



Phloi from mirror image to death by madness: A Lacanian reading of Kukrit Pramoj 's “Four Reigns”

Bo Yang*, Amornrat Netthanyakonwong

Chinese Major, Department of Eastern Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok 65000, Thailand

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Abstract

The Four Reigns is a renowned novel in modern Thai literature and is widely known in the history of world literature. The novel is rich and profound, and is often studied as a sociological or historical text. However, the psychological study of the characters is rarely addressed. The novel follows the life of the protagonist, Phloi, and is driven by her experiences and psychological metamorphosis. This research, from a psychoanalytic perspective, reveals that the novel conforms to Lacan's Theory of the three orders: the imaginary order, the symbolic order, and the real order. As such, this paper uses the Theory of the Three Orders as a basis to analyse Phloi's life journey, and explain the different stages of her personality development and the creation of tragedy from a psychoanalytical perspective. This paper offers a fresh perspective and new insights for the study of *The Four Reigns*.

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Introduction

Since its inception, Psychoanalysis has long been intertwined with literature, as seen in Freud's interpretation of Shakespeare, Jung's focus on Dante, Goethe and Schiller, and Lacan's analysis of Hemingway and Joyce. Psychoanalysis is highly effective in understanding human behaviour, and as literary works themselves depict a variety of human behaviours, a psychoanalytic analysis of literary works will inevitably reveal the deeper motives and hidden meanings that lie beneath the surface of human behaviours, which may also be the author's true

intentions. Thus, psychoanalytic critical theories and methods can be used to delve deeper into the connotations and meanings of works (Wang, 2018). Among modern Thai literature, the Four Reigns is a realistic novel, and the author's origins and experiences have had a huge impact on the richness and depth of this work. This work is known to have been studied and analysed from several perspectives, such as linguistic analysis of its idioms, literary studies of the characters, comparative literature comparing its similarities and differences with the Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, sociological studies of its costumes and food, as well as historical and feminist perspectives. It is the first time that the work has been analysed from a psychoanalytic perspective, using the Theory of Lacan's three orders.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: islandsyang@hotmail.com (B.Yang).

The Four Reigns is a novel that delves into Thai history and society and is set in the upper-middle class nobility during the reign of the fifth to eighth kings of the Bangkok dynasty (1868–1946). Though the novel takes place a century ago, the human psyche and behaviour is characterized by the unconscious, an instinctual force that drives human behaviour. Rational human actions are controlled by it, thus the characters in the novel can be explained through psychoanalytic paths, regardless of the era in which they lived.

Moreover, the author of The Four Reigns emphasizes that the settings depicted in the story are based on real and historically accurate facts that were carefully researched. The author also adhered to the principle of truthfulness in the portrayal of the characters, ensuring that their words and actions did not contradict history (Pramoj, 1985, p. 1). This documentary style of creation made the characters in the novel seem quite realistic, and it achieved great acceptance in society. For example, when the novel was serialized in newspapers at the time, many people looked forward to its publication and one reader even sent the protagonist, Phloi, sour mangoes through the newspaper office (Makaranurak, 2009). The close relationship between the literary character and real life removes uncertainty and is meaningful to study from a psychoanalytic point of view. The psychological growth of the main character, Phloi, can be explored through her life, the main plot and driving force of the work, and it is found to be highly consistent with Lacan's Theory of the Three Orders. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse and interpret this novel from a psychoanalytic perspective in order to lead readers to a clearer understanding of the character development in the work. This approach offers a fresh perspective, or even a subversive reflection, on Phloi's life, and goes beyond the traditional model of studying The Four Reigns.

