“SOCIETY DOESN’T EXIST”: THE BREAKDOWN OF PATERNAL AUTHORITY AND THE ILLEGITIMATE ORIGINS OF (POST) OEDIPAL SOCIETY

A Dissertation Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

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When a child catches adults out—when it first walks into his grave little head that adults do not have divine intelligence, that their judgements are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just—his world falls into panic desolation. The gods are fallen and all safety is gone. And there is one sure thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine. And the child’s world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing.

John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*
A B S T R A C T

“‘Society Doesn’t Exist’: The Breakdown of Paternal Authority and the Illegitimate Origins of (Post) Oedipal Society”

By Gozde Kilic

This thesis attempts to provide a psychoanalytic discussion of the institution of paternal authority and its crisis in modernity within a theoretical and literary-historical framework. It proceeds from the psychoanalytic view that far from liberating the subject, the decline of the father’s function generates new inhibitions and complexes, and illustrates this with examples from literature, history, and politics. It reads the Freudian Oedipal Father and Lacanian Name-of-the-Father both as symptoms, serving as means of avoiding the libidinal deadlock evoked by the absence of paternal authority. It employs a particular literature on the absurd represented in the works of Franz Kafka’s The Trial and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’s The Time Regulation Institute in order to explore the inconspicuous effects of this deadlock within the politics of nationalism in modern European and Turkish history. While it approaches Kafka’s The Trial as a prophetic text that anticipates the Nazi totalitarian state of the coming decade in its unique fictionalization of the failure of the paternal metaphor, or the Name-of-the-Father, it detects in Tanpınar’s The Time Regulation Institute traces of the trauma of Turkish modernization perceived as a half-hearted patricide which is commonly construed in Oedipal terms.

Keywords: Father, Paternity Crisis, Psychoanalysis, Freud, Lacan, Žižek, Kafka, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Nationalism, Turkish literature
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INTRODUCTION

As recounted in the Bible (Genesis 3:1-24), there was a time when humanity was completely unsullied in the Garden of Eden. However, this state of innocence was destroyed by the Fall, by Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God’s commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For after they ate of this tree, they lost their innocence as a result of which they realized for the first time that they were naked and covered their bodies with fig leaves. Due to their transgression, they were banished from paradise and made to reside on earth where life would be hard with toil and sweat. From then on, sin and guilt would act as antagonistic forces against their (and man’s) desire to reunite with God and return to the eternal light of the Garden.

The story of the Fall has become entrenched as the central Western metanarrative about the fall from innocence into experience. When Adam and Eve chose to eat from the forbidden tree, they surrendered their untainted innocence for a dual vision of the world, characterized by the binaries of good and evil, the lost grace and the destined sinfulness. As a result, they lost their childlike naivety and achieved awareness through the acquisition of knowledge. In this context, it is possible to view the Fall operating as a narrative of loss. First, there is the state of innocence. This state is destroyed when knowledge is attained. Knowledge becomes the necessary step into manhood. This can be understood in terms of growing, of entering the phase of adulthood. In this painful growing, something is gained: knowledge, but something else is lost: the feeling of
wholeness and completeness. This loss is what constitutes life on earth. Generation after generation, people die and the world changes; however, the feeling of loss stays. People try to find compensation for this loss by building permanent structures: communities, civilizations, empires, and states, but nothing provides a perfect coverage, and instead these structures reproduce and perpetuate the original loss.

In psychoanalysis, this sense of loss corresponds to the feeling of lack. We come to life as lacking subjects. Everything we build, as a result, is also tainted by lack. Paradoxically, we build as an attempt to fill the lack, but what we build, in return, becomes the living proof of our lack. One only needs to look at history for confirmation. For Jacques Lacan, language is responsible for inflicting lack in the subject. It is because “language cannot say the whole truth. The words to do it are missing; it is materially impossible … to achieve it and this is a source of alienation in which what emerges is the lack in every representation.”¹ This is what Lacan refers to as symbolic castration. We are not castrated by our fathers, but by language, which castrates our fathers, too. As long as we speak and belong to linguistic communities (that is, as long as we are human), we will always be marked by lack. Then, lack is what we get in return for a place in society. Consequently, what produces lack is the symbolic order which we are subjected to, due to the impossibility of words fully to convey unmediated reality.

Our desire to fill the lack in the symbolic structure determines our will to confer meaning on our lives. For centuries, religion acted as the foremost instrument in that purpose. In The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901), Sigmund Freud recognizes the crucial place of religion in man’s life when he strikingly reverses the famous verse in

¹ Yannis Stavrakakis, Lacan and the Political (New York: Routledge, 1999), 52.
Genesis “God created man in his own image” into “Man created God in his.” Later in *Totem and Taboo* (1912), he puts forth the argument that people created gods in the past for themselves to restore the earlier organic unity with the primal father (the one non-lacking, non-castrated being). These gods provided them with the security, protection, and coherence the primal father once provided. In other words, believing in the gods made them forget that they lacked. Consequently, when modernity killed God, what people realized was that they *indeed* lacked. As Maria Aristodemou writes, “the death of God in modernity may have revealed the emptiness at the heart of the symbolic order and at the heart of each subject more glaringly than ever before,” but as she is quick to add, “[T]he death of God revealed the emptiness but the death of God did not *create* the emptiness. The emptiness … was there from the start.”

Even though emptiness is *ab initio*, with modernity—and the death of God—its realization becomes even more possible. When the fantasy of God that we have created to satisfy our need for reassurance and safety cannot be sustained anymore (what Aristodemou calls our “comforting toy” that “our predecessor’s antics deprived us of”), we come face to face with the lack in being.

In this sense, in modernity we go through another Fall (another phenomenon of loss of innocence). With the death of God, we become aware of the gaping hole at our core. This awareness necessitates expulsion from the blissful childhood ignorance and insertion into a more mature state of adulthood. This (painful) state of growing is best illustrated by Octave Mannoni in the story of Hopi masks—which also called *kachinas*—which

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4 Ibid.
are considered to be heinous spirits by Pueblo Indians. These masks are worn by tribesmen at certain times of the year in religious ceremonies, and used to scare children who misbehave or wonder too far from the village. The incident Mannoni recounts occurs when the *kachina* dancers, those who impersonate *kachinas*, come without masks on. The protagonist of the story, Don Talayesva, is shocked because he can recognize all of them as his father and uncles although he is told all his life that they are gods. After this realization, Mannoni contends, Talayesva feels the need to refute the refutation reality inflicts upon him in order to keep his belief in the *kachinas* as gods. Therefore, he is only able to maintain his belief by submitting it to a radical transformation: I know it is not true, but all the same... Mannoni argues that the demystification forces refutation upon the belief in the *kachinas* and serves as the instituting moment of a new belief in the *kachinas*. The reality (*kachinas* are one’s uncles and fathers) need to be disavowed: “I know very well that the *kachinas* are not spirits; they are my fathers and uncles, but all the same the *kachinas* are there when my fathers and uncles dance with the masks on.”

Belief is maintained despite its refutation in reality by undergoing transformation; it is “necessary that the belief survives its disavowal, even though it becomes unapprehensible.” When the young Hopi, assured of the non-magical substance of the *kachinas* enters into a panic at the idea that his existence could be refuted by reality, he re-stabilizes himself by conserving his belief at the price of a transformation that renders it “magical,” and he is assisted on this point by the very institution of his people.

The *kachinas* story illustrates how belief functions in modern societies: its conservation is based upon a willing renunciation of reality epitomized in the sentence, “I

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know very well, but all the same.” I know that the gods are fallen and the fathers are inept, but I will still continue to believe that they are not. Replacing the innocent child of pre-modern period is, thus, the hypocritical and pretentious adult of modern period who prefers to sustain the lie—the symbolic efficiency which, as Slavoj Žižek claims, is “the order of the lie”—rather than trust the direct reality of his eyes. It is within this context that we can read Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s claim that “society doesn’t exist.”

Society as a coherent whole that gives meaning and consistency to our existence does not exist. It has never existed per se, but the continuation of the belief in its existence sustained it. Modernity makes it all-too-apparent that society is constituted around an impossibility, or lack, and as such “every process of identification conferring on us a fixed socio-symbolic identity is ultimately doomed to fail.”

It is at this point that psychoanalysis comes into play: where belief does not support the fiction that society is a meaningful, stable, and coherent entity anymore; as a consequence, what we are left with is a façade that hides nothing behind it. Lacan relates the birth of psychoanalysis to this schism between what we believe to be reality and what it really is: to the rupture that modernity creates between “knowledge and truth,” or between Reality and the Real. This rupture is brought about by the breakdown of paternal authority because paternal authority, as psychoanalysis views it, is the agency that sews together the fissure in the symbolic order. Consequently, when it cannot function properly, the gap in the center of the symbolic order—the lack—becomes palpable to the extent that it disturbs the smooth functioning surface of the latter. It is,

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8 Ibid.
9 Aristodemou, Law, Psychoanalysis, 50.
therefore, possible to say that psychoanalysis starts with the death of the father. As a modern discourse, it situates modernity in the murder of the father (the primal patricide)—which we can understand as the murder of the ideal of an omniscient and omnipresent higher-entity. What follows this murder is the take-over of the sons who establish a new order based on egalitarian principles and as such guarantee the non-monopoly of paternal dominance.

In this exchange, father’s death is expected to result in the liberty of the sons from his rule; however, psychoanalysis warns us about this rather hasty conclusion. The death of the father does not free subjects from his overwhelming authority; rather, it opens up new issues and problems. It is the goal of psychoanalytic inquiry to explore the nature of these new potentials. As Žižek states:

Psychoanalysis is neither a theory which bemoans the disintegration of the old modes of traditional stability and wisdom, locating in them the cause of modern neuroses and compelling us to discover our roots in old archaic wisdom or profound self-knowledge (the Jungian version), nor just another version of reflexive modern knowledge teaching us how to penetrate and master the innermost secrets of our psychic life—what psychoanalysis focuses on, its proper object, consists, rather, in the unexpected consequences of the disintegration of traditional structures that regulated libidinal life. Why does the decline of paternal authority and fixed social and gender roles generate new anxieties, instead of opening up a Brave New World of individuals engaged in the creative ‘care of the Self’ and enjoying the perpetual process of shifting and reshaping their fluid multiple identities? What psychoanalysis can do is to focus on the Unbehagen [the discontent] in the risk society: on the new anxieties generated by the risk society, which cannot be simply
dismissed as the result of the tension or gap between the subjects’ sticking to the old notions of personal responsibility and identity (like fixed gender roles and the family structure) and the new situation of fluid, shifting identities and choices.\footnote{Slavoj Zizek, \textit{The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology} (London: Verso, 2009), 341-2.}

Psychoanalysis encourages us to look deeper and further. We might think that existing social structures are meaningful and that we are reasonable, “but psychoanalysis knows that behind this façade there is something else lurking, waiting to mess things up, to make claims of its own.”\footnote{Stephen Frosh, \textit{Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions} (New York: Palgrave, 201), 3.} It shows “how we are continuously infiltrated by things we know little about, or what we thought we had escaped.”\footnote{Ibid., 9.} In my dissertation, I employ psychoanalytic theory to expose what is at stake with the decline of the father as the embodiment of the symbolic law. Rather than bringing liberties and privileges, I argue that this decline generates new problems and difficulties for the subject who, without the mediation of the father, is forced to confront the Real of the social order as well as himself.

