

DOKTORI (PhD) ÉRTEKEZÉS

CASES OF PATRICIDE AND (SELF-)FATHERING IN SELECTED NOVELS OF THE  
AMERICAN SOUTH

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DEBRECENI EGYETEM

BTK

2014

# **CASES OF PATRICIDE AND (SELF-)FATHERING IN SELECTED NOVELS OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH**

Értekezés a doktori (Ph.D.) fokozat megszerzése érdekében  
amerikanisztika tudományágban

Írta: Asztalos Márta okleveles angol nyelv és irodalom szakos tanár

Készült a Debreceni Egyetem Irodalomtudományok doktori iskolája  
(Angol és észak-amerikai irodalom és kultúra programja) keretében

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Én, Asztalos Márta teljes felelősségem tudatában kijelentem, hogy a benyújtott értekezés önálló munka, a szerzői jog nemzetközi normáinak tiszteletben tartásával készült, a benne található irodalmi hivatkozások egyértelműek és teljesek. Nem állok doktori fokozat visszavonására irányuló eljárás alatt, illetve 5 éven belül nem vontak vissza tőlem odaítélt doktori fokozatot. Jelen értekezést korábban más intézményben nem nyújtottam be és azt nem utasították el.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Area and Objective of Research**

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the problematics of father-son relationships, orphanage, and patricide in four selected Southern novels: Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), William Faulkner's *Absalom Absalom!* (1936), Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1946), and Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). These novels share the critical assumption to be among the most influential Southern novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, they all have fathers, substitute fathers, and sons in their centers, engaged in a power game.

The protagonists all want to become free of the paternal inheritance and break out of the shadow of the past and the ancestors. In doing so, they commit a series of patricide on the thematic, structural, textual or figurative levels of each text. The protagonists can be aptly described with Marthe Robert's words as "Bastards" who are never done with killing their fathers in order to take their place (30). In their quests to achieve this goal, they commit numerous attempts of real and symbolic father murders. In the dissertation, I focus on and analyse these orphan heroes' different attempts of overwriting the paternal pattern, overcoming the father and establishing their freedom from paternal authority to see what forms these attempts may take, whether they can become successful and what their success or failure mean and entail.

### **1.2. Theoretical Background**

C. Vann Woodward talks about "the peculiar historical consciousness of the Southern writer" (24). According to him Southern writers are characterized by a "preoccupation, obsessive concern" (35) with the past in the present, which "has been expressed often explicitly as well as implicitly in their stories" (35). Similarly, John T. Matthews claims that "Southern writers in

general are often seen as distinctively preoccupied with the past . . .” (173). It seems that for the Southern writer, the haunting presence of the past cannot be done away with. As Faulkner states in his *Requiem for a Nun*: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” (*Requiem* act 1, scene 3). I claim that there is a similar ‘preoccupation and obsessive concern’ with the question of the father/fatherhood in the Southern novel. The metaphor of the father is a key fantasy appearing in it. In my view, the father is a symbolic embodiment of the past in these novels. Thus, overcoming the father is one way of overcoming/coming to terms with the past.

Literary critic Richard H. King argues that the intellectuals and writers of the Southern Literary Renaissance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were attempting symbolically to define their relationship with the region’s “fathers” (13). Iconic sons and strong fathers have been predominant images in modern southern literature (16). As I have been mostly educated on poststructuralist theory, the writers’ attempts and intensions – in King’s sense – are not subject to my investigations. Discussing the protagonists’ attempts, however, drives me to the same conclusion: the heroes of these novels intend to define, or rather redefine their relationships with the father/fathers. They attempt to overwrite the traditional Southern patriarchal pattern. I claim that the protagonists of these novels are all self-willed orphans, who embrace orphanage and do not tolerate any attempts of fathering coming from the outside. Moreover, they ensure their fatherless state by several father-murders, which take place on the thematic, structural, textual, and figurative levels of the narratives.

King’s approach has been widely popular and has had many followers, who examine Southern novels in their cultural historical context. Father-son relationships, orphanage, and “Bastard” sons could also be examined from this perspective, focusing mainly on the iconic

“bastard” archetype of the South: the fruit of the “plantation liaison,” “the tragic mulatto<sup>1</sup>,” the mixed-blood son of the plantation Lord born from his illegitimate affair with his slave women. From this aspect numerous iconic Southern texts could be subject to my investigation, such as Alan Tate’s *The Fathers*, Langston Hughes’s *Mulatto*, and several novels of William Faulkner. The present dissertation does not want to break with this tradition, moreover, it uses some of its insights and examines one tragic mulatto figure in detail in the chapter entitled “Family Romances in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” However, the reading strategies of the dissertation follow the methods of poststructuralist narratology and psychoanalysis; essentially it does not build on the cultural historical background and its textual reflections, but the other way round: it focuses on and analyses the paternal filial relationships appearing in the different texts. A practical effect of this is that the number of examined texts had to be limited. However, I will elaborate on the choices I have made in the outline of the dissertation.

I will examine fatherhood, father-son clashes not only at the plot but the structural level of narratives as well, as, in my view, the presence of the father can be detected not only at the thematic, but at the structural level of narratives too. Claiming that, I follow in the footsteps of Robert Caserio, Peter Brooks, Patricia Tobin, Janet Beizer, and Robert Con Davis, who have all examined the possible connections of the figure of “the father” and Western narratives. Although they approach the field of study from diverging perspectives, they all share a basic assumption: they all identify the “paternal impulse” (Caserio 234) or the “narrative authority, the symbolic father” (Con Davis, *Fictional Father* 25) as key to the sense of plot in narratives.

In *Plot, Story and the Novel*, Robert Caserio insists that “[t]here is indeed an analogy between family line and story line in the modern novel” (234) and recognizes the “paternal” to be crucial for “a sense of plot.” However, he also states that this “repressive central authority” (235)

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<sup>1</sup> As Zsolt Virágos refers to the stereotypical figure (Virágos 248) to whom I am indebted for this idea.



has to be subverted and replaced by a fictional discourse with “adjacent parts” which “are fraternal, but they are kin without parents” (235). Similarly, according to Patricia Tobin, there is a “homologous congruity between time-line, family-line and story-line” (ix) in realistic narratives, which can be detected as a “lineal decorum” that “pervades the structure” (7-8). On a wider platform, in *Family Plots*, Jeanette Beizer introduces a general theory of the narrative based on the work of Balzac. She states that “our experience as readers links traditional or classical narrative . . . to themes of the father and the family line and to related issues of authority, subordination and insubordination. A chain of associations further attaches this tradition to formal principles of mimesis, order, coherence, linearity, unity, closure, and totalization” (3). In spite of the fact that these scholars make claims about different types of narratives (Caserio about the modern novel, Tobin about realistic narratives, Beizer about narratives in general), I consider their claims to be highly similar. My investigation, however, is more limited, focusing not on narratives in general, but on four novels in particular.

In the novels I examine, I have also found a connection between family line and the story-line, however, this connection is far from being an “analogy” or a “homologous congruity.” In these novels, the story-line subverts patrilineage, not necessarily to have it replaced by fraternal “adjacent parts” though, as Caserio claims. All protagonists are sons subjected to a patrilineage and numerous paternal narratives. All of them endeavor to overwrite these paternal narratives and outscribe themselves from them. They want to be free of paternal control and authority.

In the following part of the chapter, I introduce those theorists who have examined the connection of novelistic narratives and paternity on different (structural, thematic, semantic) levels, in other words, those, who can be listed as direct inspiration to my work.

Marthe Robert's insights are of central significance to my argument, as she recognizes the roots of the novel as a genre in Sigmund Freud's childhood family romance,<sup>2</sup> a common fantasy among children, which may appear in later life with neurotics, too. According to Freud, the child<sup>3</sup> fabricates a fabulous tale to overcome the first disappointment he suffers in his parents: "the child's imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing" ("Family" 237-39). This act of liberation usually happens through assuming that they are not his true parents, but strangers who found him and took him in. Thus, the child starts thinking of himself as a "Foundling,"<sup>4</sup> to whom his Royal parents will reveal themselves. However, the Romance does not end here but gets a renewed shape when sexuality appears on the scene. From then on, the child does not see his parents as undifferentiated but realizes that they have "two distinctive functions in the story of his birth" (Robert 25). Therefore, he strives to keep his mother by his side and get rid of the father, replacing him with an absent, imaginary, noble father to ensure the desired noble rank. The father's nobility and extended absence provides a perfect combination for the child, since he can see himself in a flattering royal glow and can also fill the place of the absent father. Considering that the unconscious sees every relationship as a sexual one and every absence as murder (27), in spite of all the allusiveness and euphemisms, it is not too difficult to notice the Oedipal theme in the background. The "Bastard"<sup>5</sup> child is "never done with killing his father in order to take his place, imitate him or surpass him by 'going his own way'" (30). Not only does he rob the father of the mother, but of his phallic power, too,

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<sup>2</sup> Freud uses the terminology in lowercase, while Marthe Robert capitalizes it. In the dissertation, I use the Freudian form.

<sup>3</sup> Both Freud and Marthe Robert focus their attention on the male child, so whenever I use the term "child," I also refer to sons.

<sup>4</sup> Robert's terminology

<sup>5</sup> Robert's terminology

since, in his fantasy, he *rewrites* the story of his own conception as well as the family's genealogy.

So far, with the exception of the names (Foundling, Bastard), Robert does not add anything to the Freudian scenario. However, she goes on to state that "[s]ince the Oedipus complex is a universal human phenomenon, all fiction, invention and image making expresses it more or less explicitly" (31).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, she identifies the family romance not only as the psychological origin of the genre but as the only one convention to which it is willing to submit (32). According to her, the novel has "a *compulsory content* and an *optional form*, admitting of as many variations as the imagination can invent" (32). Owing to the fact that the child's family romance has got two separate stages, Robert differentiates between two kinds of novels: Foundling and Bastard. The Foundling type admittedly creates a world of his own, ignoring reality, while the Bastard tries to be true to life and imitate reality as much as possible.

Although Robert's view on the compulsory content of novels is arguably rather limiting, I find her work particularly useful for my argument as it can be employed to explain the relationship of male protagonists and their real or imaginary family romances in novels, as well as their real or symbolic patricides motivated by the desire to take over the father's place.

Another critic whose work is highly relevant to my research is Pamela A. Boker, whose typical hero of American literature is "the adolescent orphan" who seeks "to quest for the ideal father" and "escape from, or disavow, the real, disappointing father" (22). He is the "compulsive wanderer" who forever defers mourning for his lost parental object" and this deferral surfaces in his pursuing "the active fulfillment of his own death-wishes" (23). Thus, according to Boker, the

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<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes also suggests this when in the *Pleasure of the Text* he asks: "Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflict with the Law, entering into the dialectics of tenderness and hatred?" (47).

typical hero of American novels is the suicidal orphan, “who is on a voyage to join the lost, the dying, and the dead. His voyage to adventure is, in itself, an act of mourning . . .” (22-23).

The protagonists of the Southern novels I examine can also be regarded as wandering orphans (cf. Boker) either literally or symbolically, as they are either orphaned, or act as if they were, or do their best to be. Thus, as opposed to Boker, in my view, the orphan heroes of these novels are not so much “suicidal orphans” as patricidal ones. Following in the footsteps of Marthe Robert’s *Bastard*, they keep committing real and symbolic patricides in order to take their real or symbolic father(s)’s place. Driven by an insatiable desire of self-fathering, they aspire to become the source of their own origin, the writers of their own genealogies.

Peter Brooks’ *Reading for the Plot* has inspired me to look for paternal and filial plots and quests (for power) on multiple levels of the narrative text. In these novels, the text becomes a battlefield of clashing paternal and filial forces, striving for control and authority. In this battle of forces, the plot and plotting, the narrative and narrating, writing and reading often become not only the field, but also the means of taking control.

Underlying all this, however, the main theoretical framework of the dissertation is provided by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. I have chosen this framework, as both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis are of crucial importance in the theory of the paternal-filial relationship and the role of the father in psychic development. In the following pages, I intend to outline the main Freudian and Lacanian concepts and theories I operate with in the dissertation.

### **1.3. Introduction to the Applicable Concepts and Theories**

#### ***The Applicable Concepts of Psychoanalysis***

Freud was one of the first to challenge the humanistic concept of a stable self fully governed by free will. In his interpretation the self consists of a conscious and an unconscious territory. The unconscious is a warehouse of repressed desires and is driven by instincts. His most famous statement about the relation of the unconscious and the conscious is “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden:” Where It was, shall I be. In other word, according to him “It,” the unconscious shall be replaced by consciousness.

Freud’s most important theories from the perspective of my dissertation are his theory of psychosexual development and his theory of the family romance fantasy. He differentiates between five stages of psychosexual development that begin with birth and last throughout a person’s life: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages. The oral stage lasts from birth to age 1, the anal stage begins at the age of 1 and finishes at the age of 3. From the perspective of father-son relationships, the third (phallic) stage is the most important. In this stage, as the naming illustrates, the male child becomes aware of the fact that he has a genital organ and that touching it can cause excitement and pleasure. Moreover, this newly arisen sexual interest is directed towards his mother. As a result of this, he begins to feel jealousy and rivalry towards the father. “His identification with his father then takes a hostile coloring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother” (Freud, *Ego* 26). However, his conscious self knows that his father is stronger and he has no chance against him, thus, a so called castration anxiety appears: the child becomes afraid that his sexual interest for the mother will be punished

with castration. The Oedipus complex is resolved with the son's renouncing his mother and his identification with the father.

According to Freud, these ambivalent and contradictory feelings for the father have their roots in the primal horde, where the sons, tired of their violent and jealous father, came together and devoured him and "so made an end of the patriarchal horde" (Freud, *Totem* 141). They hated their father for presenting "such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires, but they loved and admired him too" (142). He had definitely been "a feared and envied model" for each of them and devouring him, they identified with him and "each one of them acquired a portion of his strength" (142). However, the affection that had also been there for the father made its way to the surface in the form of remorse and guilt felt by the whole group and thus "[t]he dead father became stronger than the living one had been" (143). "What had up to then been prevented by his actual existence was thenceforward prohibited by the sons themselves [. . .] They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and renounced its fruits by resigning their claim for the women who had now been set free" (143). According to Freud, the repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex and the main taboos of our society are rooted here.

Freud's family romance fantasy is another applicable theory for the dissertation. According to Freud, it is a common fantasy among children. In the early years, the parents (the parent of his/her own sex) constitute the model and ideal for the child who wants to be big and strong like his father. However, as he grows, he gets to know other parents as well and thus acquires a basis for comparison and doubt. He cannot help noticing that his parents are not perfect. "Small events in the child's life which make him dissatisfied afford him provocation for beginning to criticize his parents" ("Family Romances" 237) "[T]he child's imagination becomes

engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing” (238-39). Moreover, when the child learns about the different parts mothers and fathers play in procreation, a second, “sexual stage” of the romance emerges: when a boy is far more likely “to feel hostile impulses towards his father than towards his mother and has a far more intense desire to get free from him than from her” (237).

Jacques Lacan interprets Freud in the light of structuralist and poststructuralist theory. For him the conscious can never take the place of or rule the unconscious. According to Lacan, the unconscious is structured like language, as its two main processes are condensation and displacement. Its elements are signifiers which form a signifying chain. In the signifying chain there are no signifieds, as there is nothing the signifiers ultimately refer to. Due to the lack of signifieds, the signifying chain is continuously sliding, without a stable point. The process of becoming an adult (symbolization) can be interpreted as an endeavour to stop this constant sliding in order that stable meaning be possible.

The process of psychic development according to Lacan is also the process of getting the illusion of a self, an “I.” He divides this development to three phases/registers: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. The child<sup>7</sup> is born into the real. The real is characterized by totality, an original unity with the mother, no sense of identity and separation, thus no sense of absence or lack. All the child’s needs are fulfilled immediately. The real cannot be represented as such, as it is outside and beyond language, outside symbolisation, it is “that which resists symbolization absolutely” (Lacan, *Freud’s* 66). This primal sense of unity with the mother is lost when the child

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<sup>7</sup> Lacan, in the footsteps of Freud, also concentrates on the male child and the male subject. Both theorists have been rightly criticized for being gender biased and insensitive to sexual differences. However, for the dissertation, I do not consider this blind spot significant, as my focus lies on sons, for the examination of which, I consider both theories adequate.

begins to distinguish between his/her<sup>8</sup> body and everything else in the world. He/She realizes that s/he is not one with the mother, thus the idea of the “other” is born. The idyllic unity is lost and the feeling of separation, anxiety and lack take its place. This separation gets even stronger with the mirror stage, as the child beholds his/her image in the mirror and identifies with his/her specular image that s/he recognizes as a gestalt. Without this identification it would not be possible for the child to perceive him/herself as a “complete” being, as an “I.” The assumption of the specular image coincides with the birth of the Ego, which, according to Lacan, is thus the product of a misunderstanding (*méconnaissance*), as it is based on an illusion of autonomy and wholeness (*Écrits* 5). The imago in the mirror is other than the child, thus his/her identification is based on a misrecognition. The mirror stage also gives way to the first experience of the other/otherness.

In the beginning of his career, Lacan sees the mirror stage as a stage that takes place at a specific time in the child’s psychic development (between sixteen and eighteen months), as a drama “which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality . . . and . . . to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development” (3). Later he introduces some changes to the concept and regards it not as a specific time in the psychic development but as a permanent structure of subjectivity: the paradigm of the imaginary (118).

The imaginary is the realm of the imaginary identification that happens in the mirror stage. As that identification is based on misrecognition, “alienation is constitutive of the imaginary order” (Lacan, *Psychoses* 146). “The imaginary is the realm of image and imagination, deception

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<sup>8</sup> In the light of footnotes 3 and 7, this gender option may read as false pretense. To the contrary, it is an indication of my effort to use non-sexist language in all parts of my text which do not require otherwise for critical purposes.



and lure. The principal illusions of the imaginary are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality and, above all, similarity” (Evans 84). The child identified with the whole unified image s/he sees in the mirror and covers up the sense of lack and separation with a misrecognition/lie. The imaginary precedes the Law and the (symbolic) order and is characterized by freedom from the constraints associated with these: identity, dichotomies, (teleo)logical thinking, time.

The passage from the imaginary to the symbolic order takes place with the Oedipus complex, first described by Freud. Lacan keeps the concept of the Oedipus complex, however, he identifies three times of it. The first time of the complex is characterized by the “pre-oedipal triangle:” the mother, the child and the phallus. Dylan Evans identifies this as a point where Lacan diverges from Freud, as the former claims that “there is never a purely dual relation between the mother and the child but always a third term, the phallus, an imaginary object which the mother desires beyond the child himself (131). This is the time when the child realizes that “both he and the mother are marked by a lack” (131). The mother desires the phallus that she lacks. When the child realizes that the mother’s desire aims at something beyond him, he “wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire” (Lacan, *Écrits* 289). However, as a substitute he can never completely satisfy the mother; her desire for the phallus persists, which gives rise to anxiety in the child. This conflict gets resolved in the second and third times of the Oedipus complex. In the second phase of the Oedipus complex the imaginary father intervenes, imposing the Law on the mother’s desire. The intervention is often mediated by the discourse of the mother, through her speech and through her subjection to the Law. The third phase of the Oedipus complex is the actual intervention of the real father, who shows that he possesses the phallus, “in such a way that the child is forced to abandon his attempt to be the phallus” (Evans 23), he makes

the child give up his desire for the mother and substitute it for the Name-of-the-Father (this substitution is also referred to as the paternal metaphor).

The symbolic: It is the structure of language that we need to enter so as to become speaking subjects and designate ourselves as “I.” When the child enters the symbolic, he accepts the order regulated by the *nom/non-du-père*, and renounces his first object of desire—the mother; he accepts the law of language, which structures human desire through metaphor and metonymy. Through a “symbolic pact,” he acquires an authorized speaking position and becomes the “slave of language” (Lacan, *Écrits* 113). Entering the symbolic order marks one’s birth as a subject, a subject to the Law of the father.

The Law is a “legal-linguistic structure” that underlies and governs all social relations (Evans 101). It is a “primordial Law which in regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of a nature abandoned to the law of mating” (Lacan, *Écrits* 66). It is imposed on the child by the father during the Oedipus Complex, thereby regulating the child’s desire. There is a dialectical relationship between the Law and desire, as prohibition itself triggers the birth of desire.

The father: “From very early on in his work, Lacan lays great importance on the role of the father in psychic structure” (Evans 62). He is the representative of the social (symbolic) order, and “only by identifying with the father in the Oedipus complex can the subject gain entry into this order” (62). However, the father in Lacan is a complex concept, as he differentiates between real, imaginary and symbolic father. The real father is the biological father. The imaginary father is an imago, a collection of images the child builds around the figure of the father. The imaginary father can be a double image, it may be constructed as “an ideal father, or the opposite, as the father who has fucked the kid up” (63). As an ideal father, the imaginary father is a model who

possesses all the qualities the real father lacks. In the latter role, the imaginary father “is the terrifying father of the primal horde who imposes the incest taboo on his sons” (63). The symbolic father is a function or a position in the symbolic order. His task is to impose the Law and regulate desire in the Oedipus complex, intervening in the dual narcissistic mother-child relationship and imposing the incest taboo on the child. The symbolic father is also referred to as the Name-of-the-Father (*le nom du père*) which is often linked to the concept of *le ‘non’ du père* (the no of the father), indicating the inseparability of the legislative and the prohibitive functions of the symbolic father.

The Lacanian other/Other is a double concept that also has a crucial importance in the dissertation. In lower case, the other is the specular image the child identifies with in the mirror stage, thus it is inscribed in the imaginary order and is constitutive of the lack the subject experiences. The uppercase Other is a radical otherness that “cannot be assimilated through identification” (136); it is the core, the center of the structure thus it is inscribed in the symbolic order.

The concept of the phallus has also been mentioned, however, it has not been clarified that, by Lacan, it is not identical with the penis. Penis is the male genital organ while the phallus is the role this organ takes up in fantasy. Lacan differentiates between imaginary and symbolic phallus. The imaginary phallus is perceived by the child as the mother’s desire thus the child endeavors to become the phallus (Oedipus complex). The symbolic phallus is a signifier, “the signifier of the desire of the Other” (Lacan, *Écrits* 270).

Freud and Lacan approach the human psyche and psychic development from different perspectives. Nevertheless, I do not think that their theories are incompatible with one another

and cannot be applied for textual analysis side by side, as Lacan himself argues that he only returns to the original Freud, “the meaning of Freud” (89).

### ***Concepts I Have Introduced***

In the following part of the Introduction, I will explicate on “fathering” and “freedom” – further concepts my argument operates with in the dissertation. “Fathering” stands for a number of different functions and mechanisms. If we look up the verb “to father” in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, we find a list of different, but related meanings and connotations: “to beget,” “to be the founder, producer, or author of,” “to fix the paternity or origin of,” “to place responsibility for the origin or cause of,” “to impose.” I use the expression “fathering” in reference to all of these connotations, aiming to keep the expression open to let the primary materials, the novels, also provide us with additional understandings of it.

Freedom, as used in the chapters, however, in the given deconstructive-psychoanalytic context, related to the figure of the father, means not being subjected to (not being a subject in) others’ paternal plots; not being subjected to the Law of father, the paternal order, or keeping a playful distance to it; not assuming a restricted position in the symbolic order through yielding to the fantasy of becoming an “I” but keeping an ever changing imaginary “identity” characterized by a relative “freedom” and lack of congruence.

## **1.4. The Outline of the Dissertation**

### ***Chapter 2***

My choice for Mark Twain’s novel in “Reading, Writing, and Paternity in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,” has been motivated by two factors. On the one hand, as Boker claims, “[i]n

all of American literature there is perhaps no adolescent male protagonist who is . . . more representative of the American orphan-hero than Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn" (137). On the other hand, it is likely the most significant Southern novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I claim that the plot is organized around a power game between Huck and the numerous representatives of the paternal order who try to establish control over Huck, subjecting him to their order/code. In the novel, the activity of plotting itself acquires crucial importance. Huck tries to "out-scribe" himself from the different paternal plots and achieve mastery over his life and plot as well.

In the first part of the chapter, I examine the different representatives of the paternal order and the plots they try to inscribe him. In the second part, I focus on his quests to out-scribe himself from these plots and achieve freedom.

### ***Chapter 3***

Faulkner, as critics like Richard P. Adams, Andre Bleikasten, or Lynn G. Levins have observed, was obsessed with the questions of fatherhood, patriarchy, and the metaphor of the father as the key fantasy of the South. Almost all of his novels can be read, or even offer themselves to be read, as inquiries into the functions and malfunctions of fatherhood and father-son relationships. His world "abounds in orphans and bastards" (Bleikasten 116), and "in at least four of his major novels—*The Sound and The Fury* (1929), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Go Down, Moses* (1942)—the father-son relationship is assuredly one of the crucial issues" (120). Moreover, Faulkner himself stated in an interview that *Absalom, Absalom!*, one of his most important novels, is a "story of a man who wanted a son and got too many, got so many that they

destroyed him” (83). Thus, it is a story of fathers and sons and their mutually dependent and mutually destructive existence.

In “Family Romances in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*”, I regard narration and storytelling as a paternal legacy and a family destiny as well, which bind the son to the father and the Grandfather. However, narration and storytelling also become the means of overwriting the paternal meta-narrative and endeavors of narrative self-fathering, self-begetting. In my reading, the “story-weaving” of the narrators—to use Mieke Bal’s concept, the *narrative text* and the story woven (by them); the *story* in Bal’s terms—swirl around the same conflict: the “battle” of fathers and sons. In this chapter, I examine how these paternal-filial power relations and conflicts work in both “layers” of the novel and how they influence each other. Doing so, I make use of the insights of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially the theory of the Freudian family romance.

#### ***Chapter 4***

In, “Fathering and Self-Fathering in Robert Penn Warren’s *All the King’s Men*”, I focus on the different attempts at filling in the father’s lack and fulfilling his position.

In the first part of the chapter, I examine the effects the father’s lack and his failure in fathering have on the “story.” The lack of a/the father triggers the crisis of the paternal function on different levels of the story, such as the proliferation and endless substitution of potential father figures. Having examined the mechanism of this substitution and the other symptoms the malfunction of the paternal order causes, I inspect the effects the father’s lack and the malfunction of the paternal order has on the personal story of the son (his story) from a psychoanalytic perspective. I argue that the paternal malfunction brings about an “error” in the resolution of the child’s Oedipus complex and thus Jack’s psychic development gets stuck. I also examine the

symptoms of this in Jack's life: his foetus fantasy, his periods of Great Sleep, the ideologies he comes up with (his being an Idealist and the Great Twitch), his preoccupation with history, and his actions as a character.

In the second part of the chapter, I look at the two serious attempts at filling the gap the father left behind and at fulfilling the paternal function (at fathering) first from a psychoanalytical perspective. I examine the two father candidates and their duel in detail. Then, I examine the duel, the success of the father candidates and the act of fathering from a more narratological perspective, which provides me with a more complex understanding of the concept of fathering. Using this newly gained concept of fathering, I reexamine the novel and get a new candidate for the paternal position. In the last two sections of the chapter, I examine Jack's endeavors at fathering and self-fathering both as a character and as a narrator.

## ***Chapter 5***

In "Quest for the Son in Flannery O'Connor: *The Violent Bear It Away*," I read O'Connor's novel, too, as a quest narrative, in which the object of the quest is "the boy's" (Tarwater's) "possession." All three members of the family, including Tarwater himself, try to "have" the boy, occupy the position of the father, and establish control over him and his future. I focus on their separate, though closely intertwined, quests for power. I explore what forms they take, how they relate to each other, and what results they bring. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the two self-appointed fathers' (Old Mason Tarwater, Rayber) quest. First I deal with Old Mason Tarwater's endeavor to inscribe the boy into a storyline, a line of descent and into the linearity of a quest structure. Then I explore how Rayber endeavors to overwrite the Old Man's plot and reconstruct the boy in his own fashion. However, my main focus lies on Tarwater's attempt at

attaining freedom from the previously mentioned paternal quests and self-fathering. In this endeavor of his, crossing out the paternal master narrative, twisting the paternal quest into an anti-quest and doing NO instead of saying NO play crucial roles. To understand why he “can’t just say NO” to the Old Man’s will and paternal quests he left behind, why Tarwater “got to do NO” (*Violent* 157), I will apply Austin’s speech act theory to understand the performative qualities of the Old Man’s speech. To understand how his gaze works, I will apply the theory of hypnosis and Lacan’s concept of the gaze. Finally, I examine why the Old Man’s speech and gaze can be termed violent and why the violent bear Tarwater away.



## CHAPTER 2

### READING, WRITING, AND PATERNITY IN MARK TWAIN'S *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

“Persons *attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted*; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; *persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.*” (Twain 1, emphasis added).

The above passage is the very first sentence of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: a paternal “[n]otice” “by order of the author” that, among other things, forbids reading for the plot or plots. Going against the author's paternal warning or following his latent inspiration, I intend to read for “the plot” and plots in the present chapter, moreover, claim that it is organized around a power game, a game of plotting between Huck and the different representatives of the paternal order on different levels of the novel.

Let us have a look at the main objects –plot, motive, and moral – of the prohibition a bit more thoroughly. If we open the *American Heritage Dictionary*, as Brooks does in his *Reading for the Plot* (11), we will find five main definitions under the entry “plot”:

1. a. A small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose: a garden plot; a cemetery plot. b. A measured area of land; a lot. 2. A ground plan, as for a building; a diagram. 3. See graph1 (n., sense 1). 4. The plan of events or main story in a narrative or drama. 5. A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; a scheme.

In spite of the fact that all five of these definitions seem to be connected to one another through some “subterranean logic” (12), the last two senses of plot are even more closely intertwined: “in modern literature . . . the organizing line of plot is more often than not some scheme or machination” (12). Moreover, as plots are not simply organizing but intentional structures as well, goal-oriented and forward-moving, as Brooks points out (12); the movement of the plot is not only organized but fuelled and motivated by acts of plotting.

If we keep on investigating the meaning of this prohibition against investigation and go on to look up “motive” (another object of the above “paternal prohibition”), the same dictionary gives the following definitions: “An emotion, desire, physiological need, or similar impulse that acts as an incitement to action” or “[a] motif (‘recurrent thematic element’ [‘motif’]) in art, literature, or music,” which through its recurrence also builds the work’s structure.

Taking all this into consideration, the quoted authorial note seems like a paternal warning against looking for plots, intended meanings, secret motifs, the author’s motives; against finding out what kinds of desires drive the narrative/plot forward, what motivations (plots) hide behind the acts of plotting.

Further, this plot against plotting may be even “trickier.” Sacvan Bercovitch (following this interpretive scheme/plot), in an essay that has determined critical discourse about the novel’s ironic language, reads this note as “a directive against interpretation,” which, on the other hand, is “a deadpan directive, which therefore requires interpretation” (83). In other words, it outlaws reading for the plot and plots, outlaws finding (or constructing) some sort of secret meaning, and, simultaneously, with the very same gesture, also calls attention to the possibility of hidden

motives and plots, constructing these precisely by prohibiting looking for them, and therefore inspiring the reader to transgress, search, construct, and plot.

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the author's game of plotting between Huck and the paternal order is being played not only on the banks of the Mississippi or the South, but also in the field of language, where the activity of plotting itself acquires crucial importance. And the most important moves in this game are all connected to plotting, reading, writing, and interpretation. Huck is questing for freedom and self-mastery via plotting and writing. (T)His<sup>9</sup> narrative is his means of "out-scribing" himself of the paternal plot(s) into which the figures of the Law<sup>10</sup> and order are trying to inscribe him. I also argue that the "figures/agents of the Law" have an intimate relationship with certain rhetorical figures and signs, so the ability/inability of reading and (mis)interpreting signs and figures acquire decisive influence on the success of the quest. Therefore, when Cynthia Brantley Johnson writes in her "Interpretive Notes" to the novel that "Huck wants to escape the figurative bonds of his life" (423), she is right in more than one sense: literally as well as figuratively.

## **2.1. Plots in Conflict**

As the novel opens, two opposing "plots" unfold in front of our eyes, overshadowing Huck's life: Widow Douglas and Miss Watson's "sivilizing" efforts and pap Finn's "unsivilizing" tendency. Thus, Huck seems to be pulled about by two opposing forces and torn apart between two different roles in two opposing "plots." To get away, to "out-scribe" himself from these—often threatening—paternal plots and the roles imposed by them becomes the original motivation and

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<sup>9</sup> We will see if he manages to earn that possessive pronoun or not.

<sup>10</sup> I use the word "Law" in the Lacanian sense, referring to those fundamental principles and structures which govern and underlie all social relations and interactions, which make any kind of social existence possible. The Lacanian Law is primarily a linguistic entity, "identical with the order of language" (Lacan, *Écrits* 66).

the main organizing principle behind Huck's adventures, thus, the main driving force of the narrative: "I guessed I wouldn't stay in one place, but just tramp right across the country, mostly night times . . . and *so get so far away that the old man nor the widow couldn't ever find me any more*" (Twain 36-37, emphasis added).