Lacan's Theory of the Three Orders and the Four Reigns

Jacques Lacan was a leading French psychoanalyst and is considered one of the most original figures in modern psychoanalysis (Clément et al., 1975). Despite his emphasis on a return to Freudian psychoanalysis, he expanded on Freud's theories and had a significant impact on literary and cultural studies. Among Lacan's many theories, the Theory of the three orders of personality is a departure from Freud's Theory of the "Id, Ego, and Superego." Lacan initially developed the "Mirror stage" and on this basis, developed the Theory of the "Imaginary," "Symbolic," and "Real." In fact, the "Three Orders" is not a specific Theory, but a framework with various and

complex contents. In terms of Phloi's trajectory in The Four Reigns, we focus on three stages of her psychological development, which broadly encompass the following main elements:

- The Imaginary: analyzing Phloi's development during the Mirror stage and her entry into the Oedipus Complex.
- The Symbolic: analyzing Phloi's "Name-of-the-Father" and the manifestation of Phloi's "Desire" under the influence of "the Other."
- The Real: an analysis of how Phloi comes into contact with the "Real" through "Trauma" and "Fantasy."

However, these Three Orders are not in a progressive relationship, but rather intertwined, with areas of overlap between them. It should also be noted that this is not the whole of the Theory of the Three Orders, as in The Imaginary there is also the Unconscious, but this aspect will not be discussed as, in terms of literary criticism, "the focus of Lacanian criticism is not on the Unconscious of the character or the author, but on the text itself and even on the relationship between the text and the reader" (Homer, 2014).

In The Four Reigns, Phloi's life is shown in full, from young girl to old age, allowing us to analyse the development of her personality. Her time with her mother and the period when she first entered the palace can be described as being in the stage of the Imaginary. Her life alone in the palace after her mother's departure and her life after her marriage are in the Symbolic, and the epiphany she had about her life before her death is in the Real. However, these Three Orders of her life are not absolute temporal changes and progressions; at different stages, these Three Orders also overlap and work together to coordinate the growth of Phloi's personality.

The Embodiment of Phloi in the Imaginary Order

Mirror stage

At the beginning of the story, Phloi is a ten-year-old child of some intelligence but lacking psychological maturity, similar to what Lacan calls the Mirror stage. In this stage, she can see an image of herself in the "mirror," the "ideal-I." The mirror does not have to be a literal mirror, but can also refer to the actions and words of others that influence the shaping of the "ideal-I." For example, at the beginning of the novel, Phloi's mother says, "Remember what I said, when you grow up and get married, you must find a good husband and not marry a womanizer with many concubines!" (Pramoj, 1985, p. 3). This is a "mirror" that Phloi recognizes and references later in the story.

However, the “ideal-I” can be broken and developed, and Phloi’s tolerance and understanding of her husband’s illegitimate child before marriage is a breakthrough from her initial “ideal-I” formed in her early childhood. Additionally, after her mother brought her to the palace, the compliments paid to her mother by her acquaintances and the words spoken to her mother by the Princess all served as “mirrors” that contributed to the development of Phloi’s “ideal-I.” (It should be noted that at this point, as Phloi develops in reference to her mother’s image, it is the Other of the Symbolic Order that is at work. The Narcissistic identification in the Mirror stage and the Other identification in the Symbolic Order occur simultaneously, as expressed above. Lacan’s Three Orders, rather than being temporally altered, are intertwined. Phloi’s experience of entering the palace also confirms this. Nonetheless, this overlap of the Three Orders is not the focus of this discussion and will not be argued in detail.)

Phloi also reflects on her past as she sits on a boat leaving her childhood home. She remembers the layout and function of each room, the objects and furnishings, and more importantly, the image of her father not saying a word as she says goodbye to him, and his “as if he had never met me before” gaze (Pramoj, 1985, p. 4). This memory stays with Phloi and she recalls it decades later. During the previous ten years of her life, Phloi had experienced a great deal, but in this short moment of reflection while leaving her home by boat, she can only recall certain memories in bits and pieces. It’s like a “baby looking into a mirror, where their inner physical experiences are fragmented and disjointed” (Wu, 2010). But it’s these memories that have solidified the image of her father, mother, siblings, and especially her two sisters, which is the process of forming the world, or the Imaginary. Her feelings towards her two sisters, her fondness and gratitude for her elder sister “Choei”, and her fear of her eldest sister “Un”, are also expressed through her memories of trivial and concrete events. These bits and pieces of memory form a “mirror” that allows Phloi to confirm her own existence and feel a sense of binary oppositions between the Ego and the Other.