Psychoanalysis makes it apparent that when the father is dead, and when we expect to have the most autonomy and freedom, we get exactly the opposite: more restrictions. “For psychoanalysis, even if the father is killed, even if there is no God issuing prohibitions from above, this does not mean that the subject is blissfully and wildly free.”\footnote{Aristodemou, \textit{Law, Psychoanalysis}, 38.} As Aristodemou describes it, “the morning after the death of God” is nothing but “a nasty hangover we inherited from our parents’ riotous party.”\footnote{Ibid.} The removal of the father’s prohibition puts up new fences and walls in front of the subject. Sigmund Freud

\footnote{Ibid.}
points to this in *Totem and Taboo* when he writes that the dead father comes back even stronger than he had been because his authority is now internalized. In other words, the father as an outside figure was an external hindrance to the subject’s full enjoyment, but when his authority is internalized, he becomes entrenched in the psyche, constantly and continually pressuring the subject (the ego) with his commands. As Gilles Deleuze writes about “the difference between the before and after the death of God”: “instead of being burdened from the outside, man takes the weights and places them on his back.” When there was a father, he was the one who used to tell the subject what to do and what not to do, and in his absence, the subject is left to the mercy of his own psychic organization. This psychic organization is the unconscious which represents the father’s internalized authority. Through it, the father still exists internally as an unconscious force.

Our unconscious does not reside in some hidden, undiscoverable region, but it is entrenched and expressed in our speech. It is in our linguistic practices, cultural productions, social institutions, and political discourses. Drawing upon Lacan’s famous assertion that “The unconscious is structured like a language,” we can suggest that the unconscious is not a separate entity, detached from the symbolic world (of the father), but it is constituted by this very world. When the unconscious is made up of language, can we really draw a line between what constitutes outside and inside, public and private, subjective and objective? It would be really hard to talk about the existence of a separate, independent entity within the psyche that is not in contact with the symbolic world when that entity is born out of an encounter with the law of the symbolic world (the father). In other words, Lacan’s maxim points to the central problem that psychoanalysis deals with,

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15 Ibid., 107.
namely, the inability to properly distinguish between internal and external influences. As Aristodemou writes, “Psychoanalysis throws into doubt the assumption of a division between the public realm of law and state on the one hand and the private realm of the individual on the other because for psychoanalysis, it is the distinction between self and other, subject and neighbour, inside and outside, that is precisely blurred: the most intimate part of ourselves is actually taken from the outside, from the other.”16 This is what Lacan’s idea of the unconscious as language rolls up to: what we create, language, creates us in return. The most intimate parts of our being are determined by the discourse of the Other.

If we cannot draw an easy dividing line between what constitutes inside and what constitutes outside, then we cannot set apart what is real from what is fiction. What is fiction is a part of the real, and vice versa. For this reason, I will primarily use works of fiction (specifically the ones that engage with the political in a highly symbolic way) in my illustration of the ramifications of the breakdown of paternal authority in modern societies. I will discuss this breakdown as a process that emerges at modernity’s culmination in Europe by looking at Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925), and at its inception in Turkey by looking at Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar’s *The Time Regulation Institute* (1961). Both novels use irony as a rhetorical ploy to keep the unconscious from the realm of the immediate. However, through a reading of this ploy (like an analyst) and locking into the play of language, I try to unravel the authors’ unconscious. And if the unconscious is not the seat of individual instincts, but the structure of language, then what I try to unravel becomes the whole symbolic order. That is to say, what we consider to be the truth of the

16 Ibid., 3.
individual contained in his unconscious (be it Kafka, Tanpinar, or their characters) becomes the truth of the social structure they are situated in. Then, by reading the works of *The Trial* and *The Time Regulation Institute*, we can learn about their respective social (as well as historical and political) structures—what they repress, disavow, and try to keep out of view—because, as Lacan tells us, the unconscious is never individualistic; it is trans-subjective due to its linguistic character, which makes it trans-cultural and trans-historical, too.

Before offering a comprehensive analysis of the novels, in the first chapter I will provide a psychoanalytic account of the decline of paternal authority by examining Freud, Lacan, and Žižek’s renditions of the father. First I will look at how Freud develops his famous theory of the Oedipus complex in response to the paternity crisis at the height of modernity in fin de siècle. However, it remains as a conventional solution: the one that answers the hysteric’s dream of an ideal father by reinstalling him in the place of the real father. Lacan goes deeper as he tries to provide an answer to why we need such a solution (reinstallation of the father): Why do we want a/the father? Why do we want our own subjugation? As he conceptualizes, the answer lies in the Real. Because the father works as a cork as the Name-of-the-Father suturing the gap in the symbolic order and holding the Real in check, when he does not function properly, it puts the subject at the mercy of the Real, having to deal with his own symptoms. Lastly, Žižek relates this experience to our postmodern world by looking at the way in which such eruptions of the Real find embodiment in the obscene, malicious father figures who do not prohibit but command enjoyment, which becomes the strongest impediment on the way to enjoyment. In the second and third chapters, I will discuss the novels *The Trial* and *The Time Regulation Institute* in terms of their critique of society in the aftermath of the death of the father.
Both novels go beyond the surface appearances and show us the Real of society: that it lacks. If, as Aristodemou writes, “a psychoanalytic account of society, rather than succumbing to the lure of ideology, aims to wake up the subject: instead of perpetuating the consolations of fantasy and conniving with the forces that would obscure and efface gaps, it exposes what is lacking in society,” then the two novels provide us with the best examples of psychoanalytic account of society. They show us that “society does not exist”: that it exists only as a perverse and psychotic construction that, by producing mental disorders, does not give its inhabitants a choice other than madness.

The fictional worlds of both Kafka and Tanpinar provide an exploration of the social symptoms of the breakdown of paternal authority. These symptoms manifest themselves most catastrophically in the realm of politics, and specifically in the political implications of the ideology of nationalism which is essentially an attempt to usurp the vacant position of the father. While I read Kafka’s work within the context of German nationalism and its culmination in the Holocaust, I read Tanpinar’s work within the context of Turkey’s modernization and its transformation into an autonomous nation. *The Trial* anticipates, in a peculiarly prophetic way, the ultimate cost of the xenophobic and exclusionary nationalism in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, *The Time Regulation Institute* responds, in a retrospectively critical way, the consequences of the development of nationalism as a secular replacement for religion in Turkey. Thus, both novels offer extended inquiries into the dark underside of the modern state’s declared mission to create a wholly rational, homogenous, and law-based nation. While *The Trial* explores this through the concept of law by exposing its immoral and impetuous character behind

17 Ibid., 54.
its benevolent face, *The Time Regulation Institute* employs the concept of time to
demonstrate the impossible dream of homogenization through the futile, absurd quest for
the synchronization of time. In the end, both novels make it painfully obvious that the
collapse of the symbolic father discloses a reality which has always been existent; namely
that the modern structures of power (state, law etc.) have their own unacknowledged,
forgotten, repressed “anti” version—what Slavoj Žižek calls “antagonism,” what Julia
calls “the Real”—that they try to hide from view, but that returns in traumatic forms.
CHAPTER 1

SEISMIC MUTATIONS IN THE STATUS OF
PATERNAL AUTHORITY IN PSYCHOANALYSIS & SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis, like most studies of human culture, has its own metanarrative that posits the killing of the primal father of the primitive horde as the original trauma of civilization. Having happened in an unknown time and place, the primal parricide sets in motion a continuous chain of events through time leading from the initial trauma to the establishment of a new social order that marks the beginning of civilization. Moreover, as Freud tells us, even though the original deed has been forgotten or repressed in our day, it still exerts its power from within on the modern people. We moderns are involved in the common guilt in the murder of the primal father—and perhaps are the real criminals of the story.

For us, the inhibited folks, “murder” is not only restricted to action, and can in the widest sense include thought. When, for example, we wish for the death of our father, it substitutes for the deed. However, for the uninhibited primitive man, thought found a direct correlative in action, and for this reason, concludes Freud, “in the beginning was the Deed.”¹ This is what Maud Ellman calls his “error of mistaking the last for the first:

¹ Except where otherwise indicated, citations of Freud’s work in English will be taken from The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 24 vols., ed. and trans. James Strachey
Freud posits a beginning on the basis of the end, inferring the initial murder from its melancholy afterwards.” In other words, Freud erroneously makes a prediction about the past based upon evidence from the present. This throws doubts on the historical accuracy of his account of the primal parricide, something which Freud himself has occasionally called into question throughout his career. However, even though his myth of origins collapses at the level of historical fact, it “shows remarkable resilience in the realm of fiction;” it is not the factuality or provability, but the very indeterminacy and contingency of this myth that makes it effective in cultural terms.

According to Jacques Lacan, “the phylogenetic suppositions” of Freud’s myth should be read in structuralist terms as “a fable of paradigmatic value, revealing the structure that organizes society and its culture.” It cannot exist outside of its time, and therefore cannot describe a distant past; instead it is a (disguised) attempt to make sense of the ideological currents of its present. That is why, Lacan states in Seminar XVII that “no one has ever seen the least trace of the father of the human horde.” The question is no more a question whether the primal father actually lived, or whether we can see “natural humanity” in its pure form (which is impossible), but what this myth can tell us about our modern culture, its structures and contradictions—“except through the reflection” of that same culture as Todd McGowan reminds us. Thus, I read Freud’s

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(London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74). References to this edition will be indicated by SE, followed by volume and page. This quote is from Totem and Taboo, SE, vol. 13, 161.
3 Ibid., xvi.
6 Ibid.
myth as a rhetorical tool that presents in narrative form the main premises of modern social, political, and legal order, and also materializes their contradictions and crises. I think of the primal father myth as the modern equivalent of the Biblical stories of the Creation and the Fall, for it encapsulates the same sense of rupture with regard to the modern epistemological break with tradition, illustrated through the primitive deed of patricide, which stands as our chief sin and the reason for our nondisposable sense of guilt in the modern era. Consequently, I will start this chapter with an expansion on Freud’s primal father story, to which I will come back at the end. As with all origin stories, Freud’s myth represents all the essential elements, all the primary colors, of the issues raised in this and following chapters, and for this reason will be an important narrative I keep referring to during the whole dissertation.

*Killing at the Origins*

In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud puts forth his hypothesis of the primal parricide by bringing together Darwin’s notion of the primal horde and W. Robertson Smith’s theory of totemism, and giving it a psychoanalytical spin. He re-imagines Darwin’s horde leader as a jealous, powerful father who exercises his unrestricted control in a despotic manner by keeping all women to himself and driving away his sons. He speculates that this tyrannical figure has to be killed at some point so that he can later be reduced to a symbol (of the animal) in totemism. That is how Freud comes up with his illustrious origin myth: one day the expelled sons unite together for the purpose of getting rid of their father; they not only slay but also devour him in a cannibalistic act whereby his absolute rule is overthrown. By eating a part of the father’s body, each son assumes a portion of his strength, and later, when totemism is established, the same act is repeated in a disguised form in the totem meal which becomes the commemoration of this
memorable act of parricide. Totemism, the earliest state of social organization, thus becomes “a covenant with their [dead] father, in which he promises them everything that a childish imagination may expect from a father—protection, care, indulgence.”

In Freud’s origin myth, the killing of the father is not an end, but is a beginning. Just as in the aftermath of every act of destruction, the elimination of the father’s solitary rule raises the question of how to avoid disintegration and recreate order. Will the strongest among the sons assume monopoly power and succeed the paternal tyrant? Or will it turn into an ever-recurring struggle among sons “whose parricidal hands” are once more “clenched in fratricidal strife”? Freud believes that the transition from the primal horde to the next stage of social evolution takes place in a rather conciliatory and non-violent way through a freely agreed social contract among the sons. He speculates that it is possible to see the same ambivalence implicit in the father complexes of modern day neurotic patients and children at work in the primitive men. Their hatred of their father culminates in their murder. This is followed by the resurgence in the affectionate current of feelings for him which makes itself felt in the form of remorse. Freud argues that these feelings of remorse and guilt provide the sons with an incentive to organize themselves around a social contract with a set of restrictions reminiscent of the father’s.

