



The Study of Foucault's "The Composition of Forces" in *Shutter Island* (2003)

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Abstract— *The American author Dennis Lehane, published his masterpiece Shutter Island in 2003. In his psychological novel, alongside the thrilling themes of crime and crisis, a heavy undercurrent of power and punishment grabs reader's attention. From a literary philosophical side, Foucauldian notions of madness, "the composition of forces" upon the mentally disturbed patients, could captivate a critic's attention. It is therefore, beneficial to analyze the Dissociative Personality Disorder of the protagonist of the novel. The present study aims to investigate "the composition of forces" in Shutter Island (2003) based on Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish (1975). Foucault in his book scrutinizes "the composition of forces," how individuals and bodies are placed, and redirected in larger machines, like choosing good soldiers and training them for army. Among Foucault's ideas, "the composition of forces" has been considered as one of the primary and essential tools of maintaining the disciplinary power. The study concludes that the main character of the novel shows resistance and denial through his process of treatment. In fact, his Dissociative Identity Disorder is a manifestation of the way he wants to escape from the superintending forces of the disciplinary power.*

Keywords— *Dennis Lehane, Michel Foucault, the composition of forces, disciplinary power, Dissociative Identity Disorder, denial, resistance*

I. INTRODUCTION

The chief purpose of the present paper is to investigate the representation of Michel Foucault's "The composition of forces" in Dennis Lehane's *The Shutter Island* (2003). There has been an attempt to elaborate on how the aforementioned theory could be appeared as the governing philosophical investment in the novel and how the main character revolves around the related concepts.

In the third chapter of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), Michel Foucault introduces different methods to train the bodies of individuals. He elaborates extensively on "The art of distribution", "The control of activity", "The organization of geneses" and "The composition of forces" as influential practices in order to produce docile and trained body. Although the last

of the foursome is among the applied theoretical frameworks in this research, some references to the other cited theories are provided interjacently in the writing of this study in order to enlighten the application of "The composition of forces" to the novel.

Foucault's applied theories could help explicate the traits, behavior and conflicts of the main character's adventure. The series of misfortunes and failures that he goes through vividly show how he is deeply influenced by different methods that an organizing institution can practice over the body of its individuals to overcome their belief system and to make them as normal and submissive as to the utmost possible level according to its centrally defining theme of authority: that is the main functional goal of the disciplinary power.

1.1. A Brief Analysis of the Main Character

The story of the novel revolves around the mysterious life of a widowed man called Teddy Daniels, a U.S marshal, who is on a mission to Shutter Island with his colleague Chuck. Certainly, the focus of this research is on his mental health and of course his psychological state, actions and reactions during the story. The protagonist is deeply preoccupied with World War II, during which he killed a lot of people and witnessed so many horrifying spectacles as well. The experience of war has predisposed him to drink alcohol in order to escape his past trauma. Alongside this fact, to a great degree he is mentally influenced by the death of his wife, who thinks was killed by a man named Andrew Laeddis. Teddy assumes that Andrew is on the island on which he is on a police mission, so with eyes wide open, he attempts to find him.

From the beginning of his mission with his keen eyes he notices the uncommonly strange behavior of doctors and nurses. He tries to identify the method of their chief treatment and their own personal background, but Dr. Cawley, who is in charge of the medical premises, refuses to cooperate.

The truth behind the story is that Teddy is actually Andrew and he killed his wife because she had murdered their children. Teddy's defense mechanism, that is to say his choice to forget the past could protect him from all the pains and perplexities in his real life. His denial of reality culminates to the concluding scene where after a role play therapy that is to say, Teddy's fake police mission, there is no option other than lobotomy on the table for doctors.

II. METHOD AND DISCUSSION

2. 1. "The Composition of Forces"

The protagonist of the novel has a complicated personality. He is living in a delusional life, where he cannot recall the dreadful incidents and horrible details of his life. He had been in war, slaughtered many people and acted brutally and mercilessly towards his enemies. Moreover, he has witnessed pure fright, like people piled up in the cold under the snow. Consequently, all these traumatic experiences led him to forget and resist reality.

Confidently, he introduces himself as a marshal whose profession is to solve crimes and find criminals. It could be stated that he is under the influence of what Foucault calls "the composition of forces" to act like a police agent who represents disciplinary power in society.

