

Between Freedom and Captivity: A Dual Analysis of *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* through Freudian Psychoanalysis and Postcolonial Criticism

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"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."
Galatians 5:1 (NIV)

ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* through the dual lenses of Freudian (1923) psychoanalytic theory and postcolonial criticism by Bhabha, H. K. (1994), revealing that the narrative articulates complex thematic oppositions through a multifaceted analysis. The study yields three key results: **1)** Freudian constructs such as the 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego' exemplify the internal conflicts of characters, emphasizing the dynamic tension between instinctual desires and moral control; **2)** a clear binary opposition is established between the pursuit of freedom, embodied by characters like Captain Jack Sparrow, and the state of entrapment, exemplified by the cursed crew whose internalized guilt and consequences of greed bind them; and **3)** the integration of psychoanalytic and postcolonial perspectives provides interdisciplinary insights, demonstrating how historical power dynamics and personal identity conflicts converge in cinematic storytelling. The significance of these findings lies in their potential to refine methodologies in literary and film criticism by offering a nuanced understanding of narrative complexity and cultural dynamics. Consequently, further research is expected to extend this dual-framework approach to a broader range of films and narrative forms, thereby enriching scholarly debates on themes of freedom, power, and identity within contemporary popular culture.

Keywords: *Freudian Psychoanalysis, Postcolonial Criticism, Binary Opposition, Freedom vs. Entrapment, Cinematic Narrative*

INTRODUCTION

Stories, especially for younger readers, help us understand real life problems by exploring issues like freedom, being trapped in a particular situation, and making difficult decisions. These are things that everyone faces, and research shows that young readers like stories that reflect their own struggles (Smith, 2018). In a world where balancing personal freedom and societal rules is hard, these stories show how

these challenges play out in daily life. Directed by Gore Verbinski, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), is an action yet adventure movie that shows the visual narrative of pirates, treasure and the fight for freedom. The movie is rated for older children and teens and has won several awards, including the MTV Movie Award for Best Male Performance and the Saturn Award for Best Makeup.

While it's an action packed film, it also deals with important ideas like good vs. evil and making choices. Led by Captain Barbossa, Captain Jack Sparrow is depicted as a pirate on a quest to claim his stolen ship back as his, the 'Black Pearl,' in a battle against the ship's cursed crew. These pirates are undead because of their greed for Aztec gold, and they are stuck in an endless cycle of wanting more without ever being able to enjoy it. Jack's journey shows that true freedom is not just about escaping the rules. It is also about being willing to face the consequences of your actions. The film explores the tension between wanting freedom and being held back by personal desires, guilt, and moral decisions. This paper looks at Freud's ideas about guilt and repression (1923) to understand the inner struggles of characters like Jack Sparrow and Barbossa. Freud's theories also help explain the behavior of the cursed crew. The movie can also be analyzed through post colonial theory, which looks at power struggles between the pirates and the British Navy. Based on the above issues, this study investigates how *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* portrays the binary opposition of freedom versus entrapment through its characters and narrative structure.

One study by Jones (2012), titled *Captive Narratives: Psychoanalysis and Colonial Discourse in Pirate Films*, found that pirate films use psychoanalytic ideas to show the tension between colonial power and individual identity. In his research, Jones explains how characters in these films represent both the pressure of colonial domination and the struggle for personal freedom. While his study and our analysis both use psychoanalytic theory, Jones focuses mainly on how colonial oppression affects the characters. In contrast, this paper explores a step further by combining Freud's ideas about the psyche conflicts, such as: the 'id', 'ego' and 'superego', as well as the postcolonial critique to examine both internal conflicts and external power issue. This dual approach has not fully explored how these two perspectives work together in previous research, creating a research gap. Future research could apply this combined method to other films to further explore the interaction between personal and social forces in shaping narratives. This research fills a gap by using Freudian theories and post-colonial ideas to better understand the film's themes of freedom and power.

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl reflects freedom versus being entrapped. All these ideas come through in the character's lives and decisions. Jack Sparrow wants his freedom and tries to break free from the rules of society, while the cursed crew of the Black Pearl is entrapped within their trap of greed. To Jack, freedom is the right to live free, not taking orders from anybody, and to him,

that is the Black Pearl. Yet, it is true that freedom does come with its costs, and many times, Jack has to choose between what he wants and what is the right thing to do.

On the other hand, the cursed crew serves to show how greed can ensnare. They wanted treasure, but the curse they brought upon themselves brought them nothing but misery. Their lesson serves to warn of the dangers of wanting too much. Themes of freedom and being trapped run deep in this film and draw awareness to how decisions and sometimes desires take one down a completely different path from what was originally intended.