Out of this self-imposed obedience to the dead father, the sons implement two fundamental taboos—one forbidding father murder and one forbidding incest. While the first of the taboos, patricide, becomes the basis totemism is founded upon (totem animal acting as a direct father substitute exhibits their remorse and gives a form to their desire to reconcile with their father), Freud believes that the second taboo, incest, has a more

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7 Freud, Totem and Taboo, 144.
8 Ibid., 142, fn.
practical/social basis. It restrains the sons from fighting to possess each other’s women since, as he notes, sexual desires are a good reason for division. With the institution of the first law against incest, the sons unite under a common banner, living together—and not against each other—in equal partnership. Their fraternal social contract guarantees “one another’s lives … [ensuring] that no one of them must be treated by another as their father was treated by them all jointly.” In Freud’s scenario, rather than seizing absolute power (following in the footsteps of the father), the sons settle for an even share of power. Their fraternal clan rests upon equal control and opportunities rather than the paternal principle of despotic domination.

*The Dead Father Becomes Stronger*

Freud’s origin myth is therefore an account of how the patriarchal horde is replaced by the fraternal clan, banded together in their “complicity in the common crime.” This crime becomes the social glue that brings sons together to sustain a democratic and equal community; paternal despotism and monopolistic authority fade in the face of the victory of the fraternal principles of liberty, sovereignty and human solidarity. The resemblance between Freud’s myth and modern narratives which embrace personal freedom and liberties over the rule of an absolute monarch is not hard to notice. While Freud thought that he narrated a story of origins, he did not have to go that far in history. What he

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9 Ibid., 146.
10 Ibid.
11 What Freud calls civilization—the ambiguous term he uses to apply to the evolution of all human society from a savage to a more enlightened state—is actually a very modern concept which is attributed exclusively to modern Western civilization. During the Ottoman reformation and efforts to adopt aspects of Western experience, for example, Europe (with its higher level of emancipation and enlightenment) was seen as synonymous with the idea of civilization, and the Ottomans thought of themselves only as imitators, struggling to ascend to the level reached by Europeans. An Ottoman intellectual, Abdullah Cevdet, encapsulates this in his statement that “there is no second civilization … Civilization means European civilization.” (See Elif Shafak, “Accelerating the Flow of Time: Soft Power and the Role of Intellectuals in Turkey,” *World Literature Today* 80 (2006): 24-26 for a detailed discussion of the quote).
unwittingly did was to create a perfect mythology for the modern fall of the father, the patriarch. The myth of the primal father is a story about the establishment of the modern democratic collective, one that is modelled by the brothers’ seizure of the father’s place. As Juliet Flower MacCannell writes, “the construction of a political state around liberty, equality, and fraternity is indeed the very essence, the real hope and glory of modernity, the heart of democracy.”\(^\text{12}\) Freud’s myth of the primal father becomes the myth of modernity par excellence, understood as the realization of a humane and egalitarian form of governance. This explains its persisting relevance and significance in the cultural imagination.

However, in this new non-patriarchal, egalitarian form of society, the sons are not necessarily free to enjoy the lack of the father’s active presence. As Norman O. Brown points out, the whole social arrangement is contradictory in essence: “sonship and brotherhood are espoused against fatherhood: but without a father there can be no sons or brothers.”\(^\text{13}\) In other words, the constitution of a fraternal unity is falsely predicated upon the complete eradication of the father, the ancestor, the origin (who is again falsely seen as a rightful enemy). The father cannot wholly be eliminated as his existence is a precondition for the existence of sons (you cannot simply have sons without fathers). Where has the father gone in the newly established society then?

At this point, Freud directs us to the enduring feelings of guilt that the sons are left with after the murder of their father. He writes that “a sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group. The dead


father became stronger than the living one had been.”

As is evident in the symbolic act of devouring, the sons introject the father, making him imminent and even immediate, as conscience. Hence, after his murder, the father returns in a disguised form attaching himself to the figure of each son, and henceforth exerts his influence and authority as part of their psyche. Moreover, since he is no longer imprisoned in a corporeal body, he is free to take different forms through substitutes and other agents. There is now no escape from him. He follows the sons like a shadow—this also gives the dead father a spectral quality, stalking, to haunt and torment, his assassins as a ghost. At the end, the sons cannot free themselves from their father and are eternally afflicted by the peremptory commands coming from his internalized authority, which Freud will later call the superego. In this way, civilization progresses as reinforced domination, as Herbert Marcuse argues, where the patriarchal despotism of the father is replaced “by the internalized despotism of the brother clan.”

In this new society, the father is not gone anywhere, and instead he is everywhere; his authority is socially spread and self-imposed by the reigning group itself.

Conscience becomes the secret, intimate face of the father, the voice of his internalized and reinforced authority, while the institution of rules and regulations compelled by the social contract between equals becomes the other, public and visible, face of the father. His interdiction is transferred to the prohibitive and authoritative function of law. The first laws, patricide and incest, are created in an attempt to allay the “burning sense of guilt, to bring about a kind of reconciliation with the father.” And thus “what had up to then been prevented by his actual existence was thenceforward

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14 Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 143; my emphasis.
15 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 34. We have already established that the concept of civilization as Freud uses it denotes modern Western society.
16 Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 144.
prohibited by the sons themselves, in accordance with the psychological procedure so familiar to us in psycho-analyses under the name of ‘deferred obedience.’”17 Law becomes the external and social representation of this “deferred obedience.” It enables the sons to create a social organization where they can continue to live cooperatively, but are also subjected to the restrictions of the totemic system. Ultimately, in Freud’s account of the origins of civilization, the beginning of law also becomes “the beginning of so many things, of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion”—all made possible by the great primeval crime; the dead father does reappear stronger than the living one had been.18

This is the main problem with the death of the father. After he dies, the father comes back with renewed vigor. He is reborn in the form of internalized conscience and externalized law. This is how he continues to exert his influence: not by overt interdictions but by covert, yet equally or even more effective, coercion. Thus, the elimination of the father figure, instead of opening up a brave new world of liberties, rights, and opportunities; of comfort and happiness; of fair and egalitarian treatment, introduces new challenges and anxieties for the subject who does not enjoy lack of restraint, but finds himself in a more cloistered situation. This will become clear as I track the seismic mutations in the stature of the father in psychoanalysis from Sigmund Freud’s imaginary concept of the Oedipal father to Jacques Lacan’s symbolic metaphor of the Name-of-the-Father and to Slavoj Žižek’s Real-alive figure of the Father-Jouisseur.

Herewith, I will start the chapter with Freud, probing into the ambiguous status of the father in his theory by pointing to the gap between his biological and mythological

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17 Ibid., 143.
18 Ibid., 142.
positions. I view the Oedipus complex as Freud’s ultimate response to the attempt to close this gap by bringing together the father’s two divergent roles. Then, I turn my attention to Lacan who, in his return to Freud, begins a linguistic restructuring of the Oedipus complex, and propounds that the father is a metaphor who is external and extrinsic to biological categories; therefore, he shifts the axis from the imaginary role of the father to his symbolic position. Lastly, I examine Žižek’s advancement of the Lacanian thesis, and his focus on the surplus and obscene dimension of the father that comes out with the decline of the symbolic realm. Žižek isolates this surplus element in its Real dimension, and uses it to account for the perverse forms of power and dominance in postmodern society. Therefore, if we have to introduce a trajectory for the breakdown of paternal authority, we can talk about a creeping advent of the obscene supplement (in the dimension of the Real) with the disintegration of traditional symbolic structures.

**FREUD’S AMBIVALENT FATHER: BETWEEN BIOLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY**

Freud insists on the central role of the father in individual and social psychology throughout his work. The murder of the father occupies a significant place, thematically and formally, within the epistemology of his psychoanalysis. However, the reason why the father figure is so “overestimated” in Freud’s work is not because Freud was simply reflecting the status quo of his time with regard to the elevated, sanctified position of fathers in society; on the contrary, he was actually responding to a crisis vis-à-vis the father in the patriarchal family. It can even be said that Freud’s psychoanalysis developed out of a desire to counteract the impact of this crisis on individuals.¹⁹ Freud realized early

¹⁹ This is, according to Paul Verhaeghe, Lacan’s hypothesis. As he writes, “When the young Lacan discusses *les complexes familiaux* … he too considers the then-current degradation of the patriarchal imago
on in his career that the decline of *potestas patris familias* created an impasse that affected the individual’s very psychic formation, generating new psychological and pathological problems. That is why, he had focused, since his earliest writings, on the family dynamics as an essential element in the development of neurosis. For this reason, we can say that the powerful, invincible, and menacing father figures in Freud’s theory were not a reflection of reality, but were a way to reinstate the fantasy of paternal omnipotence discredited by the decline of modern patriarchal family.

One way to demonstrate this is to draw attention to the ambivalence in the representation of the father in Freud’s theory. There is not just *one* father in Freud’s theory; there are *multiple* representations of the father, and although Freud never clearly acknowledges this plurality, the father in his theory is as divided and incomplete, full of contradictions and ambiguities, as ever. As Russell Grigg also notes, father is an “unresolved question” in Freud’s work—one which is settled only later by Lacan. This ambiguity manifests itself especially in Freud’s confusion of the real father with the father that he creates in his mythology of the primal horde and the Oedipus complex. Initially, Freud grounds the father largely in his biological function; psychoanalysis becomes an attempt to disclose the father’s central impact on the child’s psychic development. However, Freud gradually adopts a more flexible idea of the father. Especially with the progress in this theory of the Oedipus complex, the father turns into a mythic/symbolic figure—the image of an ideal father—moving away from his attachment to an actual body. This makes the father’s function in the Oedipus complex obscure, and,

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in the family and society to be the main cause for psychopathology. He even suggests that psychoanalysis arose in response to this very degradation and the crisis that ensues it.” See *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex* (New York: Other Press, 2009), 10.

rather than being resolved, the discrepancy between the real and the mythic father persists throughout Freud’s writings. So, the simple question “what is a father?” becomes increasingly complex in Freud’s theory as one tries to find an answer. Freud’s father is not a coherent and singular figure; rather, he is a split character determined by the combined forces of biology and mythology. It is in between these two forces that we see the truth of Freud’s theory and practice of psychoanalysis which develop out of a need for a solution to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal father.

*Normative or Pathogenic?*

The conflict between real and ideal penetrates into the very essence of psychoanalysis’s central discovery of the Oedipus complex. Freud’s earliest reference to the Oedipus complex is found in a letter addressed to his friend Wilhelm Fliess in 1897, where he mentions, in the context of his self-analysis, a universal feeling of love for the mother and hatred of the father found in every child as a part of his infantile sexuality:

A single idea of general value dawned on me. I have found, in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood … If this is so, we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*, in spite of all the objection that reason raises against the presupposition of fate. … Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy and each recoils in horror from the dream fulfillment here transplanted into reality, with the full quantity of repression which

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21 This discrepancy can even be seen in Freud’s choice to name his theory of the Oedipus complex after a Greek tragedy: his view of parent-child relationship belongs to a mythic structure, and not a real rival. He doesn’t derive the name of his theory from the name of a patient’s parent, for example.
separates his infantile state from his present one.\textsuperscript{22}

With the publication of his book \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams} in 1899, Freud brings his theory of the Oedipus complex out into the public for the first time; however, even though he continues to argue for its universality, he adds the new information that these infantile incestuous and patricidal wishes are the main cause of psychic defects, namely neuroses. Therefore, his theory of the Oedipus complex is undermined by a general confusion as to its nature: is it normative or pathological?

