

The Battle of the Minds in the Case of Multiple Personality Disorder in Michael Lander's *Peacock*

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the battle of the minds in the case of John's Multiple Personality Disorder in the movie *Peacock*. Through the battle of the minds between John and his alter personality Emma, I want to find out the cause, the process, and the result of the battle. To analyze the battle of the minds, I am using the theory of Multiple Personality Disorder. In my analysis, I find out that the battle of the minds is caused by the existence of the alter, the resolutions of the host, and the interference of the alter. It takes place with the attack of the alter and the defense of the host, and the result of the battle is the victory of the alter.

Keywords : multiple personality disorder, battle, mind, host, alter

In this paper, I discuss Michael Lander's *Peacock*, a psychological thriller movie. Psychological thriller is a as "a narrative that makes the characters exposed to danger on a mental level rather than a physical one" (Geerinck, par. 7). *Peacock* is one of the psychological thriller movies in 2010. I am interested in analyzing this because of the rare case of Multiple Personality Disorder, which is also known as Dissociative Identity Disorder (MPD/DID) and the battle between the two minds of John, the host, and Emma, the alter. In this analysis, I will find out the cause, the process, and the end of the battle of the minds.

In this paper, I use the theory of Multiple Personality Disorder. Dennis P. Sacuzzo, in his book *Psychology from Research to Application*, defines MPD as "the rarest and most dramatic of the dissociative disorders is multiple personality, a condition in which a person has two or more distinct personalities, each of which operates independently and often without the awareness of others". In MPD/DID, the personality who comes out the most is the host, and it is common that the host is also the original personality who experience the abuse, and the personalities resulting from the split are usually called the alters. The cause of MPD/DID is mostly the traumatic abuse in the sufferer's past or childhood ("What is Dissociative", par. 8). MPD/DID is developed as some kind of defense mechanism to the traumatic events that might be too much for the patients to handle. The alters in the MPD/DID system will then function to help the victim to deal with the traumatic memories and to cope with the painful experience.

Generally, each personality in the body might possess different characteristics and patterns of behavior. The personalities take control alternately, and the shifting between controlling the body can happen anytime, either after a long or short time of period. Despite being in one body, the personalities perform their activities like different personalities in different bodies, and every personality works autonomously. One personality does not acknowledge what actions other personalities are conducting or what they are planning when he/she is having the control over the body. However, the personalities can vaguely sense that something is wrong in spite of the oblivion to what the other personalities are doing.

I am going to use the theories about Multiple Personality Disorder above to provide the basic overview of John Skillpa's condition as a person with MPD. The theories are important to explain the psychological mechanism of how personalities, two personalities in John's case, can co-exist and work within one body. These theories are also going to be used in analyzing the battle of the minds in how the conflicts appear and how Emma and John use their strategies in the battle.

THE CAUSE OF THE BATTLE OF THE MINDS

There are two causes of the battle of the minds between Emma and John in *Peacock*. The first one is the existence of the alter, since without the alter there will be no battle at all. The battle exists in the first place because there is another personality in John Skillpa's body : Emma. The second cause of the battle is the resolution of the host and the interference of the alter.

The Existence of the Alter

The battle of the mind in *Peacock* is an internal battle between two personalities inside one body, in which those two personalities have their own characteristics, thoughts, and will. A conflict would never have appeared if there is only John as one personality in one body and he does not suffer any psychological disorder. The battle of the mind is able to occur in the first place because there is another force of mind in the form of an alter who appears because of John's MPD.

John's MPD/DID is caused by the abuse done by his mother in his childhood, in accordance to what is stated in the theoretical framework. John's mother was doing the emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and physical abuse to John before she died. Emotional abuse, firstly, is a form of abuse that involves "non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring or 'checking in,' excessive texting, humiliation, intimidation, isolation or stalking" ("What is Emotional", par. 1), and John's mother emotionally abuses him by isolating him, as shown in the beginning of the movie. Besides abusing John emotionally, John's mother also abuses him sexually. As sexual abuse includes any action that pressures someone to do sexual acts they do not want to do, John's mother abuses John sexually by forcing him to have sexual intercourse with Maggie, as shown in a confession by Maggie. Moreover, John's mother abuses John physically, which is shown by John's words to officer McGonigle.