Binary Opposition

Freedom	Entrapment
<p>The theme of freedom vs. limits is obvious, as characters move between personal wants and outside controls, from Jack Sparrow's search for independence and escape from society's rules to the crew's being trapped by a curse that takes away their human pleasures. "<i>Freedom of the will is a matter of knowing how to choose between the claims of the various instincts</i>" (Freud, 1930, p. 56).</p>	<p>Jack's desire for freedom as a pirate is compared with his moral decisions, even as he often pushes the boundaries of the law. The crew's curse is a real chain that contrasts with their longing for freedom, highlighting how one's actions and choices can lead to either freedom or being trapped. "<i>The tension between the demands of the superego and the actual performance of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt</i>" (Freud, 1923, p. 64).</p>

METHOD

This paper examines the film *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* through the two essentially straightforward concepts of how people think psychology and how history affects who is in power in postcolonial theory. Psychology helps explain the actions of characters, looking at their desires, decisions, and sense of right and wrong. Therefore, Freudian Psychoanalytic theory was used primarily based on *Freud's The Ego and the Id* (1923), which introduces key concepts such as the id, ego, and superego, along with ideas about repression and guilt. Along with *Postcolonial Criticism*: This framework is supported by H. K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), which provides tools to examine concepts like binary opposition, colonial discourse, and hegemony in narratives. The postcolonial theory does take into consideration how the story reflects history. The very presence of the British Navy and pirates could show colony powers and rebellion. This movie was chosen because it has intriguing characters and themes that could fit well in this study. While viewing the movie, some notes were taken that highlighted the important parts, such as what the characters had to say. These notes were used to find patterns in the characters' behavior and also to connect them to historical ideas. The study identified key themes at the outset, such as greed, freedom, and power. Then it organized the actions of the characters

based on their personal desires and decisions in comparison with greater ideas about history and colonialism. The analysis focuses on this one movie alone; hence, the results may not be generalized to other stories. No ethical issue arose since the research did not involve people. This method is helpful in explaining how characters' struggles and events are related in the film.

DISCUSSION

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl tells the story of Captain Jack Sparrow, a clever and charming pirate, who tries to get back his stolen ship, the Black Pearl. The movie mixes adventure with deeper themes about freedom and being trapped, exploring these ideas through the characters' actions and struggles. Jack is always seeking freedom, while the crew of the Black Pearl, under their curse, is forced to stay in a terrible state where they cannot enjoy life. The film also follows Elizabeth Swann, a brave woman who wants to break free from the rules of her society, and Will Turner, a blacksmith who feels torn between his pirate past and his desire to live an honest life. This image of a scene from the children's literature, "*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*" depicts Captain Jack Sparrow holding Elizabeth Swann at knifepoint. In this scene from *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, the camera focuses on Elizabeth's face, showing her fear and defiance. Jack stands behind her, which makes him look more in control. The lighting is dark, drawing attention to their faces and creating a sense of tension. This setup highlights the power struggle between them, showing how their relationship is both dangerous and complicated. In that moment, Jack uses Elizabeth as a chance to escape capture, demonstrating his cunning and capableness. It's a scene where Jack's playful yet clever personality is highlighted as he navigates a dangerous situation with wit rather than brute force. They show the struggle between wanting freedom and dealing with the rules and responsibilities of life.



In this scene, the cinematography emphasizes the tense standoff between Captain Jack Sparrow, the British officers, and Elizabeth Swann. The use of wide framing shows all the characters in the same shot, creating a sense of balance and opposition. The swords drawn and pointed toward each other visually represent the conflict and the imminent danger. The characters are positioned in a way that Jack is slightly apart from the rest, suggesting his outsider status and his defiance of authority. The bright lighting contrasts with the darker background, highlighting the characters and the tense situation. This scene highlights the tension between



order (the British officers) and chaos (Jack), as well as the fragile alliance between Elizabeth and Jack. The undead crew, led by Hector Barbossa, is cursed because of their greed. They steal Aztec gold, and the curse punishes them by making them unable to feel or eat. Though they try to break the curse to gain freedom, their greed and guilt keep them trapped. In Freud's theory of guilt, where he wrote, "*The tension between the demands of the superego and the actual performance of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt*" (Freud, 1923, p. 64). This shows how guilt is both mental and physical, keeping them stuck in their curse. Beyond his impulsivity (id) and rational planning (ego), Jack's occasional moral hesitations reveal the influence of his superego, suggesting that his actions are moderated by an internal sense of right and wrong.