Freud develops the Oedipal thesis in \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams} by emphasizing the chief place parents have in the mental lives of children who later become psychoneurotics. In this context, Freud introduces the Oedipus complex in relation to neurosis, as key in determining its later symptoms. So, it is a potentially pathogenic complex. However, in the same book, Freud also asserts that “psychoneurotics [do not] differ sharply in this respect from other human beings who remain normal. … [T]hey are only distinguished by exhibiting on a magnified scale feelings of love and hatred to their parents which occur less obviously and less intensely in the minds of most children.”\textsuperscript{23}

This is supported in his letter to Fliess in which he finds the same complex in himself (where he presents himself as a “normal” person). Therefore, Freud imagines the Oedipus complex “not only as ‘the nucleus of neurosis’ but also (and perhaps above all) as a universal mechanism of sexual and social normalization.”\textsuperscript{24} This confusion also gives the father an ambiguous status in the Oedipus complex. As Grigg notes, it is not clear if the father in Freud’s theory is normative, guaranteeing the subject’s positioning in the social

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] Sigmund Freud, \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams, SE}, vol. 4, 261.
\end{footnotes}
realm, or pathogenic, “playing as he does a causal role in subsequent neuroses.”

Father becomes a key factor in every mental illness as the source of the problem as well as the heart of any solution.

Later, in his Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), Freud brings more clarity to the pathogenic and normative functions of the Oedipus complex; the particular ways it appears and is resolved characterize different types of normality and pathology. For Freud, we all experience the Oedipal phase: “every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls victim to neurosis.” A successful resolution of the conflict allows the subject to move on to “normal” subjectivity and sexuality. Failure to resolve, on the other hand, results in falling “victim” to neurosis. Although Freud makes a clear-cut distinction between normal and neurotic conditions, they are not that sharply dichotomous. This is implied in Freud’s contention that one cannot get rid of the Oedipus complex once and for all after its resolution; repudiation continues on a constant basis, and success depends upon constant restraint in puberty and later in adult life. Repression can never be jettisoned entirely; it emanates a ceaseless force to come to surface. Thus, in essence, everybody is potentially neurotic. Normality comes only from being good at repressing, continually and habitually.

According to Freud, strong repression (which equals to normalcy) necessitates the

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25 Grigg, Lacan, Language, 29. Grigg also notes that there is a clear shift in the father’s role from a more moderate to a more extreme position during the development of Freud’s work: “The development from the Oedipus complex to the myth of the father of Totem and Taboo and later of Moses and Monotheism is very striking. At the outset the father’s function is clearly to pacify, regulate, and sublimate the omnipotence of the figure of the mother, called by Freud ‘the obscure power of the feminine sex.’ But by the end the father himself has assumed the power, obscurity, and cruelty of the omnipotence his function was supposed to dissipate in the first place.” This argument will make more sense as we consider the change in the stature of paternal function towards a more non-symbolized, malicious, and obscene dimension of power.

strong presence of a father who is the agent of repression. Father’s role in the Oedipus complex is to separate the child from the original/maternal. He is the third element in the triangular—the external—that comes later into the circle in the way of an intruder into the mother-child relationship and the symbiotic bond and says “no” as the first social imperative of renunciation. In his intrusion, there is his desire to separate the child from his sexual object/the maternal body through the prohibition of incest. In this constellation of the Oedipal family, then, father as the symbol of incest prohibition first and foremost prohibits desire and thus inaugurates a process of continuous repression where desire is substituted in the social realm of institutions, organizations, and relationships. The child who emerges as a consequence of this repression becomes a proponent of the father’s (repressive) law. But, who is this father that represses? What exactly is the agent that implements the law of incest? Is Freud talking about a real flesh-and-blood father, or a product of cultural imagination? These questions are left open in Freud’s repression theory, and its inconclusiveness ultimately links to the ambiguous position of the father as both normative and pathogenic in his Oedipus complex.

Real or Phantasy?

If father’s prohibition is the foundation for the development of an (ostensibly) autonomous ego, how can Freud account for the inconsistency between the universality of his theory and the particularity of each and every father? This becomes a fundamental problem in Freud’s account of the Oedipus complex, and especially perturbs his theory of the castration complex. The castration complex is only mentioned here and there (in the case of the Little Hans and Totem and Taboo) until thoroughly discussed in a late paper entitled “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex” (1924). In this essay, Freud ponders upon what exactly brings about the destruction/dissolution of the Oedipus complex. The
question, however, is never adequately clarified, and, as it happens, Freud makes things even murkier: castration turns out to be an ambiguous term, subject to many alterations. He describes the castration complex (in literal terms) as the threat that impels the (male) child to give up his “most precious” object. As to the source of this threat, he is in ever confusion. If, as Lacan writes, Freud’s castration complex fundamentally signifies “the terror inspired in a male by a male—in fact by the father;” then the father figure that inspires this threat should be someone who embodies it in his demeanour—someone who can emanate fear in his posture, behaviour, words, and real intimidations.\textsuperscript{27} The problem is that not every father can possibly match this criterion, so how to explain the uniformity of the castration fear?

The question of course points to a larger problem with the representations of the father in Freud’s theory. There seems to be a dissonance between what he sets as the model, the ideal image, and what he encounters in reality. The mighty, castrating Oedipal father he casts in his theory renders incongruous when donned on the real fathers he has to take into account in his clinical practice. To illustrate this point, I will look at the case study of Little Hans Freud published in a paper called “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year Old Boy” (1909).\textsuperscript{28} Little Hans was a five-year-old boy with an irrational fear of horses. This situation did not alarm his parents until the child’s fear turned into phobia as he grew afraid to go outside for fear of a horse biting him. Freud eventually traced this phobia to Hans’s fear of his father for whom horses became a substitute. Behind the fear of a horse biting him, Freud thought, was the fear that his father was going to punish him.


\textsuperscript{28} The material for this case comes from the writings of Hans’s father as Hans is not actually Freud’s patient. Freud bases his interpretation of the case on the father’s observations and encounters the child only once—at the end of his analysis.
for the jealous and hostile feelings he had nourished against him. Freud surmised that the child “regarded his father (as he made all too clear) as a competitor or rival for the favours of his mother, towards whom the obscure foreshadowing of his budding sexual wishes were aimed.”

Freud positioned Hans in his all-too-typical attitude of a male child going through the Oedipal phase—of being sexually attracted to his mother and making a rival out of his father—as his “little Oedipus.” He did not refrain from showing his excitement to thus find a subject that could become the living embodiment of his Oedipal model. Little Hans would fully validate his theoretical points—or would he instead reveal their ambiguities and contradictions?

Even though Hans hated his father and wanted him “out of the way,” as Freud’s account makes clear, he also loved and admired him. Freud explained the vicissitudes of these ambivalent feelings in relation to the castration anxiety: the father is respected as an object of admiration by the child because he possesses “a big penis”; however, he is also feared as a “dreaded enemy” because he threatens to castrate the child’s. It is these conflicted and contradictory emotions that point toward a split within the father. Regardless of Freud’s efforts to merge the impulses of love and hate in the same father figure, it becomes obvious that these two affections are not necessarily simultaneous, and are indeed evoked by different paternal constellations. When we look closely at the case study, it is clear that Hans genuinely loves his father. While it is easy to locate the child’s feeling of affection toward his father, it is equally difficult to discover the source of his fear. Hans’s father is unable to assume the fearful attribute Freud tries to confer upon him. The fact that he is not in tune with Freud’s Oedipal father image constitutes the

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29 Freud, Totem and Taboo, 129.
fundamental problem of the case study. This is reinforced, and complicated, by the other fact that the threat of castration does not even emanate from the father, and instead belongs to the mother. It is uttered in the form of a real threat when Hans’s mother sees him masturbating and tells him that if he continues playing with his “widdler,” it will be cut off. At the end, it is obvious that “Hans is not at all afraid of his father; on the contrary, he is afraid of his mother.”

Despite the obvious truth of this statement, there is still an effort on the part of Hans’s father to fit into the image of the father in the Oedipal family triangle. This is illustrated in his report of Hans’s giraffe dream, and his efforts to interpret it in a way that befits Freud’s theory:

[Hans recounts:] *In the night there was a big giraffe in the room and a crumpled one; and the big one called out because I took the crumpled one away from it. Then it stopped calling out; and then I sat down on top of the crumpled one.*

The father interprets this as a phantasy played out between the animals, but which in fact reproduces a bedroom scene which takes place almost every morning between Hans and his parents. Hans likes to come into his parent’s bed, but his father (the big giraffe) often objects. Hans takes away his mother (the crumpled one) which causes his father to cry out. He desires to sit on his mother to claim her for himself. Confirming this interpretation of the father, Freud adds that the choice of the giraffe-phantasy derives “perhaps, by an unconscious comparison based upon the giraffe’s long, stiff neck” which represents the large adult penis, and thus the father.

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32 Ibid., 122.
Hans’s father’s efforts to mould the child’s phantasy into a truth about omnipotent father, Jay Geller states that “the only reference to a neck in the text is … to his mother’s … When his father suggests that the long neck (of the big giraffe) reminded him of a penis, Hans replied: ‘Mummy has a neck like a giraffe, too. I saw when she was washing her white neck.’”33 So, in essence, the feared figure for Hans is not the father but the mother. It is her from whom the castration threat emanates.

*A Dreamt-Of Solution*

In his book *New Studies of Old Villains*, Paul Verhaeghe writes that Freud’s interpretation of the giraffe story does not really “tally with the way in which Hans experiences his father during the daily reality of his family life.”34 At home, his father has a more passive position while his mother takes on a more active role. This creates a gap between the empirical reality of his family relations (a passive father who cannot possess his wife and threaten his child with castration) and the uber-reality, the big giraffe phantasy, which his father tries to live up to. Verhaeghe’s contention is that when the actual father cannot implement the role of a separator coming in between the child and the mother, Freud steps in and “installs the father in the very position where the child needs him.”35 Freud’s intervention, according to Verhaeghe, thus delineates “for Hans’s father the place he should occupy in the family constellation in Hans’s imagination.”36 This is illustrated in the case study at one point when Hans’s father says that *verily* he has never hit Hans. However, Hans retorts that he *in fact* hit him, and thus confirms Freud’s construction that his father has to function as an authority figure for him. In a nutshell,

36 Ibid., 14.
then, “what Freud considered to be the given circumstances—the Oedipal, strong father figure standing between mother and child—is initially what was lacking for little Hans; it is through Freud’s intervention that Hans can begin to view his father in this way.”

The situation demonstrated in the case of Little Hans, according to Verhaeghe, was not an exception, but rather a common phenomenon in Freud’s clinical practice where he came across father figures (such as Dora’s, the Rat Man’s, and the Wolf Man’s fathers) who were dissociated from his own sketch of the Oedipal father. Instead of being strong, strict, and intimidating, they were often weak, passive, and sickly. This was what impelled Freud to devise the theory of the Oedipus complex as an effort to bridge the gap between the daily reality of the father’s diminished status and the ideal with which he was clothed. Specifically, the Oedipus complex was an answer to the hysteric’s secret desire to recover the impotent father and build him up again as an omnipotent protector. After all, as Verhaeghe writes, the hysteric’s definition of the father entails such a gap “between the pathetic reality he must contend with and the idealized version of the person who is supposed to protect him.”

Freud’s Oedipal construction would thus act like a “rescue fantasy” for the hysterical subject by effacing the gap between the real and the imaginary through the installation of the omnipotent father in place of the impotent father.

