

**Inheriting Man's Estate:  
Constructions of Masculinity in Selected  
Popular Narrative.**

**By**

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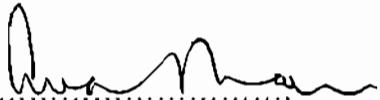
## **Declaration**

I declare that this dissertation is my own work, except where specifically indicated to the contrary. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. Where use has been made of the results of other authors, they have been duly acknowledged in the text.



Patricia Gail Ewer

As the candidate's supervisor, I have approved this dissertation for submission.



Professor Anton van der Hoven.

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## Abstract

This dissertation analyses the violence of patriarchal culture as it is staged in three twentieth century texts: the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), the South African novelist Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1993) and the American film *Night of the Hunter* (1954) directed by Charles Laughton. Each of these works focuses on the induction of the boy child into culture and the trauma attendant on this process of accession. The thesis is that if culture is violent then it must follow that damage is done to the developing subject in the process of its construction by the cultural forces that shape masculinity.

The theoretical grounding of the analysis is derived from two main sources: Jacques Derrida's account of the violence of culture in *Of Grammatology* (1976) and the analysis of patriarchy and the Oedipal development of the boy child into manhood found in the work of Freud and Lacan. Derrida is used for his thinking on the inherently violent nature of culture and the way in which cultural discourse is structured through binary dualisms. The three chosen works all critique and dismantle binarist thinking as a move towards imagining a less destructive discursive order. The Oedipal narrative, as a myth which describes and explains the forces shaping the male child in the process of acculturation, exemplifies and illustrates cultural violence: As expounded by Freud and Lacan, the Oedipal myth is one which underpins all three of the chosen works.

Derrida, Freud and Lacan have been very usefully mediated by several cultural critics and therefore extensive use is made of commentaries by Kaja Silverman, Frank Krutnik and Madan Sarup. Slavoj Žižek's interpretations of Lacan have also yielded much that is interesting about the nature of the Law of the Father and consequently reference is made to his ideas, principally in Chapter Four.

## **Abbreviations**

**CMA** *Cronica de una Muerte Anunciada*

**RA** *Die Reuk van Appels*

**SSP** "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."

**Fathers** "Fathers and Sons: Structures of Erotic Patriarchy in Afrikaans Writing of the Emergency"

**VL** "The Violence of the Letter."

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## Chapter One: The Nature of Culture

To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated at, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, weighed, censored, ordered about, by men who have neither the right nor the knowledge nor the virtue. To be governed means to be, at each operation, at each transaction, at each movement, noted, registered, controlled, taxed, stamped, measured, valued, assessed, patented, licensed, authorized, endorsed, admonished, hampered, reformed, rebuked, arrested. It is to be, on the pretext of the general interest, taxed, drilled, held to ransom, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then at the least resistance, at the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, abused, annoyed, followed, bullied, beaten, disarmed, garrotted, imprisoned, machine-gunned, judged, condemned, deported, flayed, sold, betrayed and finally mocked, ridiculed, insulted, dishonoured. That's government, that's its justice, that's its morality!

*Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*

I intend in this dissertation to explore the way in which a range of imaginative texts stage accession of the boy-child into culture and to compare the degree to which they resolve the tension between the determining power of culture and the freedom usually associated with human possibilities. The works I have chosen to analyse are Charles Laughton's film, *The Night of the Hunter*, García Márquez's novella, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and South African writer Mark Behr's novel, *The Smell of Apples*. *The Night of the Hunter*, although not text as such, is a staging of Davis Grubb's novel which adheres faithfully to the original as regards dialogue, metaphor and, for the most part, tone and emphasis. As film is arguably the most popular form of narrative of the twentieth century, I feel that the inclusion of the film genre in this exploration is wholly justifiable. Moreover, this film is an admirable exposé of the three tropes which I hope to explicate in this dissertation: they are, firstly, the violence which informs culture, especially patriarchal culture; secondly, the binarist thinking

which enables that violence and thirdly, the role played by the Oedipal narrative in perpetuating and exemplifying the first two. Garcia Márquez's indictment of macho violence in the ultra-patriarchal context of Colombia, although it does not chart in any chronological way the induction of the male child into his patrimony, vividly stages the effects upon the protagonist and his community of that inheritance. *The Smell of Apples* is a novel of post-colonial white guilt, of both confession to the male child's inevitable, if innocent, complicity in the violence of apartheid culture and of self-exculpation insofar as the subject has no real alternative. Each of these works, therefore, in different ways and contexts, stages either the induction of the subject into culture or the effects of that induction and each points toward the possibility of a degree of palliation of the violence of the inevitable process of acculturation. I am interested in exposing the tension implied in the chosen popular texts between the predetermined destiny of the male subject and the desire to ameliorate the harshness of its dictates.

### *The Violence of Culture*

Psychoanalytic and post-structuralist theory has long been concerned with understanding the nature of culture, the order it imposes on human life and the violence inherent in this imposition. If the cultural order is inherently violent, then it must follow that damage is inevitable, not only to those who will never enjoy privileged access to the name of the father (female children) but also to the male subject itself which, in the course of its construction by the cultural order, is simultaneously not only constrained but, in some cases, even destroyed by it. Three theorists whose writings on the violence of culture are especially apposite in this regard and whose writings I have found particularly useful in understanding the



violent nature of culture are the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, the post-Freudian analyst, Jacques Lacan, and the post-structuralist philosopher, Jacques Derrida. Derrida in particular makes it very clear that the nature of culture is always violent, and that violence itself may be traced through three aspects.

In his chapter on "The Violence of the Letter" from his work *Of Grammatology* Derrida critiques the idea that culture is ever a benign order. He effects this view through taking issue with the theories of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss, in the course of his observations of the Nambikwara Indians in Brazil, critiques writing as being a damaging import of the West, imposed on Rousseauistic noble savages in innocent, edenic cultures. Both Rousseau and Levi-Strauss apparently privilege speech over writing on the grounds that the speaking subject is "fully self-present" to his audience with whom he has face-to-face contact (119). During the course of his observation of the Nambikwara, Levi-Strauss inevitably introduced the concept of what is commonly understood to be "writing." Basing his argument on an incident in which a leader uses his "privileged understanding" of "writing" in order to impose his authority on those without access to the written word, Levi-Strauss condemns writing as violence perpetrated upon a people who enjoy an alleged "primal plenitude," on the grounds that it destroys their so-called "proximity to the truth." This phonocentric transparency is somehow brought about by the closeness to nature and to each other of the tribal interlocutors. Derrida dismisses what he sees as the false sentimentality of Levi-Strauss's self-accusation. By attempting to withhold writing from these cultures, says Derrida, Levi-Strauss is actually validating ethnocentrism in the name of critiquing it, as Western man may then continue to retain the benefits of literacy for himself while, at the same time,

bolstering his own, comforting desire to believe in an innocent primal identity for mankind, unpolluted by the oppressions visited by man upon other men. However, there is, in any case, no point in denying writing to communities such as Levi-Strauss's Nambikwara, says Derrida, as they already engage in a sort of arche-writing, which, in his view, is also a form of arche-violence.

Derrida sees culture, any culture, even the simplest and most allegedly edenic, as embodying violence on three levels. He maintains that at the first level, "anterior to the possibility of violence in the current and derivative sense ... there is ... the violence of the arche-writing, the violence of difference, of classification, and of the system of appellations" (110). It is a form of violence that occurs in its most basic form at the level of naming; that is to say, that naming a child within a system of differences denies its "proper" or "real" identity and limits its possibilities. Awarding a name to an infant indicates appurtenance and is a classificatory act that presupposes exclusion of every other name and, by extension, other position within the polity. No human society is innocent of this arche-violence: every system of cultural organization which subscribes to the incest-prohibition (and there is no culture which does not) is circumscribed and hierarchised by it. Derrida points out that "a people who accede to the genealogical pattern accede also to writing in the colloquial sense" (125). Thus the child, according to Derrida, is constrained by the discourses of its culture at the basic level of nomination; its "reality" (that is to say, all the possibilities of its selfhood) is violated and expropriated by that culture in the very act of naming it.

Furthermore, Derrida argues, Levi-Strauss's belief that his own ethnographic logocentrism, his privileging of speech over writing, is based on the thought of Rousseau is invalid for, in fact, Rousseau ironically rehabilitates writing at the same time that he disqualifies it when he confesses that "presence (is) disappointed of itself in speech" because "speech denies itself as it gives out" (142). That is, one can actually never be "fully self-present in living speech" because one is "dispossessed of the longed-for presence in the gesture of language by which we attempt to seize it" (141). In this, Rousseau seems to adumbrate the thought of Lacan who maintains that language distances the subject from reality.

The second level of violence propounded by Derrida is that of the cultural constraint which enforces morals, laws and taboos. The binarist beliefs of culture are inculcated at this level. The child learns what is considered good and what evil. This second level creates conscience and guilt. The acquisition of the latter may be seen as corresponding to the operation of the superego, in Freudian terms. Freud theorises guilt and self-policing as the internalising of parental, especially paternal, disapprobation. In *Totem and Taboo*, he postulates an intriguing myth for the origin of man's self-imposed cultural strictures, especially the universally practised incest prohibition. C.R. Badcock sums up Freud's exposition, in *The Psychoanalysis of Culture*:

Following a suggestion by Darwin, [Freud] proposes that men originally existed in a condition which he calls the 'primal horde'. A single tyrannical father dominated it, enjoying the favours of a number of females and absolutely excluding the sons from it as soon as they achieved sexual maturity.

Eventually, these excluded sons, driven on by their frustrated sexual desire for their mothers and sisters, banded together, drove out the primal father, killed him and devoured him. But, having done so, they became ... subject to deferred obedience and a sense of guilt.... [The dead father's] prohibition of their access to the mothers and sisters was retrospectively obeyed by instituting the ban on incest. (4)

That is, the ban on sexual activity with one's female relatives was imposed by the brothers themselves. This self-censorship, or the operation of the super-ego, has been further explained by Michel Foucault in analysing the operation of Bentham's panopticon. This has been called the perfect prison surveillance system as it pre-empts the necessity for punishment by external authority. Individual cells are arranged in a circle surrounding and facing a single, central observation tower. This arrangement has the effect of each prisoner's censoring his own behaviour, in the belief that he is being monitored all the time.

It is only at what Derrida calls the third level of violence that we reach that which is commonly thought of as being violent: in other words, empirical violence, bodily or spiritual, such as rape or betrayal or the wholesale, mindless destruction of war or, indeed, any form of physical or emotional injury or assault. It is this same third level of violence which is a recurring trope throughout the texts I have selected for examination. Laughton's film features a serial widow-killer by whom two terrified children of one of his victims are threatened; Márquez's novella is a vertiginous retelling of the true story of a young man murdered by his friends in order to comply with the exigencies of an archaic code of honour (an example of Derrida's second

level of violence); Behr's novel exposes the multifaceted violence of the apartheid military state: specifically, dispossession, racial oppression, warfare, torture and child rape (both literal and metaphorical).

The third level is a form of violence which, although it is the most obvious and shocking manifestation of the three, nevertheless draws its power from the first two levels. There is an interconnectedness between the obvious brutality commonly recognisable as the third level of violence and Derrida's more primary levels. The third level is a repetition of the two prior levels, a manifestation in more palpable form of the archeviolence that infuses culture and which may be seen to operate through its binarist thinking. This is particularly apparent in the Behr novel, in which all the violence and brutality perpetrated by the apartheid state may be seen to originate in the initial violence of naming, of labelling people as different and relegating them to opposite poles of the binary continuum.

#### *The Binarist Structure of Culture.*

The essential violence of Culture is enabled by binarist thinking and therefore the critique of binaries is a crucial tool for understanding the operation of the symbolic order. Gendered binary thinking is clearly evident in the three texts with which I have engaged in this dissertation. They are structured around such binaries as good/evil, father/mother, black/white and nature/culture. Again I have found the thought of Jacques Derrida helpful regarding the nature of binary oppositions as he critiques the way in which they may be said to structure totalising and exclusionary systems of thought. In an influential paper entitled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" Derrida examines the way in which discursive systems are

structured. They function by being organised around a centre, which holds the structure together and serves to arrest the play of meaning. The centre therefore provides the necessary stability and security which enable the system to operate. Although the centre seems to be a given, a truth, an origin, having prior meaning before the discourse came into being, existing outside the system and transcending it, a “presence” somehow always already there, Derrida points out that centres only function as such. They are, in fact, discursively produced by the system in which they are a term like any other, something of which we should always be aware in order to guard against fundamentalism, against dangerously totalising assumptions.

Derrida takes issue with Rousseau and Levi-Strauss on the nature of “presence.” Derrida says it connotes inherent meaning, self-identity, transcendentalism: the term in a system that is meaningful in and of itself. However, he argues, identity is not located in the thing itself, but is created or imposed in relation to other things, so that, in fact, nothing is ever itself in some fundamental way. Everything gets its identity from its relation to other things in the system, so that, for example, the notion of “oneself” is not a truth except there is a “not-oneself” to make the concept possible. Derrida says that we do not need to abandon these “truths” because they turn out not to be originary. We have to use the concepts available to us while acknowledging that they are not fundamental givens but products of our own discourses. Using the terms of a discourse in order to critique that discourse is inevitable “*bricolage*,” an idea first expressed by Levi-Strauss and which means using whatever (imperfect) tools are available to one, in order to “get the job done.” Its opposite, perfect and pristine thought or “engineering,” is impossible. Derrida warns that we need to remember that

we cannot get totally outside of our own discourses and that, ultimately, the *bricoleur* must always build his castles with debris (139).

Derrida's poststructuralism thus takes the central tenet of structuralism, the binary opposition, a step further. The oppositions are not really opposite, says Derrida, but each term of the binary relies on the other to get its meaning, so that, for example, in the culture/nature opposition the idea of culture is meaningless without the concept of nature and vice versa. Each concept bears the trace of the opposite that gives it meaning and brings it into being. Related to this is the concept of supplementarity. Culture and nature may be said to supplement each other, in that each carries a trace of the other; hence, every concept is not just itself, but rather itself plus the effect of the supplement. This poststructuralist theory, while acknowledging the binary nature of culture, also suggests ways in which the excesses of binarist thinking can be ameliorated.

Culture is structured around gendered binary oppositions which enable and perpetuate the violence. Therefore, the binary oppositions foregrounded in the works I am examining need to be interrogated in order to expose the way in which the symbolic order functions and also to mitigate the damage wrought inevitably by accession to this violent system. Entry into the symbolic order and the acquisition of language means accession to a system of gendered inequity. If one is aware that good and evil, culture and nature are supplementary to each other, that they stand in a reciprocal relationship one to the other, one may escape the totalising habit of thought which, in my chosen texts, entraps communities in the American Midwest, in Colombia, or in apartheid South Africa. The violence that destroys the young protagonist of Behr's

novel might have been avoided were the binaries good/evil and white/black upon which the apartheid system is predicated to be undone. The complicity of Willa Harper in her own annihilation might have been averted if she had not internalised, from childhood, the guilt and self-denigration instilled by the binarist values of her patriarchal culture; the extremist values inculcated in the subject by Church, State, Family, the Law, and the media might be lessened were the macho binaries of man/woman to be less unquestioningly adhered to by the small-town Colombian community.

*The psychoanalytic narrative.*

Accession to the system of gendered inequity that is the symbolic order is vividly exemplified in the Oedipal narrative which is so powerful a feature in the three works I have been analysing. I have found three commentators helpful in understanding the way in which the Oedipal narrative explicates and dramatises, through the induction of the male subject into his patriarchal heritage, the violence of culture and its expression through binarist thinking. They are film critic Frank Krutnik, cultural commentator Madan Sarup, and semiotic theorist Kaja Silverman. Silverman in *The Subject of Semiotics* has provided an accessible and comprehensive explanation of the way in which this narrative dramatises the perpetuation of the violence of the symbolic order. Not only does she make use of Derrida's poststructuralist ideas in considering the subject and its relation to narrative, but she also finds Freud's Oedipus theory and Lacan's elaboration of it a useful description of the way in which the subject is interpellated into patriarchal culture, while losing no opportunity of pointing up the lacunae and contradictions in the models of both these psychoanalytic thinkers.



In *The Subject of Semiotics* Silverman first defines what is meant by the term “subject”.

Silverman explains that the idea of the subject conflicts with Descartes’s idea of the “individual”. The Cartesian individual suggests a free, autonomous self that is knowable and a reliable source of truth, but, since Freud’s postulation of the unconscious mind, the subject has been recognised as being divided or split as there are unconscious motives and drives to which he or she does not have access. The Cartesian individual supposes the possibility of a private selfhood outside culture, outside discourse, whereas the subject is seen as being influenced by, and at the mercy of, culture: indeed, as the product of culture, rather than as something exterior to it, it is subject to the dictates of culture and subject to its own desires. Like the subject of a sentence, the meaning of which is syntactically derived, acquiring meaning in relation to other words in the sentence, the human subject acquires its meaning in relation to other cultural constructs. This conflicts with the Cartesian idea of an autonomous speaking individual, one that speaks without simultaneously being spoken. Silverman says that the subject, on the contrary, is spoken by culture, as if the subject were lip-synching the culture. Similarly, as culture determines speech, it instigates desire. Even what we think of as being our most private, integral desires are in fact collective as they are shaped by our culture which speaks through us. Silverman sums up succinctly with:

The term “subject” foregrounds the relationship between ethnology, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. It helps us to conceive of human reality as

a construction, as the product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious. (130)

Freud, in his search for the cause of his patients' neuroses, was forced to conclude in *Civilization and its Discontents* that it is civilization or culture itself that is "largely responsible for our misery" (76). In elaborating this contention he maintains that "What decides the purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle," that is to say that the instinctual drive towards survival demands satisfaction of the need to experience pleasure (represented initially by the mother's breast) or at least the need to avoid unpleasure (pain, discomfort or lack). However, individual indulgence of the pleasure principle conflicts with the survival of the social order. Indeed, the frustration and denial of the instinctual needs of that inchoate, unconscious selfhood Freud calls the "id" are a prerequisite for civilization. As Freud himself puts it, "It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct" (95).

In the light of these insights, Freud concludes that the socializing of the infant subject is a violent process in which constraint and coercion are unavoidable. The individual must learn to reach an accommodation between its own needs and those of the culture into which it is inserted. The pleasure principle must succumb to the constraints of culture. Under pressure from this "reality principle," the selfhood he called the ego separates off from the id, which persists as an unconscious mental entity with which the ego remains in touch, only the most deeply repressed part of the id remaining inaccessible to the ego. The ego itself is "associated with reason and common sense, its relation to the id being one of guidance and self-restraint" (Silverman 133). The

formation of the ego is not, however, the end of the process of acculturation which the individual is forced to undergo. Culture mediates the development of the subject inescapably at every crucial juncture. Later in the course of its psycho-sexual development, the child will acquire what Freud called the superego by internalising parental disapprobation of culturally proscribed behaviour.

Western culture is patriarchally ordered and it perpetuates its structures through the male subject who is the inheritor of its power and privilege. In order for this to be effected, it is necessary that the subject be socialized heterosexually in accordance with the dominant values of the patriarchy. This is by no means a natural process: the cultural patterning is effected by the Oedipus complex, which Freud regarded as the turning point in the *consolidation* of the child's sexual identity. Interestingly though, Freud theorizes a constitutional bisexuality of the young child which is never completely eliminated. To Kaja Silverman this suggests that "sexual identity is cultural, not organic" and that the agency for *producing* male and female subjects is the Oedipus complex, "the juncture at which they are *compelled* to follow separate paths" (Freud quoted in Silverman 138, my italics). Despite this seeming anomaly, Freud persisted in his conclusion that sexual identity is basically organically determined and he makes it clear that sexual definition means definition in relation to the penis, possession of which also confers a measure of aggression on the male subject. Aggression has, as its binary opposition or supplement, the passivity which is associated with female lack.

In writing about the Oedipus complex, Freud explains that Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is a tragedy of mankind's futile struggle to escape his destiny. In the play, destiny takes

the form of the will of the gods who declare that Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother. In an heroic attempt to escape his predestined fate, Oedipus unwittingly (i.e. unconsciously) enacts the very drama of desire and identity which he thought to avoid by choosing to travel another road. A series of harrowingly tragic events results from this well-intentioned choice. By extrapolation, according to Freud's model, the lesson for every developing male subject who experiences hostile feelings towards his father as a rival for the affections of his mother is that he must needs submit to patriarchal law (the will of the gods) "or face devastating consequences," in this case, castration by the father (Krutnik 76). He realizes he must toe the culturally acceptable line, or lose his male organ and the privileges that it confers.