His "lighting out" is, however, not only an escape, but also a quest for "freedom" and self-mastery, as many critics, among them Harold Bloom and Alan Trachtenberg point out. Moreover, they also understand "freedom" to be the main theme of the novel and consider Huck Finn to be "the image of freedom most central to American literary culture" (Bloom, *Huck* 3). However, as Bloom also observes, in his "Introduction" to one of the numerous anthologies about the novel appearing under his name, "the book after all is not just about freedom, but about the limits of freedom as well," about control and authority (*Huck* 1). Moreover, he links the concept of freedom to that of the father and defines it to be mainly a freedom from the father: "Huck's family consists of a dangerous, indeed murderous father, who might also turn up again somehow. Obviously freedom in the first place must mean freedom from such a deathly father . . ." (1). While sharing Bloom's view, I reserve that the concept of the father needs to be taken in a wider sense, as pap Finn is not the only paternal presence in the novel that threatens Huck's freedom. The novel abounds in figures trying to establish control and exercise dominance over Huck, subjecting him to their order/code. They all want to "civilize" him according to their own code systems, which, as we shall see, have more in common than the first impression would suggest.

Boker, in her book *The Grief Taboo in American Literature: Loss and Prolonged Adolescence in Twain, Melville, and Hemingway*, devotes a chapter to Huckleberry Finn and his "anti-oedipus complex." She examines the novel and Huck's quest along the concepts of freedom and fatherhood, however, as the title of the book also suggests, she focuses her attention on

repressed grief and loss, which she identifies to be central to American fiction. She also argues that “Huck seeks to free himself from parental bondage” and “patriarchal civilization,” however, she comes to the conclusion that “once this adolescent rebellion is undertaken, he suffers deeply from an almost unbearable loneliness and isolation” (137). Moreover, she also states that Huck’s “compulsion to wander” represents “an act of mourning for the lost parents for whom he refuses to grieve” (138) or “an unconscious search for the ‘good,’ or ideal, lost parents” (139). She claims that Huck, playing out “a classical family-romance struggle” (150), continuously “attempts to find an ideal, heroic father and to establish a lasting bond with the ‘good mother’ [who, according to her, ‘is played by Jim in the novel’]” (139).

I would definitely avoid calling this family arrangement, with Jim in the role of the “good mother,” a “classical family-romance struggle.” In my view, Huck’s actions and plots are fuelled by less paradoxical motivations and desires: he is questing for self-mastery. He is trying to “out-scribe” himself of the paternal plot(s) into which the figures of the order are trying to inscribe him. In the following part of the chapter, I examine who the different figures of order are and how they function in Huck’s life.

### ***Pap Finn: The Law of the Out-Law***

The most threatening paternal presence in the novel for Huck is pap; his ghostly presence, abrupt appearances and disappearances keep Huck in constant terror. Part of the terror may arise from his apparently liminal, “passing to and fro,” position between life and death. When he is first mentioned in the novel, he is dead, “was found in the river drowned [sic]” (Twain 17), but gets resurrected from the dead very soon: “They said he was floating on his back in the water. . . . I knowed mighty well that a drowned man don’t float on his back but on his face. So I knowed,

then, that this warn't pap" (18). However, when "his own self" (26) appears, he looks quite dead: "there warn't no color in his face, where his face showed; it was white; not like another man's white, but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl—a tree toad white, a fish-belly white" (27). His appearance is very much like that of the undead in folklore, horror fiction and films. He transgresses boundaries, subverts order, and causes terror with his very being. Instead of being a "radical alterity" in the Lacanian sense ("Object," an *Other*<sup>11</sup>), he represents an alterity more in the sense Julia Kristeva designates with the term abject: "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4), or that which is "improper/unclean" (2). Through posing a threat to boundaries that regulate order, the *abject* evokes horror. His name, pap also confirms his liminal position, shedding light to two different aspects of his liminality. One of the meanings of the word the *American Heritage Dictionary* provides is a "material lacking real value or substance." Something that does not occupy a clear-cut position or possess an essential nature, thus, cannot be grasped and categorized (ordered) that easily.

Another meaning of the word "pap" is "a teat or nipple" or "something resembling a nipple," probably coming from the Latin papilla ("Pap"), which means "a small nipplelike projection, such as a protuberance on the skin." Pap also functions as a protuberance of the order that sticks out of it, on the other hand he also belongs there. He is the excessive, transgressive double of Law; an obscene superego supplement to Law that Žižek discusses as being constitutively split from the very beginning "into Law as 'Ego-Ideal' - that is, symbolic order which regulates social life and maintains social peace - and into its obscene, superegotistical

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<sup>11</sup> In Lacan *Other (Autre)* designates a radical alterity for the subject and is equated with language and the law (the order of the symbolic). A subject may also occupy this position and thereby embody the Other for another subject (Evans 136).

reverse” (*Everything* 225).<sup>12</sup>

The other, major source of Huck’s terror originates in the fact that their relationship is highly Oedipal in nature, as Boker points out, “centering on pap’s obsessive anger at his son’s attempt to surpass him morally, socially, and financially” (141). He wants to be “the boss of his son” (Twain 31), to take control over him and his money. His trying to take control, however, does not take place in a Lawful (Oedipal) manner, as an attempt at oedipalization, due to his being an out-Law himself, representative of a paternal disorder rather than order.<sup>13</sup> There is, in fact, nothing orderly about him; he is “ragged” with “uncommon long hair” (18). Moreover, he causes disorder whenever he has a chance, getting drunk and going “a-blowing around and cussing and whooping and carrying on . . . all over town, with a tin pan, till most midnight,” getting jailed whenever he does so (31). Thus, it is not by mere chance that “his mark” (32), the sign standing for him is the cross (a chi) “in the left-boot heel made with big nails” (23), which is the symbol of chiasmus: the trope of sub/inversion (disorder). Moreover, the inverted, reflexive, split structure of the chi can also remind us of the structure of Law in Slavoj Žizek.

In total conformity with the twisted logic of the chi, his non-du-père—the legislative and prohibitive function of the Father, the exercising of which makes the child enter the (symbolic) order and subjects him to the Law of language—works inversely: its objective is to keep the child out of the order of Law and language,<sup>14</sup> to turn him into an out-Law in a general and Lacanian sense, too. His paternal “non” is the prohibition of language, order, and the Law:

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<sup>12</sup> I am indebted to Tamás Bényei for this idea.

<sup>13</sup> Apparently, in *Huckleberry Finn*, the point that should serve as the protagonist’s entrance into the symbolic is the very point where that order is most corrupted; and the figure who should stand for the compulsory order of meaning that castrates the subject becomes a subject himself, someone very characteristically marked by castration and the aporias of meaning.

<sup>14</sup> Which the representatives of the order strive to make him enter.

You're educated too, they say—can read and write. You think you're better than your father, now, don't you, because he can't? I'll take it out of you. . . . And looky here—you drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put an airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what he is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn't before they died. I can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself up like this, *I ain't the man to stand it*—you hear? . . . Now looky here; *you stop that putting on frills. I won't have it.* I'll lay for you, my smarty; and if I catch you about that school I'll tan you good. First you know you'll get religion too. *I never see such a son.* (28-29, emphasis added)

However, in perfect, ironic accordance with its twisted nature, the son's non-du-père brings the opposite, twisted result: instead of following his father's order and avoiding school, Huck, for the first time in his life, gets inspired to attend school just to "spite pap": "I didn't want to go to school much before, but I reckoned I'd go now to spite pap" (33). What is more, this brief state of inspiration in Huck's part may also illustrate how the "shadowy double" (Žizek, *Everything* 226), the obscene, superegotistical part of the split Law in Žizek becomes "socially constructive" (225), how it assists and ensures the functioning of the "Law as Ego-Ideal."

So far the novel, mainly due to pap's activity, seems to be an ironic, sarcastic version of the classical narrative of oedipalization. In the following part of the chapter, I am going to examine how others' attempts succeed in accomplishing the task of oedipalization, how orderly or



perversed their attempts are, and what the findings communicate about Fatherhood and the Law in the novel.

Since Huck's "real" or biological father, as we have seen, is not able to fulfill the function of the symbolic father, others take over the father's place, trying to fill the lack and perform the paternal function. Let us examine whether these others manage to become Others, whether they are able to establish control over Huck in a more Oedipal manner and make a "proper" subject out of him thus filling the void in the Other.

### *(M)o/Others: Paternal Mothers*

Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, and Aunt Sally are the three most important (m)other figures of the novel. In spite of this, they are not motherly at all. Their intention is not to nurture and love Huck but to "sivilize" him. Instead of being maternal, they are rather paternal in their manners and function as actants of the paternal order, bearers of the Southern moral code, and representatives of the Law of the Father. "Paternalism" heavily intertwines almost all their actions. Both the Widow and Miss Watson rely on fundamental texts of the patriarchal order: the Widow on the *Bible*, basically the Old Testament, which is the master narrative of patriarchy per se; and Miss Watson on a spelling book, which regulates the order of language.

As Boker also observes, "the absence and the inappropriateness" of Huck's father "does not make it possible for him to enter the symbolic order through a paternal identification" (142). However, she fails to add that "the absence or inappropriateness" of Huck's father also triggers a proliferation of possible other candidates for the task, who all want to provide a place for Huck in the symbolic order either through naming him<sup>15</sup> or through providing models for him to identify with. When the widow calls him a "poor lost lamb" (4), these two actions merge. On the one

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<sup>15</sup> "The widow called me a poor lost lamb and she called me a lot of other names" (4).

hand, she expresses her desire to shepherd him, to lead him back to the forsaken right path. On the other hand, taking into consideration the Christian connotation of the word, we can also state that doing so, she offers him a model to be identified with: the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei), Jesus Christ, who willingly took upon himself the sins of others, showing full obedience to the will of his Father.

Telling him the story of Moses, she also tries to provide a model for him to be identified with. The story of Moses is offered to him as an allegory, indeed, since there are several identical elements in their lives, as Jose Barchillon and Joel S. Kovel point out. They state that “the lives of Moses and Huckleberry Finn have . . . a striking over-all similarity” (787) and maintain that in the novel, “[t]here are many threads of reference to Moses: taken together they form a fabric which strongly suggests that the Biblical hero is indeed a personage of consequence, although a shadowy one, in this novel” (787). Moreover, following this line of thought, they assume *Huckleberry Finn* to be a retelling of the Moses myth in which “the threadbare myth begins to gain life and color” (805). In spite of the fact that I think that they got somewhat carried away in their analogy hunt, I also maintain that the figure of Moses was provided to Huck as a model to be identified with. What is more, this identification could be crucial in his process of oedipalization. Moses, through accepting and subjecting himself to his Father’s (God’s) will and following his command, becomes the hero, the leader/Father of his people, but remains the transmitter of the Law of God, the Father (in the form of the Ten Commandments) all his life. Thus, we can say that Moses’ case is a perfect example of a successful oedipalization: he accepts the Law of the Father thereby accepting the fact that he can never have the phallus, therefore symbolically acquires it. However, the Widow’s attempt at Huck’s oedipalization via the Moses narrative fails, as Huck does not

identify with him; he is unable to understand the allegory and loses interest in the story as soon as he learns that “Moses had been dead a considerable long time” (Twain 4).

Miss Watson, with her spelling-book and her prohibitions,<sup>16</sup> also quite clearly represents the Law and language—the two of which are inseparable in Lacanian psychoanalysis. She tries to teach Huck how to read and write and how to pray to God (address the Father): “She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it” (16). Huck, however, takes this information literally and gets quite disappointed when it does not work:

But it warn’t so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn’t any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three of four times, but somehow I couldn’t make it work. By and by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and *I couldn’t make it out no way*.  
(16, emphasis added)

He does not get the widow’s notion of “spiritual gift” and cannot see any point in praying if, in the literal sense of the word, “nothing come out of it” (16).

Thus, the Widow and Miss Watson both fail at being Others to Huck; their plots to bring Huck under patriarchal-symbolic authority falter. They are able to attain their object neither by threatening him with the “bad place” nor by holding out promises of the “good place” (5). He is interested in either of them only if “Tom Sawyer would go there . . . because I wanted him and me to be together” (5-6). Their “sivilizing” efforts fall short, since the sole reason Huck takes interest in being “sivilized,” as we have seen, is to “spite pap.” He slips out of their neat, *order-ly* world,

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<sup>16</sup> “‘Don’t put your feet up there, Huckleberry’ and ‘Don’t scrunch up like that, Huckleberry’ . . . ‘Don’t gap and stretch like that, Huckleberry’” (5).

not even understanding in a little while “how I’d ever got to like it so well at the widow’s, where you had to wash, eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular, and be forever bothering over a book and have old Miss Watson pecking at you all the time” and not wanting “to go back no more” (34).

### ***Tom Sawyer: Lawful Subversion***

It might be surprising, at first sight, to see him mentioned at this point—among the “others” aspiring to become Others in Huck’s life—since he is often treated as the companion or chum of Huck Finn, even the writer himself describes Huck on the title page as “Tom Sawyer’s Comrade.” “Comrade,” according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, is a “person who shares one’s interests or activities; a friend or companion.” However, if we have a closer look at their relationship, we can easily notice that something is wrong with this companionship. The possessive case of the above mentioned very first description of Huck on the cover page already sheds light on “what is wrong” with it: Huck and Tom Sawyer are never on the same level. As James L. Kastely also observes in his essay entitled “The Ethics of Self-Interest: Narrative Logic in Huckleberry Finn,” “Tom and Huck are not equals. Tom is the leader who organizes games in which he can be a hero; for the most part, Huck is just a follower who goes along” (415). Huck is not only a follower, as Kastely points out, but he is also defined in relation to Tom. He can acquire a position and become “somebody” in relation to him, like a son through his father.

As the definition and the possessive “s” already indicate, Tom is always the boss, the master (Mars Tom), the “father.” Moreover, he does treat Huck accordingly: as if Huck were his Noble Savage (Fiedler 567), knowing nothing about the world: “Shucks, it ain’t no use to talk to you, Huck Finn. You don’t seem to know anything, somehow—perfect saphead” (Twain 21).

In spite of the associations of freedom and subversion that his wild adventures and mischief might call into our mind, we have to notice that, similarly to the Widow and Miss Watson, Tom also has his own code system, his own order that he imposes on Huck and all the others. Quite akin to the Widow and Miss Watson's, his code system is also taken from books, though, as Neil Schmitz observes, he "asserts the primacy of the bad book" and not "the Good Book" (54). In the novel's world and in Huck's understanding, however, in my view, the two are not that far removed from one another. Both are dead letters derived from dead "authorities" (Twain 336). Using and enforcing bookish examples, he also tries to impose pre-existent plots, channel the flow of events into already existing patterns. He wants to do everything in "the right way" (341), as it is written, following the pattern word by word without understanding it. Probably the best example for this is his insistence on *ransoming* the kidnapped without admittedly having the slightest understanding what the word means:

"[. . .] mostly it's considered best to kill them—except some that you bring to the cave here, and keep them till they are ransomed."

"Ransomed? What's that?"

"I don't know. But that's what they do. I've seen it in books; and so of course that's what we've got to do."

"But how can we do it if we don't know what it is?"

"Why blame it all, we've got to do it, Don't I tell you it's in the books? Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books, and get things all muddled up?" (13)

Doing so, he illustrates the “constitutively senseless character of the Law” and “the vicious circle of its authority” (*Sublime* 35) observed by Žižek: “we must obey it not because it is just, good or even beneficial, but simply because it is the law” (35).

Tom and the gang’s behavior is a perfect example to, what Žižek calls “external obedience to the Law,” or to the “Command” in which the “incomprehensible,” “traumatic” and “irrational” character of the Law guarantees its perfect functioning, and becomes “a positive condition of it” (35). What is more, Tom demands the same obedience from the others as well. He acts like a tyrannical father, not permitting any contradiction; everything has to go according to his orders. His style is in perfect accordance with all this, since he does nothing but gives commands; his speech is full modal verbs of command and obligation, such as “has got to” and “have to,” thus setting the final pillar of the Law, by its enunciation (36).

He indeed tries to act as a Father in naming things as well: he “called the hogs ‘ingots,’ and he called the turnips and stuff ‘julery’ . . . a blazing stick, which he called a slogan,” “we would lay in ambush, as he called it” (Twain 18). For him, in a Lacanian manner, the name itself, the signifier seems to be much more important than the signified. Naming things something different from what they actually are, he not only fathers them anew, but takes them for something else, substitutes them for something else. Naming “the turnips and stuff julery,” he substitutes “julery” with turnips, the stealing of which does not violate law and order as much. The mechanism strongly resembles that of displacement, where a “transference of physical intensities . . . [takes place] along an ‘associative path,’ so that strongly cathected ideas have their charge displaced onto other, less strongly cathected ones” (Schmidt-Kitsikis). Here, instead of strongly cathected ideas, we have highly subversive acts, which are displaced by less or non-

subversive acts, thus making it possible to find *jouissance* through displacement, without violating order.

The sign of the band is the chi, a “cross,” the trope of subversion; nonetheless, as we have seen, they only play/pretend subversion/transgression by severely violating order while keeping it mostly intact: “We hadn’t robbed nobody, hadn’t killed any people, but only just pretended” (Twain 18). What is more, it is exactly through playing out-Laws that they stay inside the Law. The desire to violate order and break the Law is regulated through the pretend play, in other words, through figures.

Tom also wants to turn Huck into a subject in the Lacanian sense of the word,<sup>17</sup> who by entering the symbolic order through a “symbolic pact” acquires an authorized speaking position and becomes the “slave of language” (*Écrits* 113). Joining Tom Sawyer’s Gang does, in many respects, resemble entering the symbolic (or at least an ironic version thereof). When the child enters the symbolic, he accepts the order regulated by the *nom/non-du-père*, and renounces his first object of desire—the mother and the possibility of *jouissance*; he accepts the law of language, which structures human desire through metaphor and metonymy.

Huck does offer the closest “thing” he has to a mother—Miss Watson—in order to be accepted in Tom Sawyer’s Gang and, along with the other boys, makes his mark on the paper in blood (a gesture imitating the cut of castration upon entering the symbolic), signaling his subjection to the Law (of the Gang), which, as we have seen, does (playfully) regulate desire through metaphors (pretended plays).

However, in spite of the fact that Huck, along with the others, takes part in pretending to be a robber and laying in ambush (in other words, in Tom Sawyer’s introduction to figurative functioning, substitution, and displacement), he does not seem to learn his lesson this time either:

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<sup>17</sup> “The subject is a subject only by virtue of his subjection to the field of the *Other*” (Lacan, *Freud’s* 188).

*I wanted to see the camels and the elephants, so I was on hand next day, Saturday, in the ambuscade; and when we got the word we rushed out of the woods and down the hill. But there warn't no Spaniards and A-rabs, and there warn't no camels nor no elephants. It warn't anything but a Sunday-school picnic, and only a primer class at that. We busted it up, and chased the children up the hollow; but we never got anything but some doughnuts and jam, . . . . I didn't see no di'monds, and told Tom Sawyer so. He said there was loads of them there, anyway; and he said there was A-rabs there, too, and elephants and things. (Twain 19, emphasis added)*

Despite all his efforts, he is not able to see them, since, as Neil Schmitz observes, he remains “metaphor-blind” and “too literal to take the leap into this form of symbolization” (55).

Having a closer look at what is wrong with Huck's sight or “literacy” reveals how his seeing/reading (mal)functions. As several earlier examples have shown, he does have crucial problems with seeing/reading: he sees signs, but if the surface and what is behind the surface do not match, he is unable to read them. More precisely, he is able to understand what semioticians would call *motivated signs*, which do not need abstraction, in which there is a more or less transparent connection between the signifier and the signified. But anything that requires more than that—any signs in which the connection between the signifier and the signified is not “transparent,” but arbitrary, conventional, or figurative—is beyond his comprehension. He assumes all signs to be motivated, all meaning to be literal. In other words, we may say that he remains too literal-minded to be symbolically literate, as Schmitz also states, blind for figures and



metaphors. The scene after Tom Sawyer tells him about genies and magic lamps is another perfect illustration of this, as he “got an old tin lamp and an iron ring, and went out in the woods and rubbed and rubbed till [I] sweat like an Injun, calculating to build a palace and sell it; but it warn’t no use, none of the genies come” (Twain 21). The situation is highly similar to the one with Miss Watson and the prayer, since in neither of the cases is he able to draw a distinction between reality and “fiction,” between the literal and the figurative. Even Huck notices the similarity between the two situations and draws a link between them, stating that Tom’s stories “had all the marks of a Sunday-school” (21).

Thus, not only is Tom Sawyer not able to make a subject out of Huck, he also fails to be an Other, a symbolic father. However, he does function as an imaginary father, since in spite of (or, perhaps, due to) Tom’s despotic tendencies, Huck builds a family romance around his character. He becomes the ideal father (imaginary father, according to Lacan<sup>18</sup>), with whom he would love to identify, as Sacvan Bercovitch argues (96). There are several incidents in the novel that confirm this, showing him imitating Tom Sawyer or acting as he imagines Tom would; for example, when later in the novel he decides to give a “rummaging” to the Walter Scott: “Do you reckon Tom Sawyer would ever go by this thing? Not for pie, he wouldn’t. He’d call it an adventure—that’s what he’s call it; and he’d land on that wreck if it was his last act. And wouldn’t he throw style into it?—wouldn’t he spread himself, nor nothing?” (Twain 92). He motivates and inspires himself with sentences like: “I says to myself, Tom Sawyer wouldn’t back out now, and so I won’t either” (93). Whenever it comes to measuring himself, or somebody else, against something, Tom is the model; and when it comes to praise, the greatest acclaim in Huck’s dictionary is: “Tom Sawyer couldn’t get up no better plan than what I had” (59) or “Tom Sawyer couldn’t ’a’ done it no neater himself” (277). But even when he compares himself to Tom, he is

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<sup>18</sup> “The imaginary father can be construed as an ideal father” (Lacan, *Freud’s* 156).

often too humble to mention himself in the same breath and makes sure to restore Tom's superordination in sentences like: "Of course he would 'a' throwed more style into it, but I can't do that very handy" (277) or "[n]obody could spread himself like Tom Sawyer in such a thing as that" (46).

If we take all this into consideration, we can come to the conclusion that Tom forms a bridge between Miss Watson and pap Finn. He seems to have a lot in common with both of them. He tries to introduce Huck to figurative and symbolic functioning, subject him to order and the Law, as Miss Watson does. However, the trope of the chi also forms an intimate connection between him and pap Finn. Moreover, if we consider that chiasmi are not only the tropes of in/subversion, but also those of "deception and the (dis)tors/(t)ion of (the presence of) meaning" (Kalmár, *Szöveg* 150),<sup>19</sup> we instantly have even more reason to mention them together. Both pap Finn and Tom are great deceivers: Tom pretends subversion and keeps the order mostly intact, whereas pap pretends to be following order (to Judge Thatcher), while subverting it the next possible moment.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the inverted, twisted logic of the chi also connects them.

However, subversion forms a twisted link not only between pap Finn and Tom, but also it relates to all the representatives of the paternal "order" mentioned so far. None of the figures of the patriarchal "order" are orderly in the strict sense of the word: as we have already seen, pap Finn is the representative of a paternal disorder rather than order; order and disorder cannot be kept neatly apart in the case of Tom Sawyer either; the (m)others instead of being maternal are rather paternal. Thus, the operations of the chi also seem to suggest that the relationship between

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<sup>19</sup> My translation.

<sup>20</sup> "They tucked the old man into a beautiful room, which was the spare room, and in the night some time he got powerful thirsty and clumb out on the porchroof and slid down a stanchion and traded his new coat for a jug of forty-rod, and clumb back again and had a good old time; and toward daylight he crawled out again, drunk as a fiddler, and rolled off the porch and broke his left arm in two places, and was most froze to death when somebody found him after sun-up. And when they come to look at the spare room they had to take soundings before they could navigate it" (32).

the inside and the outside of the symbolic order, between Law and transgression, is more complicated and paradoxical than one may think and cannot be conceptualized according to a clear-cut binary logic. Moreover, Žižek goes as far as stating that “transgressions are inherent to the social order; they function as as a condition of the latter's stability” (*Everything* 225).

So far we have had a look at the different representatives of the paternal “order” and the paternal plots that encircle Huck at the beginning of the novel, posing, at first sight, different, yet, rather similar threats to his “freedom.” From this point on, I am going to investigate these somewhat twisted plots and their developments following the plotline, as I intend to examine what movements (twists and turns) get generated in the plot as an effect of these personal plots for power and mastery. I will focus on Huck’s quest to out-scribe/plot himself from these (and other) paternal plots and achieve self-mastery.

## **2.2. Twists and Turns When Pap Returns**

Quite a number of scholars, among them Alex Pitofsky and James Cox, share the view that the novel’s plot is set in motion by pap, who operates as a catalyst (Pitofsky 61, Cox 390). While on the surface, the claim is true, we also should not leave unnoticed that pap’s action is boosted largely by Huck’s endeavor to spite him (Twain 33), which ends up being quite successful: “Well, wasn’t he [pap] mad? He said he would show who was Huck Finn’s boss” (33-34). Thus, we can also claim that it was Huck who ignited the action indirectly, hoping that some adventure would come out of it. His hopes, as we will see, do come true, as, having faced that all his threats and efforts to intimidate Huck were to no avail, pap resorts to violence: he captures Huck and hauls him into his cabin in the woods. The motion pap generates in the plot is in perfect alignment with his previous tendencies, as he is the one who starts “writing” the logic of the twist into the novel

through the chiasmus he sets up by abducting Huck. He hauls him to the same woods that earlier functioned as shelter, place of freedom, rest (22), and safety for Huck in case of a “paternal threat”: “I used to take to the woods most of the time when he was around” (17). But “*cross[ing]* over to the Illinois shore where it was woody” (34, emphasis added) with Huck, pap crosses out/subverts the pattern and turns the former place of freedom into a place of confinement and d(r)ead:

He kept me with him all the time, and I never got a chance to run off. We lived in that old cabin, and he always locked the door and put the key under his head nights. . . . He got to going away so much, too, and locking me in. Once he locked me in and was gone three days. It was dreadful lonesome. I judged he had got drowned, and I wasn’t ever going to get out any more. (34-35)

The threat of death and murder is a recurring element in their relationship from the very beginning. When Huck mentions pap for the first time, he attaches a death wish to his very first sentence: “I didn’t want to see him no more” (17), or at another place he states that “I judged the old man would turn up again by and by, though *I wished he wouldn’t*” (18, emphasis added). Pap also threatens Huck with killing him more than once in the novel. The scene at the end of chapter 6, in which pap Finn turns, indeed, into (the grotesque parody of) a castrating Oedipal father, running after Huck with a knife, taking him for “the Angel of Death” is only the outbreak of a long-lurking tension between them. In fact, having that notion about Huck, he was not all that mistaken as we will see. The ominous encounter closes without a tragedy, since both of them fall asleep: pap clutching a knife in his hand, promising that “he would rest a minute and then kill me

[Huck]” (41), Huck holding his father at gunpoint. Literal murder, in spite of all the preparations, does not happen, but the incident prepares the way for several symbolic ones. It also functions as a catalyst, since this is the point when Huck decides to have had enough from all the “paternal” plots and will endeavor to set himself free from all of them for good.

### **2.3. Plotting for Freedom**

#### ***Twisting Fate and Plot***

This is the first time in the novel when, plotting his escape, Huck takes the course of action, the plot of the novel into his hands. Earlier it has been shaped and driven by the others: pap, the Widow, and Tom Sawyer. His plotting is aided by the circumstances as well, since hardly does he decide to get away, when the rising of the river provides him with the means to do so: “all at once here comes a canoe; just a beauty, too, about thirteen or fourteen foot long, riding high like a duck” (43). Having the means to flee, he only needs to “fix up some way to keep pap and the widow from trying to follow” (44) him. Pap’s warning—“Another time a man comes a-prowling round here you roust me out, you hear? *That man weren’t here for no good*” (emphasis added)—gives him the very idea he wanted. He “fixes up” the place as if robbers had ransacked it, killed him, and taken the things (46).

Leaving around all the signs indicating that he was brutally murdered by robbers, he actually does nothing but “fix up” (writes) his first narrative to be read, interpreted, and believed by others/“the others.”<sup>21</sup> Doing that, he “out-scribes” himself from his father’s murderous narrative; overwrites, thus crosses out, the paternal chiastic “plot,” to give the thing a little twist and style, with another chiastic, murderous one: becoming dead to the world and his father, he seizes his only opportunity to live and not to die by his father’s hands. Just to make sure that he

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<sup>21</sup> “*You could easily see* that something had been dragged over the ground” (46, emphasis added). “I dropped pap’s whetstone there too, *so as to look like* it had been done by accident” (47, emphasis added).

does not fall too far behind Tom Sawyer's creativity, he does try to "throw in the fancy touches" and bloods not only "the ax good" (46) but also the X of his chiastic counter-plot.

He gives the paternal plot another, perhaps "un-plotted," twist, as his "narrative" is open for more readings than he might have expected, "for people thinks now that he [pap] killed his boy and fixed things so folks would think robbers done it" (79), "[s]o there's a reward out for old Finn, too—two hundred dollars" (79). Thus, it seems that after the old man sets off to hunt for Huck's presumed murderer with "the mighty hard-looking strangers" (79) and the money he coaxed out of the judge, it does not take long for his fate to twist and turn him from hunter into hunted. Moreover, as the readers get to know only in the very last page of the novel, he does get hunted down and "reformed" with a shotgun (probably for the two hundred dollars reward). Therefore, if this twisted logic is straight, Huck's very first narrative ends up being a patricidal one, since he obliquely becomes the murderer of his father.

While this indirect but literal patricide has escaped other critics' notice, many of them—such as Kenneth S. Lynn, Alex Pitofsky, Harold Beaver, and Pamela Boker—have observed that Huck commits another, symbolic one as well. The incident with the hog can be taken as a symbolic patricide; since the wild pig Huck kills off may be an imaginary substitute for the father (pap Finn), in connection with whom "hog imagery" is invoked several times in the novel.<sup>22</sup> As Harold Beaver puts it, his killing of the wild hog can be interpreted as a "brutal Oedipal act" (178); or as Kenneth S. Lynn states, it symbolizes his desire "to slay his father and the sordid animality of his ways" (400).

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<sup>22</sup> "He used to lay drunk with the hogs in the tanyard" (12); "There's a hand that was the hand of a hog" (31).

However, besides being a symbolic patricide, the same act can also be interpreted as a symbolic suicide without any contradiction,<sup>23</sup> as, among the above-mentioned critics, both Lynn and Boker observe. For Lynn, it “symbolizes his [Huck’s] desire to end his own miserable life” (400). Boker, besides stating that Huck’s symbolic suicide is an expression of his melancholic death wishes, also claims that he kills off only “his civilized identity,” “the ward of the Widow and Miss Watson” (144). My view is a lot closer to Boker’s second claim, as I maintain that his symbolic suicide is very far from an act of despair, mirroring a “desire to end his own miserable life.” Rather, for me, it is clearly an act of freedom because he kills his “social self,” the boy named Huck Finn, to become free of all the constraints and threats which belong to that existence; to become a no-name, a non-entity, a “body” outside the patriarchal order and disorder as well. Moreover, his endeavor to do so turns out to be successful, since it grants him the freedom from all the paternal plots and constraints: “I know I was all right now. Nobody else would come a-hunting after me” (Twain 54). His symbolic suicide also functions as a symbolic self-fathering, since it enables him to be “reborn” just the way he wants to: as a “body” free of all identities and subject positions the others wanted to impose on him, outside of patriarchal order and (dis)order as well. The Mississippi, which swallows up his symbolic dead body, becomes his baptismal water as well, since his rebirth happens “by water,” on the river. His rebirth and self-fathering happen in a rather “paternal” fashion (like pap Finn), since he turns himself into an “undead,” somebody nonexistent according to the records, thus, is “out of Law.”

Overwriting or crossing out the paternal chiastic “plot,” Huck also commits another symbolic patricide, debunking the power and authority of the father. Overwriting the paternal plot, destroying the figure of the father, one not only commits a patricide but also inscribes

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<sup>23</sup> Boker states that “[t]hese views are not contradictory . . . in view of the fact that, in Twain’s mind, suicide and patricide are one and the same” (144). However, she does not elaborate why she supposes so.

oneself into the paternal position, taking over the position of the father through overwriting/plotting. Thus, Huck's first "plot" and narrative, designed to be read and interpreted by others/"the others," can also be interpreted as an act of self-fathering.

What is more, judging from the number of characters who read and believe it, we can state that Huck's first suicidal-patricidal plot is a huge success, not only as a "complot," but as narrative as well: "Most everybody was on the boat [looking for Huck's dead body, reading for the implied "closing chapter" of the narrative]. Pap, and Judge Thatcher, and Becky Thatcher, and Joe Harper, and Tom Sawyer, and his old Aunt Polly, and Sid and Mary, and plenty more" (53).

It is worth having one more, closer look at his plotting and writing the narrative of his own murder into the space of the forest, since by doing that, he makes the "others" "read for the plot"—which the "Father" of the novel strictly advises against, threatening the readers with being shot. Knowing about the author's threat, we can also interpret Huck's making the "others" "read for the plot" as a patricidal attempt, which, actually, turns out to be successful, since pap, who first "reads for the plot," does get shot.

The island he chooses in the middle of the river (Jackson's Island) seems to be a perfect place for a new, free life. What is more, as it is a no man's virgin land, free to be conquered, it also allows him to become the Father, the lord of the land. He takes possession of it very soon and starts acting as the master of it: "I went exploring around down through the island. I was boss of it; it all belonged to me" (54). We can also say that he turns into the Robinson of the island and is "pretty well satisfied" (54) with his new situation: he has everything he could wish for and nobody threatens or bothers him.