An important character in the Mirror stage of Phloi’s personality formation is “Choi,” a lively and spirited friend in the palace. Compared to Phloi, who is described as monotonous and uninteresting, Choi is a lively, bold and spirited person who dares to love and hate, and has a sense of humour as well. Through observing Choi’s actions and behaviour, Phloi is able to confirm her own image and identity. In fact, Choi has already begun to

influence Phloi’s “ideal-I”, and her inner love and praise for Choi is expressed through her desire to be more like her. At the same time however, Phloi represses this desire and instead conforms to her societal role as a child of nobility due to her greater desire to reflect the image of her mother that the people of the palace have praised. Additionally, her sister Choei, who is similar to Choi in many ways and is also from a noble family and court, serves as another bold and spirited mirror image that Phloi aspires to be like. This resemblance can be seen when the Princess’s butler, Sai, first meets Choei and describes her as looking like a boy (Pramoj, 1985, p. 93).

However, it is clear from the content of the novel that Phloi does not realise this “ideal-I” in the mirror throughout her life but instead rejects or suppresses it. She was, in the circumstances, determined to be a gentle person. It could also be said that her life in the palace was a replica of her mother’s life in the palace, that her relationship with Choi was a replica of her mother’s relationship with Sai, and that her relationship with the Princess was a replica of her mother’s relationship with the Princess. The history of the two generations is so similar that it suggests a similarity in human behaviour.

These spiritual contradictions and divisions are referred to as “Misrecognition”. It is also the very beginning of her final madness. The imaginary world plays a vital role in people’s lives and is formed in a certain cultural environment (Kuang, 2020). The mirror stage does not disappear after a while, because people always have a “misrecognition” of themselves that corresponds with their cultural environment.

Phloi was deeply influenced by the court culture and was not exposed to a wide range of society. When she first left the palace to return home, she found the outside world very exciting, but at the same time, she felt that the vendors and other passers-by spoke vulgarly and behaved indecently, revealing that her actions and thoughts have been conditioned by traditional thinking from the beginning. Thereafter, when she sees the court undergo a series of major changes influenced by western culture, her mind is shaken to the core, and it can be said that she begins to understand the real world, and that her imaginary court life, which represented eternity, disappears and her misconception of herself ends.

But as a whole, she defines herself in a mirror made up of her mother, Sai, the noble Princess and others, until she dies of old age. For the many changes that followed made her well aware that “the old order no longer existed, that the formerly singing and dancing royal palace was in ruins and desolation, that her family had fallen into disrepair, that her siblings had sunk into poverty,

one emotional blow after another left her grieving, but she struggled to maintain her family in spite of her pain. She is shaken and inspired by the changes in history, but still unable to adapt to them" (Pang, 2011). This inability to adapt can be interpreted as a form of rejection and disapproval, for by this time she has built up an unshakeable ego.

Lacan explains that "the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an "orthopedic" form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure" (Lacan, 2006). Through reading the text, Phloi, that is, in a small space, gradually shapes herself from a fragmented image, a shaping that can be seen as a kind of orthopedic surgery. Her internal pressure does not achieve a breakthrough in herself. Eventually, however, her ego hardens and drags her towards tragedy.

In summary, Phloi's mirror stage is "a decisive moment. Not only does 'the self' issue from it, but so does 'the body in bits and pieces'" (Gallop, 1985). At the same time, this stage has had a lifelong impact on Phloi, as "This moment is the source not only for what follows but also for what precedes. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction and yet it is itself a moment of delusion, of captivation by an illusory image. Both future and past are thus rooted in an illusion." (Gallop, 1985). This is confirmed by Phloi's behavior when she grew up and the "sober confusion" shown in her last words.

