

Psychological Condition of Richard Strickland in *The Shape of Water*

Kondisi Kejiwaan Richard Strickland dalam The Shape of Water

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Abstract

This study strives to elucidate the psychological condition of Richard Strickland, the main antagonist in Guillermo Del Toro's and Daniel Kraus' novel *The Shape of Water*. This study uses the close-reading method and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis in examining the psychological factors which trigger the three distinctive features of Richard Strickland, namely hate, disgust, and fear, that lead him to pick up destructive murderous habits. The results of data analysis indicate that (1) Strickland's fear of intimacy has made him distant from his family and colleagues, preventing him from understanding them and instead triggering him to be too attached to General Hoyt's influence, (2) Strickland's low self-esteem has made him powerless to defy Hoyt's authorities but made him feel justified to perform displacement, by torturing and harrasing "lesser" people and animals, and (3) Strickland's unstable sense of self, rooted on his guilt of conducting violence, making him repress his psychological wounds and destroying his own life.

Keywords: *The Shape of Water*, fear; unstable sense of self; low self-esteem; psychoanalysis

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguraikan kondisi kejiwaan Richard Strickland, tokoh antagonis utama dalam novel The Shape of Water karya Guillermo Del Toro dan Daniel Kraus. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode pembacaan cermat dan teori psikoanalisis dari Sigmund Freud dengan menelaah faktor-faktor psikologis yang memicu ketiga sifat utama Richard Strickland, yakni kebencian, rasa jijik, dan ketakutan yang mendorongnya melakukan kebiasaan-kebiasaan buruk. Simpulan dari penelitian ini ialah (1) ketakutan akan keintiman yang dialami Strickland membuatnya jauh, secara emosi, dari keluarga dan rekan-rekan kerjanya, yang mendorongnya untuk beralih mengabdikan diri sepenuhnya pada Jenderal Hoyt; (2) rasa rendah diri Strickland membuatnya segan menentang kebijakan-kebijakan brutal Hoyt, tetapi di sisi lain memicu Strickland untuk merasa berhak menyakiti hewan dan orang-orang yang berstatus sosial lebih rendah; dan (3) ketidakstabilan diri Strickland yang berakar dari rasa bersalahnya karena telah banyak membunuh yang membuatnya menekan luka-luka psikologisnya dan menghancurkan hidupnya.

Kata kunci: *The Shape of Water*; ketakutan; ketidakstabilan diri; rasa rendah diri; psikoanalisis

1. Introduction

The Cold War era is well-known as the state of geopolitical tension emerging after World War II, around 1945 and 1989, between nations belonging to the East European Bloc (the Soviet Union and its satellite states) and those in the Western Bloc (America and NATO-allied countries). Although neither blocs waged direct large-scale fighting, each of them supported major regional wars, or called as proxy wars, which consisted of the race in sending the first man to outer space (Shaw, 2007:3). At that time, the politic upheaval was profoundly intact that every aspect about American art—values and perceptions, forms of expression, symbolic patterns, beliefs and myths—was heavily suppressed (Whitfield, 2006:269). The Stalinism totalitarian state of the Soviet Union had impacted on the American culture, eventually making it to be such a barren place for any kind of idealist creativity. Art was perceived illegitimate for its possibility to reveal or represent challenging ideas which could endanger the creator's position—in many cases causing the authorities to question his/her national loyalty and political stand. Many citizens were deprived of their occupations because of the pressure of the Cold War (Whitfield, 2006:256).

There have been numerous fictional works which are set in the Cold War era, namely Ian Fleming's *From Russia, With Love* (1957), Richard Condon's *Manchurian Candidate* (1959), Hergé's *The Calculus Affair* (1956), Peter Schneider's *The Wall Jumper* (1984), Ian McEwan's *The Innocent* (1990), Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), Robert Littell's *Young Philby* (2012) and many more (Kerridge, 2014, *The Telegraph* online). One of the latest novels set in the era is the novel adaptation of Guillermo Del Toro's fantasy romance film *The Shape of Water*, which has won many critical film awards in the early 2018. The

novel is selected to be examined since it offers myriad issues of social humanities, particularly from the very diverse way of each of the prominent characters is represented, both in the film and the novelization.