At the same time, one of the main parts of the story is Jack's constant chase for freedom and treasure. He values his independence above all and treats his ship as a symbol of that freedom. However, Jack's journey shows that freedom is not just about escaping rules but also about making the right choices and dealing with personal struggles. This image shows a fight in the movie named *Pirates of Caribbean* and it raises question of loyalty, controversies and ethic issues regarding the character. The author means that many scenes illustrate the main antagonism of the performance, like the soldiers as the manifestations of power and authority, and the pirates as the manifestations of freedom and rebellion. As Freud wrote, "*Freedom of the will is a matter of knowing how to choose between the claims of the various instincts*" (Freud, 1930, p. 56), which connects to Jack's balancing act between his desires and his duties.

In this scene from *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, the cinematography focuses on the interaction between Captain Barbossa and Elizabeth Swann. The lighting is soft and misty, which creates a sense of mystery and foreboding. Elizabeth is positioned in the foreground, with her arm extended, holding a coin, symbolizing her power and agency in the situation. Barbossa stands closer to her, but the way he is framed, with the crew



behind him, suggests his authority and control. The soft focus on the background contrasts with the sharp focus on the characters, emphasizing the tension between them. The positioning of the characters and the visual composition highlight the negotiation of power, where Elizabeth challenges Barbossa, hinting at her growing influence in the story. Jack's personality has two sides: his love for adventure and fun, and his ability to plan ahead and make smart choices. This balance can be explained by Freud's ideas. The id is the part of the mind that only cares about fun and pleasure; the ego tries to balance what a person wants with what is possible or fair. Jack's impulsive behavior, like chasing after buried treasure, comes from his id. But his responsible and clever moments show his ego. Jack also forms temporary alliances, showing

his inner conflict between selfishness and unexpected kindness. This mix of traits makes Jack a complex character who is always balancing his desires with the world around him. As Freud also said, "*The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions*" (Freud, 1923, p. 19), Jack's behavior results from a continuous negotiation among the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, where the *ego* mediates between his raw impulses and his internalized moral standards, creating a dynamic character, which helps explain what is going on in Jack's behavior.

Greed takes over the cursed crew. Their choice to steal Aztec gold came from a desire for power and wealth, but the curse turned their search for freedom into a form of prison. They are stuck in an immortal state where they can neither live nor die, showing the dangers of uncontrolled desires. In *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, Elizabeth Swann is captured by Captain Barbossa and his cursed crew. To protect herself, she claims to be "*Elizabeth Turner*," which convinces the pirates she is the descendant of Bootstrap Bill Turner. Believing her blood can break their curse, they plan to use her in a ritual to return the stolen Aztec gold. This sets up the daring rescue mission by Will Turner and Jack Sparrow to save Elizabeth and end the curse. This situation can be explained by Freud's idea of guilt: the curse is like punishment for their greedy wish. He wrote, "*Conscience is the internal perception of the rejection of a particular wish operating within us*" (Freud, 1930, p. 82), showing how their guilt creates a prison stronger than any physical barrier.

The cinematography of this scene uses dramatic lighting and shadows to highlight the chaotic and intense sword fight. The beams of light shining from above create a sense of otherworldliness, casting long shadows that emphasize the characters' movement and the fluidity of the action. The reflections on the water add an element of danger, as the characters' silhouettes are mirrored, enhancing the



tension. The scattered debris in the background further suggests a sense of disarray and conflict, while the focus on the fighters underscores the struggle for dominance. The dynamic composition of the characters in mid-action visually conveys the unpredictability of the battle, giving the sense of adventure and suspense. Elizabeth Swann's journey adds another layer to the movie's themes. At first, Elizabeth is stuck in a life full of rules that dictate her behavior, as the daughter of a governor. However, Elizabeth envies the pirates because they are free to live life however they want. As the film progresses, Elizabeth becomes more independent. She stops following all the rules and begins to make her own choices. Freud's ideas explain this change. The *ego* is the part of the mind that balances desires against rules, and Elizabeth's growth shows her ability to find this balance. By the end of the movie, Elizabeth is no longer the quiet, polite woman she was at the beginning. Instead, she becomes an active part of the adventure, showing that

freedom is not only about breaking rules but also about choosing a path in life. Freud describes this balance: *"The task of the ego is to harmonize the claims of the id, the superego, and reality"* (Freud, 1923, p. 58), which matches Elizabeth's growth.