The Oedipus complex is seen by Krutnik as a description of

how men come to align themselves with the patriarchal system (identifying with the obligations of masculine identity), while women tend to be located in an excluded and inferior position as the reproducers of culture rather than its prime movers. – i.e. as (m)others" (77).

The male subject relies for his authentication on the felt inferiority of the female subject. To overcome his own inadequacy, he must strive his whole life to maintain the fiction of hers.

The Oedipal trajectory described by the male child is the one theorized in detail by Freud. It involves the deep object-cathexis that the male child forms with his mother. She has been the source of gratification of his instinctual needs since his birth and his

affection for her is equal to his ego-cathexis or primary narcissism. Initially, his identification with his father is simple and direct. It is when his sexual cathexis for his mother becomes intense that the boy-child develops ambivalent feelings towards his father. Kaja Silverman suggests that this intensification of desire is the result of the *cultural imperative to be his father* (140). Although he admires his father he feels hostile towards him, as the father constitutes a threat and an obstacle to the indulgence of his love for his mother. The child realizes that the mother belongs to the father and that the contest is an unequal one. He wishes to eliminate the father in order to supplant him in the affections of his mother. This scenario is proscribed in the cultural narrative which writes his gendered behaviour. The resolution of this difficult situation involves choosing to identify more closely with one or other parent. The “normal” trajectory, according to Freud, sees the male child intensifying his relationship to his father and renouncing his mother as the object of his sexual desire and as the “repository of identity” (Krutnik 81). Correspondingly the little girl identifies more intensely with her mother. Her desire for the penis now takes the form of desiring the father and wishing to have his child.

This simple and admittedly schematic triangular situation is complicated by the constitutional bisexuality of the young child. The more complete form of the Oedipus complex would involve both positive and negative identifications in which not only does the boy child positively cathect with his mother and harbour hostile feelings for his father, but simultaneously identifies with his mother, behaving towards his father in a feminine, flirtatious manner and displaying feelings of jealousy towards his mother. “Normal” gendered identity, involving a clear distinction between “masculine” males and “feminine” females can therefore by no means be assumed. As

in all binary oppositions, one term always contains at least a trace of the other, even in the most “successful” Oedipal trajectory.

The Oedipus complex and the male subject’s accession to patriarchal power and privilege have been elaborated by the Freudian analyst, Jacques Lacan. Both the Freudian and the Lacanian models, if they are considered as being descriptive rather than prescriptive, provide a useful explanation of the way in which the developing subject is stamped with the imprint of patriarchy. Lacan brings to the practice of psychoanalysis a scholarly interest in the linguistic and anthropological theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss respectively. He creates an interface between Freudian psychoanalysis and post-structuralist theory.

Lacan’s thinking follows on from Freud’s work on the acculturation of the child, but with the difference that the Lacanian subject (male as well as female) is entirely defined by lack. The developing subject is subjected to loss of its primal plenitude at every critical stage of its development: from birth (when it is separated from the mother’s body and its placenta), through the territorialization of the body (when sensual pleasure is focussed on the orifices of the body instead of being experienced globally), the mirror stage, access to language and the Oedipus complex. Lacan postulates three principal registers of existence. The first of these is the “real,” which is the earliest phase of awareness, one of fullness of being which escapes signification, when the infant perceives itself as being not differentiated from the mother. Later, the infant subject accesses the register of the imaginary order, marked by the mirror stage, a phase of homologues, of correspondences, of likenesses, when the child first becomes aware of itself as a being discrete from the mother, whom it

recognises as other than itself and with whom it yearns once more to fuse. The mirror stage is also a crisis of alienation at the same time that it promises self-identification since to know oneself through an image in a mirror, something external to one's self, "is to be defined through self-alienation" (Sarup 27). Because one identifies with things *outside* of the self, and cathects with *other* things in which one recognises the self, one is constantly reminded that the self is constructed in the field of the other. Lacan pithily sums up this idea as "I is an other" (*Ecrits* 23). These two early registers, the real and the imaginary, correspond to Freud's pre-Oedipal stage. However, in Lacan's model, the imaginary register continues after the developing male subject enters into the symbolic order, or Law of the Father, when it acquires language and accepts the name of the father, forswearing its close relationship with its mother. As Madan Sarup expresses it: "The laws of language and society come to dwell within the child as he accepts the father's name and the father's 'no'" (25). He enters into the world of signification, the cultural order which is linguistically structured according to a system of differences: a system of meanings premised on, and shaped by sex and gender, by inequities, as the male term is inherently privileged in the signifying system. Also, entry into language means being cut off from the world as naming distances things from the self.

Lacan stresses the word "phallus", instead of the word "penis" in order to emphasise that "the crucial differentiation in the Oedipus complex is not between types of sexual organ but modes of sexual organization which are established in relation to the patriarchal authority invested in, and figured forth via, the phallus" (Krutnik 80). The phallus, says Lacan, is more than the penis. It stands for power, privilege and plenitude, all those values that are opposed to *lack* (Sarup 28). Although the term

“phallus” and the values it embodies are discursive rather than anatomical, the fact remains that possession of the penis brings one closer to the phallus. It confers membership of the club of the patriarchy (Krutnik 83). The male child accepts the Law of the Father as he inherits his privileged position within the symbolic ordering of patriarchal culture.

Western culture is phallogocentric in that the phallus is at the centre of the signifying system. It functions as the signifier that is inherently meaningful both inside and outside the system. Inside in that everything in culture is value-coded in relation to the phallus and apparently outside because it functions as the “transcendental” signifier, that which *seems* to be originary, but which is, of course, discursively produced like any other term in the system (Derrida SSP 110).

The girl child is explicitly excluded from symbolic power, because she does not possess the penis: instead, her body is inscribed with lack. The male child is now expected to deny and to devalue the possibilities and pleasures of the pre-Oedipal existence represented by the female, maternal body. Female bodily configuration now signifies phallic lack or castration. The reliance of the pre-Oedipal male subject on the mother as source of nurture and satisfaction must be renounced if he is to take up his privileged position in a phallically-ordered society. The powerful Imaginary relationship, involving both primary narcissism and object-cathexis, might well constitute a dangerous alternative to his gendered identity within the symbolic order, so that once a male subject has accepted his role within the phallic regime, he must constantly work to reinforce and consolidate that position against disruption and erosion from the alternative possibilities he has been forced to renounce (Krutnik 83).



His powerful identification with the father, which effects the end of the Oedipus complex, consolidates the formation of the superego in his psyche. By this means, the values of the father and, by association, those of the institutions of a patriarchal social order such as the Law, the State, the Church, economic power structures and the values promoted by texts and media of all kinds are internalised by the male child.

The castration of the little girl was never in doubt from the start and consequently, according to Freud, this prevents her from ever forming a strong superego, or moral sense. Lacan, in firmly excluding her from the Symbolic, awards her the “second prize” of a mythical “*jouissance*” instead. Paradoxically, he credits the female with a closer identification with the real, and therefore with fullness of being, so that she somehow “is” the phallus (Silverman 188). Either way, says Silverman, Lacan’s theory privileges the male, in that he may accede to phallic power and privilege himself, *and* possess plenitude through appropriation of a woman. The woman too, lacking the phallus, will desire it as the Other in the form of the father, represented also by the other culturally privileged signifiers, “law”, “money”, and “knowledge” *inter alia*. In this way she will maintain and reaffirm the primacy of the paternal signifier. Thus it is clear that the family is a discursive site for the perpetuation of phallic privilege. Silverman points out that what Lacan has done is unwittingly to collapse the symbolic into the real, by making the phallus mean both plenitude and lack. She reminds us that, as a signifier, a discursive construct, the phallus can only acquire meaning within discourse. It only *functions* as the transcendental signifier within the phallogentric system but it is actually a cultural, discursive construct as much as any other signifier in the system (188). Similarly, Silverman warns that one

should recognise that the dominant discursive practices that shaped the models of Freud and Lacan are cultural constructs and not unalterable cosmic laws.

The salient feature about Lacan's model of the subject is that it is predicated on lack, locked into a system of alienation from the self from its very inception. It is doomed to a lifelong striving to be equivalent to the ideal symbolic roles assigned to it by culture and "the result can only be a brutalising sense of inadequacy for both male and female subject" (Silverman 191). Even the male subject, of whom identification with the ideal father is expected, "can never be equivalent to the symbolic position with which he identifies." The role which has been culturally laid down for him always exceeds him. As long as one recognises that these patterns are culturally constructed and function to perpetuate the patriarchal system, says Silverman, it becomes possible to think another subjectivity, another symbolic order (192).

Accession to the present symbolic order and the Oedipal drama can be seen as myths which explain human behaviour in terms of a cultural construct. My project in this dissertation will be to examine three popular narratives which stage the enactment of these myths in order to assess the extent to which the protagonists are, like Oedipus, determined by their predestined roles, and to what degree they are able to exercise choice in writing the narrative of their own lives.

# *The Night of the Hunter*



## Chapter Two: *The Night of the Hunter*

*"The dangerous shadow was no more than a faint dappling of darkness among the sun-speckled shallows: ... the dark gar in the river of his mind".*

Davis Grubb

I have chosen to examine this film because it offers an especially clear account of the inescapability of the violence of the symbolic order and also because Charles Laughton, in presenting his visual metaphors of good and evil, shows a particularly sensitive understanding of the way in which the terms of this binary opposition cannot be distanced or excluded one from the other.

### Synopsis

Although the film is regarded as an American classic by film scholars, it is relatively unknown amongst the general public. I have therefore thought it advisable to provide a synopsis of the story.

Set in the rural Mid-West during the great depression, *The Night of the Hunter* tells the story of the Harper children terrorized by the villain, Preacher Harry Powell, who kills widows, supposedly at God's instigation, but also so that he can steal their money. Arrested for theft of a vehicle, Powell shares a cell in the Moundsville Penitentiary with Ben Harper, condemned to death for robbery and murder. Preacher is unable to wheedle from Ben the secret of where he has hidden the \$10,000 that he had stolen from a bank. He resolves to hunt down Ben's money and Ben's widow once released.

Upon his discharge, he heads for Cresap's Landing in order to get his hands on the money. Ben's two young children, John and his little sister Pearl, know where the money is hidden, but were sworn to secrecy by their father moments before the police officers came to get him, sirens wailing. John has also sworn to look after Pearl with his life, to be her "father." Their mother, Willa, who works for elderly Walt and Ikey Spoon at their ice-cream parlour, is not made privy to the secret.

Powell arrives and ingratiates himself with Willa, Pearl and Ikey, who urges Willa to take on Powell as husband and father to the children. Despite John's rejection of him, Powell and Willa marry but Willa's hopes of a loving relationship are dashed when he makes it clear that there will be no sex in their marriage. Once installed as the father substitute, Harry Powell sets about interrogating the children as to the whereabouts of the money.

Pearl wants to please him by telling, although Preacher has earlier terrified her by threatening to tear her arm off if she doesn't. Willa overhears this and, that night, Powell listens for the voice of God telling him to murder Willa, who accepts and even invites her fate as sacrifice to the will of "the Lord." Preacher cuts her throat and drives the car, with her corpse roped to the seat, into the river.

The menace to the children is now intensified and they hide in the cellar while Harry searches the house for them. Ever well-meaning and domineering, Icey brings supper and calls them out. Preacher eats alone, denying food to the children until they yield up the secret. John tricks him into returning to the cellar from whence they escape after Pearl, at the moment when Preacher resolves to cut John's throat, blurts out that the money is hidden inside her doll. With the murderer temporarily locked in the cellar, the children run to Uncle Birdie Steptoe's wharf-boat on the river for help, as he has been something of a father-figure to John and, aware that all is not well, has offered them a haven whenever they might need it. However, Uncle Birdie, having earlier caught sight of Willa's corpse underwater while he was out fishing, fears that he will be held responsible for her murder and is dead drunk when the frantic children arrive. Unable to wake Uncle Birdie, John drags Pearl to Ben's skiff and manages to push free of the riverbank just as their pursuer comes crashing, ogre-like, through the bushes. They drift for days, pursued by the preacher on horseback, begging for food at farmhouses along the river together with other destitute children, eventually drifting to the farm of tough but loving Rachel Cooper, who is to be their salvation.

They are taken into Rachel's "family" of abandoned children, little Mary, Clair and adolescent Ruby. But the hunter, who we know has been trailing them, sweet-talks the susceptible Ruby into confirming rumours of their whereabouts. He arrives at the farm to claim them but is chased away at gun-point by a percipient Rachel. Cursing, he threatens to return after dark. When he does, Rachel is waiting for him, seated in her rocking-chair at the window, pump-gun across her lap. He gains access to the house and suddenly appears in front of her. She shoots and wounds him and he takes refuge, howling, in her barn. The next morning the police arrive to get him in an exact re-enactment of the arrest of Ben Harper. John suddenly loses control and rushes up to the prone Harry Powell shouting "Here, take it! It's too much," and hitting him repeatedly with the doll from which the fatal 10,000 dollars burst and scatter.

At Powell's trial, John refuses either to identify him or to testify against him. The good people of Moundsville and of Cresap's Landing, led by a vociferous and vengeful Icey and the formerly meek Walt Spoon, go on a mob rampage, attacking the prison in a fever of vigilantism. The hangman who had felt remorse at having been the agent of Ben Harper's execution professes his satisfaction at being appointed to do the same for Harry Powell.

At the end of the film, stability is reasserted. Rachel's family are cosily celebrating Christmas as the snow swirls down outside. There is a symbolic exchange of gifts and Rachel has the last word about the resilience and strength of children, their capacity to "abide and endure."

Although commonly cited as one of the great American films of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is surprisingly little critical commentary on the film that Charles Laughton created with so faithful a degree of truth to the original text of Davis Grubb's best-selling novel. The reviews and critiques of the film tend largely to concentrate on the binary opposition of good and evil which it foregrounds and which is famously illustrated by the words "love" and "hate" tattooed on the backs of Harry Powell's fingers, but without paying any attention to the way in which Laughton presents them as being mutually implicated. Some reviewers draw conclusions regarding the treatment of sex in the film that are quite simply unjustified. In this regard I would mention Jonathan Romney's review in the *New Statesman* of 2 April 1999, on the occasion of the rescreening of the film in art-house cinemas in London. In this review he writes of Rachel Cooper that she is "the very figure of tough love, with her soap, biblical parables and stern warnings against sex" and that "her regime is based on sexual repression every bit as draconian as (Preacher's)" (39). In fact, Rachel responds with understanding and sympathy to Ruby's confession. Of the villain Romney claims that "the preacher becomes the one figure we can trust, simply because he's a solid presence" (39). On the contrary, Harry Powell is mercurial in the extreme, being at times the sanctimonious man of God, at times the ruthless killer, and even, at times, the cartoon ogre when apprehended through the consciousness of the threatened children. One might, indeed, trust Harry Powell as one might trust Tartuffe, a character analogy perceptively drawn by Simon Callow in his critical appraisal of the film for the British Film Institute (70).

Moylan C. Mills has written a useful article entitled "Charles Laughton's Adaptation of *The Night of the Hunter*" in which he perceptively observes its "strange erotic amalgam of sex, religion and money"(54) and the stylised, Brechtian, intertextual approach of the director

(52). However, he too is given to unnuanced assertions regarding character and theme that I would query. Does the film really affirm “the timeless triumph of love over hate, good over evil, innocence over corruption” (49)? I would argue that this assessment is reductive and oversimplified. If, as Mills seems to posit, Preacher represents evil and Rachel Cooper, good, he shows scant sensitivity to the trace of the opposite in each term of the binary in Laughton’s interpretation of both characters. The Hunter is, at the end, shown to be the hunted, a helpless victim of the patriarchy, and Mills’s assessment of Rachel Cooper as “the exemplar of all the decent human values” takes no cognisance of her undoubtedly human failings (49). However, Mills’s account gives interesting background information regarding Laughton’s approach to interpreting Grubb’s masterpiece in cinematic terms, much of which is duplicated in Simon Callow’s small book for the BFI on *The Night of the Hunter*.

Callow’s account, despite some irksome lapses of accuracy in relating the sequence of events and even as to what actors actually say and do in the film, is highly informative regarding all aspects of the creation of the film with illuminating quotes from Grubb on key scenes. He also includes an overview of the critical reception of the film on its release in 1955. Some of these reviews foreground the Freudian/Oedipal theme. None, however, links the film’s staging of the Oedipal drama to ideas of the symbolic order and the violence of enculturation that may be found in the late Freudian and Lacanian models. This is an approach that emphasises the cultural programming of the subject in alignment with the patriarchal order. Laughton who, as a boy, had been expelled from Stonyhurst, and who abominated patriarchal institutions like British public schools and organised religion, found much to excite his sympathy in Grubb’s novel (Callow 25). He wrote to Grubb: “Hollywood has been looking

for forty years, Davis, to find a story about the church, what it is and what it does, and you've found a way of doing it that we can put over" (Callow 24). According to Paul Gregory, Laughton's associate, filming

an allegory of the struggle between good and evil: a Christian mural in which the Preacher has the part of the devil ...was a marvellous opportunity to show that God's glory was really in the little old farm woman, and not in the bible totin' sonafabitch. (Callow 25)

As Gregory suggests, Laughton's film not only highlights the coerciveness of cultural constructs like Christianity, the law and the state and the way in which they are imbricated with one another, but also the way in which good and evil, those supposed opposites, are likewise part of each other. Cinematically the film has many *noir* attributes, one of the most important of which is the moral ambivalence of the protagonists. In the historical context of this work, the depression years of the thirties, morality is inextricably enmeshed with money. Money means power and privilege. It is a potent patriarchal metaphor. In a capitalist social order, particularly during a depression, money, the lack of it and the desire for it, takes on symbolic importance. In Laughton's *noir* film an apparently decent family man robs a bank in order to ensure that his children never suffer privation, never have to become beggars roaming the streets. This pre-emptive act of violence has the ironic effect of his children's being reduced to homeless beggary, because the decent American family man is armed and two bank officials are shot. Violence has irrupted into a "safe" space, a trope that will recur many times throughout the narrative. Although Ben Harper is presented as being the "good"



father, there is never any suggestion, either in Grubb's novel or Laughton's film, that he acts out of despair as a poverty-stricken unemployed person. His crime, being pre-emptive, is therefore gratuitous, unnecessary. He attempts to arrogate to himself the power conferred by money in an unjust capitalist system for the best of reasons (for the sake of his children) no less than Harry Powell does for the best of reasons (to the glory of God). This is one of the most persuasive points that both Grubb and Laughton make about the interconnectedness of good and evil: that they are not necessarily distinguishable from each other, as one resides within the other, rather than existing at opposite ends of the moral continuum.

In Lacanian terms, *The Night of the Hunter* stages the drama of accession to the symbolic order, to the Name of the Father, of the child John Harper. Having introduced his representatives of "good" and "evil", Rachel Cooper and Harry Powell, Laughton plunges into the Oedipal plot with brisk economy. Aerial camerawork establishes an idyllic American Pastoral setting and homes in on the two Harper children amongst daisies.



Both are dressing Pearl's doll, Miz Jenny, an activity in which John engages quite unselfconsciously, as his status in this restaging of an induction is still that of a pre-Oedipal

being, and playing with dolls may be seen as being informed by the Lacanian imaginary, the ongoing register of identifications and homologues which precedes full entry into the cultural order. Their father, wounded, bursts in upon this scene of childish innocence, frantically casts about for and finds a hiding-place for the stolen money and swears the children to secrecy. He emphasises that the money is for them when they grow up. The doll now contains the money, always a potent phallic metaphor, and as such it now becomes a term in, and gets its meaning from, the symbolic order into which the little boy is now prematurely inducted. Laughton stages this scene as a visually explicit ritual oath-taking. John towers over the crouching Ben, assuming physically the status of an adult.



That this accession is firmly gender-oriented is made clear in that Willa, their mother, is not considered worthy of being granted access to the secret. "You got common sense. She aint," is Ben's terse summary of his wife's nature. (Neither is Pearl sworn to secrecy with any ceremony. Hers is a sketchy, throwaway induction at best, nor is she expected to utter the words, as is her brother. A silent nod suffices.)

As a staging of gendered accession into the symbolic order this scene is both noteworthy and classical. It is attended overwhelmingly by violence and it is a dramatising of the earlier, unconscious Oedipal struggle that occurred when the children were much younger, when they first acquired language and were inserted into the gendered hierarchy of signification. It recapitulates the unconscious process by which John earlier acquired his position of privilege within the gendered family structure. The film also stages John's premature accession to the position of Symbolic Father, a position that, in any case, always exceeds the actual individual person occupying it, as Kaja Silverman points out (180). Throughout the movie John struggles heroically to be equal to the symbolic role he has promised to fulfil. His first act is to turn and run from his mother, as she represents the pre-Oedipal phase that he must now leave behind.