Guillermo Del Toro is a prominent and critically appraised Mexican film director, screenwriter, producer, and novelist specialised in dark fantasy theme, vampire superheroes, and science fiction monsters. As a young man, he studied at the Centro de Investigación y Estudios Cinematográficos, University of Guadalajara. His Spanish-language films are *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and his American films are *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy* (2004), *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008), *Pacific Rim* (2013), *Crimson Peak* (2015), and a computer-animated fantasy television series entitled *Trollhunters* (2016—present). His latest film, *The Shape of Water* (2017) won the Academy Award for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Production Design, and Best Original Score at the 90th Academy Awards and won a Golden Lion at the 74th Venice International Film Festival. It also won Best Director and Best Original Score at the 75th Golden Globe Awards, won three awards (including Best Director) at the 71st British Academy Film Awards and won four awards (two of them being Best Picture and Best Director) at the 23rd Critics' Choice Awards. As well as making films, Del Toro has also written several novels, such as *The Strain Trilogy*, a vampire horror novel: *The Strain* (2009), *The Fall* (2010) and *The Night Eternal* (2011), in which he co-authored with Chuck Hogan. Together with Daniel Kraus, Del Toro has also written the novel version of *The Shape of Water*, published by Feiwel & Friends, New York, in 2018. Daniel Kraus is a novelist who was listed on *Entertainment Weekly's* Top 10 Books of the Year for his notable work, *The Death and Life of Zebulon Finch* and has

won two Odyssey Awards for two other works. Kraus' works have also received other literary awards, such as Library Guild Selections and Bram Stoker Nominees.

The Shape of Water (2018) is a novel set in Baltimore, US, in 1962 at the height of the Cold War era between America and the Soviet. The protagonist, Elisa Esposito, is a mute woman who lives at an apartment above a cinema and during the days she works as a janitor at a secret government laboratory. One day, the lab welcomes a humanoid amphibian from a South American river, called by the Amazonian locals as Deus Brânquia, hauled off to Baltimore by Colonel Richard Strickland, so that the lab's scientists can study it. However, soon General Frank Hoyt, Strickland's superior, orders it to be vivisected instead. Having fallen in love with the creature, Elisa begins to visit it in secret and later asks for her friends' help to bring the creature home and help him escape. On the verge of her struggle, she and the creature are shot by Strickland, who refuses to admit defeat that he has failed to take control his project. Surprisingly, Strickland is eventually killed by the creature, who has managed to heal himself. Later, the creature brings Elisa into the canal, heals her, gives her gills, and takes her to live with him underwater.

Among all of the characters that are present in the book, one of the most influential characters in steering the plot of the story is Richard Strickland, the antagonist working as the colonel who supervises the Amphibian Man project in the secret governmental laboratory. From the very beginning of the book, Strickland is constantly portrayed as a troubled, abusive, threatening, harsh, cruel, controlling and a sexually molesting man to those who are beneath him. Strickland is always displayed as someone who would not hesitate to

perform dirty work in order to satisfy his ego as a military man or achieve his goals.

Although he has repeatedly acted brutally to demean others, there are many moments in the book when Strickland is shown to be haunted by his murdering acts performed under the order of General Hoyt, his supervisor. Moreover, the book has also shown more details regarding Strickland's personality than the movie does: there are times when Strickland has to reassure himself again and again that he is a capable man who is masculine and brave enough to face his challenges, leading him to molest women, kill animals at random and torture the humanoid amphibian. All of these traits are considered important in analysing what the actual psychological condition of Strickland is, given his flaws.

There has not been any previous studies regarding *The Shape of Water* novel, but there have been some regarding *Pan's Labyrinth*, such as its hypertextual and metatextual themes which coincide with Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), and Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997) (Kotecki, 2010: 243). Another related study is the representation of transnational violence toward children found in Del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo* (2001), of how children were forced to witness every conduct of violence to testify, eventually leading to their traumatic literal and psychological wounds (Robinson, 2017: 202). The last is about myth, facism, theopolitical imagination and Jungian archetypal figures found in Del Toro's *Cronos*, *The Devil's Backbone*, and *Pan's Labyrinth* which explores how these themes have been suffused with alchemical and Christian imageries (Sinclair, 2016:3). None of these studies has explored the psychological realm of *The Shape of Water* novel, therefore the work is selected to be examined further.

Moving on to the psychoanalysis theory, according to Sigmund Freud, the impact of the rise of civilization is the repression of human instincts (Freud, 1973a:47). In a more detailed stance, Freud (1973a:47) stressed that anyone who wishes to have his or her way into the society has to repeat the sacrifice of the instinctual satisfaction for the sake of the entire community. Freud further underlined that the strongest drive to this psychological matter is the sexual instinct.

Although the society or civilization has demanded that the sexual instinct has to be repressed to the point of sublimation, that kind of settlement does not work effectively since the sexual naturally can never be perfectly tamed (Storey, 2010:91). This is where Freud came across the two parts that belong to the psyche: the unconscious and the conscious. While the conscious refers to the aspects from the external world, the unconscious refers to the 'container' of repressed wishes and instinctual drives (Storey, 2010:91). Freud also added one more aspect, the preconscious, which refers to moments when a person is unable to remember something at a certain moment but can recall with some thinking effort (Storey, 2010:91).