Analyzing Foucault's "The composition of forces" could be a very practical theory to understand the main character's resistance towards reality caused by his

past trauma. The body of the condemned in Foucault's idea should be directed through different practices and filters in order to be able to attain a particular rank and place in society. Accordingly, the subject is like an unformed and untitled body that can be normalized and placed in different units.

"The composition of forces" is supposed to work as a machine which consists of different units. In each of these units there are unified and similar bodies sharing same talents and they work together in the same way. Systematically, they are to be trained and converted so that they can function more efficiently to achieve the main purpose of the governing disciplinary power.

Foucault introduces four steps in creating the docile body. As it was mentioned before they include "The art of Distribution", "The control of activity", "The organization of geneses" and "The composition of forces". Supposedly, with the help of all these steps the creation of discipline and docility would be possible. It is emphasized by Foucault that the existence of the minor units is essential, because they enable the creation of a machine which is made upon force and discipline. Thus, the question of the individual body is what is important in most of Foucault's philosophy and for sure this research is not an exception.

Foucault believes that only after institutions train and teach the individuals, they can produce the ultimate performance from what they have created out of the trained bodies. So it could be stated that disciplinary power aims to "construct a machine whose effect will be maximized by the concerted articulation of the elementary parts of which it is composed" (*Discipline and Punish*, p. 164).

According to what has been stated before, which is, Foucault's attention to the importance of individuals in society, it could be argued that Andrew is an individual who has gone through various methods and experiments related to the standards of disciplinary forces in order to become institutionalized and normalized to be an appropriate member of the system. Naturally, studying the main character of the novel is one of the possible ways leading to a more complete and refined understanding of Foucault's "The composition of forces".

Dennis Lehane portrays the individual's transformation through his novel with the help of disciplinary forces and methods. Dealing with past trauma, alcoholism, murder and eventually dissociative identity disorder, the protagonist goes through some experiments and treatments which could be said carry the label of "The composition of forces". Indeed, reading Foucault's thoughts and beliefs assists individuals to realize that

whether they want it or not, they are constantly analyzed and observed by a disciplinary power.

In the novel, doctors are trying to classify the patients according to their mental state and their gender. In Andrew's case Dr. Sheehan is trying to put him in a specified category: either he is sane or insane, normal or abnormal. This is exactly like what the disciplinary power tries to do by categorizing individuals and labeling them. Similarly, Foucault in his *The History of Madness* (2006) point to the way "a dualist pathology that will divide everything into binary oppositions—normal and abnormal, healthy and sick—to create two radically different domains separated by the simple formula 'good for confinement'" (p. 128).

During the story the protagonist has many mental flashbacks to his presence in World War II. He talks to Chuck and other doctors about his unfortunate past memories and the fact that he was chosen to be a part of the U.S. army to be in the war. The final result of his participation was a serious mental disorder and intentional loss of his memory.

At the beginning of the story, before arriving at the island he talks about what it used to be in the past. He tells Chuck that:

"You know it used to be a POW camp?"
Teddy said.

Chuck said, "The island?"

Teddy nodded. "Back in the Civil War. They built a fort there, barracks."

"What do they use the fort for now?"

Teddy shrugged. "Couldn't tell you. There's quite a few of them out here on the different islands. Most of them were target practice for artillery shells during the war. Not too many left standing."
"But the institution?"

"From what I could tell, they use the old troop quarters."

Chuck said, "Be like going back to basic, huh?"

"Don't wish that on us." Teddy turned on the rail. (*Shutter Island*, pp. 9-10)

It could be understood that he is still struggling with what he had gone through during the war. Basically, the practice of "The composition of forces" does not end in the war; also the treatment of the patients and therapy could be considered as other ways of normalizing patients,

that is to say, the main purpose of "the composition of forces" mechanism. As Dr. Cawley claims, the treatments that they apply to their patients are much more different from the common methods of the past. He tries to prove that he is carrying out morally accepted procedures which are not against humanity. He states that:

For the work. A moral fusion between law and order and clinical care. Just half a century ago, even less in some cases, the thinking on the kind of patients we deal with here was that they should, at best, be shackled and left in their own filth and waste. They were systematically beaten, as if that could drive the psychosis out. We demonized them. We tortured them. Spread them on racks, yes. Drove screws into their brains. Even drowned them on occasion. (*Shutter Island*, p. 21)

2. 2. Dr. Cawley and The Disciplinary Power

Dr. Cawley's treatment procedures are comparable to the core issue in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. He tried to compare the punishment in old times to what is common in his time. Moreover, he believes that disciplinary force and punishment of the condemned body is behind the doors rather than in front of the public and represents the good and civilized face of the treatment.