Even his unspoken wish for a companion gets granted, since as soon as he becomes somewhat lonesome and bored, he bumps into Jim, Miss Watson's "runaway nigger" (78). They



make themselves home on the island, finding a cavern for shelter, setting up traps to provide them with food, making their lives more and more comfortable. However, it turns out that the happy “Robinsonade” cannot continue, they cannot stay there; since Huck, nosing around in disguise, gets to know that the island is going to be given a hunt for the runaway nigger suspected of his murder. The pressure of the situation (neither of them can stay on the island), their similar statuses (now both are out-Laws, needing to stay away from people, the land, and the Law and remain unnoticed) lead to their joining forces. By the end of chapter 11, Huck already refers to the two of them as “us” and declares: “[t]hey’re [the men coming to search the island] after us!” (86). This declaration is crucial, as each element of it reveals something very important about them and their newly acquired situation: Huck has started to consider the two of them as “us,” as a unit, sharing the same situation and action (in other words, the same “plot”), running for their freedom from the same faceless threat (“they”). The success of Huck’s quest has been rather temporary: he has “out-scribed” himself from all the paternal plots; yet, joining forces with Jim, he gets inscribed into another paternal one, which takes the form of a quest for freedom.

### ***Plotting with Jim***

The plot of the novel gets structured by plotting for freedom (again): they take to the river together and start downriver on a raft, planning to get to the mouth of the Ohio and to continue up the river from there on a steamboat to the free states. The raft becomes a true home for them— “[t]here warn’t no home like a raft” (173)—and their relationship also turns quite homely and intimate, as the above quote illustrates. This high degree of intimacy has acquired much critical attention and has been interpreted in the most various ways. James L. Kastely sees Jim as the person who, through his affection and devotion, teaches Huck what “true friendship” is (415).

However, according to Leslie Fiedler's interpretation, their relationship is rather a homoerotic "Sacred Marriage of Males" (580).

I regard Jim as a comrade or friend, who also has quite a number of paternal characteristics, thus could and should also be mentioned among the novel's numerous paternal figures trying to teach and "civilize" Huck. Friendship and comradeship are not the only things Huck could learn from Jim. In spite of his surface ignorance the readers are meant to laugh at, Jim has a vast knowledge of the world, especially the world of superstition and sorcery. He believes in good/bad signs and in their prophetic meaning and takes pride in being able to *read* them. "Jim knowed all kinds of signs. He said he knowed most everything" (Twain 62).

Some young birds come along, flying a yard or two at a time and lighting. Jim said *it was a sign* it was going to rain. He said it was a sign when young chickens flew that way, and so he reckoned it was the same way when young birds done it. I was going to catch some of them, but Jim wouldn't let me. He said it was death. (62, emphasis added)

According to Cleo McNelly Kearns, Jim is "the novel's own model of what it means to read in semiotic terms" (110). In her view, Jim has an "apparent and insistent faith in the complete, direct, reciprocal, and transparent relationship between sign and meaning" (111). However, when Kearns argues for this, she fails to take into consideration that superstitions and good/bad signs work exactly the opposite way: there is no whatsoever transparent connection between a sign and its "meaning," the "meaning" in these cases is contingent, based on tradition and agreement.

What is more, as I see it, like the Widow, Miss Watson, and Tom Sawyer, Jim also tries to “learn” Huck about language and signification: how to notice and understand signs, how to see figurations and read them. He shows him how to look behind and notice the figurative meaning behind the literal, to discern if something stands for something else; thus, to read a metaphor. However, he also fails in his endeavor, as all the others aspiring to become Others have: Huck enjoys listening to his explanations and is impressed by Jim’s knowledge, but does not become “symbolically literate.”

His aspirations and failure at teaching Huck to read figuratively are not the only qualities that make Jim similar to the others. Like the rest of the representatives of the paternal order, there is something “twisted” about Jim as well.<sup>24</sup> Besides acting in many respects as the representative of the symbolic order (“learning” Huck about figures and signs), he is also quite maternal: [h]e “would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me” (Twain 303). Boker goes as far as stating that he is a “preoedipal mother/rescuer and comforter,” a “‘good’ mother imago” (145), and their idyllic life on the river is the “blissful experience of pre-verbal oneness with the fantasized symbiotic mother” (145)..

The idyllic freedom of the river and the free flow of the raft are also highly deceptive, as Huck and Jim finally float by Cairo (the town at the mouth of the Ohio, where they want to catch a steamboat to the free states) under the cover of the fog and the flow of the river takes them closer and closer to the deep South. Moreover, the river endangers their liberty not only with its flow but through the adventures floating by on it as well. Through the deceptive machinations of the Duke and the Dauphin, Jim ends up losing his “freedom” without ever leaving the river and

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<sup>24</sup> As we have already seen, none of the representatives of the paternal order are “orderly.” Pap Finn is the representative of disorder rather than order, order and disorder cannot be kept apart in case of Tom Sawyer either, the (m)others, instead of being maternal, are rather paternal.

setting foot on the land. Going back to the raft, Huck once finds that “old Jim was gone” (299) and hears from a boy on the road that “[h]e is a runaway nigger, and they’ve got him” (300).

### ***Plotting for Jim***

With Jim’s abduction, plotting for freedom starts again, and the plot reassumes its teleological quest structure. Moreover, to Huck’s greatest surprise, Tom intends to help steal Jim out of slavery. Huck finds this shocking, since

[h]ere was a boy that was respectable and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before anybody. I *couldn’t* understand it no way at all. (Twain 328)

It is no wonder Huck could not understand it, since this decision goes against Tom’s previous tendencies and does not fit the picture we have of him: this time, it is not just playing/pretending subversion but subverting order for real, not just playing “nigger-stealers” but stealing a “nigger” for real. No matter how surprising and extraordinary it is, Tom Sawyer “was in earnest and was actually going to help steal that nigger out of slavery” (328). It seems that all of Huck’s dreams are to come true: he is together again with his long-desired ideal, side by side in an adventure, questing and plotting for (Jim’s) freedom together.

However, not all of Tom’s tendencies seem to have altered, as with his “help,” plotting and the plot get “regulated” again, start following patterns and bookish examples. Every detail

gets motivated by the fact that “it’s in the *regulations*” and “that’s what they [prisoners] all do” (337, emphasis added). In other words, subverting and transgressing order happen in a rather “orderly” fashion: through precisely (and senselessly) copying the examples of the “authorities.” Tom’s behavior is, thus, still in perfect accordance with Žižek’s “external obedience to the Law,” illustrating its “incomprehensible,” “traumatic” and “irrational” character with all his deeds (*Sublime* 35). Moreover, Tom still acts as the holder of knowledge, the master:

“I bet I *know* where Jim is.”

“No! Where?”

“In that hut don by the ash-hopper. Why, looky here. When we was at dinner, didn’t you see a nigger man go in there with some vittles?”

“Yes.”

“What did you think the vittles was for?”

“For a dog.”

“So’d I. Well, it wasn’t for a dog.”

“Why?”

“Because part of it was watermelon.”

“So it was—I *noticed* it. Well, it does beat all that *I never thought about a dog not eating watermelon.*” (Twain 327, emphasis added)

As the above situation shows, knowledge still means the ability of noticing, reading, and interpreting signs. In addition, the scene also illustrates that in spite of the fact that Huck can see

them as well, he is not able to read them, or, as he himself observes: “[i]t shows how a body can see and don’t see at the same time” (326).

The “body” with the (in)sight is still Tom Sawyer, and he takes up Huck’s education exactly where he left off at the beginning of the novel. Huck, however, does not seem to have learnt anything since then. He does not understand or see any point in the figures and schemes Tom introduces while plotting. Tom justifies their necessity by the fact that the “whole thing [the plot of freeing Jim] is just as easy and awkward as it can be. . . . You got to invent all the difficulties” (334-35). To solve this problem, Tom packs the plot with autotelic twists and turns, copied from various “authoritative” fictional sources; and we may say that his strenuous effort to complicate the plot brings success: every detail is for its own sake, or for the sake of plotting. The situation with the plates illustrates this quite well: “[c]an’t nobody *read* his [Jim’s] plates.’ ‘That ain’t got nothing to *do* with it, Huck Finn. All *he*’s got to do is to write on the plate and throw it out. You don’t *have* to be able to read it’” (339). Tom’s plot is, thus, perfectly impractical and “non-teleological.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in the end, in spite of/due to all the energy and time spent on plotting Jim’s “evasion” (374), it turns out to be a failure: “[h]asn’t he got away?’ . . . ‘Deed he hasn’t. They’ve got him back, safe and sound, and he’s in that cabin again, on bread and water, and loaded down with chains, till he’s claimed or sold’” (401).

However, as we get to know very soon, their plot has never needed to be either teleological or successful as far as Jim’s slavery and freedom are concerned, since “[t]hey hain’t no right to shut him up! . . . he [Jim] ain’t no slave, he’s free as any cretur that walks this earth! . . . Old Miss Watson died two months ago, and she was ashamed she ever was going to sell him

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<sup>25</sup> We might also state that plotting for Tom is not making the plot move forward but postponing its doing so as long as possible: “[h]e said it was the best fun he had ever had in his life, and the most intellectual [sic]; and said if he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out” (348).

down the river, and said so; and she set him free in her will” (401). Therefore, it finally becomes clear how it was possible for Tom to take part in the subversion: he was freeing an already free “nigger.” His tendencies have not changed at all: subversion was only a pretend-play, a deception, a figure this time, too. This is the point when Huck has to realize that Tom Sawyer, faithful to his sign (the chi), was twisting the truth again and was not so earnest when he “was in *earnest* and was actually going to help steal that nigger out of slavery” (328, emphasis added).

The whole plot about Jim’s escape was nothing but an escapade, a plot for the sake of plotting, or, to be more precise, plotting for (the sake of) the plot. Plotting was a cover up for the pointlessness of plotting, for the underlying structures/motives. Tom is, however, not the only person and comrade who “plays around” with covering and uncovering whilst plotting for freedom together with Huck.

#### **2.4. Jim’s Uncovering His Covering up/Covering up His Uncovering**

Jim also reveals only on the very last page of the novel that he “knowed most everything” (62) that Huck would have needed to know: that “[h]e [pap Finn] ain’t a-comin’ back no mo’” because “[d]oan’ you ‘member de house dat was float’n down de river, en dey wuz a man in dah, *kivered up*, en I went in en *unkivered* him and didn’t let you come in? Well, den, you kin git yo’ money when you wants it, kase dat wuz him” (406-07, emphasis added).

The scene he refers to takes place very early in the course of their journey, in the very first chapter after they meet in Jackson’s Island, during the visit paid to the “Floating House of Death,” which is their first mutual adventure. Therefore, the situation displays high resemblance to the one with Tom Sawyer: Jim, like Tom Sawyer, also hid a crucial piece of information from Huck from the very beginning. He concealed the dead man’s identity from Huck, the facts that pap Finn

is not after him any more, that the Oedipal father threatening his life is dead, and that there is no reason for him to run any further (with Jim).

Thus, both Jim and Tom Sawyer cover up the loss of telos in the structure, the pointlessness of plotting, and keep up the appearance of a goal-oriented quest. In other words, they maintain the illusion that the narrative/plot is still Huck's, but in fact, they have filched it from him under (the) cover. As at the very moment of "covering," the act of reading/interpretation and writing/"plotting" converge: the one who reads becomes the one who writes, and Huck's illiteracy dooms him to lose his plot for good.

But let us have a closer look at Jim's (un)covering, since it still has some surprises in store for us. The day following the incident in the "Floating House of Death," Huck "wanted to talk about the dead man and guess out how he come to be killed" (72). To avoid that, Jim provides the following reading/interpretation of the situation: "[h]e said it would fetch bad luck; and besides; he said, he might come and ha'nt us; he said a man that warn't buried was more likely to go a-ha'nting around than one that was planted and comfortable" (72). Since "[t]hat sounded pretty reasonable," Huck "didn't say no more" (72). Thus, Jim covers up a crucial piece of information by seemingly uncovering it through introducing an alternative reading/interpretation.

Critics, however, take different stands concerning the question why Jim withholds the dead man's identity. According to Boker, Jim hides this information out of kindness and doing so he "exercises his maternal solicitude" (144). Otherwise, she does not attribute too much significance to the incident and claims that "[i]t is merely a detail . . . that Huck's father is not dead" (144).

I, nevertheless, consider the situation to be of key importance and regard it to be highly similar to the previous one with Tom Sawyer. Both of them cover up a crucial sign and its



significance by seemingly uncovering it through a mis- or alternative reading/interpretation. In other words, they use interpretation in the Nietzschean sense, as “the introduction of meaning” (Nietzsche, *Will* 327)<sup>26</sup> or “deception through meaning” as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated the word *Sinnhineinlegen* in her “Translator’s Preface” to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (xxiii),<sup>27</sup> probably relying on Nietzsche’s own statement: “[i]nterpretation [is] by causality a deception” (296). Therefore, subjecting Huck to the Law of language is not the only subjection they attempt to perform on him. Besides teaching him to read (about interpretation, signification and figures), they also make use of Huck’s “illiteracy” to exercise control over him and the plot/narrative.

Nevertheless, let us get back to Jim once more, since if the reader is sufficiently attentive, s/he realizes that Jim employs another cover-story at the very end: the story which is supposed to uncover the truth on the last page also covers it up, or at least attempts to do so. He says “dey wuz a man in dah, *kivered up*, en I went in en *unkivered* him” (Twain 406-07). However, if we go back and have a look at the scene in chapter 9, we find there the exact opposite of what he says on the last page:

“There was something laying on the floor in the far corner that looked like a man.

So Jim says:

‘Hello, you!’

It didn’t budge. So I hollered again, and Jim says:

‘De man ain’t asleep—he’s dead. You hold still.’

He went, and bent down and looked, and says:

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<sup>26</sup> “‘Interpretation,’ the introduction of meaning into things—not ‘explanation’ . . . There are no facts, everything is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive; what is relatively most enduring is—our opinions” (Nietzsche, *Will* 327).

<sup>27</sup> “Interpretation is ‘the introduction of meaning’ (or ‘*deception through meaning*’—*Sinnhineinlegen*), a making-sign that is a making-figure” (Spivak xxiii).

‘It’s a dead man. Yes, indeedy, naked; too. He’s ben shot in the back. I reck’n he’s ben dead two er three days. Come in, Huck, but doan’ look at his face—it’s too gashly.’

I didn’t look at him at all. *Jim throwed some old rags over him* but he needn’t done it; I didn’t want to see him.” (69, emphasis added)

The man was lying naked and exposed on the floor; Jim went there, looked at him, and after seeing who the man was, covered him up with some rags. Thus, when he uncovers the truth to Huck about his father, with the same speech-act he also covers up his attempt to cover up by exchanging “kivering up” and “unkivering.” Thus, the truth gets twisted again through an inversion of meaning. In spite of the fact that Jim is not associated with the chi, it seems he also has a lot to do with the trope of deception.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

The success of Huck’s quest is somewhat ambiguous. He does manage to out-scribe himself from the paternal plots he originally intended to and takes the plot into his hands. His first plotting/quest for freedom reaches its goal. Jim finally also attains the desired freedom (the objective of the second and third quests). In other words, we can argue that the different quests for freedom reached their goals at different points of the story, that each quest attains its objective after some deviation. Nevertheless, this interpretive move would (not) be appropriate. It would definitely fit with the interpretive and reading strategies we have seen applied, since it would be an act of covering up while pretending uncovering, deception through reading/interpretation. Moreover, it would reenact the stealing of “the plot” under the cover of granting it to Huck.

As I have quoted at the beginning of the chapter, Brooks states that the organizing line of plot, in the case of modern literature, is more often than not some plot or scheme (*Reading* 12). This, as we have seen, seems to be applicable cumulatively in case of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The plot of the novel is structured along paternal and filial plots for control and freedom. Moreover, the plots and plotting are motivated by the desire to achieve control over the plot itself.

Thus, we can come to the conclusion that it has been worth following the implied author's paternal *No-tice* against plotting, interpretation, and finding (or constructing) some sort of secret meaning, since it covered up/uncovered that plotting, in the novel, is inseparable from interpretation—"introduction of [a secret] meaning," which is "deception through meaning."

### CHAPTER 3

#### FAMILY ROMANCES IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

In William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), the "story-weaving" of the male narrators (narrative text, Mieke Bal) and the story woven (by them) (story, Bal) swirl around the same conflict: the "battle" of the fathers and sons.

On the one hand, narration and storytelling are a family legacy and a family destiny that fall from the Grandfather (General Compson) to the father (Mr. Compson) and from the father to the son (Quentin)<sup>28</sup>, strengthening the Compson-patrilineage. The story functions like a ritual thread which binds the son to the father, and through the father to the grandfather. This way it strengthens paternal authority: the sons are subject to the story of the fathers' and to the obligation of storytelling. They are doomed to function like channels, as the story has to be told, the narration has to be continued. On the other hand, as narrators they can overwrite or

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<sup>28</sup> "It was part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man" (7).

reconstruct/deconstruct the hereditary, paternal narrative and, through that, paternal authority itself.

In the following chapter, I investigate how narration and storytelling may also become the means of debunking paternal authority and self-fathering. I will give a comprehensive reading of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, examining how these paternal-filial power relations and conflicts work in the novel and how they influence each other. In my reading, I will make use of the insights of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially the theory of the Freudian family romance.

The "told layer" of the novel (the Sutpen drama) takes shape in front of the reader's eyes through the contribution of four narrators: Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, as well as Quentin Compson and Shreve MacCannon with united efforts. All the four narrators approach the story material from different perspectives and with different dispositions, in consequence of which they come to very diverse conclusions concerning the major enigmas that trigger the story: the reason behind Henry Sutpen's repudiation of his father on the Christmas Eve of 1860 for his college friend Charles Bon; and the motivation behind his murdering the very same man at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred four years later. In spite of the fact that Rosa's narrative is also highly intriguing and could be read from a psychoanalytic perspective, I will not examine it in the chapter as my main focus lies in the father-son narratives.

### **3.1. Mr. Compson and His Fatalistic Romance**

Thomas Sutpen becomes the self-made American hero of Mr. Compson's narrative. He also tries to come up with a logical explanation concerning the central enigmas of the novel. According to him, Henry's reason for murdering Bon was the latter's intended bigamy, since he already has an

doctor's wife and a son in New Orleans, kept secret. In Mr. Compson's version, this is the information that Sutpen had found out and exposed to Henry on the ominous Christmas day, causing Henry's repudiating him and leaving Sutpen's Hundred with Bon the very same night. Four years later the same fact, plus Bon's unwillingness to renounce the other woman and the child, were the reasons of Henry's murdering the man for the sake of whom he had given up everything.

There seems to be a consensus among critics that Mr. Compson constructs his story in the pattern of classical Greek tragedies and epics (Kartiganer 78, Adams 181, Basset 39). I do agree with the foregoing critics that some elements of his narrative resemble those of the Greek tragedies such as: Sutpen's introduction, the epic proportions, and the crucial importance he attributes to "the machinations of a fatality" (Faulkner 81). Fatality is, indeed, one of the two most important characteristics of his narrative. He claims, at several points in the novel, that the tragic events were "instigated by that family fatality which possessed, along with all circumstance, that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate when reduced to using human being for tools, material" (94).

Besides being the result of his laying great emphasis on the machinations of fate in recounting the story, I maintain that the fatal overtone of his narrative is also due to his narrative technique. He often constructs his narratives in a spiral, opening the story with the effect, the final tragic outcome (for example with a tombstone in his last narrative) and going back only after that to relate the cause, the events leading up to it. Moreover, he keeps revisiting the tragic ending in references and flash forwards. For example, in Chapter IV, his narrative starts spiraling between Bon's Christmas Eve visit to Sutpen's Hundred and the next, final time he ever gets close to the gates of the Sutpen mansion:

Because Henry loved Bon. He repudiated blood birthright and material security for his sake, for the sake of this man who was at least an intending bigamist even if not an out and out backguard, and *on whose dead body four years later Judith was to find the photograph of the other woman and the child . . .* he and Bon rode side by side through the iron dark of that Christmas morning, away from the house where he had been born *and which he would see but one time more and that with the fresh blood of the man who now rode beside him, on his hands . . .* (71, emphasis added)

The other hallmark of his narrative is the major role assigned to love and romance. He constructs his story along the lines of male-female relationships: Bon-Judith, Bon-the octoroon, provoking the required conflict in the plot by intersecting them. Moreover, he hints at romantic attachment in both cases: “he [Bon] loved her [Judith]” (102), “a woman with a face like tragic magnolia, the eternal female” (91), “the woman and the child that Bon would not renounce” (94). Actually, to be more precise, instead of constructing two mutually exclusive, linear, one-to-one love relationships; he constructs two “love-triangles”: an Oedipal triad, Bon—the octoroon—their son (Charles Etienne de St. Valery Bon); and an incestuous one, Bon—Judith—Henry. He keeps emphasizing the motive of incest or the presence of incestuous attraction between Henry and Judith:

In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister’s virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that

virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband . . . . (77)

The two “love-triangles” drawn by Mr. Compson, actually, work quite similarly in terms of how desire functions, how it is barred and gets resolved through a substitution. In Freud and Lacan, the fundamental desire is the incestuous desire for the mother, the primordial Other (Lacan, *Ethics* 67). The child (son) desires the mother and wants to become her object of desire; the circuit of mutual desire between mother and child is broken with the intervention of the father, who makes the child abandon his desire for the mother and substitute it for the *Name-of-the-Father*, which leads to the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. Through a symbolic identification with the father, the child accepts “substitution” and lets go of the mother, “giving her over” to the father.

In Henry and Judith’s case, we can perceive something highly similar: Henry cannot commit incest in the literal sense of the word, in spite of the fact that he, according to Mr. Compson at least, would love to. He is, thus, ready to “commit” it through substitution, through an identification with the “rival.” He lets go of Judith, giving her over to Bon. However, the situation is made even more exciting, since Henry is ready to choose Bon not only as a substitute, as a “rival,” who would “despoil” the sister instead of him, but as his own “despoiler” as well if only “he could metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride” (Faulkner 77). His affection and unconditioned love for Bon are often portrayed as bordering on homoeroticism: “Because Henry loved Bon” (71), “Yes, he loved Bon, who seduced him” (76).

Several critics, like John T. Irwin, Ilse Duso Lind, etc. assign Henry’s homoerotic attraction to Bon to Quentin or/and Shreve’s similar tendencies. Irwin states that “the latent

homoerotic content in the story of Bon and Henry may well be the projection of Quentin's own state made in the act of narration" (Irwin, *Doubling* 78). On the other hand, Ilse Duso Lind argues that "Shreve . . . projects the fraternal affection, mildly homosexual in basis, which exists between his roommate and himself" (892). However, we need to notice that it is Mr. Compson who starts inscribing this thread into the narrative; Quentin and Shreve only keep the thread and weave it on. This initiative of Mr. Compson is, in fact, made necessary by the fact that he tries to "rationalize" everything with "love," and male-female affection (Bon's supposed affection for Judith) is not able to account for most of the events of the plot. "Love" in his narrative works quite similarly to "the machinations of a fatality" (Faulkner 102). Whatever he is not able to give a logical explanation to, he attributes to "love." As Robert Dale Parker puts it, "it's easy enough and maybe even plausible enough for him to write off as love what he doesn't understand" (52).

Thus, fatality and love are the patches that he uses in an attempt to cover the gaps remaining.<sup>29</sup> In other words, he tries to make a hermeneutic clue from the lack of those, tries to pass off the lack of a motive as a motive. Moreover, on the surface, he manages to do these quite successfully, as Brooks points out: he ends up having a "complex, intricate, seemingly highly motivated plot" ("Incredulous" 255). However, he himself acknowledges the discrepancies: "It's just incredible. It just does not explain" (Faulkner 80). However, pretending that everything is apt, he short-circuits the problem by stating that: "Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know" (80). Hence, the story-triggering, narrative-provoking lack, having been imputed to "that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate" (94), remains exactly where it was, calling for further storytellers.

### **3.2. Quentin Compson and the Proliferation of Romances**

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<sup>29</sup> For example his version does not offer any acceptable explanation concerning Henry's four-year delay.



Quentin, both previous narrators' patient audience, takes over the thread of the story from his father and continues reconstructing the past, trying to fit together the pieces of the puzzle. As Quentin joins the line of narrators, the Sutpen drama takes another, renewed shape. He relies on story patterns different from those of the previous narrators and approaches the story from a radically different viewpoint, which is his own perspective: the perspective of a son. Referring to his perspective is, however, not totally valid, as he relates his story to his college roommate, Shreve MacCannon, who, at quite an early point, changes from passive audience to active participant in the narration. From that point on, they construct the story as "sons," in brotherly unison.

Quentin starts his narrative in the same pattern as the previous narrators did: reshapes the figure of the Father, Thomas Sutpen. From his/their narration the reader gets another radically different picture of the Father. He draws the figure of the old Sutpen. While Rosa created an all-powerful demon, almost the devil himself, and Mr. Compson shaped the self-made American hero, a "conquistador," who "turned his back upon all that he knew . . . and . . . set out into a world which even in theory . . . he knew nothing about" (40); he/they formulate the figure of a "*mad impotent old man who realized at last that there must be some limit even to the capabilities of a demon for doing harm*" (148), an "*old wornout cannon*" (148). They dethrone the omnipotent Father, the great general, showing him in his utmost misery: "*running his little country store now for his bread and meat*" (149), degrading himself to seducing Milly Jones, the fifteen-year-old daughter of his tenant in desperate hope for a male heir. Thus, we can rightly say that they start their narrative with a symbolic castration and murder of the father. Moreover, they perfect the picture with a literal patricide as well, recounting the murder of Sutpen in detail, a description unworthy of a colonel.

Having read the first twenty pages of their narrative, the reader can rightly have the impression that they are obsessed with the figure of the Father. This anticipation is justified as one reads on, since having related the story of Charles Étienne Saint-Valéry Bon, Quentin “exhumes” the Father and goes on to recount the story of Sutpen’s childhood to Shreve and the reader. This is the first time in the novel when Sutpen’s character is shaped like a human figure and not like a demon, a superhuman hero, a monster, or a freak. It may not be accidental that this human figure is a son.

However, Quentin’s obsession with the figure of the Father is not exhausted with recounting the story of how the son became (or endeavored to become) a Father, but appears as a proliferation of Oedipal threads and romances on the thematic level of the novel. Quentin and Shreve inscribe several real and imaginary sons and fathers into the story and attribute all dramatic situations to some kind of paternal-filial tension. I also argue that the inscribed Oedipal threads highly resemble the pattern of the Freudian family romance, which can be detected not only in all threads that the Quentin/Shreve narrational function introduces but works as the main structuring device. Not only is Quentin’s obsession with paternity and paternal authority evident if one reads the narratives constructed by him and Shreve, but it is crucial in understanding his main motivation for storytelling. I claim that the family romance fantasy is not only a recurring, constitutive element of Quentin and Shreve’s narrative, playing a crucial role in working through father-son relationships and the anxieties present in them; but the final stage of the romance (desire of self-fathering) functions as the main motivation behind their narrative act.

The family romance, according to Freud, is a common fantasy among children, which, with neurotics, may reappear in later life as well. “Small events in the child’s life which make him dissatisfied afford him provocation for beginning to criticize his parents. . . . [T]he child’s

imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing” (“Family Romances” 237-39).<sup>30</sup>

In his article entitled “Children of the Idea: Heroes and Family Romances in *Absalom, Absalom!*,” T. H. Adamowski examines the novel from the perspective of the Freudian family romance and Otto Rank’s concept of the hero. He states that “Sutpen’s desire is structured in such a way by the narrative” (117) that it is reminiscent of the Freudian family romance. He provides a detailed examination of Sutpen’s life story from the given perspectives. Moreover, he proclaims that Bon and Henry also act out different aspects of the family romance as “Sutpen’s experience haunts that of his children and they repeat various aspects of it, almost compulsively” (129). However, he attributes the inscription of the family romances to Quentin and Shreve in a rather vague manner in one single sentence: “The account offered by Shreve and Quentin of the family reunion begins to suggest romances within romances” (125). He suggests that it is worth considering Quentin and Shreve’s conjecture in the light of the family romance, however, he does not exploit the possibilities of the idea: he tries to understand neither their “conjecture” nor the act of “conjuring” in the suggested “light.” He only comes to the conclusion that Quentin “does become fascinated with the ‘other family’” (127)<sup>31</sup> and states that “Faulkner’s many references to Shreve and Quentin as being ‘both of them,’ Henry and Bon, must inevitably suggest identification” (127).

Irwin also gives a psychoanalytically informed reading of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. In his article entitled “The Dead Father in Faulkner,” he comes a lot closer to

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<sup>30</sup> According to Marthe Robert, the novel as a genre has its roots in this elementary form of storytelling, thus she declares the novel to be the ultimate “Oedipal” form (31).

<sup>31</sup> André Bleikasten also maintains a similar view, stating that “*Absalom, Absalom!* might also be viewed as an abortive ‘family romance,’ a phantasmal scenario in which Quentin rearranges his family situation in such a way as to compensate for his sense of lack and loss” (138).

considering Quentin and Shreve's "conjecture" from a similar perspective, in spite of the fact that he does not operate with the concept of the Freudian family romance in his text. In his study, he brings together Nietzsche's ideas about the nature of time<sup>32</sup> and Freud's notion of the repetition compulsion with the concepts of fathering and filiation. He states that a son's fate is determined by that of his father's "because to come after is to be fated to repeat the life of another rather than live one's own" ("Dead Fathers" 148). In consequence of this, a son is also "fated" to struggle against his father and against time. Thus, Irwin comes to the conclusion that, for Quentin, the act of narrating the Sutpen story becomes a similar struggle against the nature of time and his father, "in which he tries to best his father" and "seize 'authority' by achieving temporal priority" to him in the narrative act (152). His struggle is to transform repetition as a compulsion, as a fate into repetition as "a means of achieving mastery" of time (152). Freud refers to this "mastery through repetition" as revenge with two major elements: repetition and reversal—one repeats the traumatic situation but reverses the roles. When there is no chance of taking revenge on the one who delivered the affront, the revenge is inflicted on a substitute (quoted in Irwin). Following this idea, Irwin also argues that through the act of narration, Quentin endeavors to take revenge against his father on a substitute—his roommate Shreve.

I do not see how Quentin could achieve temporal priority in the narrative act, however, I do agree with Irwin's claim that Quentin's main motivation to tell the story is closely connected to his desire to "best his father." Moreover, I claim that storytelling is not only a family destiny, a dynastic inheritance to which Quentin subjugates himself, but a way, or, rather, the only way, through which he can "walk[ed] out of his father's talking at last" (Faulkner 142): it is his only chance to grow up, to "walk out of" paternal authority. His telling the story is an attempt to

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<sup>32</sup> "[E]very moment in it exists only insofar as it has just consumed the preceding one, its father, and then is immediately consumed likewise" (Irwin, "Dead Fathers" 145).

overwrite (cancel out) the paternal meta-narrative, thus an endeavor of narrative patricide and self-fathering. In the following part of the chapter, I will attempt a close reading of the family romances inscribed by Quentin and Shreve and an examination of the extent to which they can serve Quentin in his attempt of self-fathering.

### ***When the Father was a Son: Thomas Sutpen***

The first story that Quentin recounts is that of Sutpen's childhood<sup>33</sup> and the birth of his "design." We get to know from him that Sutpen was ten when his family, following his father's abrupt decision, left their home in the Virginia mountains and set out towards new frontiers. Together with the family's journey, the boy Sutpen's initiation also started. He is presented primarily as a *son*, suffering a series of disappointments in his father and, consequently, losing faith in him. Since on the journey towards their new home, he has to witness his father degrading himself, right in front of his children and strangers as well, at almost every tavern on the way, where "the old man was not even allowed to come in by the front door and from which his mountain drinking manners got him ejected before he would have time to get drunk good" (183). When they finally settle down, his father starts working at a plantation where the owner makes a huge impression on the young Sutpen. He starts looking at the plantation owner as an ideal, a model and adopts him "as his surrogate father" (Irwin, "Dead Father" 154). As T. H. Adamowski and André Bleikasten<sup>34</sup> also observe, at this point Sutpen's story starts to show an uncanny resemblance to the Freudian family romance. Even the surrogate father's occupation fits the Freudian scheme: of Freud's two examples to illustrate higher social standing, one is "the Lord of the Manor" ("Family Romances" 239), whom Sutpen chooses as an imaginary father.<sup>35</sup>

Other critics, like Irwin, and, in his footsteps, Carolyn Porter, also point out the importance of choosing an ideal father and deciding "to become him" (Porter 179) in the birth of Sutpen's design, however, they do not draw on Freud's family romance fantasy when examining Sutpen's behavior. Both of them use Freudian psychoanalysis in their readings, however, instead

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<sup>33</sup> From this point on I will consistently refer to Thomas Sutpen as "Sutpen" and to Henry Sutpen as "Henry."

<sup>34</sup> "His career begins like any other Oedipal family romance" (139).