In the Freudian psyche, there are three terms that can be found within the psychological state: the *ego*, the *super-ego*, and the *id*. The most primitive of all, the *id*, is where every form of darkness, excitation and chaos abounds, and it is where the *ego* is created (Freud, 1984:362). In this sense, the *ego* develops; it cannot grow by itself, and the *ego* strives to have control over the *id* (Freud, 1973b: 106). If it is made into an analogy, the *id* represents the horse, which is full of energy, while the *ego* stands for the rider, who is in authority to choose and decide the movement of the horse. Therefore, the *ego* represents the logic that always reasons with the *ego*,

which is full of passion and desires (Freud, 1984:363).

Meanwhile, the *super-ego* is closely linked to the Oedipus complex, being created out of the internalization or introjection of a child's male parent, developing an authority. Later, this voice of authority is followed by other voices of authority, creating 'conscience' (Storey, 2010:92). The existence of the *super-ego* is aligned with the voice of culture, but it is closely linked with the *id*. Furthermore, it is clear to see that humans are born with an *id*, and that their egos are built via contact with culture. Thus, 'human nature' is actually governed by culture, something that is introduced from the external world (Storey, 2010:93). However, the psyche is considered to be the place of never-ending battle between the *id* and the *ego*. While the *id* wishes to satisfy the desire regardless of what the society thinks, the *ego*, sometimes aided by the *super-ego*, has to serve the norms and rules of culture. The perpetual conflict inside the psyche is also called as the fight between the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle' (Storey, 2010:93).

In Freudian psychoanalytic reading, we focus on the patterns of adolescent behavior that are destructive. The repetition of these disorders dysfunctions speak for psychological complication that has been impacting someone for some time, probably without the awareness of the person himself (Tyson, 2006:12). Lois Tyson (2006:12) stated that *family* plays a crucial key in psychoanalytic theory, since the first role that each person is assigned to comes from the family, eventually leading to the 'birth' of the unconscious. The kinds of early conflict that can emerge are: *oedipal conflict*, *sibling rivalry*, and the like. Against all of these destructive behaviors, we are consciously equipped to deal with them through building defenses, including *selective perception* (choosing things that

we think we are able to listen to and witness), *selective memory* (modifying our memories so that we will not be burdened by them anymore), *denial* (refusing to believe that the problems exist), *avoidance* (staying away from people or situations which tend to make us feel agitated), *displacement* (unleashing anger, frustration or disappointment to someone or something that is deemed less threatening than our 'sources' of pain, hurt, anger, or frustration), and *projection* (believing someone or something to be the cause of our suffering or pain and later punishing them for it, refusing to admit that we possess it ourselves) (Tyson, 2006:15).

Going further, in critical moments we might also undergo *anxiety* as our defenses fall in. Many forms of fear we feel will break out as such: *fear of intimacy* (the overwhelming feeling that emotional closeness will somehow break and hurt us, hence we try to draw the line from others to keep ourselves 'safe'), *fear of abandonment* (haunted by the thought that one day everyone will leave us), *fear of betrayal* (the disturbing feeling that our close ones can never be fully trusted), *low self-esteem* (the belief that we do not deserve the best things that life has to offer), *insecure or unstable sense of self* (being unable to maintain a solid self identity and make us vulnerable to people's opinions), and *oedipal fixation* (a flawed relationship with a parent of the opposite sex that remains broken until adulthood, disallowing us from creating mature relationships with close acquaintances) (Tyson, 2006:16--17). Each piece of these fears represents our past 'unfinished business' or unresolved conflicts, with some are already too chronic to be consciously realized. In other extreme cases, we still unconsciously desire experiences we failed to receive or resolve in the past.

This article tries to answer two questions simultaneously: (1) the psychological condition of Richard Strickland, the villain who has caused so much suffering and hurt to the humanoid amphibian, and later, the painful death of Hoffstetler and Elisa in Guillermo Del Toro and Daniel Krauss' *The Shape of Water* novel, and (2) how Strickland's psychological condition affects his relationships with others, whether they are his supervisor, subordinate or family member, thus determining the flow of the narrative. The novel was selected to be discussed from several reasons. First, until this article was written, both the movie and the novel adaptation were still of a novelty in the early 2018s (when it won numerous prestigious film awards, including the Oscars in 2018), and there has not been much discussion aimed at it, especially in terms of its memorable characters. Second, the study became significant since there have been the rise of the bullying phenomena, discrimination, and the degrading tolerance for difference among permanent citizens and immigrants in the US, which were proven by the winning of controversial President Donald Trump (a Republican) in 2016 as the 45th President of the United States, whose campaign was focused on strengthening the border between the US and Mexico, with the latter being the home country of the director and author of *The Shape of Water*, Guillermo Del Toro. Furthermore, what lurks behind Richard Strickland's bullying and demeaning attitude can be seen and interpreted further for he symbolises the white supremacy that has been flawed in many ways.