But how does the Oedipus complex effectively install the father in the position where the hysterical needs him? According to Verhaeghe, it does it by recourse to Freud’s authority as a criterion to establish its truth. However, even more than that, it does it by referring to an even higher authority: the non-castrated father of the primal horde, “from

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37 Ibid., 15.
38 Ibid., 16.
39 Ibid., 16.
whom every father inherits his power,” including Freud himself.\footnote{Ibid., 15.} The fantasy of the primal father as a god-like figure starts out as a myth; then is intermixed with theory, and is finally used to alter reality. In this reverse order—where reality is made to fit into theory—Freud appeals to the primal fantasy whenever the Oedipal solution fails, or needs a boost, to revive in memory the strong, virile, and mighty father whose alleged existence continues in phylogenetic recollection. As Verhaeghe writes:

> In those cases where the daily reality does not fit the scenario as predicted by the theory—that is, in almost every case—a child will appeal to a higher-order reality that is preserved in schematic form in the collective memory of mankind. … The Oedipus complex, according to Freud, would be the most prominent example of these collective schemas, which are capable of remodelling reality for us. [As an anchor of the Oedipus complex, the primal fantasy would work to consolidate it by making the Oedipal memory] part of a phylogenetic heritage that is present unconsciously in every child.\footnote{Ibid., 20.}

Whenever the reality of the father did not correspond to the idealized image of him, a child could appeal to a “hyper-reality”—the Oedipus complex—which went back to a pre-historical “reality” when patricide was a fact. Such appropriation of reality, Verhaeghe argues, was Freud’s neurotic solution in the form of an elevation of the authoritarian father to a historical truth.\footnote{Ibid., 22.} As such, it was an attempt to fix the decline of the \emph{protestas patris familias}, or the weakening position of the father in modern family and society. In substance, as the father’s status declines, more hysterical subjects emerge who
need a strong paternal figure, and Freud’s Oedipal theory, safeguarded by the primal fantasy, meets this need by imposing such a figure into the child’s (and sometimes even the father’s) mind. Therefore, as Verhaeghe concludes, “The paternal figure as defined by Freud within his Oedipal theory is not the kernel of the problem for the neurotic subject. On the contrary, he is the dreamt-of solution.”

Or Just an Illusion?

Freud’s “dreamt-of solution” seems easy enough. In the place of the real father whose status as the head of the family was being eroded, Freud installs the imaginary omnipotent father whom we used to have sometime in the primitive past. Therefore, he fixes the hysteric’s problem by sustaining the belief in the ideal of a strong, powerful father who ensures stability and security. However, as Freud advances in his theory of the Oedipus complex, the efficacy of this “dreamt-of solution” becomes more and more questionable. Is it able to provide a conclusive answer to the hysteric’s cry for an idealized, exalted vision of the father? Is it able to suture seamlessly the gap between the real and ideal paternal figures?

In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud writes that the Oedipus complex arises when the male child’s early identification with his father turns into aggression as a result of the intensification of his sexual desires towards his mother which causes him to perceive his father as an obstacle. And from then on, the fundamental factor that defines the father-child relationship becomes ambivalence (between identification and aggression). The father, in the eyes of the son, becomes both a hated and admired figure. This situation is actually determined by the gap between the real and ideal father. Hate is for the real

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43 Ibid., 24.
father who fails to fill the position of authority, and love is for the ideal father who derives legitimacy from the ethos of patriarchal rule. The ambivalent feelings generated by this gap are, according to Freud, the main reason for the development of neurosis. So, in order not to fall into neurosis, ambivalence should be resolved. For this, the Oedipus complex should be resolved. And it is resolved only through the reinforcement of the child’s identification with his father by requiting his hostility with love. This is essentially what Freud was trying to achieve with his Oedipal solution: helping the patient view the father only in his idealized image, which means the same thing as claiming that the only way to accede to a normal social status is by reinforcement of identification with the father (which is a result of the resolution of the Oedipus complex). In other words, identification with one’s father is not so much an identification with his real self, but with his idealized image (much like the Oedipal or primal father). This is what Freud’s “dreamt-of- solution” is actually based on.

If the Oedipal solution is a reinforced identification with the paternal rival, then the same question arises as to whether or not this reinforced identification provides a conclusive resolution of the ambiguous feelings for the father (which point to the gap between the real and ideal father). In their article “The Oedipus Problem in Freud and Lacan,” Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Douglas Brick argue that it does not: “[F]or what mysterious reason should the hate identification with the rival necessarily be transformed into a respectful identification with the bearer of authority? Identification is precisely the reason for the rivalry, and even more essentially, for ‘affective ambivalence,’ so there is every reason to believe that the post-Oedipal identification should, instead, perpetuate
that ambivalence." For this reason, Borch-Jacobsen and Brick think that “the Oedipus complex is the name of an illusory solution to the problem of identification.” It works to hide from view the impossibility of identification. What does it mean? It means that father-identification is never fully complete. It is never absolute. Borch-Jacobsen and Brick point to the inconsistency at the heart of the Oedipal theory to explain the impasse in identification: if identification originates from rivalry, how exactly is the rival transformed into the love object? How does the hostile relation between father and son turn into a respectful identification of the latter with the former? The conclusion they reach is that identification only provides a superficial resolution, as it never really eliminates the love-hate ambivalence. Hence, it never really closes the gap between the real and imaginary father.

In the last analysis, then, there is essentially no way to completely get rid of the Oedipal ambiguity. Identification provides a way out through entry into a sort of normalization, but it is only in appearance. This means that our normalization is always deficient, and that we are always on the verge of becoming neurotic. In this way, we can say that Freud deconstructs the boundary between neurotic and normal behavior with his theory of the Oedipus complex. If the resolution of the Oedipus complex is what separates the rational from the pathological, the fact that it is only an “illusory” resolution (in the form of father-identification) makes their distinction from one another less sharp and more blurred. The roots of this deconstructive reading can be traced back to Freud’s initial confusion about the nature of the Oedipus complex, whether it was pathogenic or normative. Perhaps Freud knew that such distinction hardly existed anymore.

45 Borch-Jacobsen and Brick, “The Oedipus Problem,” 274.
46 Ibid.
LACAN’S NAME-OF-THE-FATHER: THE (IN)FINITE SUPPORT OF THE SYMBOLIC

Freud’s representation of the father is ambiguously laid out in his psychoanalytical theory. It is not clear when he refers to the father as a feared and hated figure, whether he is relying on his clinical observation and experience with actual fathers or his theoretical assumption and construction of an idealized paternal image found in his Oedipal and primal father myths. While Freud does not really provide a clear explanation of the different dimensions and aspects of the paternal function in his work, Lacan differentiates it within his tripartite structure comprising the imaginary, the symbolic, and the Real, and thus settles the father problem once and for all. Starting in his early writings, he gets away from the biological father. He perceives what Freud believed to be a crisis of the father vis-à-vis his role in the family as the social decline of the paternal imago. It does not concern the real fathers, but their image (in the social unconscious). This would be the first step in his reworking of Freud. It would ultimately lead him to look for another paternal concept outside the realm of the image/the imaginary and within the realm of the language/the symbolic. Thus, Lacan comes to regard the father as a linguistic function of authority and calls this more fundamental father the symbolic father or the Name-of-the-Father—a social construct produced by language. In this way, he emphasizes the symbolic and cultural role of the father which is above and beyond the material father. Likewise, he reconceives the Oedipus complex as a symbolic and metaphoric event (rather than one based on inborn biological instincts) which marks the child’s initiation into the symbolic order of civilization where he becomes a speaking subject under the rule of the Name-of-the-Father.

Lacan’s most important contribution to the enigma of the Freudian father is to
reconceive it in linguistic terms as the Name-of-the-Father; however, while elevating the function of the father in this way to a transcendental signifier, Lacan eventually uncovers its structural shortcoming as the pawn of the symbolic order. As he develops his later theory of jouissance, Lacan discovers that the father as the master signifier appears without lack or division, but in fact is just an agent “who is or ought to be paid to do a certain job: that of the master agency.” It is a job that requires sustaining the appearance of wholeness and camouflaging the reality of lack—a job that the father as the master signifier is failing more and more glaringly to accomplish. Hence, instead of Freud’s castrating father, Lacan offers the castrated and humiliated father, and defines his shame as his incapacity to cover over the lack. While Freud’s theory reveals the gap between the real/empirical and the ideal/imaginary father, Lacan’s theory reveals the gap between the symbolic father (as a linguistic function) and the Real (as lack).

The Social Decline of the Paternal Imago

In one of his early papers Family Complexes (1938), Lacan deals with the problem of identification by expanding on the function of the ego ideal and the superego. They are psychic agencies that emerge as a result of the introjection of paternal authority following the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. In The Ego and the Id where he develops these concepts, Freud does not make a clear separation between the two even though he shows that the internalized authority issues two contradictory demands:

The super-ego is, however, not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: “You ought to be like this (like

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47 Verhaeghe, New Studies, 70.
your father).” It also comprises the prohibition “you may not be like this (like your father)—that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative.”

This double aspect of the ego-ideal had the task of repressing the Oedipus complex; indeed, it is to that revolutionary event that it owes its existence.\(^48\)

Freud assumes that the contrasting commands “you must be like me” and “don’t be like me” come from the same source: the super-ego. According to his assumption, “the father is both the one whom the little boy must imitate … and the one whom he must not imitate.”\(^49\) Lacan attempts to clarify this ambiguity by differentiating between what he views as two separate roles of the father: the one who sublimates and the one who represses, the former being the conscious ego ideal and the latter being the unconscious superego. He writes that in matriarchal societies these different functions were divided between the father and another figure such as the maternal uncle. While the father’s function was that of sublimation (ego ideal), “a more friendly supporting role as master of skills or tutor of courage in difficult enterprises,” the maternal uncle’s function, “as guardian of the family taboos and initiator into tribal rituals,” was that of suppression (superego).\(^50\) However, in modern societies these two functions converge on the same person of the father. As Lacan writes, “[T]he imago of the father concentrates in itself the functions of repression and sublimation. But this in turn is socially determined by the existence of the [modern] paternalistic family.”\(^51\)

According to Lacan, the fact that the normalizing ego ideal and the repressive super ego coincide in the same figure of the father is the reason that explains the cause of

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\(^{48}\) Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” 34.


\(^{50}\) Lacan, “Family Complexes,” 50.

\(^{51}\) Ibid. 49.
neurosis in modern life. The model that requires identification corresponds to the rival that prohibits it. How can this be explained? There is a traditional, familiar demand to emulate the father as a model, “to be like him,” and there is also a hidden, underlying desire to negate his authority, “to be not like him.” These contradictory calls issue from the same source: society. There is a continued veneration and esteem in society for the father as a token of pseudo-patriarchy, but, at the same time, there is a slow diminishment and degradation of his position, and these conflicting forces exist together in the psyche of the modern subject causing his neurosis. This is what Lacan perceives as “the social decline of the paternal imago” (weak and humiliated status of the father) in *Family Complexes*. It is, in effect, the decline of society. It is this decline that produces neurosis. Neurosis arises, as Borch-Jacobsen writes, “from an anomaly of the familial situation,” and from an ‘anomie’ of the modern family,” and, I would add, from the anomic state of the social system.\(^{52}\) In such a system, “With whom should one identify in order to achieve sexual normality, if not with precisely the same ‘biologically inadequate (homosexual) object’ with whom one *must* not identify?”\(^{53}\) As it happens, society constantly undermines the model it simultaneously relies on, and as Lacan makes clear, this undoubtedly nullifies Freud’s Oedipal solution in the form of an omnipotent father because it is doomed to failure.