The boy child now inhabits, in this restaging of his accession, a liminal space. He is at once a child and a father in the socially scripted drama, and has to juggle two identities. He now has no father with whom he can identify in order to resolve the Oedipal transition. Instead of

intensified identification with a strong father who putatively wields the threat of castration over the boy child, John has had the disturbing experience of seeing his father symbolically emasculated by the representatives of the structures of economic and state power he has attempted to buck. Wounding is classically a castration metaphor, and it is here emphasised by Laughton's *mise-en-scène*, by the tableau formed by the actors during the arrest. Ben's position is one of female helplessness, prone and threatened by the phallic handguns of four representatives of the patriarchy.



Pearl, too, is relegated to the margins of the cultural order, but her ongoing alliance to the imaginary register is far stronger. She cuts up and plays at paper-dolls with some of the banknotes, naming them John and Pearl, perhaps attempting to establish control by whatever means she may. This is a provocative image. The phallic, symbolic money inside the doll (representative of the imaginary register) is made to “give birth” to more dolls. The small female can only understand the symbolic as a version of the imaginary. To Pearl, the money is merely paper, and she values it as such in cutting it up in order to perpetuate the imaginary.

It is only when she is reminded by the presence of her brother/father that the paper is, by patriarchal agreement, invested with material value, that Pearl concedes her error: “I done a sin,” she confesses.



She is eager to shrug off her incomplete and distorted accession, re-enacting the violence of the experience when she tears up the flower from John's shirt after the wedding and expresses her wish to be released forthwith from the speech-prohibition. Her role in the resolution of the female Oedipus complex is to intensify her identification with the mother in desiring the father, in this case, the surrogate father and, by extension, the patriarchal order. She therefore “loves Mr Powell lots an’ lots” and desires to give him her “baby” and the symbolic power it contains.

The violence attendant on John's premature accession to the position of Symbolic Father is deeply internalised by the boy child (as Laughton has him physically, gesturally enact when he

clutches his belly, keening softly, “Don’t. Don’t!”).



He tells Pearl a bed-time story in which the king (a Freudian metaphor for the father) tells his son to kill anyone who tries to take the money from him. He asserts his curatorship over Pearl obsessively, engaging in a ceaseless power-struggle with the surrogate father for “ownership” of her as the “other” who is needed by the patriarchy as a king needs subjects in order to validate his ascendancy.

Both John and Pearl are physically exiled from the world of other children, as they no longer attend school and are socially ostracised by their peers who see them as being tainted with the poison of their father's transgression. They are thus suspended in a limbo of not-belonging in either a family or a social context. This trope of liminality is a complication that is manifested through other characters in the narrative. John's filial affections become displaced onto Uncle Birdie Steptoe whose position within the cultural context is an ambivalent one. Clearly he

does not enjoy total acceptance within the cultural structures. He is a marginal character, living on a wharf-boat barely connected to the river-bank, but for John, Birdie is a fully masculine icon, invested with the romance of the river, presented by Laughton to the accompaniment of river-boat chimneys gushing steam and smoke and brave noise. It is clear, however, that, as he lives alone, Uncle Birdie has no-one over whom he can assert his ascendancy as a man. Indeed, he is constantly subject to the "gaze" of the photograph of his late wife, to whom he feels the need to exculpate himself at all times. Uncle Birdie treats John as an equal, which is indicative, too, of John's similarly marginal status. "Shucks, aint it a caution what a woman will load onto a *man's* back when he aint looking?" he confides, as one put-upon man to another, and calls John "Cap" and shares his boat and fishing skills with him as a caring father might. Uncle Birdie's outburst of seemingly unprovoked rage against the inedible fish he lands is greeted with approval by John in the fleeting moment of the dissolve. He has been convinced that in Uncle Birdie's victory over the gar, "the meanest, orneriest critter" in the river, can be read an affirmation of his ability to triumph over his evil stepfather. (Grubb makes the point that the thought of Preacher is "the dark gar in the river of [John's] mind" (132). He can trust Uncle Birdie to come to his aid if needed. For the viewer, the sudden irruption of violence into the still and peaceful river scene is a telling metaphor for the inescapability and ubiquity of the trauma that pervades the cultural order. Although Uncle Birdie is relatively powerless within the prevailing hegemony, the violence that pervades it works through him also. Similarly, the scapegoat status of marginalized people, their exile from the power and privilege of the cultural order, is underlined by Uncle Birdie's fear that he will be blamed for Willa's death. "If I go to the law, they'll hang it on me", he moans.

Walt Spoon is another character who occupies a liminal space in the cultural order and seems not to enjoy much access to the phallus. Emasculated by his wife, he intuits that there is something wrong with Willa in a way that is often stereotyped as “feminine.” Birdie, too, senses that all is not well. Both Walt and Birdie are frequently positioned in liminal spaces such as doorways and windows, indicative of the marginal place they occupy in the social order.

The condition of widowhood itself is presented as being a marginal state, wherein the woman is neither maiden nor married, under the protection of neither father nor husband and therefore automatically vulnerable. Laughton chooses to stress this by opening his narrative with the discovery of a murdered woman in a doorway. Willa enacts fully the victim status of the widow in society, at the mercy both of predatory males and of the machinations of other women to whom her unattached status presents a threat. The scene in which Willa is “martyred” by her husband is highly Gothicised, both as regards the shapes and forms which make up the *mise-en-scène* and the lighting, which frames the willing sacrifice in an ogive arch, posed with her arms crossed on her bosom like an effigy on a sarcophagus.





Her fatal passivity is the correlative of violence; it invites oppression and incites effacement. She is the absolute victim of the patriarchy; the opposing term which enables it to exist and gives it meaning.



The picnic scene is one in which the superficially innocent American pastoral idyll is foregrounded visually over the implied Oedipal drama, but at the same time the grouping of the figures makes clear the way in which the social order is organised around male symbolic power and emphasises the isolation of the Harper children. Laughton, we are told, based the *mise-en-scène* on Seurat's "*La Grande Jatte*," that peaceful and orderly painting depicting an outing beside the River Seine (Callow 44). The assembled community consists mainly of women in light frocks (and the ineffectual Walt in a white suit) gathered around the black-clad "man of God" who leads them in singing "Bringing in the Sheaves" with Willa, unsure both of the words and of herself, at his side.



John and Pearl sit alone while the other children play together. The idea that one's very desires are culturally instigated is seen in Ikey's dictating to the children and to Willa what they *should want*. At the same time that Ikey procures Preacher for Willa, she contradicts her prurient action with a jeremiad against sex, which is seen as unclean in this post-lapsarian, unidyllic world. Yet ironically, when Willa assures Preacher, "My whole body is just a-quiverin' with cleanness," she is signalling her readiness to him.



Immediately after Willa's implied acceptance, Harry Powell asserts his control, his patriarchal status, by adjusting John's tie, a clear castration threat and indicative of the subtle shift in power relations now that his way to Willa lies clear. It is a gesture that may also be read as a threat to John's site of speech, an adumbration of future coercion (and of Preacher's avowed intention, in the cellar, to cut John's throat.) It is shot from an extremely low angle, from John's perspective, thus heightening audience identification with the threatened child and the sense of mounting fear and tension.

Laughton presses home this point in the pivotal scene in which Preacher confronts John in the dark passage-way to announce the news that he will be taking over as the father. This is a *noir* sequence shot from a high angle and very tightly framed, giving it an expressionistic, claustrophobic feel. Giant shadows and angular shapes of chiaroscuro augment the sense of entrapment as Preacher cuts off John's escape.



A passageway might be construed as neutral ground, where struggle may be engaged. But here there is simply no contest. The *mise-en-scène* augments the metaphor of the pegs behind Preacher at Spoon's on their first meeting. These have now become explicitly jutting cylinders on the hall-stand behind him, as he announces that he is about to become the father-substitute. John's defiant refusal to relinquish his position as the father and the older man's smug confidence provoke a crisis in John that almost causes him to breach his induction oath.

Laughton constructs many such clever and subtle visual analogies for implied Oedipal states. The little boy charged with behaving like a father remains "a baby," especially on those occasions when he is in the company of the surrogate father with Pearl as the site of contestation. Powell wields the icons and appropriates the women. He lifts the besotted Pearl onto his lap and he is the possessor of the phallus. He has a big knife: John, on the other hand, does not; on the contrary he is frequently positioned against a window, his head framed by frilly curtains, the image of a neonate.



Thus the director repeatedly makes the point that John, by comparison with Preacher, is still only a “baby.” Powell drives this home by perpetually unmanning and disempowering him verbally when he calls him, “boy” and “little lad” and insists that “John doesn’t matter.”

Willa’s ambivalent signal to Powell is a readiness not only for sex but for martyrdom also. In his novel, Grubb writes of her self-abasement: “Willa had discovered sin. It seemed somehow that this discovery was something that she had sought and hungered for all her life” (107).



The point is made that she has been impressed with the guilty burden of being female, of bearing the mark of Eve, since entering the field of gendered signification. As Grubb remarks in a letter to Laughton:

The bud of guilt was there from the beginning for preacher to bring so quickly into flower....Ecstasy slips so quickly from the loins to the praying hands....Preacher you see brought Willa the punishment she had felt (perhaps since childhood) that she had deserved. (Callow 30)

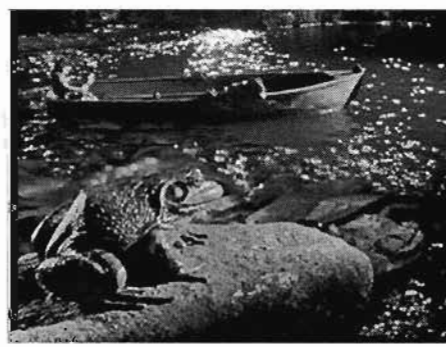
The loss of the mother heralds a new phase of intense anxiety expressed symbolically as the world is mediated through John's consciousness. He now sleeps with his hand over Miz Jenny's mouth, as if asserting his power over the female figure whose dangerous utterances he *can* easily control. The disconcerting cellar scene, which steps so far over the line between dream and waking, fantasy and reality, seems intended to signify a sojourn in the underworld, the Freudian unconscious. It is introduced by the hymn theme of the Hunter, segueing in over the image of Willa underwater so that the viewer is in no doubt that her fate awaits the children also. The camera irises in on their faces at the cellar window, a Brechtian cinematographic device that denies verisimilitude and suggests a distorted awareness, perhaps indicative of John's heightened level of fear. Also it narrows the gauge of the Hunter's focus as he combs the house for his prey. Ikey's interruption is no help to them. She was ever the midwife to their present plight, an agent of cultural support for the appropriation of children by the law of the father. Preacher intones deeply and meaningfully the lines: "Weren't you afraid, little lambs [to the slaughter?], *in all that dark?*" and "You go ahead of me. *Down those stairs.*" By the light of Preacher's candle the cellar takes on a menacing blackness that it did not have when the children were there on their own. It is he himself who has created "all that dark".



The ensuing slapstick, cartoonish sequence of the hairsbreadth escape of the quarry from the monster is mediated through John's heightened sensibilities, formed through acquaintance with fairy stories, cinema cartoons and the atavistic Oedipal fear of the punishing power of the father (awakened by the threat posed by the knife in the preceding supper scene). In this scene Preacher, in his role of ogre indulging in a solitary feast while the children starve (Gerard Lenne in Callow 59), threatens with the weapon, the phallic emblem, which it is a violation of his power to touch. Pearl, fascinated by the erectile "toy", puts out her hand to it, but he warns her that he will lose his self-control if she does. "Uh-uh! Don't touch my knife! That makes me mad. That makes me very, very mad," he tells her. Clearly, even the armed adult male is subject to anxiety, conscious of being exceeded by the role he feels called upon to interpret in the patriarchal narrative. The idea of the knife as a radically insufficient phallic emblem vulnerable to pollution or weakening by the proximity of the female has earlier been adumbrated in the burlesque show sequence prior to Preacher's arrest. In this telling scene, as he watches the gyrating stripper, Preacher's hand tattooed with the word "hate" convulsively erects the knife through the fabric of his jacket.



The children's escape on the river, the nurturing, maternal body of water that is so embedded and potent an American myth of freedom, is presented with all the surreal cinematography and metaphoric, fairytale *mise-en-scène* of the opening sequence. It is not realistically presented because it is not real. Their escape from the law of the father is not real. The hunter is on their trail. They are not so much free as temporarily detached from the structures of the paternal signifier. The Edenic animals that occupy the foreground are metaphors for their situation as they drift downstream. First they move away from the spiderweb, a clear reference to their escape from the network of patriarchal power. An exaggeratedly lit bullfrog at the water's edge suggests, by its amphibious nature, a dualism of land/water, of frog/fairytale prince.



All the animal metaphors connote a duality of being and of belonging: owl, rabbits, tree-fox, and turtle: all inhabit two worlds, two modes of existence. One world is the supplement of



the other, complementing its apparently opposing term. This sequence resonates metaphorically with Laughton's prior presentation of a world in which good and evil do not each have a separate ontological existence.

The final section of the narrative which deals with the children's being taken in (and over) by Rachel Cooper presents a resolution of their tragedy, but it is more complex than that. The skiff glides into a nest of reeds on the riverbank in a slow, lingering take. This is a sexually charged moment, a marriage between the drifting world of the homeless children and what seems to be a new, if flawed, Eden, replete with emblematic apples. In Grubb's novel Rachel is an androgynous figure, with hands "like roots," more masculine than the (still) quintessentially girlish Lillian Gish. Here she appears as an anachronistic fairy tale character in long skirts at a time when the people in urban New Economy (the nearby market town) are dressed in the contemporary mode. From the start she wields the instruments of patriarchal power in what appears to be an unnecessarily overt way. This establishes her as the paternal signifier in the constructed family context. John's anxiety concerning his rebirth into this new surrogate family takes the form of attempting to avoid the washing ritual, but his act of rebellion is quickly quelled, again with uncompromising physical violence from the "father" figure. The terror he evinces at the sight of the Bible is palliated by hearing his own story emerge from it. There is a significant moment of attachment afterwards, when Rachel and John share an apple (an atavistic, biblical statement of complicity). She has usurped his power but before he can accept this, he needs the assurance that he can once more attain the privileged status of "king" or father. If baby Moses, washed up in the bulrushes in his "skiff," can become "a king of men," then so, when the *time* is right, can he. Hesitantly he reaches

out and lays his hand on hers in a deeply moving gesture of trust and bites into the apple, thus signalling his acceptance of the new dispensation.



Rachel renews her promise to John that he may once more accede to the status of father, that she will one day share or indeed relinquish her position to him, when she relates, at the moment of most intense threat from the hunter, the allegory of baby King Jesus escaping from the infanticidal King Herod. She delivers this promise in an urgent and agitated manner, pacing vigilantly, while they all wait, lined up against the wall in the dark for the hidden hunter to show himself. John is reassured, so that when Powell suddenly pops up in front of Rachel we see him through John's eyes, as a cartoon character once again, this time more comic than monstrous, for now it is Rachel who wields the bigger weapon. The incantatory yips and whoops uttered by the wounded killer as he flees the house for the shelter of the barn, are clearly intended to be laughable, a device for the defusing of tension. It is noteworthy that it is Harry Powell who now spends the night *outside*. From this moment on, the Hunter ceases to present a threat and instead is transformed into his binary opposite, a victim.

Laughton has Rachel wait until morning before calling the state troopers. When dawn breaks she is sitting, vigilant in her rocking chair with the pump-gun across her knees as before. John occupies a position of privilege and responsibility beside her and his first move on waking is to “see to Pearl”. All the female children, including the much older Ruby, are positioned on the other side of a glass barrier behind them. In this new, constructed, surrogate family context, John again enjoys a status that is denied to the girls.



When the lawmen arrive, sirens wailing, John’s reaction to Powell’s arrest highlights Laughton’s and Grubb’s understanding of the implacable, institutionalised violence of the cultural order. His hysterical attempt to give back that which he never can, the intolerable burden of violence and responsibility, is triggered by his recognition of the killer as cognate with his father. As the troopers close in on Harry Powell, who offers no resistance, but reels out of the barn as if in a dream or trance, assuming the pose of a Michelangelesque bound captive, John sees the “castration” of the father being re-enacted with mirror-image exactness.



Snatching the doll from Pearl's grasp he flings himself at the prone and helpless man, flailing at him with the gendered puppet that has become so tainted with symbolic significance and sobbing out the words which reflect his rejection of allegiance to the patriarchal power bequeathed to him by his father: "Here! Here! Take it! It's too much, Dad! I don't want it! Here!" and lapses into unconsciousness. Rachel Cooper's anxious cry of "John-John!" thus identifying him as a little boy again, announces the moment of his regression to an infantile, pre-Oedipal state.

During this period of rebellion against recruitment into the patriarchal order, he vacates his position in the social scheme, inhabiting a world of non-signification, a locus of suspended consciousness of culturally constructed relationships. He erases the arche-writing that has scripted the story of his subjectivity within the syntagmatic network. Grubb's novel makes it clear that his state is pathological in his failure to recognise anyone from his life in Cresap's Landing. Having thus opted out of culture, rejected his scripted position in the symbolic order, he is mute and unco-operative at the trial of the killer, appropriately bereft of the

power of signification. Cinematically, Laughton configures the final trial scene, the last of three, differently from the previous two as regards the positioning of the actors. In the first two trials, those of Harry Powell for car-theft and of Ben Harper for murder, the judge was positioned in the same place relative to the accused and to the left of the portrait of Abe Lincoln. In this final trial of Powell for multiple murder it is John who is positioned to the left of the portrait, i.e. in the position of the judge. His utter refusal, either to look at his step-father or to identify him as his mother's killer, despite the accusing, pointing finger of the prosecutor, the representative of patriarchal law, recalls Rachel's lesson from the bible, "Judge not, lest ye be judged."



He is gently reinducted into culture through the loving agency of Rachel Cooper, a character who, though female, is a match for the privileged masculine structures of her social context, modifying and mediating their prescriptions. Although she is clearly in no way outside of the social order, her deployment of its instruments is tempered by her status as archetypal loving mother. She provides, as it were, a counternarrative to the stern biblical strictures of her culture, one of love, flexibility and inclusiveness. In her, the father/mother dualism is shown

to be mutually supplementary.

When Laughton directed his *noir* film, which treats essentially of the myth of American innocence, he patterned it on typically morally ambivalent lines that may be read through a Derridean lens. Not only does the film make visible the violence that is always part of culture, but also it visually complicates or undoes the binary oppositions like culture/nature, good/evil, love/hate by which the symbolic order is structured and upon which it depends. As a result, the entire binarist structure of the cultural order is called into question. Thus the film undermines the symbolic order in two ways; firstly by revealing that culture is always violent, that even a “gentle” induction is an induction into a coercive and violent “order of things” and secondly, by complicating or undoing not only the culture/violence binary (the idea that culture is a benign order) but other crucial oppositions as well. Laughton translates binary oppositions like love/hate, nature/culture, good/evil into juxtapositions of image, of sound and of foundational concept that are as closely linked as Preacher’s interlaced, tattooed fingers.



Throughout the film the fundamental binary dualisms subvert and collapse into each other. Laughton has crafted a careful tissue of balanced juxtapositions of apparent opposites, consistently maintaining an iconography of *noir* ambivalence and undecidability. These ambiguities suffuse every aspect of the work. His cinematographic styling incorporates both the rural idyll of Griffith's *American Pastoral* and the stagey, claustrophobically enclosed, starkly lit spaces of the German expressionist mode. These two contradictory visual styles represent the two faces of the same symbolic order, a concept that lies at the heart of this story. The apparently idyllic is invested with the nightmarish, the distorted. Religion, presented in the opening sequence as a stabilizing force for social good, is immediately afterwards bodied forth by the murderous preacher who takes his cues for killing directly from God. The river, eternal symbol of life and maternal nurture is contaminated with the institutions of the cultural order and can offer no solace. The film is given an eerie, disturbing quality by the uncompromising juxtapositions, presented through carefully composed *mise-en-scène*, of contradictory concept, style and genre.

Laughton's technique is to present more than one identity to the viewer. He always provides the obverse of the symbolic coin and these ironic audio-visual oxymora pervade the film. The romantic image above the wedding-night bed of a military officer (a "white knight") astride a rearing black steed is answered by the supplementary term of the black-garbed hunter on the stolen white horse. The hand tattooed with "love" wraps around the open-bladed knife as Harry prayerfully expresses his intention of courting Ben's widow, and as Willa feebly resists Icey's pimping, the potent phallic image of the dark train charges across the screen to the accompaniment of the ponderous horns that signal the presence of the Hunter.