2. Method

The article elucidates the psychological condition of Colonel Richard Strickland, the main antagonist in Guillermo Del Toro's *The Shape of*

Water (2018) novel. The character is selected out of others since Strickland proves to be the most problematic figure in the narrative, being haunted and heavily traumatized by his participation in the Korean War twelve years ago (1950-1953) under the supervision of abusive and sadistic General Hoyt. The method of data collection is conducted through applying the close-reading technique towards the words, phrases, figures of speech and quotes that underscore Richard Strickland's hateful and fierce character traits found in the novel, especially those that clearly show his psychological condition.

The collected data are later categorised according to the disorder dysfunctions and the defenses, two categories set up in the psychoanalysis theory in order to reveal the psychological condition of Richard Strickland. By using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory, the article is focused on revealing Strickland's three strongest emotional states, that are his hatred (toward many things or people deemed inferior to him), self-disgust (which leads to his obsession to cleanliness and hygiene), and fear (of the influence of General Hoyt and failure of aiding his project with the Amazonian creature). These three aspects are later discussed regarding their impact on other characters who have suffered the abuse of Richard Strickland, and what his actual psychological state is, which drives him to do so.

3. Results and Discussion

One specific area of human behavior examined in *The Shape of Water* which gives crucial influences for psychoanalytic criticism is the prolonged violence performed by Richard Strickland under the influence of General Hoyt that causes other characters to suffer pain and agony. For some reasons, Strickland shares many similarities to Captain Vidal

from *Pan's Labyrinth*. While Vidal is certainly the embodiment of tyrannical political authority, a 'realist' vision which reminds the world that history always leaves a painful mark in the world (Ward, 2014: 25), Strickland poses as the symbol of authoritarian patriarchal figure who is obsessed about his dominion over everything and everyone, especially those who are deemed lesser than himself (e.g. the Indians in the Amazon, the humanoid amphibian, the janitors, the scientists at Occam Aerospace Lab, his wife Lainie and his daughter Tammy). This stand is reinforced over and over as General Hoyt keeps on forcing Strickland to perform the "dirty work" (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 3) in any mission, doing the killing and torturing, making their work relationship as "a form of blackmail" (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 3). The interest created by the professional relationship between General Hoyt and Strickland lies not in its apparent violence but in the ways it stirs many relationships depicted—those between Strickland and Lainie, Strickland and Bob Hoffstetler, Strickland and Elisa, Strickland and Zelda, Strickland and the creature—and this reveals a pattern of psychological conduct accountable for a good deal of the narrative progression.

This pattern is deeply rooted in Strickland's *insecure* or *unstable sense of self*, *low self-esteem*, and *fear of intimacy*, which from time to time supersedes one another. As a soldier, Strickland has always been programmed to be strict, stiff, cold, and above all, masculine. Acting masculine, in the mainstream definition of patriarchal culture, means acting tough, repressing strong emotion, being fierce and never showing any sign of weakness. Indeed, Strickland "smothers his hate, disgust, and fear" since the three "give you away" (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 11). Years of doing training and war missions as a soldier does nothing but reinforces this principle over and

over, until it becomes Strickland's biggest obsession, leading him to justify General Hoyt's brutal influences on him. Therefore, Strickland is used to associate feeling emotions with being feminine—being coquettish—something that is profoundly intolerable in the eyes of patriarchal stand, thus affirming his fear of intimacy with anybody, including his own family members. Yet, Strickland is an ordinary human being who is perfectly capable of feeling emotions but refrains himself from doing so. It is proven by the way he resents himself from being caught doing a 'feminine' activity whilst sailing on an Amazonian river to hunt for Deus Brânquia:

Strickland is furious, not at the captain, but himself. What sort of soldier leaves his back exposed? Plus, he's caught gazing at the moon. It's feminine, something Lainie would do while asking him to hold her hand. (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 11)

Strickland marah, bukan pada sang kapten, tetapi pada dirinya sendiri. Prajurit macam apa yang membiarkan kelemahannya terekspos? Parahnya, ia terpergok saat sedang memandangi bulan. Itu hal yang seharusnya dilakukan perempuan, sesuatu yang mungkin dilakukan Lainie sembari memintanya [Strickland] menggenggam tangan sang istri.

