

The Effects of Cobb's Trauma in Christopher Nolan's *Inception*

Evania Nur Aprilla¹, Cahyaningsih Pujimahanani²

^{1,2} English Literature Department, Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Surabaya, Indonesia

1vaniahye6@gmail.com, 2Cahyaningsih.Pujimahanani@unitomo.ac.id

Abstract

This study, entitled "The Effects of Cobb's Trauma in Christopher Nolan's *Inception*" aims to explore how trauma shapes the life of the main character, Cobb. Using a qualitative method and Charcot's theory. The finding show that unresolved trauma dominates Cobb's mind and behavior, producing deep and long-lasting effects. Cobb's trauma is reflected in psychological conditions such as anxiety and flashbacks, and it also influences his decisions, actions, and relationships. The study concludes that trauma not only affects Cobb's inner world but also directs the course of his life journey.

Keywords: Cobb, Effects, *Inception*, Trauma.

INTRODUCTION

Trauma is a mental illness that people can experience at any age, whether they are children, teenagers or adults. According to Braga, trauma is a violent shock that is capable of producing an impact that the individual cannot resist (Braga, et al., 2008). Trauma is understood as a sudden and powerful shock that an individual cannot resist or fight against. This shock comes from events that threaten safety, involve violence or cause intense fear and it gives a deep impact on someone's mind, emotions, and body. Because it is so intense, trauma often leaves lasting marks that are difficult to overcome and it affects both mental and physical well-being in the long term.

Trauma is defined as deeply distressing or disturbing experiences (Bodziak, et al., 2021). From the traumatic experiences that a person has gone through, many people do not know that trauma greatly affects physical, emotional and mental health. It is important to realize that trauma has a huge impact on mental and physical health.

Center for Health Care Strategies (2017), tells trauma overwhelms a person's coping capacity and has long-term effects on functioning and well-being. Trauma is an overwhelming experience that goes beyond a person's usual coping abilities, so the individual feels emotionally and mentally distressed. When coping capacity cannot handle the impact of trauma, it brings long-term consequences that affect daily functioning in psychological, social, and physical aspects. As a result, the individual's well-being is as anxiety, depression or PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder), difficulties in social relationship, decreased quality of life and challenges in maintaining emotional stability and productivity.

Therefore, this paper use literary works because literary works is the idea of meaning has become a useful tool for literary analysis of words and sentences as well as for discussion about literary works themselves. The idea that a literary work is a verbal expression, verbal construct or utterance and that is unique essence is determined by the unique manner it means (Olsen, 1982).

Christopher Nolan's movie script entitled *Inception* (2001) shows the main character, Cobb, who experienced trauma and it shows several effects of the trauma that Cobb experiences. The story describes the effects of Cobb's trauma and shows several reactions to the effects of the trauma.

This paper entitled "The Effects of Cobb's Trauma in Christopher Nolan's *Inception*" aims to find out how the effects of are portrayed through the main character, Cobb. The researcher is very interested and decides to analyze the effects of Cobb's trauma as depicted in the movie script *Inception*. Its complex and innovative storytelling. The film explores the concept of dream within dreams, creating multiple layers of reality that captivate audiences and challenge the intellect. The movie script tells the story of Cobb's struggles in dealing with his traumatic experiences, especially related to his wife, Mal, and shows how these effects influence his mind, emotions, relationships, and ability to distinguish between reality and dreams.

METHOD

This study using a qualitative method because is focuses on describing and explaining the effects of Cobb's trauma in Christopher Nolan's *Inception* through words and explanations. *Inception* movie script, which has 182 pages published on 2001 as the primary source of data, words forms, dialogue, and sentences quoted from *Inception* movie script. Supporting references such as books, journals and articles related to trauma. All data from this study involved a close reading of the movie

script focusing on the language, the structure of the scenes and the wider context in which the story takes place. However, qualitative method rely on text and image data analysis and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 2014). Here, it indicates how the effects of trauma appears on Cobb's in the movie script Inception.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trauma has several effects. This paper finds there are 16 data: anxiety and flashback. 11 data showing of anxiety and 6 data showing of flashback.