As a result to the abuse, John suffers from the MPD/DID, and unconsciously develops another personality as a defense mechanism. Although John suffers because of the abuse his mother done to him, he is also dependant to her, and when the mother dies, John unconsciously creates a nurturing figure to keep his connection and to fulfill his need of someone who takes care of him. The fact that John met Emma the day his mother died strongly suggests that the alter personality appears in John in order to maintain his attachment with his mother, in accordance to a theory of Ruth Blizard in a research of attachment to abusive caretakers in the case of MPD/DID. Blizard explains that children who later develop MPD/DID still cling to their abusive caretaker although they are abused because they avoid the depression of being abandoned. In this case, John's connection with his caretaker, who is his mother, is severed when his mother died. In order to maintain his attachment with a caretaker figure, John unconsciously creates Emma, an alter who can nurture him and take care of him as a wife. Since *Peacock* is set in the 1950, Emma's figure of a wife is ideal according to the 1950s standards, as a wife is expected to also take a role of a nurturing woman.

However, no matter what characteristics an alter has, the existence of an alter itself will create endless crises. It is in the nature of an alter to have conflicts with the host or other alters since an alter has different thoughts and will, and therefore it is highly possible for an alter to interfere. Worse, if an alter appears to maintain an attachment to an abusive caretaker in the host's past, there is a huge chance that the alter also becomes abusive since he/she is "displaying the disorganized/ disoriented attachment behaviors and characteristics of the contradictory pattern of attachment to the abusing caretaker" (Blizard, 248). The battle of the minds exists because Emma exists as an alter built by John. If there is no Emma, there will be no conflict, let alone a battle.

To sum up, the battle of the minds happens because the existence of Emma as an alter. Emma is unconsciously created by John, who suffers from MPD/DID caused by the emotional, sexual, and physical abuse done by his mother in his childhood. Emma serves the role of a nurturing wife to maintain John's attachment with a caretaker figure, but she also have the nature of a conflicting alter, which interferes with John's resolution. Her existence, therefore, is one of the causes of the battle of the minds.

The Resolution of the Host and the Interference of the Alter

In a battle, it is necessary to have two or more parties in opposition. In *Peacock*, besides the existence of Emma as an alter, the battle of the minds also rises because John's resolutions, the resolution of the host, to the requests directed towards him is intruded by Emma's interference. John's resolutions and Emma's interference in the request of the political rally and the money contribute as the causes of the rise of the battle of the minds.

First of all, John's resolution of rejecting the political rally is clashed by Emma's interference with her agreement to the political rally. The political rally will be held because of the train accident. The train is a part of the campaign of Senator Wyatt, who is going to run for the senate again, but it crashes on John's backyard. Wyatt's rival is going to use the accident to strike Wyatt down. In order to prevent that, a political rally for Wyatt is going to be held right on the spot of the accident, John's backyard, before the rival takes advantage of the crash. John's permission is needed for the political rally to be held, but as seen in his dialogue with the mayor and the Senator's advisor, rejects the idea and insists that he wants the train to be gone. John shows that he has a firm resolution of not doing the rally.

However, Emma interferes with John's resolution by agreeing to the rally without John's consent, as can be seen when she tells Fanny and Connor that he is going to do the rally. Emma even goes as far as lying to Fanny when Fanny asks about John's agreement since Fanny has already received John's rejection before. By agreeing with the rally, Emma does something which clashes with one of John's resolutions, which is turning down the request for the rally. Emma's interference with John's resolution might be caused by social roles pushed to her by others. From the start, Emma has already had a role of John's nurturing wife. After the train accident happens, this role of Emma as a wife becomes even clearer as the society also grants her with this role, such as how they quickly assume that Emma is John's wife after the train accident and how her name is written as "Mrs. John Skillpa" on the newspaper headline of the train crash news. Besides the role of a wife, the role of a fellow woman who should help other women is also pushed towards her, as shown in how Fanny says that women have to stick together in her persuasion to get Emma's help for the rally.