Consciously, Strickland mocks the girly sides of his own wife Lainie, which he refers to being the total opposite to masculinity and superiority of a man. Thus, he immediately feels conflicted whenever any of this emotion comes up. Strickland's ego as a senior soldier is

endangered; he believes himself to have mastered the role of a 'perfect' male embodiment but the results are embarrassing him. Strickland never expects that over the years of bottling up these 'feminine' emotions of him does not actually make them fade away; they leak out unaccidentally from time to time, and it happens more often than before. Hence, it is understandable that once the occasion presents itself to him, Strickland tries his best to suppress this through performing violent and brutal acts. Whilst hunting for the much sought-after humanoid amphibian for about a year, Strickland listens to a local legend of a male pink *boto* dolphin, a shape-shifter, which can change into a charming beau who lures young women into the river. As Strickland feels the need to punish this 'girly' side of his, he naturally associates the tale of the pink *boto* dolphin with the childish fairy tale that are more familiar with children and women, those who cannot be associated with superior male power. That is why he feels the urge to 'kill' his feminine proclivity by performing *displacement*, which is shooting the pink dolphin with his gun, intending to break the coupling between his version of constructed masculinity and the unwanted feminine side:

Fanciful tales don't deserve to live. Harsh reality, that's what Hoyt seeks and what Strickland must find if he hopes to get out of here alive. The dolphin's shape becomes visible beneath the water. Strickland waits. He wants to look it in the eyes. He'll be the one to deliver nightmares. He'll be the one to drive the jungle insane. (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 12)

Kisah-kisah dongeng tidak pantas ada. Kenyataan pahit, itulah yang dicari Hoyt dan yang

harus ditemukan Strickland jika ia ingin keluar dari tempat ini hidup-hidup. Sosok lumba-lumba itu makin terlihat di air. Strickland menunggu. Ia ingin memandangi hewan itu tepat di matanya. Ia akan menjadi orang yang mendatangkan malapetaka. Ia akan menjadi orang yang mengacaukan seisi hutan.

As it has been viewed, because of his innate deep pride (or more likely, obsession) toward Western logocentric superiority (which is also has been ingrained for years under General Hoyt's forcible influence), Strickland also strongly believes that this illusion justifies his cruelty and brutality toward others. For years, Strickland has been denying his sadistic acts toward the victims in the Korean War (which occurred twelve years earlier), and his sojourn in Amazon—being surrounded by the Indian locals, the jungle and its wild inhabitants and their endless screaming—has brought out the worst in him: his wronged conscience and guilt of the innocent lives he has taken. Strickland's inner conflict of ego deals with the hard fact that, although he is a soldier who should always follow orders, nothing can validate his acts of killing mass of innocent lives under any circumstance. In his great distress, Strickland struggles to build defenses by repeatedly performing destructive behavior, that is, by randomly shooting, torturing and even consuming wild animals in the Amazonian jungle (referring them to the helpless Korean villager victims), only to be reminded of his own children back home:

So Strickland starts firing. Monkeys fall like aguaje fruit, and men gasp in horror. This annoys Strickland. He advances

against a gut-shot monkey, machete raised. The soft-furred animal curls into a woeful ball, its hands pressed over its sobbing face. It is like a child. Like Timmy or Tammy. This is like slaughtering children. He flashes back to Korea. The children, the women. Is this what he's become? The surviving monkeys scream in sorrow, and the sound pins into his skull. [...] The screaming, the screaming. Dinner is rubbery gray balls of monkey gristle. He doesn't deserve to eat but does anyway. The screaming, the screaming. (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 20)

Karenanya, Strickland mulai menembaki mereka. Kera-kera berjatuh dari pohon seperti buah aguaje. Ini sangat mengganggu Strickland. Ia mendekati seekor kera yang perutnya tertembak, goloknya terangkat. Hewan berbulu lembut itu meringkuk seperti bola, kedua tangannya menutupi wajahnya yang menangis. Kera itu terlihat seperti anak kecil. Seperti Timmy atau Tammy. (Membunuh mereka) rasanya seperti membantai anak-anak. Ia teringat kembali saat perang di Korea. Anak-anaknya, para wanitanya (yang menjadi korban). Sekeji itukah sosoknya kini? Kera-kera yang masih hidup menjerit-jerit pilu, dan suara-suara itu membuat kepalanya berdenyut-denyut. [...] Jeritan, jeritan (terdengar terus-menerus). Mereka memasak bangkai-bangkai kera abu-abu itu untuk makan malam. Ia tidak pantas memakan mereka, tapi ia tetap melakukannya. Jeritan,

jeritan (terdengar terus-menerus).

From this point, it is also quite easy to understand why Strickland is unerringly faithful but at the same time holds a deep grudge toward General Hoyt, whom he sees as an unforgiving superior as well as sadistic father figure. Strickland's unquestionable attachment to Hoyt's authority reveals his own insecurity and inner low self-esteem, of which Strickland has a good deal. He dreams of being free of Hoyt's ghastly influence, finally free to be the good husband and father his family wants him to be. Instead, Strickland's fear and loyalty to General Hoyt have conquered his mind, soul and almost all aspects of his life; Strickland even considers Hoyt to be the one who has haunted him day and night at the jungle. The only reason to this traumatic problem is that Strickland's *unstable sense of self* (his old fear of intimacy and death) has created the blank space for General Hoyt's overbearing influence to be completely absorbed before he can create or adapt to more sensible principles or personality.