Phloi's Oedipus Complex

Throughout the novel, the role of the father looms like a shadow over Phloi from the very beginning. It is the inescapable Oedipus Complex of Phloi. In Lacan's psychoanalytic Theory, the Oedipus Complex is different for women and men. "For girls, however, the Oedipus complex has to account for the process whereby girls first give up their initial love-object (the mother)" (Homer, 2005). This process has a total of three stages, and it is clear from the analysis of the text that Phloi's personality is built up entirely through these three stages.

The first stage can be referred to as the Mother-infant mirror stage which emphasizes the close relationship between mother and daughter. In this stage the relationship between the child and the mother is the closest as can be seen at the beginning of the novel during the earliest

encounters between Phloi and the mother. But there is a third-party present at this time, the object of the mother's desire, the Phallus, as Lacan says, or the father. In the novel, it is Phloi's mother who loses the struggle with other women for her husband and is forced to leave home, which subconsciously makes Phloi realize the importance of "Phallus." At this stage, Lacan sees the mother as a symbolic presence who can be absent at any time when the child needs her. This is also the case with Phloi's mother in the novel, who leaves shortly after sending Phloi to the palace and occasionally comes back to visit her. Additionally, it is mentioned several times in the novel that Phloi's feelings for her mother have faded, as she grew a "little further away from mom emotionally." (Pramoj, 1985, p. 86). The mother is no longer a real person at this point in the story, but rather a symbol. This prompts Phloi to ponder the meaning of her mother's absence or disappearance. Ultimately, she discovers that what the mother desires is the Phallus. Throughout the novel, the mother leaves Phloi multiple times to be with men she feels that she can rely on. Despite her repeated claims that she loves Phloi the most, her actions suggest otherwise. As such, the mother introduces Phloi to the Oedipus complex through her own behaviour and desire for the Phallus.

In the second stage, the father figure makes an appearance, specifically the symbolic father. It is not necessary for a person to have a real father in their life for them to grow up "normally", but it is essential for them to have a symbolic father. If the father's name is missing or excluded, it can lead to the individual becoming a psychopath (Ma, 2006). Before Phloi leaves home, she lacks a father figure in her life. Her real father is indifferent or suspicious of her existence. The only constant in her life is her mother. However, upon her mother's departure, a symbolic father appears and in Lacan's Theory, this symbolic father holds great authority. He is the object of the mother's admiration, shattering the perfect image Phloi had of her mother. Through analyzing the text, it is clear that this symbolic father is Sadet, the Princess in the palace. In Freud's Oedipus complex Theory, the father is portrayed as brutal and terrible, whereas in Lacan's Theory, the father is seen as loving and gentle, while also being a legislator who promulgates taboos. Lacan states, "It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Lacan, 2006). In the novel, the Princess, who is even more powerful than Phloi's real father, serves as a legislator and a symbolic father figure. At the same time, the novel is full of descriptions of various acts of care for

Phloi by the Princess, making her a loving figure, which aligns perfectly with Lacan's Theory. These experiences lead Phloi into the third stage of the Oedipus complex.

In the third stage, the child begins to identify with the father after discovering the mother's imperfections and deprivations through all the symbolic fathers. The novel describes Phloi's psychology by saying, "It occurred to Phloi that if there was anyone who had the right to dictate her life, to educate her, and to make her obey, it was only her father at home, besides the Princess in the palace" (Pramoj, 1985, p. 86). Phloi's identification with her father is clearly expressed in the novel, such as her excitement after the appearance of her father at the Tonsure ceremony, and, after the ceremony, when she receives news of her mother's death, the author does not even describe her feelings and performance before opening a new chapter. At this point, it is understood that the mother-infant mirroring stage is over and the identification with the father has begun. Next, she was devastated by her boyfriend's betrayal, but when she followed the king by train outside the city, she saw her father among the farewellers at the station, and she "saw her father, and her worries about him diminished, and the depression and bitterness she had felt for days disappeared, and her life seemed to have meaning" (Pramoj, 1985, p. 239). Her psychological activities towards her father show her identification with him, while "the disappearance of bitterness" and her realization that "life has meaning" profoundly express the status of her father in her heart.