In point of fact, the penal system is more focused on torturing the mind of the individuals rather than their bodies. That could be the reason why Dr. Cawley believes that unlike the treatment used before, he puts his thoughts and energy to look after his patients and to really change them. Regarding his treatment he says that: "Now we treat them. Morally. We try to heal, to cure. And if that fails, we at least provide them with a measure of calm in their lives" (*Shutter Island*, p. 21). Even when Andrew calls the escaped inmate a prisoner, Cawley disagrees: "'We know a female prisoner is missing.' Teddy placed his notebook on his knee, flipped the pages. 'A Rachel Solando.' 'Patient.' Cawley gave them a dead smile" (*Shutter Island*, p. 21). It could be claimed that Cawley and Dr. Sheehan smartly play the role of the modern face of the disciplinary power and its penal system.

On the second day of Teddy's arrival when he and Chuck meet Dr. Cawley at the entrance of ward B, Cawley explains about how the therapy has changed through the time. He talks about the gap between old school and new school. As it was stated before, Cawley attempts to present a humanistic face of the penal system. Here is the conversation that took place:

"The old school," Cawley said, "believes in shock therapy, partial lobotomies, spa treatments for the most docile patients. Psychosurgery is what we call it. The new school is enamored of psychopharmacology. It's the future, they say. Maybe it is. I don't know."

He paused, a hand on the banister, midway between the second floor and the

third, and Teddy could feel his exhaustion as a living, broken thing, a fourth

body in the stairwell with them. "How does psychopharmacology apply?"

Chuck asked. Cawley said, "A drug has just been approved lithium is its name

— that relaxes psychotic patients, tames them, some would say. Manacles

will become a thing of the past. Chains, handcuffs. Bars even, or so the optimists

say. The old school, of course, argues that nothing will replace psychosurgery,

but the new school is stronger, I think, and it will have money behind it.

(*Shutter Island*, p. 41)

As their conversation goes on Teddy asks about Cawley's opinion and his belief:

"Which school are you?" Teddy asked gently.

"Believe it or not, Marshal, I believe in talk therapy, basic interpersonal skills. I have this radical idea that if you treat a patient with respect and listen to what he's trying to tell you, you just might reach him."

Another howl. Same woman, Teddy was pretty sure. It slid between them on the stairs and seemed to spike Cawley's attention.

"But these patients?" Teddy said. ,

Cawley smiled. "Well, yes, many of these patients need to be medicated and

some need to be manacled. No argument. But it's a slippery slope. Once you

introduce the poison into the well, how do you ever get it out of the water?"

"You don't," Teddy said.

He nodded. "That's right. What should be the last resort gradually becomes standard response. And, I know, I'm mixing my metaphors. Sleep," he said to

Chuck. "Right. I'll try that next time." "I've heard it works wonders," Chuck said, and they headed up the final flight. (*Shutter Island*, p. 50)

When Teddy meets the real Rachel Solando whom he thought was missing, he realizes that Dr. Cawley was only pretending that he could treat the patients based on the standards of the new school. What he found nearly proved that Cawley was doing a barbaric practice on the inmates. Rachel tells him:

If you are deemed insane, then all actions that would otherwise prove you are not do, in actuality, fall into the framework of an insane person's actions. Your sound protests constitute denial. Your valid fears are deemed paranoia. Your survival instincts are labeled defense mechanisms. It's a no-win situation. It's a death penalty really. Once you're here, you're not getting out. No one leaves Ward C. No one. Well, a few have, okay, I'll grant you, a few have gotten out. But they've had surgery. In the brain. Squish—right through the eye. It's a barbaric medical practice, unconscionable, and I told them that ... (*Shutter Island*, p. 157)

In contrast to what Dr. Cawley has claimed before, Teddy finds out that the truth behind the walls of the lighthouse and Cawley's job was no treatment. They were experimenting and creating monsters and zombies out of their patients.