However, it is more likely that Emma is deliberately interfering with John's resolutions. Emma agrees to the rally because she actually wants to. Emma does not seem interested in the rally in the beginning. However, after Mrs. Sternberg says that the shelter helps displaced children, Emma shows more interest and seems to be more cooperative regarding to the request of the rally. Emma seems to take an interest to children, and more specifically, she wants to have a child. She already has this affection for children from the beginning, as it is shown by her habit of sitting by her bedroom window to affectionately look at the neighbor's children. Emma's interest to children draws her to agree to help with the rally because it will help the shelter and it might give her some kind of a connection to the shelter, which means access to children. Because of that, Emma agrees to help with the rally and it clashes with John's resolution, which is to refuse helping the rally. Therefore, John's first resolution, which is to refuse helping the rally, is opposed by Emma, and it creates a battle between them.

John's second resolution is giving Maggie the money to move away and start a new life, and Emma interferes with that resolution by making Maggie stay in Fanny's shelter. Maggie is a young woman who is related to John because of John's mother's sexual abuse. Years ago before the current time of the movie, John's mother sexually abuses John by forcing him to have sexual intercourse with Maggie. As a result of the intercourse, Maggie has a child, Jake, and John's mother sends money to Maggie to make her stay away from the house. However, John's mother dies, and the money stops coming. Maggie brings Jake, who is still two, and comes to John to ask for the money. As a response to this, John goes upstairs to take his money to give it to Maggie. It shows John's resolution of giving Maggie the money. This is the point where Emma interferes once again.

John has agreed to give Maggie his money and go upstairs to take his money. However, the switching happens after that, most likely because John remembers back something about his mother which could be traumatic, as the switching can happen because of depressive thoughts of the traumatic events (Putnam 28). Maggie tells Emma everything about how she met John, what

John's mother did to them, and that she needs John's money. Emma then persistently force Maggie to stay in the shelter instead of accepting John's money, which is clashing with John's resolution. By telling Maggie to stay in the shelter, Emma once again interferes with John's resolution, which is to give Maggie the money so that she could move away.

The reason of Emma's second interference might be her desire to adopt Emma has already had the interest in children in the first place. Her interest of children can be seen from her habit of sitting by the window to affectionately look at the neighbor's children, from how she responds eagerly to Fanny's persuasion for the rally after knowing that the shelter helps displaced children. Moreover, Emma herself said that, "All John and I ever wanted was a little boy running around our house." Furthermore, the fact that Emma wants to specifically adopt Jake can be seen when she calls an adoption center and asks about how to adopt Jake. She learns that Fanny's shelter can help with the adoption process if Maggie and Jake stay there. If John gives the money to Maggie, Jake will be taken away from Peacock, and Emma will not be able to get her hands on Jake. Emma cannot directly prevent John to give the money to Maggie since Emma does not know that John has the money. Emma, thus, directly deals with the problem by persuading Maggie to stay, saying that she can also make a better living in Peacock, not outside it. It clashes with John's resolution, which is to help Maggie move away with the money, and cause the battle of the minds to happen.

In other words, the battle of the minds is caused by John's resolution and Emma's interference. John's first and second resolutions, which are refusing to help the political rally and agreeing to give Maggie the money to move away, clashes with Emma's interference, which are agreeing to help the political rally and making Maggie stay instead of moving away. The cause of Emma's first interference with the rally is the social roles pushed to her and her interest in children in the shelter whom might be helped through the fundraising in the rally. The cause of Emma's second interference with the rally is her desire to adopt and furthermore abuse Jake.

THE PROCESS AND THE END OF THE BATTLE OF THE MINDS

In a battle, the opposing parties are using their tactics against each other. Similarly, in *Peacock*, the host and the alter who battles are using their tactics to attack or defend. In the case of MPD, it is more likely that the alter is more aggressive than the host in terms of making clashes and attacking since the host or the original personality is "in most cases a person of low self-esteem, prone to depression and very dependent" (Secret, pars. 6-7) as the personality who took the trauma. This is displayed in the battle of the minds in *Peacock*, and thus Emma becomes the one who attacks and John becomes the one who defends. The battle finally ends with John's death since in his death he cannot continue to fight anymore, making him the defeated party and Emma the victor.

