worlds of the mother and the child, which are strongly bonded yet severely inhibited, and thus severed," highlighting the complex and strained nature of the mother-child relationship (p. 31). Demetria DeLia (2016) offers a more nuanced insight into the family dynamic and core issue than Shehzad, characterizing Paul as "a parentified child who fulfills the emotional needs of the parent" (p. 133).

The scholarship on "The Rocking-Horse Winner" predominantly revolves around the mother-child relationship in relation to desire, approaching the subject from diverse angles. While the story remains a staple of literary analysis, it has rarely been examined from a Lacanian perspective, with the notable exception of Ben Stoltzfus's study in his book *Lacan and Literature: Purloined Pretexts* (1996). Stoltzfus builds upon the interpretations of W.D. Snodgrass, who argues that "the rocking horse stands for the child's imitation of the sex act" (1963, p. 121), and Janice Hubbard Harris, who suggests that the rocking motion symbolizes masturbation (1984, p. 226). Within this framework, Stoltzfus explores the horse as a "symbolic extension of desire" (1996, p. 33), yet he distinguishes his analysis by focusing specifically on the linguistic transformation of "filthy lucre" into "little fucker" as an anagram embedded within the symbolic structure of Lawrence's narrative (1996, p. 39). Because Lacanian readings of the story remain limited to these specific linguistic shifts, my study differentiates itself by moving beyond the existing focus on sexual anagrams. I aim to expand the analytical scope by employing Lacanian concepts, specifically the gaze, desire, lack, phantasy, and the ego, to offer a novel and more comprehensive psychoanalytic interpretation of the text.

Whether interpreted as autobiographical or biographical, D. H. Lawrence's story illuminates the development of a child's ego in relation to an emotionally distant mother's gaze. In this regard, Janice Hubbard Harris argues that "mothers shape their sons into the desirable opposite of their husbands" in D.H. Lawrence's later short stories, such as "The Rocking-Horse Winner," and his

novel, *Sons and Lovers* (Harris, 1984, p. 225). However, I challenge this argument, proposing instead that the story highlights a neglected process of ego development in children, particularly in Paul. On the contrary, Hester neglects to support her son's ego, exhibiting an unemotional, cold attitude towards the child's development.

According to Antonio Quinet, "the pre-existence of a gaze is correlated with the given-to-be-seen of the subject," suggesting that the recognition and visibility of the Subject, or, more specifically, the construction of the Subject's object-image, is contingent on the gaze of the observer, particularly that of the mother (Quinet, 1995, p. 139). Paul is a young boy who lacks the necessary support and validation from his mother, leading him to seek her recognition as a means of constructing his ego. His efforts to be seen by his mother indicate that he is under the effects of the Mirror Stage, where "armor of an alienating identity" is donned and "will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure" (Lacan, 2006, p. 97). The author does not specify Paul's exact age, but his use of a rocking horse and his uncle's remark, "Aren't you growing too big for a rocking horse? You are not a very little boy any longer, you know," suggest that he is approximately five or six years old (Lawrence, 1993, p. 107). In accordance with Lacanian theory, Paul is expected to develop his ego by internalizing the reassurance of his mother's gaze, a process rooted in the Mirror Stage occurring between the ages of six and eighteen months. The form of the "I" established in the mirror stage serves as the "rootstock of secondary identifications," which means the identity formed here provides the foundation for the social identity the child develops later (Lacan, 2006, p. 95). However, when evaluated within the framework of Lacanian gaze theory, Paul is deprived of his mother's gaze and attention, both of which are crucial for identity formation and serve as fundamental sources of validation and affection. His psychological growth and need for approval go unnoticed by his mother, leading him to construct a phantasy as a means of coping with his unmet need for love and recognition.

Through Paul's tragic fate, Lawrence, within the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis, epitomizes a phantasy caused by the lack of love, recognition, and validation, emphasizing the crucial role of the mother's gaze in the development of a child's ego. The importance of this work lies in how a child, denied the warmth of maternal recognition, begins to build their entire identity around a desperate cycle of overachievement and self-sacrifice. When a child isn't truly seen, they often try to fill that void through relentless striving, eventually sacrificing their own well-being to meet an impossible demand.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions: How does the maternal gaze function as a structuring force in Paul's ego formation? In what ways does Paul's phantasy emerge as a response to lack and unmet desire? How does the child's attempt to satisfy the desire of the Other result in compulsive behaviour and self-destruction? The primary objective of this research is to demonstrate that Paul's tragic fate is not merely the result of excessive ambition or familial dysfunction, but the consequence of a failed process of symbolic recognition. By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to a theoretically informed and original reading that deepens our understanding of subject formation, desire, and trauma in Lawrence's modernist fiction.

