

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

The human nature of desiring something for self-satisfaction is naturally induced by psychological needs. Psychological satisfaction refers to an individual's inner happiness in life. A person's deep desire for a certain thought, idea, person, or activity that is always desired and becomes the center of attention of individuals who often interfere with their daily lives is called an obsession (VanDerBill, 2022). The obsession, based on the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) is “*the control of one's thoughts by a continuous, powerful idea or feeling, or the idea or feeling itself*”, which eventually takes over the mind of the individual to do anything and everything to fulfill the obsession. Obsession can be positive when a person becomes more focused on the passion to achieve the goal of something they are obsessed with, for example, someone who takes a more serious path in doing their hobby or passion.

However, it can also be a negative thing when they are too obsessed with something that makes them a threat to others. Fink (1997) describes the psychological condition of an obsessive person who tends to have thoughts that are very focused on their desires and is unable to accept or tolerate other voices or influences (referred to as foreign voices) that differ from what they obsessively believe or think. When this satisfaction can be achieved, they will be pleased, but in contrast, if this satisfaction is not fulfilled, their psychology will be disturbed, which leads to unhealthy behaviour until the individual experiences some mental struggle. Obsession is one of the behaviours that cause various kinds of

disadvantages because of a person's desire. The desperate need to achieve unreachable goals or to control certain aspects of life may drive them into harmful behaviours such as severe stress, physical self-harm, and decreased emotional stability. When their obsessions remain unfulfilled or threatened, they may experience intense emotional distress, leading to frustration, anxiety, or even violence (Neuralword, 2023)

The number of crimes or behaviours caused by obsession is one of the biggest impacts of mental and psychological disorders. The individuals are unable to contain their deepest desires, resulting in a lack of sanity in distinguishing what should be allowed to happen in reality. They would do everything they can to achieve their desires, even if they have to commit crimes that take the lives of others. In addition, this mental disorder can also build an individual's character into someone who represents their desires. They are usually more sensitive and temperamental especially when it comes to what they are obsessed with.

Obsession is one of the issues that is often raised in the world of literature, in various media such as novels, films, songs, performances and other forms of literature. It is intended that people can have more understanding and awareness that mental disorders are something real and may happen among us or even within ourselves. *Pearl* (2022) film shows the mental disorder experienced by Pearl, a young girl who lives in the countryside and has a dream to become a star. The desire to become a star eventually becomes an obsession that Pearl displays in this film with various actions and behaviours that ultimately make her a killer.

*Pearl* (2022) is a psychological horror film that is the origin story of Pearl, a young woman trapped on her family's remote farm, dreaming of a glamorous life as a star like “a city girl”. When her aspirations clash with the harsh realities of her life, an overbearing mother, a sickly father, and a husband away fighting in a war-torn and pandemic disease, Pearl's mental state falls apart under the stress she endures, leading to a violent and tragic madness. The choice to become an artist so that she could leave home eventually became her deepest desire, with her doing whatever she could to become a ‘*Star*’.

Directed by Ti West and serves as a prequel to the trilogy; the first film, *X* (2022) and *MaXXXine* (2024), the sequel. Mia Goth (the main actress for Pearl's character), who co-wrote the film with West, delivers a haunting and mesmerizing performance as the iconic protagonist and the villain, it explores themes of isolation, oppression, and the dark side of ambition. This film received a lot of recognition from psychology horror film lovers, especially distributed and produced by A24 Film Company, which has produced many psychology horror films such as *Midsommar* (2019), *Hereditary* (2018), *Talk to Me* (2022). Several awards were also obtained from this film, Best Actress and Best Director were also obtained by Mia Goth and Ti west for their performances (*Pearl* (2022) - IMDb, n.d.).

Film is a medium that serves to entertain by displaying audiovisuals with an interesting storyline. Film can be enjoyed by anyone, regardless of age, gender, race or any other limitation. Film has evolved into a highly effective medium for conveying messages, arousing feelings, and changing people's perspectives. Film frequently functions as a reflection of reality in cultural, social, and other contexts.