<sup>35</sup> Faulkner could actually have read Freud's "Family Romances," as the article's first English translation appeared in Otto Rank's *Myth of the Birth of the Hero* in 1913, and he started working on the novel in 1933 (Brumm 195).

of the family romance fantasy they rely on the concept of Oedipalization, which I think, cannot account for the crucial momentum of replacing the actual father with somebody more apt for the position.

In Sutpen's romance the vital turn takes place when his father sends him to that big house with a message to the plantation owner (Faulkner 229), but he is ejected by a "nigger" "even before he [had] had time to say what he came for" (188). "He never even remembered what the nigger said, how it was the nigger told him . . . never to come to the front door again but to go around to the back. He didn't even remember leaving" (188). Many critics emphasize this incident at the mansion door as the central moment of his life, the "traumatic affront" (Irwin, "Dead Father" 154), which "puts an end to Sutpen's childhood" (Adamowski 120), determining the course of subsequent events. However, they attribute the "trauma" to different aspects and details of the incident: according to Patricia Tobin, it is caused by Sutpen's "recognition of his own anonymity" (109); Adamowski states that, at the front door, in the other's gaze, Sutpen acquires a "sharp sense of himself as an object in the world, among other objects" (120). According to J. G. Brister, this is Sutpen's first moment of self-consciousness, of self-perception" resulting from "his feeling of racial 'otherness'" (43). He claims the encounter between Sutpen and the "monkey nigger" to be a replication of the Lacanian mirror stage, but, "in this case, the mirror is a racial 'other'" (43). He also argues that

Sutpen's sense of self is not born out of an identification with the white plantation owner . . . but out of the realization of racial difference: fundamentally unaware of difference, Sutpen is awakened by his encounter with the black servant to the dialectic between oppressor and oppressed . . . , between rich and poor, between

self and other. This encounter ultimately leads to the revelation of the self he will become, of the patriarchal authority he will assume. (44)

I consider all the above-mentioned arguments highly relevant, however, would also add my, somewhat different, perspective to the picture. In my view, the ominous encounter is so traumatic for him because it mirrors those humiliating incidents which called forth his disillusionment in his father: the father's not being allowed to enter the taverns through the front door and his being thrown out by a nigger once he tried to do so. Moreover, he comes to the big house in place of his father, as his metaphorical substitute, trying to speak the words of the father and all of a sudden finds himself "really" in his father's place, suffering a weirdly similar humiliation as the old man did. He is experiencing himself being "transformed" into his father, whom he does not want to identify any more.

The humiliation at the front door functions as a trigger and determines the rest of Sutpen's life. He cannot pass that affront without determining to take revenge on the aggressor. However, instead of killing him, he rather chooses to identify with him:

*He knew* that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life . . . *He thought* . . . 'So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and fine house to combat them with. You see?' (Faulkner 189-90, emphasis added)



Thus, his romance culminates in the desire to create, to father himself<sup>36</sup> by realizing his design outlined above. However, the term “his design” is not entirely appropriate, since he, driven by what René Girard terms *mimetic desire*, wants to copy an already existing pattern. His desire is a borrowed desire, like the Proustian snob’s, who “slavishly copies the person whose birth, fortune, or stylishness he envies” (24), wanting to become his mediator, intending to steal from the mediator his very being (54). He wants to reach autonomy and become *original* through turning into a copy, thus, losing his autonomy in fact. The failure of his self-fathering quest is, therefore, predetermined. Despite all his efforts, he can never get out of the symbolic paternal power structure, he can never free himself, as the design through which he wants to define and father himself is that of the ancestors, his desire is the desire of the *Other*.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The Bastard’s Romantic Family Romance: Charles Bon***

As Quentin recounts the story of Sutpen’s second endeavor to accomplish the design, we reencounter the central dilemma of the novel, which has already been presented to us twice by the previous narrators but remained unsolved: the mystery of Henry’s repudiation<sup>38</sup> of his father for Charles Bon, and the reason of his murdering the very same man four years later. In Quentin and Shreve’s interpretation, just as one would expect, paternal-filial conflicts are lurking below the surface here as well. Their “solution” of the dilemma comes in a rather unexpected fashion: they reveal Charles Bon to be Sutpen’s firstbo(r)n, repudiated, part negro son seeking the acquaintance and recognition of his father. By doing so, they break away from Mr. Compson’s love-triangles

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<sup>36</sup> According to Freud, the desire to take his father’s place and “to be his own father” (“Dostoevsky” 173) is the ultimate wish of the child in the family romance fantasy.

<sup>37</sup> According to Girard the desire of the snob and that of the child (puerile bovarysm) have much in common and work according to the same mechanism (35-36). Apparently the concept of puerile bovarysm/the Proustian snob’s imitative desire may communicate with the Freudian idolization and mimesis of the father in the family romance in a fruitful way. The limitations of the present chapter, however, do not allow for this investigation.

<sup>38</sup> Sutpen’s only legitimate son, “so glib to the design” (211)

theory. In spite of this, many critics argue that Quentin and Shreve's story follows the pattern of a romantic love story (Adams 181), a chivalric (or traditional medieval [Levins 43]) romance, celebrating the eternal verity of love (42), or as Donald M. Kartiganer claims: it is modeled after a Byronic romance (93).

In partial agreement with these critics, I am inclined to say that Quentin and Shreve's story is organized around the problem of love, but the concept of love is radically different from the ones used by the previous narrators, or classical love stories. In Rosa's narrative, love means the "affection" of Bon and Judith; it is always used in reference to male-female relationships. Mr. Compson adds some more subversive colors to the concept, portraying Henry to cherish incestuous desires for Judith and possess brotherly love of such intensity for Bon that it borders on homoeroticism. In Quentin and Shreve's textual world, however, love gets a further meaning and connotation. When Shreve introduces the topic: "'And now . . . we're going to talk about *love*'" (Faulkner 253, emphasis added), the reader, judging by the antecedents, (rightly) expects that s/he is going to read about the budding affection between the only hypothetical couple of the fiction. However, in spite of the fact that Shreve starts talking about Bon and Judith, his thoughts wander on, in search of a "more appropriate" love object. Judith as a love object, as a Platonic object of desire does not and cannot appear in Quentin and Shreve's version, as "desire exhibits a structure of the wish; it is based on the absence or privation of its object" (Grosz 64), and she is portrayed as somebody always there waiting to be gathered:

*She would be easy* like when you have left the champagne on the supper table and are walking toward the whiskey on the sideboard and you happen to pass a cup of lemon sherbet and tell yourself. That would be easy too only who wants it . . .

besides knowing that that sherbet is there for you to take. Not just for anybody to take but for you to take, knowing just from looking at that cup that it would be like a flower that, if any other hand reached for it, it would have thorns on it but not for your hand. (Faulkner 258-59)

The Barthesian “staging of an appearance-as-disappearance” (10) cannot even emerge, as the veil, which should cover the woman and is necessary for the operation of desire, is missing; she is there exposed: “He must have known all about her before he ever saw her — what she looked like, her private hours in that provincial women’s world that even men of the family were not supposed to know a great deal about; he must have learned it without even having to ask a single question” (253).

Since Judith is not able to function as an object of desire, their attention shifts on to Henry, the other angle of Mr. Compson’s incestuous love triangle. It is interesting to notice that they seem to take into consideration the solutions offered by the previous narrators, especially those provided by Mr. Compson, since he is the first one who tries to offer real solutions to the dilemmas. Henry, however, with “the eagerness which was without abjectness, the humility which surrendered no pride,” with “the entire proffering of the spirit” (254) has no chance either to take the place of the *object petit a*, thus, needs to be discarded as well.

Through the brother’s face, however, Shreve’s attention shifts to the person who is the unapproachable, the unattainable entity per se, thus the perfect object of desire: the father of the illegitimate child:

I shall penetrate by something of will and intensity and dreadful need, and strip that alien leavening from it and look not on my brother's face whom I did not know I possessed and hence never missed, but my father's, out of the shadow of whose absence my spirit's posthumeity has never escaped. (254)

In Sutpen's figure, they have everything together: the momentum of rejection in the past, the mystery of the unknown, heroic stature. The formula seems to work, since Bon's first utterances mentioning Sutpen as his father clearly designate him as the object of desire (*object petit a*) and bear strong resemblance to a declaration of love:

"All right. I'll come home with you for Christmas," not to see the third inhabitant of Henry's fairy tale, not to see the sister because he had not once thought of her: . . . but thinking *So at last I shall see him, . . . whom I had even learned to live without, . . .* Because he knew exactly what he wanted; it was just the saying of it—the physical touch even though in secret, hidden—the living touch of that flesh warmed before he was born by the same blood it had bequeathed him to warm his own flesh with. (255)

In their version, Bon shows the slightest interest in the marriage with Judith only to get near Sutpen. The sole motivation behind all his actions is to get the recognition of his father: "that instant of indisputable recognition . . . *That's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly that he need not do that, that I do not expect that, will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son*" (255). He is willing to

subdue everything for that instant of acceptance, for “the living touch of that flesh” (255), which would provide him with a subject position in the world, which would inscribe difference into that “original undifferentiated stage before the emergence of subjectivity” (Fowler 103). In J. G. Brister’s words, he desires the “castrating” touch of the father that would “hail him into the symbolic,” that would “stabilize the drives that ‘run hot and loud’ in his body, that he may be castrated into the repressing patriarchal design” (48). His yearning for being named by the father, for “*a sheet, a scrap of paper with the one word ‘Charles’ in his hand,*” also confirms this. Brister argues that his “unsymbolized” status is not only due to the lack the Father in his life, but to his racial otherness and his resulting intimate relationship with the realm Kristeva calls the semiotic. “Bon represents the semiotic” in the world of the novel, while “Sutpen embodies the symbolic” (47).

His longing for objects like “*a sheet, a scrap of paper with the one word ‘Charles’ in his hand, . . . . Or a lock of his hair or a paring of his finger nail*” (Faulkner 261), on the other hand, also illustrate his wish to possess the object of his desire through possessing a partial object, a token. His behavior, the emotional stages he is portrayed experiencing highly resemble those of the yearning “lover”: “suspense and puzzlement and haste,” and later “passive surrender” (265). Taking all these into consideration, we can come to the conclusion that the Lacanian *object petit a* (*autre/other*) and *Autre/Other* coincide in his case, and the coincidence happens in a highly romantic overtone.

### ***Another Romantic Family Romancer: Henry Sutpen***

In Shreve’s version Henry is portrayed nourishing similar affection towards Bon, whom he looks at as a “mentor” (254), a Father. He apes his clothing, his speech, his movements, everything

about him, “completely unaware that he was doing” so (252). There is nothing Bon could not “*do with this willing flesh and bone*” (254), there is nothing he could not “*mold of this malleable and eager clay which that father himself could not*” (254). Moreover, as we have already learned from Rosa, when the time comes for Henry to choose between Bon and his father,<sup>39</sup> he formally abjures his father and renounces his birthright (62) for his chosen ideal. Moreover, his affection for Bon, similarly to that of Bon’s for Sutpen, is also related with words that belong to the vocabulary of love: “*We belong to you, do as you will with us*” (262). “*All right. I’m trying to make myself into what I think he wants me to be; he can do anything he wants to with me*” (264). “*Hers and my lives are to exist within and upon yours*” (260).

Thus, the word “romance” seems to be highly relevant, though not in its “conventional” meaning. In Quentin and Shreve’s narrative, “romance” and “love” are concepts that are always mentioned with reference to imaginary father-son relationships. In their world, love can be directed only towards an ideal father, an idealized hero<sup>40</sup>—such as Bon for Henry, or Sutpen for Bon. Hence, romance is relevant in the Freudian sense of the word. The Freudian family romance, however, acquires an additional “romantic” overtone.

### ***The Closure of the Romances***

In Sutpen’s and Henry’s cases, we can find all elements of the Freudian family romance: disappointment in the real father, choosing a surrogate father, idolizing and miming him. In Bon’s case the situation is somewhat different, as his family romance seems to have undergone some curtailment. Being born a bastard, he does not need to imagine himself as such; having grown up

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<sup>39</sup> Henry chooses his ideal (Father) and turns away from Sutpen when Sutpen reveals to him the “truth” about Bon’s descent and on account of that prohibits Judith and Bon’s marriage.

<sup>40</sup> Henry “looked upon Bon as though he were a hero out of some adolescent Arabian Nights” (76). For the analysis of Bon’s character as a Rankian hero see T. H. Adamowski’s “Children of the Idea: Heroes and Family Romances in *Absalom, Absalom!*”.

without a father, he does not need to pretend not to have one. Thus, the usual first steps in his family romance are missing. Sutpen (who is his biological father “according to Shreve”) refuses to fill that part, causing an absence, a lack. As the “knowledge of the father’s empty place . . . constitutes desire itself” (Con Davis, “Discourse” 9), the figure of the biological father, in this case, may become the Girardian mediator,<sup>41</sup> and the object of desire, thus, the ideal father of the family romance.<sup>42</sup>

However, Henry’s fratricide, triggered by Sutpen’s uncovering the secret of Bon’s “negro” descent, brings about a tragic closure of all the hitherto mentioned family romances. *Le non du père* pronounced to Henry by Sutpen<sup>43</sup> prohibits incest and miscegenation and reestablishes Sutpen’s paternal authority over his legitimate son. Henry kills Bon, his “ideal” father, obeying his biological father’s order and, thus, reintegrating himself into the Law of the Father. Bon is to die without his father’s recognition. His quest is destroyed; he cannot become a son, a subject: he has to remain a bastard, a non-subject, a non-entity, a “de-sign.” Turning his only legitimate son into a murderer, an outlaw; Sutpen loses his only chance of accomplishing “his design.” Thus, he is not able to become his own father, as the son able to make a dynastic father out of him is destroyed. What is more, after a last failing attempt to father a son with the fifteen-year-old Milly Jones, Sutpen dies at the hands of Wash Jones—a drunkard, white trash—who highly resembles Sutpen’s own father. Therefore, all filial quests fail, all three sons (Bon, Henry, and Sutpen) are retracted by their origins, and the romances relapse back to their starting points.

At this stage the following questions arise: if Quentin and Shreve want to “get even with,” or walk out of paternal authority via telling this story, why do they construct filial tragedies and

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<sup>41</sup> Girard introduces this term for the model who determines or seems to determine the object to be pursued for the disciple (2).

<sup>42</sup> Sutpen is also the Lord of the Manor, thus his figure complies perfectly with the Freudian model.

<sup>43</sup> “*He must **not** marry her*” (283, emphasis added).

family romances destined to fail? Why do they choose to enter a game they have already lost even before entering? Is it lost at all?

If we regard Quentin's story as a family romance on the level of the narrative text, aiming at self-fathering through the construction of a narrative, working better than his own father's did; the formation of filial tragedies should not necessarily mean the tragedy or fall of Quentin (and Shreve). Provided that they were able to come up with a neat, well-constructed narrative; they could successfully overwrite the paternal meta-narrative and beat paternity "on home ground," especially because Mr. Compson's narrative, as many critics have pointed out, lacks ground: there are too many gaps, too many inexplicable incidents attributed to the caprice of fate. Let us see now if their family romances can prove to be more "successful" on the level of the narrative text than on the level of the story, if they are able to fulfill the expectations attached to them and can become the means of Quentin's self-fathering.

### ***Narration as a Family Romance***

Sutpen's story is recounted by Quentin, but, according to him, it originates from his Grandfather, to whom Sutpen himself "told . . . about it' . . . 'when the architect escaped'" (Faulkner 177). Narrating Sutpen's story, Quentin constantly uses him as a point of reference, trying to prove the authenticity of the story. His narrative is scattered with references such as "he told Grandfather" (177, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 186, 193, 195, 200, 203, 208), "he remembered" (181, 182, 183, 200, 201, 207), "[t]hat was how he [Sutpen] said it" (193), "[t]hat was how he told it" (181, 204). Thus, at the beginning of his narrative, it is the Name-of-the-Father that corroborates the story, that keeps it together, functioning as the focal point, as a Lacanian point de capiton. At certain points, however, these references are overused to such an extent that some suspicion



rightly arises in the reader whether they are trying to hide something or make up for the lack of something.

Moreover, the reader may notice some “uncanny” elements in the story of Sutpen’s life, in his portrayed behavior, which can be weirdly familiar from earlier points, or, to be more precise, from Quentin’s earlier behavior. The child Sutpen’s split consciousness in the cave—the image of someone arguing with oneself about something—may ring a bell from the beginning of the novel, where Quentin is portrayed in exactly the same manner: “he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now—. . .—the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence . . . : *It seems that this demon—his name was Sutpen—(Colonel Sutpen)—Colonel Sutpen . . .*” (5). These signs may indicate that he weaves the story after his own fashion; that his Sutpen acts, feels, and talks like Quentin would in a similar situation.

Quentin’s changing the references used in his narrative also illustrates that as he gets into the swing of storytelling, he forgets about anchoring his narrative in the past. To be more precise, the gesture remains, but the introductory verbs of his indirect speech go through an alteration, mirroring a change in his narrative attitude. In the first half of his narration, he uses verbs of mediation or reporting—such as say, remember, or tell—which, by referring to Sutpen’s actual speech act, keep his position as the origin, the source of the *story* intact. However, after a certain point, Quentin starts using verbs of mental activity—know, think, and see—and via these, slips into Sutpen’s character: he knows, remembers, and sees in place of him. Hence, he becomes active in the creation of the story, not being content with the role of the mouthpiece. Gaining confidence as a narrator, he starts seizing the authority above the/his story, venturing out from the camouflage of the ancestors for some moments. However, the reader can also observe the countermovement when Quentin loses ground and falters in the narration. “‘He went to the West

Indies.’ Quentin had not moved, not even to raise his head from its attitude of *brooding bemusement* . . . . ‘*That was how Sutpen said it*’” (192, emphases added). This is a point of rupture after which he is spectacularly unable to continue the story. He tries to gain some time by depicting how Sutpen told it, at least from three different perspectives, bracing himself to go on, but he gets stuck at the very same point each time he tries to continue. The reader can easily trace his struggle: the same or highly similar versions of the above quote are uttered four times in two pages. “‘He just said, ‘So I went to the West Indies,’”(193) “‘telling Grandfather . . . : ‘So I went to the West Indies’” (194). But for his brooding, he does not manage to come up with a creative continuation. Finally, he tries to solve the problem by claiming that Sutpen “not telling how he got there, what had happened during the six years between the day he had decided to go to the West Indies and become rich” (199). Thus, we can see that the moment Quentin’s creativity and narrative talent falter, he returns to the Father’s shadow, claiming emphatically that the discrepancy is Sutpen’s or his Grandfather’s fault: “that was how he [Sutpen] said it” (193), “[t]hat was how Grandfather remembered it” (198). He puts the blame of the narrative’s lack of regard for “logical sequence and continuity” (199) on Sutpen, trying to keep the illusion of “truthfulness.”

Quentin is still in the middle of depicting Sutpen’s hypothetical musing about the inscrutability of his fate, when Shreve—tired of Quentin’s fiddling about with trivia, and his dragging the story on without slight amount of development—leaves the room for some time, and then returns, flinging the “joker” onto the table with a graceful move.

He did not say Wait, he just rose and left Quentin sitting before the table, the open book and the letter, and went out and returned in the robe and sat again and took

up the cold pipe, though without filling it anew or lighting it as it was. “All right,” he said. “So that Christmas Henry brought him home, into the house, and the demon looked up and saw the face he believed he had paid off and discharged twenty-eight years ago. *Go on.*” (213; emphasis added)

Thus, refuting the common critical (mis)conception (Lind 896) that this radically new information is introduced by Quentin, we have to notice that it is Shreve’s creation, who, by this act of intrusion into the narration, sets absolutely new rules for the “game.” Shreve takes the step that Quentin was reluctant or unable to: to step out from the shadow of the fathers, to exercise the potential creativity and freedom, which is within the power of the storyteller. By doing so, he gives an impetus to the so far jolting narration. At this point, it becomes clear for the reader that Shreve’s previous urging, sometimes impatient gestures—“All right. Don’t bother to say he stopped talking now; just *go on.*’ . . . ‘Just don’t bother,’ . . . . ‘Just *get on with it*’” (Faulkner 208, emphases added)—also try to persuade Quentin to stop wasting so much time and energy on making the story look faithful to those of the fathers. Shreve encourages him instead to take over the narration from the ancestors not just apparently, but in reality as well.

In spite of Quentin’s ““Yes,”” (210), which is probably meant not only as the verification of Shreve’s statement about Bon’s descent, but also as the acceptance of the new rules; he does not quit his previous narrative strategies. He imports the new information provided by Shreve into the story, but keeps referring to the ancestors as its source; what is more, he cites both his father and his grandfather just to make sure: ““Father said he probably named him himself. Charles Bon. Charles Good. He didn’t tell Grandfather he did, but Grandfather believed he did, would have”” (213). At this point, however, we can observe Shreve’s taking up the function of the catalyst, as

he does not leave it at that, he does not let Quentin get away with such a striking inconsistency, but forces him to rectify, to get it straight:

“Your father” Shreve said. “He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, . . . . If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octoroon woman?”

“He didn’t know it then. Grandfather didn’t tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it.” (214)

Shreve persists until he forces Quentin to come out from the shadow of the fathers, to undertake the place of the narrator with all its hardships, risks, setbacks, and possibilities (self-fathering).

“Then who did tell him?”

“*I did.*” Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. “The day after we — after the night when we —” (214, emphasis added)

With this “I did,” Quentin takes over the responsibility of accounting for the newly imported information (Bon’s descent) from Shreve. However, since Quentin is not able to come up with a meaningful rationalization, it is Shreve again who offers the solution, gallantly making it appear as if it came from Quentin: “‘Oh,’ Shreve said. ‘After you and the old aunt. I see. *Go on. And father said —*’” (214, emphasis added). Having offered the decisive piece of information again,

and having set up a game of provocation, Shreve withdraws to the background<sup>44</sup> to let Quentin fight his battles.

As the narration proceeds, however, this separation resolves, the manner of storytelling is transformed: Shreve also takes a more active part in story-weaving; it becomes more and more difficult to tell apart the narrative voices. “It was Shreve speaking, though . . . it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one . . .” (243). The narrative soon starts working as a duet, as “some happy marriage of speaking and hearing” (253), both of them being Henry Sutpen, and both of them being Bon, compounding each of both yet either neither (280). Their narration starts functioning as the “other,” the counter-discourse of the realistic “patrilinear” narrative tradition: it operates according to different rules. They do not “remember” and “recollect” any more what the ancestors said, but they “believe” (267), “invent” (268), and sometimes “dont [sic] know” (259). They turn to inventing the story instead of relating it. Their mutual aim is to create “between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere” (243), to tell a story which is “probably *true* enough” (268, emphasis added). However, true here does not mean corresponding with something “outside,” being true to historical facts and thus being “realistic;” but it is defined “inside” this paradigm, constructed by the two of them. Their concept of “true” means “fit[ting] the preconceived” (253).

Accepting Shreve’s idea that he (Quentin) got hold of the decisive information when he went to Sutpen’s Hundred with Rosa, Quentin shifts the most important point of reference, the one which keeps the structure of the story together, the Lacanian point de capiton from the figure of Sutpen (and Grandfather and Father) to the night incident about which the reader has learnt

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<sup>44</sup> If we consider that Shreve’s name does highly resemble the word *to shrive*, meaning to hear somebody’s confession, we can say that this behavior fits the task.

quite little so far. Thus, the point of reference, the “preconceived” pillar of their story is projected ahead to the point where their narrative reaches this past incident. By this, the disclosure is postponed, and Quentin gains some more time to “brood” over the solution.

“And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn’t have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn’t been out there and seen Clytie. Is that right?”

“Yes,” Quentin said. “Grandfather was the only friend he had.”

“The demon had?” Quentin didn’t answer, didn’t move . . . paid no attention whatever, . . . his face still lowered, still *brooding*<sup>45</sup> . . . . (220-21; emphasis added)

The story of the night incident is recounted only when it cannot be put off any longer, at the very end of the narrative. It is Shreve again who pushes Quentin to reveal the mystery of his knowledge and understanding, extracting the climax of Quentin’s romance: ““You dont [sic] know. You dont [sic] even know about the old dame, the Aunt Rosa”” (289).

The tension gradually increases as they get nearer and nearer to the hidden secret of Sutpen’s Hundred: Henry Sutpen, who has been hiding there for four years. He is the living past who is in on all the secrets, the meeting with whom has been designated as the source of Quentin’s supposed understanding of the Sutpen drama: ““you wouldn’t have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn’t been out there”” (220). The relation of their meeting is supposed to justify their narrative retrospectively. “We have been prepared for it as a climactic moment of understanding” (Guetti 99). By this act of justification and ratification, their narrative

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<sup>45</sup> The verb *brood* is frequently used in reference to Quentin’s narrative effort. If we take into consideration that it originates from the verb *breed*, it also backs up the theory that Quentin’s unconscious motivation of storytelling is self-fathering.

would be able to reach a coherent formal pattern, and via that, could become “true,” could be accepted as (the Sutpen family) “history,” and could take the place of the incoherent paternal master-narrative(s). However, the designated point of reference is empty. No meaningful or relevant information gets transferred between them:

*And you are ——?*

*Henry Sutpen.*

*And you have been here ——?*

*Four years.*

*And you came home ——?*

*To die. Yes.*

*To die?*

*Yes. To die.*

*And you have been here ——?*

*Four years.*

*And you are ——?*

*Henry Sutpen. (298)*

As Brooks puts it “the passage reads nearly as a palindrome, virtually identical backward and forward, an unprogressive, reversible plot” (“Incredulous” 264), which provides no kind of information about the mysteries. Thus, I would argue, it is unable to function as the verification of Quentin’s narrative. It signifies the collapse of the sons’ narrative, which was standing on this “pillar,” thus denoting the failure of their quest for narrative authority, for “self-fathering.”

In spite of the fact that Brooks also identifies the palindrome as “a kind of hollow structure, concave mirror or black hole at the center of the narrative” (264), he does not recognize this moment as the one proving Quentin wrong and denoting the failure of his hermeneutic quest. This is due to the fact that Brooks designates a different incident as the source of Quentin’s understanding of the Sutpen drama: “the discovery of a certain formal pattern of the crossing of categories: Clytie’s Sutpen face with its negro pigmentation, the very design of debacle” (259). Moreover, he elevates Clytie to be a “hermeneutic clue” in the novel. This, on the other hand, does not mean that Brooks is happy with the narrative design of the younger generation. He however, assumes the problem to lie elsewhere: the story of the House of Sutpen as told by Quentin and Shreve, according to Brooks, seems to be caught between two figures: on the one hand, incest, “which overassimilates, denies difference, creates too much sameness” (265); on the other hand, miscegenation, “which overdifferentiates, creates too much difference, sets up a perpetual slippage of meaning” (266). The two young men are “never able to interweave them in a coherent design” (266). “Incest and miscegenation, sameness and difference . . . fail to achieve a pattern of significant interweaving . . . the tale can never be plotted to the final, thorough Dickensian accounting” (266); there is a residual meaning embodied in Jim Bond, who seems to be “the very principle of nonsignificance” (266).

At this point, it is also worth having a look at how other critics evaluate Quentin’s endeavor or achievement: T. H. Adamowski states that “Quentin’s own heroic adventure, his decision to climb the old Sutpen staircase and look into the bedroom . . . allows him to overthrow his own father, or at least reject Mr. Compson’s interpretation of the Sutpen disaster” (127). Irwin also considers Quentin accomplishment as a narrator a success:



In the struggle with his father, Quentin will prove that he is a better man by being a better narrator—he will assume the authority of an author because his father does not know the whole story, does not know the true reason for Bon's murder, while Quentin does. . . . Moreover, in terms of the narrative act, Quentin achieves temporal priority over his father, and within the narrative Quentin takes revenge against his father, against time, through a substitute. ("Dead Father" 156)

However, the question rightly arises: If Quentin's endeavor was successful, if he managed to "overthrow" (Adamowski 127) his father, "prove that he is a better man by being a better narrator," or "achieve temporal priority" over him (Irwin, "Dead Father" 156); why would he "conclude" his narrative with the following words: "Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore" (Faulkner 298).

His physical appearance also leads me to somewhat different conclusions. He is lying on his back "still and rigid . . . with the cold New England night on his face" "his eyes wide open" (298), like somebody dead but still breathing, his soul haunted, tortured by some unknown restlessness or anxiety.

If we look at the dialogue from another perspective, it can provide us with the clue to the failure of their narrative. Henry and Quentin's supposed conversation is not only a palindrome but a circular, reclinate structure, which returns to the exact point where it began. As we have seen before, circular structuring is one of the main characteristics of Mr. Compson's paternal narrative, providing the reason for his story's appearing to be so fatalistic. He almost always starts with the final scene, the outcome, and portrays the events leading up to it later. Quentin also takes over this structuring principle, as it is traceable at several points in his narrative; for example, in the

story of Sutpen, where they start with the final scene: his murder and then relate his life story in detail, only to get back to the murder again in the end of Chapter VII. This, in other words, means that he also falls victim to the Girardian mimetic desire, which seems to be contagious among the sons in the novel—Sutpen miming an already existing design (the design of the plantation owner, his ideal father), Henry miming Bon's behavior and style. This understanding can also give us a possible explanation for the highly interesting romantic overtone of Quentin and Shreve's family romances as well. They come up with new, crucial pieces of information, providing their characters with new motivations for their deeds and granting a different pattern of logic to the events of the plot. However, they keep certain elements of the father's narrative, like the overtly romantic tone and the pattern of "love"-triangles driven by desire. Family romance also has a triangular structure (driven by desire) with the son in one angle, the father to be replaced and the ideal father in the other two.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

This puts Quentin's failure as a narrator into a new light as well. Being left on his own, he is not able to come up with an origin-al solution, to become the origin, the father of the story; but, like Sutpen himself, he looks to the outside, to a/the father for a *design*. He copies and repeats the design (and the mistake) of the father, drowning his narrative in circularity, in mimetic desire turning against itself.

Thus, he does not manage to overwrite the paternal meta-narrative and his endeavor of narrative self-fathering, self-begetting also fails. The family romances are not able to fulfill the expectations attached to them and prove to be failures not only on the level of the story but on that of the narrative text as well. The "battle" of fathers and sons brings the same result on both levels.

## CHAPTER 4

### FATHERING AND SELF-FATHERING IN ROBERT PENN WARREN'S *ALL THE KING'S MEN*

Sons and fathers are in the center/apex of Robert Penn Warren's works as well. According to Randy J. Hendricks the wandering son is one of the most often recurring character types in Warren's literary oeuvre (75). In the following chapter, I examine Warren's probably most famous wandering son, Jack Burden, the protagonist of his 1946 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel (75)<sup>46</sup> and the father figures who surround him questing for the father's position. In the first part of the chapter, I examine how the father's lack and his failure in fathering affects the "story" and the personal story of the son from a psychoanalytic perspective. In the second part, I look at the different attempts at filling that gap and at fulfilling the paternal function first from a psychoanalytical, then from a narratological perspective, examining the success of the father candidates and Jack's self-fathering endeavors from both angles.

Many critics, among them Jonathan Baumbach and Norton R. Girault, seem to agree on the fact that Jack is in "search for a true father" (Baumbach 66; Girault 31), as he is lacking one. Moreover, they claim his search to be the main theme of the novel.

Concurring in part with the aforementioned critics, I argue that the lack of the father in his case is highly relevant. What is more, it is so in more than one sense of the word. It has serious consequences for the paternal order in the storyline and in the life of Jack, as well. However, besides the lack in the father's position, there is also an overabundance of father figures in the novel, since the lack of a/the father/Father triggers a proliferation of potential father figures, or, rather, a proliferation of characters trying to fill in the father's, and also the Father's, place. What

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<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, he, besides claiming that "[a]nalysis of these figures from the novels and the nonfiction would be fruitful" (76), concentrated on Warren's poetry in his study of wandering sons.

makes the situation even more complex is that Jack himself is not only searching for a true father but is also trying to become one.

Thus, I would slightly modify their claim and would suggest that there is a (paternal and filial) quest for the father's place and for fulfilling the paternal function—in other words, for fathering. I could say that the intention of my study is to search for the “true father,” like Jack Burden is claimed to, or to solve the novel's mystery of paternity or fathering. However, I think that quest/goal would be somewhat too ambitious, perhaps naïve, and definitely more simplifying than I would like it to be. The objective I find more attainable and more exciting, too, is to “dig up” and examine the different attempts at fathering on different levels of the novel, making use of the critical vocabulary and understanding of psychoanalysis and narratology.

Michael Szalay, in his paper “*All the King's Men*, or, the Primal Crime,” also examines the novel from a partially psychoanalytic perspective, although he claims that his essay (in spite of its title) is “decidedly not a psychoanalytical reading of *All the King's Men*” (348). He defines the novel to be a “novel of Southern politics” and examines it from a political and racial perspective, claiming that Warren uses Freud as a “tool” “particularly well suited” to deal with “a set of problems that at bottom had more to do with Federalism and integration than the sexually repressive bent of modern civilization” (348). In spite of the fact that I am not so utterly interested in the political and racial questions raised by the novel, I find his essay a fascinating read and will refer to it from time to time.

