

Psychological Torment in Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island*

VINOTHINI S.¹, DR. R. VITHYA PRABHA², DR. S. SUDHA³

¹ Department of English, Dr. N.G.P Arts and Science College, Coimbatore.

² Professor and Head, Department of English, Dr. N.G.P Arts and Science College, Coimbatore.

³ Associate Professor, Department of English, Dr. N.G.P Arts and Science College, Coimbatore.

Abstract- *This article delves into the psychological turmoil of the protagonist in Dennis Lehane's novel, Shutter Island. The novel, a gripping and unpredictable psychological thriller published in 2003, explores the idea that an individual's mental state can significantly impact their perception of reality. The protagonist, US Marshal Teddy Daniels, is assigned with tracking down an escaped long sufferer from Ashcliffe Insane Asylum on Shutter Island. Teddy realizes, in a stunning twist, that he is a patient at the asylum and suffers from Delusional Disorder. He has built a new world in order to escape the hardships of his previous existence. Shutter Island raises ethical concerns about psychological treatment and delves into various mental disorders, such as psychosis, delusion, hallucination, and amnesia, that feature prominently in the story. The novel's isolated and gothic setting of Shutter Island is a departure from Lehane's previous works. This article explores how a psychological thriller can effectively depict a character's psychological disorder, examining trauma through the lens of Freud and other leading predecessors to shed light on the various mental distortions that are prevalent throughout the novel.*

Indexed Terms- *Delusional Disorder, hallucination, Mental distortions, psychosis, Reality, Trauma*

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychotic refers to a state in which reality testing is substantially compromised. This word can refer to a person's behaviour at a certain time or to a mental disease that produces severely poor reality testing in individuals at some point throughout its development. "When reality testing is grossly impaired, individuals inaccurately assess the validity of their perceptions and thoughts and draw incorrect conclusions about external reality, regardless of any contradictory

evidence presented to them" (James Sadocks and Alcott Sadocks 272).

Shutter Island is a complicated psychological thriller centred on Teddy, who believes he is a federal marshal entrusted with locating a missing patient called Rachel Solando with the assistance of his colleague, Chuck. Teddy, on the other hand, is Andrew. Chuck is Laeddis' primary therapist. Andrew is torn between his conscious state, Teddy Daniels, and his unconscious state. Andrew Laeddis as a result of his tragic past. He is aware that his wife Dolores murdered their children and that he murdered her in a fit of wrath. His remorse and struggle, however, draw him back into his delusional world, where he is continuously chased by his daughter's attempts to persuade him that he murdered his family. This makes *Shutter Island* a good example of Freud's psychotic hypothesis, where the "id" personality seeks immediate gratification, as exemplified by Dolores, who is depicted as a woman suffering from sadness and schizophrenia. She sets their apartment on fire, among other things, due to the voices in her head. Dolores only exists in Teddy's fantasy world, and her irrational and psychotic tendencies drive her to kill their three children without considering the consequences. Some argue that Dolores controls Teddy because he allows it. In contrast, the character of Dr. Sheehan in the book embodies the "ego" persona, wherein he faces actuality and strives to rationalize every situation. He comprehends the gravity of Andrew's ailment and complies with his role in Teddy's illusionary realm, intending to eventually cure him of his psychotic state. A case in point is when Dr. Sheehan and Teddy probe the vanishing patient's case and get confined in a structure during a hurricane.

Teddy comes to the conclusion that the doctors at *Shutter Island* are brainwashing their patients, including himself and Dr. Sheehan. Dr. Sheehan agrees with Teddy's beliefs and acts rationally while

dealing with him. Teddy has signs of both Grandiose and Persecutory Delusional Disorder, in which he feels he is on the verge of a tremendous discovery while also being persecuted by the physicians. Teddy's Delusional Disorder may be the result of his experiences in war and the death of his wife and children, which led him to establish a new persona in order to shelter himself from the sorrow of his past. Teddy's illusions remain despite several indications and recommendations throughout the novel. *Shutter Island* is not only centered on the theme of trauma, but it is also a form of trauma itself since it alienates and challenges the reader's understanding. To completely appreciate the core of trauma in *Shutter Island*, both clinical and literary competence is required. Distress in *Shutter Island* is analyzed by two main elements: the mindset of its protagonist, Andrew, and the traumatic experiences that have influenced his psychological condition. Andrew's distorted mental state serves as the origin of numerous dreams, illusions, and hallucinations that pervade the novel.