Theoretical Framework

Lacan reformulates psychoanalysis by developing a set of concepts grounded in Freud's theory. In his approach, the study of the unconscious becomes central. He also places strong

emphasis on the role of language and argues that the psychoanalytic process unfolds through the interplay between language and the unconscious. Rather than Freud's developmental stages of the oral, anal, and genital phases, Lacan introduces the interconnected notions of "need, desire, and demand" (Bailly, 2023, p. 117).

Need refers to basic biological requirements such as nourishment, demand involves the appeal to be satisfied by another, and desire emerges in the gap that remains when need and demand can never be fully reconciled. Lacan associates these three concepts with the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic dimensions of human experience (Bailly, 2023).

The Real is linked to bodily necessity and to a fundamental sense of lack that cannot be articulated in language. The Imaginary concerns images of the self, identification, and illusion. The Symbolic, by contrast, is the domain of language, rules, and social structures. Within this framework, the Symbolic order is decisive, since it governs meaning and positions the subject within a network of linguistic and cultural relations. Desire itself is shaped by this symbolic structure and reflects the subject's submission to shared social codes.

Homer (2005) observes that "for Lacan, our reality consists of symbols and the process of signification; therefore, what we call reality is associated with the symbolic order or 'social reality'" (p. 81). This reality is not a seamless construct because the "Symbolic order is accessed through the experience of lack," which is fundamentally structural (Bailly, 2023, p. 82). Within this framework, the subject is "barred" by the signifier and is thus prevented from ever fully coinciding with itself (Lacan, 2006, p. 487). This inherent division generates a structural lack and a subsequent desire that persists as an effect of the impossibility of full satisfaction.

In Lacan's account of early life, the infant initially exists in a state of deep dependence on the mother. From the infant's perspective, there is no clear boundary between itself and the maternal figure, and the two appear as a unified whole. This phase is defined by the satisfaction of needs such as feeding, comfort, and care, during which the infant does not distinguish between its own needs and the objects that fulfil them. The dissolution of this natural unity begins when the child is introduced into culture, an entry that requires separation from the mother and submission to the Symbolic order.

Lacan distinguishes between the other as a specular counterpart and the big Other as the locus of language, law, and symbolic authority. The big Other represents the field within which speech acquires meaning and from which desire receives its coordinates. At the outset, the mother represents law, language, and rules to the child because "the mother is the first representation of the Other to the child" (Bailly, 2023, p. 80). At first, the child has a "dyadic" relationship with its mother, but after its entrance into the symbolic order, the mother becomes an interpersonal other (Bailly, 2023, p. 80).

The subject emerges through its insertion into this symbolic order and is therefore constituted as "barred" (Lacan, 2006, p.542). This transition introduces a sense of loss and a fundamental alienation known as aphanisis. In this regard, Lacan (1998) refers to this existential lack, remarking that "there is no subject without, somewhere, aphanisis of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established" (p. 221).

Once the child recognizes that it is distinct from the mother, the earlier feeling of completeness disappears. Something irretrievable is experienced as having been lost, and the world structured by language marks the end of this original unity. After this structural shift, the Symbolic

becomes the primary mediator of experience, and any encounter with the Real can only occur through symbolic forms. Consequently, the subject is forever shaped by the quest to fill the void left by the Other, a pursuit that defines the tragic trajectory of Paul in Lawrence's narrative.

Desire is structured around lack and anxiety derived from this lack. That said, "the object cause of desire" is known as *objet petit a* (Fierens, 2025, p. 25). *Objet petit a* is the leftover produced when a subject enters language and symbolic order. *Objet petit a* is elusive, and it cannot be symbolized because it does not have a definite object. However, in order to stabilize or fix an unattainable object of desire, the subject resorts to fantasy, where the subject imagines how enjoyment is obtained or withheld. In this way, "desire and aiming to become fixed in the phantasy" (Fierens, 2025, p. 6).