2. 3. Teddy Daniels

As it was mentioned before, the protagonist has gone through horrendous incidents in his past life. The negative influence of his past trauma, the war, has turned him into an alcoholic. His presence in the war and killing people as a soldier is the outcome of experiencing "The composition of forces".

Teddy has a mission in Ashecliffe to find a lost inmate. Generally he tries to act as an agent of power. He has been so homogenized and normalized that unknowingly he behaves as the subject rather than the

object of power. He tries to sort out the patients and obtain the every possible bit of information from the staff and he is highly determined to do his job.

In the fifth section of the novel, he argues with Dr. Jeremiah Naehring on drinking alcohol and its connection to his profession:

"Why you don't drink alcohol. Isn't it common for men in your profession to imbibe?" Cawley handed him his drink and Teddy stood and crossed to the bookshelves to the right of the hearth. "Common enough," he said. "And yours?"

"Excuse me?"

"Your profession," Teddy said. "I've always heard it's overrun with boozers."

"Not that I've noticed."

"Haven't looked too hard, then, huh?"

"I'm not sure I follow."

"That's, what, cold tea in your glass?" Teddy turned from the books, watched Naehring glance at his glass, a silkworm of a smile twitching his soft mouth. "Excellent, Marshal. You possess outstanding defense mechanisms. I assume you're quite adept at interrogation." (*Shutter Island*, pp. 38-39)

Their argument continuous on the matter of acting violently in Teddy's profession when Naehring says he should be an expert in interrogating. Teddy tells him that:

"I'm a federal marshal. We bring them in. That's it. Most times, others handle the interviewing."

"I called it 'interrogation,' you called it 'interviewing.' Yes, Marshal, you do have astonishing defense capabilities." He clicked the bottom of his scotch glass off the table several times as if in applause. "Men of violence fascinate me."

"Men of what?" Teddy strolled over to Naehring's chair, looked down at the little man, and rattled the ice in his glass. Naehring tilted his head back, took a sip of scotch. "Violence." "Hell of an assumption to make, Doc." This from Chuck, looking as openly annoyed as Teddy'd ever seen him.

"There's no assumption, no assumption."

Teddy gave his glass one more rattle before he drained it, saw something twitch near Naehring's left eye. "I'd have to agree with my partner," he said and took his seat.

"No." Naehring turned the one syllable into three. "I said you were men of violence. That's not the same as accusing you of being violent men." (*Shutter Island*, p. 39)

Like a responsible marshal government and a subject of power, Teddy asks for the personnel files of the asylum staff. Although Cawley highly disagrees, he is very persistent and has keen eyes to learn every detail about them especially from Dr. Sheehan. At this point Dr. Cawley says:

"Dr. Naehring, among other capacities, serves as chief liaison to our board of overseers. I asked him here in that capacity tonight to address your earlier requests."

"Which requests were those?"

Naehring stoked his pipe back to life with a cupped match. "We will not release personnel files of our clinical staff."

"Sheehan," Teddy said.

"Anyone." (*Shutter Island*, p. 40)

The role that Teddy plays during the novel is an axis of power, which is trying to gain knowledge from every unit of the Ashecliffe so that he could control and predict the incidents on the island. It was stated earlier that Teddy was suspicious about the things that were going on in the facilities on the island. In the like manner he was distrustful of the treatments as well as the mysterious light house. Teddy felt that things were not like the way Dr. Cawley had explained. He came to know that the patients whom he met during the interviews were programmed before and also whatever Cawley claimed was a cover-up hiding the truth. Eventually, he reaches the conclusion that they were doing inhumanly horrible experiments on the human brain after he met Rachel Solando in the cave, who was a former doctor of Ashecliffe and had escaped. Rachel revealed the secret of Ashecliffe to Teddy:

"Now ask yourself, how does pain enter the body?"

"Depends upon where you're hurt."

"No." She shook her head emphatically. "It has nothing to do with the flesh. The brain sends neural transmitters down through the nervous system. The brain controls pain," she said. "It controls fear. Sleep. Empathy. Hunger. Everything we associate with the heart or the soul or the nervous system is actually controlled by the brain. Everything."

"Okay..."

Her eyes shone in the firelight. "What if you could control it?"

"The brain?"

She nodded. "Re-create a man so that he doesn't need sleep, doesn't feel pain. Or love. Or sympathy. A man who can't be interrogated because his memory banks are wiped clean." She stoked the fire and looked up at him.