According to Lacan, the Oedipus complex is a symptom of the crisis of the social structure. In its attempt to perpetuate the patriarchal ideal, it reveals the same ideal’s corrosion by society. As Borch-Jacobsen notes, this diagnosis “has the merit of accounting for the aporia of the Freudian Oedipus complex by inscribing it in the

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\(^{53}\) Ibid., 38.
historico-sociological context whose expression it is.”54 It also constitutes the fundamental problem that accounts for Lacan’s introduction to the symbolic order and the reformulation of the Oedipus complex in structural terms.55 Lacan feels the need to distinguish between the deficiency of the paternal imago and the function of the paternal symbol. This leads him to discover a transcendental symbolic function of the father that is beyond the imaginary realm of the ideal. Now we are going to examine into the evolution of this function in Lacan’s theory.

_Toward the Symbolic Plane_

Lacan distances himself from the traditional understanding of the Oedipus complex as based on inborn biological instincts (every child instinctually feeling love for the opposite-sex parent and hatred for the same-sex parent). He contends that what makes it universal is that it is cultural: “culture structurally modifies human nature, ‘naturalizes itself,’ by becoming universal.”56 That is to say, what we call universal—and the reason why the Oedipus complex is considered to be universal—is cultural. It is what is naturalized by culture so it appears universal.

In this way, Lacan sets out for a cultural/structural reinvestigation of the Oedipus complex. If the Oedipus complex is a cultural construct, what does that make the father? Lacan focuses on this question in his Seminar V entitled _The Formations of the Unconscious_ (1957-1958). He begins his seminar on “Paternal Metaphor” by problematizing and reconceiving the paternal absence: “Was the father there or was he not there? Did he travel, was he away? Did he come back often?” These questions lead to

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55 Ibid., 278.
another question: “Can an Oedipus complex be properly constituted for example when there is no father?” This is of course a tricky question because as Lacan makes clear there is no single, unified father that we can refer to. Which father do we mean? And what do we mean by paternal lack or absence? “Because, if, in certain cases, one says that he is too nice, that would seem to mean that he should be cross. On the other hand, the fact that, manifestly he can be too cross implies that it might be better from time to time to be nice.” In other words, whatever a father does, it always constitutes a problem. It seems impossible for the father to please everyone. Too much niceness might appear as lack of authority, and too much authority as lack of affection.

If we return to the case of Little Hans, for example, we remember that Hans’s father was not—realistically speaking—absent; in fact he was a little too present in his affections and actions. However, this did not prevent Freud from locating him as the central psychic determinant in Hans’s anxiety. The father’s presence at home and in domestic affairs was not enough to exclude him from being the pathogenic cause of the child’s errant behavior. It is at this point that Lacan makes a distinction between “the father as normal” and “the father as normative” distinguishing the empirical from the normative which is linked to the Oedipus complex. To talk about the absence of the empirical is not the same as talking about the absence of the ideal in the complex. Lacan writes: “Because, to talk about his lack in the complex, it is necessary to introduce a dimension other than the realistic dimension … which is defined by the characterological,

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58 Ibid.
biographical, or other mode of describing his presence in the family.”

This dimension which is beyond the father in flesh and blood is the “function” of the father in the Oedipus complex. According to Lacan, it refers to the father who is linked to the primordial law, the law prohibiting incest. He exercises this prohibition by separating the dual relationship between the child and the mother. Lacan locates the origin of castration precisely in this separation; however, for him, the source of the castration fear does not reside in the father but the subject/the child. That is why, he argues that “the fear experienced before the father is clearly centrifugal, I mean that it has its center in the subject.” The child imaginarily projects onto the father the aggressive impulses caused by his separation from his first object; therefore, aggression toward the father lies in the child’s personal tendencies. It means that as long as the castration threat emanates from the imaginary aggression of the subject, there is no need for the presence of an actual father. As in the case of the Little Hans, it can well be taken on and implemented by the mother. Hence, Lacan proceeds to argue that castration is a *symbolic act* whereby there is a real intervention about an imaginary threat: the agent is somebody real who tells Hans that it is going to be cut off, but the object (the phallus) is imaginary. If the child feels himself cut, it is because he imagines it.

*The Father More Than Father Himself*

With this, Lacan presents many strata of the father in the Oedipal and castration complexes within his matrix of the symbolic, the imaginary and the Real. He complicates the process by writing that castration is, on the one hand, “profoundly linked to the *symbolic* articulation of the prohibition of incest” and, on the other hand, “something that

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59 Ibid., 120.
60 Ibid., 121.
manifests itself on the imaginary plane.”61 In addition to the symbolic and the imaginary realms, there is also the plane of the real (in this sense, of reality) which concerns the agent who utters the castration threat. Lacan explores the father’s role in bringing about castration in separate stages and degrees, and argues that as in the case of the Little Hans, there is no need for an actual father, that the imaginary and the symbolic father exist independently of the real father. He thus detaches the real father as the contingent agent of castration from his symbolic mandate, which is his interruption (as the third term) of the asocial mother-infant dyad. If the father is not a real object, then what is he? Lacan’s answer hinges on the signifying/linguistic function of the father as he argues that “the father is a metaphor … a signifier that comes in place of another signifier.”62 What the paternal signifier replaces is the maternal signifier (S in place of S’); mother’s desire needs to be signified through the paternal signifier. So, it is not the child’s incestuous desire that the father must prohibit but the mother’s—it is her desire that needs to be kept at bay.

By interpreting Freudian Oedipal complex as paternal metaphor, Lacan distances himself from the idea of the real father, and stresses function beyond the actual father figure. He treats the father as a symbol outside the subject and the empirical field. Paternal function is a structural duty as a part of the social formation. This function takes the “Name-of-the-Father” in Lacan’s nomenclature: “it is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law.”63 When the concept first appears in

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 124.
Lacan’s theory in the early 1950s, as Dylan Evans writes, it refers to the prohibitive role of the father as the one who stands for the first social imperative of the incest taboo, and therefore is written in small letters. It reflects Lacan’s play “on the homophony of le nom du père (the name of the father) and le ‘non’ du père (the ‘no’ of the father), to emphasise the legislative and prohibitive function of the symbolic father.”64 A few years later in his Seminar III entitled The Psychoses (1955-1956), the concept is both capitalised and hyphenated when Lacan confers upon it a founding role as the fundamental signifier which imposes identity on the subject by positioning him within the symbolic order.65 The Name-of-the-Father thus takes on a transcendent meaning, and in that is situated outside of history and culture, consolidating its position as immutable and unchangeable. Russell Grigg states that “In calling this signifier transcendental, he [Lacan] is claiming that while it has no correlate in any representation, it is nevertheless a condition for the possibility of any representation. … As a pure signifier, the Name-of-the-Father supports the entire symbolic system; it is its keystone, its point de capiton, or quilting point.”66 As the signifier of the signifiers, the Name-of-the-Father is what weaves the symbolic order into seeming wholeness.

However, even though the Name-of-the-Father can form a totality, this totality is only the illusion of the totality of the symbolic order. In reality, the Name-of-the-Father, reduced to the performativity of the signifier, is “dead.” Lacan emphasizes this point with regard to the myth of the primeval murder in Totem and Taboo. He writes that Freud was well aware of the close relationship between symbolic function (being reduced to a

65 Ibid.
signifier) and death. He knew that for the father to assume the representative position as the figure of the law, he had to be killed. As Lacan puts it, “How, indeed, could Freud fail to recognize such an affinity, when the necessity of his reflection led him to tie the appearance of the signifier of the Father, as author of the Law, to death—indeed, to the killing of the Father—thus showing that, if this murder is the fertile moment of the debt by which the subject binds himself for life to the Law, the symbolic Father, insofar as he signifies this Law, is truly the dead Father.”

The Name-of-the-Father, according to Lacan, is the dead father—the dead father of the primal horde. But more importantly, it is dead because it is a pure signifier which is founded on language.

The state of deadness is determined by the very nature of the signifier itself. When a concept is created through language, it becomes an effect of the signifier, and as such is abstracted from the material, contingent externality that fostered it in the first place (which equals to its death). Lacan dramatizes this situation in his Seminar I entitled _Freud’s Papers on Technique_ (1953-1954) when he uses the example of the elephant to explain the relationship between the signifier and the signified:

Think for a moment in the real. It is owing to the fact that the word _elephant_ exists in their language, and hence that the elephant enters into their deliberations, that men have been capable of taking, in relation to elephants, even before touching them, decisions which are more far-reaching for these pachyderms than anything else that has happened to them throughout their history … Besides, it is clear, all I need to do is talk about it, there is no need for them to be here, for them to be here,

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thanks to the word *elephant* and to be more real than the contingent elephant-individuals.\textsuperscript{68}

When one says “elephant,” it has no relation to the animal with fan-shaped ears and a long trunk. What is more, the idea erases the particularity of the actual thing it represents, so the word elephant kills the real elephant. This is how we ensure our dominance over elephants, or animals in general, by integrating them into our linguistic system and accumulating systematic knowledge about their species. In other words, the fact that we have language—that the word has more weight than the actual thing—is what makes us human/speaking subjects different than the non-human/non-speaking beings. This quality of the signifier, according to Žižek, is what makes the father more than father himself: “the non-coincidence of symbolic and real father means precisely that some ‘non-father’ … is ‘more father’ than the (real) father.”\textsuperscript{69} As he continues, “It is for this reason that Lacan designates the Name-of-the-Father, this ideal agency that regulates legal, symbolic exchange, as the ‘paternal metaphor’: the symbolic father is a metaphor, a metaphoric substitute, a sublation of the real father in its Name which is ‘more father than father himself.’”\textsuperscript{70} However, as the father more than the father himself, the Name-of-the-Father is actually a lacking father, its lack being brought on by language, precisely by the failure of the signifier to wholly represent the reality it appears to signify.

*There is No Other of the Other*

The transition from a conception of the Name-of-the-Father as a transcendental signifier to a conception of the Name-of-the-Father as a lacking signifier marks,\textsuperscript{68,69,70}

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\textsuperscript{69} Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), 134.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
according to Lorenzo Chiesa, the evolution of Lacan’s thought from the late 1950s to 1970s. As Chiesa writes, Lacan of the early 1950s was convinced of “the absolute transcendence of the signifier Name-of-the-Father with respect to the Other” as he maintained: “The Other itself has beyond itself an Other which is able to found the law.”\(^{71}\) This “Other beyond the Other” acts as the guarantee (“the Other”) of the symbolic order (“the Other”), summarized in the motto that “there is an Other of the Other.” However, Lacan of the 1960s swiftly moved away from the emphasis he had given to the Name-of-the-Father as the absolute guarantee of the symbolic order, and posited, instead, that there was no greater Other to appeal to. In “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” (1960), Lacan states: “Let us begin with the conception of the Other as the locus of the signifier. No authoritative statement has any other guarantee here than its very enunciation, since it would be pointless for the statement to seek it in another signifier, which could in no way appear outside that locus. I formulate this by saying that there is no metalanguage that can be spoken, or, more aphoristically, that there is no Other of the Other.”\(^{72}\) The Name-of-the-Father can no longer be deemed “an ‘external’ metaguarantor of the Other of the signifiers [Other].”\(^{73}\) It does not ensure the consistency and continuity of the symbolic space in which we operate in everyday life. More precisely, it is deficient because this deficiency (lack) is an effect of language which plagues every signifier, including “the signifier of the signifiers.”