Vanheule, Hook, and Neill (2019) describe the mirror stage as "a process of identification that is mediated through signifiers offered by the (m)Other" (p. 36). The mirror stage is "the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to it being objectified in the dialectic of identification" (Lacan, 2006, p. 76). This stage belongs to the pre-Oedipal period and marks a crucial moment in the formation of the self. At this point, the image of the "I" emerges within the Imaginary field, where the child's experience remains shaped by a sense of unity with the mother. Central to this process is the maternal gaze, which functions as the child's first point of identification and recognition. As Bailly (2023) emphasises, "the mother's loving gaze is the child's first mirror and crucial to the formation of the infant's sense of identity" (p. 114), and similarly, "The mother's gaze is the child's first mirror; the child's identity or notion of itself as a whole being is first formed in that gaze" (p. 37). In this imaginary relation, the mother appears as an interpersonal other, a specular counterpart whose gaze supports the child's emerging sense of wholeness. Yet the gaze also situates the child as object for the Other, exposing the instability of imaginary unity and foreshadowing the emergence of lack that will structure desire.

However, this relation shifts once the child perceives that the mother is not complete but structured by lack. At this point, the mother occupies the position of the Big Other, the locus of desire whose absence cannot be fully resolved. In this regard, Owens & Almqvist elucidate the relation between gaze and desire as follows:

Desire is what is unknown in the Other and ourselves, and this unknown is what gives the enigmatic character to the gaze or the voice of another. It is that which distorts the fabric of reality, that aspect of ourselves that forms a crack in the contours of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. (2019, p. 109)

Confronted with this perceived lack, the child develops a phantasy in which it strives to become the signifier of the mother's desire and thereby fill her lack. In this regard, Bailly (2023) explains that "the idea (signified) of the object of the mother's desire is an object that can fill 'the lack in the other'" (p. 67).

Within *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, Paul's fantasy takes the form of becoming lucky and wealthy, a position through which he imagines he can secure his mother's recognition and restore her sense of completeness. His imaginary identification as the "lucky" child depends on the maternal gaze, which initially functions as a mirror sustaining his ego formation. Yet the same gaze also positions him as an object within the field of the Big Other's desire, exposing the gap between his constructed self-image and the mother's persistent dissatisfaction. Paul's compulsive pursuit of luck can therefore be understood as an attempt to reconcile these two registers: he seeks

confirmation within the imaginary relation to the small other while simultaneously responding to the enigmatic demand of the Big Other. The impossibility of occupying the position of the object that would finally satisfy the mother's lack ultimately destabilises his identity and drives the repetitive and destructive dynamics that structure his trajectory in the narrative.

Paul experiences *jouissance* through his compulsive rocking of the horse and his obsessive pursuit of money to satisfy his mother. This repetitive activity exceeds the register of pleasure and instead produces an excessive enjoyment that borders on self-destruction. *Jouissance*, in Lacanian terms, is an enjoyment that surpasses the pleasure principle and even "opens onto [the question of] the death drive tied to drives," thereby sustaining desire rather than resolving it (Lacan, 2006, p. 68). Paul's frantic rocking thus functions not as a means of achieving satisfaction, but as a compulsive attempt to access this excessive enjoyment while simultaneously confronting lack and anxiety. Similarly, Bailly (2023) defines *jouissance* as distinct from pleasure, arguing that while pleasure reduces tension and responds to need, *jouissance* constitutes an "unjustifiable condition" from which desire derives its persistence (pp. 98–99). Paul's actions, therefore, illustrate how *jouissance* fuels desire and repetition, ultimately propelling him toward exhaustion and death.

Freud had described this lack in terms of penis absence, and within this dynamic, the infant may imagine that it can complete what the mother lacks. Lacan captures this relation by suggesting that because the mother's desire is structured around the phallus, which means the symbolic signifier of the ultimate object of desire and of lack in the Other, the child attempts to position itself as the phallus "functioning as the signifier of a lack" in order to satisfy her desire (Owens & Almqvist, 2019, p. xxx). From this perspective, desire is never purely individual but is always bound up with the desire of the Other.

D. H. Lawrence and Lacanian Psychoanalysis

D.H. Lawrence is renowned for his distinctive exploration of human emotion, offering "psychologically powerful accounts of individuals in England," and their interpersonal dynamics while examining the emotional and spiritual dimensions that shape human experience (Hughes, 1993, p. 213). His deep understanding of human psychology allows him to portray the motivations behind individuals' actions, whether drawn from his own repressed emotions and attachment style or inspired by the personal experiences of those around him. In this regard, Rosemary Reeves Davies notes that Lawrence had a "habit of making identifiable use of his friends and acquaintances in his novels and short stories" (Davies, 1983, p. 121).