Laughton chooses to open his film with an unsettling image of masked-off, disembodied heads suspended in starry space. They are disposed in a rigid, gothic conformation suggestive of an early Renaissance or Byzantine painting featuring a central, frontally positioned Virgin flanked by *putti*. The sound-track offers angelic voices singing a lullaby (scripted by Grubb and composed by Walter Schumann) which introduces the nightmarish trope of the hunter in the night. The “good” character reads aloud (in itself an activity that operates at the level of convergence between speech and writing) from the Bible, the “good” book that is so “full of killing.” These disturbing discontinuities announce that this film will inhabit an edgy space between fantasy and reality and indeed, will foreground unsustainable binary oppositions as a moral blueprint for the film’s design.





But who are the children who listen so attentively to Rachel Cooper's exemplum in which she teaches (with no hint of irony) the way to distinguish between good and evil? Are they in fact John, Pearl, Mary and the others? Their shining faces are subtly unrecognisable. They seem both to be and not to be the characters who are named John, Pearl and Mary. They are not fully present as these named subjects, but rather as ideal images, their features strongly, expressionistically lit. This initial image serves as a metaphor for the split subject and prepares the spectator for some of the more jarring generic juxtapositions perpetrated by Laughton during the course of the narrative. No character is wholly one thing, but demonstrably bears the trace of its opposite. Rachel's introductory parable deals with the central duality of good and evil around which the story is structured. As is made immediately clear, one term cannot exist without the other. Their natures are undecidable and it is only by their "fruit" that the trees of Rachel's parable may ultimately be distinguished.

There are many sites of conflation which Laughton presents to the viewer. Ben Harper reacts with instant violence against the inverted Preacher in the prison bunk. It is his automatic response. Harper is a perpetrator as much as he is a victim. That John is all too aware of this is made clear at the end when he responds to Preacher's arrest in the same way as he did to Ben's as the violence of the system represented by the lawmen is recapitulated, mirrored in every detail. The twisted killer superficially epitomises gentlemanly virtues and even Rachel Cooper engages in mildly transgressive behaviour. Even Rachel, the "strong tree with branches for many birds," is exceeded by the culturally scripted role of mother as she confesses to having lost the love of her son. Nor is she above violence or dishonesty: "Put the big ones on top," she advises Mary about her basket of apples for sale, showing that even she cannot wholly occupy the unshakeable centre of moral decency that Moylan C. Mills

claims for her (49). She is no more able to get outside of the discourses of the Symbolic than anyone else. This is a point which Laughton is apparently at some pains to stress on several occasions, notably when Rachel sings the same songs and reads from the same book as Harry Powell. Conversely, the evil Preacher (already a contradiction in terms; the very concept of an evil man of God is paradoxical) becomes at the end, a pathetic, wounded victim of the violence endemic to the culture of which he, too, is a construct.

Laughton's treatment of the character of the hangman embodies interesting contradictions and rehearses the trope of violence irrupting into "safe" spaces. Bart tenderly adjusts the bedclothes of his sleeping babies with his hangman's hands and the camera lingers on his face while the soundtrack segues into the childish chant. The words impinge on the haunted face of the man who has just reluctantly dispatched the father of two children:

Hing Hang Hung

See what the hangman done.

The camera cuts to the taunting children, mocking John and Pearl with cruel songs and drawings of a hanged man. Cruelty is shown to be the domain of the "innocent" and vulnerable as much as it is that of "bad men"; children are no more innocent and naturally good than are Levi-Strauss's premodern societies. The very young subject quickly learns to lip-synch the discourses of its culture. (Pearl is likewise spoken through when she herself repeats the chant, unconscious of its significance for her own life.) Bart's regret at having had to perform as the killing instrument of his culture when he hangs Ben Harper changes to

satisfaction with his assigned role when he learns he will be hanging Harry Powell: "This time it will be a privilege," he beams. He has no absolute moral stance, but as the agent of authority, is the puppet of (culturally determined) public opinion. The pervasive violence of the cultural order, organised round the phallus, the transcendental signifier, is emphasised by Laughton in his presentation of the massive extent of the prison buildings, accompanied on the sound track by the tolling of the church bells, and in the mindless destructiveness of the lynch mob. Even the innocent world of the river contains the murder victim and the "dark gar," stages Uncle Birdie's violent rage and duplicates the structures of the cultural order in the reflections of the farmhouse and barn.



As objective correlatives for the patriarchy, the transcendental signifier itself, the director foregrounds the gas-flame that burns constantly outside the Harper house, the naked light-



bulb over the hotel bed that sheds its revealing glare over Willa's humiliation, the single, cyclopean eye of the locomotive headlamp and the lit candle that stands beside the apples (those metaphors both of Eden and of transgression) on the barrel where Preacher prepares to cut John's throat.

The Manichean opposite to this manmade light is the moonlight which floods the scenes that are least realistic, most idealised. Grubb in his novel places great emphasis on the moon and moonlight as a balancing expression of both purity and of the feminine and stresses its pagan associations as opposed to the murderous patriarchalism of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Both Pearl and Willa and later, Ruby, as female subjects internalise the guilt instilled by

culture. "You'll get awful mad, John," Pearl confesses. "I done a sin." Here is an embryonic form of Willa's tortured public admission of her sinfulness, her culpability. In Pearl's awareness of wrong-doing we see the seeds of Willa's denial of her husband's evil and her internalised conviction of her own worthlessness. The spoken gendered subject takes into herself the guilt and blame that is not her own. (Dean McCannell in "Homeless *Noir*" avers that it is typical of *noir* sensibility that "guilt for social pathology is distributed among the innocent") (289). Ruby, too, blames herself for being exploited by the youths of New Economy. "I bin bad," she whispers, holding the text of her awakened sexuality, a "Movie" magazine featuring a glamorous couple in a passionate embrace, close to her bosom. Here Laughton clearly points up the cultural scripting of desire. That Ruby *expects* to be punished for her sexuality is underscored when she prostrates herself over Rachel's lap, assuming the passive attitude demanded of the transgressor. Instead of the anticipated response of anger and rejection, she receives understanding and recognition of her femininity from the female authority figure. From this time forward, Ruby is dressed like a young woman instead of a clumsy child. Rachel undertakes to guide her accession to being a "strong, fine woman." Emblematised by the gift of jewellery at Christmas, it is clearly a gendered accession. Ruby is expected by her culture to be decorative as well as strong and fine. Rachel, as head of the family, is, after all, the representative of the patriarchy and cannot but operate as *bricoleur* of its discourses.

Her gift to John - a watch that proclaims its function with "good, loud" ticking - the masculine symbol of order and control that he had coveted since his initiation into the name of the father, marks his now timely reinduction into the world of the symbolic. It symbolises that which is good and useful, as well as controlling and restrictive, about the

cultural order. The implication seems to be that a gentler, more inclusive induction is both possible and desirable if it does not deny the importance of the imaginary register. The feminine aspects of this accession are everywhere to be seen in Rachel's environment. Circular forms abound in the mise-en-scène in practical household items such as plates and bowls and also in purely decorative or symbolic circles superimposed on the walls and woodwork. But now Rachel voluntarily abdicates her position of sole wielder of patriarchal power and, as she has promised, is willing to share it with John. "It's good to have a man around to give you the right time of day," she tells him. At this moment we know that John, having now become the willing heir to his patrimony, has formally succeeded to his intended position in the cultural order.

# *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*



Paul Giovanopoulos

### Chapter Three: *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*

Upon Death's purple altar now

See, where the victor-victim bleeds.

*James Shirley* (1596 – 1666)

In this chapter I shall be looking not so much at the process of the induction of the boy child into culture, as the effects of this induction upon the male subject at a later stage of accession, that of young adulthood, as it appears in a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. As a point of departure I find it useful to revisit Krutnik's writing on *Masculinity and its Discontents* and especially the insightful statement that:

...the Oedipal model has a widespread currency in patriarchal fictional forms. However, it is not the case that this "Oedipal structure" is simply reiterated, but rather its component processes are reworked for and within the terms relevant to specific cultural contexts. Indeed, the Oedipal drama is so perpetually and pervasively reworked within popular fictional forms that its specific embodiments can be read as a 'barometer' of the pressures bearing upon, and the challenges besetting, the masculine ordering of culture (and the cultural ordering of masculinity) at any juncture. (87/88)

The "specific cultural context" in which Gabriel García Márquez works is that of his own Latin American country of Colombia, and in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* García Márquez "rewrites the dominant chronicle of Spanish American consciousness" (McGuirk 187). He deals with the extreme patriarchalism of Latin-American social codes in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they are embodied in the institutions of the church, the family and the law. For this reason I find this novel a



rich vein to mine in the context of the Oedipal myth and of the alignment of the man-child with the Patriarchy as the author performs a critique of his own cultural context, of the relentless, destructive *machismo* of conservative, Catholic Colombia. In this novel, I shall argue, it is machismo that causes the death of the *macho* hero.

It is perhaps necessary, first, to outline briefly the particular pressures bearing upon the Colombia of García Márquez's experience. Colombia is both geographically and culturally a very divided country. García Márquez's home terrain, the north east, is low-lying, Caribbean, tropical, agricultural and multi-ethnic; the western *Altiplano*, in which is situated the capital, Bogotá, is cold, wet, grey, and the repository of conservative culture in the Spanish-colonial mode. Not only is it a geologically divided country, but it was riven, from the time of independence from Spain up to at least the mid-sixties, by political power-play between two factions of oligarchs, the Conservatives, who favoured a close relationship between church and state, and the Liberals, who desired a more secular regime. During the protracted period of "the Violence" (at its worst between 1946 and 1966), the rural peasantry, who laboured on the estates of the wealthy elite, were coerced by these landowners into serving as their cannon and ballot box fodder. Although regular elections were held, they tended merely to provide a superficial veneer of democracy, as whichever party held power made sure, by drastically exclusionary measures, that they maintained it. Adherents of the losing party were excluded utterly "from access to the benefits of that power" (Minta 13) and were discriminated against at every level. It was a situation that had affinities with the South African *apartheid* system. All local appointments were given to supporters of the ruling party (Minta 13) so that, according to an article in the Bogotá weekly *Semana* in 1958,

[t]o lose power ... meant that the mayor of the town would turn into a dangerous enemy, that the official of the branch of the Agrarian Bank would refuse the loan, that the new teacher would look with disfavour on one's child attending school, that the official of the Department of Health would first attend his fellow partisan of the other party... and that it was necessary to remain at a prudent distance from the local police. (in Minta 13)

As a result, “[s]imply to ensure preservation of life and property, conservative and liberal peasants had to depend on the local defence capabilities of their respective parties” (Minta 13). The savagery and suffering was not about ideology, but about power and who would have access to it.

The church, being partisan, showed little interest in doing anything to eliminate the inequalities and corruption and senseless loss of life. On the contrary, it forced radical priests like García Márquez's good friend, Camilo Torres, to resign their ministry. García Márquez's critique of the church, its patriarchalism, its distance from the suffering people and of its empty, mechanical rituals permeates the metaphoric fabric of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Some South American historians believe that “the Catholic Church has been more tenacious in its hold upon national and civil life in Colombia than in any other Latin-American country” (Minta 87). The Church's identification with the Conservative party is clearly enough seen in a joint pastoral letter issued by two Colombian bishops in the late 1940s which decreed that

all Catholics of our jurisdiction are obliged in conscience, and under mortal sin, to vote for candidates who they are certain, before God, will not be dangerous to the Church or favour Communism. (Minta 87)

García Márquez's family was traditionally liberal, his forebear Colonel Gerineldo Márquez having fought for the liberal faction during the civil war. However, as a result of having had contact with Marxist teachers at High School, García Márquez became a lifelong and committed Socialist in his adolescence and he now considers Colombia to be too dangerous a place for him to live in. His writing has always been informed by his left-wing beliefs. When he left the college in Zipaquirá in 1946 he knew that he "wanted to be a journalist, ... to write novels, and ... to do something for a more just society. The three things...were inseparable" (Minta 39).

In conversation with his friend, Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, García Márquez asserts that *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is his best work in that he was able to exercise strict control over it. "The theme demanded the precise structure of a detective story," he says (62). The novella took some thirty years to incubate, partly because his family and friends were involved, the event having taken place in their home town of Sucre, and partly because a friend many years later suggested the sort of ending he had long felt to be lacking. *Chronicle* is based on the true story of an honour-killing, a form of homicide which is, according to Aníbal González, still common in Latin-America (67). This is a telling indictment of the patriarchal system of the Law in Latin America. The legal processes of the State protect and promote the commerce of the patriarchy, the economic system in which the female subject is considered little more than a chattel, an item of exchange between men in the marriage economy, as Luce Irigaray has elsewhere pointed out (107). In this transaction, "second-hand goods" are

worse than valueless. A woman who is not a virgin or a mother is assumed to be a whore. There is no worse insult than to imply that someone is illegitimate because bastardy means uncertain paternity and therefore, doubt about inheritance of property, and property is very much the business of the law in a patriarchal system.

The original crime which prompted the writing of the novel involved a young bride, Margarita Chica Salas (Angela Vicario in García Márquez's version), being returned to her family by her husband, Miguel Reyes Palencia (Bayardo San Roman), on the day after her marriage, on the grounds that he had found her not to be *virgo intacta*. Her brothers, Víctor and Joaquín, (the twins, Pedro and Pablo Vicario), demanded to know the identity of her lover and she named Cayetano Gentile Chimento (Santiago Nazar), whom they then stabbed to death in front of his home in full view of the assembled population in order to restore what was perceived to be the family's damaged honour.

There are three distinct strands which weave the fabric of this novel. There is the story of an "honour-killing" that occurred in 1951; there is the framing journalistic reconstruction of the events surrounding the murder and there is Angela's story. García Márquez includes himself in the narrative in his capacity of investigating journalist who comes back twenty-seven years after the event to get at "the truth" by "trying to put the broken mirror of memory back together from so many scattered shards" (5). Two things about the murder particularly intrigued García Márquez when it was first reported. One was the truth about who had perpetrated the violation of the bride, as there was considerable doubt among the community, and in the mind of Gabriel himself, that Cayetano was the one guilty, that therefore his revenge-murder

was “a mistake”, (that the “destiny” he fulfilled was therefore not his own), and that Margarita had her own reasons for naming him, which she has never divulged. The other was that, in spite of the manifest reluctance on the part of the brothers to murder a young man who was their friend also, nobody stopped them.

Several critics have taken García Márquez’s suspicion of his friend’s innocence literally, and have performed sleuthing operations on the text, which is strewn with clues, or red herrings, as to who the real perpetrator might have been. Bernard McGuirk, in his insightful (if parodic) Derridean “speculations” on the novella, suggests that the violator was the hand of Angela Vicario herself (183). Gonzalo Diaz Migoyo has deduced that it is García Márquez who is to blame for the death of his friend by virtue of his being responsible for the bride’s dishonour and not admitting it (84). He bases his deductions on the writer’s statement that Oedipus Rex is the perfect detective story “because it is the detective who discovers that he himself is the murderer” (79). To fall into these undoubtedly seductive hermeneutic traps is, I think, to miss the point. García Márquez, the politically radical writer, is not concerned with whether or not Santiago Nasar fulfilled the destiny intended for him. García Márquez, the journalist who is embedded in the narrative is not, after all, the same self as García Márquez, the writer of the novel. The “I” that writes exceeds the “I” that is written. The victim’s innocence is never established; neither is his guilt. The reader may find many supporting statements for either thesis. The point the writer is making is rather that his death, or anyone’s, should not have happened for so arbitrary a reason as a point of honour. García Márquez is announcing the guilt of the “dominant narrative of Latin-American consciousness.” He is condemning the violence which informs and

pervades it. The Oedipal myth certainly does structure the text, but less as a model for a detective story than as an exposition of the ineluctable trajectory of the subject.

The writer in his role of narrating post-hoc journalist deploys an almost televisual technique in the framing investigation. He interviews eyewitnesses, to most of whom he awards pseudonyms; he refers to the brief of the original judicial enquiry; he includes members of his own family and fictional characters from other García Márquez texts – Raymond Williams finds “nine citations from the written record and a total of 107 quotations from the thirty-seven characters” (137); he also interpolates his own opinions during the course of the reconstruction. Thus he loses no opportunity to emphasise his own involvement with the narrative, his own embeddedness in the fabric of his discourse.

The “Chronicle” of the title is used more as a journalistic term for articles which tell a story rather than as a history related in a diachronic progression (Bell-Villada 183). Time, in the novel, is entirely paratactic, synchronic, and therefore appropriate to the bewildering vortex of incomprehension in which the community is caught up. Chapters are not numbered as there is no real linear progression of the narrative, except in so far as the story begins with Santiago Nasar’s waking up at home at 5.30 a.m. and ends with his death on the kitchen floor some one and a half hours later. The fifth and final act of the tragedy opens with this confession regarding the damage done to the communal psyche by the killing:

For years we couldn’t talk about anything else. Our daily conduct, dominated then by so many linear habits, had suddenly begun to spin around a single common anxiety. The cocks of dawn would catch us

trying to give order to the chain of many chance events that had made absurdity possible, and it was obvious that we weren't doing it from an urge to clear up mysteries but because none of us could go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and mission assigned to us by fate. (97)

During the unfolding of the story, García Márquez refers back to the central, controlling event with inexorable repetitiveness. Repetition is a prerequisite for much that is of concern to García Márquez in this novel. It is essential both to ritual observance and to the learning process during which the child accommodates itself to the requirements of culture.<sup>1</sup> The text is suffused with repetition, with cyclic rehearsal of the inevitable. The chapter endings are interesting in this regard. The first section ends with the words, "They've already killed him." The second section with Angela Vicario's fatal announcement of the name, "Santiago Nasar." The third chapter ends with the cry of "They've killed Santiago Nasar!" and the last chapter concludes with the moving description of his last moments: "Then he went into his house through the back door that had been open since six and fell on his face in the kitchen." The exception to this seemingly preordained pattern of violence is chapter four, which breaks the cycle of inevitability in the description of Bayardo San Roman's return with the letters that effect the miracle for Angela. By this subtle, almost subliminal device, the writer signals his message that the inexorable repetition of violence can be interrupted by the counternarrative of love.

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<sup>1</sup> One thinks of Freud's example of the infantile "*fort/da*" game in which the baby repeatedly enacts the dreaded disappearance and desired reappearance of the mother as a means of reconciling itself to her temporary absence and of reassuring itself of her subsequent return. The cyclic inevitability of this pattern of events allows the infant to come to terms with, to reach an accommodation with, a painful circumstance which it cannot otherwise control.

The titular “chronicle” is therefore ironically named in accordance with the lack of logic, of reason, governing the events of that “fateful morning.” People behaved, against their better judgment, according to the anachronistic moral code of *pundonor*. *Pundonor* is a profoundly conservative tragic mode in which the roles that are apportioned *must* be acted through. It is a premodern, pre-enlightenment revenge code of justice, tacitly endorsed by the equally mediaeval structures of the Catholic Church, which clearly privileges male pride and ascendancy and entrenches hypocritical sexual attitudes. *Pundonor* is an expression of the symbolic order which is deeply embedded in the Colombian national psyche, a mechanical, unnuanced process driven by an inexorable fatalism, whereby, once the name of the perpetrator has been announced, the prescribed ending to the drama, the revenge killing, is inescapable. The Spanish title of the work is *Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada* and it is the annunciation of the name of the violator that initiates the inevitable process (Díaz Migoyo 78). In this regard Michael Bell has proposed that the murderers’ surname of Vicario suggests a “fundamental posture of acting vicariously for some principle beyond themselves”(87). Once the cultural template has been laid down, people are unable to change the pattern of behaviour that has been drawn up for them. Life follows Art in that the narrative of tragedy reinscribes cultural assumptions that make people assent to the crime. It sets up a cycle of inevitability which cannot easily be broken, except with counter-narratives which change the story and suggest other possible outcomes (as Angela Vicario changes and controls her own life through rewriting it under the rubric of love). *Pundonor* is a peculiarly Latin-American tragic narrative, one of “pervasive, anachronistic *machismo*” (Bell 88). García Márquez’s personal belief regarding *machismo* is that it is quite simply “the usurpation of other



people's rights" and that *Chronicle* is "both an exposé and a condemnation of the basic *machismo* within our society" (Apuleyo Mendoza 108).