Unlike the rest of the characters in the novel who possess more physical limitations than him (Elisa being mute, Zelda being a black woman, Giles being a middle-aged homosexual, Deus Brânquia being the one tortured and captured, Hoffstetler being torn with his status as a secret agent to Soviet), Strickland (who is white, able-bodied, and a powerful soldier) is actually the most powerless figure in the narrative as he brings his 'prison' everywhere, in his mind. This is clearly reinforced in the quote below, as Strickland adopts another habit of *displacement*, which is chewing cheap, hard green candies as a stress-release method, a substitute to ease his own pain in having to carry on with Hoyt's brutal plans:

Strickland survives the call only with the distraction of green hard candies. Generic label, synthetic taste, but the flavor is achingly concentrated, almost voltaic. [...] The crunch of the candy is loud. Despite thousands of miles of wire, Hoyt's voice is even louder. As if he'd always been there in the jungle, observing Strickland from behind sticky fronds or veils of mosquitos. (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 26)

Strickland berhasil mengendalikan diri di telepon dengan memusatkan perhatiannya mengunyah permen-permen hijau keras. Permen merk murah, buatan massal dari pabrik, tapi rasanya luar biasa pekat, nyaris seperti obat. [...] Suara kunyahan permennya terdengar keras. Walau berada ribuan mil dari tempatnya sekarang, suara Hoyt masih terdengar jauh lebih keras. Seolah sang jenderal mengikutinya ke hutan, mengawasi Strickland dari balik daun-daun palem atau kelambu-kelambu nyamuk.

Still, Strickland's paralyzed state of mind also emerges as an effect of the Cold War backdrop, as a string of unavoidable social, economic and political pressures generate many forms of threats. There are four types of threats that are exposed to the citizens during that era: physical (pain, injury, demise), economic (seizure or destruction of property, rejection of access to work or resources), threats to rights (imprisonment, denial of normal civil liberties), and threats to position and status (demotion, public humiliation) (Buzan, 2016: 50). All of these threats have certainly contributed to the social

and political nuance in the daily lives of many Americans at that time, making them constantly feel constrained. Since many social activities were deemed suspicious to the ruling government, therefore people were prone to feel stressed and pressured most of the time.

The tense and rigid situation of the era is perfectly portrayed by Richard Strickland, the man who suffers the direct mental implications of the Cold War the most. Indeed, it is ironical since Strickland has repeatedly affirmed his white supremacy above others, showing everyone how little they mean to him by menacing the scientists at Occam lab with profanities and demeaning the janitors and even his own wife. Strickland even carries around “an orange cattle prod” (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 51), an electric torturing device that he uses to “move the asset in or out of the pool” (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 60), which frightens both Elisa and Zelda when they see that there is “a fat, dark red drop of blood clinging to one of the two brass prongs” (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 60). It is indeed another proof that Strickland likes to be seen as an omnipotent figure who loves nothing more than showing off his power over any lesser being.

Somehow, this is a reversed kind of logic to think so, since the act of flaunting power and dominance through demonstrating violence bespeaks one’s need to bolster chronic insecurities about one’s self rather than one’s intelligence or superiority. His low-esteem and lack of courage to defend himself against Hoyt’s orders and authority have contributed a great deal to all of his prolonged suffering as a distressed subordinate. It is no surprise that Strickland prefers to degrade and eradicate those who belong to the lower strata than himself. Even his own choice of newfound sexual interest in Elisa, a low-class, mute janitor and an orphan, reinforces this ego. This could only mean that Strickland has

unconsciously acknowledged the fact that though he might one day be finally free from Hoyt’s claws, he unconsciously believes that he will never be adequate to hold the same position and manage better missions. Strickland will perhaps end up repeating doing the similar dirty work, carried out by his future obedient subordinate so Strickland himself can repress his own guilt, and therefore repeating the same traumatic circle over and over. Or, in the worst case scenario, Strickland will probably remain to be a puppet to another military superior in the future because of his failure in dealing with his low self-esteem and his unresolved guilt.

Furthermore, Strickland’s very frequent use and obsession with guns, harpoons, knives, machetes, military vehicles and electrical cattle prods is confirmed as the *male imagery*, that the weapons are *phallic symbols* functioned as tools to express his unconscious sexual aggression and exploited identity. Later, as it has been mentioned earlier, Strickland gets his newfound attraction to Elisa for being a seemingly simple, mute girl who “can’t make a peep” (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 84), who is so much different from Lainie (whom he considers inadequate to take care of their family). He conducts a sexual harassment to Elisa, even making a sexual offer to her (to which she rebuffs by immediately escaping his office).