In addition, afterwards, she obeyed all the arrangements made by the Princess, and also obeyed her father's advice to marry her husband, Prem. Moreover, Prem is also the same as her father's youth, both in the palace as a guard, and Phloi's marriage and her mother's marriage, reflects the recognition of her "self" by her mother's influence in the mirror stage. At the same time, according to Lacan, the girl will see her mother as a rival to her father, but she will eventually find it impossible to unite with him and turn to a similar person, and Prem is a perfect replica of her father. Finally, the completion of the three stages of the Oedipus complex marks the transition of Phloi from the imaginary to the symbolic.

The Embodiment of Phloi in the Symbolic Order

In the Imaginary, man becomes aware of the self and at the same time begins to recognize the existence of the Other. The Other on the one hand opposes the ego, bringing psychological stress, anxiety and a sense of hostility, and on the other hand, the Other represents the environment of the society, and the ego begins to feel that

it must relate to the Other as a member of the society, Obeying the orders given to him by the society (Tang, 2016).

In Lacan's Name of the Father Theory, the father and the name are no longer real, they are symbols. The Princess, the real father, the palace, the king, the Thai culture, etc. can be the father, and their names, in the form of language, bring the person or the self into a world of symbols, where language ties the self to the "Name-of-the-Father." These names represent social laws and a combination of cultural factors. For example, Phloi's love, marriage, childbearing and other actions are all done under the influence of the "Name-of-the-Father". More importantly, in the Symbolic Order, human desire, which has sprouted in the imaginary, enters a new state due to the intervention of the Other. Desire is one of the most important problems that man has to face when dealing with the Symbolic.

In Freud's Theory, desire is closely related to sex and is an extension of the sexual impulse, while Lacan does not endorse this view, but proposes the logic of "need-demand-desire."

When Phloi first appeared in the novel, homeless and with little hope, she needed someone to save her. According to Lacan's logic, "need" is a biological scarcity, which in Phloi's case is the resolution of her homelessness through the fulfilling of her need for a warm home, which she then obtains in the palace of the Princess. After this, it rises to "demand." In Lacan's view, "Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for. It is demand for a presence or an absence. The Other's privilege here thus outlines the radical form of the gift of what the Other does not have—namely, what is known as its love" (Lacan, 2006).

In the novel, Phloi is preoccupied with the gaze of others and constantly feels like she is being watched or judged. This is in line with Lacan's Theory of the "gaze" and the absence of the initial "Big Other" or maternal figure in one's life. Phloi seeks to fill this absence by seeking the approval and love of others and is constantly trying to present herself in a certain way to gain their envy and love. Her actions and desires, such as wanting a fancy bicycle or trying to gain the approval of her older sister, are motivated by this desire for love and acceptance.

In other words, Phloi's actions and desires are shaped by the expectations and desires of others, rather than her own true desires. As stated in Lacan's view, true human desires are always false and are merely the desires of the Other (Zhang, 2006). According to Zizek (1993), if we subtract need from demand, we get desire. This is reflected in the novel through the words of the Princess who, after she has fallen out of love, tells Phloi:

"If we handle what happens every day just right, we will have good results in the future, but if we don't handle it properly, we won't have good results. Our life is like a drama, where the actors' task is to perform and the orchestra is accompanying us. We are actors, we have to perform to the rhythm of the music, and whoever performs in tune will be praised."

(Pramoj, 1985, p. 229).