Many critics consider his works to be autobiographical, particularly in their depiction of familial relationships. For instance, "The Rocking-Horse Winner", widely regarded as one of Lawrence's finest short stories, incorporates "several complementary levels of reference: social, familial, psychological" (Harris, 1984, p. 225). Some argue that "The Rocking-Horse Winner" reflects Lawrence's own bond with his mother, emphasizing her dominance and his father's near absence (Koban, 1978; Harris, 1984; Grice, 2024). Harris (1984) links explicitly the story's portrayal of a son's dependence on his mother to Lawrence's own connection with his "young, British, dissatisfied" mother (p. 251). Lawrence's father, a coal miner renowned for his alcoholism, also had a poor relationship with his son, which is comparable to Paul's ineffective father in the story (Worthen, 1991; Schwartzman, 2011; Ayvaz, 2016).

On the other hand, it is possible that the story was also influenced by the real-life experiences of Lawrence's friend, Lady Cynthia. Lady Cynthia was described as emotionally detached and

unable to express her love for her autistic child, whom she eventually lost. Drawing on both his personal experiences and those of his acquaintances, Lawrence creates a fictional depiction of a dysfunctional family. He thus reveals the psychological and emotional development of the child hero, Paul, and shows how his development is affected in the family (Davies, 1983; Harris, 1984; Schwartzman, 2011; Ayvaz, 2016). This depiction highlights a broad scholarly consensus that, at its psychological core, the story primarily explores the mother-child relationship. Accordingly, it has been widely analyzed through the perspective of the Oedipus complex and attachment theory.

The Function of the Gaze and Mirror Stage in the Creation of Paul's Phantasy

D. H. Lawrence's short story, "The Rocking-Horse Winner," opens with a strong emphasis on the emotional coldness of the mother, Hester, and the impermanent and "[un]loving gaze" she exchanges with her children (Bailly, 2023, p. 38). The narrative follows Paul, a young boy, as he grapples with his mother's insatiable desire for wealth and her preoccupation with the family's ongoing financial instability. Hester believes she is cursed with bad luck and attributes her unhappiness to her financial circumstances. This belief leads Hester to distance herself from her children emotionally and to express dissatisfaction with life continually.

As a child, Paul needs his mother's "loving gaze" to help him feel secure in his ego (Bailly, 2023, p. 38). However, he is deprived of this reassurance due to his mother's emotional barrenness. Paul recognizes that his mother's primary desire is to be wealthy, which she equates with being lucky. Because of this, Paul comes to feel, without fully realizing it, that his mother's life will only be complete if he can somehow obtain money. To cope with this pressure, he escapes into a fantasy in which he is naturally lucky and wealthy, persuading himself that he can predict the winners of horse races. In doing so, he seeks to fulfill Hester's desire for wealth, drawing her gaze to him and allowing him to be seen, recognized, and validated. This validation, in turn, symbolizes his ability to find a place in the symbolic order of Britain.

In an effort to gain his mother's attention and affection, Paul discovers that he can predict the outcomes of horse races by intensely riding his rocking-horse. To fulfill his mother's desire for financial independence, he secretly places bets on the horses. Paul harbors a profound ambition to acquire the luck or wealth that his mother holds in high regard. As Paul's success grows, so does his determination to please his mother. However, his relentless pursuit takes a toll on him, leaving him emotionally and physically drained. Ultimately, Paul's final desperate attempt to secure a large sum of money for his mother results in his tragic death. Paul ultimately earns eighty thousand pounds, but he succumbs to illness and collapses following his last, intense ride on the rocking horse; he is transported to his room in a critical state. His mother, Hester, stays at his side. As Hester cradles Paul on his deathbed, Paul, in a state of delirium, fervently and repeatedly solicits his mother's validation by asking, "Do you think I am lucky, mother?" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 122). Despite all his efforts, Paul is unable to secure his mother's recognition or become the son she desires, as her true longing is for wealth rather than affection. Paul's relentless pursuit of luck and fortune ultimately leads to his death.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the formation of the ego begins with the mirror stage and is contingent on the gaze of the Other, as the individual internalizes external perspectives to construct a coherent self-image. Prior to symbolic differentiation, the mother functions as the infant's primary other while simultaneously representing the Other. In this respect, Lionel Bailly states that "the gaze of the mother is the first mirror in which the child is faced with the issue of its image,