Santiago Nasar is the ultimate exponent of *machismo*. He is the absolute beneficiary of the patriarchal system who also becomes its victim: the archetypal male subject who is both constructed and destroyed by his culture. His mother's sigh of "[h]e was the man in my life" introduces the classic Oedipal theme (5). This is supported by the knowledge that his archetypal Father, Ibrahim, teaches him the manly, aristocratic skills of riding, hunting, hawking and exercising his "*droit de seigneur*" with the peasant women. He inherits "man's estate" in the context of Catholic Colombia; the family ranch is appropriately named "The Divine Face", which suggests that the patriarchal structure of the Church plays a large part in his accession to culture and, by association, in that of Latin-American youth in general. His interlude of obsession with the prostitute, María Alexandrina Cervantes, interpreted by some critics as a flirtation with literature, may be seen as a deviation, a regression to the pre-Oedipal phase, to the imaginary register where men "lose themselves", i.e. forget their designated masculine roles in favour of the alternative attractions of union with the "illicit woman". Cervantes suggests an alternative mother figure. She is tender, strict and apostolic, all desirable maternal attributes; yet she is exotic and oriental, being associated with Alexandria, Turkey and Babylon (77). The combination adds up to an object cathexis it is difficult for a young man to resist. She is also the only one, apart from the narrator, with the moral clear-sightedness to blame herself for having excluded Santiago Nasar from her "house of mercies" hours before his death (66). If one accepts that his passion for Cervantes symbolizes an involvement with literature, and his "transformer's tricks" in changing the identities of the girls as a period of

novelistic creativity, a pre-Oedipal indulgence in the realm of the imaginary, one must see Santiago Nasar, too, as an “author.” Angela Vicario names him as her author, her perpetrator, and it may be that, in seducing her, he writes her tragedy on her body and therefore also, ultimately, on his own.

His violent separation from Cervantes and banishment to the estate by his father marks the resolution of the Oedipus complex for Santiago Nasar. “The Divine Face” suggests a sort of spiritual panopticon where his behaviour is constantly under the gaze of the Father and where he learns to forego forbidden, pre-Oedipal pleasures. As he learns to accept the Name of the Father, Divina Flor and any other “wayward virgins” are in danger of having their buds nipped by the young *señor* while his arranged engagement to the culturally licit woman, Flora Miguel, runs its course. Santiago Nasar learns, inevitably, to hold “the same utilitarian concept of matrimony as his father” (113).

The narrator is one of Santiago Nasar’s group of close friends who have known one another since “Grammar School” (14), a group which includes the writer/narrator’s brother, Luis Enrique and Cristo Bedoya. They enjoy a closely bonded relationship. They discuss girls, get drunk, visit prostitutes and generally carouse together. Sharing stories of one’s sexual exploits is a means of validating one’s masculinity in the eyes of one’s peers. The narrator cannot believe that Santiago Nasar could have taken his cousin, Angela’s virginity without their all being privy to the secret “and such a big secret” (41). The narrator fails to see, however, that he himself keeps his sexual affair with Cervantes a secret from Santiago Nasar. Not *all* secrets, clearly, are shared among the members of the group in order to reinforce the bond of confraternity. The

group are aware of Santiago Nasar's chicken-hawk exploits and the narrator knows of his *macho* sexual interest in Angela. "She's ready to be hooked, your cousin the ninny is," he leers (31). Nevertheless, the narrator is still prepared to believe only positive things of his friend, that he is "merry, peaceful and open-hearted" (6). The narrator's sister Margo, is likewise inclined to see only the attractive side of Santiago Nasar. She finds him the perfect "catch," being "handsome, a man of his word and with a fortune of his own at the age of twenty-one" (17). In brief, in the eyes of his peers he is the perfect young gentleman and the absolute beneficiary of the patriarchal system. To those of a lower social class than himself, however, his sexual rapacity is a threat and a menace that engenders in Divina Flor a "premature anxiety" (8). It is this same threatening *machismo* that leads Victoria Guzman deliberately to withhold the warning that would have saved his life (17). It is not only in revenge for Angela Vicario's lost honour that he dies, but also, pre-emptively, for that of Divina Flor.<sup>2</sup> One may therefore deduce that it is the very *machismo* inculcated and encouraged by his culture that ultimately destroys him.

The hieratic tenor of the prose emphasises the sacrificial nature of the killing, the martyrdom of the victim to a socio-religious doctrine, and this mood is effected through the metaphoric texture and sacerdotal music of the writing. Critics have commented on "the elaborate play of names and binaries" (McGuirk 181) of which the writer makes such intriguing symbolic use. Clearly the characters are not merely

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<sup>2</sup> Garcia Marquez uses lines from a poem by 16<sup>th</sup> Century poet, Gil Vicente, as the epigraph to the novel: "The hunt for love/is haughty falconry", referring to the sexual rapacity of the young *seigneur*. A further quotation from the same poem, literally: "A falcon that plays with a hostile crane/ may anticipate bane" (my translation) becomes prophetic when applied to the falcon's stooping to Divina Flor. The "hostile crane" is then, by association, her protective mother, who threatens Santiago Nasar with a disembowelling knife in the full knowledge of his impending butchery.

representative of themselves, but also of archetypes in the cultural narrative; therefore many of the names are appropriately ecclesiastical, in order to point up the indivisible agency of both church and family in the unfolding of the story. The Vicario brothers' name suggests their function as officiating priests, performing the ritual on behalf of the assembled community. Their quotidian occupation as butchers stresses the site of slaughter as a "sacrificial stone" (39) or altar, and the murder is several times referred to as a "sacrifice" (39, 51, 52). The metaphor recurs when Santiago Nasar, stricken three times unto death, "let(s) out the moan of a calf" (120). The killing at the end "implicitly involves the community as a whole, who are assembled like choric witnesses for this last act" (Bell 99), or indeed as participants in the Mass, the paradigmatic re-enactment of tragic sacrifice.

The sacral nature of the text is further emphasised by onomastic suggestion and correspondences, chiefly that of Santiago Nasar with both St James the Apostle and Christ. His first name is suggestive of *Santiago Matamoros* (St James the Moor-killer), the Spanish saint who is considered to have been instrumental in ridding Spain of the Arabs. Santiago Nasar is himself a "Moor" or Arab, his father, Ibrahim Nasar, having been one of a group of Arabs (called "Turks" by the Spanish Colombians in the novel) to have immigrated to the Caribbean after the civil wars (9). The implication then seems to be that Santiago the Moor, in initiating the action of the tragedy, has, like Oedipus, written the narrative of his own destruction. That he is a metaphor for Christ is suggested by his family name of Nasar (as several commentators have remarked). He is the Nazarene whose death was foretold from the moment of the annunciation by the Angel(a). He is as powerless to alter his destiny as "a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written" (47). One may

therefore deduce that his destiny is written in his very name: a name instigated by his culture and effected through the agency of his family. Jacques Derrida has pointed out that the first level of cultural violence is enacted at the level of naming, as a gesture of appurtenance and classification. It may therefore be true to say that Santiago Nasar is both guilty, by virtue of being “the one” who violated the bride and innocent, in that the violation was instigated by his culture at the level, initially, of nomination. It is also significant that the name of the announcing angel in the story of Christ was Gabriel, which suggests a correspondence between the author and Angela Vicario who is later to rewrite her own life and that of her estranged husband. This is an important homology, as Angela writes a story of love, thereby providing a necessary counternarrative to the story of death in which the entire community is enmeshed.

The narrator’s announcement of the Death comes in the first line of the novel. The startling opening line is a hallmark of García Márquez’s narrative style, a journalistic device of immediately engaging the reader’s attention. He believes that “the first sentence can be the laboratory for testing the style, the structure and even the length of a book” (Apuleyo Mendoza 27). The first sentence of this novel states three themes: first is the inevitability of Santiago Nasar’s death by the impersonal “they,” second, the privileged relationship between the protagonist/victim and church high officialdom and third, the precise stipulation of time, which introduces the form of the book as an (anti)detective novel, and as a compelling story of tension and dread. As a “laboratory for testing the style,” the second of these is the most crucial as the poetic measure, the grave, fatalistic music of the first line establishes the mood of the Mass, the atmosphere of ritual sacrifice. However, it needs to be said that Gregory Rabassa’s translation, in the brisk, matter-of-fact tone of its opening lines:

On the day they were going to kill him, Santiago Nasar got up at five-thirty in the morning to wait for the boat the bishop was coming on (1)

fails to express the hieratic, incantatory quality of the original Spanish with its stately internal assonances and sonorous rhythms:

*El día en que lo iban a matar, Santiago Nasar se levantó a las cinco y media de la mañana para esperar el buque en que llegaba el Obispo*  
(CMA 11).

Similarly, Plácida Linero's statement to the narrator: "He was always dreaming about trees"(1), although half-rhyming in English, loses the orotund portentousness of the full Spanish vowels in: "*siempre soñaba con arboles*" (CMA 11). The wealth of symbol, precise syllabic placement and dense allusiveness of the language give to the novel something of the tight verbal texture of a poem. Trees are traditionally symbols of masculinity, of the phallus, as an indulgent Plácida Linero in her sibylline role of interpreter of dreams, understands them. They represent also the essential violence of the symbolic order, which a potentially vulnerable Santiago Nasar has so far successfully managed to negotiate "in a tin-foil airplane" (2). The omen of the "timber trees" prefigures the cutting down of proud masculinity, and the almond trees are presumably those in the town square in front of the house, site of his imminent sacrifice in accordance with the augury. The high seriousness of expression regarding the dream sequence here lays stress on its symbolic importance to the novel and contrasts effectively with the dream the narrator has when lying beside a compulsively gormandising María Alexandrina Cervantes after the murder (78). In this later dream, the images are garbled and make no sense, as one might expect from

a situation in which chaos reigns and the dreamer's companion is swallowing her grief.<sup>3</sup> This technique of allocating equal emphasis to both the significant and the trivial is a deliberately misleading narrative device that García Márquez wields throughout the book, teasing the reader into construing everything as being a possible key that will unlock the "mystery". As much detail is supplied, for example, about Santiago Nasar's firearms (3-4) which are never ultimately deployed in his defence, as about the pig-killing knives, (51-59) which are, in his demise.

The ritualistic, sacral rhythm of the text is effected largely through repetition, as in "that was the last time she/he/we saw him"(7, 105 et al) or in the many, relentless reminders that "they were going to kill him" (1, 13, et al). The statement, shocking in its matter-of-fact interpolation two paragraphs into the narrative, that he would be "carved up like a pig an hour later" resonates in the repeated, detailed discussion of the minutiae of the tools of the twin's trade and their (ironic) inability to slaughter animals they had got to know. Their pigsty has a "sacrificial stone and a disembowelling table" (39), which rehearses the image of Victoria Guzmán's evisceration of the rabbits and Santiago Nasar's premonitory horror at the breakfast table (8). The image of the disembowelling of a helpless victim is a recurrent one throughout the novel. In Victoria Guzman's case, of course, the violent action is deliberate, almost the performance of a sympathetic rite. She *wants* to make the process come true for Santiago Nasar, the raptor/rapist who grabs her daughter "with his butcher hawk hand", and threatens her honour.

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<sup>3</sup> In this case, Rabassa's very loose translation, with its jingly rhymes, is entirely appropriate to the situation and cleverly conveys the non-sense of the original. (He renders, "*Ella mastica a la topa tolondra, un poco al desgaire, un poco al desgarrate*" (CMA 82) as "She crunches like a nutty nuthatch, kind of sloppy, kind of slurpy." (78)

Repetition and similarity are, in a sense, cognate, and in this regard, Carlos Alonso comments on the writer's reflecting the complicity of the culture in his abolishing of "difference through confused identities and onomastic similarities" (162). Plácida Linero "confuses (the narrator) with the memory of Santiago Nasar"(5) at the start of his investigation and Pedro and Pablo Vicario are virtually impossible to distinguish one from the other. The characters share names, often with their binary opposite: the family estate, *El Divino Rostro* is thus equated with the young servant *Divina Flor*, the octogenarian Don Rogelio de la *Flor* and the lawful fiancée, *Flora Miguel*, who shares an identity with the illicit prostitute, María Alexandrina *Cervantes*. There is a correspondence between the two "victims", *Bayardo San Román*, and the "boyardo", the "seigneur", *Santiago Nasar*. Father *Carmen* Amador is linked to Purísima del *Carmen*. There is a network of names linking elements of the story together, forcing a recognition of shared culture, shared guilt, shared blame. The narrator himself admits that "we all could have been to blame" for the murder (82), implying that the violence is ubiquitous, endemic in the social order to which everyone has no choice but to subscribe.

García Márquez further deconstructs the culturally entrenched dichotomy between "good" and "bad" women, virgins and whores, by conflating *Mercedes Barcha Pardo*, the very young girl to whom he proposes marriage during the wedding festivities, and the brothel, *la casa de las Mercedes* (the house of mercies), which he later visits and where we learn that María Alexandrina Cervantes has "the eyes of an insomniac leopard" in the gloomy light of the bedroom (69). García Márquez is clearly critiquing the morally loaded machismo of his compatriots, a manifestation of their cultural conditioning, which permits, even encourages men to visit brothels, and



condemns women who are not virgins. He inverts the roles played by the women, like Santiago Nasar with his “transformer’s tricks”, so that, after the murder, the illicit woman becomes unable to engage in sexual activity and the lawful fiancée becomes a prostitute “among the rubber-workers on the Vichada” (98). As the twins begin their act of slaughter Santiago Nasar cries out, “¡Hijos de puta!” (CMA 121) not so much “Sons of bitches!” as Rabassa has translated it but, surely, in this case, more literally, “Sons of a whore!” The saintly Purísima Vicario is thus equated with her absolute moral opposite and mortal insult is heaped upon the Vicario brothers to add to the injury done to their sister. It is an utterance which both encapsulates Santiago Nasar’s contemptuous attitude towards women, elsewhere seen in his arrogant behaviour towards Divina Flor and his scornful comments regarding Angela Vicario (31), and which denies the dichotomy between good women and bad, whore and mother, with the further implication that Pura is guilty of prostituting her daughter to the patriarchy.

The link in the Colombian cultural psyche between sex, religion and death is pointed up by the many occasions on which the noise of the killing is mistaken for that of the wedding revelry or of the bishop’s advent (3,9,12, 13, et al) or the fact that Santiago Nasar computes the quantity of flowers at the wedding as being equivalent to that of “fourteen first class funerals” (42). The Catalan Magdalena Oliver’s dismayed cry of “God’s balls! What a waste!” (86) at the sight of the moribund bridegroom further supports this connection as does the oxymoronic “stain of honour” on the wedding sheets (38) and the repeated statement that the crime or the disaster had been “consummated” (13, 47 et al).

The “vicars” who perform the sacrifice on behalf of the entire community, the acolytes, Pedro and Pablo, belong to the paradigmatic Latin-American family which is

both subordinate to and representative of the church. It falls to the Vicarios in the novel to play out the role of the family in the formation of the subject. The induction of the Vicario children into the cultural order is laconically expressed by the narrator's comment that "the boys were brought up to be men. The girls had been reared to get married" (30). Luisa Santiaga approves of the fact that the girls have "been raised to suffer" (31) and we remember that Bayardo San Roman is originally attracted to Angela's downtrodden air of humility and the strict supervision of her by the implacable matriarch, Purísima. As one of the avatars of motherhood in the narrative, the strict, uncompromising Pura Vicario epitomises the perpetuation of the cultural order through the agency of the mother in the context of the family. Another mother who enthusiastically endorses the discourse of honour is the mother of Prudencia Cotes who inculcates the same sentiments in her daughter, Pablo's fiancée. "I never would have married him if he hadn't done what a man should do", Prudencia declares stoutly (63). The nominal head of this family of vicars, the "pontiff," Poncio, has Oedipally blinded himself in pursuit of the family honour and presides impotently over the wedding festivities, waving vaguely with his staff *ex cathedra*, isolated and out of touch (44).

Patriarchal metaphors of church and masculinity are cunningly woven into the fabric of the text, revealing the ways in which they are culturally imbricated. That the church is a primary avatar of the patriarchy is obvious from the title "Father" borne by even the ineffectual Father Carmen Amador, and we learn that the bishop is fond of soup made of coxcombs, the part of the rooster that most flagrantly advertises its macho, aggressive sexuality. The bishop's tangential and fleeting visit, during which he bestows a perfunctory, distant blessing upon the town and, by extension, upon the

honour-killing that is about to take place, is accompanied by a cacophony of crowing roosters. This is the same sound that wakes the community at dawn every day after the killing, implying that the townspeople will never achieve absolution or understanding of their part in the drama, because the very stuff of their lives is informed by patriarchal metaphors every waking moment. The performative side of the Catholic religion, with its ritual enactments and gorgeous display “has an irresistible fascination” for Santiago Nasar to whom “Church pomp...(is) like the movies”(6), a mesmerising spectacle in which one may lose oneself by making strong identifications with ideal role models. Both the Catholic Church and the cinema exemplify the idea of the imaginary in the service of the symbolic. In addition, the elaborate iconography of the Catholic Church foregrounds the seductive pre-oedipal icon of mother and boy-child in a close dyadic relationship as pervasively as it does the image of the crucified Christ.

Father Carmen Amador, the “Roman” priest who feels that stopping a murder is not the business of the church, and that the bishop’s visit takes precedence over warning the potential victim, is roundly pilloried by García Márquez. Father Amador too is in love with the performative aspects of the Catholic faith, its trappings, its gestures, its glamorous costumes and sensuous theatrics. When Luis Enrique stumbles from Clotilde Armenta’s shop, he runs into Father Carmen Amador and his acolytes with a portable altar and robes “for the bishop’s field Mass” which never takes place. Luis Enrique’s ironic episcopal blessing to the Vicario twins prefigures the emptiness of the bishop’s mechanical benediction, and we note that the murderers automatically cross themselves before they cross the square to slaughter Santiago Nasar. The fact that the priest takes instruction from the equally torpid Colonel Lázaro Aponte about

performing the autopsy on the murdered man points up the complicity between Church and State as regards their mutual inability to act correctly in discharging the social responsibility that comes with their privileged position in the community. When the murderers, reeking with sweat and the blood of their victim, confess to the priest, he absolves them immediately by conceding that they *are* innocent “perhaps before God” (49). “Before God and before men. It was a matter of honour,” avers Pablo. They know their rights under Colombian law; and so it proves when the Law “absolves” them, citing “homicide in legitimate defence of honour” (49).

It is made abundantly clear, however, despite their unrepentant attitude, that the Vicario twins do not want to commit the murder and they announce their “intention” of doing so to everyone they meet, so that someone will intervene and relieve them of the burden of action, “to spare them,” as Clotilde Armenta says, “from the horrible duty that’s fallen on them” (57). Ironically, their announcement is construed by some as mere bluff, as they are known to be peaceable by nature despite their profession as butchers. More menacingly, their profligate announcement of their “duty” is accepted by many as the mere prelude to the inevitable act. Even Luis Enrique, the narrator’s brother and close friend of Santiago Nasar, drunkenly blurts out, when questioned as to the whereabouts of his friend, that “Santiago Nasar is dead” (70). He retains no memory of having said this. The utterance is entirely subliminal, suggesting that, subconsciously, he accepts that Santiago Nasar is fated to die although his conscious mind rejects it entirely.

Many other such premonitory visions are experienced once people are apprised of Santiago Nasar’s “inevitable” fate. Clotilde Armenta has “the impression that he was

dressed in aluminium,” an unsettling reference to his dream. “He already looked like a ghost,” she tells the narrator (13). Hortensia Baute sees the Vicario twins’ knives dripping blood even before they have killed Santiago Nasar (62), and Divina Flor imagines that the hand with which the victim grips her wrist feels “frozen and stony, like the hand of a dead man” (12). The fatalism which writes the narrative of tragedy operates below the level of their conscious minds.

García Márquez admits to his own cultural conditioning both as the seeker after truth in this novel and in his everyday life. “We are all hostage to our own prejudices. I can’t escape the prejudices of my Catholic background and bourgeois society,” he has told Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza (109). The writer’s journalistic self in the person of the narrator makes it clear that he is unable to provide any counternarratives. For all his busy investigating, he achieves nothing more than a mere re-inscription of the original brief and of the crime itself. There is little objective reportage twenty-seven years after the event, some eye-witnesses succumbing to the lure of the pathetic fallacy regarding the weather on the morning of the murder, and recalling a light drizzle such as the murdered man had experienced in his dream. García Márquez is making the Derridean point about writing and critique, that the critic is always embedded in his culture, always socially structured and therefore always subject to the dictates of his cultural assumptions. The narrator/journalist as seeker after “truth” approaches the enquiry with his “truths” pre-formulated and therefore does not ask the probing questions that might open up other possibilities and inscribe different stories. His investigations merely mimic and perpetuate those of the investigating magistrate who was sent from Riohacha twelve days after the murder to discover “the truth.” García Márquez himself, however, being clearly aware of his own embeddedness, *is* able to

break through, to find a discursive mode (i.e. fantasy, imaginative literature, such as that engaged in by Angela) that will move him beyond the limitation of the dominant discourses of culture by pointing to the possibility of a more benign discursive order.