The Attack of the Alter

An alter basically exist as a defense mechanism of the host, as I explain in the introduction, but in the case of abusive alter, the alter can attack the host or the original. An abusive alter, who exists to maintain the host's attachment to a caretaker figure, modeled themselves after the previously abusive caretaker, mostly the host's parent, and becomes abusive just like the previous caretaker. If the alter becomes abusive, then, the host will be protected from an external abuser. However, this kind of alter will also repeat the abusive actions done by the previous caretaker, as stated by Ruth Blizard in her research paper of abusive alter and attachment. This phenomenon is called an introjection. This is what happens in *Peacock*. Emma, who is unconsciously created to maintain John's attachment to a caretaker figure, introjects John's abusive mother in herself. Emma already has the potential to be abusive in herself, and it is triggered by Maggie's information about John's abusive mother. As Emma's abusive characteristic becomes more visible, Emma attacks John using the introjection of John's mother. John's fear to his mother is his weakness, and by using the introjection, Emma is attacking John's weakness, in accordance to one of Sun Tzu's Art of War, attack weakness. To win the battle efficiently, one should attack the enemy's weakness (McNeilly 24). Emma attacks John by showing John that she introjects his mother's abusive nature, by showing John that he is powerless and cannot escape from her, and by killing John. In all of these attacks, there are introjections of John's mother.

First of all, Emma attacks John by showing John that she introjects his mother's abusive nature. Emma does this by leaving all the signs, which shows that she is starting to put herself in John's mother's place, for John to find out. Emma's signs of introjection of John's mother can be seen from the scenes where Emma puts John's childhood picture from his mother's shelf separately from other pictures and how Emma sleeps on John's mother's bed. The scene shows that Emma is starting to introject John's mother and she is letting John see that. In the way she puts John's picture separately, it can be seen that Emma thinks of the picture as something special. The affection, however, is heading toward a negative result because it will lead to abusive actions towards John and Jake, John's child whom Emma wants to adopt. This negative affection Emma reflects by putting the childhood photograph separately introjects John's mother's care for John although she severely abuses him. Another thing that Emma did was sleeping on the mother's bed, and the way Emma sits and lies down on the mother's bed shows that Emma is putting herself in the place of John's mother. Furthermore, Emma's action of letting everything be and leaving the room open shows that she wants John to find out that she has already introjected John's mother. As a response, John becomes alert and warns Maggie and Jake to stay away from Emma, and John refuses to go back home.

Secondly, Emma attacks John by showing John that he is powerless and cannot escape from her. Emma does this by showing John her wig and the mother's clothes when he is trying to escape. The scene shows how Emma shows John that he cannot escape from her. The wig and the dress in John's bag shows that Emma can still take over John although he tries to run away from the house. John cannot escape from Emma taking over him, and when that happens, Emma will do whatever she wants to although it includes harming John since John stands between Emma and her goal. Also, the scene shows that in Emma's threat, there is more of Emma's introjection of John's mother. That dress Emma put inside John's bag is his mother's dress, and that is what Emma will wear when she takes over. It shows that Emma has already put herself in John's mother's place, and she makes John see that and threatens John that she will use her dominance, which comes from her introjection of the mother, to control, to take over, to harm, to abuse John, or to do whatever she wants to if he still tries to oppose her.

Finally, Emma attacks John by killing him. How Emma kills John can be seen from the scene where Emma goes a bar, and seduces a man to sleep with her in John's motel room. While the man prepares some wine, Emma hits the man from behind him with a metal crowbar so hard that he falls unconscious. Then, Emma dresses the man up with John's clothes, puts him on the bed, and burns the inside of the whole room including the man dressed up as John. It is true that Emma does not kill John physically since they share the same body, and the one who is physically dead is that man Emma seduces. However, the significance of 'killing' John is actually the act of isolating him. People assume that John is already dead, and John will not be able to come out in front of them because he is dead to them. His physical existence after death will be denied, and no one will ever know about his psychological existence because no one knows about his MPD/DID from the beginning. Regardless of whether John still exists in the MPD/DID system, he cannot come outside the house. Even if he appears inside the house later, his appearance in the house has no purpose. With Emma's plan of adopting Jake, his role of a cared child will be substituted by Jake. If this is the case, John's existence will only be in the inner world of the MPD/DID system, and that is a form of isolation, like what John's mother did to John. Emma probably does it worse, since this time John is totally isolated. Emma, in that case, perfectly introjects the mother's abuse, if not surpasses her. This is Emma's final attack that forces John to stop opposing Emma.