that is, what the mother sees" (Bailly, 2023, p. 37). Hester's gaze conveys to Paul a profound sense of burden and worthlessness. At the story's outset, Lawrence presents Hester, her children, and their connections through their mutual gazes. Hester is portrayed as a beautiful but unlucky woman who "married for love, and love turned to dust" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). Hester has three children who, as stated, "had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). Her inability to love them is conveyed through the silent exchanges of gaze between Hester and her children. Paul and his siblings perceive the emotional coldness in their mother's eyes, recognizing her distant and unloving demeanour. Even before the conception of the objectified self in the Mirror Stage, "the child knows that its mother sees something when she looks at it; it knows of itself as the recipient of smiling affection or angry irritability" by the function of gaze (Bailly, 2023, p. 37). Paul is therefore aware that he and his siblings are recipients of their mother's unloving gaze. Paul is therefore aware that he and his siblings are worthless in his mother's eyes, even if Hester does not explicitly tell him that he is "thrust upon her" and that he is a complete burden to her (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). That is why the children "looked at her coldly," reflecting their awareness of her detachment (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). As a result of this mutual, but silent, communication through gaze, Hester deliberately avoids direct eye contact to conceal her lack of maternal affection. When her children look at her, she feels an urgent need to mask her incapability to love, as indicated by the statement, "hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103).

Paul and other children feel the lack of love and nonrecognition in their mother's eyes. They know that "at the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). The author refers to the gaze as the source of information of the children, and he says, "they read it in each other's eyes" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). Hester's discomfort with her children's presence and their scrutinizing gaze, along with her efforts to conceal her emotional detachment, suggest that she conveys this reality to them through her own gaze rather than through verbal expression. At the same time, she recognizes their ability to communicate nonverbally, suggesting a silent mutual understanding.

Through their mother's gaze, the children not only perceive her lack of interest, affection, and love toward them but also come to recognize Hester's anxiety and unfulfilled desires. Hester's desires and demands permeate the household, and in the absence of her desired object, her anxiety takes hold, as she is the bearer of the gaze that structures and orders the family's dynamics. This is exemplified in how the children perceive their mother's desires and anxiety through the shared gaze:

...the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: There must be more money! There must be more money! The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud...They would look into each other's eyes to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. "There must be more money! There must be more money!" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 104)

Since Hester is the bearer of the gaze in the house, as she is still the representative of the Other for the young boys, she imposes what is desirable and what is not. Hester's desire for money becomes the desire of everyone in the household, and the knowledge that money/wealth is valuable and desirable is conveyed through her gaze. That is because Hester's presence serves as a symbolic gaze within the family, providing the source of meaning and worth for both individuals and objects. In contrast to Hester's dominant role in the household, her husband is portrayed as ineffective and passive. Hester "bitterly" labels him as "very unlucky," attributing his perceived misfortune to his

financial inadequacy (Lawrence, 1993, p. 105). Paul longs for his mother's gaze, not merely as an act of looking but as a means of recognition and validation because he goes through the mirror stage in which he forms his ideal-I, or ideal ego. Paul's self-perception and ego formation are profoundly shaped by his mother's unloving and indifferent gaze. In response, he experiences a shift in the family dynamic, moving from a state of "depressed tension to greater intimacy and a striving for acceptance" from Hester (Schwartzman, 2011, p. 177). In the absence of maternal recognition, Paul continuously strives toward an unattainable ideal self, constructing the illusion that fulfilling the desire of his mother will render him a worthy son in his mother's eyes.

He perceives that his mother's desire and attention are directed toward wealth, which she equates with luck. When Paul questions their inability to afford a car, Hester describes them as "the poor members of the family" and attributes their financial difficulties to her husband, stating, "It's because your father has no luck" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 105). Paul further inquires, "What is luck?" to which Hester responds that it is "what causes you to have money" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 105). That said, Hester's gaze has a twofold effect on Paul. First, it has a defining and structuring impact on him, as she embodies the figure of the Other, the representative of the symbolic order within the household. Occupying a paternal role providing "the name of what the mother wants that goes beyond the child and the name given by [a signifier/a figure] to what the mother is lacking," Hester functions as the agent of law and social structure, establishing the categories of value and meaning within the household (Fink, 2007, p. 266). That is, as the primary authority figure, she communicates to Paul that her attention, desire, and anxiety revolve entirely around wealth, which she equates with luck. Consequently, she instills in Paul the notion that material wealth constitutes the ultimate object of desire, shaping his own desires and anxieties in alignment with Hester's. Paul observes that "there was always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money!" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). Anxiety is intrinsically linked to desire, as the absence or unattainability of a desired object generates anxiety. As a result, in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms, Hester's anxiety clearly reflects her experience of lack and the unattainability of her *objet petit a*, the elusive object of her desire. Thus, Hester's anxiety about "money" or "prospects" being materialized is interpreted by Paul as an expression of her desire for these very things (Lawrence, 1993, p. 103). In this way, as a representative of the Other, a symbolic gaze within the household, Hester inscribes material wealth as the central focus of her gaze and desire, placing it on Paul.