The young magistrate is the only anonymous character in a novel that names people obsessively, thereby emphasising his lack of imbrication in the network of relationships which structures the town. Nevertheless, even he cannot be a purely disinterested observer, despite his nominal unconnectedness with the community; he is yet imbedded in the same culture and is as subject to its dictates, its prescriptions, its prejudices. It may be that he represents, at least partially, the young author himself, who had earlier been a law student in Bogotá. He is given to “lyrical distractions” which prompt his own imaginative writings in the margins of the brief (101). These are written in blood-coloured ink, a reminder of the Derridean connection between writing and violence. Carlos Alonso proposes that the writing of the “Chronicle” of the long-ago murder is in fact a re-enactment of it, a ritual repetition in order to effect “absolution and catharsis,” in the manner of the Catholic Mass (159). However, says Alonso, the act of writing fails to effect this absolution and cleansing “since it is itself constituted and sustained through a violence that traverses it to the very core” (162).

García Márquez very deliberately sews the book thickly with contradictions and inconsistencies in order to “undermine any sense that the narrator’s version of events is somehow more reliable than anyone else’s might have been” as Stephen Minta points out, thereby “alerting the reader to the fact that this can only be a version of the story, with no claim to the superior status of objective truth” (124). As reader, one is repeatedly misled into believing that the ultimate revelation is on the point of being

made, or indeed, has been made, only to realise that the writer has once again yanked the hermeneutic rug out from under one's feet. He appears to be sending a Nietzschean message to the reader: that the search for truth is itself both misdirected and problematic, as it is 'untruth' or uncertainty which is the better good since it is a guard, a hedge against a totalising fundamentalism. His narrating self sets out to impose a preformulated version of the truth on a single past event and fails utterly to do so. Every version of "the truth" in the novel is deconstructed, undermined or contradicted by another version which opposes it. An amusing example of interpretative error is the state-decreed and ecclesiastically perpetrated autopsy in which the bumbling Father Carmen Amador performs a ludicrously inept reading of the signs in the absence of science and reason in the form of both Dr Dionisio Iguarán and the young healer, Cristo Bedoya. García Márquez seems to be implying that it is the business of science to seek physical truth, and that the attempt of metaphysics to fulfil this role can only result in an inadequate performance. (Bernard McGuirk (184) memorably describes the "Roman" priest as an "amateur physician ... an obscene ... haruspex, picking over the entrails of the dead Santiago Nasar".)

The autopsy is "a massacre" that dismembers, distorts and hastens the final dissolution of the murdered body. It confirms the status of Santiago Nasar as victim. It also serves to show to what degree his religion has been internalised. He swallowed the medal of the virgin of Carmel at the age of four and it has lodged within him ever since (75). Santiago Nasar's body is clearly conflated with that of Christ in this section, a correspondence made absolutely clear by the statement in the judicial report that the stab in his right hand looked like "the stigma of the crucified Christ" and further, by the linen strip with which the compassionate Cristo Bedoya wraps the

ravaged body, having first replaced the intestines. Both Christ and Santiago Nasar are the inheritors of and representatives of the patriarchy; both Christ and Santiago Nasar are the victims of the same patriarchy. This apparent paradox is central to the perpetuation of culture which demands the sacrifice of the beloved son, as it is daily enacted in the Catholic Mass. It seems clear that García Márquez is effecting a strong critique of the church in this episode through the metaphor of the inept interpretative bungling of Father Carmen Amador. By association, the church *Fathers* are seen to perpetrate a “massacre” on the body of the murdered Christ. They distort and discard his message of love and caring, the aspects of Christianity that embrace the imaginary, substituting such commercial concepts as honour and power in their stead, aspects which favour a patriarchal symbolic. *Father* Carmen Amador admits that “[i]t was as if we [i.e. the Church] killed him all over again after he was dead.” He tears out the intestines, the “bowels of compassion” (1 John 3:17) and angrily discards them as mere offal, as surplus, replacing them with corrosive quicklime, which only serves to hasten the process of dissolution of the original body, under the illusion that “it would last longer that way.” “They gave us back a completely different body,” laments the narrator; that is, a distorted, mediated form of Christianity upon which havoc has already been wrought by its officiants (76).

There can surely be little doubt that Garcia Marquez has successfully elaborated on the third promise of his opening line. He has written a tense and compelling story, *pace* Carlos Alonso, who proposes that the final murder scene is an anticlimax. In his view the fact that we already know the details of the damage to the body from the autopsy report in the previous chapter effects a detachment from the description of the killing which “deprives the murder scene of its potentially ghastly impact” (154). On



the contrary, it is *because* we already know all about the hideous wounds that the anticipated enactment is so horribly suspenseful. It is *because* we have read what has already been written that, from the moment Pedro Vicario announces the advent of the sacrifice with “there he comes” the tension builds to an unbearable pitch. It is the sheer inescapability of what we know must be experienced *because* it has already been written that our pity and terror are activated.

Like the dogs that are destroyed for doing what they have always been encouraged to do (i.e. devouring the discarded guts), Santiago Nasar is just as unfairly sacrificed for living up to the expectations of his culture. The final pages rehearse in microcosm the story of the son of man. (He appears frighteningly large to his murderers perhaps because he is more than just himself; he assumes the heroic, transcendental stature of Christ at the very moment of victimization.) Threatened by the phallic violence of the symbolic order, he attempts to regain the safety of union with the mother, but it is too late. He has already learnt to despise the female body, as is clear from his shout of “¡Hijos de puta!” His mother, the passive reproducer of the structures of the phallus, reassured by others that her son is safe, unwittingly shuts him out. His anguished cry of “¡Ay mi madre!” (CMA 121) is a recognition that he cannot go back; his mother has been lulled, pacified, into abandoning him to the phallic order. He knows better than anyone what that means and, “lean[ing] his back against his mother’s door,” abandons himself to his inevitable fate.

From this moment, he apparently accepts and is complicit in his own sacrifice. He seems to be laughing as he is pinned, Christ-like, to the wood, while the vicars knife him “with ... easy stabs, floating in the dazzling backwater they had found on the

other side of fear”(120). They register nothing except their awareness of their own power, inhabiting fully a rare moment of phallic plenitude; as Pablo declares, “I felt the way you do when you’re galloping on horseback” (120). It is not until he sees “his own viscera in the sunlight, clean and blue” that he recognises his own mortality and falls to his knees, a disembowelled victim, like the rabbits of Victoria Guzmán.

But the reader is not left with this image of Santiago Nasar as pitiable victim. In his last minutes of life he is imbued with a tragic dignity that is both admirable and ineffably moving. Having fulfilled for the community the role of sacrifice, he does not die in the dust of the public square but picks himself up and makes his way back to the shelter of his own home, to his mother’s house. In a cyclical rehearsal of the beginning of the story, when an accidental bullet from his father’s pistol ripped through the neighbours’ dining room “with the thunder of war,” Santiago Nasar takes a short cut through the house next door to get to his own. Holding his clustered intestines in his hands and walking with dignity despite “the terrible smell of shit,” he politely acknowledges the stunned Lano family who are just sitting down to breakfast. The training of a gentleman never leaves him, as he walks with “good bearing ... handsomer than ever” past the table, through the house and out of the back door. He recognises the narrator’s aunt, when she calls to him with familiar affection from across the river, “Santiago, my son, what has happened to you?” His response, equally affectionate and familiar, is a simple “They’ve killed me, Wene child,” automatically infantilising the older woman even to the end as he always has done. The small, fastidious gesture of brushing off the dirt that sticks to his hanging intestines after his stumble bespeaks his complete internalisation of the conduct

becoming to a young *hidalgo*. Then the writer has him gain the shelter of his home and fall on his face in the kitchen.

At this point of recapitulation and circularity the novel ends: at a moment of restraint, of delicate balance between tragic heroism and corporeal destruction. The reader has no need to be reminded of the pandemonium that ensues as the dogs fall upon the trailing intestines of Santiago Nasar in his death throes. It has already been written. Instead, García Márquez suspends the novel at the symbolic moment that most precisely situates his protagonist as exponent of a chillingly problematical ambivalence in the theatre of Latin American male subjectivity.

# *The Smell of Apples*



Manfred Zylla

## Chapter Four: *The Smell of Apples*

*Apollo, friends, Apollo –  
he ordered my agonies – these, my pains on pains!  
But the hand that has struck my eyes was mine,  
mine alone – no one else –  
I did it all myself!  
What good were eyes to me?  
Nothing I could see could bring me joy.*

*Oedipus the King, Sophocles*

Like *The Night of the Hunter* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, *The Smell of Apples* stages the violence of culture. The first of these offers a redemptive resolution in which elements of the imaginary and the feminine are incorporated into the process of acculturation, thus pointing towards the possibility of a less damaging, more inclusive, induction into culture. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the inexorable, deterministic working out of the tragedy, endorsed by the influential Catholic Church, of the sacrifice of the beloved son encloses a germ of mitigation in the surprise subplot of the counternarrative of love. Mark Behr's novel, set in the narrow, claustrophobic context of Apartheid South Africa, seems, of the three works, to be the most bleakly deterministic, ending, as it does, with the death of the narrator/protagonist as he muses, "Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history" (198).

Mark Behr's rite of passage novel stages the accession of the boy-child into apartheid-era South African culture. Thematically, it demonstrates the Freudian/Lacanian theories of subject construction, while incorporating Derridean thinking on both the violence attendant on the process of induction into the cultural order and the

untenability of the binary oppositions which underpin the assumptions of the wielders of power in the apartheid context. The “black”/“white” binary opposition is the lynchpin of apartheid policies, the polarity of which is maintained and supported, in this novel, by the nature/culture opposition. The latter binary serves also to underpin the imposition of culture over nature in the process of induction to the social order; significantly, “the smell of apples” of the title emanates from apples that are not growing naturally on trees or piled in a loose, haphazard heap, but enclosed within boxes stacked high on the back seat of a car (124).

If masculinity in the Latin America of Garcia Marquez’s *Chronicle* is constructed along the lines of *machismo*, in apartheid South Africa the masculinities of white South African boy-children were formulated through the militarism necessary to maintain the ruling race in power. Behr’s novel shows the eleven-year-old child protagonist, Marnus Erasmus, being recruited into the militaristic apartheid structures by the agency of his loving family, to his ultimate destruction. The family and its warm, comforting sureties are shown to be coextensive with the coercive and discriminatory practices of the system, so that the induction happens insidiously until the final, shocking drama of violence and betrayal when the child protagonist sees his admired father rape his little friend. Significantly, the violation is never mentioned, but is silently assimilated into their lives. Behr is pointing up the inescapable violence of the cultural order that originates with the Law of the Father. The Law of the Father or superego, according to some recent readings of Lacan, notably by Slavoj Žižek, is radically discontinuous at the locus of its very inception. “The law allows transgression while seeming to forbid it ... the punitive superego is driven by an obscene and anarchic *jouissance*” (Wright on Žižek 38). That Behr’s awareness of

this ambivalence saturates the dark ironies of his text is evident in his deployment of the device of doubling his characters by furnishing them with *alter egos* and by constructing parallel but disjunctive situations within which they operate.

The novel stages the ways in which individual choice is restricted by the ideological apparatuses that structure society. In this novel it is the Afrikaner family which is the principal site of subject construction, supported by an Afrikaner Calvinism that permeates every aspect of the family life of a people committed to their “divinely ordained destiny” under apartheid, as we see, for example, when “Dad” assembles the family for prayer before they go to Sedgefield (200) or when The Lord’s hand is said to rest over False Bay (200). So in awe of the punitive power of the Father is eleven-year-old Marnus that he believes taking the name of the Lord in vain is “one of those sins where the punishment gets carried from one generation to the next” (10). Calvinism, the paradigmatic Protestant religion, is predicated on the dogma of predestination, which is appropriate to the theme of induction into culture in this novel. In the phallogentric power structures it is “the Father” who is important, as Marnus observes while visiting the home of the dominee. An oil painting of a man and his children on a beach bears the legend (written in the sand), “Honour Thy Father and Mother,” but Marnus observes that that only the father appears in the painting, the mother, as “other,” being relegated to invisibility in the scopic economy of the South African racist phallocracy.

Michiel Heyns, in his paper “Fathers and Sons: Structures of Erotic Patriarchy in Afrikaans Writing of the Emergency,” emphasises the power of the father to “love” his son into accepting his heritage of violence. He points out that in order for the

cultural structures espoused by the fathers to be perpetuated, the sons must be seduced into *wanting* to fight the father's wars for them (82). He quotes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's claim that "[i]n any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power"(83). Furthermore, Heyns maintains that this "'special relationship' (is) mediated through the father-son nexus," pointing out that "in the South Africa of the 1970s and 1980s, it was the sons who went to war and the fathers who sent them there, with whatever support from dutiful mothers" (83). Behr emphasises the family as the traditional locus of Afrikaner nationalist indoctrination under a paternalistic political regime by having Marnus, while parroting his parents' dogma, talk of *Uncle John Vorster* (70) and *Uncle P.W. Botha* (45). Indeed, both Marnus and his mother, Leonore, lip-synch the discourses of the patriarchy with almost every utterance. Marnus admiringly repeats the prejudices and prescriptions of his adored father at every opportunity. "Dad says" prefaces all his most pious and dogmatic political statements, as in:

Dad says it's typical of the Americans to try and prescribe to the republic how we should run our country while their own president is such a rubbish. Dad says you don't tell someone else how to make his bed when your own house looks like a pigsty. (12-13)

However, so thoroughly has Marnus internalised the prejudices of his parents and of his culture that it is not always necessary for him to introduce his bias with "Dad [or Mum] says." It is enough for him merely to parrot the ruling ideology for the reader to recognise its provenance. "Where have you ever heard of a Masai or a Kikuyu or a Wachagga that knows anything about running a farm?" he muses, (37) and "The



Communists muddle up people's brains so that in the end you can't trust anyone. The Communists indoctrinate everyone" (81) he tells Frikkie, entirely innocent of the irony which pervades his every cliché. The quotidian reality of the racist state is evident in such a revealing confidence as:

Doreen also has a tin mug she uses in the kitchen, together with her own tin plate and knife and fork. She keeps her stuff under the washbasin in the laundry with her overalls. (90)

And :

Jan Bandjies and his family used to live in Kalk Bay. But they had to move because all the visitors from overseas complained about the Coloured's dirty houses. So the government built them nice homes somewhere else. (84-85)

Or, "It's the same with the Coolies in the Free State. The Coolies aren't even allowed to stayover for one night, because once they *sit*, they stay *sitting*" (53).

What is clear from these formulaic utterances is that the project of apartheid was to keep the other as far distant as possible from the self, so that the binaries, "white"/"non-white," civilised/barbaric, were never recognised as being supplementary one to the other, but maintained in a position of artificial polarity. Thus "the Coloureds" and "the Coolies" had to be relegated to a position outside the areas designated "white" so as not to contaminate the hegemonic minority with their feared proximity. What was never acknowledged was the fact that barbarism was always already within. This is made clear during "Dad's" slide show when he and the Chilean respond with such

righteous satisfaction to images of white terrorism (171/2). Evidence of General Erasmus's humiliation, torture and killing of naked black men are the prelude to his sexual abuse of Frikkie some hours later. In this context, Žižek explains the Lacanian concept of the obscene superego:

Although, on the surface, the totalitarian master also issues stern orders compelling us to renounce pleasure and to sacrifice ourselves in some higher cause, his effective injunction, discernible between the lines, is a call to unrestrained transgression.... Obedience to the master allows you to transgress everyday moral rules.... A passionate ethnic identification ... is a liberating call of 'You may': you may violate the stiff regulations of peaceful co-existence in a liberal tolerant society: you may ... even hate, fight, kill and rape. It is by offering this kind of pseudo-liberation that the superego supplements the explicit texture of the social symbolic law.

Behr constructs his novel on a dual time frame. In the 1970s, the child Marnus who narrates the story is father to the man, Marnus, in the 1980s a lieutenant in the Permanent Force, fighting and, eventually, dying in Angola, his presence there denied officially by his father, a very senior officer in the South African Defence Force (an act of betrayal which would be classifiable as Derrida's violence of the third order). The adult Marnus periodically interrupts the child's narrative, interjecting the grim truth about the future outcome of his youthful indoctrination. It is a textual irruption of violence into an apparently "safe" space, that of the cosy family narrative, the credulous innocence of the child narrator thrown into sharp relief by the cynicism of the adult soldier. 'It's over,' announces a war-weary Marnus, from the Angolan "sea

*of dust and desperation*" (11)... *'We see it all'* (30). This distanced, objective view contrasts with the partial vision of the child, exemplified by his peering through the knotholes in his bedroom floorboards, a perspective that is always necessarily narrow and circumscribed by the structures surrounding it. Eventually, of course, what Marnus sees through the knotholes is the sordid truth, with which he is ultimately to come to terms, finally acceding, after a brief moment of moral rebellion, to his inevitable induction into the militaristic masculinity that has been constructed for him by his culture.

Behr makes it quite clear to the reader from the beginning that the child's fate is predetermined. "The protagonist" in a rite-of-passage novel, writes Michiel Heyns in "The Whole Country's Truth: Confession and Narrative in Recent White South African Writing," interacts "with a coercive society in which guilt is incurred through entry into a culpability always already there" (54). In the context of the South Africa of the 1970s the culpability is specifically that of the enforcement, by Apartheid military structures, of the racist status quo, into which Marnus will inevitably be inducted, and by which he will, arguably just as inevitably, be destroyed.

That Behr is deliberately staging the myth of perceived options is made clear when, from his distanced vantage point in Angola, the adult Marnus attempts to understand and control the events leading up to his present desperate position. "*Just that one week in December* [of the Chilean general's visit] *"determined it"* he decides, while conceding that "*the arrival of the visitor cannot be divorced from what preceded his coming*" (31). The Chilean visitor is the double of Marnus's father who is "the youngest major-general ever in the history of the South African Defense Force" (14).

The visitor is physically like General Erasmus and also occupies a high rank in the military hierarchy of a parallel site of military *machismo* and oppression. The visitor's advent is the catalyst, in Marnus's blinkered understanding, for his own "choice" in favour of induction as a professional soldier, rationalizing that "[t]o understand my own choice, I need to muster as much of the detail as possible." He then delivers an analysis of what brought him to "choose" to follow in his father's military footsteps: tellingly, he does this through an extended military metaphor. He is unable to appreciate the irony of his own linguistic formulations, being too deeply embroiled in the very discourse with which he is attempting to effect his analysis:

*It resembles an ops-room or an ops-tent: the commander discusses everything, not only the heavy artillery .... Only once he has all of this – the cold objective facts – only then can he make an informed choice, his subjective intervention, his analysis, his battle plan. Only then does he become deadly. (31)*

In fact, of course, he never does control his destiny, the "choice" having been made for him long before he ever became consciously aware that there might be a choice to be made. Similarly, when instructed by headquarters to prepare for an offensive, Marnus and his men feel "a flicker of simultaneous thrill and fear," imagining that "[a]fter weeks of aimless waiting for a sign...the time has come.... Once more it is a choice between life and death" (12). The inauthenticity of this "choice" is illustrated when Marnus berates the conscript who has been complaining about having to do National Service:

*'You had a choice, you little fuck-head. You had a choice'*

*He answered: 'But I'm not PF like you, Lieutenant – I'm National Service and we don't have a choice, we have to come, whether we want to or not. If we don't we go to jail for six years.' He gave me a sarcastic smile. They hate PFs.*

*'Exactly,' I said, 'you had a choice – like me – and you made the easier one.'*

*Then he was quiet. (83)*

From this we may deduce that Marnus's "choice" to follow his father into the army was easier than choosing not to do so. Coming off the track, deviating from the pre-ordained trajectory, was infinitely harder to do than staying on it. In fact, for Marnus and for the male subject, the choice is between accepting the power and privilege of the Law of the Father or being locked forever into his Oedipal relationship with his mother, signalled in the novel by Marnus's taking the place of the absent father in his mother's bed (103) and by his furtive obsession with her breasts (16). Behr structures his novel so that the very form of its chronology supports and emphasises the predestined trajectory of the male subject. All the central concerns are presented at the very beginning of the narrative. The subsequent working out of the plot is then the elaboration of what has already been written, so that it may be seen that, for the male subject, there is indeed "no escape from history," from what has already been written (198).