"They're creating ghosts here, Marshal. Ghosts to go out into the world and do ghostly work."

"But that kind of ability, that kind of knowledge is—"

"Years off," she agreed. "Oh, yes. This is a decades-long process, Marshal. Where they've begun is much the same place the Soviets have—brainwashing. Deprivation experiments. Much like the Nazis experimented on Jews to see the effect of hot and cold extremes and apply those results to help the soldiers of the Reich. But, don't you see, Marshal? A half century from now, people in the know will look back and say this"—she struck the dirt floor with her index finger—"this is where it all began. The Nazis used Jews. The Soviets used prisoners in their own gulags. Here, in America, we tested patients on Shutter Island." (*Shutter Island*, p. 158)

In this part Teddy realizes that as an individual who is prone to migraines and had a very sad past trauma could be a particular chosen person who is on the island on purpose. It could be stated that this is the moment when Teddy turned to be an object of power and an offshoot of "The composition of forces," rather than being the mere subject of power.

2. 4. Andrew Laedis

As the story goes on the twisted secrets of the novel are unraveled Teddy's real character being revealed. He himself is Andrew. Due to his dark past and gloomy life experiences, he has created a fake world full of lies so that he can protect himself from the harsh reality. Teddy was the main target of the Ashecliffe and was the most dangerous patient with a very powerful defense mechanism in ward C. Additionally, he attempted to deny his true identity and lose his memories to survive. Accordingly, he was the product of "The composition of forces," chosen to be experimented and analyzed in order to get homogenized and at last normalized.

Andrew had gone through the war, witnessed death camps, carnage and murdered his beloved wife. As Teddy, he resists the reality of his life and this resistance is the outcome of "The composition of forces". In a part when he is talking to Cawley about the reality of his life he tries to deny the truth when he could not believe that he had been in the asylum as a patient for two years. In response to what Dr. Cawley tells him about his presence on the island he says:

"And, what, you had a guy working in the U.S. marshals' office? Guy's job was to spike my joe every morning? Or maybe, wait, he worked for the newsstand where I buy my cup of coffee on the way in. That would be better. So for two years, you've had someone in Boston, slipping me drugs."

"Not Boston," Cawley said quietly. "Here." (*Shutter Island*, p. 187)

This conversation proves that he still cannot accept the truth. The functioned influence of "The composition of forces" can be perceived during the whole path of his therapy and even his past life as he had always been the object of it.

The life of the protagonist is an illustration of how the process of turning an individual to a normalized and homogenized body is always effective even in an invisible manner. Andrew was the object of "The composition of forces" when he was picked out of the ward C, and received different types of treatment such as the role play by Dr. Cawley and Dr. Sheehan. He had been passed through many filters but nothing could turn him into an obedient member of the system. Eventually unlike what was expected of a modern method of psychotherapy, they performed a lobotomy surgery on him so that he could be more useful as a lifeless monster.

The protagonist tried to deny his identity and what he has done before, because it was really hard to accept murdering his own wife. He acted like he had never

done anything horrible before and his denial still continues even when Cawley read his reports about Andrew: Patient is highly intelligent and highly delusional. Known proclivity for violence. Extremely agitated. Shows no remorse for his crime because his denial is such that no crime ever took place. Patient has erected a series of highly developed and highly fantastical narratives which preclude, at this time, his facing the truth of his actions. (*Shutter Island*, p. 18)

His constant denial of his real identity and the actions he had done possibly means that Dr. Cawley and Dr. Sheehan's mission has failed again; a failure which resulted in brain surgery.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study analyzed the main character in Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* under the lens of Foucault's "The composition of forces". Foucault's ideas helped this study to perceive and prove the cause of the protagonist's mental disorder, Dissociative Identity Disorder.

The main character learns about his multiple personalities as Teddy Daniels and Andrew Laeddis. His strange behavior is proved to be the outcome of the practices of "the composition of forces" as a way to turn him into an obediently useful part of the army and the asylum. Andrew shows denial in his behavior in accepting the truth of his life and he struggles with the loss of his memory. Also his other character, Teddy, shows resistance to what has been going on in the asylum and the lighthouse and also his real identity. Therefore, all the hospitalizations, experiments, modern psychotherapy in general and "The composition of forces" in particular failed to turn the protagonist into a docile body.

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