Second, her gaze produces a decentering effect, through which Paul is "reduced to a mere object—subjected to the process of objectification" (Banerjee, 2021, p. 8). In this sense, Paul becomes an object of Hester's experience; what she sees in him and how she regards him become sources of fascination and concern for Paul. As a result, Hester's desire and anxiety, particularly her fixation on wealth and luck, are transferred to Paul, shaping his sense of self and fuelling his relentless pursuit of financial success to secure her recognition and affection.

As a result, through Hester's words and gaze, Paul internalizes the notion that poverty and the absence of material wealth are undesirable and degrading conditions. In contrast, being "lucky," which she associates with financial success, represents a virtuous and esteemed quality that ensures her recognition and affection (Lawrence, 1993, p. 122). In this way, Hester's paternal function "that brings the symbolic Other into existence" mediates Paul's integration into the symbolic order, inscribing luck and wealth as the primary objects of desire (Fink, 2007, p. 257). Furthermore, by signaling that her gaze is fixed on wealth and luck, qualities she claims they lack, Hester positions her husband and Paul within an undesirable and deficient subject position. From

this, Paul derives the meaning that if he lacks money, he is not lucky, and consequently, he is unworthy of his mother's recognition and affection.

The Phantasy of Paul

Hester's unloving and distant gaze serves as the foundation for Paul's development of his image-self, or ego, which begins to take shape during the Mirror Stage, between 18 months and 6 years of age. For healthy identity formation and psychological growth, Paul requires his mother's consistent and affirming gaze. In this regard, Naess argues that "there are no completely separable objects, therefore no separable ego or medium or organism... Within such a field, any concrete content can only be related one-to-one to an indivisible structure, a constellation of factors" (Naess, 2001, p. 57, as cited in Ben Moussa, 2016, p. 36). However, Hester fails to function as a reflective mirror that validates and reinforces a positive image of him. Hester's inability to provide recognition deprives Paul of the foundational affirmation necessary for his sense of self.

As Paul's ego develops, he seeks to attach desirable attributes to his objectified self. Since his mother, Hester, dictates what is valued and what is devalued within the symbolic order, Paul structures his ego in accordance with the qualities Hester defines as positive, such as being "superior" and "lucky" (Lawrence, 1993, pp. 103–105). In Lacanian theory, "ego is what a person says of him/herself" (Bailly, 2023, p. 35). In this context, Paul explicitly tells his mother, 'I am a lucky person,' expecting acknowledgment and validation through her gaze (Lawrence, 1993, p. 106). However, Hester's response is marked by indifference: "She did not believe him; or rather, she paid no attention to his assertion. This angered him somewhere and made him want to compel her attention" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 106). In other words, Hester fails to serve as Paul's first mirror, leaving him with an unmet desire for recognition and compelling him to seek validation through alternative means.

Lionell Bailly explains that "as the child's language develops, it begins to attach ideas to the objectified self, which is to become the ego or 'le moi': the ideas it attaches are often produced by a denial of reality, denigration or wishful thinking" (Bailly, 2023, p. 36). For Paul, the notion of being lucky emerges as a response to the denigration he experiences when his mother fails to affirm or acknowledge his claim of luck. In rejecting his assertion, Hester implicitly positions Paul as unlucky. Through this experience, Paul directly confronts the reality of Hester's indifference and emotional neglect. He understands that, in her view, unlucky individuals are unworthy and undeserving of her recognition or the "steady and loving gaze" that would help him construct a positive self-image (Bailly, 2023, p. 38).