Among the main concerns introduced early in the narrative are three levels of cultural violence, corresponding to those propounded by Derrida, which are sequentially illustrated in the metaphoric texture of the writing. In the opening paragraph, Behr presents the reader with the first of these and also introduces the theme of circularity,

of the inevitable trajectory imposed on the subject by culture. The Derridean theme of arche-violence is introduced in the first sentence of the novel in its concern with the first level, that of appellations, itemizing all the names awarded to the narrator by his parents. His “real” name is Marnus, the identity by which he is “known” in the home and school contexts. His father more specifically appropriates the boy child by calling him “my son” and the model of masculinity to which the boy child is expected to conform by his father, and by extension, by the culture into which he is socialised, is evident in the nickname “my little bull.” (“Bulls don’t cry,” Marnus’s weeping father reminds him in the crucial scene of revelation and confrontation (197), thus undoing the macho persona he has presented as ego ideal throughout the novel and demonstrating even his inability fully to exemplify the role of father enjoined by his culture.) Placing the action squarely within a South African arena, his parents also “like calling [him] ‘my little piccanin’,” a nickname which comes across with a balder, more ponderous irony in the original Afrikaans version as “*my kaffertjie*” (RA9). Rita Barnard, approaching this novel from an Althusserian perspective, comments on the ways in which the South African subject is interpellated into apartheid ideology. She points out that “the narrative traces a closed circle” in that “it ends with the narrator’s acceptance of these identities and of his position in the racist, hyper-masculinist society that these names simultaneously construct and express” (208). Having already responded to “The Voice” (*Die Stem*) of Apartheid South Africa, Marnus flees in terror from the interpellation of his black brother-in-arms, believing him to be the enemy, a communist, one of “Fidel’s sons” (166). (The greater part of the Angola narrative deals with the unnecessary agonies he suffers as a result of this foreclosure of his response to the call of the Other.)

*I try to scream, but no sound leaves my throat.... Everything is turning white.  
Voices in languages often heard but never understood. As I stumble and fall  
forward, I hear the sound of boots coming to a halt in the dust, right beside my  
head. (167)*

Having reached safety, Marnus cannot rationalise his inability to respond to the voice of his fellow South African:

*The black section leader comes over and asks whether I have any instructions.  
No, I answer, let every man sleep till he wakes.*

*He lies down on his back next to me in the grass.*

*'Lieutenant?' he asks.*

*'Yes?'*

*'Why did you keep on running, Lieutenant? Didn't you hear me  
calling?'*

*I look him in the face and slowly shrug my shoulders.*

*I turn over to sleep.(178)*

The coercive nature of appellations extends from the initial, specific application of the naming of the narrator to the system of classification and differences that underpins the apartheid system. Indeed, the classification of human beings according to racial difference is the form of cultural inscription that was the distinguishing feature of apartheid policy. For all the pious talk of different racial groups being “separate but equal” under apartheid, the classification “white” meant superior and therefore privileged, and the designation “black” meant inferior and therefore disempowered and dispossessed. As the “white”/ “non-white” binary opposition is the controlling fiction informing apartheid ideology, it is Behr’s project to deconstruct this polarity

through metaphors and parallels. This is exemplified through Doreen, who is the coloured housekeeper for Marnus's family. Her first name is the only one she is known by. It is as if her family provenance is either not important to the employer class or, as it transpires, an affront to their elitist convictions. The revelation of Doreen's surname by Ilse, the only one of the family who knows it is Malan, is deferred until almost the end of the story (188). This clearly comes as a shock to Marnus, as Malan was the surname of one of the Afrikaner architects of apartheid. "I didn't know there were also coloured Malans", he admits. The knowledge of a family name shared between white Malans and Others would have been an admission of everything apartheid sought to deny. The binary dualisms of self and the other, rather than being poles apart, are thus shown to be supplementary to, and part of, each other.

Having introduced the theme of appellation and of interpellation, Behr early presents the second of Derrida's levels of violence, that of internalisation of the Law of the Father, the acceptance of its punitive, castrating power. The degree to which Marnus is in awe of patriarchal power may be seen in his relationship with his best friend and *alter ego*, Frikkie Delport, whose father represents the phallic power of the financial structures of the culture, being described by Marnus as "a *big nob* at Sanlam" (my italics). It is demonstrated by Marnus's guilt-ridden confession of his transgression of the moral law at school by allowing Frikkie to copy his Maths homework and lying to the teacher in order to keep his parents from finding out (8). Duplication, as Rita Barnard suggests, is closely linked to duplicity in this novel (218). Marnus has an unusually strong superego. He internalises his parents' disapprobation and prohibitions with frequent guilty self-accusations and recourse to the ultimate paternal signifier, "the Lord" of Afrikaner Calvinism, for forgiveness of his sins (8). He is



unable to face his father's "disappointment" in him should his dishonest behaviour be discovered. That the very laws laid down by his father and, by extension, his culture, are, in fact, built upon a fundamental dishonesty is something Marnus will begin to discover only at the end of the novel, with the deconstruction of the white/non-white opposition and the rape which dismantles the hetero/homosexual and culture/violence binaries.

Behr reserves the specific incidents illustrative of the third level of violence until the end of the story. Up to the scene of the rape of Frikkie by Marnus's father, a telling disclosure of violence "in its colloquial sense" (Derrida V.L 112) there have been subtle hints about the capacity of Marnus's father for coercion and brutality, which are only gradually allowed to become unsettling. We learn quite early in the narrative that Frikkie is (prophetically) afraid of General Erasmus. His fear of swimming naked with the General is explained as a putative fear of "seals," arguably a phallic metaphor. The account of "Dad" chasing Marnus down the beach, catching him up under his arm and carrying him screaming into the waves (50) parallels the scene in which "Dad" carries Marnus, screaming, into the bathroom, under one arm while he beats him with the other (196).

An important theme introduced in the first pages of the novel is the ascendancy of culture over nature, thus emphasising its significance in the narrative. Marnus and Frikkie visit the museum, which not only serves as a repository of the ruling dispensation's version of history, but also encloses ossified natural forms. Of interest in this incident is the mention of the stuffed marlin, relegated to the back of a display cabinet. It is an enormous fish which, like non-whites, does not come to the beach

(91) and over which Marnus's "Dad" seems to enjoy conspicuous ascendancy (67). The boys agree that whales would be too big to be contained by the interior space of the museum, and we learn of the disappearance of whales (emblematic of nature) from False Bay since the advent of commercial whaling (symbolic of the financial institutions of culture) in the area.

In the second paragraph of the novel, Behr presents the first of his metaphors of circularity, of the inevitable trajectory that will be described by his child protagonist, namely the Scalextric set that is a fixture on Marnus's bedroom floor. On its closed track two cars in complementary colours, one green and one red, chase each other round on a predetermined path. The Scalextric is an interior avatar of the railway line, which is a notable feature of the topography of their geographical situation. The railway line runs alongside the road, separating the Erasmus home from the beach. The product of British Imperialism, of Cecil John Rhodes's dream of the railway line that would link British land in Africa from the Cape to Cairo, it serves as a reminder that the exclusionary structures of the system of apartheid were an extension and an amplification of the patterns laid down by the British colonisers. The fact that it is not occulted is an affront to Marnus's "Dad" not only because its proximity devalues his home, but also perhaps because it is a visible emblem of an imposed, constructed power of which he is the representative and embodiment, and therefore a constant reminder of the parallel and unpalatable fact that he commits his own life to imposing an externally constructed dogma rather than, as he would like to believe, a divinely ordained vision.

The people who live on this narrow, circumscribed stretch of land above the railway line have no unmediated access to the beach or to the ocean, (which traditionally features as a metaphor of maternity, of origins, of the power of nature, and of rebirth.) It is always necessary to duck underground, through a subway, before one can get to the beach (57,135). Unmediated contact with the maternal, the pre-Oedipal, is impossible for the people who live in the masculinist structures of apartheid. The very act of having to duck underground as an everyday action underlines the basic dishonesty and self-deception which the structures of apartheid constrain its adherents to observe. The railway track seems to me to stand for two things: it indicates the human divide which characterises the political ideology and, more broadly, it indicates the inevitable road that the trains (a phallic reference to the male subject) must follow. Like the Scalextric, it admits of no deviation from the track, from the preordained trajectory; any such occurrence constitutes a disaster to the system.

Apart from the useful symbolic proximity of ocean and railway track, the fact that Behr has chosen to situate his novel in the Cape locales of False Bay and the built-up slopes of Oranjezicht offers further metaphoric possibilities. The name "False Bay" is a constant reminder of the untruth at the heart of the patriarchal dogma that structures apartheid thinking and the steep, narrow strip of land between mountain and sea echoes the constraints of apartheid ideology. Its circumscribed terrain offers no latitude for growth or divergence in either direction. A similar urban topography obtains in Oranjezicht where Frikkie lives, just "above" the school. Dwellings are vertically arranged; access is by steep steps on which it is easy to lose one's footing, indicative of a hierarchised society and its attendant insecurities (128).

Michiel Heyns postulates a homoerotic drive that connects father and son to the fatherland ("Fathers" 82). This homosexual factor elaborates the Freudian complete Oedipus Complex, which has the male child not only cathecting with the mother and harbouring ambivalent feelings towards the father, but also identifying with the mother in order to be the object of the father's desire. I would argue that this sexual ambivalence and the splintered subject in general is metaphorically figured forth by Behr through the device of doubling. This notion of the divided self is taken to the extreme of physically splitting his subjects so that each character has an actual corporeal counterpart in the narrative: that is to say that each character has a double or an *alter ego* which is configured in another character. This has the effect of stressing the ambivalence inherent in every subject and in every ideology. Not only are *alter egos* or doubles notably created for General Erasmus (Mr Smith) and Marnus, (Frikkie Delport), but the coloured female personality is also polarised and split, as exemplified in the extremes of characterization represented by Doreen and Gloria. Doreen, who is quiet, humble and self-effacing, is a foil to the brassy, self-assertive Gloria, who mimics popular white stereotypes of speech and glamour, much to the discomfiture and unease of white women like Leonore Erasmus for whom the "white"/ "non-white" binary must remain true (112). Gloria considers herself to be superior to "kaffirs" whom she views as "the scum of the earth" (54). She, too, as a victim of Apartheid, insists on her own system of binary differences as a means of accessing power.

Doreen's ten-year-old son, Little Neville, so helpless a victim in the narrative, is an *alter-ego* for the aggressive Frikkie, with whom he is merged in Marnus's recurring dream, and also for the Chilean General, with whom he shares a dark skin and a mixed-race provenance. This equation of Little Neville with both Frikkie and the

Chilean undoes the “white”/ “non-white”, oppressor/oppressed binaries upon which the apartheid system is based. Through this conflation of Frikkie and Little Neville, Frikkie’s rape by General Erasmus, representative of military power in the abusive system of apartheid, is a metaphoric enactment of the abuse of “brown” races by the same system. Marnus, witnessing the rape, relates that, “Frikkie’s lying on his stomach. His head is covered with the pillow.” The general ... “pulls Frikkie’s legs apart and it looks as if he’s rubbing something into Frikkie’s bum” (177). This recalls Leonore’s description of Little Neville’s (white, railway-worker) torturers who “rubbed lard or something all over his back. And then ... they held him up in front of the locomotive furnace” (131), a phallocratic punishment for a petty transgression against the railways, that is, the apartheid system. Little-Neville’s posture of rape victim in his hospital bed is emphasised by Behr’s positioning him “on his stomach” and “completely naked” with his legs “drawn wide apart” (189). The scarring “[b]etween his thighs, across his bum and all over his back” reflects the Chilean general’s “brown back” with its “mark of what must have been a terrible wound” (82) “stretching from his one shoulder right down to the other hip” (99). It is significant that Behr represents the Chilean General as a victim when he believes himself to be the victor, the beneficiary of his militarist regime. Behr’s point, one deduces, is that he, too, is a victim because everyone is; everyone bears the scars of accession to culture. Even the epitome of Latin American *machismo* bears the marks of terrible damage, of castration. The victor/victim binary opposition is thus inverted and dismantled.

Marnus is said to be a “carbon copy, a photocopy” of his father (35). Ilse also calls him “a blueprint” of his father. A blueprint being a plan for a future construction, this

suggests that not only has the father created an exact copy of himself in his son, but also that the son himself, in his turn, is destined to create copies of his father, thus perpetuating the patriarchy. When Marnus, after a brief and traumatic moment of rebellion, follows his father into a military career, it comes as no surprise. However, ironically, he is never to perpetuate his father. When, after urinating against a tree in Angola (65), he examines his genitalia, they are minutely, microscopically described as interesting male anatomical details, rather like the details that so fascinate Marnus of the Chilean general's arms and hands and the black hairs (adult masculine attributes) that grow on them (132). The time and space in the narrative accorded by the writer to this examination is revealing. There is an innocence, a child-like character attributed to the genitals as if they themselves were Marnus's babies, rather than the masculine instruments of reproduction. The opening "resembles a small mouth with tiny lips in the act of yawning" and Behr describes the organs with epithets such as "fine," "softer tissue," "smooth and without wrinkles, like shells of abalone," "sparse hair," "young trees," suggesting their non-threatening quality and a fatherly tenderness towards them on Marnus's part. As Heyns has pointed out ("Fathers" 95-6), there is nothing rampantly or aggressively sexual about them, the penis, by this stage in the narrative, having been "mortgaged" for the phallus. The reader is afforded the opportunity to understand that it is the possession of these male attributes that is responsible for Marnus's being in Angola at all, fighting in a furtive, undercover war as an officer in the permanent force. As Heyns has cogently remarked, "this 'mister,' the euphemism by now a sad echo of childhood days, is also that all-important signifier that marks Marnus as part of patriarchy" ("Fathers" 96). The penis is shown to be the "membership card" to the "men only" club of the phallus, a point (also observed by Heyns) that is underlined by the Xhosa section-

leader's statement that, "[i]t's men that must make war" (120). That men are never equal to the potency and aggression enjoined on them as possessors of the phallus, is suggested by Marnus's noticing, in a belated recognition of brotherhood, the vulnerable appearance of the back of the black section-leader's neck. This Xhosa soldier is also an *alter-ego* for Marnus, a brother in arms, whose response to Marnus's half-joking suggestion that "eventually (you) blacks could end up being the same as the bloody whites" is a level, "Who else should we be like, Lieutenant?" (120).

It is crucial to the symbolic plot of this narrative that General Erasmus be doubled in the undercover Chilean general who is visiting them. The two generals are physically alike to the extent that, in dim light, one might be misidentified as the other. Marnus is clearly excited by "Mr Smith," the details of whose body and masculinity fascinate the child to the same degree as do the details of his own father's body. Behr draws constant attention to the physical parallels existing between Dad and the Chilean general, just as he is careful to make it obvious that Marnus and Frikkie are parallel characters. The theme of the equivalence of the two generals is further emphasised by Behr's presenting both men as products and inhabitants of a virtually identical topographical and ideological landscape. He locates both generals in almost, but not quite, the same symbolically appropriate place. The Chilean is from Santiago de Chile where a gigantic statue of *El Cristo Redentor de los Andes* watches over his country and its traditionally fascistic neighbour, Argentina: General Erasmus lives in St James, (*Santiago* in Spanish) on False Bay, over which the "hand of the Lord" is several times said to be resting. Behr deliberately engineers the False Bay coast and its settlements as the locus of his novel for the wealth of symbolic associations he is able to exploit, not the least of which is the suggestiveness of the names. St James the

Apostle, also known as the “Moor killer” is an Hispanic saint, believed to have been instrumental in ridding Spain of the Moors at the battle of Clavijo during the *reconquista* when he miraculously materialised on a white horse, upraised sword in hand, and effectively annihilated the Moorish opposition. The politically repressive, racist regimes espoused by both generals are thus metaphorically pinpointed by their places of residence<sup>1</sup>. The Chilean general duplicates the South African general because violently exclusionary, racially oppressive systems are, of course, not exclusive to South Africa. His connection with *Santiago Matamoros* reminds the reader that racial oppression and violence are global, ubiquitous, and furthermore, valorised and endorsed by the structures of religion, a point which is underlined by the old German woman, Mrs Schneider, screeching “*Ihre Juden*” at the children. Importantly, the visitor is not only a militaristic South American: he also goes under the bland, generic pseudonym of “Mr Smith.” In this way, Behr suggests that he represents the symbolic father who intervenes in the life of the boy-child and recruits him into the symbolic order.

In the thematic exposition which Behr gives the reader in the first section of the child’s narration, he makes it clear that Marnus *chooses* Frikkie to be his “other half.” Karl Miller suggests that the double might be “an effort to deal with the existence of evil – an effort which leads to the assignment of destructive urges to another self” and that the one who imagines a double “is engaged in the impossible task of trying to escape from himself, or to separate himself from someone whom he can’t help resembling or repeating” (46-7). Marnus does not imagine his transgressive double, but deliberately picks him out. Frikkie is in every way but physical looks, Marnus’s

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<sup>1</sup> See Note 1



complement. Marnus is preternaturally well-behaved, polite, clever, hardworking, an ideal ego balanced by the rebellious, disobedient, sadistic, slow-witted bully epitomised by Frikkie. Together they add up to one whole exemplar of the new generation of “Verwoerd’s Children” (Heyns “Fathers” 83). Together they attend the male bonding exercises of “*Voortrekkers*”, a proto-military Afrikaner consciousness-raising boys’ movement similar to the Boy Scouts, and are generally inseparable. Marnus’s first overture of friendship to the bullying Frikkie during a playground top-spinning game is fraught with sexual imagery, introducing the theme of the sexuality that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims is part of all homosocial bonding systems (Heyns “Fathers” 82):

You’re holding your top wrong, I said, and quickly walked over to him without giving him time to answer. Before he could say anything, I took the top from his hand and showed him how to curl his finger around it before he throws. After a few tries he got it, and soon he was trying to kiss everyone else’s tops. We call it kissing when you managed to spin your top on top of one that was already spinning. Before tops went out of fashion, Frikkie had broken quite a few tops in half with his deadly kisses.(3)

Karl Miller makes the point that “Duplication has kept its ties with duplicity and damnation, with lying and dying” (48). Rita Barnard takes up this theme in regarding Behr’s apartheid themes of duplication and duplicity as being closely linked in the homework-copying episode and the subsequent mendacity attendant on it (218). Of further significance, I would suggest, is the fact that the homework in question is not English or Geography or any other subject, but “Maths,” and more specifically,

fractions. Behr is here weaving in the thread of equivalences, of more than one part comprising a whole unit that is so vital a part of the symbolic texture of his novel. The Freudian split subject is configured in more than one character, having more than one name. The Chilean visitor first sees Marnus alone at his bedroom window and later asks, 'Are you the face at the window – or are you hiding a half-wit in the attic?' Marnus immediately responds, '*Ja dis ek.*' He is both himself and only half of a self. (He is here also conflated with his mother who, many years later, we see gazing out of her son's bedroom window, like the proverbial madwoman in the attic).

The one-ness of Marnus and Frikkie is reinforced in the bedroom scene when the two boys swear an oath of blood brotherhood. This is a ceremonial of male bonding with strong homoerotic overtones and allusions to the fear of castration that accompanies the Oedipus complex:

I take two elastic bands from the desk. We each tie a band around our forefingers, and the tips turn red almost immediately ... with my free hand I push the compass against his finger that's looking like a mulberry ... I shove harder and Frikkie jumps back when the point goes in too deep. 'Ouch!' he groans. That's too much.' Almost at once, there's a drop of blood on his fingertip .... I hold out my finger to him. I close my eyes as he comes towards me with the compass. I feel the jab and when I look again, there's a drop of blood, pushing up from the skin. Then we rub our fingers together until it's sticky.

'Now we must make the oath,' I say, and start moving over to the Bible.

'Take the elastic off! Your finger's going to fall off.' (78/79)

Behr underlines this when Marnus goes to the bathroom for a drink of water after this ritual and he is startled to encounter the Chilean with his wound emblazoned across his back. It is now that "Mr Smith" first identifies himself as a parallel father to Marnus: 'You remind me so much of my own son,' he tells him (82). The mark of castration of this substitute father amplifies that of the young initiate. Tellingly, Marnus's access to the water, a feminine, pre-Oedipal element, is blocked by the Chilean in this episode.

It is notable also that the bathrooms of the Erasmus home are the sites of both intimacy (nakedness and its attendant vulnerability), and retribution. Marnus and Dad shower together, Marnus fascinated by Dad's "mister" and Dad inquisitive about Marnus's sexual maturity; both Ilse and Marnus are beaten by Dad for the first and only time in the bathroom. The second encounter of Marnus and the Chilean takes place there when "Mr Smith" offers to dress Marnus's grazed knee. Again, it is an encounter of considerable intimacy, implied sexuality and tenderness, in which the general reiterates his equivalence to "Dad" by mentioning his own son in connection with normative masculinity, "My son is always grazing himself. It's natural for boys" he assures Marnus (132). It is significant that the general squats down, so that he is on the same level with, or lower than, Marnus (a posture which recalls that of Ben Harper when inducting his son, John into the Name of the Father). This attitude is recapitulated in the critical scene in which "Dad's" tears soak through Marnus's camouflage suit as Marnus holds his father's head to his chest (197). The last memory Marnus has before dying is precisely this image of his father sobbing against his chest prior to investing him with the stature of manhood, inducting him into the name of the father. It is interesting that Freud in his paper on *The Uncanny* suggests that the

double has its own ambivalence in that it both perpetuates life *and* becomes a “ghastly harbinger of death” (141).