The effects of Cobb's trauma in Christopher Nolan's Inception there are:

1. Anxiety:

The variety in how a person experiences anxiety has different impacts on behavior, such as avoiding certain situations, delaying work, or acting compulsively. It also affects an individual's ability to carry out daily activities, such as decreased focus, disrupted social interactions, reduced productivity, and sleep disturbances.

2. Flashback:

Flashbacks are sudden and intense experiences where a person feels like they re-experience a traumatic event from the past, which leads to feelings of fear and anxiety, so they need to be well understood in order to receive appropriate treatment.

1. Anxiety

This paper finds there are 11 data showing anxiety explained below:

“Cobb pauses. Takes a breath” (Nolan, 2001)

The narrator points out that a manifestation of the internal tension and fear that constantly haunt Cobb. The quotation above shows how Cobb is in such a tense mental state that he needs to stop himself and take a breath to try and control his emotions, mind, and body. This becomes a physical reaction that is often found in individuals who experience severe anxiety, especially when they are in emotionally stressful situations or when they have to deal with unresolved past trauma. Anxiety in this case arises from two directions: firstly, from internal pressure, which is the intense emotional drive and guilt. Secondly, from external pressure, which is the demand of the situation (usually when he explains something to someone else or is on an important mission).

“COBB: Yeah, Why?” (Nolan, 2001)

The statement above is interpreted as a manifestation of anxiety that hides in a seemingly simple dialogue. When someone is in a situation where their mind is full of tension, inner pressure, or fear of what is being revealed or what might happen, questions like this often become a spontaneous reaction to cover up real anxiety. Cobb tries to appear calm, but he actually anticipates answers that might touch on his psychological wounds or traumas.

“COBB: You can’t fix that. Nobody could.” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement is a form of anxiety response to helplessness where one realizes that what happens cannot be fixed and that there is no solution that brings things back to the way they were. Cobb's anxiety arises because he not only fails to fix things, but also cannot accept his inability. This dialogue clearly represents anxiety in the form of an inability to accept emotional facts and human limitations, as well as a deep-seated fear that lingers because of an unchangeable past.

“COBB: You didn’t imagine it, you remembered it...” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement is a real traumatic experience, not just an illusion or imagination that appears in a dream. This closely relates to anxiety because it touches on the root of Cobb's anxious state, which is the inability to distinguish between reality and dreams, between memories and subconscious construction.

“COBB: Mal, no!” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement is not just an attempt to physically stop his wife's actions. It also reflects an emotional outburst of anxiety that he holds back. Cobb is in mental distress due to his past decisions. He plants the idea in Mal's mind while in the dream that their world is not real. The idea grows into a destructive obsession within Mal, even carrying over into the real world.

“Cobb takes out his pewter spinning top.” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement includes a symbol of the anxiety that continues to haunt him. The spinning top is not just a tool to distinguish dreams from reality but becomes a concrete representation of Cobb's obsessive need for certainty

and control, two things that are generally missing in individuals with severe anxiety. Cobb always carries the spinning top with him and spins it whenever he feels unsure whether he is in the real world or in a dream.

“Cobb is breathing, breathing, breathing” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement describes Cobb's struggle to consciously regulate his breathing despite his unstable emotional state. Cobb doesn't speak or move much in this moment but the narrative of his breathing gives us clues that he struggles within himself. The dialogue above shows that Cobb's anxiety is not something he expresses openly to others but rather something that works internally, silently, within his own body.

“COBB: Everything is fine.” (Nolan, 2001)

The quote above shows that Cobb's speech is a very strong example of an expression of anxiety. Cobb covers it up with the phrase *“Everything is fine”* but in reality it is not. Cobb may be trying to reassure himself or trying to keep the situation from getting out of hand.

“Cobb, splashes water on his face, breathing hard-” (Nolan, 2001)

The quote above is a description of someone who experiences anxiety. This statement shows Cobb's psychological condition, which is under extreme mental stress. Cobb has intense dreams or recalls past traumas, such as Mal's death or his failure as a father. At the time, Cobb tries to stabilize himself. Cobb struggles with his own thoughts and often feels trapped in anxiety about losing control, being unable to distinguish reality, and being haunted by a deep sense of guilt.