So, what exactly does the Name-of-the-Father do? Lacan argues that the Name-of-

\(^{71}\) Chiesa, *Subjectivity*, 92.
\(^{72}\) Lacan, *Ecrits*, 688; my emphasis.
\(^{73}\) Chiesa, *Subjectivity*, 115.
the-Father is a defense against the lack in the symbolic order. It operates to cover over the lack by providing an illusory sense of stability and identity. As Chiesa explains, its function is to suture the symbolic order as a “cork”: “such a cork fills in the gap of a real hole which … somehow remains present in spite of being corked.” This hole in the symbolic corresponds to the Real as the elusive, irreducible element that remains outside representation. When the signifier kills the real thing (the word “elephant” is not the elephant itself), it kills that which was before words and before language. There is no way to regain this pre-linguistic experience after language takes over, but it still exists within the symbolic order, albeit in a form that resists symbolization, hence proper expression. It shows that the symbolic order is not as harmonious and stable as we often think it is, but is structured around a lack which is the very name of the Real—the object that is impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and which, in return, shows the impossibility of the same order to provide wholeness or fulfill desire. The Name-of-the-Father functions as a mask to prevent us from an encounter with the Real, but as Lacan realizes, it is only one way of forestalling such an encounter, and there are other ways of doing it as well. This is how Lacan “relativizes the function of the Name-of-the-Father and, from the early 1960s, speaks of the Names-of-the-Father in the plural. The real hole in the Symbolic can now be corked in many different ways. The Name-of-the-Father represents the standard way in which this is achieved.” Lacan’s pluralization and devalorization of the Name-of-the-Father divests it of its transcendental status and reduces it to a privileged yet subordinate position—only a name—as the support of the symbolic order. In this way, “the statement that ‘the father [qua law] is a dead father’

74 Ibid., 117.
75 Ibid.
finds its true implication”: it is dead because it is an empty regulating fiction charged with the duty of concealing the fact that the symbolic is a lacking order.\(^7\)

If the Name-of-the-Father fails to conceal the lack, and exposes it, then it cannot prevent the subject from being invaded by the Real. The psychoanalytic equivalent of this situation is called psychosis. In psychosis, the Name-of-the-Father cannot perform its job for one reason or another, leaving the subject at the mercy of the Real. Lacan’s later theory about the Name-of-the-Father—that it doesn’t encircle the Other, but simply sutures it by veiling its lack—implies that psychosis is not just a neurotic condition, but is a structural possibility. This means that we are always at the risk of falling into psychosis. If hysteria is a symptom of the gap between the biological and imaginary father, psychosis is a symptom of the gap between the symbolic and the Real when the Name-of-the-Father cannot properly cork the Real (hole) in the symbolic. Following this, we can say that both Freud’s hysteria and Lacan’s psychosis are conditions produced by society—by the very structure that, as Lacan discovers, is well and functioning as long as it is able to mask its own inadequacy. As we will see in the next section, Žižek draws attention to how the symbolic order increasingly becomes unable to fulfill this critical task, giving way to multiple manifestations of the eruption of the Real in the public space.

**ZIZEK’S FATHER JOUSSEUR: THE OBSCENE SUPPLEMENT OF LAW**

Žižek locates the origins of the crisis of paternal authority in the late nineteenth century bourgeois nuclear family. Following Lacan’s review of the Oedipus complex, he contends that the two functions (“the pacifying Ego Ideal, the point of ideal identification, and the ferocious superego, the agent of cruel prohibition; the symbolic function of totem

\(^7\) Ibid., 119.
and the horror of taboo), which were ordinarily separated in previous societies, merged in
the figure of the father in modern societies.\textsuperscript{77} This unification “sowed the seeds of the
subsequent ‘crisis of Oedipus’,” or the decline of the symbolic paternal function.\textsuperscript{78} As a
result of this decline, since the turn of the century, symbolic structures were “smeared
more and more by the mark of obscenity and thus undermined from within.”\textsuperscript{79} In Žižek’s
view, the dimension of obscenity has always been an element of symbolic authority, but
only to the extent that it is continually restrained under the jurisdiction of the law. The
moment it is revealed, the figure of paternal authority potentially turns into an obscene
\textit{jouisseur} (he-who-enjoys): “When the ‘pacifying’ symbolic authority is suspended, the
only way to avoid the debilitating deadlock of desire, its inherent impossibility, is to
locate the cause of its inaccessibility in a despotic figure which stands for the primordial
\textit{jouisseur}: we cannot enjoy because he appropriates all enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{80} Such an overbearing
figure is not an exception, but is someone we can come across in the everyday reality of
contemporary life, from Bill Gates to Donald Trump. A quality common to both of these
personages is that they are seeking their own pleasure. While Bill Gates does it under the
guise of our “Little Brother,” someone who is not a patriarchal father-master, but is our
equal, Donald Trump does it under the false pretense that he is the ultimate father who
will protect us from all dangers. This, according to Žižek, is a sign that the retreat of the
traditional father does not liberate the subject from the father’s prohibitions, but rather
exposes him to excessive enjoyment.

The figure of the obscene father \textit{jouisseur} is a central concept in Žižek’s

\textsuperscript{77} Slavoj Žižek, \textit{The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology} (London: Verso, 2009), 313.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 315.
psychoanalytic theory to discern the repercussions of the paternity crisis in social, cultural, and political (among other) domains. However, before going into the details of this concept, I will devote some time to investigate his expansion of Lacanian theory to discuss the contemporary crisis in the symbolic order as a result of which emerges the preoccupation with the dimension of the Real. According to Žižek, when the symbolic structures of patriarchal society stop functioning properly during the transition from modern to the postmodern order, it leads to a legitimation crisis, and as an outcome of this crisis, the obscenity inherent to law—which has been disguised until then—becomes evident in both personal and public spheres, induced by the ferocious superego. The fact that the father is dead results in his return in the Real, which makes him alive and well.

**The Big Other No Longer Exists**

Žižek postulates that “when, today, one speaks of the decline of paternal authority, it is … the father of the uncompromising ‘No!’, who is effectively in retreat; in the absence of his prohibitory ‘No!’, new forms of phantasmic harmony between the symbolic order and *jouissance* can thrive again.”\(^{81}\) The retreat of this prohibitory father is uncomfortably close to the erosion of the symbolic order. This is why Žižek interprets this deadlock as an indicator of a subtler change in the status of the big Other, and famously declares that “the big Other no longer exists.” The big Other here refers to the symbolic and institutional structures that mediate the subject’s relation to his society. According to Žižek, these structures do not function properly in today’s world. It should be noted, though, that they have never existed as such. Žižek reminds us that the symbolic representation has always been based on a constructive fiction; it exists solely on the

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 322.
plane of “belief” rather than of “material causality.” The symbolic belief implies a certain disavowal epitomized by the formula “I know very well, but nonetheless” which encapsulates the subject’s epistemological condition in the symbolic order: he has to refute the reality of what he can subjectively know for the sake of the maintenance of the fiction; therefore, the subject is essentially a believer—in the words of the (big) “Other.” The efficacy of the symbolic order, in which the symbolic mandate matters more than the material reality, thus fundamentally relies on an unquestioned faith in the authority of the symbol itself. This makes its disintegration a simple matter: if the force of the symbolic order derives from the force of belief, then its disintegration for Žižek calls for a simple giving up of belief—becoming a cynic who “believes only his eyes.”

In several instances, Žižek uses Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes” as an example to illustrate this point. The child’s fault in the tale—which might as well be a blessing—is that he speaks out the obvious fact (what he perceives with “his eyes”) that the king is naked, yet the paradox of telling the truth lies in the fact that this “liberating gesture” results in the dissolution of the very bonds that have, thus far, held the community together: “by blurting out what should remain unspoken if the existing intersubjective network is to retain its consistency [he] unknowingly and involuntarily sets off the catastrophe.” Through this tale, Žižek exposes the mystique of authority: authority in so far as it is symbolic does not reside in the form or the content, but is solely based on the power of the symbolic ritual transmitted from generation to generation. It is exactly for this reason that the father’s authority should not be questioned because one is

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 323.
84 Žižek, For They Know, 12.
bound to discover that it is a pure semblance—that the father is an imposter. Therefore, the authority crisis has nothing to do with the personal characteristics or qualities of the authority figures (the fact that they are weak, passive, dishonest, and so on) as Freud believes, but is an outcome of the failure of the sustenance of belief.

With the decline of the symbolic structures—the big Other—what is experienced, then, is an authority/legitimation crisis. This means, in Lacanian terms, that the Name-of-the-Father fails to embody its function. We can refer to an example Žižek uses to illustrate this claim. Žižek writes that a judge is a judge in so far as he wears the insignia of law and hence becomes its representative. The moment he wears his robe, he becomes more than himself as when he speaks, it is the law that speaks through him. Žižek calls this change in the “substance” of the judge an instance of “transubstantiation.” More precisely, the body of the judge turns into a sacred representation of law. From this point on, it does not matter if he is personally weak, passive, or dishonest. What matters is that he is sanctioned by law, and hence the form takes precedence over the content. However, with the legitimation crisis, the judge can never enter the stage of transubstantiation by assuming a symbolic title. Since his body cannot be transformed into a sacred representation of law, he is left in the pathetic reality of his person. This, according to Zizek, recapitulates the contemporary situation: when the symbolic screen (the Name-of-the-Father) does not work properly, we are left with the obscene reality of our own greed, selfishness, abuse, and emptiness. All authority figures, just like the judge, experience the same demystification and consequently turn into “obscene-jouisseurs.” Žižek talks in detail about this figure of jouisseur, but before exploring it further, I want to dwell on the idea of obscenity with regard to the fundamental inconsistency at the basis of the law.
The Splitting of the Domain of Law

It is not a common practice to question the legitimacy of law’s supposed authority which is based on (the authority of) democratic institutions and procedures. Law is customarily accepted as rightful, beneficial, and necessary—as law is law. According to Žižek, such tautology that “law is law” often functions to conceal the occult origins of legal power by presenting it in such a way that it appears “authentic and eternal.” Under the guise of this vacuous statement, law is depicted as grounded in some transcendental idea of Justice or Good, and its forceful, coercive character is obscured. Žižek maintains that law needs such a disguise that it is just and good exactly because it is not; that an illegal and illegitimate constituent lies at the very foundation of the reign of law which should be publicly unacknowledged for law to take hold. Žižek thus views law as internally and constitutively split between its public letter and the shadowy practices that must be disavowed for law to maintain its image of being neutral and fair. The external, proper face of law is always supplemented by some “inherent transgression” that Žižek points to in his work as embodying an obscene and uncanny excess, a source of jouissance.

Žižek’s insight about the split nature of law is essentially derived from—and advances—Freud’s primal crime hypothesis, which gives an account of both the fantasy-construction by bourgeois ideology that legitimizes the reign of law and the darker, violent underside of law that lies at its founding. When the brothers kill their father, they establish a new society held together by a social contract that secures their liberty and rights. However, this civil order of society comes with a serious cost: the dead primal

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85 Žižek talks about law not necessarily in the legal meaning but as the whole of the symbolic structures that regulate our lives.
father reigns in the psyche of the brothers (in the form of guilt) as reinforced domination—what Freud calls the death drive. It is this destructive force that penetrates into the constitution of law, but law sustains its existence by concealing it through the fantasy of the liberal social contract: that we are equal, free, and happy under its guard. Hence, as Žižek argues, every law is based on an original violence that it continually subdues and keeps in check so that subjects are deceived to experience the authority of law as “authentic and eternal” and act according to the rules of civilized rational order: “‘At the beginning’ of the law, there is a certain ‘outlaw’, a certain Real of violence, which coincides with the act itself of the establishment of the reign of law: the ultimate truth about the reign of law is that of an usurpation, and all classical politico-philosophical thought rests on the disavowal of this violent act of foundation.”86 The originary violence out of which the civil constitution grows must become invisible, forgotten and repressed if the reign of law is to be established. Yet, it cannot entirely be obliterated, and will “persist as a repressed traumatic kernel” since it is the necessary precondition for its existence.87

This fundamental inconsistency of the domain of law is a characteristic of every law, and Žižek gives several examples from Christian law to illustrate his point. For example, the incoherence at the heart of Freud’s story of origins (of law) is evident in the story of Adam and Eve. Žižek writes: “if it is prohibited to eat from the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise, why did God put it there in the first place? Is it not that this was a part of His perverse strategy first to seduce Adam and Eve into the Fall, in order then to

86 Žižek, For They Know, 204.
87 Ibid., 208.
Moreover, the omniscient God already knew about the offense that would soon be committed. While He put the Tree in Paradise and commanded the prohibition “Do not eat!”, He simultaneously knew that His Law would be transgressed. Žižek deduces that every prohibition includes the possibility of its transgression; an external rule, when applied, is always met by an internal and perverse drive to transgress it. He then takes it a step further and proclaims that “the prohibitive law creates sin” as such. This means that before the introduction of law, there is neither transgressive enjoyment nor the lack of it. It is law that creates enjoyment through prohibition because every prohibition includes the possibility of its transgression. Hence, the creation of law in Freud’s primal father myth grows only ostensibly out of a desire for restraint, but in fact stems from a desire for enjoyment because desire is correlative to the act of restraint.