Behr builds up his novel to a series of increasingly violent climaxes with the scene of Frikkie’s rape by Marnus’s father, of Marnus’s beating and his eventual acquiescence in his symbolic investiture with the trappings of militarism, and of Marnus’s eventual death as a result of this induction into his culture. Having carefully laid the groundwork of equivalences between “Dad” and “Mr Smith,” Marnus and Frikkie, Behr is careful to suggest that at first sight, it seems that it is the Chilean who is abusing Frikkie sexually. When it becomes clear that it is “Dad” the symbolic significance of the rape moves into focus. As Frikkie is equivalent to Marnus, it is Marnus who is being violated by his own father. The source of the superego that constructs the young male subject is simultaneously engaged in violating it. The father of the ego-ideal doubles as the Lacanian obscene father. The rape forces Marnus to acknowledge the transgressive violence of the process of introjection of the father. The import of this knowledge is uncomfortably brought home to Marnus by the knowing laughter of the naval ratings whom he suspects are discussing his father (184). He comes to recognise the fallibility of his ego ideal. The binary opposition of superego (source of the heteronormative law) and obscene father is dismantled: the apples of the apartheid Eden are revealed to be rotten.

The child’s attitude *vis-à-vis* the adults and their doubles undergoes a change. He will not approach his father for a kiss, as the complete Oedipus complex reaches the point of dissolution, and he now realizes that his mother and the Chilean general share a guilty secret, that she it was who he saw standing in the doorway of the general’s

room the previous night. He feels betrayed by his mother. The object of her desire, the one to fulfil her lack is not himself, but this avatar of the father, that is, the father himself. This is the moment of resolution of the Oedipus complex that Marnus's father has so impatiently been awaiting. The truth about the violent nature of the introjection of the father has been seen and recognised, yet it is accepted and internalised nevertheless. It is never spoken of; its negative aspects, therefore, are repressed. The boy-child has no choice but to turn from his mother as object-cathexis and identify more fully with his father, accepting his investiture with the regalia of militarist masculinity (197). Having surrendered his pre-Oedipal self he can now accede to manhood, and accordingly, the boy experiences his first erection as he lies in bed in his military costume. Behr uses the penis to underscore accession to the phallus. It is for this reason that Marnus rejects Ilse's overtures with a rough, "You don't understand anything!" It is because she is excluded from access to the phallus by virtue of her gender.

That male and female children are constructed according to different criteria is made clear through the Erasmus parents', particularly "Dad's," expectations of Ilse and Marnus. While it is true that Ilse's relinquishing of her participation in the paramilitary youth organization, "*Voortrekkers*," is accepted with disappointment by her father (46), Marnus's decision to give up singing is delightedly encouraged by his "Dad" to whom male singers are "poofers" (104). As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests, homophobia is often considered (wrongly) as a prerequisite of homosocial structures (1,4). Ilse's bonding with her father seems limited to his dictating to her what she should say to impress the adjudicators of the debating competitions she invariably wins. She is thus (reluctantly) coerced in to lip-synching the discourse of

the father. It is the poor white female child, Zelda Kemp, whose subjectivity is most clearly circumscribed by her gender. Zelda is also excluded from accession to the privileges of the phallus, but in more ways than the more fortunate Ilse, whose appropriately ill-fitting garments she inherits. Her red-haired brothers are allowed to go hatless as it is considered acceptable for boys to be freckled. Zelda, at the risk of a beating, is constrained to wear her hat out of doors at all times so that her skin remains "as white as paper" (58). She is almost killed in the attempt to retrieve this protective covering, guarantor, in the face of her family's poverty and their social proximity to the "coloureds," of her credentials as a "white" girl, when Frikkie steals it and dares her to reclaim it at great personal risk (60). In this incident, it is clear that the boys are able to operate at the dangerous interface between culture (the quay) and nature (the threatening waves) by virtue of their access to the phallus (the lighthouse). Zelda has no such privileged relationship with phallographic structures and is overwhelmed by the power of the water and almost drowned. Her pathetic eagerness to be recognised and included by the boys despite her previous experience of Frikkie's cruelty (53) is evidence of her own low self-esteem. Marnus's recurring dream of phallic power, which he first experiences after his acceptance of induction into the masculine cultural structures, is a paradigm of his accession to the phallus. Marnus, Frikkie, even Little Neville, all, by virtue of their male anatomy, possession of the penis, are imaged mounted on galloping horses, emblematic of phallic power. The terrified figure, still obediently clutching her hat to her head and running from them, is the dispossessed female child who has no privileged access to, and who is permanently under threat from, the phallic structures of culture.

The theme of the internalisation of patriarchal law may further be seen in the apparently willing acceptance by the women of the ruling “white” race of the paternal structures which it is their role to underpin and perpetuate. It is exemplified in Leonore Erasmus, who is proud of having sacrificed her own career as an opera singer in order to devote her life to indoctrinating her children into the approved ideology, making herself the instrument of and allowing herself to be spoken by her culture. “Now you keep *quiet*, Ilse” she snaps at her rebellious daughter, enjoining silence over dissent from the female child (191). However, not even the passive Leonore is able totally to perpetuate the prescriptions of the conservative, exclusionary system at all times. She enjoys her own moments of rebellion in listening to Jazz, “black” music performed by “black” people, in the company of her children whose complicit silence on the matter she imposes.

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* Gabriel Garcia Marquez took, as his model of the inexorably deterministic enactment of tragedy, Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*. Mark Behr, while using the Oedipal scheme, introduces the Virgilian story of *Dido and Aeneas* as intertextual resonance. *Dido*, too, is a tragedy of destiny. Behr constructs the device of Leonore’s being a retired singer who once sang the title role in Purcell’s opera. By this means he avails himself of a further example of the predetermined trajectory of the male subject as decreed by the patriarchal power that shapes one’s existence within culture. In Nahum Tate’s libretto for Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, Aeneas attempts, like Oedipus, to deviate from the path he is destined to follow: The malevolent sorceress articulates his fate, that of being the founder of a colony in Italy that will one day be Rome with the words:

The Trojan prince, you know, is bound

By Fate to seek Italian ground.

But Aeneas is determined to choose his own path, which is to remain in Carthage with Dido:

Let Dido smile and I'll defy

The feeble stroke of Destiny

(Tate)

he resolves. But Dido, who, like Ilse and Leonore, is not able to understand the inescapability of history for the male subject, and furious that Aeneas could have entertained for a moment the "option" of leaving her, rejects him. It ends, predictably, in tragedy, with Aeneas sailing away to do what he must, and Dido and her maidservant, Belinda, gazing out to sea at his departing ship. Dido commits suicide and Carthage is burnt to the ground.

Leonore, possibly out of ignorance of the true state of South African military involvement in Angola, assumes that Marnus can refuse to go back to the bush war, in the same way that Dido believed that Aeneas could refuse to go and found a colony once the gods had decreed that he should. For all the bleak determinism of Behr's narrative, he introduces a ray of hope via Leonore's touching letter to Marnus in Angola, with her news of the appearance of the belated whale, so close to the beach, where they and the marlins used not to venture. This sequence hints at death in the greyness of everything; in Leonore's jersey, her faded hair, the weather; the house that, without Marnus, is "grey and empty" (136). The greyness carries an ambivalent charge, however, being suggestive also of the dismantling of the "black"/ "white" binary, elaborating what has been introduced earlier by mention of the dust that



covers everything in Angola and renders everyone the same colour. "Dad," and by extension, the apartheid system, is ageing, failing; the flowers are diseased; the system is crumbling. It is 1988; the war may be ending, hints Leonore and now there is promise of a new beginning in that the bulbs are coming up. Leonore relates how she and Doreen pass together under the railway line, the divisive determinant of their culture, like two shades in the underworld. Like Dido and Belinda, they are two women gazing out to sea, not at an abandonment, but at a visitation, a promise from the ocean (source of regeneration) of a return of the powerful forces of nature to inhabit once again the proscribed spaces that have for so long been dominated and colonized by culture.

## Note 1

*Santiago Matamoros*, it is worth noting, is an ongoing source of contention in the Spanish and Latin American media. A transcript from a Spanish radio broadcast on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2000 declares: “Almeria burns! *Santiago Matamoros* Rides Again in El Ejido!” (Burgos). The gist of this story is that the possessions of impoverished Moroccans living outside Almeria in Southern Spain, had been set fire to in a racial /xenophobic attack. In Mendoza, Argentina, a newspaper editorial (Romani) concedes, with reference to cities and cathedrals boasting representations of the sword-brandishing saint mounted on his white horse, “while none of the major religions of the world has been characterized for its sensitivity towards minorities, it must truly be offensive that religious images should invoke symbols of war on and intolerance towards those who are different.” Travel writer John Dagenais, in a review of a travel book on the Compostela pilgrimage, points out that “the iconography of the Saint ...survives throughout the Hispanic world.” He refers specifically to Santiago’s role in the conquest of the New World as it is illustrated in a painting by Guaman Poma de Ayala which depicts

{t}he mounted Santiago traml{ing} not a Moor, but one of the New World’s indigenous inhabitants. The iconography in this illustration is precisely that of mediaeval Iberian representations of the saint, who charges ahead scattering Moorish body parts in his wake.

*Santiago Matamoros*, 18<sup>th</sup> c. New Orleans Museum of Art.



Taken from: Leibsohn, Dana and Barbara Mundy. *Vistas: Spanish American Visual Culture, 1620-1820*. <http://www.smith.edu/vistas>, 2004.

This oil-on-canvas painting was probably created in Cuzco, where legend of Santiago had special currency. During a battle to retake Cuzco from the last Inka ruler, Manco Inka II, in 1536, Spanish troops believed they saw Santiago. Like their Iberian forebears, they won the battle. So to Spaniards, Creoles, and indigenous viewers, Santiago was an emblem of Spanish supremacy. While this work shows the conventional image of a mounted Santiago trampling turbaned Muslims, some versions show Santiago “Mataindios” not “Matamoros”—Indian-slayer, not Moor-slayer, with the prone and trampled bodies of Andeans beneath the feet of his horse.

While this painting probably hung in a church, Santiago frequently escaped its confines. Sculptures of the mounted Santiago were paraded thorough city streets on feast days, and plays retelling the wars of conquest, reached wide audiences.

# CONQUISTA MILAGRODELS

tiago mayor apostol de xristo



en el siglo

15.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis of the chosen works, it is clear that all three of them are dramatisations of the unavoidable violence of culture in which the male protagonists, who are the heirs to its patriarchal ordering, are shown to be either damaged or destroyed as a result of their induction into the patriarchy. The authors of these stagings of accession and/or its consequences are demonstrably critical of the destructive power of the phallocracy and all of them suggest, however tangentially, an alternative way of being, one that has been repressed by the prevailing version of the patriarchal system. All three protagonists are shown to engage, to a greater or lesser extent, in gestures of rebellion against accession to the name of the father, attempting to exercise a measure of free will, manifesting an awareness that there might, after all, be some alternative, some existential latitude within which to move, some degree of “play” in the system.

The question, however, remains: “To what extent is it possible to overcome the patriarchal system and the violence inherent in it?” In order to address this more directly it is useful to consider another trope shared by all three of the works I have been exploring: that of the uncanny. Preacher, in *The Night of the Hunter*, is an uncanny character. He is furtive, silent, appearing suddenly when least expected (Grubb 90, 137-8, 168). He is eerily duplicitous, being able to present a façade of good that deflects suspicion from the evil of his motives. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is replete with uncanny coincidence, as the young magistrate feels moved to commit to the record: specifically, the recurring tropes of mirroring and doubling and the eerie foreshadowings of the death of the protagonist. Freud, in his paper on “The

Uncanny,” stresses that this feeling is brought about by recurrence and repetition, upon which Marquez’s novella is paratactically structured. Appropriately, of the uncanny quality of coincidence, Freud’s words are:

It is ...this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds with an uncanny atmosphere what would otherwise be innocent enough and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of ‘chance’ only. (144)

Freud and Karl Miller both stress the uncanny provenance of *doppelgängers* and *alter egos* and, of course, *The Smell of Apples* is constructed on a network of doubling that is fundamental to the plot. But it is the repetitive, recurrent nature of these surfacings which constitutes their uncanny and inescapable nature.

Freud defines the uncanny as “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us” but that has since been repressed (123). It seems to me that if one asks the question, “What is this knowledge that the authors foreground as being repressed in the works we have been investigating?” one will discover two answers: one political and the other psychoanalytical. The political answer to the question must surely be that it is the second term of the binary, the suppressed, negative element of the feminine and, by extrapolation, the pre-Oedipal that is repressed. Repression in its political form (suppression of the secondary term of the binary opposition) is the kind that may be subject to the ameliorative effects of individual and communal rescripting. Culture, being structured by binary oppositions like self/other, male/female, white/black, good/evil, is shown, in all of the works I have discussed,

to be engaged in distancing, excluding and repressing the second term so that it presents no threat to the privileged primary term. However, as Derrida has convincingly argued, the second term cannot wholly be excluded from the primary term, being in fact, part of it, as its trace or supplement. It is always already inside the primary term and therefore cannot be entirely denied or “othered”. Perhaps the conclusion that may be drawn from my examination of these texts is that damage and violence might be mitigated were the rigid differentiation of the binary oppositions to be questioned and deconstructed within a more inclusive discursive system.

Several feminist theorists, among them Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva and Silverman, have postulated an alternative, oppositional discourse in which the feminine, repressed term is given a voice, in which women’s writing and feminine values are valorised over those of the exclusionist, masculine systems of naming, defining and categorizing. The three works I have examined also offer a palliation of the damage of induction emanating from the agency of women, in *Chronicle* and *The Smell of Apples*, more specifically, from women’s writing. As Silverman has proposed, if the second term in the male/female binary were no longer considered in terms of negative value, in terms of lack in relation to the phallus, but instead as complement of and supplement to the phallus, then a more equitable and inclusive discursive order might be brought into being.

This is not to suggest that one may ultimately escape the symbolic order, but the fact that one can *imagine* an alternative discursive order marks the limits of the present, oppressive symbolic, making it seem less cripplingly totalising. Simply being able to *think* another order is a gesture of agency, a political project that has the potential to bring about change.

The psychoanalytical form of the repressed that returns in uncanny moments, unlike the political form of repression, is one in which there is no palliative agency possible. What returns as having been repressed by the subject is no less than the Law of the Father and the repetitious surfacing of the subject's awareness of the essential violence of the symbolic order to which he is heir. Psychoanalytically, what is repressed is the knowledge that to accept the Name of the Father is to accept death, as Behr suggests in his novel. It is the realisation that the patriarchy, figured forth via the father, requires, paradoxically, the sacrifice of the son in order to survive.

The resolution of the Oedipus Complex is effected through the castration threat. It is through this very act of violence, then, that the boy child accedes to his patrimony, identifying himself fully with his father and denying or sublimating his powerful cathexis with his mother. It is this process of the sacrifice of the [desire of] the individual male subject which ensures the survival of patriarchally aligned culture, as may be seen in the chosen narratives. The works under discussion in this dissertation offer clear illustrations of the violence of the Name of the Father. Ben Harper is castrated by his culture; he is wounded, imprisoned and hanged. Preacher, who is the representative of the transcendental signifier, of the deity of the culture, while being accepted by the community as "good" is in fact evil and violent, the agent of "castration" of the male child who inherits the Name of the Father. Santiago Nasar, model of his culture's masculinity, heir to its potency, is nevertheless sacrificed by the vicars of the ultimate Father because the perpetuation of the system requires it. Marnus Erasmus is seduced by his culture into reproducing its tenets and structures, but the seduction is revealed to be rape; the true nature of induction into culture is, in the end, shown as being ineluctably violent.



It is interesting that, in these fictional dramatisations of the inheritance of man's estate, all three loci of action present an extreme and unenlightened manifestation of the patriarchal system. *The Night of the Hunter* plays out against a backdrop of the McCarthyite depression years and the disenfranchised masculinity and revivalist religious susceptibility attendant on that historical period. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is shaped by the *macho* code of honour endorsed by the powerful creed of Catholicism in Latin America. *The Smell of Apples* is set in militarist Southern Africa where the ruling "white" race makes brutal war on "others" in order to uphold the values of Calvinist fundamentalism. Indeed, one might extrapolate that the more extreme the cultural matrix and the more polarised the binaries, the more destructive the process of induction will be.

Another conspicuously recurring trope that the texts have in common is their emphasis on "God" as the transcendental signifier, the central originary presence around which the cultural structure is organised. Man has created his god in the image of the father, revered less as loving than as wrathful and punitive. This is a potent father whose power and right to castrate is not in doubt and it is in the name of this Father that the subject is interpellated into the ideological matrix of his culture. Indeed, it is this numinous concept of a God the Father which activates and validates all the other patriarchal metaphors (the law, education, family and media) by which the subject is coerced into the hegemonic observances of his social order. "He", being the central presence, "outside" the system, cannot be queried or gainsaid. "He" is invoked at all times as a sort of absolute cosmic endorsement of the most brutal impositions, which, if they are "God's will", must be not only permissible, but actually desirable. The one thing they never are is contestable. This is the "cosmic" validation that apartheid claimed for itself, one that it shared with Nazi fascism, the belief that "God is with us," an example illustrative of the way in which cultural discourse fashions its absolute origin

in line with its own preferences and prejudices. As long as the violence is done in the Name of the (transcendental) Father it is entirely acceptable. Once we are inducted into the exclusive club of the chosen elite, “We are free to ... kill, rape, plunder, but only insofar as we follow the master” (Žižek online).

Derrida, in analysing the nature of binary thought, points out that the “presence” believed to be at the centre of all structures is not a fixed locus, but a function: that the centre itself does not escape structuration (*SSP* 109). The “transcendental signifier” is itself a term in the discourse of morality like any other, and, like any other term, is therefore open to interpretation and to question.

If we accept this, it then becomes possible to imagine a less punitive discursive structure, held together by a less exclusive “centre”. The ultimate validation for the rigid differentiation of the binary dualisms would lose its power for harm. The “man of God” need not automatically be accepted as “good” by the credulous; masculinities need not be formed by unquestioning adherence to conservative codes of violent behaviour and “the other” would be recognised in the self. These linear moments of political progression are indeed offered in all three works under discussion; however, they are contained and delimited, in each case, by the larger, circular movement of the unalterable presence of the symbolic. What returns as the repressed is not only the suppressed binaries of the patriarchy but also the awareness of the ineluctable violence of culture itself. Although Rachel Cooper may offer love and protection for the children, she is nevertheless constrained to operate within the confines of her culture: the stories and songs she repeats are the same as those of the twisted fanatic and the outraged lynch mob. Angela Vicario’s brave rescripting of history is enclosed within the repetitive structures of the tragic drama: structures which are echoed in the very form and

fabric of García Márquez's novella. Marnus Erasmus attempts briefly to escape from history, but the cyclical nature of culture, mirrored by Behr in the repetitious patterning of all key aspects of the work, disarms and vitiates the progressive moment.

Thus it is shown that the second, psychoanalytical order of repression which surfaces in uncanny moments is the one which is not susceptible to amelioration or avoidance by any political project. This repressed is embodied by the terrifying presence of Harry Powell, of whom John wonders, "Don't he never sleep?" He represents the Symbolic patriarchal presence; he is the representative of God and he is also the obscene father; he is "the dark gar in the river of [John's] mind" (Grubb132), the repressed knowledge that this symbolic, substitute father is coterminous with [his] dead father. This repressed is the tragic dimension that structures *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and in *The Smell of Apples* it is the introjection of symbolic law as rape.

Psychoanalytically, the knowledge of the repressed is the recognition that culture is death: that culture requires the sacrifice of the son for its own survival. All three texts feature moments of the return of the repressed that signal the violence of the symbolic order through inexorable repetition. Repetition implies the opposite of progress: it speaks of inescapability and marks the perpetuation of violence. The surfacing of these repetitive moments is a reminder that what returns as the repressed is not only the Name of the father, the patriarchal nature of historical culture, but also the notion of culture as trauma. History may well be without teleology, but at least it offers a measure of agency to the subject otherwise bound on the wheel of culture. Repetition implies circularity. The recapitulative, cyclical movement bounds and delimits the little linear moments, the small diachronic gestures of history, within the larger context of the tragedy of culture as violence which is also the story of man.

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#### *The Night of the Hunter*

United Artists, 1955. Director: Charles Laughton; Producer: Paul Gregory; Screenplay: James Agee; Cinematography: Stanley Cortez. 92 minutes. Black and white.

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