This article also aims to explore the theme of trauma in *Shutter Island* from numerous angles in order to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of its nature inside the novel. Trauma is a dominant theme that plays a central role in the plot, and it affects not only Andrew but also other characters, with multiple recurrences throughout the story. The murder of Andrew's wife is the central trauma in the novel, but there are other traumas that impact the characters as well. Andrew is haunted by his memories of Dolores, who he believes he killed due to his psychosis. These encounters with Dolores are both dreamlike and hallucinatory, blurring the line between reality and imagination. There is a connection between trauma and repetition in the novel, as Andrew's excessive repetition of his delusions, hallucinations, and dreams reinforce his traumatic past. Water is a prominent symbol in the novel, representing both the cause of his children's death and his own phobia. Andrew's traumatic state affects him both mentally and physically.

In essence, *Shutter Island* uses dialect to illustrate the complex nature of trauma and its effects on the mind. Through Andrew's experiences, the novel demonstrates how traumatic events can shape a person's mental state and lead to a distorted perception of reality. The repetition of traumas and symbols

throughout the novel highlights the cyclical nature of trauma and its lasting impact on individuals.

The fundamental basis for the aforementioned assumption is that Andrew suffers not only from mental delusions and hallucinations, but also from bodily symptoms such as tremors and splitting headaches, which are detailed extensively throughout the work. To get beyond the trauma-focused interpretations and into the mental illnesses and psychiatric parts of *Shutter Island*, one must first grasp Andrew's psyche, keeping in mind that he is basically a psychotic person.

In *Shutter Island*, Andrew's psychotic tendencies have led him to create a fictional world that he perceives as reality, including his belief that he is still a US Marshal investigating a conspiracy surrounding the escape of Rachel Solando. This delusional state is exacerbated by his false beliefs about who he is, the invention of non-existent personas like Andrew Laeddis and Rachel Solando, and his charges of brutal experiments and drugging by the facility's doctors. While hallucinations and delusions play an important role in the storyline, they are not restricted to Andrew. Dolores, a manic melancholic lady who committed herself, had illusions as well.

It's critical to understand the nature of Andrew's psychosis, which entails severely defective reality testing, which causes him to overestimate the correctness of his perceptions and ideas. Despite evidence to the contrary, he insists in his own world. Andrew's hallucinations and delusions drive the storyline of *Shutter Island* and serve as a critical hinge around which many people's madness, brutality, and schizophrenia revolve. The plot would not have come to life without these ingredients.

Andrew Laeddis exhibits a superego personality due to his deviation from his moral standards when he murders his wife, leading him to create a delusional world to justify his actions. However, he ultimately decides to die as a good man rather than live with the guilt of his actions. *Shutter Island* effectively portrays Delusional Disorder and blurs the line between reality and delusion to the point where the audience is unsure of what is real. The novel sheds light on the disorder and offers insight into how psychologists can help

those who suffer from it. Delusional Disorder can be hereditary and may affect a particular gender. Interestingly, not only does Andrew suffer from the disorder, but his wife was also previously diagnosed with manic depression. The novel prompts philosophical questions about insanity, how it can be diagnosed, and whether it can be cured. It challenges society's perceptions of what is considered sane or insane, and calls into question all psychological diagnoses. The novel accurately depicts Teddy's case of Delusional Disorder, allowing the audience to understand his perspective and how he perceives reality. However, the novel ends with a twist, leaving the possibility that Andrew's delusions may have some basis in reality or that he may simply be mentally unstable due to his past trauma. Overall, *Shutter Island* provides a meaningful portrayal of Delusional Disorder and raises awareness of the challenges faced by those who suffer from it.

Despite the psychiatrist's persistent explanation that he had been undergoing role-play therapy, Teddy remains in denial about murdering his wife or having children, and he refuses to acknowledge that he is Andrew Laeddis, the person the therapy aims to reveal to him. Through the events of the plot, this novel depicts a variety of mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and schizophrenia, highlighting the real-life situations and struggles experienced by youngsters.

REFERENCES

- [1] D. Lehane (2003). *The island of Shutter Island*. Harper Collins, New York.
- [2] R. Sinnerbrink (2016). *Exploring Ethical Experience Through Film*. Routledge, London and New York.
- [3] Sigmund Freud (1933). *New Psychoanalysis Initial Lectures*. New York: Norton Books.