#### **4.1. Lack of the Father**

Jack Burden grew up without a father, in the lack of a father, as Ellis Burden, his real father, or at least the person whom he knew as his real father and whose name he bears, walked out on him

and his mother when he was six years old, “not even bother[ing] to shut the door behind him” (Warren 158). He does not know for a long time what his father’s reason for leaving was, but takes it for granted that it came about because Ellis Burden was unable to “give her [the mother] what she craved” (62). It seems that he did not possess what the mother “craved,” he did not possess the (mysterious) object of the (m)other’s desire, what Lacan calls the phallus (*Écrits* 289). According to the Lacanian scenario, the mother desires the phallus since she (also) lacks it, and the child attempts to become the object of her desire, a substitute-phallus. But no matter how hard he may strive, he can never completely satisfy the mother’s desire. Desire is always the desire for something more, and her desire for something more than the child/subject also marks the child as lacking. The feeling of impotence and insufficiency triggers unbearable anxiety in the child, which is relieved only with the father’s intervention in the third time of the Oedipus complex. The most important momentum of his intervention is his demonstration that he is in possession of the phallus, so the child does not need to substitute himself for one.

Nevertheless, in our case the father is also marked by lack, the lack of having, which gives our story a twist and makes some of the usual closures of the Oedipal narrative impossible. He does not have the “thing” the mother desires (*manque à avoir*). By abandoning his family and leaving behind everything he had, he moves from the stage of not having to the stage of not being. In other words, he moves from the lack of having (the phallus) (*manque à avoir*) to the lack of being (*manque à être*): “Way back, *there had been* the thick-set, strong man, not tall, with a shock of tangled black hair . . . and a big gold watch-chain, which I liked to pull at.”<sup>47</sup> *Then he wasn’t there*” (Warren 171, emphasis added). Interestingly enough, the two lacks (*manque à avoir* and *manque à être*) contrasted by Lacan come very close to each other or even overlap in this

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<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to note that the only phallic symbol mentioned in connection with Ellis Burden (the gold chain worn on the waist) also bears witness to his lack, since his chain, by nature, is recumbent, non-erect.

situation. This may occur because for the father being in the lack of having the *phallus*, on a very simplified level, means a lack of being (as a symbolic father). Thus, as a symbolic father, as the representative of the Law, he “wasn’t there” even before he “walk[ed] out of his law office” (171, 158).

According to a Lacanian logic, the situation could have been “saved.” He as a symbolic father could have been “rescued” (perhaps born) if he had stayed and died instead of leaving living. But he decided to leave and live, not to be seen “dying,” by which he ensured to be regarded as dead even before he managed to die:

. . . and my mother pressed my head against her breast and said, “Your daddy isn’t coming back any more, Son.”

“Is he dead?” I asked, “Will he have a funeral?”

“No,” she said, “he isn’t dead. He has gone away, but you *can think of him like he was dead*, Son.” (171, emphasis added)

Thus, literally he is not dead, but figuratively or symbolically he is. And through his becoming a dead father (only) in a symbolic way, through a figure of speech, through “combination,” according to the “twisted” logic of Lacanian psychoanalysis, he cannot become a symbolic father.<sup>48</sup> Physically he is alive, but as a symbolic father he is dead, nonexistent. The split or tear between the two (the physical and the symbolic) forms the figure of a cut, that of castration. In other words, the symbolic/metaphoric death of the father (“like he was dead”) sentences the

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<sup>48</sup> According to Lacan, the death of the father coincides with the birth of the symbolic Father, and “the symbolic Father is, in so far as he signifies this Law, the dead Father” (*Écrits* 199). So, Lacan argues, the death of the father/Father results in the birth and fortification of the symbolic order, the Name of the Father, the paternal metaphor.

paternal metaphor to “death” as well, bringing about the crisis of the paternal function on different levels.

### *Crisis in the Story*

Through his desertion, he vacates not only the position of the symbolic father, which he did not manage to fill even when he “was there,” but the positions of the imaginary and the real father as well, leaving a gap or a lack behind. However, it does not stay unfilled for a long time after the “Scholarly Attorney was gone” (171). A number of different men attempt to fill it, “who had married my mother and come to live in Ellis Burden’s house” (61). Yet none of them last too long, as in the house not only “the furniture changed, but the people in it . . . too (170). The men in the position of the father change each other like the furniture in the long room.

There was always a change in the room. . . . When I’d come home I’d always look around and wonder what it would be, for there had been a long procession of choice examples through that room, spinets, desks, tables, chairs, each more choice than the last, each in turn finding its way to the attic to make way for a new perfection. Well, the room had come a long way from the way I first remembered it, moving toward some ideal perfection which was in my mother’s head. (170)

In case of the men, too, each is “more choice” than the last, but each in turn finds his way out and makes way for a new perfection: First there was the Scholarly Attorney,

[t]hen there was the Tycoon, who was gaunt and bald and wheezed on the chair . . .  
. When she came back there was another man, who was tall and slender and wore  
white suits and smoked long cigars, and had a thin black mustache. He was the  
Count . . . . Then there was the Young Executive. (171-72)

Their renaming lays even more emphasis on this parallel: like furniture, they are named after their most favorable qualities, the qualities which make them worth keeping around, which make them somebody in the eyes of the society and desirable in the eyes of the mother. Like the Sheraton break-front desk's most peculiar qualities are its Sheraton style and its break-front, the Young Executive's most favorable qualities are his youth and his position. We can also say that the qualities which seem to satisfy the mother's desire momentarily are also substitutes for the phallus (like the child); they make up for the lack of "ideal perfection" (170), for the lack of having the "real thing," or, to be more precise, the thing "which can take on the signifying function of the phallus" (Lacan, *Écrits* 290). The qualities seem to be different yet the difference has no significance and meaning. It is lost in the seemingly endless substitution and displacement. The substitute, since it is just a substitute, can always be substituted. Therefore, the substitution and displacement never stops.

Both the furniture in the long room and the men in the position of the father are continuously "moving toward some ideal perfection which was in my mother's head" (Warren 170). In other words, both lines of substitution are kept in motion by desire, the desire of the (m)other. The unceasing substitution signals that the desire left unsatisfied by Ellis Burden in the beginning remains unsatisfied; none of the candidates for the father's place are able to "give her what she craved" (62). None of the substitutes are able to fill in the (original) lack (that seems to



be constitutive of narrative). There is somebody present in the position of the father, but the Father is still absent. Thus, we might say that the men in the father's place function as substitutes also in the Derridean sense of the word: they are "neither a presence nor an absence" (Derrida 314), or, perhaps even more precisely, "the mark[s] of the absence of a presence" (Spivak xvii); in other words, traces.

Since Ellis Burden himself becomes the first element in the chain of substitutes as the Scholarly Attorney, we can say that the name of the father (Ellis Burden) also dies with the Name-of-the-Father. The name of the father, the patronym (Burden) remains only as a patrimony in the family name of the son, who carries it around as a burden, as a brand of impotence and weakness: "I had always felt some curse of his weakness upon me, or what I had felt to be that" (Warren 532). In other words, we might also say that the name, instead of functioning symbolically as the Name-of-the-Father, the paternal metaphor, starts functioning literally. Losing its symbolic power, it does become what it says: a burden.

The aforementioned malfunctions of the name of the father and the Name-of-the-Father call attention to, and are examples of, another twist of/in the order, which takes the shape of the twist itself: a transversal, twisted, chiasmic movement takes place between the spheres of the metaphoric/symbolic (not in the Lacanian sense) and the literal. What should function in the literal sense starts functioning symbolically; what should function symbolically starts functioning literally. The father should die literally to become a symbolic father, yet he dies only symbolically. The name of the father should function symbolically as the-Name-of-the-Father; however, it starts functioning literally, becoming its meaning: a burden.

### ***Crisis in History***

The lack of the father has serious impact not only on the order but on the child's psychic development as well. Joyce McDonald in her study entitled "Lacan's Mirror Stage as a Symbolic Metaphor in *All the King's Men*" argues that Jack's psychic development got stuck at a certain point. According to her, this halt took place before the mirror stage.

McDonald supports her argument partly by Jack's recurrent fetal imagery and with the fact that "throughout most of the book, Jack Burden appears to be unaware of his own reflection" (73) appearing in mirrors and reflexive surfaces. Moreover, "he [also] experiences a world that is fragmented, divided, dreamlike and unreal" (74). However, besides examining different details of Jack's life and character that could support her claim, she also talks about "his Others" that serve "as a kind of alter ego, which extend[s] one's self-definition" and "as a reflection of self as well" (76). Moreover, she also states that "Ann and Adam Stanton both function as Jack Burden's other selves" and "Willie Stark also serves as Burden's alter ego, his Other" (76). However, I find it rather contradictory that having proven that Jack does not possess an ego yet (as his development got stuck before he could have acquired one), she claims his having alter egos and Others.

I also argue that Jack's psychic development seems to have lagged behind. However, in my view, it is due to the lack of the father and his resulting failure to intervene in the third time of the Oedipus complex. This paternal malfunction brings about an "error" in the resolution of the child's Oedipus complex. Not having the phallus, Ellis Burden cannot exercise his prohibitive, legislative function: le non-du-père, can regulate neither the mother's desire for the phallic object, nor the son's desire for the mother through imposing his Law. He cannot prohibit the child's attempt to fill in the place of the imaginary phallus and become the object of the mother's desire. Lacking the phallus, he is not able to exercise the other part of the Lacanian homophonic dyad: le

nom-du-père (the-Name-of-the-Father), either. He is not able to free the child from “the impossible and anxiety-provoking task of having to *be* the phallus” (Evans 132) and the continuous experience of lack attached to that. He cannot help him overcome the primary attachment to the mother and provide a model for the child to identify with. In other words, the child’s lack, in this sense, can be interpreted as the result of the father’s lack, as a paternal inheritance, as the father’s lack revisited on the son.

Moreover, the discourse of the mother, which should also mediate the intervention, not only fails to do so, but also “twists” and, instead of mediating the intervention and thus supporting the paternal metaphor’s taking function, does the exact opposite: deprives the father of his position and all his power<sup>49</sup> and reinstalls the imaginary “pre-oedipal triad” between herself and the child accepting Jack’s offer to replace the father.

“Why did he go away?”

“Because he didn’t love Mother. That’s why he went away.”

“I love you, Mother,” I said, “I’ll love you always.”

“Yes, Son, yes, you love your mother,” she said, and held me tight against her breast. (Warren 171)

Thus, the paternal metaphor (the substitution of the desire of the mother for the-Name-of-the-Father) cannot function; the dissolution of the Oedipus complex cannot take place in a normal manner.

His being stuck in a pre-Oedipal or pre-Oedipalized stage is also supported by his foetus fantasy. He is convinced that he himself and everybody carry around a “clammy, sad little foetus”

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<sup>49</sup> “. . . he isn’t dead. He has gone away, but you can think of him like he was dead, Son” (171).

in him/herself, which “is you way down in the dark which is you too. . . . Its eyes are blind, and it shivers cold inside you for it doesn’t want to know . . . . It wants to lie in the dark and not know, and be warm in its not-knowing” (14). The image of the blind foetus<sup>50</sup> in the protective womb of “not-knowing” (14) is clearly a pre-Oedipal image, while the “great big” all-knowing eye and the “cold hand in a cold rubber glove” obviously belong to the Other/Father who with the “cold grip” of his intrusion threatens the imaginary detachment and safety:

There was a bulge and a glitter, and there was *the cold grip* way down in the stomach as though somebody had laid hold of something there, in the dark which is you, with a cold hand in a cold rubber glove. It was like the second when you come home late at night and see the yellow envelope of the telegram sticking out from under your door and you lean and pick it up, but don’t open it yet, not for a second. While you stand there in the hall, with the envelope in your hand, you feel there’s an eye on you, a great big eye looking straight at you from miles and dark and through walls and houses and through your coat and vest and hide and sees you huddled up was inside, in the dark which is you, inside yourself, like a clammy, sad little foetus you carry around inside yourself. The eye knows what’s in the envelope, and it is watching you to see you when you open it and know, too. But the clammy, sad little foetus which is you way down in the dark which is you too lifts up its sad little face and its eyes are blind, and it shivers cold inside you for it doesn’t want to know what is in the envelope. It wants to lie in the dark and be warm in its not-knowing. (13-14, emphasis added)

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<sup>50</sup> I will use also the British spelling of the word, since Robert Penn Warren spells the word this way in the novel.

Moreover, the foetus imagery not only appears in his fantasies, but is also acted out in his periods of Great Sleep. He starts enacting and living this foetus-like condition, recreating the warmth and darkness of the maternal womb around him in the room, drawing the shades and stripping buck-naked, sleeping “soundly, with the sweet feeling of ever falling toward the center of delicious blackness, until the last possible moment the next morning” (461). Plunging into sleep he (re)creates the darkness and blindness of not/knowning around him whenever “knowing” seems to threaten him. Let us have a look at what this knowledge is which is so threatening in his case. What catalyzes his Great Sleeps and how do they function?

It first appeared when he was working on his dissertation on the life story of Cass Mastern. After one and a half years of research, however, he did not write a single word. He “simply sat there at the pine table, night after night, staring at the photograph, and writing nothing” (282), and finally “he laid aside the journal and entered upon one of the periods of the Great Sleep” (284).

What was in the journal or in the life story of Cass Mastern that he could not face? Years later when he reconstructs what made him quit the project of the Mastern journal, he attributes his action to his *not knowing* and *not understanding* Cass Mastern, but even more importantly, to his being afraid to, or resisting to understand what there was to be understood: “Or perhaps he laid aside the journal of Cass Mastern not because he could not understand, but because he was afraid to understand for what might be understood there was a reproach to him” (284). Let us have a look at what was there to be understood for him, which made him so paralyzed with fear:

Cass Mastern lived for a few years and in that time he learned that *the world is all of one piece*. He learned that *the world is like an enormous spider web* and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest

perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle and is drowsy no more but springs out to fling the gossamer coils about you who have touched the web and then inject the black, numbing poison under your hide. It does not matter whether or not you meant to brush the web of things. (283, emphasis added)

We can also say that Cass Mastern understood and describes the working of the symbolic and signification: that the world is a “web of things,” a structure made up of connections where everything has an effect and a meaning. What you meant, the fact “whether or not you meant” something, “does not matter,” that does not mean or signify, since “signification is not present at any one point in the chain” (Lacan, *Écrits* 153), but meaning is the result of the “ripples,” the interplay of things or, as Lacan himself puts it, it “insists” “in the movement from one signifier to another” (153).

How could Jack possibly understand this when for him the world was like a heap of signifiers without signifieds: “for him the world then was simply an accumulation of items, odds and ends of things” and “one thing had nothing to do, in the end, with anything else” (Warren 284). A signifier without the signified is, according to Lacan, a “pure” or “real” signifier, and “every real signifier is, as such, a signifier that signifies nothing” (Lacan, *Psychoses* 185). It is nothing but “a meaningless material element in a closed differential system” (Evans 189). Thus, it is not surprising that for Jack things “meant nothing,” “for names meant nothing and all the words we speak meant nothing” (Warren 466). His experiencing the world as an accumulation of pure signifiers also bears witness to his regression to an “unsymbolized,” “pre-Oedipalized” state,

since signification starts with the child's entrance to the symbolic, with the symbolic pact,<sup>51</sup> the initial act of substitution.

Cass Mastern's insight "that the world is like an enormous spider web" (283) gives us a picture of the working of the symbolic not only through the working of signification, but shows us another segment as well: the superego. His learning that one's touching the web will not stay unnoticed and "unrewarded"—"the drowsy spider . . . inject[s] the black, numbing poison under your hide" (283)—is nothing but the internalization of the Law of the Father (who in Cass Mastern's case and understanding is God the Father) as a moral conscience; in other words, the birth of the superego. Thus, Cass Mastern's "learning" does not only refer to the integration of a certain piece of new information, but also illustrates the birth of "a knowledge" (conscience) and his birth into conscience.

This is "a knowledge" (a conscience) that Jack quite obviously lacks. Both ideologies he comes up with (his being an Idealist and the Great Twitch) testify to his lack of "conscience" and moral responsibility: "What you don't know," he says, "don't hurt you, for it ain't real. . . . If you are an Idealist it does not matter what you do or what goes around you because it isn't real anyway" (45). "There was, in fact, a time when he came to believe that nobody had any responsibility for anything and there was no god but the Great Twitch" (656).

So it seems that his foetus fantasy, his Great Sleeps, as well as his "theories," partially bear witness to, and are symptoms of, his being stuck in a pre-Oedipalized stage. On the other hand, they also safeguard him from getting "unstuck," since they also function as avoidance strategies with which he resists "knowledge" and symbolization and defends himself from castration. This is even truer if we take into consideration that a fantasy is, by definition, "a

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<sup>51</sup> Boys accept that "they can symbolically 'have' the phallus only by accepting that they can never actually have it" (Homer 55).

defence which veils castration,” “a relatively stable way of defending oneself against castration” (Evans 61), a possible way of freezing the film before the traumatic (Oedipal) scene. His foetus fantasy is “shot” or constructed in perfect accordance with this: the protagonist of the fantasy (referred to with a general “you”) and the foetus inside are depicted right before their “birth into knowledge,” right before he opens the envelope.

History and the past also fulfill a rather similar role in his life: he is “hiding from the present” and takes “refuge in the enchantments of the past” (240, 455). His personal philosophy as a student of history (see quote below) and his philosophy as an “Idealist<sup>52</sup>” sound almost the same, both aiming at finding a secure position where he can stay unaffected, where he can stay in his imaginary caul of not-knowing detachment. He takes refuge in the past, in history partly because it is “his” story—meaning somebody else’s. As long as he is kept occupied with somebody else’s past he is safe from his own; he does not need to know and face his own past (the gaping lack of the father which stigmatizes him as well).<sup>53</sup> The position as a student of history seems to be comfortable enough since it is detached and unaffected: “A student of history does not care what he digs out of the ash pile, the midden, the sublunary dung heap, which is the human past. He doesn’t care whether it is the dead pussy or the Kohinoor diamond” (235).

Not only do his “fantasies” and “theories” illustrate and safeguard his infantile or stunted status, but so do his actions as a character as well. His hiding from the present takes form in avoiding taking action in the present as well, which brings about the crisis of linear, teleological structures in his life. He seems to be floating aimlessly, without any objective. “The subject of my

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<sup>52</sup> “If you are an Idealist it does not matter what you do or what goes on around you because it isn’t real anyway” (45).

<sup>53</sup> History in psychoanalysis always refers to the subject’s history, which is never just a real sequence of past events, but “the present synthesis of the past” (Lacan, *Freud's Papers* 36). Thus, the interest he takes in history may imply a latent interest in his story, a latent wish to know the past, his past: to come to terms with things. His studying history may have started out as a substitutive displacement for studying his own history.



future, as a matter of fact, was one on which I had never cared to dwell. I simply didn't care. . . . I had no ambitions" (428). When he manages to start a "project," like law school, his dissertation on Cass Mastern, or even his relationship with Anne Stanton, he loses interest at a certain point and quits without reaching the goal. He drops out of law school, "laid aside the journal of Cass Mastern and entered upon one of the periods of the Great Sleep. . . . [T]hen one morning he went out into the world and did not come back to the room and the pine table" (284). To be more precise, he always turns back at the moment when action needs to be taken. In the case of the dissertation, he leaves it at the point when, after one and a half years of research, it is time to write: "He simply sat there at the pine table, night after night, staring at the photograph, and writing nothing" (282). With Anne, he fails to consummate the relationship leaving Anne lying naked on the bed and causing the deterioration of their relationship. His failure to sleep with Anne can also be read as a manifestation of his refusal or avoidance to know, if one considers that one of the archaic (Biblical) meanings of the word "to know" is "to have sexual intercourse with" (9. *American Heritage Dictionary*).

#### **4.2. Crisis-Management: Fathering from a Psychoanalytical Perspective**

##### ***The Novel's Paternal Tyrant: Willie Stark***

As we have seen, quite a number of symptoms in Jack's life bear witness to the lack and failure of the father in oedipalization. However, if the biological father cannot fulfill the function of the symbolic/imaginary father, somebody else takes his place. The first candidate who seems to be capable enough to fill that place and fulfill the function is Willie Stark.

He seems to get the grip on him, since he is the one who jerks Jack out of his Great Sleep and gives him a position amongst his men, bringing structure into his life: "I didn't get to do

much sleeping. I got a job. Or rather, the job *got me*. The telephone *got me out of bed* one morning. It was Sadie Burke, who said ‘Get down here to the Capitol at ten o’clock. The Boss wants to see you’” (161, emphasis added).

He does act like a father to him in several aspects. Besides him being Jack’s Boss, there also seems to be a strangely familial connection between them from the very first moment: “‘Glad to meetcha, Mr Burden,’ . . . and then, I could have sworn, he gave me a wink” (23). While Willie has a relationship based on authority and “tyranny” with all the rest of his “crew,” his behavior and manners toward Jack are quite paternal from the very beginning: “‘Boy,’ he said, and smiled at me paternally” (24), “hugged me like his brother, his true love, his son” (305). He usually addresses Jack in a fatherly manner: “Boy,” “Jackie,” and “Son.” Jack seems to have access to “the Boss” that nobody else has: “Many’s the time we’ve settled affairs of state through a bathroom door, the Boss on the inside and me on the outside sitting on a chair with my little black notebook on my knee” (43). The same is true in the other direction as well, as Bloom points out: “Burden’s barely repressed love for Stark, [is] essentially filial in nature” (4).

Their story actually starts with their being introduced to each other in the back room of Slade’s place with the following words uttered: “‘Glad to meetcha, Mr. Burden,’ like something he had memorized, and then, I could have sworn, he gave me wink” (23). In spite of the fact that only one verbal utterance takes place; two texts are in the air, two messages are transferred. The “deadpan” and the “memorized,” impersonal courtesy are one, and the “wink of fellowship” is the other. However, the latter becomes an unsolvable enigma for Jack, as he is unable to decide if it was a wink or not. Moreover, when he asks Willie, the Boss is not willing to tell:

“Well, Boss,” I demanded, “did you or didn’t you wink at me?”

. . .

“*Boy*,” he said, and *smiled at me paternally* over his glass, “that is a mystery.”

. . .

“*Boy*,” he said, “if I was to tell you, then you wouldn’t have anything to think about.”

*So I never did know.* (23-25, emphasis added)

If we look at the wink as a text, which Randolph Paul Runyon also encourages us to do, we can say that the wink is a latent text, which runs parallel to the verbal cover-text, establishing a latent connection between the two men and starting to write them into one story. Runyon also regards Willie’s wink as a text and states the following about it:

If Willie’s wink were a text (which it would be if it were indeed a wink) and if Stark is one of Burden’s fathers (of which there is much less doubt), then its taciturnity, given his refusal to answer Jack’s question, recalls what Socrates said about texts in Phaedrus: that they are forever orphans likely to get into trouble, bereft of fathers who could have safeguarded their meaning. (116)

His Socratic claim may very well be true in most of the cases, however, in the present one, I would argue that the “taciturnity” of the text is very much intended (and safeguarded) on Willie’s part. Moreover, the text attains its intended meaning and performs its function exactly through its taciturnity and the uncertainty generated by that. Precisely through these does it establish the (intended) power relation between Jack and Willie: Jack, in spite of the fact that he would love to

know, never gets to know if it was a wink or not. Willie is the only one who knows the truth about it. Thus, it puts him into the position of “the one who knows,” which almost always coincides with the position of “the one in power.” This “two in one position” in Western philosophy is usually the one of the father, who through his authority keeps the knowledge, and via keeping the knowledge keeps his authority as well. The other available position in the given situation is the position of the one who does not know or does not see and thus lacks power and authority.

Willie’s declaration “it is a mystery” clearly distributes the positions between himself and Jack. It also declares that it is “my st(e)ory” in which Jack can only be a character, a part of the plotter’s plot. Jack’s situation at this point is highly similar to that of Huck Finn, who also lacks power because of his inability of seeing/reading and his resultant lack of knowledge. Moreover, Willie, like Jim and Tom Sawyer, also knows that he can keep his power and authority by keeping the text of the wink unreadable for Jack. Thus, both Jack and Huck become parts of a larger paternal plot through their deficiency of reading/interpreting.

Examining the “mechanism” of the wink, we can also say that it functions quite similarly to the phallus, since it fulfills its function because it is veiled. It is not the existence of the wink, or the non-existence of it, which matters, but the uncertainty created by the veil. The “mystery,” the veil suggests that there is an object behind it. Thus, it is the veil, the mystery which calls the “Object” and the Father into being, which establishes the power relation between son and Father.

There are several other examples in the novel which illustrate the distribution of power and knowledge between Willie and Jack:

“So you work for me because you love me,” the Boss said.

“I don’t know why I work for you, but it’s not because I love you. And not for money.”

“No,” he said, standing there in the dark, “*you don’t know* why you work for me. *But I know*,” he said, and laughed. . . .

“Why?” I asked.

“Boy,” he said, “you work for me because I’m the way I am and you’re the way you are. It is an arrangement founded on the nature of things.”

“That’s a hell of a fine explanation.”

“It’s not an explanation. Not of anything. All you can do is point at *the nature of things*. *If you’re smart enough to see ’em*.”

“*I’m not smart enough*,” I said.

“You’re smart enough to dig up whatever it is on the Judge.”

“There may not be anything.”

“Nuts,” he said. “Go to bed.” (287-88, emphasis added)

Willie is the one who knows and sees the nature of things, the one who is “smart enough,” and Jack is the one who is “not smart enough” to see the nature of things (the latent connections, the causality, “the web of things”).

The same harsh contrast is present in almost all areas between them. Willie seems to possess all the qualities that Jack is lacking: manliness, firmness, determination, authority. While Jack is the notorious quitter, Willie never turns back. “‘I’m going to run,’ Willie said glumly. ‘They can’t keep me from running’” (89). “The truth is going to be told and I’m going to tell it. I’m going to tell it over this state from one end to the other if I have to ride the rods or steal me a

mule to do it, and no man, Joe Harrison or any other man, can stop me. For I got me a gospel and I —” (140). He is goal oriented, and he achieves his goals at all costs. He dares to do things his own way. More precisely, his own way is the only way he is willing to do them. He is a creator by definition, like Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*, “creating the Sutpen’s Hundred, the *Be Sutpen’s Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*” (Faulkner 9). However, while Sutpen copies an already existing design with the plantation and the dynasty, Willie never takes things as they are, as he “inherited” them, but changes and generates things: “He figured *if he wanted to do anything he had to do it himself*. So he sat up nights and studied books and studied law so maybe he could do something about changing things. . . . *So he could change things some*” (Warren 136). His philosophy about “Goodness” also reflects the same idea:

“*Goodness*. Yeah, just plain, simple goodness. Well you can’t inherit that from anybody. *You got to make it*, Doc. If you want it. And you got to make it out of badness. Badness. And you know why, Doc? . . . Because there isn’t anything else to make it out of.”

“There is one question I should like to ask you. It is this. If, you say, there is only the bad, then how do you ever know what the good is? How do you ever recognize the good? Assuming you have made it from the bad. Answer me that.”

. . .

“*You just make it up as you go along*.”

“Make up what?”

“The good,” the Boss said. “What the hell else are we talking about. Good with a capital G.” (387)

According to him one does not make “Goodness” from badness following a pre-existing, consensual concept of “goodness,” but one comes up with/fathers his own concept of goodness. One is the creator of one’s paradigm, the maker of one’s meaning.

Moreover, he goes even further than that: for him not only meaning-making works this way, but the law as well: “The law is always too short and too tight for growing humankind. The best you can do is do something and then *make up some law to fit*” (204, emphasis added). His attitude towards the Law echoes that of Freud’s primal father’s, who is the omnipotent lawgiver “not included in his own law because he is the Law” (Evans 101). Willie does act as if he himself were the Law. For him, nothing is impossible, nothing is unlawful. His character, in this sense as well, is highly similar to that of Sutpen, who also acts as a “paternal tyrant,” considering himself to be the Law.

Willie calls to mind the image of the Freudian “paternal tyrant” in other aspects as well: Like Freud’s primal father he is also the one who has access to all the women. Almost all the important female characters in the novel belong, in some way or another, to Willie Stark: Lucy Stark, Sadie Burke, Anne Stanton. Moreover, it is also indicated that besides these women, Willie enjoyed the company of quite a number of other “lady friends.” He is the embodiment of phallic power and potency, while the “son’s” manliness and virility, as we have seen earlier, is at least ambivalent.

Michael Szalay also reads the figure of Stark as a primal father. As he claims: “Freud writes that the king’s men feel ‘tremendous temptation’ for ‘contact with the king.’ In *All the King’s Men*, Jack Burden feels likewise compelled by Willie Stark” (348). Like Freud’s primal father, Stark indulges his unquenchable appetites in a way that Jack cannot. Thus, the son’s

feelings toward the primal father are appropriately ambivalent: he both loves and hates Stark (348). However, Szalay argues that Starks' tremendous attraction and power is also due to his racial-like otherness. In spite of the fact that he is not black, he radiates a "personally vitalizing but anti-social sexuality [Norman] Mailer associated with black men" (347) and "presents a racially coded threat to the kinship group that once ruled the state" (368). Moreover, Szalay goes as far as stating that Warren's "Freudian accounts of primal fathers seem always to be, at one and the same time, accounts of the racially inflected hipsterism usually associated with Mailer. That is, Warren's sexual potentates seem always to confuse the racial and sexual (364-65).

The "omnipotent 'father of the primal horde' of *Totem and Taboo*," or the father in the image of the primal father, appears in Lacan in the second phase of the Oedipus complex (Evans 101), while "in the third time . . . the father is included in his own law, the law is revealed as a pact rather than an imperative" (102). It is probably not by accident that Willie appears in the form of the primal father, the father of the second time of the Oedipus complex, since it is exactly this time where Jack's development seems to have gotten stuck, or malfunctioned due to the failure of Ellis Burden as a castrating father. And it is also not by accident that Willie seems to have all the qualities that Jack is lacking and seems to be the reverse image of Ellis Burden. He functions as an imaginary father for Jack, in both senses of the word Lacan attributes to it: as an ideal father, a model who possesses all the qualities the despised real father lacks, and as "the terrifying father of the primal horde who imposes the incest taboo on his sons" (63).



### ***The Dead Father: Judge Irwin***

However, Willie Stark is not the only candidate for the position of the father/Father. There is another person who enters Jack's life "after" Ellis Burden leaves and who also seems to have all the qualities required for the "job" of fulfilling the role of an imaginary father:

Judge Irwin, who lived in the last house, who had been a friend of my family and who used to take me hunting with him and taught me to shoot and taught me to ride and read history to me from leather-bound books in the big study in his house. After Ellis Burden went away *he was more of a father to me than those men who had married my mother and come to live in Ellis Burden's house.* And the Judge was a man. (Warren 61, emphasis added)

Moreover, the Judge, like Willie Stark, is in possession of all the qualities that Jack considers himself lacking (brevity, strength of character, manhood, potency, authority), and the lack of which he has tended to ascribe to his paternal legacy. Thus, the Judge is (also) a perfect candidate to be identified with.

Until "The Case of the Upright Judge" the two lines of fathering run parallel. However, the case brings together the two "fathers" into the same picture, in a duel for power, which turns out to be a duel for/over the son, and for fathering as well. The duel, however, involves Jack not only as an "object" quested for, as the "objective" of the quest, but as an "objective" research student as well (323). The feature the two positions have in common is the illusion of "objectiveness," detachment, of being an outsider to the quest itself. It first seems like a "perfect research job," "a job cut out for him," since his task is only to use his skills as a student of history and "dig

up whatever it is on the Judge” (591). Digging into the past and getting lost in somebody else’s history, he can continue “hiding from the present.”

I set out to dig up the dead cat, to excavate the maggot from the cheese, to locate the canker in the rose, to find the deceased fly among the raisins in the rice pudding. I found it. But not all at once. You do not find it all at once if you are hunting for it. It is buried under the sad detritus of time, where, no doubt, it belongs. And you do not want to find it all at once, not if you are a student of history. If you found it all at once, there would be no opportunity to use your technique. I had an opportunity to use my technique. (289)

It is a “perfect research job,” “sensational success,” “a job well done” (286) in terms of the result, too, since he does “find the deceased fly” in the rice pudding in the form of the deceased Mortimer Lonzo Littlepaugh and his story left behind in his suicide note or letter of legacy. However, it is marred in its technical perfection by one thing: the story “*meant something*” (286, emphasis added). The story he dug up using all his technical skills refuses to stay history, somebody else’s story/case,<sup>54</sup> but twists in his hands and turns out to be *his-story*. The “ash pile, the midden, the sublunary dung heap of the human past,” which looked so safe for digging because it seemingly had nothing to do with him, turns into his own always already dreaded past fully excavated. The objective truth that he “sought[,] without fear and favor” pierces his subjective world and all the facts once considered meaningless start *to mean* something (323). In other words, the “job *cut out for you*” turns out to be a “cutout” for him, the scene of castration.

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<sup>54</sup> That is, the case of the Upright Judge.

But let us have a look at the “cutout” and the path leading there in a little bit more detail. The letter of Mortimer Littlepaugh is proof of the Judge’s single act of dishonesty, and is, thus, a weapon in the power struggle of the Boss and the Judge. It is the means by which the Boss could be able to blackmail the Judge. However, it does not function as the means of blackmail but turns into a black mail, a murderous weapon instead, since the Judge does not yield to the pressure as the Boss and Jack expect him to, but kills himself instead.