Still, after a gruesome incident with the creature/the asset/Deus Brânquia at the totalitarian facility research of Occam, Strickland loses his two fingers as they are torn off by the creature’s fierce bite whilst being tortured. Although the fingers are later restitched again, it is obvious that the incident has metaphorically maimed the ‘dominant’ *phallic symbols* of Strickland, the fingers (both his ring and little fingers) that have been used to hold and pull gun triggers, flung a machete, hold a cattle prod, put on a wedding ring, and sexually molest Elisa.

Instead of being constantly privileged and free to walk away from his sins, Strickland has finally received the first fatal punishment of his brutal misconducts. His torn fingers and the failure of reattaching them later have served as a sign that Strickland has permanently failed to atone for his sins, making him continue perform his stubborn *displacement* toward everything.

Interestingly, Strickland's act of *displacement* triggers two other interrelated destructive aspects: his self-disgust and craving for cleanliness. Upon realizing that he has got blood on his hands (from the human and animal victims he has brutally murdered), Strickland projects his fear and guilt to every tiny detail in his life, demanding each one of them to be spotless, neat, and tidy—a total opposite to his own messed-up life. His one-year hunting trip in the jungle, the haunting images of blood, screaming, and dead bodies, recklessness in peeing and failure in making pleasant small talk with the female janitors are all 'soiling' and 'dirtying' his mind and soul. Since Strickland cannot be free from Hoyt's orders and projects yet (as he is also too afraid to challenge Hoyt's rank and authority), he cannot stop himself from feeling constantly deprived and frustrated all the time. Unconsciously, his stress is leaking out in continuous tiny misconducts as such:

Strickland feels the hot creep of shame. The urine crawling across the slanted floor, it's too much. [...] But it's disgusting. Peeing on the ground, it's what he did in the Amazon. Cleanliness is what he craves now, and here he is, literally pissing on it. (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 60)

Strickland merasakan wajahnya memanas karena malu. Tetesan urin itu mengalir merambat sepanjang lantai, ini keterlaluhan. [...] Tapi sungguh menjijikkan. Membuang air kecil di tanah adalah kebiasaannya saat di Amazon. Kebersihan adalah yang dibutuhkannya saat ini, dan di sinilah dia, secara harafiah justru mengencingi lantai yang bersih (kebersihan itu sendiri).

On some rare occasions, Strickland presents himself as a fair-minded man; he belongs to those who can appreciate and encourage differences in his own country, which is about the racial thing against the black people. Whilst interrogating Zelda and Elisa, he mentions his opinions about the black that they do have the same rights as the white in any aspect of the society. However, Strickland's pride as a superior white man is reinforced in the way he refers to Zelda in a universal religious understanding that "God looks *human*", only that his white race supremacy supersedes this as he later pompously claims that, "Though let's be honest. He looks a little bit more like me," (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 23). It is a strong indication that Strickland only wants to create a good impression on Elisa, whom he considers quite attractive, and not to truly intending to practice what he has preached, clearly still being a racist. His affectation of being an open-minded man is clearly a sign of insecurity, of which Strickland definitely has a good deal. Worse, Strickland even strongly denies that as a civilized Westerner there is no way that he shares any tiny bit of resemblance to the captured humanoid amphibian:

The idea that he and the asset share a light sensitivity enrages him. He's no animal. He left his animal self in the Amazon. He

had to if he had any hope of being a good husband, a good father. (Del Toro and Kraus, 2018: 86)

Pikiran bahwa ia dan makhluk itu sama-sama memiliki sensitivitas yang mirip membuatnya marah. Ia bukan binatang. Ia telah meninggalkan sisi buasnya di Amazon. Ia harus melakukannya jika hendak menjadi seorang suami dan ayah yang baik.

Once again, Strickland's *denial* of his sensitivity—rooted in his *fear of intimacy* as well as having *low self-esteem* for years after being a heartless soldier in the military—prevents him from healing himself and rearranging his life. His resentment toward the lesser beings—the creature/the asset/Deus Brânquia in particular—makes him fail to reconnect to his surroundings and therefore fail to know himself well. By refusing to accept the hard fact that humans are not that much different from animals when it comes to their natural behavior and instinct, Strickland has put blinders on his own progress as an ever-growing human. Through drawing the line between himself and the lesser beings, Strickland is trapped in the kind of imaginary perception that he is an independent, civilized, unique individual rather than a product of a certain cultural society, raised with specific ideologies. His apparent refusal to recognize his natural similarities to others, given the fact that no human is truly distinct from the rest, confirms his desire for ego gratification. In this capacity, Strickland is indeed incapable of acquiring a stable sense of self since he refuses to accept and admit that he is a flawed human being, even far more defected than those whom he perceives inhabiting the lower strata than himself.