“COBB: You shouldn't be in here.” (Nolan, 2001)

The dialogue above reflects a psychological reaction that Cobb experiences, which clearly shows symptoms of anxiety. Cobb is in his dream with Mal, and he becomes aware of the presence of someone else, Ariadne who emotionally burdens him and disrupts his mental stability. Cobb feels scared, anxious, angry, and worried all at once. He struggles internally as he tries to manage the overwhelming emotions that arise from Mal's presence in his subconscious and Ariadne's intrusion into this deeply personal and painful space. Cobb is afraid that either intentionally or unintentionally, he might hurt Ariadne. Cobb's anxiety in this moment intensifies because he feels responsible for what might happen, yet powerless to fully control it.

“COBB: I know what's real.” (Nolan, 2001)

The dialogue above shows Cobb questioning the boundary between reality and dreams, a dilemma that haunts him since the death of his wife Mal and since he starts building an artificial reality in the dream world. The dialogue above falls into the category of anxiety because it shows Cobb's deep anxiety about the boundaries of reality that begin to collapse in his mind. Cobb feels trapped in a circle between loss, guilt, and illusion, and the only way he survives is by constantly convincing himself.

2. Flashback

This paper finds there are 5 data showing of flashback explained below:

“COBB: I know this bridge. This place is real-” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement uttered by Cobb is part of a flashback, which is a mental experience in which a person suddenly remembers or relives a past event, usually an emotionally charged or traumatic one. Cobb recognizes the place they step on: a real bridge, which he and Mal once visit in the real world. Cobb recognizes the bridge as part of the real world that they visit together as a couple. This shows that the memories are so strong that they cross the line between reality and dreams.

“COBB: That we'd grow old together.” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement is a depiction of the depth of the flashback. The dialogue above refers to the past hopes and commitments they build together when they are still living in the real world. The dialogue above is not just an ordinary memory but a very strong emotional flashback to the promises and dreams they share that are now destroyed. It is an inner agreement that Cobb once has with Mal, and this becomes a real manifestation of a flashback.

“COBB: A hotel. We spent our anniversaries in this suite.” (Nolan, 2001)

This statement shows the dialogue above as a strong representation of a flashback. This flashback is particularly heartbreak because Cobb tells the memory to Ariadne while at the same time reliving it in the form of a dream. His mind uses the dream as a way to stay connected to Mal, the woman he deeply loves and tragically loses.

Cobb sees, hears, and feels everything as if it is happening again. Cobb is trapped in the past, and the traumatic events he experiences not only haunt his conscious thoughts but also take over his subconscious mind. This creates a cycle where Cobb cannot distinguish between memory, dream, and reality.

“COBB: For our anniversary...” (Nolan, 2001)

The dialogue above is categorized as a flashback because it refers directly to past memories that are full of emotional meaning, especially in the context of the personal relationship between Dom Cobb and his wife, Mal. Cobb is in a dream world formed by his own memories, a subconscious world that represents his memories and feelings towards Mal. Cobb relives a specific moment in their married life, a moment that Cobb finds particularly memorable and loving. Cobb is still emotionally attached to his past and has yet to come to terms with the fact that those memories now exist only in his mind.

“COBB: We built for years. Then, when what that got stale, we started in on the memories.” (Nolan, 2001)

The dialogue above is part of a flashback because Cobb recounts the long journey that he and Mal experience while being trapped in the dream world. Cobb explains that he and Mal live for decades in a layer of dreams, creating city after city as a manifestation of their imagination and togetherness. But over time, their creations begin to lose meaning, and as a form of escape from the emptiness of the artificial world, they start to build a world based on real memories from their lives in the original world. This makes the dialogue a flashback, as Cobb not only retells what happens, but also retraces his emotional footsteps, realizing that what they build is no longer just a dream but a full representation of their past.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study “The Effects of Cobb’s Trauma in Christopher Nolan’s Inception” highlights that unresolved trauma can dominate the mind and behavior of an individual, showing its deep and long-lasting effects. The effects of Cobb’s trauma are reflected in several aspects: his psychological condition, such as anxiety and flashback. These findings reveal that trauma not only impacts Cobb’s inner world but also influences his decisions, actions and overall life journey.

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