The Defense of the Host

In the battle of the minds, the host defends himself against the alter's attack instead of counter-attacking the alter. The host is rarely described as an agile, aggressive personality since the host is the one suffering the trauma of the abuse. The host, thus, is not likely to attack other alters or people around them aggressively. In *Peacock*, John is the host, and as a victim of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, he experienced social and psychological difficulties. Because of the severe abuse, he grows into a socially awkward and distant person, which can be seen in the early scenes of John's interactions with his neighbor Mrs. Sternberg and his boss Mr.

French. Similarly, in battling Emma, John did not do any direct attack on Emma like Emma does on him as I explain in the previous sub-chapter. However, although he is depicted as a passive, weak character in *Peacock*, he still fights to prevent Emma from achieving her goal, which is adopting Jake, and he displays avoidance defense mechanism against Emma's attack.

John defends himself against Emma's attack using the avoidance defense mechanism, the act of "refusing to deal with or encounter unpleasant objects or situations" (Cherry, par. 6). A person with avoidance defense mechanism will avoid uncomfortable situations or direct conflict with someone else. Firstly, how John uses the avoidance can be seen from the scene where John desperately insists that he will take Maggie to Madison since he is too afraid to go back home after he finds out that Emma begins to introject his mother. Next, John's avoidance can be seen when he crouches by the lake instead of going home. After John agrees to give Maggie the money and take her to Madison, he goes to the bank to take his money, but the bank is closed and locked. Instead of going home that night, he goes to the lake, where officer McGonigle. John's avoidance can furthermore be seen after officer McGonigle takes him home. John quickly grabs his bag inside a closet, leaves the house as quick as possible, and moves into a motel room.

All of the scenes shows that John desperately refuses to go back home since he is afraid of Emma, and he is afraid that if he goes back to the house, Emma will take over him and harm him. John is looking for whatever reason he can find so that he will not go back home, and by taking Maggie to Madison, he will not need to go home and give Emma the chance to take over him. When John's plan to run away is delayed because of the bank, John still insists not to go back home and goes to the lake instead. Emma has attacked John by showing him that she introjects the mother, and John understands that if he goes home and stays there, there is a big chance that Emma will control him and attack him furthermore.

The reason of why John uses somewhat a passive, escaping strategy against Emma's attacks, besides of being the weaker personality compared to Emma, might be that he realizes that his situation is a no-win situation. After John sees that Emma introjects his mother on her first attack, he might realize that there is no way he can win against Emma by strength versus strength. John might think that he is already powerless against Emma who introjects his mother, just like how he is powerless against her mother's abuse. It is also possible that John defends himself because he senses that Emma possesses danger to him. As I have stated in the introduction, it is possible that one of the personality can vaguely sense that another personality is scheming something. Right after Emma's first attack, John seems to understand that Emma is dangerous.

It can also be seen that while John is trying to protect himself against Emma's attacks, he still tries to fight against Emma's resolution. John still tries to prevent Emma from adopting Jake by warning Maggie to go away from Peacock. Although his decision of taking Maggie and Jake by himself to Madison is also meant to protect himself since he is also running away from Emma, he is taking Maggie and Jake away from Emma, and that is against Emma's resolution. In this case, John is protecting not only himself, but also the others whom Emma might harm. If he succeeds in taking Maggie and Jake away, Emma will not be able to get her hands on Jake and reach her resolution. This way, John still fights against Emma while he is trying to defend himself against Emma.