The death of the Judge triggers Jack’s mother’s “bright, beautiful, silvery soprano scream” (524) and her discourse, which does fulfill its assigned function and does mediate this time. Her scream finds Jack in the fetus position well known from his Great Sleeps—sleeping naked on his bed in his room—and grips him out of that, forcing him to get born into “knowledge.” Her discourse overwrites the most basic ideas he had about himself and the world: “‘You killed him, you killed him.’ ‘Killed who?’ I demanded shaking her. ‘Your father,’ she said, ‘your father and oh! you killed him’” (525).<sup>55</sup> All his life he has tried to foster the belief that things that happen, including his actions, do not have meanings, they do not make a difference. Now, however, he gets to know that something he did in the past has the most severe consequence in the present: a murder. Secondly, her discourse names, or, more precisely, renames, the father (to Montague Irwin). It is her discourse again which announces the death of the father, which, however, is not a symbolic but a literal death this time. He is dead literally, and thus he is “alive” or active symbolically, as a symbolic father.

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<sup>55</sup> At this point, I would like to call attention to a study about the truth value of this statement. James A. Perkins, Patrick C. McCarthy, and Frank D. Allen Jr. in their paper entitled „Human Genetics in All the King’s Men: The Case of Jack Burden’s Paternity” examine if Mrs. Burden’s claim concerning Jack’s paternity is tenable from the perspective of genetics. They come to the conclusion that based on the information about the looks of Jack, his mother, and the Judge provided in the novel, it is impossible that Jack was fathered by the Judge, as two light haired people with blue/green eyes cannot have a dark haired progeny with dark eyes (71-72). I find their study intriguing, however, not being an expert in genetics, I am not able to evaluate their results.

Jack's Oedipus complex, which the impotence of Ellis Burden and his failure to intervene brought to a halt, seems to be continuing from the exact point where it stopped. It halted at the second time of the complex, where the imaginary father failed to enter, and instead of the mother's privation, the exact opposite happened: the castration of the father through the mother's words. Now the discourse of the mother does, however, fulfill its assigned function, it does mediate. She names the father and designates him as the bearer of the phallus, the object of her desire:

It happened last year. I knew when it happened.—Oh, I knew it would be like this. . . . When Monty died. . . . Jack, *it was Monty*—don't you see—it was Monty. . . . *It was always Monty.* I didn't really know it. . . . But it was always Monty. *I knew it when he was dead.* I didn't really want to know it but I knew it. (646, emphasis added)

Thus, Jack is forced to make the passage into the symbolic, subject himself to the Law of the father and substitute his desire for the mother for the Name-of-the-Father; in other words, to suffer and accept symbolic castration. Thus, the job “cut out” for him does turn into a “cutout” for him, since he can only make the passage into the symbolic suffering castration.

The “initial substitution,” the paternal metaphor,<sup>56</sup> establishes “normal” metaphorical functioning, signification, and meaning-making.<sup>57</sup> As we can read, the father's death introduces meaning into the system and Jack's life: “It was a perfect research job, marred in its technical perfection by only one thing: *it meant something*” (286, emphasis added). We can also observe

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<sup>56</sup> The paternal metaphor is “the fundamental metaphor on which all signification depends” (Evans 140-41).

<sup>57</sup> The production of meaning is only made possible by metaphors, as it requires the crossing of the bar, “the passage of the signifier into the signified” (Lacan, *Écrits* 164).

that the proper functioning of the paternal metaphor fixes the “mess,”<sup>58</sup> as does the malfunctioning of the order in other areas: the seemingly endless chain of substitution and displacement in the father’s position ceases, since the mother realizes that she “couldn’t go on” (646) “making more mess.” It was driven by her desire, and now that she has recognized who the holder of the object of her desire was/is, it can stop.

Jack’s secondary or symbolic identification with his father also seems to confirm that metaphorical functioning is “back to normal.” His occupying Judge Irwin’s house<sup>59</sup> signals an acceptance of his newly acquired paternal legacy and his acceptance and occupation of a position in the world through that legacy, through the-Name-of-the-Father:

I had by this time grown accustomed to think of him as my father. But this also meant that I had disaccustomed myself to thinking of the man who had been the Scholarly Attorney as my father. There was a kind of relief in knowing that that man was not my father. I had always felt some curse of weakness upon me, or what I had felt to be that. . . .

My new father, however, had not been good. He had cuckolded a friend, betrayed a wife, taken a bribe, driven a man, though unwittingly, to death. But he had done good. He had been a just judge. And he had carried his head high. That last afternoon of his life he had done that. . . . Well, *I had swapped the good, weak father for the evil, strong one. I didn’t feel bad about it.* (Warren 532)

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<sup>58</sup> “. . . everything was a mess. Everything had always been a mess” (Warren 646)

<sup>59</sup> “So I live in the house which my father left me” (658).

His initiation into the symbolic, into Law and order, also signals the birth of the superego; his being born into knowledge, his moving from the state of “un-conscience” to that of “conscience.” He has to face and understand the knowledge he has been avoiding so long: the fact that his actions mean something and have effects and he is responsible for those, that in the web of things events of the past and those of the present are interconnected. This understanding makes him able to face and acknowledge his responsibility for the first time in his life: “Perhaps I had done it. That was one way of looking at it. I turned that thought over and speculated upon *my responsibility*” (531). Moreover, now that he is in possession of the knowledge (“conscience”) Cass Mastern was also in possession of, he is able to return to the project he laid aside. “I write the book I began years ago, the life of Cass Mastern, whom once I could not understand but whom, perhaps, I now may come to understand” (660).

As we have seen, from a psychoanalytic point of view Jack’s “birth into knowledge” can be read as the story of his successful Oedipalization and his entrance/birth (in)to the symbolic, and thus, as the story of a successful act of “fathering.” The mother’s discourse, Jack’s finally “successful” castration, and all the events which testify the finally “proper” functioning of the paternal order also seem to provide an answer to the mystery of fathering and seem to decide the duel of fathers and “answer” the question of fathering.

However, we need to take into consideration one momentum to which we have not paid too much attention so far: the mother’s scream, realization and discourse, which pierces Jack’s comfortable caul of not-knowing (un-conscience) and forces him to get born into knowledge, was triggered by the death of the father: “It was always Monty. I didn’t really know it. . . . But it was always Monty. *I knew it when he was dead*” (646, emphasis added). Thus, the question which rightly arises is the following: Was the question of fathering, the duel only decided by the death

of the Judge and his consequential turning into a dead, hence, symbolic father? Does Willie's, from a psychoanalytic perspective, doubly motivated death<sup>60</sup> and his turning into "the father of the primal horde murdered by his own sons," in other words, into a symbolic father,<sup>61</sup> make the "answer" to the question less valid a posteriori?

The emergence of these questions, in my point of view, does not make the "answer" or the reading which led us to this conclusion less relevant or less valid, but does relativize it. It does not cross it out, however, does put it under erasure (*sous rature*) in the Derridian sense, depriving us from the illusion of getting a totalizing reading.

#### **4.3. Fathering from a Narratological Perspective**

##### ***Jack Burden's Acts of Patricide, Fathering, and Self-Fathering as a Character***

If we look at the event from a slightly different, not psychoanalytic, point of view, we may get a different understanding of what happened and a slightly different "definition" of fathering. From a narratological perspective what happened can be described as an act of re/overwriting. The renaming/rewriting of the figure of the father overwrote Jack's story (history) and, as he describes it, radically altered the picture in his head about the world and also about the place he occupies in that world: "It is a story of a man who lived in the world and to him the world looked one way for a long time and then it looked another and very different way" (656). It overwrote not only his story but his understanding and perception of himself as well, and thus it overwrote/redrew his character in his story (history). These facts tell us, on the one hand, that the picture in his head

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<sup>60</sup> Willie's death by the hands of his "sons" is, from a psychoanalytic perspective, doubly motivated: partly by the horde's envy for the father's power and potency (Tiny Duffy) and their (Adam Stanton's) "incestuous rage" (Szalay 349) following a Freudian logic, and partly by the need of the son's successful Oedipalization, following a Lacanian logic. Thus, interestingly enough, he needs to die because he is the Father (Freudian logic) and also to become a Father (Lacanian logic).

<sup>61</sup> The symbolic father "is also the dead father, the father of the primal horde who has been murdered by his own sons" (Evans 63).

about himself and the world was of a paternal origin and thus was due to his being a “Burden.” Moreover, they also provide us with an understanding of fathering from a narratological perspective: an act of (over)writing, (re)shaping the picture of the world in one’s head, (re)drawing one’s character in one’s own story (history), providing oneself with a (new) subject position. This new understanding of fathering takes us very far from being able to put an end to the story of fathering, since the fathering considered above (Jack’s) is only one of its kind in the novel.

In the next part of the chapter I will set out to “dig up” the rest of the attempts at fathering, perhaps to find, according to the logic of the narrative, that the “knowledge” I “dig up” makes the story of fathering, which “looked one way for a long time,” look “another and very different way.”

To reveal the first fathering, we need to go further back in the storyline than the Case of the Upright Judge, further than Willie’s ordering Jack to “dig up whatever it is on the Judge,” even further than his being able to order anybody around, and thus further than he became the Boss. Willie Stark, then “Cousin Willie from the country” (470) or “the *Boy* with the Christmas tie” (490, emphasis added), shows no resemblance whatsoever to the Boss when Jack first encounters him: “Alex came in with a fellow with him . . . he had the Boss with him. Only it was not the Boss. Not to the crude eye of the *home sensuel*” (20).

Like Jack, he also starts out in the state of not knowing, as the appearing foetus imagery suggests. However, the image in his case is somewhat different from Jack’s “clammy, sad little foetus,” which “wants to lie in the dark and not know, and be warm in its not-knowing” (14). The “thing” in Willie is big and in motion towards somewhere: “He would lie there and shiver in the dark. . . . and inside him something would be big and coiling slow and clotting” (42). The



movement from the darkness of not knowing features prominently not only “inside,” but outside as well. He has an immense thirst for knowledge: “‘Gee, back in those days I figured those fellows who wrote the books knew all there was. And I figured I was going to get me a chunk of it.’ . . . He had been going to get a chunk of all there was” (101). As the source of knowledge, he identifies “those fellows who wrote the books” and “the great names” (100): “Emerson and Macaulay and Benjamin Franklin and Shakespeare” (100); in other words, the fathers of our patriarchal, western culture and civilization. He expected that by literally copying them<sup>62</sup> and memorizing “every durn word” (100) he would obtain the knowledge he desired. The “chunk” that he finally ends up getting consists of law (ideas/rules of the fathers), the history of the country (deeds of the fathers), and a collection of “fine sayings and ideas” of the “great names” (words of the fathers). However, these do not get him any closer to *knowing*. Moreover, in perfect accordance with the logic of patriarchal order, it is exactly the knowledge and ideals acquired from the fathers that keep him in his caul of not-knowing. His “fine sentiments” (104) and “his notion of a high destiny” (106) blind him and make him unable to see what is going on around him, how he is being used and abused through his naivety and (paternal) ideals. He cannot see through<sup>63</sup> what he is presented as the truth: “that he was the savior of the state” (99), since that was exactly what he has aspired to be all his life, the ideal he had in mind.

His birth into knowledge happens when he gets robbed of his “notion of high destiny” (106), when his caul of ideas and ideals gets ruptured, when it is revealed to him that the world outside does not function in total accordance with the fine thoughts and the highly “paternal” picture in his head. And Jack plays a major role in that. He “destroys Willie’s sense of innocence,

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<sup>62</sup> “. . . he had a notebook, a big cloth-bound ledger, in which he wrote the fine sayings and the fine ideas he got out of the books . . . quotations from copied out in ragged, *boyish* hand” (100, emphasis added).

<sup>63</sup> He is not able to see the “nature of things,” the web of connections. “He couldn’t figure out what was wrong” (107).

decreates him into manhood” (Baumbach 67). He is not alone in this “parenting,” since Sadie Burke takes on the role of the mother to Willie’s (re)birth (Girault 39). The two of them together create and catalyze Willie the Boss from the raw materials of “Cousin Willie from the country” (Baumbach 66).

Hence, we might say that the caul Jack ruptures is not a maternal one, but is quite obviously of a paternal descent, woven from the words, thoughts, and rules of the fathers. By rupturing the caul, Jack causes Willie to get born into knowledge, gives him a new life, a new existence; in other words, he fathers Willie the Boss. However, the fathering move is also a destructive, patricidal one, since he destroys the paternal ideas and picture Willie had in mind and replaces it with a new one. It is also an act of rewriting/overwriting, since he replaces the paternal meta-narrative in Willie’s head with a new narrative.

This is, however, not his only act of this kind. “Digging up the truth” about the Judge’s “single act of dishonesty,” which also triggers Governor Stanton’s impairing “his honor to protect him [the Judge]” (524), and revealing the “truth” about their father to Anne and Adam Stanton, he does exactly the same thing. He, in his own words, sets out to “change the picture of the world inside his [Adam’s] head” (371), which is a picture that he inherited from his father and his forefathers. As Jack himself states, Adam has a certain view of the world

*because he is Adam Stanton, the son of Governor Stanton and the grandson of Judge Peyton Stanton and the great-grandson of General Morgan Stanton, and he has lived all his life in the idea that there was a time a long time back when everything was run by high-minded, handsome men wearing knee breeches and silver buckles or Continental blue or frock coats, or even buckskin and coonskin*

caps . . . who sat around a table and candidly debated the good of the public thing.

It is because he is a romantic, and he has a picture of the world in his head, and when the world doesn't conform in any respect to the picture, he wants to throw the world away. (370, emphasis added)

Changing the picture means overwriting the paternal meta-narrative in this case as well, which has gone from General Morgan Stanton to Judge Peyton Stanton, from Judge Peyton Stanton to Governor Stanton, and from Governor Stanton to Adam Stanton. By giving Adam and Anne a "history lesson" (372), he overwrites history or rather *His* (the father's) story as they knew it. He shatters Adam's ideas by shattering his ideal(s), by shattering the image of the father. Putting it in other words, he kills the father as they knew him (who besides being a real father also functioned as an ideal, imaginary father for Adam) and demolishes the Stanton patrimony (the picture of the world they inherited from their father). As a result Adam turns to bitterly reject his father, his heritage, and the position that name and that legacy provided him and accepts the new position offered to him in the order by a new "father."<sup>64</sup> Thus, by changing/destroying the image of the father in the son's head, Jack commits a symbolic/figurative patricide, and by causing Adam to get born into knowledge and occupy a new position in the order, he also takes over the role of the "murdered" father.

Moreover, if we have another look at the "Case of the Upright Judge," we can notice the very same pattern there as well. In that situation Jack is endeavoring to do pretty much the same thing as in Adam's case: change the picture of the world in the Judge's head. It is also the picture

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<sup>64</sup> Willie does call him from the beginning of their acquaintance by filial names: "See, *boy*, it's not as bad as you thought, it won't kill you" (383, emphasis added). "There are lots of ways to get votes, *son*" (384, emphasis added). "I might fire you, *boy*, but I won't interfere" (384, emphasis added). "You're *a great boy*, Doc," (390, emphasis added).

of the father that he is trying to change: the picture the father has of himself, and the picture people have of him. “You aren’t dead, and you live in the world and people *think that you are a certain kind of man*. You aren’t the kind of man who could bear for them to think different” (522, emphasis added). Changing the picture is equivalent to destroying the image in this case as well. The Judge would like to see himself as somebody who has “done right,” who has done his duty (522). However, by tossing the one single piece of “truth” which does not fit the picture<sup>65</sup> under the Judge’s nose, Jack causes the picture of the father (his father) to burst.

Changing the picture happens through “giving a history lesson” in this case as well; through reminding the Judge of a certain incident in the past (in *his story*) about which he has already forgotten.

“Mortimer L. Littlepauqh,” I said, “don’t you remember?”

The flesh of the forehead drew more positively together to make the deep vertical mark like a cranky exclamation point between the heavy rust-colored eyebrows.

“No,” he said, and shook his head, “I don’t remember.”

And he didn’t. I was sure he didn’t. He didn’t even remember Mortimer L. Littlepauqh. (519)

In all of these cases, by destroying the images of fathers Jack commits patricides on a symbolic/figurative level. However, if we have a look at the casual connections in the plot, we can notice that these are not the only patricides he is responsible for. He seems to be highly blamable not only for figurative, but quite literal ones as well. It is he who, reminding the Judge of his “single act of dishonesty” (524), “puts the pistol to his heart” (533), and it is also him who

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<sup>65</sup> The evidence that the Judge took a bribe once to save his estate (which is nothing but Jack’s patrimony).

by revealing the same piece of truth to Adam and Anne sends the “two little spurs of pale-orange flame” (597) on their way to Willie’s chest.<sup>66</sup> Thus, digging up the truth, he kills two fathers “with one stone.”

Michael Szalay puts forward a rather thought-provoking claim concerning Willie’s murder by Adam, which is highly relevant for the dissertation. According to him, “when Adam Stanton discovers that his sister has been with Willie Stark and then shoots Stark dead on the steps of the State Capitol, we see the ghost of Henry Sutpen from *Absalom, Absalom!* shooting down Charles Bon at the gates of Sutpen’s Hundred,” as “Stark presents a racially coded threat to the kinship group that once ruled the state.” (368) In other words, his assassination is “something like a racial crime, a murder of the dangerously excessive but politically empowering emotion and affect that Warren long associated with liberal responses to the South” (368). I find the link he establishes between the two novels very interesting and regret that the scope of the dissertation does not allow me to investigate it in more details.

However, he has another claim in connection with Willie’s murder that I cannot accept as it is. He argues that Jack only “imagines himself having killed Stark” and his fantasy is that “his own adolescent sexual repression [his failure to have sex with Ann when they were teenagers] causes Stark’s eventual assassination” (349), as Jack and Anne slowly drift apart after the bedroom incident and years later, Anne becomes Stark’s lover. When Anne’s brother discovers the liaison, he kills Stark (349). It is true that Jack also blames himself and states that “somehow by an obscure and necessary logic I had handed her over to him” (467). However, the logic is not

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<sup>66</sup> After Anne gets to know that Governor Stanton was not as noble and truthful as she thought him to be, she becomes the mistress of Willie Stark: “Then you told me—you told me about my father. There wasn’t any reason why not then. After you told me” (489). And it is the knowledge of her sister’s love affair with Willie and his refusal to “be pimp to his sister’s whore” (588) which pulls the trigger in Adam Stanton’s hand. Thus, “by an obscure and necessary logic” he handed over the love of his life to Willie (467) and with the very same act also set the murderous clock-work in motion.

necessarily the one that Szalay outlines, as he skips a crucial detail, in my view, exactly the one that leaves Jack highly blamable for both Judge Irwin's and Willie Stark's deaths. Adam would not find out about his sister's affair with Stark, moreover, there would be nothing to find out about if it were not for Jack's digging up the truth about Judge Irwin and Governor Stanton's "single act of dishonesty" and his revealing it to Ann: "Then you told me—you told me about my father. There wasn't any reason why not then. After you told me" (Warren 489). The quote illustrates that Jack himself provided the final impetus to Ann but it was not his teenage impotence but his "history lesson." Thus, in my view, Jack has a crucial role in Willie's murder and his filial guilt is not the result of a fantasy but a literal (though indirect) patricide.

All the aforementioned acts can be seen as patricides, as they destroy a father/fathers in one way or another. However, from another perspective they can be interpreted as acts of fathering as well. As Norton R. Girault observes, in the case of Judge Irwin, "he [Jack] has also created a father, for it requires the violence of the suicide to wring from his mother . . . the long suppressed information" (61). In my view, besides this, all patricides committed by Jack can be interpreted as acts of fathering in another sense as well, since they intrude the subjects' (Adam's, Judge Irwin's, Willie's) ideal, imaginary creation of a world, rupture the protective caul of dreams and illusions, and make them get born into knowledge.

To support the notion of "getting born into knowledge," all three cases resonate with and call into mind Jack's fetus fantasy. However, the image appearing in them is a reverse image/mirror image of the original: it is not Jack who is featured as the fetus destined to get born into knowledge but Willie, Adam, and the Judge. Jack takes the "Other" position in the fantasy: he is the holder of knowledge; like the eye, he "knows what's in the envelope" and is watching Adam and the Judge to see when they open it and know, too (Warren 13). He takes up not only

the role of the eye, but also that of the “hand in a cold rubber glove” (13), since he is the one who obstetricates at their “births into knowledge,” playing an active role in their “fathering.” Moreover, in neither of the cases does he say a word, but his eyes and his hands “do the job.” This is especially prominent during the incident with the Judge:

I stepped to the chair which I had occupied and leaned down *to pick up the manila envelope on the floor* beside it. Then I moved to his chair, and *laid the envelope in his lap*. . . . I took *my gaze* from his face and *directed it to the papers* on his lap. He saw me do that, and looked down, too. The words stopped, and his fingers touched the papers, tentatively as though to verify their reality. Quite slowly he raised his eyes back to me. “You’re right,” he said. “I did this, too.” (520, 522, emphases added).

This different point of view, and all the aforementioned “cases” which that point of view has enabled us to “dig up,” do seem to make the story of fathering look “another and very different way”; in other words, they seem to redraw the picture we so far had in mind about fathers and fathering in the novel, turning the duel of fathers into a “trial.”

They also provide us with a new understanding of fathering: From these events it seems that an act of fathering is, by nature, an act of patricide as well. They seem to be each other’s mutual premises, two inseparable sides of the same coin.

Overwriting the paternal narrative, destroying the figure of the father, one not only commits a patricide but also inscribes oneself into the paternal position, taking over the position of the father through (over-)writing. Thus, an act of fathering seems to be not only the birth of the

subject into knowledge, into “connaissance,” but it is also the birth of the father as such. Thus, it is also a “co-naissance,” a double birth. Moreover, following this logic, every act of fathering is by nature an act of self-fathering as well. I am going to deal with the question of self-fathering through writing or story-telling and the actual figures it takes in the novel in detail in the next part of the chapter.

The psychoanalytic and the more narratological reading of the plot or *histoire*, according to Gérard Genette, or *fabula*, in Mieke Bal’s term (Herman and Vervaeck 45), seem to overlap at certain points. Oedipalization, suffering castration, and entering the symbolic order mark one’s birth as a subject, a subject to the Law of the father, the symbolic order. Having one’s story (over-)written also turns one into a subject in more than one sense. First, since according to common understanding a subject is a “syntactic element . . . representing someone or something of which something is said or predicated” (Matthews), saying or predicating something about somebody, by definition, turns somebody into a subject. What is more, the subject of the predication (story) is subjected to the storyteller’s, narrator’s, predication and has no authority over the story s/he is written into; thus, s/he is also subjected to the law or order of the other’s story, who through the subjection also turns into an Other in the Lacanian sense.

### ***Jack Burden’s Acts of Patricide, Fathering, and Self-Fathering as a Narrator***

The plot is not the only area of the text where patricide, fathering, and self-fathering feature side by side and get inseparably entangled, one becoming the means of the other. As we have seen, Jack is the source of all the intentional and unintentional, literal and figurative patricides in the plot. However, his action can be interpreted as highly patricidal (and “paternal”) on the level of the narrative, *récit* (Genette), or story (Bal) (Herman and Vervaeck 45), as well. Since he is the



narrator (narrative agent) of the story, it is he who inscribes all the father murders into the narrative. He is the one who through telling/writing the story of multiple patricides “makes them happen,” who commits them on a textual level. Now let us have a look at how this exactly happens, what the steps are that he takes and the means that he uses.

His narrative starts with a flash forward, a prolepsis. The first chapter picks out a crucial piece of the story: the actions which lead to Jack’s getting the assignment to dig up the truth on the Judge, which ultimately leads to all the major events of the story and to all the patricides. However, after the recollection of that has been completed, the reader gets another flash forward, to have a glimpse of the effects the completion of the assignment brought about, a glimpse of the situation at the time of the narration:

And Adam Stanton is dead now, too, who used to go fishing with me and who lay in the hot sunshine with me and with Anne Stanton. And Judge Irwin is dead, who leaned toward me among the stems of the tall gray marsh grass, in the gray damp wintry dawn, and said, “You ought to have led that duck more, Jack. You got to lead a duck, son.” And the Boss is dead, who said to me, “And made it stick.” Little Jackie made it stick, all right. (Warren 75)

The passage calls to mind the enumerations found in heroic poems before the action (the battle) starts. However, instead of reviewing the two opposing forces before the battle takes place, we review the “two opposing forces” after the “battle.” On one side we can see the ones slain, on the other we see “little Jackie,” who “made it stick,” and is in the best of health. The passage, besides giving the impression of there being two sides—that of those surviving, and that of those already

dead—also sets up a causal connection between the two. By sticking the sentence “Little Jackie made it stick, all right” at the end of the passage, Jack points at himself as the one answerable for the actions mentioned beforehand. In other words, he positions himself as a patricide.<sup>67</sup> What is more, he not only posits himself as a patricide, but also commits the given patricidal acts on the level of the narrative, since what he does in the passage is nothing but verbally killing off the fathers before starting the rest of the narrative. This act can ring a bell from *Absalom, Absalom!*, too, since Shreve and Quentin do exactly the same thing before getting started with their narration.<sup>68</sup> It seems as if the murder of the father was the prerequisite of the son’s narration. Jack is not able to tell his story either as long as the fathers are alive, as long as they are watching over the narrative.

However, (father) murder is only one side of the coin even on the narrative level, since by telling the story of the fathers he also “calls them into textual existence” and thus “fathers” them. The characters as we know them are his creations, his “offspring,” as is the narrative. Writing, his hands give birth to the narrative, like the hands in the robber gloves in the foetus imagery. He not only functions as the hand, but also as the eye, since we get to know everything from his point of view; besides being the first person, dramatized narrator, he is the focalizer as well. We see as much as he sees, we understand as much as he understands from the events in retrospect.

If we make the same move in the case of “history” as well and go back to the very first instances narrated, which starts out with the lack of a/the father, we can also realize that the figure of Ellis Burden as an impotent failure of a man is also his creation. He does not know what his father’s reason for leaving was, but claims that it came about because Ellis Burden was unable to

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<sup>67</sup> It is also noteworthy that the verb he uses, “stick,” also means “to pierce, puncture, or penetrate with a pointed instrument” or “to kill by piercing” (“Stick”).

<sup>68</sup> For more on this topic, see the chapter entitled “Narrative Short-circuits in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*”

“give her [the mother] what she craved” (62). Thus, the lack of the father is written into the narrative and perhaps into the figure of the father as well, by him. It may well be him who delivers that castrating cut to the father, fathering the lack to be filled and trying to fill it at the same time.

Writing stories of patricides is not his only attempt at narrative father-murder and taking over the paternal position through (re)writing. As we have already seen and examined in another context, he overwrites all the patronyms in the narrative as well. None of the fathers is spared. All of them lose their names and acquire a new ironic/parodic one: the Scholarly Attorney, the Upright Judge, the Young Executive. Through renaming the fathers, he robs them of their names, the Name of the Father. Robbing them of their names functions like an act of symbolic castration or murder, since through the act of renaming, he deprives them of their authority and their paternal function. They cease to function as figures of the Law (if they ever managed to do so), since “[i]t is in the *name of the father* that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law” (Lacan, *Écrits* 67).

Canceling out the names of the fathers and renaming them is also a two-fold act, since it can be read as an act of patricide as well as an act of fathering (naming is the privilege of the father in psychoanalysis; it is the father who, by naming the child, assigns a subject position to him in the symbolic order). Through renaming the fathers, Jack also assigns new (ironic/parodic) subject positions for them in the order of the narrative. If we consider these acts of renaming to be parodic, it also emphasizes their twofold patricidal and fathering nature since, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, parody has a “potential power both to bury the dead . . . and also to give it new life” (101).

Writing the story of the fathers and their murders and placing himself in the position of the creator and name-giver are also endeavors of narrative self-fathering, self-begetting on Jack's part. However, there is an even more evident attempt than the ones just mentioned. As he is one of the characters in the story, he himself as we know him is also his creation, his begetting. The story besides being "the story of Willie Stark" and the fathers, as he himself states, is also *his story*: ". . . it is *my story*, too. For *I have a story*" (Warren 656, emphasis added). Thus, he is also writing his own story, which is a story about his initiation into the world, his Bildungsroman: "It is the story of a man who lived in the world and to him the world looked one way for a long time and then it looked another and very different way" (656). In the beginning of the novel he starts out rendered impotent and paralyzed in his action by his paternal legacy and abandonment. He is unable and also refuses to engage in anything, to take action, to make a change in the world. He is hiding from the present and takes refuge in the past. However, at the end of the story we see somebody who is ready to act, get engaged (literally as well as figuratively), and take responsibility for his actions and others. As the last sentence of the novel reveals, he is ready to "go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history [also *his story*] and the awful responsibility of Time" (661).

If we take into consideration that he as a narrator is supposed to be him as a character after all the events of the plot have taken place, after his Bildung, we get another perspective of the narrative and his Bildung; moreover, we can check if his narrative supports/verifies the picture of Bildung drawn in the plot.

He as a narrator makes all the choices that he as a character is paralyzed to. The text that we are holding in our hands is his narrative, his "writing," perhaps the one he is working on at the end of the plot, since it also includes the full story of Cass Mastern. Thus, it does function as

proof, showing that he has finally managed to get over the block (of not-knowing or not-understanding) that kept him from writing. As we have already seen in the close-reading of the “patricidal passage,” he as a narrator seems to be taking responsibility for his actions as a character, which is in opposition to his pattern of behavior as a character almost throughout the entire plot. Moreover, with the enumeration of the dead, he also sets up a teleological structure for the narrative and does follow it to the end, with which, as we have seen earlier, he as a character has great difficulties.

Taking a look at his “writing” itself—namely, the rhetorical structure of his narrative—we can also notice that the language he uses is highly metaphorical. His style, as Jerome Meckier also observes, “has a density per page of similes and metaphors unequaled elsewhere in modern prose fiction narrative. (This becomes even less debatable if one counts what might be called hidden or subdued similes—the use of such phrases as ‘the kind of,’ ‘the way that,’ and ‘as though’)” (71). His narrative style thus creates the impression of unity and interconnectedness through selection. As Mackier puts it, “any one fact or idea” in his narrative “leads to an almost infinite series of related facts and ideas” (72) creating a web of connections. Thus, we might say that his narration seems to be “acting out,” or putting into practice the understanding he finally arrives at, the knowledge he finally learns to embrace in the plot: that “the world is all of one piece,” that it “is like an enormous spider web” (Warren 283).

His narrative seems to support the *Bildung* drawn in the plot. Therefore, we can state that the narrative itself, as we have seen, is an attempt at self-fathering. On the other hand, it is also a tribute to its success.

Or is it not?

According to Michael Szalay, Jack’s (imagined) murder of the father and the arising filial

guilt function in his life exactly the same as described by Freud in his *Totem and Taboo*: “when a band of sons within a clan kills this figure and then, instead of granting themselves the liberties he once enjoyed, succumb to guilt and reproduce his fundamental prohibitions in still more severe fashion” (347). In his view for example, Jack’s “[t]aking Anne is less an assertion of filial autonomy than an obedient gesture to just his paternal responsibility” (349). Moreover, he goes as far as stating that Jack’s attachment to Anne is “the principal occasion for enshrining in permanent form ‘the curse of Jack Burden’—his crippling guilt for Willie Stark and Adam Stanton’s deaths” (349). He also comes to similar conclusions concerning Jack’s narrative: “[t]he lugubrious, elegiac meditation on Stark’s life that is Burden’s narrative likewise accomplishes this same turn. . . . [The] self-flagellating, memorializing bent assures us that Burden will execute all of his subsequent actions, both private and public, with Stark always in view” (349).

The doubt concerning Jack’s success rightly arises. If we take a closer look, his achievement at the end of his *Bildung*, all the evidence of the success of his self-fathering, highly resemble those phenomena which signal the “normal” functioning of the paternal order (the emergence of meaning-making through the working of metaphors; the working of structures built on the Logos such as causality and the emergence of moral conscience and responsibility; the substitution of the mother for another woman).

Does this signify the success or the failure of his self-fathering? Does this mean that he ends up in the very same patriarchal pattern, just taking a different route?

Nevertheless, it seems that the writing and over-writing that he uses as a means of self-fathering inscribes him back into the “order,” which, from a Derridian perspective, is not surprising at all. According to Derrida, writing is by definition patricidal, since it writes *différance* into the Logos, the presence of meaning. There is always an unpredictable element in writing, the

possibility of difference. There is always the chance that what you meant to write ends up meaning something else, that instead of the destination planned, writing takes you somewhere else.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Reading the novel from a psychoanalytic and a narratological perspective has given us two different, perhaps at first sight hardly reconcilable, readings about fathering and father figures in the novel. Moreover, neither of the readings provided us with a univocal, irrefutable answer to the question of fathering. Shall we consider this a failure or a success? From my own perspective, I do consider it a success and the understanding that we can draw from it very valuable: Perhaps the most important insight that the novel and our readings of it can give us on fathering is that the story of fathering is by definition “polyphonic.” Jack also comes to the same conclusion in the end of the novel: “Does he [Ellis Burden] think that I am his son? I cannot be sure. Nor can I feel that it matters, for each of us is the son of a million fathers” (658).