In response to Hester's disbelief and indifference, rather than succumbing to feelings of worthlessness and passivity, Paul unconsciously retreats into a phantasy in which he constructs his Ideal-I or ego as a lucky and wealthy boy. When recognition and validation are lacking or distorted, the child may embrace an unattainable Ideal ego. Regarding the changing nature of the ego, Ed Jewinski (1989) highlights that "the old stable ego is gone, for Lawrence and Lacan: individuality is seen as a fluctuating process, as a tension, as an active creation and recreation, not a static state" (p. 23). This phantasy serves as a narrative construction aimed at reconciling the tension between Hester's gaze, which fails to recognize him, and his desire to be acknowledged and loved. Paul unconsciously assumes that by attaining luck or wealth, which appears to capture his mother's attention, he can secure Hester's loving gaze. Thus, he formulates a phantasy of being lucky as a

means of fulfilling this unconscious desire. In line with the cause of Paul's phantasy, Bruce Fink explains the function of phantasy as a defense mechanism in response to the Other's desires:

Discussion of all those things the analyst spent so many sessions encouraging (dreams, fantasies, daydreams, slips, sex, mom, dad, family) may become rote, automatic, and unproductive, serving as a defence mobilized to deal with the Other's desire: "If I give the Other what he or she is demanding, maybe I'll be able to hold onto my desire and the little pleasure I still manage to derive from it" (Fink, 1999, p. 57).

In Paul's case, he internalizes luck as a defining attribute of his ego, attaching his sense of self to an objectified image shaped by his mother's desires. He wants to be lucky because it aligns with the desire of the Other, namely Hester. Paul seeks to be recognized as lucky by attaining wealth, unconsciously believing that this designation will not only make him desirable and the focus of his mother's attention but also solidify his worthiness in her gaze. His efforts to accumulate wealth can be understood through the functioning of phantasy, which operates as a protective mechanism against the anxiety of failing to meet Hester's desires. Without this defense, he would be confronted with a profound sense of inadequacy and trauma, ultimately threatening the coherence and integrity of his sense of self.

Paul's ultimate effort is to secure his mother's gaze, as it plays a crucial role in his ego formation due to its structural significance. The gaze is not merely about seeing but about being seen, shaping how Paul perceives his objectified self. This is why Hester's gaze holds a central place in Paul's phantasy. His very sense of self hinges on whether his mother acknowledges him or ignores him. Lacan's theory illuminates the connection between the gaze and Paul's phantasy by stating that "in the scopic relation, the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the gaze. It is a privilege and also that by which the subject for so long has been misunderstood as being in its dependence derives from its very structure" (Lacan, 1998, p. 83).

Paul experiences a fundamental lack, a concept central to subject formation. He realizes that his mother equates wealth with luck and admires those who possess financial success. In response, he constructs a phantasy in which acquiring wealth will transform him into the "lucky" figure his mother admires, allowing him to position himself as the object of her desire (Lawrence, 1993, p. 106). Through this phantasy, Paul seeks not only to attain financial success but to become the very embodiment of his mother's desire, ensuring that he remains the focus of Hester's gaze. Paul's actions reflect this attempt to form his ego through her recognition, equating his perceived fortune with his value and existence within the symbolic order.

As the Other, Hester functions as a representative of the symbolic order within the household, where her desire operates as a structuring force that mediates subjectivity, language, and desire. In this context, being seen by Hester's gaze signifies being acknowledged, recognized, and accepted within the symbolic order. Conversely, not being seen or recognized by the Other equates to being nothing, ceasing to exist within the symbolic order—an experience that constitutes an unbearable trauma. Paul's pursuit of luck and wealth is therefore a desperate attempt to establish his position within the symbolic order by attaining Hester's gaze and positioning himself as the object of his mother's desire. In this regard, Stoltzfus states, "winning the money which, in effect, is winning the mummy. Whereas the father is unlucky, the son, by winning, proves to himself and to his mother that he is lucky" (Stoltzfus, 1996, p. 42).

Paul "situates himself as determined by the phantasy" and is compelled to ride his rocking horse in a frenzied manner, believing it will enable him to predict the winning horses at the races (Lacan, 1998, p. 185). Paul believes that "the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So, he would mount again and start on his furious ride" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 107). Initially, Paul wins five thousand pounds, and with his uncle's assistance, he arranges for the money to be paid in five installments, ensuring that his mother receives one thousand pounds each year on her birthday.