John defends himself against Emma's attacks using the avoidance defense mechanism. Besides being the passive host, John's reason of choosing the avoidance defense mechanism might be that he realizes that it is impossible for him to win over Emma using his attack. John understands Emma's strength, and he chooses to protect himself using the avoidance. Also, while protecting himself using the avoidance defense mechanism, John is still fighting against Emma's resolution.

The Victory of the Alter

A battle will end when one of the opposing parties defeats the others and appears as the victor. Retired colonel and noted military historian Trevor N. Dupuy wrote that "a victory in the battle is achieved when one of the opposing sides forces the other to abandon its mission, or to surrender its forces, or routs the other, i.e., forces it to retreat or renders it militarily ineffective for further combat operations" (67). If one succeeded to force the enemy to abandon his/her mission, to

immobilize the enemy, or to kill the enemy, one is said to gain victory over the defeated enemy and the battle will end. In *Peacock*, the battle of the minds ended when Emma kills John.

The battle of the mind ends after John is killed by Emma. It starts after the scene where Maggie tells Emma that John is going to help her with the money and to take her and Jake to Madison. After hearing this, Emma goes home and calls Maggie. Using John's voice in the phone, Emma disguises herself as John and tells Maggie to meet at the motel that night so that she can give the money to Maggie. Obviously, Maggie thinks that it is John who is calling and agrees to meet at the motel. That evening, Emma comes to a bar and meets a man to whom she introduces herself as Maggie. Emma successfully seduces Cal to sleep with her in the Husker motel room. However, while the man is preparing the wine, Emma suddenly hits him unconscious with a crowbar from behind. Then, she dresses Cal up with John's clothes, puts him on the bed, and burns the whole room. When Maggie comes to the motel, the room is already filled with fire. Maggie panics and tries to open the room, but the room is locked. The next morning, officer McGonigle, Fanny, and a priest come to John's house to inform Emma of John's death. McGonigle says that Maggie confirmed it was John who died and that the fire chief said it was probably caused by John smoking in bed. John, then, is confirmed to be dead by others since the body is in his suit, there is someone who confirms it is him, and the cause of the fire is already clear.

It can be seen from the scenes above that Emma has already planned this from the start. Emma disguises himself as John in the phone and intentionally makes the appointment with Maggie so that Maggie will become the one who discover the fire and confirms John's death. Maggie will not think that it is someone else because 'John' himself has made an appointment with her, and the place and the room of the meeting is specifically given to her. If the body is burned, no one will recognize that it is not John, and with Maggie's confirmation of the body, an autopsy to identify the body will not be needed. It is also possible that by telling Maggie to keep this away from Emma and by introducing herself as Maggie to Cal, Emma is trying to not get herself suspected for the fire. By using John's and Maggie's identities, Emma clears herself out of suspicion. No one will suspect that it is her who kills John, and that it is not John who is dead.

In the end, John's 'death' is isolating him from the outer world, making him unable to continue to fight Emma's resolution furthermore, and therefore, he is defeated in the battle of the minds. However, by making him physically dead to the people, Emma is psychologically isolating him. Because John is dead to Peacock townsfolk, he cannot show up again outside of the house. If John cannot come out, he will not be able to fight Emma furthermore. Emma's final attack of killing John has immobilized John and made him unable to continue his fight, and thus, John is defeated. Emma, therefore, becomes the winner of the battle of the minds.

To sum up, the battle of the minds ends with Emma's final attack that causes John's death. By making John physically dead to the Peacock townsfolk, Emma makes John psychologically isolated from the physical world. In the isolation, John is unable to continue his fight furthermore, and because of that, he is lost. As a result, Emma becomes the winner of the battle of the mind.

CONCLUSION

From my analysis, I find that the cause of the battle of the minds between the alter and the host in John in *Peacock* are the existence of the alter, the resolution of the host, and the interference of the alter. Furthermore, from the analysis, I conclude that the battle of the minds goes on with the attack of the alter and the defense of the host, and the battle ends with the victory of the alter. from my findings on the process and the end of the battle, I learn that in MPD/DID, although an alter is supposed to protect and help the host to deal with the traumatic abuse or the memories of the abuse, an alter can also attack the host. It can even turn for the worse if the host has something against the abusive alter's goal.

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