For further evidence, Strickland's authority and power is put to test when he learns that the Amphibian Man has been stolen from the governmental laboratory, right under his nose. While he clearly seems to be on the rage about it, Strickland is actually repressing his fear and embarrassment since deep inside, he knows that such mistakes should never have occurred in the first place, given his rank, position, and influence. With such strong and careful surveillance and security that Strickland has set up, it is hard to imagine that anyone would ever succeed in taking the creature away, unless the whole act was orchestrated and helped by people from within the lab, who have secretly turned against him. Moreover, Strickland's own strong belief (which is actually a logical fallacy), that being a high-ranked military man does automatically entitle him to gain anyone's obedience and respect (his family at home, the creature, the scientists and the janitors at Occam Aerospace Lab) is clearly proven wrong. Those people are, indeed, capable of thinking for themselves and deciding what is best for them, which includes 'robbing' Strickland of his power by kidnapping the creature.

Since Strickland is so used to filling his mind with denial of his own insecurities and reinforcing self-reassurance that he is indeed very qualified and superior to hold his current position at work, Strickland is blinded by the fact that he does not possess the same level of authority as General Hoyt's and will never do so. The fact that it was Elisa, Zelda, Hoffstetler, and Gilles, people who are undoubtedly beneath him, who managed to trick him and take Deus Brânquia away from his claws, and hide the creature for some time, has surely shaken him to the core. Let alone feeling betrayed, Strickland finally learns that all of his torturing acts and degrading others has actually proven to be worthless; he has confirmed himself to be a fool in

sorting out his priorities. Instead of accepting and admitting his emotional flaws and working his way to improve them in regards to his relationship with others, Strickland is heavily obsessed with making himself look masculine, fierce, and superior to others, thus driving him to lose sight of what is truly important: standing up for what feels right, regardless of what others may think. This includes embracing his 'feminine' and 'melancholic' side, developing an understanding towards his wife, children, and subordinates at work, standing up to General Hoyt's sadistic orders, making his own decisions on guarding the lives of others, and rewriting his principle of what it truly means to be powerful and in charge of authority.

4. Conclusion

As it has been examined earlier, there are three dominant factors that have made Strickland the problematic man as he is today: his *fear of intimacy*, *low self-esteem*, and *unstable sense of self*. The relation and the function of Strickland's *id*, *ego*, and *super-ego* has been shown quite clear from the beginning of the story. Richard Strickland tries to maintain his *id*, which is his desire to act more leniently and sweetly, to 'let loose', despite General Hoyt's and the American society's expectations of how a soldier may act. However, after bottling up all of his emotions inside, Strickland undergoes emotional leaks from time to time, resulting in his awkwardness and his will to perform torturing and murderous acts in order to cover it all up. Yet, when Strickland loses his two fingers because of his constant attack on the Amphibian Man, his *ego* starts to emerge as Strickland begins to harm others more but at the same time blames every bad accident that befalls him to a particular person, Bob Hoffstetler. However, when Strickland finds out that it was Elisa

Esposito's idea to steal and hide the creature away, he becomes fully enraged, thus failing to utilize his *super-ego*. Indeed, Strickland has failed to synergize his three psyche aspects altogether.

Furthermore, regarding Strickland's dominant factors which drive him to be in his psychological condition in the novel, it is much more complicated since Strickland always tries his best to deny his emotional needs and instead focuses on displacing them all the time. For a start, his fear of intimacy prevents him from getting emotionally close to his own family and building sympathy for his colleagues. In order to show himself worthy of a military rank and a position in Occam Aerospace Lab, Strickland puts on an arrogant and sadistic act wherever he goes, making sure that anyone knows who is in power. Secondly, as Strickland has always had low self-esteem, he dares neither question nor challenge Hoyt's authorities, forcing him to shoulder all of the emotional burden of his tasks alone. Strickland's low self-esteem triggers him to attach himself completely to his harsh superior, General Hoyt, the only one who presents himself to Strickland as a man in charge of intelligence, power and authority—everything Strickland thinks to be worthy of recognition in the white male's world. Third, being related to his guilt of murdering mass of innocent people and animals, Strickland naturally becomes a man with such unstable sense of self that he starts picking up repetitive destructive habits, his *displacement*, such as randomly torturing animals and harrasing women, eating green hard candies that wound his mouth, as well as cursing profanities to degrade others in numerous occassions. Supported by his fatal pride of white supremacy and logocentric ideals, from a psychological perspective, it is apparent that Strickland's troubling psychological condition best illustrates the implicit outcome of repressing psychological

wounds: making himself grounded in repeating them and end up creating a destructive chain reaction which destroys other aspects in his life.

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