Obviously, the Princess explains that life is like a performance, and that the actors (people) must perform to the rhythm of the music (the desires of the Other). Phloi's desires to be a good courtesan, to have a happy life, and to marry a good man are all desires imposed upon her by the Princess, her mother, and her father. She is not acting on her own desires, but rather trying to fulfil the desires of the Other. Furthermore, Phloi is trying to fit the ideal of a courtesan, in which the performance is the most important thing; Phloi's actions and desires are shaped by the expectations of others and not her own true desires.

In addition, this concept of imposed desire can be found in Phloi's attitude toward objects, such as making luxurious clothes for the ceremony of the king's return, food and pajamas for her lover, wanting a bicycle, etc. Also, Phloi feels honored to have a "sister of status and position" after seeing her sister, Choei, who speaks and dresses elegantly during the ceremony. This "honor" is generated by the presence of the Other. Or rather, since the Other wanted such a sister, Phloi desired to have such a sister as well. Phloi's disappointment and shock after hearing that the two brothers were drinking and smoking opium were from the perspective of the Other, a sign of the father's sadness and the contempt of others. Phloi's expression of these feelings was also influenced by the desire of the other.

Additionally, the desire of the Other affected her marriage to Prem, her psychology during the war, her tolerance for her elder sister, her treatment of children (including those of her brother and Prem), and so on. These fragmentary examples are summed up by the fact that Phloi has always had in her mind a mentality from the "noble house," a term that, as a symbol, reflects her unconscious desires. This desire was formed under the influence of the desires of others such as her father, mother, the Princess, and Sai. Thereafter, throughout her life, she also defended this desire of the others, or, as the Princess said, performed to the rhythm of the music, or, performed to the desire of the others.

Moreover, according to Lacan, desire arises when there is a separation between needs and demands, and the

liminal area where they are separated is "anxiety." We can also find from the novel that Phloi is in a state of "anxiety" from the beginning to the end, anxiety about her identity, anxiety about social change, and so on. Phloi is in a state of going with the flow of life, or in a state where she has no control over her desires, and is even less courageous than her own mother.

The Embodiment of Phloi in the Real Order

In the real world, the vast majority of people spend their lives in the Imaginary Order and the Symbolic Order and rarely enter the Real Order. At the end of the novel, Phloi is nearing death and she raises many questions:

"I don't understand... I am so tired, I begin to understand a little, I am so tired that my heart is broken, I am too old after Four Reigns, or, I am tired because there are many things I do not understand."

(Pramoj, 1985, p. 986).

The words of the dying are contradictory and reasonable at the same time. Her death, in many literary criticisms, might be seen as it represents the change of times, or even the tragedy of women's lives, etc. But from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is a glimpse of awakening and epiphany of reality as Phloi finally touches the real in her dying moment.

For Lacan, there is an essential difference between objective reality and the real, which cannot be touched, expressed in words, or even imagined. If it is verbalized or imagined, it immediately enters the Symbolic, and at the junction of these two Orders is trauma, because the experience of trauma cannot be symbolized. Phloi's last words in the novel, "I am so tired, so tired that my heart is broken" is an expression of trauma, and it represents the emotional and mental exhaustion she feels. The phrase "I don't understand a lot of things" corresponds perfectly to the inability to express the Real (the unconscious) in words. This phrase implies that Phloi is struggling to understand and process the reality of her situation and the expectations imposed upon her. On the other hand, the phrase "I begin to understand a little" is proof that she has entered the Real, it suggests that Phloi is starting to gain a deeper understanding of herself and her situation, which is often the first step in overcoming trauma.

From the beginning, unlike her son and husband, Phloi pursues no grand ideals, but only to escape the shadow of her mother's tragedy and establish a good

family life, on which there is also some hope for the continuation of a good social system in terms of ideology. But none of this went as she had hoped. That's where her trauma lies. Throughout the novel, Phloi's experience is repeatedly characterized by "a sudden break in the dreamlike imagination and symbolic domination. In that surreal moment of reality, the Other's domination fails, the mask falls off, and the man as a pseudo-subject becomes a void, a trauma" (Zhang, 2005). And the cause of the formation of these traumas is the establishment and destruction of the fantasy time and again. In order to resist these traumas, she had to keep building up fantasies and desires. We can also feel that Phloi was enjoying this combination of pain and pleasure until all the fantasies were completely and utterly destroyed, when the long-standing doubts in Phloi's body were raised and she started to have an epiphany and stopped resisting, while going mad and dying.