The other lesson that we can learn from the novel is that there is no such thing as a “true father.” From the plot it seems that a “true” (meaning: an “upright,” “lawful,” or “unfailing”) father is only a myth, a paternal narrative which is, perhaps, always already destined to be written over. From our reading of the novel, we can also come to the conclusion that a “true” father/Father (meaning a “proper” one who “functions accurately”) is also a myth of the order, as is probably the proper functioning of the order. As Nietzsche says: “truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions” (“On Truth” 359).

## CHAPTER 5

### QUEST FOR THE SON IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S *THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY*

Flannery O'Connor earned her place quite distinctively, as the orphan adolescent is one of the most frequently appearing character types in her brand of fiction (Brittain 49). Francis Marion Tarwater, the protagonist of her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, is such an orphan adolescent.

In the following chapter, I follow this orphan adolescent's quest for freedom and "self-possession" against (paternal) control. Whilst it is generally agreed that the plot revolves around his spiritual and physical journey, critics tend to have very different opinions concerning the direction/destination and success of it. Suzanne Morrow Paulson claims that the novel is Tarwater's "odyssey toward madness" (21), Marshall Bruce Gentry views it as his quest for prophethood (147), while, according to Robert Donahoo, it is his march toward the feminine (102). Some critics interpret the novel as his *Bildungsroman* (Buzan 33) or initiation story (Orvell 98).

According to Carol Y. Wilson, the novel "presents one of the most complex family structures in O'Connor's works" (78), and the "whole question of the novel is asked in terms of family" (Wilson 77). However, in spite of the fact that Wilson's claim is true, the phrase "complex family structure" is somewhat ironic, as even the term "family" is only partially valid, since the "family" appearing in O'Connor's novel is not a family in the everyday sense of the word. There are no mother figures or women present; all three central characters are male: the great-uncle, the uncle, and the boy.



I concur with Wilson that the novel's plot revolves around a single question that actually is given voice in the novel by the lady in Cherokee Lodge: "Whose boy are you?" As Wilson argues, "[t]he novel can be seen as Tarwater's attempt to answer this question familially and universally" (78). Nevertheless, in spite of pointing out the centrality of this question to the novel, Wilson does not make an attempt to answer it. In her essay entitled "Family as Affliction, Family as Promise in *The Violent Bear It Away*," she examines the concept of family in the novel and states that "it is essential to the meaning of the novel, and it is founded on a reluctant sense of responsibility" (78). However, the concept itself remains rather unclear throughout the text. She states that "[f]or Tarwater the family is the old man's words become flesh, and the apocalypse comes by way of this family, history behind history, an unbroken line extending back into the past to Adam and forward into revelation" (78). In spite of this, in the conclusion, she claims that "Tarwater has grown, out of the convolutions of family, from child to boy to man; he has grown into the old man's future" (84). I sense an insoluble contradiction between the two statements, which, for me, greatly damages the rather thought-provoking essay.

In my view, all the conflicts of the novel arise from the fact that the characters of the "trinity" come up with very different answers to the same question mentioned above. Everybody, including Tarwater himself, tries to "have" the boy, occupy the position of the father/Father, and establish control over him. Thus, the novel can be regarded as a quest story from the point of view of all three characters, and, interestingly enough, the quests overlap and the goals are the same: to achieve control over the boy and his future, to fill the position of the Father. Tarwater himself aspires for the same. He wants to have/father "himself," to gain control over his own self, life, and future. Thus, in a way I agree with Wilson's above claim. The novel can be seen as Tarwater's

attempt to answer the question of his “ownership,” but not in the sense of finding the answer to the question but in giving his answer in a way that everybody understands it once and for all.

In the present chapter, I am going to focus on these three quests for the son’s possession and the role of the father. More precisely, I am going to explore what forms they take, how they relate to each other, and what results they bring. Doing so, I am going to make use of the insights of Lacan’s concept of the gaze, and Austin’s speech act theory, approaches that are strikingly absent from the novel’s history of reception. The only Freudian and Lacanian reading of Flannery O’Connor’s works is James M. Mellard’s essay entitled “Flannery O’Connor’s Others: Freud, Lacan, and the Unconscious.” Nevertheless, instead of dealing with O’Connor’s fictions in his essay, Mellard psychoanalyzes the writer herself, thus engages in a practice very far from my own.

### **5.1. The Orphaned Bastard**

Tarwater is born out of wedlock, as a bastard, without a lawful father. He is born “in a wreck” (O’Connor 41), at the scene of the car accident after which his mother, “unmarried and shameless” (41), lived just long enough for him to be born. After the calamity, his father, “a prey to morbid guilt” (99), also killed himself, leaving behind the child as an orphan bastard. His father’s name is actually never revealed in the novel, signaling that he did not exist as a Father. Not bearing a name, he is unable to give a name and a subject position to the child either. Born into the total lack of the father, the child is nobody, with no name, who does not belong anywhere.

## 5.2. Self-Appointed Saviors

The empty position of the father, like that of Ellis Burden in *All the King's Men*, does not remain unfilled too long as there are more self-appointed fathers to occupy it. As soon as Tarwater is born and loses his family, a duel breaks out between his uncle and great-uncle, who start fighting over him. Both of them, childless at that time, want to snatch away the boy from the other and raise and educate him according to their own ideas. Both of them want to “save” or “rescue” him from the other to make him “free” according to their own concepts: “‘*I saved you to be free*, your own self!’ he [old Tarwtater] had shouted, ‘and not a piece of information inside his head!’” (17, emphasis added). Rayber: “This one is going to be brought up to expect exactly what he can do for himself. He’s going to be his own saviour. *He’s going to be free*” (70, emphasis added).

Freedom for the old man means “the freedom of the Lord Jesus Christ” (77), while for Rayber it means the exact opposite: freedom from the Lord Jesus Christ. The old man is a self-appointed, fanatic representative of God, who reckons himself a prophet; Rayber is the representative of science, rationalism, and logic in the novel with a sharply analytical mind.

The dual fathers’ highly farcical duel ends with the old man’s “acting”: his stealing the child out of Rayber’s house and “protecting” his newly acquired heir and disciple with a gun when Rayber tries to get him back.

### ***Old Mason Tarwater: A Job of Construction***

Thus, we might say, the duel over the child gets decided through violence, and “the violent [the great uncle] bear it [the baby] away.” The old man takes the position of the father and through his very first action he also establishes himself as one: Baptizing Tarwater he becomes father to his rebirth. Since in the rite of baptism, as we can read in the Bible and at several points in the novel

as well, the person baptized is born again “of water and the Spirit” (*ESV Bible*, John 3.6) to a new “everlasting life” (O’Connor 109): “He’s been born again and there ain’t a thing you can do about it” (72). Baptizing him, the old man also provides him with another father (Father), since those who are baptized all become “sons of God”: “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (*ESV Bible*, Gal. 3.26). Thus, he inscribes him not only into his “family,” his patri(lineage), but that of God as well.

Being baptized by the old man, however, entails being inscribed into one more line of descent as well, another (patri)lineage: the line of prophets. Inserting him into this line of substitution is, in fact, the main motivation behind the old man’s action: “It was because, his uncle said, the Lord meant him to be trained as a prophet, even though he was a bastard, and to take his great-uncle’s place when he died. The old man compared their situation to that of Elijah and Elisha” (O’Connor 41). Kidnapping and raising the boy to “expect the Lord’s call himself” (5), he attempts to secure the line of substitution and ensure that the tasks he leaves behind are going to be completed.

Both the act of baptism and his insertion into the “prophetic lineage” “write” him into stories/narratives which are paternal by definition: He is born again through a father, not of a mother, and gets initiated into a highly patriarchal lineage in which knowledge is handed down from “father” to “son,” from master to disciple. Moreover, both narratives are “prefabricated”: all the main points in the narrative are set, including the end. Being baptized, he is born again to be saved. He is “trained by a prophet for prophesy” (17), to walk in the shadow of Jesus and “warn the children of God of the terrible speed of mercy” (242), “lost forever to his own inclinations” (221).

The old man functions as a symbolic father in a Lacanian sense, too, since he gives Tarwater his name and thus his subject position as well. He also functions as a symbolic father on other levels because he makes him enter language and teaches him “Figures, Reading, Writing, and History” (4), in other words, all the pillars of one’s symbolic existence. His uncle is the source of history<sup>69</sup> and his-story (his history) as well: “He knew two complete histories, the history of the world, beginning with Adam, and the history of the schoolteacher, beginning with his mother. . . . At least once a week, beginning at the beginning, the old man had reviewed this history through the end” (57).

The uncle was the source of everything, all the knowledge and information for Tarwater. He knows everything from and through him, even the most basic information about himself, like his age and their familial connection: “The old man had been Tarwater’s great-uncle, or said he was” (3). “His uncle had said he was seventy years of age at the time he had *rescued* and undertaken to bring him up; he was eighty-four when he died. Tarwater figured this made his own age fourteen” (4).

His knowing everything and everybody through the old man’s narrative<sup>70</sup> also means that the world as he knows it (his world) came into existence through the old man’s words, or, as Wilson puts it, “[f]or Tarwater the family is the old man’s words become flesh” (78). Bringing everything into existence for Tarwater through his words, the old man does function like a father, a creator. His narrative is a paternal master-narrative by definition: he is the one who creates and makes sense of everything for him.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> History is quite obviously *his* story in the uncle’s version, the story of a patrilineage starting with Adam (Eve is mentioned nowhere) expelled “from the Garden and going on down through the presidents to Herbert Hoover” (4).

<sup>70</sup> “My great-uncle learnt me everything” (79).

<sup>71</sup> I will discuss the creative power of the old man’s words and speech in more details in the section intended for the words of the father/Father.

Raising the boy to be a prophet, the old man inscribes him not only into a storyline and a line of descent, but also into the linearity of a quest structure. Before he dies, he leaves him two tasks to perform: 1. to bury him and mark his grave with a cross, “the sign of its Saviour” (3), and 2. to baptize Bishop, the idiot son of his uncle: “‘If by the time I die,’ he said to Tarwater, ‘I haven’t got him baptized, it’ll be up to you. It’ll be the first mission the Lord sends you’” (9). He does die without managing to baptize Bishop, thus leaving behind both quests to be pursued and his paternal narrative to be followed. His master-narrative, his speech acts, and his gaze<sup>72</sup> ensure his haunting “presence” in his absence. “He began to run, forced on through the woods by *two bulging silver eyes* that grew in immense astonishment in the center of the fire behind him. He could hear it moving up through the black night like a whirling chariot” (50). The whirling chariot of fire is an allusion to the prophet Elijah, he is “taken up to heaven by a whirlwind, while horses and chariots of fire interpose between Elijah and his chosen successor, Elisha” (*Eerdmans*). According to the old man, the story of himself and the boy was the same as that of Elijah and Elisha. Thus, according to the master(’s) narrative, it is time for the boy to take the legacy of the father and “begin the life his great-uncle had prepared him for” (91).

### ***Rayber: A Job of Re-Construction***

With the old man’s death, the place of the father becomes empty again, and the possibility seemingly opens up for others. As soon as old Tarwater dies and Rayber learns about it, he immediately wants to occupy the seemingly empty position of the father. The very first sentence he utters after he learns about the old man’s death from Tarwater actually reveals that he takes it for granted that the position is there for him to fill. More precisely, he immediately considers himself filling it: “*Now you belong to someone* who can help you and understand you.’ His eyes

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<sup>72</sup> “His eyes, dead silver, were focused on the boy across him” (11).

were alight with pleasure. ‘It’s not too late for me to make a man of you’” (90, emphasis added). He instantly assumes possession of Tarwater as if the boy were a “paternal” inheritance righteously his after the old man, like the house in Powderhead. He was immediately convinced that “at last *he had a son*” (201). His emphatically claimed understanding<sup>73</sup> is also a means to establish belonging/possessing; it is an attempt to “achieve a grasp” (“Understand”), to attain mental control/hold of him (putting it in the old man’s words, to keep him locked up in his head). His bodily action expresses the same intention of grasping since “his hand tightened on the boy’s shoulder” (92).

His other intention expressed in his very first utterance is “to make a man” of him (90), to “remake” him into somebody else. He is well aware that the boy is the old man’s “construction,” and thus he wants to do “a monumental job of *reconstruction*” (97, emphasis added), or, rather, *re*-construction. He tries to over/re-write the old man’s master-narrative, to write Tarwater into a different paternal story.

He not only wants to make a man of him, meaning any kind of man, but he has a quite specific idea what “man” he wants to make of him: “He had realized with an intense stab of joy that his nephew looked enough like him *to be his son*” (98, emphasis added). In other words, like the old man, he also wants to enact a substitution, wants to write him into his “lineage” and substitute Tarwater for his idiot son, Bishop: “‘All the things that I would do for him—if it were any use—I’ll do for you,’ he said” (92).

The different steps of the making, or, rather, re-making, of Tarwater actually follow the steps the old man’s has taken. First Rayber attempts to occupy the position of the father and

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<sup>73</sup> “. . . you belong to someone who can . . . understand you” (90).

display “ownership”<sup>74</sup> over the boy through the-Name-of-the-Father, as the old man did, renaming Tarwater and bestowing a new patronym on him: “‘Listen, listen *Frankie*,’ he said, ‘you’re not alone any more. . . . ‘You have *a father*’” (106, emphasis added). “Rayber had written, ‘George F. Rayber, *Frank* and Bishop *Rayber*,’” (153, emphasis added). As Michael Ragussis points out in his *Acts of Naming*, “both the family name and the proper name form part of a system whose function is to determine and fix the child’s identity, to make the child serve the will of the family. . . . [W]hat is at stake in the naming process is no less than *an act of possession*” (7, emphasis added). Moreover, renaming would provide him with a new subject position, a new place in the (symbolic) order.

Educating him also functions as a means of “re-positioning” him in the symbolic: “I want you to be educated so that you can take your place as an intelligent man in the world” (110). Moreover, it is also an attempt at overwriting the knowledge the old man provided Tarwater with: “If there’s any way to be born again, it’s a way that you accomplish yourself, an understanding about yourself that you reach after a long time, perhaps a long effort. It’s nothing you get from above by spilling a little water and a few words” (194). He also retells him all “his-story” from his perspective.

Rayber, like the old man, has “a future,”<sup>75</sup> a narrative figured out for the boy, in which Tarwater, the “insignificant boy,” would gain “meaning,” a position in signification. His gazing “through the actual insignificant boy before him to an image of him that he held fully developed in his mind” (90) discloses that for Rayber, as well as for the old man, only the (paternal) narrative/image he has in mind matters.

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<sup>74</sup> “‘That boy there—is he yours too?’ she asked pointing the pen at him as if this were inconceivable. . . . ‘Certainly, *he’s mine* too,’ he said quickly and in a voice the boy could not fail to hear” (153, emphasis added).

<sup>75</sup> “. . . sitting by the side of the bed, thinking that at last *he had a son with a future*” (201, emphasis added).



As we have seen, he follows in the old man's footsteps, tries to re-construct every layer of the old man's creation. Not only is his action a re-construction/re-writing of the old man's, but his speech seems to be a re-construction of his as well. He tends to use the same words as the old man but in a different (secular) context: "You need to be *saved* right here now . . ." (174); "He's going to be *free*!" (70, emphasis added); "Rayber saw himself fleeing with the child to some enclosed garden where he would *teach her the truth*, where he would gather all the exploited children of the world and *let the sunshine flood their minds*" (133, emphasis added). "Come away with me! he silently implored, and *I'll teach you the truth, I'll save you*, beautiful child!" (134, emphasis added). These words and expressions illustrate that, in spite of all his claims, he does walk in the footsteps of the old man. He does act like a prophet, or a "fanatical country preacher" (174), who is a preacher of logos and reason. He behaves like an analyst, a scientist, and is supposed to be the counterpoint of the old man's mad Protestantism: he looks at everything from a rational point of view, takes everything apart in a scientific, analytic, investigation.<sup>76</sup> As John F. McCarthy puts it, "he is an expert in scientific testing" (1143). However, in my view, instead of being an expert, he is a parody (a "rewriting" himself) of a scientist, since he is unable to look or focus at anything for a longer period of time:

Anything he looked at too long could bring it on . . . . It could be a stick, or a stone, the line of a shadow, the absurd old man's walk of a starling crossing the sidewalk. If, without thinking, he lent himself to it, he would feel suddenly a morbid surge of the love that terrified him. . . . He didn't look at anything too long . . . (O'Connor 113-14)

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<sup>76</sup> "[I]n the schoolteacher's head, he would be laid out in parts and numbers" (18).

Thus, he is unable to see what is in front of him, either because he is not even able to look or because he sees something else: an image that he built up in his mind (as we have already seen in Tarwater's case). Another similar example is the incident between them after Rayber follows Tarwater to the church in the middle of the night and confronts him when the boy "flung himself out" of the door (135), fleeing from the shock he went through inside. This is the only time when Tarwater could be affected, when "the sight of Rayber seemed to afford him relief amount to rescue" (135), but "[Rayber] didn't see the boy's *expression*" (135, emphasis added) or *X*-pression, the twist in his "endeavor to move" ("Pression"), his motion towards the schoolteacher. "His rage *obliterated* all but the general lines of his figure . . ." (O'Connor 135, emphasis added). He sees something unrealistic again, an image he built up in his mind: "he saw them [his lines] moulded in an irreversible shape of defiance" (135). However, quite the contrary, this was the only time when "his lines" were reversible, when the defiance was gone for a short while, when his figure would actually have been "mouldable": He "*glared* into his face. Through his fury *he could not discern* that for the first time the boy's eyes were submissive" (136, emphasis added).

He is also the analyst of the novel. He analyzes everybody's behavior including his own: "He had analysed his case and closed it" (125). He also observes the old man for a long time and writes an article about him to a scholarly magazine, giving an analysis of him being one of the last remaining representatives of "the type . . . almost extinct" (75): "His fixation of being called by the Lord had its origin in insecurity. He needed assurance, and so he called himself" (19). He also has his own psychoanalytic theory about Tarwater: ". . . it was a compulsion" (146). Moreover, he also intends to "cure" him, applying something like a shock-therapy:

What he hoped for was that if seeing and feeling the place again were a real shock, the boy's trauma might suddenly be revealed. His irrational fears and impulses would burst out and his uncle—sympathetic, knowing, uniquely able to understand—would be there to explain them to him. (150)

However, he is also a parody of an analyst, since he is deaf, thus not able to “listen” to the “patient” and unable to notice and “read” any instances of “full speech.” His conviction of being “uniquely able to understand” (150) him and “read” him “like a book” (174) is very far from the truth. He misreads all the verbal or visual signs. For instance, he is convinced that Tarwater's ability to look Bishop in the eye is a sign of the boy's progress, a sign of cooperation, submission, or “yes” on his part:

I noticed that you've begun to be able to look Bishop in the eye. That's good. It means you're making progress but you needn't think that because you can look him in the eye now, you've saved yourself from what's preying on you. You haven't. The old man still has you in his grip. Don't think he hasn't. (192)

However, it is a sign of “NO,” signifying the total opposite of what Rayber assumed. It is not a sign of friendship, cooperation, even less submission, since he is able to look Bishop in the eye having made up his mind about drowning him. The misreading of the verbal “sign” mirrors that of the visual: he takes Tarwater's “I'll tend to him” (198) as a promise to look after the child, while he means the exact opposite of that. The verb “tend” is only used two other times in the novel, both instances in conversations between them and referring to his setting fire on his great-uncle:

“I tended to him” (106); “I done your work for you. I tended to him” (105). Therefore, he should have been aware what the term means in Tarwater’s dictionary. At another point Tarwater reveals his plans to him about drowning Bishop quite explicitly: “I can do something. I ain’t like you. All you can do is think what you would have done *if you had done it* [clearly referring to Rayber’s attempt at drowning Bishop]. Not me. *I can do it*” (196, emphasis added). In spite of taking great pride in being “uniquely able to understand him” (150), Rayber is not able to “read” a single word of his.

Taking all these into consideration, we can come to the conclusion that in spite of all his efforts, he can only become a parody (parodic re-writing) of the father, not being able to fill his position for a single moment. Even the boy is well aware that he is “of no significance” (160), that, in spite of all his efforts, he cannot “signify,” cannot function as a father/the Father. He only sees him as “a piece of bait, an insult to his intelligence” (160), presenting no hazard to him and his self-fathering inclinations.

However, as unconcerned as Tarwater’s mind is about Rayber and his attempts to control him, it is nevertheless engaged “in a continual struggle with the silence that confronted him, that demanded he baptize the child and begin at once the life the old man had prepared him for” (160).

After the old man dies, Tarwater continuously fights the silence, the absence of (the paternal) speech and narrative, which, however, is also present in its absence demanding him to “baptize the child.” Thus, the old man’s death does not necessarily lead to the boy’s freedom: he still has to fight for it, confront the old man’s presence (in his absence), and embark on “a monumental job of de-construction.”

### ***Tarwater: A Job of De-Construction***

As we have seen, the old man was the source of all knowledge for Tarwater—"My great-uncle learnt me everything" (79)—he knew the world and everything through him, even himself: "as long as his uncle had lived, he had been deprived of his own acquaintance" (35). Thus, his quest for "his own acquaintance," his exploration of himself and the world, his initiation into the world can only start when the uncle is dead. The first sentence of the narrative, therefore, renders the old Tarwater dead. His being dead is, actually, the first quality we learn about him. This is probably not accidental in this case either (as much as it is not in *Absalom, Absalom!* or in *All the King's Men*), since the story of the "son," his initiation and narrative, can only start with the death of the "father," as the following quote from the novel aptly illustrates: "[t]he boy knew he would have to bury the old man *before anything would begin*. It was as if there would have to be dirt over him before he would be thoroughly dead" (12, emphasis added).

This is the first time for him to do things his own way, as "[h]e had always followed his uncle's custom up to this date" (13). The first thing that he does "his own way," where he does not follow his great-uncle's words, is his not burying the old man who "raised up a boy to bury him, suitable to his own taste" (25). He not only fails to bury him "suitable to his own taste," but he does the direct opposite his great-uncle asked him to. Having the conviction that only those will rise who are buried "properly," the old man wanted to be buried ten feet deep in the ground with "the sign of his Saviour . . . over his head" (240). However, Tarwater, finally, going against his will, does what would have horrified the old man the most and is against his beliefs the most: he burns him (or at least he thinks he does), setting fire to the whole house, letting the wind scatter his ashes.

He takes pride in his action, in his ability to go against the old man's will and assert his independent existence and will through it: "*It was me put him away. I was drunk as a coot and I tended to him.*" He said it *as if he were recalling the most vivid point in his history*" (105-06, emphasis added). It actually is the most "vivid" or lively point of "his history" up until then, as this is the first time when he is alive as an entity/character with a separate life from his great-uncle. This is his first act on his own, independent, following his own decision. Before the old man's death, he lived his life in the old man's shadow never being able to make a single decision on his own. Burning his uncle becomes the first act of a self-definition or "self-fathering."

The task of burying him "in a decent and Christian way" (3) is one of the two "missions"/quests the old man leaves him as a paternal inheritance, the other being the task to baptize Bishop.<sup>77</sup> Thus, his life (his-story) after the old man's death has also been decided, "written" for him. Going against the old man's will, pursuing "the opposite mission," the anti-quest is also an attempt to annihilate, cross out the paternal narrative, or, to be more precise, to deconstruct it literally through "de-construction."<sup>78</sup>

Crossing out the master('s) narrative is in itself a symbolic patricide, as we have seen in the cases of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *All the King's Men*; however, his actual means of doing it—burning the old man—makes it a patricide from another aspect as well, since it symbolically robs him of his resurrection. The act of burial does not only "show respect for the body but it also symbolically anticipates its future—in the resurrection" (Geisler), since the burial of the dead physical body is nothing but planting the seed of the resurrection body:

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<sup>77</sup> "'If by the time I die,' he had said to Tarwater, 'I haven't got him baptized, it'll be up to you. It'll be the first mission the Lord sends you'" (9).

<sup>78</sup> I am using the prefix "de-" in the meaning of "do[ing] the opposite of" something ("De-"): in his situation, he is doing the opposite of the old man's "construction."

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (*ESV Bible*, I Cor. 15.35-44)

The cross he is supposed to put at the head of the grave is also a symbol of resurrection. Thus, when Tarwater says that “I ain’t bothering with trifles [with setting up a cross at the head of the grave]” (15), he also says that he is not bothering with the old man’s resurrection. He does not care if the old man is going to be raised from the dead or not, as far as he is concerned, he can stay dead “on the last day” when “all the bodies marked by crosses will be gathered” (25).

Failing to bury the old man, he commits a symbolic patricide. However, if we follow Zizek, we might just as well come to the opposite conclusion: “You can kill the living—on condition that you bury them properly, that you perform the proper rites” (*Puppet* 100). Doing so,

you can “prevent them from returning to haunt you” (100). Even Mark Twain’s Jim seems to be aware of this, as he states the following to Huck: “a man that warn’t buried was more likely to go a-ha’nting around than the one that was planted and comfortable” (72). Tarwater actually shares the very same insight: “The boy knew he would have to bury the old man before anything would begin. It was as if there would have to be dirt over him before he would be thoroughly dead” (O’Connor 12). In spite of this, he fails to put dirt over him, to “put him to rest,” and thus he enables him to “live on” and haunt him.

He does experience being haunted as soon as the fire starts eating up the place with the old man’s body inside, to his knowledge: “he began to run, forced on through the woods by *two bulging silver eyes* that grew in immense astonishment in the center of the fire behind him” (50, emphasis added). However, the gaze of the old man, as we will see later, cannot be “run” away from, it keeps haunting him where(ver) he goes. Going where he does (towards the city to seek out his only other “blood connection,” his uncle), he literally “goes against” the old man’s words, who left him with the following instructions: “when I’m gone, you’ll be better off in these woods by yourself with just as much light as the sun wants to let in than you’ll be in the city with him” (24).

In the case of his other “mission”/quest, he also does the direct opposite of what the old man wanted him to do. Instead of giving a new life to Bishop (baptizing him) in water, he decides to kill him in water: “‘*You can’t just say NO,*’ he said. ‘*You got to do NO. You got to show it. You got to show you mean it by doing it. You got to show you’re not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it. One way or another*’” (157, emphasis added).

Doing the opposite of what the old man left him to do, in other words, twisting the quest into an anti-quest, is an attempt to literally cross out the paternal master-narrative through a



chiastic inversion, to set up the requested “cross” above the old man and his narrative, only not quite exactly the way his great-uncle meant it to be. Drawing this cross above the old man’s narrative through his action may also be a functional way of what Žižek called “kill[ing] the living” (*Puppet* 100) and establishing himself as somebody who “can act” and “make things happen.” Thus, in other words, it can function as a way of fathering himself.

One crucial question that has not been raised so far, however, is the following: Why does he need to “act,” to “do NO”? Why is saying NO insufficient? To be able to answer these questions, we need to have a look at how the old man’s narrative, his words and speech, work. An investigation into that might also reveal if this promising attempt at patricide and self-fathering does become “performative” and what “performativity” has to do with its becoming “performative.”

### **The Words of the Father**

As we have already seen, Tarwater knows the world and everything in it through the old man’s words: “How do you know . . . ? . . . Nothing but the old man’s word” (O’Connor 46). Thus, Tarwater’s world came to being through the old man’s words, is the old man’s “verbal” creation. We can also say that his words or speech work in the Lacanian sense: “like the words uttered by God in *Genesis*, speech is a ‘symbolic invocation’ which creates, *ex nihilo*, ‘a new order of being in the relations between men’” (Lacan, *Freud’s* 239). His words of baptism, and his orally transmitted family genealogy do work like a symbolic invocation. They create out of nothing “a new order of being” in the relations of Tarwater. His words create Tarwater’s relations with the world.

Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that what the old man says about himself: “‘It was me could act,’ . . . ‘I acted’” (76) is as true about his speech and utterances as about his actions, since being examples of what J. L. Austin calls “performative utterances,” they do “act” and “perform.” Baptism is one of the examples of performative utterances and illocutionary acts given by Austin himself, since with the declaration I baptize you “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (*ESV Bible*, Matt. 28.19), the baptist performs the act. The old man’s other crucial utterance concerning Tarwater’s life, “‘And if I don’t get him baptized, it’ll be for you to do,’ he said. ‘*I enjoin you* to do it, boy’” (77), also belongs to the group of illocutionary acts.

Austin distinguishes “illocutionary” from “perlocutionary” speech acts. The former, in Judith Butler’s words, are

speech acts that, in saying do what they say, and do it in the moment of that saying; the latter are speech acts that produce certain effects as their consequence; by saying something, a certain effect follows. The illocutionary speech act is itself the deed that it affects; the perlocutionary merely leads to certain effects that are not the same as the speech act itself. (3)

However, Butler also argues that the two categories are not so clear-cut and easy to differentiate: “[t]he illocutionary speech act performs its deed *at the moment* of the utterance” (3); however, as such utterances are “ritual and ceremonial,” acknowledged by Austin as well (19), and “work to the extent that they are given in the form of a ritual” (Butler 3), the moment is never

“merely a single moment” (3). The moment in ritual is “a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions” (3).

The old man’s speech also illustrates this quite well, since all his major illocutionary acts—his baptizing Tarwater or his enjoining him to baptize Bishop—achieve crucial significance through their “perlocutionary” qualities, through the effects supposed to follow. For example, the main reason for his baptizing Tarwater is not the immediate effect, but the substitution that the act makes possible in the future: “*HERE IS THE PROPHET TO TAKE YOUR PLACE. BAPTIZE HIM*” (O’Connor 72, emphasis added).

If we take into consideration that promising is also an illocutionary act, we can probably place prophesying into the same group. However, in this case the above claims are even more valid because the crucial significance of the act is not in its momentary/immediate effect, but in the “effect” intended to follow.

The Lord is preparing a prophet. The Lord is preparing *a prophet with fire in his hand and eye* and the prophet is moving toward the city with his warning. The prophet is coming with the Lord’s message. “*Go warn the children of God,*” *saith the Lord, “of the terrible speed of justice.”* (60, emphasis added)

Prophesying, by nature of the act, exceeds itself in past and future directions as the prophet is talking about something that the Lord “promised” in the past but, on the other hand, is supposed to happen in the future. The old man’s prophesying is even more interesting in this sense, since whenever he prophesies for Tarwater, he reenacts and relives a past moment: the moment when he did the same in front of his sister’s door. “Shouting to the silent woods” (60), he gets into the

same “frenzy” as before—to such an extent that the boy feels the need to guard himself with a shotgun. He nonetheless seems to be aware that the shotgun may protect him from certain immediate effects, from the “illocutionary qualities,” but it leaves him unguarded from some others. As we can read, what makes Tarwater listen “with a look of uneasy alertness” (60) is not the illocutionary “quality” of the speech act, not the immediate deed in the moment, but rather its “perlocutionary quality,” the possibility of it having an effect on his life later on:

. . . he would lift his face from the gun with a look of uneasy alertness as if while he had been inattentive, the old man’s words had been dropping one by one into him and now, silent, hidden in his bloodstream, were *moving secretly toward some goal of their own*. (61)

When he sets out after the old man’s death “to find out how much of” the things his great-uncle “learnt” him is “true” (79), what he really needs to find out is not whether the “education he [the old man] gave” him “is true to the facts” (46) or not,<sup>79</sup> but whether his “performatives” are becoming true or not. In Austin’s words, what he has to discover is whether the great-uncle’s speech acts are “felicitous”<sup>80</sup> or not; if the words dropped one by one into him would ever reach that “goal of their own” (61) or not.

If we take all of these into consideration, it seems that the only way for Tarwater to overwrite a speech which “acts”—what is more, a speech which acts through making him act in a certain way (“do YES”)—is to act the opposite way: “to do NO”: “*You got to do NO*. You got to

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<sup>79</sup> As Rayber wrongly supposes.

<sup>80</sup> While “constatives” can be judged true or false, according to Austin, performatives cannot. They can only be “felicitous” or “infelicitous” (22).

show it. You got to show you mean it by doing it. You got to show you're not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it. One way or another" (157).

### **The Gaze of the Other**

His "making an end" of the paternal authority and proving he "wasn't no prophet" (210) are closely intertwined with his ability to look Bishop in the eye. Before that moment, he "strictly avoided looking him in the eye" (112), his main reason to do so being that "the child reminded him of the old man" (111), since Bishop had the same fish-colored eyes as him: "his eyes . . . were grey like the old man's but clear" (23). Moreover, the child never takes his eyes off Tarwater (93). Thus, his gaze appears to be the "continuation" of the old man's, left on him at his death at the breakfast table: "His eyes, dead silver, were focused on the boy across from him" (11). With his unceasing gaze left on him, the old man keeps holding him in his "ghostly grasp" (106).