Will Turner's story is also shaped by the ideas of freedom and being trapped. A blacksmith by trade, he has a pirate father, which ties him to a life he tries to avoid. In *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, the final duel between Captain Jack Sparrow and Captain Hector Barbossa takes place in the treasure cave of Isla de Muerta. Barbossa and his crew, cursed with immortality, feel pain but cannot die, raising the stakes of the battle. Jack outsmarts Barbossa by using the curse to his advantage, briefly making himself undead and immune to harm. The climax comes when Will Turner returns the stolen gold with his blood, breaking the curse, allowing Jack to fatally shoot Barbossa.

In this scene, the wide shot shows Jack Sparrow standing alone, with the officers in the background, making him look isolated. The noose in the background and the officer holding the document show that Jack is in serious trouble. Jack's position on the side highlights his rebellious nature against authority. The bright lighting makes him stand



out against the officers, emphasizing the tension and danger of the moment. Throughout the movie, Will struggles to accept who he really is: a mix of the honest life he leads and the pirate legacy he carries. Freud's idea of transference where people project their feelings about someone onto others helps explain Will's actions. Unresolved feelings towards his father shape Will's choices, such as the ways in which he defends Elizabeth and tries to prove himself. Freud wrote, *"Transference is an instrument of proof; it brings out emotional ties, making the past alive in the present"* (Freud, 1917, p. 111). By the end of the film, Will accepts both parts of himself; he is both a blacksmith and a pirate. This journey shows that true freedom is about understanding and accepting all parts of yourself.

Freedom and control are also shown through the ships in the movie: the Black Pearl, the Interceptor, and the Dauntless. All these ships represent power and independence; whoever controls these ships controls their freedom. Jack's repeated attempts to get the Black Pearl show just how much he values his independence. The cursed crew's constant search for a way to break their curse reflects their quest to get back their lives. This story also highlights the fact that freedom is not only about having no rules but also about how one deals with feelings of guilt and fear. As Freud explained, such inner conflicts suppressing desires and feelings of guilt are as disabling as physical chains. According to Freud, *"Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will emerge later in more hideous forms"* (Freud, 1895, p. 156), showing the inner struggles the characters face. For example, in a scene where Jack opts to risk his own safety to save a crew member, his decision reflects a complex interplay of desire,

rational calculation, and moral consideration, a clear demonstration of how the *id*, *ego*, and *superego* converge to shape his character.

This is a very dramatic image that points to the basic plot of the Pirates of the Caribbean film and shows justice and authorities position, as well as rebellion. The execution rope coupled with restraint means hanging a mode of capital punishment and therefore again underlines power relations within society. By the end of the film, freedom is seen as a complex idea tied to identity, morality, and emotions. Jack's rebellion shows the desire to escape the chains that hold him, while Elizabeth learns to balance expectations with desires; Will learns to accept himself. In contrast, the cursed crew serves as a warning against greed and selfishness. By exploring these struggles, the movie invites viewers to think about their own battles for freedom and what they may have to give up to achieve it. While it is an exciting pirate adventure, the story digs deep into human nature, showing how freedom comes with choices, sacrifices, and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

In *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, freedom and being trapped are two central themes that are reflected through the characters' journeys. Captain Jack Sparrow is a self-centered person; throughout the series, he is in pursuit of freedom, though much of the time, he is conflicted about his actions. The cursed crew of the Black Pearl, in turn, represents another negative trait: greed, as their selfish actions lead them to a life without pleasure or enjoyment. Elizabeth Swann transforms from a well-behaved daughter into an independent woman, while Will Turner learns to accept that he is both a son and a pirate.

Freud's psychological theories help explain the conflicts of these characters. Jack's actions can be seen as driven by the *id*, which seeks pleasure, and the *ego*, which tries to balance that desire. The cursed crew represents the idea that when people are guilty and greedy, they may find themselves trapped by their own choices. Elizabeth's journey shows how she uses her *ego* to align her desires with the rules of society. Will, according to Freud's theory, exhibits transference by acting on feelings related to his father.

Postcolonialism also plays a role in the film, exploring history and power dynamics within the storyline. The Royal Navy represents authority, while the pirates stand for rebellion and freedom. The cursed treasure symbolizes the destructive nature of greed, especially in colonial contexts, where it harms both individuals and societies. Freud's psychoanalysis and postcolonial themes together show that the struggle for freedom and control is as much a psychological and emotional battle as it is a physical one.

In conclusion, the movie demonstrates that freedom is not about avoiding rules or physical constraints, but about understanding oneself and doing what is right, even when faced with difficult desires. The characters' arcs encourage audiences to reflect on the true cost of liberty and what they are

willing to sacrifice in their pursuit of it. This story is more than just about pirates and treasure, it offers a deep exploration of human life, examining why some people make choices in their quest for freedom.

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