Fantasy, which has a central place in Lacan's psychoanalytic Theory, is represented by a formula: $\$ \diamond a$ (formule du fantasme). The $\$$ in this formula denotes the subject castrated by various symbols. In the novel, the process of Phloi's growth is the process of accepting the other. These Others include her father and mother, the Princess, her husband, her brothers, elder sister, etc., who together shape Phloi, which, in Lacan's Theory, is the process of the subject's constant castration. The \diamond in the middle is a fantasy frame, which is what isolates Phloi as the subject and the cause of her desires, giving Phloi a sense of reality and giving her a constant desire to pursue life. Because of this, Phloi can persist for 4 eras, constantly having hope for her family and society, which is actually a fantasy, and only then can she be a normal person. Finally, the "a" indicates the reason for the appearance of the object of desire. In the novel, such corresponds to Phloi's various desires at different times and the reasons why these desires came to her.

The way she behaved before her death can be described as a kind of mental breakdown or insanity, slipping from a normal state of mind to a state of madness. It is also an epiphany of life. Although she is still asking questions and wondering, she has begun to detach herself from the reality of everyday life, which is composed of symbols and fantasies, access to the Real, which is obscured by the first two. By looking back on her life, she breaks all the fantasies she had once had and realizes that she has spent her life as a subject who has been castrated by the symbolic world.

Due to the breaking of the fantasies, she could no longer merge with reality, a feeling of emptiness of life suddenly descended, and the meaning of reality was all

dissolved. Her death was not the result of her age, not the result of experiencing four eras, but the inevitable result of spiritually breaking the fantasies. Because at this point, she is no longer a "castrated subject," but a mad person, the embodiment of the death-drive (Li, 2012).

Throughout her life, she had always taken other people's desires as her own, hoping to establish human connections and gain recognition, and only when she died did she face the reality that, as the Princess once concluded, life is a drama and they are all actors, and whoever works well with the orchestra will be praised. But then she began to question and understand why she was an actress, why she had to cooperate, why she had to be praised, and the emptiness behind all these fantasies.

In the end of the novel, Phloi comes into contact with the Real, only a moment before death, maybe less than a second, but from a psychoanalytical point of view, this is very literarily and artistically powerful.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Four Reigns is a work of historical and literary significance. It is similar to the Saga Novel, or Roman-fleuve novel, which not only has deep historical meaning but also devotes more space to the social background and various details of daily life at that time. The author describes Phloi's life in detail, and numerous studies point to her fate, and the historical and social context that caused her tragic fate. But, from a psychoanalytic point of view, Phloi's life fits perfectly into Lacan's Theory of the Three Orders. In the Imaginary, the discovery and formation of the self in the mirror stage, as well as her entry into the Oedipus Complex and its proceeding and ending, can be found plenty of evidence. In the symbolic, the influence of the other, the pressure of the "Name-of-the-Father", and the relationship between her own desires and the desires of the Other are inevitable experiences in her growth. Finally, before her death, she breaks the fantasies of life and feels the Real that many people cannot touch in their lifetime, and in epiphany and nothingness, she returns to an uncastrated subject. In conclusion, The Four Reigns is a good text to study with psychoanalytic Theory. Of course, in addition to Lacan's Theory, it can also be analysed and discovered from Carl Jung's collective subconscious and Sigmund Freud's personality theories, etc. However, it is not recommended to analyse it from the perspective of Freud's "sexuality" as the driving force, which has some significance, but it is against the author's obvious intention and is slightly biased or inappropriate.

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