He becomes able to confront the great-uncle's gaze when he decides to confront his "perlocutionarity," when he determines to "take the cross" against his "performative" master-narrative, which "pre-scribed" his-story for him before he could come up with any "inclinations" of his own: "he looked at Bishop, triumphantly, boldly, into the very center of his eyes" (177). If we examine the images focused on before and after the decision, we can see that Tarwater's endeavor to reverse his fate is also reflected in a "perceptual reversal,"<sup>81</sup> a total twist in the focus of his gaze. Before the moment he makes up his mind about the drowning, he is willing to see everything and look everywhere but into the eyes of the little boy. However, afterwards he "seemed to see the little boy and nothing else, no air around him, no room, no nothing," (155), just "the very center of his eyes" (177). In their radical difference and mutual exclusivity, the two

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<sup>81</sup> The term used for the transition from one image perceived to its alternative in Gestalt psychology.

images seen by him function like the “multistable images” of Gestalt psychology—one alternates between two mutually exclusive perceptual states. The contrastive nature and mutual exclusivity of the given images in Gestalt psychology and of those in Tarwater’s focus seem to illustrate/mirror quite well the contrastive nature and mutual exclusivity of the fates/quests/narratives (the one imposed on him by the old man, which he is trying to go against, and the one he is imposing on himself to go against the former). Knowing all this, we can understand better why the “expression on his [Tarwater’s] face” is so startling for the woman in Cherokee Lodge (155). She catches the exact moment when the two reversals take place, when the expression on Tarwater’s face mirrors for a moment his X-expression: the twist in his “endeavor to move” (“Pression”), the radical change in the “course of action” he is planning to take (177).

The conscious “perceptual reversal,” his gazing into the eyes of the child is not only a sign of his trying to establish control but also one of his means of doing it. His gaze is by definition a controlling gaze by which he assumes Rayber’s control over Bishop.<sup>82</sup> The fact that he “mesmerizes”<sup>83</sup> and “fascinates”<sup>84</sup> the child with his gaze can lead to the conclusion that his gaze has hypnotic power. His look, behavior, and body language also summons the image of a hypnotist to the reader’s mind: “Tarwater gaunt, lean, bent slightly forward, *his whole attention concentrated on the opposite figure*. They seemed to be held still in some *magnetic field* of attraction” (199). The association seems to be quite relevant especially if we consider that a hypnotist is somebody “who strives for mastery over Another’s body and mind” (Anderson

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<sup>82</sup> Rayber, observing the whole scene, is convinced that “instead of avoiding him [Bishop], he [Tarwater] planned to control him [Bishop], to show who was master” (197).

<sup>83</sup> “Bishop was sitting on the other end of it, watching him as if he were mesmerized by the steel-like glint that came from the boy’s eyes and was directed into his own” (176).

<sup>84</sup> “The little boy was watching with complete fascination . . .” (189).

305).<sup>85</sup> Moreover, not only his movements and gaze indicate his attempt to “hypnotize,” but his utterances as well: he, like a hypnotizer, also uses suggestions<sup>86</sup> to establish control over the actions of the child: “He . . . fixed the child with a narrow look. ‘Git up, you,’ he said slowly” (O’Connor 189). O’Connor’s wording, “magnetic field,” is highly remarkable from this perspective and unexpectedly supports the above supposition, since the origins of hypnosis reach back to *animal magnetism*, or, in other words, *mesmerism*, and the theories of Franz Mesmer<sup>87</sup> (Lynn, Steven Jay 9-10).

However, the positions of the one in control and the one controlled do not seem to be fixed. One moment Tarwater seems to be in control; however, in the next instance we see that his gaze is not that much directed, but rather “had slipped and fallen into the center of the child’s eyes” (O’Connor 156). The closer we get to the moment of drowning, the more questionable Tarwater’s control over the situation is. It becomes less and less clear who “fixes” whom with the stare, who is the hypnotist and the one hypnotized:

He looked through the blackness and saw perfectly the light silent eyes of the child across from him. They had lost their diffuseness<sup>88</sup> and *were trained on him, fish-colored and fixed . . . all the time the grey eyes were fixed on him as if they were waiting serenely for a struggle already determined.* (214-15, emphasis added)

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<sup>85</sup> It is also an interesting twist that what Tarwater ultimately strives to achieve is a mastery over his own mind and body and not over somebody else’s.

<sup>86</sup> Ideas and attitudes coming from another person.

<sup>87</sup> The word “mesmerize,” also used to describe the conduct of Tarwater (or, to be more precise, the effect he has on Bishop), originates from his name.

<sup>88</sup> I consider it to be worth noting that this is the first time O’Connor mentions diffuseness as a quality possessed by Bishop’s eyes. Earlier on they are always referred to as “clear” (23, 160).

The verbs “fix” and “train,” which describe Bishop’s gaze at this point, give the impression that there might have been a twist in control, since conveying power and domination these verbs belong to the hypnotizer rather than to the hypnotized. The qualities of the eyes (fish-colored, fixed) and their “behavior” (being fixed and trained) make the sameness of Bishop’s and the old man’s eyes more emphatic than ever before. Besides the aforementioned ones, there is one more quality which identifies Bishop’s seemingly hypnotic stare with that of the old man: in literature, especially in the genres of the Gothic and fantasy, hypnotic gaze is often associated with “mad eyes,” which the old man is portrayed having: “mad fish-coloured eyes” (170).

It becomes inevitable that the suspected twist in control, the inversion of the roles of hypnotist and hypnotized have actually happened when, more than forty pages later, it is revealed that “suddenly in a high raw voice the *defeated boy* cried out the words of baptism” (216, emphasis added) and “accidentally” baptized the child.

If we consider the first definition of “hypnosis” provided by the *Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, it may cast a different light on the “accidental nature” (221) of baptism and may help us understand what happened from a more scientific perspective. According to the *Dictionary*, hypnosis is “the process of inducing a state of hypersuggestibility in another person,” where “hypersuggestibility” is the highest degree “to which a person uncritically accepts the ideas, attitudes, or actions of another person” (“Suggestibility”). When the state of hypersuggestibility is reached, the hypnotist applies the power of suggestion to guide the thoughts and behaviors of the patient, to focus his/her mind upon a single dominant idea, and to encourage “the expression of thoughts and feelings that might otherwise remain hidden” (“Hypnosis”). Taking all these into account, it becomes explicable why “[i]t was an accident” and why “[t]he words just came out of themselves” (209). About the hypnotic state, Herbert Spiegel maintains that it is also



characterized by “diminished peripheral awareness” (19), which can give us another explanation for the “perceptual reversal”: Tarwater’s exclusive focus on the center of Bishop’s eyes, his seeing “nothing else, no air around him, no room, no nothing” (155).

Tarwater’s and Bishop’s gazes and what happens in their “exchange of gazes” are also understandable through the Lacanian concept of gaze and can also make the Lacanian concept itself more understandable. Lacan’s most famous example and point of reference about the gaze is Hans Holbein’s picture entitled *Ambassadors*. In the picture, under the figures of the ambassadors and a “series of objects that represent . . . the symbols of vanitas” (*Fundamental* 88), there is an anamorphous object which could not be made out from a straight angle. However, when the viewer, leaving the room, takes one more glimpse at the picture from a certain angle, or, using Žižek’s words, s/he “looks awry,” the anamorphous object reveals itself as a death’s head. Moreover, when the viewer is finally able to make out the object, it has always already been gazing back at him/her from the empty sockets of its eyes, annihilating him/her (88). According to Lacan, the death’s head in the picture and in the given situation shows us “the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function” (89). Putting this spread out function into Žižek’s and my own words, “[t]he gaze marks the point in the object (in the picture) from which the subject viewing it is already gazed at . . .” (*Looking Awry* 125). Therefore, instead of assuring the self-presence of the subject, the gaze, which is thus the gaze of the Other, reduces the subject to an object already gazed at, making him/her utterly helpless.

Now let us see how the dialectic of the eye and the gaze helps us understand the situation between Tarwater and Bishop in the novel: before coming to the decision of “doing NO,” he has a sense of “danger” which keeps him on guard: he is scared to “look awry” even when it is not about Bishop: “He tried when possible . . . to keep *his vision located on an even level*, to see no

more than what was in front of his face and to let his eyes stop at the surface of that” (O’Connor 22, emphasis added). He finally dares to look into Bishop’s eyes—which literally qualifies as “looking awry,” since the child is a lot younger and thus a lot shorter than Tarwater<sup>89</sup>—when he has made up his mind about “doing NO.” “His” gaze (confronting the old man’s) is supposed to communicate his decision to confront the old man’s will and is also meant to be the means of it. It is also the means to establish control over the object of “his” gaze and all that the object embodies/represents. Bishop “embodies” the future the old man imagined/prophesized for him (Tarwater); moreover, he also “embodies” the old man, being his metaphorical substitute. Thus, the gaze is supposed to be the sign and also the means of his endeavor to achieve mastery over his own future and over the paternal narrative and gaze holding him in a “ghostly grasp.” It is hoped to “make an end of” (157) his being subjected to (an)other’s/the Other’s will and to give him self-presence as a subject on his own right.

However, “Bishop’s” gaze does function like the anamorphic death’s head in Holbein’s picture, illustrating the Lacanian working of the gaze: his fish-colored eyes have always already been gazing back at the boy, and as soon as Tarwater gazes into them, they nullify everything else around, render the rest of the world meaningless, invisible: he “seemed to see the little boy and *nothing else, no air around him, no room, no nothing*” (155, emphasis added). Moreover, it pins Tarwater to Bishop: “the country boy followed, so directly that he might have been attached to him” (155), illustrating quite well how the gaze “undermines our position as ‘neutral,’ ‘objective’ observer, pinning us to the observed object itself” (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 91). It is also not by chance that Tarwater feels a grand “trap . . . set all about him” (O’Connor 159), as this is exactly how the gaze functions: the object “is there to be looked at, in order to catch, I would almost say, *to catch in its trap, the observer*, that is to say, us” (Lacan, *Fundamental* 92). Therefore, Bishop,

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<sup>89</sup> The “safe,” even level glance, as we can read, “grazed the top of the child’s head” (116).

similarly to the Holbein or any other picture; is nothing but “a trap for the gaze” (89), more precisely, a trap for Tarwater’s gaze. What is more, Tarwater does walk into the trap and take the bait.

Thus, the struggle, as we now may understand, is always “already determined,” since the Lacanian subject can never master the gaze, it is always already the gaze of the Other. Tarwater’s failure to achieve mastery via “his” gaze is doomed to failure from the very beginning. He has no other choice but to suffer the unavoidable “triumph of the gaze over the eye” (103), the triumph of the Other’s gaze over his eyes. The term “gaze of the Other” is doubly meaningful in our case, since, as we have discussed it before, Bishop has the old man’s mad paternal gaze, the gaze of the symbolic Other.

The interplay of the concept of the Lacanian gaze and that of hypnosis appears not only in the present study, but in one of Lacan’s lectures as well. He brings together the two concepts, stating that what makes hypnosis work is nothing but the anteriority of the gaze to the view that discovers it (273). Thus, the hypnotizer’s eyes function along the very same lines as the anamorphic object in Holbein’s picture, or the “object” of the gaze in general. This may also explain why “Tarwater’s gaze” fails to “hypnotize” or achieve mastery—his gaze has never been his, it has never been and can never be mastered by him or function as the means of achieving mastery. “Bishop’s gaze” has always already been on him, from the very first moment of their encounter. What is more, if we take “Bishop’s gaze” to be the metaphorical substitute of the old man’s, in its nature identical with the old man’s, we can also say that it has been on him since he was born (again). In other words, he was born (again) into the gaze of the Other.

“Bishop’s gaze” is remarkable from another aspect, too. As Lacan says, the gaze of the Other not only turns me into an object being gazed at, but also turns me into a picture; more

precisely and using Lacan's words, "I . . . turn myself into a picture under the gaze" (106). In Tarwater's case, being "turned into" a picture happens not only in the sense Lacan attributed to it: when he looks into Bishop's eyes, he sees that "[h]is [Bishop's] black pupils, glassy and still, *reflected* depth on depth *his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking shadow of Jesus*" (O'Connor 91, emphasis added) or at another point "looking into the eyes of the dim-witted child, he had seen himself trudging off into the distance in the bleeding stinking shadow of Jesus, lost forever to his own inclinations" (221).

What he can see in Bishop's eyes is a reflection, a picture of him, reflected. A reflection, however, can only come into existence if there has already been something to be reflected, a primary image, a picture to which it must be subordinate. Accordingly, Tarwater is turned into a picture not only in the sense of being gazed at, but in the sense of being "pictured" into a picture, "grasped" in a picture, as well. This would lead us to the conclusion that not only the old man's speech works in a "performative," prophetic way, writing him into a paternal narrative, but also his gaze, which "fixes" him into a picture, into the visual image of his paternal master-narrative. Both of them function along the very same lines: both intend to capture Tarwater, the subject (of the narrative and of the gaze), deprive him of the control he has never had but is aspiring to obtain, and subject him to a future predetermined by the old man.

### **5.3. The Violent (Words and Gaze) Bear Him Away**

Examining the effects of performativity and speech acts in her book *Excitable Speech*, Butler claims that a speech act can cause injury and violate the addressee's world. She defines injurious speech as follows: "To be injured by speech is *to suffer a loss of context*, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is *unanticipated* about the injurious speech act is what

constitutes its injury, the sense of *putting its addressee out of control*" (4, emphasis added). In another place, she writes: "To be addressed injuriously is not only to *be open to an unknown future*, but *not to know the time and place of injury*, and to suffer the disorientation of one's situation as the effect of such speech" (4, emphasis added).

Concerning the old man's speech, we have already stated that it blurs the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts; the two become inseparably entangled. However, the danger lies not so much in the illocutionary qualities but in the perlocutionary qualities of his speech acts, even of the ones which seem to be at first illocutionary. As we have seen, what makes Tarwater alert is the threat that the old man's words, "hidden in his bloodstream, were *moving secretly toward some goal of their own*" (61, emphasis added). In other words, the threat is posed by their perlocutionary "quality" and by the possibility of their "felicity."

Tarwater's suspicion about the threat is confirmed when the old man's words do seem to function like seeds in his bloodstream, which keep hiding for a long time and sprout when their time comes. This may be another, less scientific, explanation for his getting Bishop accidentally baptized whilst drowning him: in spite of all his intentions, the words of Baptism "just come out of themselves" (209), from where they were hiding. However, in the case of the baptism, Tarwater is still able to ignore what happened and give his own interpretation of the event:

The fact that he actually baptized the child disturbed him only intermittently and each time he thought of it, he reviewed its accidental nature. It was an accident and nothing more. He considered only that the boy was drowned and that he had done

it, and that in the order of things, a drowning was a more important act than a few words spilled in the water. . . . He had not said NO, he had done it. (221)

The most evident proof and the crucial turning point in the “struggle” of the old man and Tarwater, which cannot be ignored or reinterpreted any more, arises when, having been sodomized by a stranger on the way, the boy returns to Powderhead crushed and humiliated. Having set the forest on fire to get rid of the memory and his “friend,” he is suddenly startled by a “red-gold tree of fire ascended as if it would consume the darkness in one tremendous burst of flame” (242). He threw himself to the ground in front of it “with his face against the dirt of the grave” and “he heard the command:” “GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY” (242). However, in spite of the fact that he, and probably the reader as well, expects the fire to speak to him,<sup>90</sup> the words do not come from the outside but from he inside: “The words were as silent as *seeds opening* one at a time *in his blood*” (242, emphasis added). It is also worth noticing that these are the exact words the old man uttered prophesying, the ones which he was listening to “with a look of uneasy alertness” (61), and which, as we can see now, in spite of all his alertness, did drop “one by one into him, silent,” and did hide in his bloodstream. Furthermore, what is even more important, they did finally sprout, “come out of themselves,” or, in other words, they did prove “felicitous,” setting him on the path of the old man’s choice from which there is no turning back.

If we look at the previous situation from a “Butlerian” perspective, what we can see there is nothing but the “addressee” (Tarwater) “lost context,” put out of control of his own fate. As the old man’s words drop one by one into him, they make him “open to an unknown future,” never letting him know “the time and place of injury.” For a speech with such characteristics, Butler

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<sup>90</sup> He knew that it “would in the instant speak to him” (242).

uses the term “injurious.” However, the concept in our present context might tolerate some “violation” and allow me to (re)baptize it “violent.”

The Lacanian gaze can also be termed violent in a general sense of the word, or, according to Žižek, even “evil” (*Puppet* 21), because it threatens the subject with depriving him/her from his/her subject status and turning him/her into an “utterly helpless” object or picture (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 126). The old man’s gaze, as we have already seen, possesses all these qualities of the Lacanian “evil gaze” and poses a real threat to Tarwater’s subjectivity.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, it also captures/inscribes him in/into a picture, an image of an “unknown” future: “his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, until at last he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf” (91).

Giving a further definition of the gaze, Žižek says the following: “the gaze is . . . a point at which the very frame (of my view) is already inscribed in the ‘content’ of the picture viewed” (*Looking Awry* 125). In other words, the viewer/subject together with the frame (of his/her view) loses him/herself as a subject in the picture. Losing one’s frame (the frame of one’s view) is nothing but losing one’s “context,” expressed in the language of the visual. Therefore, we can come to conclusion that the (the old man’s) gaze entails the very same effect as his speech: it puts Tarwater out of control and makes him lose his “context,”<sup>92</sup> thus earning the term “violent” (“injurious”) in the more Butlerian sense of the word.

Not only his speech and his gaze can be termed violent, in a general and in the Butlerian sense of the words as well, but that which inspires them:

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<sup>91</sup> He is “lost forever to his own inclinations” (221).

<sup>92</sup> Moreover, the etymology of the word “context,” “weaving together of words,” also seems to link us back to his losing his story/his history that he never had for himself. He has always already been placed into another (the Other’s) narrative/story.

Christian love is a violent passion to introduce a Difference, a gap in the order of being, to privilege and elevate some object at the expense of others. Love is violence not (only) in the vulgar sense of the Balkan proverb “If he doesn’t beat me, he doesn’t love me!”— violence is already the love choice as such, which *tears its object out of its context*. (Zizek, *Puppet* 33, emphasis added)

Thus, the means or the expression of this violent passion (the gaze and the speech) and their functioning seem to mirror the working of the violent love, or grace, as O’Connor puts it.<sup>93</sup>

Now let us see how exactly this violent love and its expressions (the gaze and the words/speech) “violate” and put him out of control, what patterns and mechanism we are able to detect if we look at what happened from a little bit more distance. The felicity of the old man’s speech acts actually means that, in spite of all his intentions and efforts, Tarwater’s actions (deliberately the total opposite of the old man’s intentions) “twist,” do not bring the result that they are supposed to bring, but instead enable the result the old man intended. As we have already seen, the old man wanted him to have Bishop baptized, and, in spite of all of Tarwater’s counter-intentions and efforts, he is baptized. Death by water twists into rebirth by water; murdering him in water twists into giving him rebirth by water; his “doing NO” twists into “doing YES.” The same twist happens in case of the first “mission” as well: the old man wanted to be buried with the sign of his Savior at the head of the grave, but Tarwater, going against his will, sets fire to the house containing his dead body (as far as Tarwater knows). However, when the boy gets back to Powderhead, in spite of all his expectations, he finds “[t]he grave, freshly mounted . . . . At its head, a dark rough cross was set starkly in the bare ground” (240). Thus, his self-definition and

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<sup>93</sup> “[B]etter call it grace, as love suggests tenderness, whereas grace can be violent or would have to be to compete with the kind of evil I can make concrete” (qtd. in Fitzgerald 373).



self-fathering through “counter-action” or through pursuing an anti-quest fail, since the anti-quest twists back into quest through a chiasmic inversion.

Interestingly enough, in most of the situations chiasmus acts like a subversive trope, undermining paternal order. However, in this case, it turns into the instrument of the Father and undermines the son’s endeavor of self-definition/self-fathering.<sup>94</sup> The actual twist of “action”/fate happens in the boy’s “inter-action” with Bishop. This is not incidental either because, as we can read in the novel: he is the “x signifying the general hideousness of fate” (113),<sup>95</sup> in other words, the embodiment of chiasmus. He literally “embodies” the twist, since he “looked like the old man *grown backwards*” (111, emphasis added) or twisted/inverted. If we take into consideration that “chiasmi are the tropes of deception” (Kalmár, *Szöveg* 150), the present situation becomes even more understandable, since Bishop being the metaphorical substitute of the old man is nothing but a walking deception. Tarwater does indeed get deceived, lured into a trap, into the illusion that he can twist his fate, that the trope of the twist can be relied on and can be in the service of his self-fathering needs. However, it twists back on itself making him find himself fulfilling the paternal design every point.

So what makes the trope of the twist stand in service of the Father and the paternal scheme? For the answer to this question, we need to have a look at what else the “trope of deception” symbolizes. Chi is not only the trope of twist, deception, and inversion, it also represents Christ, being the first element of Chi Rho, the first letter of Christ in Greek, and the X that characterizes chiasmus can also stand for the cross on which Christ was crucified. The old

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<sup>94</sup> As Frederick Asals puts it, “the boy’s rebellion against his mission establishes his fitness to undertake it (173).

<sup>95</sup> If we take a look at the meaning of “hideous,” the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* provides the following meaning: “offensive to the senses, especially to sight.” We have already seen that he is offensive to the sight/gaze not only in the sense of ugliness but in a way the object of the gaze can offend the subject “of it.” However, he is not only offensive to sight, but offensive through sight, through “his” gaze, which is the gaze of the object/abject and what he offends through sight (gaze) is nothing but “a fate,” Tarwater’s fate.

man, claiming to be a prophet, also claims to “represent” Christ and wants the boy to take the same cross. Thus, it is no wonder that the cross of the twist, the chi of this inversion turns in favor of him, making a prophet out of the boy.

It is when he is confronted with the cross on the old man’s grave, signifying the impossibility of twisting his fate, that he understands that the trope of the twist is not in his service: “The boy’s hands opened stiffly as if he were dropping something he had been clutching all his life. His gaze rested finally on the ground where the wood entered the grave” (240). His gaze (both the old man’s and Tarwater’s) can rest, the struggle is over.

As a sign of total surrender, the “boy stopped and picked up a handful of dirt off his great-uncle’s grave and smeared it on his forehead” (242). The gesture is multiply meaningful and loaded with Biblical reference. It is the “saving seal” used several times in the Bible (Giannone, *Mystery* 152), first in the case of Cain whom God brands for protection. Subsequently, “God instructs Ezekiel . . . to mark the forehead of those who show signs of remorse for Jerusalem’s abominations in order to spare them from impending doom” (152). The dirt that Tarwater spreads on his forehead, according to Richard Giannone, is also “his anointing admission of guilt” (152).

On the other hand, the cloaking dirt from the grave fulfills the same role as Elijah’s cloak did. It fell from the sky to the feet of Elisha, his disciple and successor, when Elijah was taken up to heaven on the chariot of fire. Beforehand Elijah used the cloak to part the Jordan so that Elisha and him could cross on dry ground. “When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.’ And Elisha said, ‘Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me’” (*ESV Bible*, 2 Kings 2.9-10). After Elisha gets the cloak, he also goes to the bank of the Jordan:

Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. (2 Kings 2.14-15).

Thus, the cloak and the ability to use the power of the cloak signals that the requested double portion of Elijah’s spirit did fall upon him.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

When Tarwater covers his face with the dirt of the old man’s grave, he effaces/e-faces himself renouncing any claim for an identity or subject position. The dirt from the grave mantles the features, only the “sing’d eyes, black in their deep sockets” (243) remain visible. He takes the old man’s “spirit” upon him with the dirt from his grave and anoints himself for “the life his great-uncle had prepared him for” (93). Taking the role the old man raised him for, the boy dies as a character or entity. He dies to his own inclinations: “Nothing seemed alive about the boy but his eyes” (240), the eyes of a prophet.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, the novel ends with the death of the boy/“son” and the birth of the prophet, which can also be interpreted as the rebirth of the “father.” The only thing alive about him is the part which is not him: the “prophetic” pair of eyes. As Suzanne Morrow Paulson puts it, “the novel

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<sup>96</sup> “They looked as if, touched with a coal like the lips of the prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sight again” (233).

begins with the death of Mason Tarwater and ends with a grotesque 'resurrection' as old Tarwater's will takes over the psyche of his young nephew" (21).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the examined Southern novels abound in sons and paternal figures who strive for control and authority. The protagonists all attempt to outscribe themselves from the ancestral paternal plots or narratives that threaten their freedom or overwrite the paternal narrative to take the position of the father. In doing so, they commit a series of patricide on the thematic, structural, textual or figurative levels of each text. However, in three out of four chapters, there is no univocal solution to the problem of fathering in the end. What is more, the different solutions seem to be almost irreconcilable at first sight. We might say that they illustrate the Barthesian *irreducible* plurality of meaning (159). Having read the given novels with a special focus on father-son relationships, we have encountered, in each chapter, orphan heroes of different kinds, somewhat different cases of paternal-filial functioning and father son-relationships.

I have read Mark Twain's novel, going against the implied author's paternal notice, along the concepts of plot and plotting and have found that the two seem to be inseparable: the plot of the novel seems to be organized around different plots for the plot itself. The different father figures and representatives of the paternal (dis)order all try to achieve control, not only over Huck in an Oedipal manner, but over "his" plot as well. What is more, to achieve control, they do not shrink from applying schemes and deceptions. All the scheming paternal figures seem to be in an intimate relationship with the scheme (rhetorical figure) of the chi, as we have seen all of them twisted in one way or another: pap, bearing the chi as his sign, is the representative of a paternal disorder rather than order; Tom Sawyer, also marked by the chi, pretends disorder while trying to keep the order intact; the (m)others, instead of being maternal, are rather paternal; and Jim acts

rather maternal for a father. Moreover, being loyal to the figure of “deception and (dis)tors/(t)ion of (the presence of) meaning” (Kalmár, *Szöveg* 150), they play around with deception and the distortion of meaning: not only their comradeship, but also their paternal behavior turn out to have been deceptions implied in order that they achieve control over the plot. Thus, the novel stages the struggle between fathers and sons as one for meaning and stories: power here means the power to plot, whereas freedom often means freedom from others’ plots (in all senses of the word).

In Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* the hermeneutic quest for the truth (of the Sutpen family history) turns into a quest for narrative self-fathering through constructing the truth: a narrative that is true enough (fitting the preconceived). As we have seen, Quentin and Shreve use a story pattern highly similar to that of the Freudian family romance to construct their history of the Sutpen family. Their family romances, however, all fail on the thematic level and culminate in a tragedy. Still, the failure of the filial romances on the plot level would not necessarily mean the failure of Quentin’s family romance, of his narrative self-fathering, if the family history constructed by him worked as a narrative and could accomplish a coherent formal pattern. But it fails to do so, as his plot falls into the reversible, circular abyss of a final palindrome, marring his quest for narrative authority and self-fathering.

In *All the King’s Men*, the answer to the question of fathering is even less clear and univocal. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the novel can be read as the story of Jack’s successful Oedipalization and his entrance/birth (in)to the symbolic; thus, as the story of a successful act of fathering. Examining the story and the problem of fathering from a narratological perspective, however, has provided us with a totally different solution to the mystery of fathering: the novel reads as the story of Jack’s attempt at taking over the paternal

position and endeavor at self-fathering. Moreover, the narrative can be interpreted as the story of, and also a tribute to, its success. However, since the narrative symptoms of his successful subversion of the paternal order highly resemble those of the “orderly” working of the order, his “success” becomes questionable and “relative.”

As we have seen, O’Connor’s novel also follows the pattern of a quest narrative and, in a sense, has a very similar structure to *All the King’s Men*. The story in both cases starts with the lack of the father that calls for filling. In both novels, to the two candidates for the father’s place a third one is added very soon: the protagonist himself, who also sets out on a quest of (self-)fathering. In *The Violent Bear It Away*, the goal of Tarwater’s quest is to achieve control over his own life and future. He strives to cross out the paternal master narrative (the speech and prophecy of the great-grandfather that sets him on a quest) through going against the old man’s will, through pursuing the anti-quest: doing the opposite of what the old man left him to do. However, his self-definition and self-fathering through “counter-actions” fail, since the anti-quest twists back into quest through a chiastic inversion and Tarwater ends up fulfilling the paternal prophecy in spite of all his efforts at doing the opposite.

Introducing the topic and making my claims, I argued that the orphan heroes of these Southern novels are all patricidal orphans, who keep committing real and symbolic patricides in order to take their real or symbolic father(s)’s place and are driven by an insatiable desire of self-fathering. The various chapters sample different versions of desire:

The protagonists are all self-willed orphans, who all want to become free of the paternal inheritance and break out of the shadow of the ancestors. They embrace orphanage and do not tolerate any attempts of fathering coming from the outside. Moreover, they ensure their fatherless

state by several father-murders, which take place on the thematic, structural, textual, and figurative levels of the narratives. Let us now take a look at the most recurrent patricidal moves:

In spite of the fact that there is only one direct patricide on the thematic level (Henry's killing Bon, his imaginary father, at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred), there are several indirect ones all through the four novels: Jack provides the inspiration for both the Judge's suicide and Willy's murder. Huck Finn may also be responsible for pap being murdered, since he was probably shot for the ransom offered for Huck's murderer.

Besides, father murder may also take symbolic or figurative forms: Huck's symbolic suicide can be read as a symbolic patricide, since a hog is a recurring metaphor for the father. Tarwater's robbing the old man from his resurrection (rebirth) by not burying him properly can also be read as a figurative patricide. Moreover, since Bishop is a metaphorical substitute of the old man, and metonymically connected to Rayber, drowning him can be read as a metaphorical as well as a metonymical patricide. Destroying the image of the father (the image Adam and Ann Stanton have about their father, the image Judge Irwin has about himself and the image the world has about him) can also be read as a figurative (metaphorical) patricide.

When the son is not only a protagonist but a/the narrative agent as well (homodiegetic narrator), he is the one who inscribes all the father murders into the narrative, in other words, commits them on a textual level. Moreover, those sons who narrate tend to start their narratives with recounting the death of the father, as if it was the prerequisite of the son's narration: Jack Burden verbally slays all the father figures on the first couple of pages of *All the King's Men*, and Quentin and Shreve start their narrative by first symbolically castrating then killing Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*



Quentin's portrayal of old Sutpen before his death is, however, not the only example of the father's castration though portraying him as an impotent, miserable, incapable creature. Other examples include Jack's portrayal of Ellis Burden and Tarwater's portrayal of Rayber.

Crossing out and overwriting the paternal meta-narrative is also a frequently appearing form of textual patricide and self-fathering, which, in addition to having other implications, indicates that the meaning of "father" in these novels is often "the one responsible for the creation of meaning." Nonetheless, the paternal meta-narrative and its overwriting, as we have seen, take different forms in different novels. In the case of *Absalom, Absalom!*, it is the Sutpen family history narrated by Mr. Compson. Its crossing out and overwriting would mean coming up with a narrative which can account for the historical facts better than his narrative did. In *All the King's Men*, the paternal narrative destined to be overwritten appears, at some points, as the story of a glorious, immaculate paternal past, as Judge Irwin's and Governor Stanton's histories. Its overwriting means telling their stories with a tiny long-forgotten detail added (their only acts of dishonesty) that destroy/would destroy their images as true fathers/people. While in these two novels the paternal narrative memorializes the past, in *The Violent Bear It Away* and in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it is connected to the future, or, more precisely, to the future of the son. In O'Connor's novel, the great-grandfather's narrative that Tarwater attempts to cross out is the old man's will (tasks/quests to be performed) and prophecy about the boy's future. Tarwater makes an attempt at canceling them out by going against them, doing the opposite, and thus making sure that the old man's words will not come true (in Austin's words: his speech acts will not become felicitous). In *Huckleberry Finn*, pap's and the (m)others' paternal narratives/plots (Oedipal threats on pap's part; the Moses allegory, instructions how to pray and write on the [m]others) also aim to affect Huck's future.

Overwriting the paternal narrative or destroying the figure of the father one not only commits a patricide but also inscribes one-self into the paternal position, taking over the position of the father through (over-)writing. In other words, they are also acts of narrative self-fathering.

Naming/renaming, as a special form of (over-)writing, features frequently as an act of (self-)fathering<sup>97</sup> and displaying ownership<sup>98</sup> (the old man's naming Tarwater and Rayber's later attempt to rename him, Huck's renaming himself several times). Jack Burden's parodic renaming of all the father figures in *All the King's Men* may also be mentioned at this point: it also displays how an act of (self-)fathering coincides with an act of patricide.

Last but not least, there are several examples of parody/irony directed against paternal figures in all four novels. Running after Huck with a knife drunken, Pap is a grotesque parody of a castrating Oedipal father in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. With his inability to listen, understand, and focus, Rayber is a parody of a scientist and an analyst. He is convinced that he is "uniquely able to understand" (150) and "read" Tarwater "like a book" (174), which make him a perfect father for him. However, he can only become a parody (parodic re-writing) of the father. Through renaming the fathers, Jack also assigns new ironic/parodic subject positions for them in *All the King's Men*. However, parody is also a "double-edged sword," as Linda Hutcheon states: it has a "potential power both to bury the dead . . . and also to give it new life" (101).

The four novels investigated in the dissertation abound in different forms of literal and figurative, thematic and textual, father-murders, confirming that, in some sense, the orphan heroes of these Southern novels are never done with killing their fathers in order to take their place. However, as we have seen, not only the acts of patricide and self-fathering seem to be inseparable from each other in almost all cases, as if they were two sides of the very same coin, but they also

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<sup>97</sup> An act of fathering is the birth of the father as such; therefore, every act of fathering is by nature an act of self-fathering, too.

<sup>98</sup> "[W]hat is at stake in the naming process is no less than an act of possession" (Ragussis 7).

coincide with giving “the dead” (f/Father) a new life, ensuring that there will always be a Father to overcome and, thus, a reason for telling stories.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> As Barthes reasons in *The Pleasure of the Text*, “[i]f there is no longer a Father, why tell stories?” (47).

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