Hester learns of the money through a letter from her lawyer. In Lacanian terms, this moment can be understood as Paul's *jouissance*, which "is a form of enjoyment that includes parental injunctions even as it contravenes them, that it is a socialized form of enjoyment, an enjoyment subject to the symbolic order" (Fink, 2016, p. 28). He closely observes his mother's face as she reads the letter, seeking to capture the loving and approving gaze that constitutes his phantasy. However, as she reads, "her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then a cold, determined look came on her mouth", revealing a reaction that disrupts Paul's anticipated fulfillment of desire (Lawrence, 1993, p. 116). In contrast, Hester demands the entire five thousand pounds to be paid in a single sum, intensifying Paul's awareness of his mother's insatiable hunger for money. The author captures Hester's unyielding desire for wealth with the following description: "And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of mimosa and almond blossom, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy: 'There must be more money! Oh-h-h; there must be more money. Oh, now, now-w! Now-w-w – there must be more money! – more than ever! More than ever!'" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 117).

Hester's desire for more money exacerbates Paul's sense of lack and reinforces his pursuit of wealth, positioning him within a perpetual cycle of phantasy that he cannot escape. Paul continues to ride the rocking horse with increasing intensity, believing that this action will enable him to predict the names of the winning racehorses.

Paul's final prediction secures him £80,000, yet his obsessive attempts to become the object of his mother's gaze through frantic rocking horse rides lead to his physical and psychological collapse. When Hester discovers him, he remains unconscious, suffering from "some brain-fever" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 121). As he lies on his deathbed, he repeatedly utters the name of the winning horse, "Malabar" (Lawrence, 1993, p. 120). Upon receiving confirmation from the gardener, Bassett, that "Malabar came in first all right, a clean win," Paul turns to his mother and desperately asks whether he is lucky, seeking validation and love in her eyes (Lawrence, 1993, p. 122). In his final moments, Paul strives to be seen as lucky by his mother, asking, "Did I say Malabar, mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I'm lucky, mother? I knew Malabar, didn't I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don't you, mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn't I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I'm sure..." (Lawrence, 1993, p. 122).

Despite Paul's efforts, his winnings fail to fulfill his mother's desires, rendering his relentless pursuit of becoming the object of her gaze futile. As he lies on his deathbed, his final words are, "Mother, did I ever tell you? "I am lucky" serves as his last desperate plea for recognition and validation (Lawrence, 1993, p. 122). Hester responds, "No, you never did," indicating that Paul ultimately fails to be seen, recognized, or validated by his mother (Lawrence, 1993, p. 122). Hester's reaction in the moments preceding Paul's death underscores the futility of his efforts, highlighting the impossibility of fulfilling the fundamental lack that drives his desire. Paul

constructs his entire life around the fundamental need to be seen by his mother, which, in Lacanian terms, is essential for ego formation. His existence remains a continuous attempt to compensate for this lack. However, just as Hester fails to satisfy her insatiable desire for wealth, Paul is unable to fulfil his own sense of lack, as his need for visibility, recognition, and validation remains unmet, ultimately leading to his death.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the character of Paul and the phantasy he constructs in the absence of his mother's steady and loving gaze. The Lacanian theory of gaze and the concept of phantasy offer critical insight into the underlying motivations behind Paul's actions and his relationship with his mother. I conclude that during his ego formation in the Mirror Stage, Paul seeks recognition, approval, and validation from Hester, the Other, to consolidate his ideal self-image and secure a place in the symbolic order. However, Hester's cold, indifferent gaze exposes Paul to the threat of an overwhelming lack: his failure to be recognized and accepted by the Other. In response, Paul develops a defense mechanism in the form of a phantasy of being lucky, which ultimately comes to signify being seen, loved, and acknowledged by his mother. To cope with the sense of lack caused by his mother's neglect, Paul unconsciously structures his desires through Hester's fixation on material wealth, equating luck with financial success. For Paul, the phantasy of being lucky functions as a mediator between the desires of the Other, namely Hester, and his own longing for her gaze, which signifies recognition, acceptance, and love. He believes that by acquiring wealth and becoming lucky, he will gain Hester's attention and approval, thus consolidating his ego ideal. However, as his fortune grows, so does Hester's insatiable need for money, which only reinforces the impossibility of filling the void. His desperate pursuit of luck becomes a futile attempt to insert himself into his mother's desire, but he remains perpetually unseen. Ultimately, Paul dies without ever realizing the phantasy that has shaped his world, leaving his desire unfulfilled. Hester's gaze remains fixed on material wealth rather than on her son, underscoring the tragic nature of Paul's unrelenting yearning for recognition and love.

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