Films reflect society, and they influence society by shifting representations, questioning the morality of viewers, and influencing society. Moreover, Film can be an educational medium to the audience about various things that may be difficult to understand in the movie that clearly depicted knowledge, such as science, a concept, and other knowledge. The connection between literature and film generates an arrangement between words and images which strengthens each of these forms and shows us the way to comprehend universal stories and concepts. The most essential aspect of adapting literature to film is modifying the narrative. It needs its bridges, especially are created up of actors, directors, and screenwriters. How they deliver the stories will take consideration of the movie's conclusion and the audience's opinion of the work (Yu, 2020)

Despite the variety of genres of film, psychological horror is something different. Rather than relying on jumpscare or creepy figures, this genre focuses more on psychological tension, inner fears, and the exploration of the dark side of humanity. With its puzzle plot and deep psychological elements, psychological horror is considered a more subtle but disturbing horror, making the audience continue to reflect on the story even after the movie ends. This genre usually plays with deepest thoughts that can affect the audience's mind in the flow of the movie. Psychological-horror is a genre of film that explores the internal conflicts of individuals with the aim of allowing the audience to feel the deepest and most unstable side of the characters in a movie. Elements such as unpredictable movie paths are often featured in these films to provide impactful results for the audience. Tyson (2006) argued that psychoanalytic concepts work deeply in everyday life, not just the visible, but also the deepest to help us understand human behaviour that



might otherwise seem confusing. Psychoanalysis can make us better understand human behaviour, so it will also help us understand literary texts, which are full of descriptions of human behaviour.

Moreover, several studies have analysed the psychological disorders that are the issues raised by several films within the psychoanalytic approach. The first one, Costa (2017) analyses Annie Wilkes' psychological instability in *Misery* (1990) through Freudian theory. Her obsession with Paul Sheldon turns from admiration to violent control, reflecting dominance, repression, and gender role subversion. Meanwhile, Sayidati (2024) in her analyse of Obsessive Love Disorder in Ryan's extreme possessiveness and Jennifer's victimization in *Secret Obsession* (2019). Ryan's obsessive love leads to control, fear, and entrapment, showing the dangers of mistaking obsession for affection.

From the previous studies discussed above, the similarities of these studies are analysing the mental disorders experienced by severe characters through the lens of psychoanalysis. However, these studies are still limited to exploring psychological disorders, specifically how obsession with the dream of becoming a 'star' can affect a character's mental state. In this context, there has been no research that deeply discusses the phenomenon in the film *Pearl* (2022) which displays the psychological changes of the main character in pursuing her dream of becoming a star amidst the pressures she experiences. Therefore, this empty field and gap become the novelty of the analysis in the movie *Pearl* (2022), which the author wants a new approach to analyse. The author discusses obsession because of the interested in an over-desire of individuals that can affect the way of thinking and a person's mental state and commit a horrible action that makes a disadvantage for

many people. Therefore, this study provides an attempt to analyse obsession with a dream or fantasy using Lacan's Psychoanalytic approach (the imaginary, Symbolic, Real) that focuses on the causes and impacts on behaviour that portrayed in the film.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

1. What caused Pearl's obsession with stardom in Pearl Film?
2. How does the obsession with stardom affect Pearl's mental state?

## **1.3 Purpose of The Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyse the psychological aspects that contribute to Pearl's obsession to become a 'star' in the film *Pearl* (2022) by using Jacques Lacan's Three Orders (The Imaginary, The Symbolic, and The Real). This research aims to explore how Pearl's obsession is shaped by her perception of reality, her desires, and pressures from the world, especially from her family. In addition, this study also aims to understand how obsessions play a role in constructing Pearl's and influence her behaviour, thoughts, and decisions. By applying Lacanian psychoanalysis, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how unresolved psychological conflicts lead to a harmful actions and behaviours.

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on the psychological aspect of the main character, Pearl, as portrayed in *Pearl* (2022). This analysis examines how obsessive behaviours, mental struggles, and her identity are developed and represented through dialogue, visual elements, and character interaction. This analysis is limited to applying the theory of Lacan's psychoanalysis (the imaginary, symbolic, and real) and using Semiotics theory that analysing the sign and symbols to interpret Pearl's obsession and mental struggles through her actions and behaviour.

#### **1.5 Significance of The Study**

There are several important aspects contained in this research, both academically and socially. This research extends the application of Lacanian psychoanalysis in film studies, specifically in analysing character development and psychological motivations in horror films. This research offers insights within the field of Psychoanalysis on how the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real shape Pearl's obsessions. Through examining Pearl's obsession, this research highlights the psychological impact of unfulfilled desires, trauma, that contributing to a broader discussion on obsession, mental health. The research provides reflections on society's influence on ambition, fame, and mental health, drawing parallels between Pearl's obsessions and real-world struggles with self-identity and societal expectations. It provides insight into the consequences of dreams that do not align with reality as well as the psychological distress experienced by individuals