The opposition between the “No” of the symbolic law and the inherent drive for its transgression is further discussed by Žižek through the famous commandment “You shall not kill!” Žižek argues that what stands out in this commandment is not only the restraining act of “You shall not!” but also, and even more so, the secret injunction to do the deed, to “Kill! Kill!” More precisely, Žižek demonstrates the inherent splitting in the commandment, that it is divided into “the formal-indeterminate ‘You shall not!’ and the obscene direct injunction ‘Kill!’”:

The silent dialogue which sustains this operation is thus: ‘You shall not!’ ‘I shall not—what? I have no idea what is being demanded of me! Che vuoi?’ ‘You shall not!’ ‘This is driving me crazy, being under pressure to do something without

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89 Ibid.
knowing what, feeling guilty without knowing of what, so I’ll just explode, and start killing!\footnote{Ibid., 105.}

Thus, concludes Žižek, “killing is the desperate response to the impenetrable abstract superego prohibition.”\footnote{Ibid.} I will now review the role played by this obscene psychic agency: the superego.

*The Superego & The Injunction: Enjoy*

Starting with *The Ego and The Id* (1923), Freud introduced a new structural model effectively replacing his former topological theory which focused on the relationship between conscious and unconscious processes. This new model depicts a more complex psyche containing a continuous struggle among three hypothetical agencies: ego, id, and superego. The ego represents reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which represents the unconscious and irrational impulses. The superego, in this schema, appears as a repository of parental and cultural values—of moral consciousness—mediating between the ego and the id. Freud maintains that the superego comes out of a differentiation from the ego following the dissolution of the Oedipus complex; therefore, it is “the heir of the Oedipus complex.”\footnote{Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 36.} The task of repressing the Oedipal fantasies is carried out by the superego, which, having internalized his domination, administers the father’s law; from then on, it becomes the introjected voice of parental—and especially paternal—authority. Freud’s formulation of the superego seems to be a continuation of the hypothesis he puts forth in *Totem and Taboo* that the brothers collectively kill and devour their father, internalizing his rule in a literal act of cannibalism. This marks the
permanent retention of the father’s delimitations in their psyche. For this reason, Freud writes that the superego “has the most abundant links with the phylogenetic acquisition of each individual—his archaic heritage. What has belonged to the lowest part of the mental life of each of us is changed, through the formation of the ideal, into what is highest in the human mind by our scale of values.”

The superego represents the higher, moral side of human nature—its distinction comes from its mastering the Oedipus complex which the establishment of all cultural, moral, and religious institutions owe their existence to.

Freud crowns the superego with the highest credit, yet he demonstrates at the same time its incoherences and excesses especially in relation to its “extraordinary harshness and severity towards the ego.” As a rule, the ego carries out repressions at the behest of the superego and remains subject to its domination: “As the child was once under a compulsion to obey its parents, so the ego submits to the categorical imperative of its superego.” But is there a limit to the superego’s imperatives of repression? Is the superego ever content? Freud notes that even though the superego often works in contradiction to the id (cultural norms vs. instant gratification), by way of the superego’s relation with phylogenetic acquisitions, it “is always close to the id and can act as its representative vis-à-vis the ego.”

The stain of the id manifests itself in the superego’s exuberant and selfish drive to punish the ego when it fails to meet its demands, inducing in the ego an agonizing sense of guilt. Freud mentions that an increase in the sense of guilt can actually have an adverse effect and become a motive for crime. Thus, the moral supervision of the superego can, on the contrary, drive someone to commit a crime, do

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93 Ibid.  
94 Ibid., 53.  
95 Ibid., 48.  
96 Ibid., 49.
violent acts, and eventually cause their death: “What is now holding sway in the superego is, as it were, a pure culture of the death instinct, and it often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death, if the latter does not fend off its tyrant in time by the change round into mania.”97 Under the guise of its moral character, the superego can be tyrannical, destructive, and even malicious—“harshly restraining [and] cruelly prohibiting.”98

Lacan elaborates upon this complexity inherent in the superego, and separates its ethical and symbolic content from its harsh, cruel, and severe quality—which Freud himself never did. He revises Freud’s supposition that the contrasting commands “you must be like me” and “don’t be like me” both issue from the same source (the superego) to suggest that they point towards a differentiation between the ego-ideal and the superego. On one hand, the ego-ideal, which says “be like me,” orders positive identification with the father. On the other hand, the superego, which says “don’t be like me,” prohibits identification, almost blaming the subject for daring to ascend to the father’s level. In his differentiation between these two functions, Lacan ascribes to the ego-ideal a symbolic function, representing the order of symbolic identifications—in Žižek’s words, “the big Other who watches over me and pushes me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize.”99 The superego is the same agency in its vengeful, sadistic, and destructive dimension, belonging to the realm of the Real. Thus, for Lacan, the superego “has nothing to do with moral conscience as far as its most obligatory demands are concerned.”100 On the contrary, it is an un-ethical agency. As such, it is, at its most elementary, not a prohibitive but a producing force: “Nothing forces to enjoy

97 Ibid., 53.
98 Ibid., 54.
except the superego. The superego is the imperative of *jouissance*—Enjoy!"\(^{101}\)

According to Žižek, it is exactly this superegoic injunction to “Enjoy!” which constitutes the source of the illegal constituent of law. With its excessive and obscene quality, the superego assumes the repository for all the violence and obscenity at the founding of the law; it attaches itself to law and becomes its shadowy double, forever threatening to unveil its ideological disguise as natural and eternal. There is a fine balance between law and its superego supplement: for law to maintain itself, its obscene inverse needs to be kept at bay, or strictly controlled. What happens in the contemporary state, according to Žižek, is the disruption of this balance. As Lacan notes, “the collapse of the symbolic aspect of the superego can easily lead to the exacerbation of its ‘obscene and ferocious’ aspect,” and in our postmodern condition, this is usually referred to as the reign of the (ferocious) superego (as a result of the fall of its symbolic representation).\(^{102}\) Drawing upon this context, Todd McGowan puts forward the contention that starting from the 1960s, there has been a shift in the structuring of society from one founded upon the primacy of prohibition to one that commands enjoyment. This new society of enjoyment, according to McGowan, can be witnessed around the figure of the superego because its increasing predominance is often experienced as ceaseless inducements for enjoyment. However, writes McGowan, “despite this transformation from demand for renunciation to the demand for enjoyment … enjoyment has not burgeoned. In fact, enjoyment is now just as elusive as ever. The existence of the superegoic command ‘Enjoy!’ merely produces a sense of obligation to enjoy oneself; it does not produce

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enjoyment.” Complementing this view, Žižek explains that “the direct injunction ‘Enjoy!’ is a much more effective way to hinder the subject’s access to enjoyment than the explicit Prohibition.”

*The Primordial Father-Jouisseur*

Žižek proposes to reconsider the postmodern shift in the state of traditional and symbolic structures in the absence of the prohibitory law around the question of enjoyment, particularly the figure of the primordial father-*jouisseur*—the most rudimentary incarnation of the superego. For Žižek, psychoanalysis is unequaled in that it gives an account of what patriarchal ideology tries to keep from sight: the enigmatic status of the father in contemporary society. He writes:

The usual critique of patriarchy fatally neglects the fact that there are two fathers. On the one hand there is the Oedipal father: the symbolic-dead father, Name-of-the-Father, the father of Law who does not enjoy, who ignores the dimension of enjoyment; on the other hand there is the ‘primordial’ father, the obscene, superego anal figure that is real-alive, the ‘Master of Enjoyment.’

As with the internal division of law, the father figure is split between its symbolic, legal face and its primitive, enjoying face. The Name-of-the-Father (non-father) represents the symbolic father as the embodiment of law; it is a metaphor, “a sublation” (transubstantiation) of the real father in its Name which becomes “more father” than the real father himself (which means the symbolic function, as the regulating fiction, has more weight than its bearer who is the real father). While the Name-of-the-Father pays no

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104 Žižek, *The Ticklish*, 367.
heed to enjoyment (therefore is dead), its “non-sublated” or un-symbolized part, the obscene primordial father, enjoys fully. However, his orders for enjoyment are more effective in hindering the subject’s access to enjoyment than any prohibition by creating a deadlock of desire (complete enjoyment is an impossible ideal camouflaged by law’s prohibition that poses it as possible).

For Žižek, this obscene father-\textit{jouisseur} is nobody but the primal father of the horde in Freud’s \textit{Totem and Taboo}. In a way, argues Žižek, “Freud was already aware of it when, in \textit{Totem and Taboo}, he wrote that, following the primordial parricide, the dead father ‘returns stronger than when he was alive’— the crucial word here is ‘return.’”\textsuperscript{106}

Even though Freud depicted the primal father in all his abusive and obscene terms, Žižek believes that he was “the victim of a kind of perspective illusion” when he asserted that the death of the primal father was compensated by the establishment of legal mechanisms, so the Real father-Enjoyment was essentially replaced by his symbolic function.\textsuperscript{107} For Žižek, this order of succession is reversed in postmodernity: the symbolic father-mandate is replaced by the obscene primal father in all his aliveness “insofar as he is not yet transubstantiated into a symbolic function, and therefore remains ‘a partial object’”—a leftover produced by the failure of symbolization.\textsuperscript{108} Hence, the problem of postmodernity is the collapse of symbolic representation. Any figures of authority who try to fit into or reclaim their symbolic function ultimately fail to do so; without the necessary process of transubstantiation, or the maintenance of the mystique of authority,

\textsuperscript{106} Žižek, \textit{For They Know}, 134.
\textsuperscript{107} Žižek, \textit{The Metastases}, 206.
they turn into “crude, unnegotiated power figures”—primordial fathers.\textsuperscript{109} For this reason, the Real Thing, writes Žižek, is not the dead father, but is “the obscene Father-\textit{jouissance} prior to his murder and subsequent elevation into the agency of symbolic authority.”\textsuperscript{110}

In the political realm, Žižek’s primordial Father-\textit{jouissance} finds the most consummate representation in totalitarian leaders, from Hitler to Stalin. Žižek views their ascension to power almost always following “the overthrow of the impotent old regime of the symbolic Master,” replaced by these “anal father-Leaders” who become far more oppressive and tyrannical than the former rulers.\textsuperscript{111} In this respect, Žižek cites totalitarianism as a reactionary and harmful development (against liberal democracy, its practices and premises) to illustrate the (post)modern forms of power in the aftermath of the modernist dissolution of paternal authority. He points to a break with tradition and traditional practice of authority in the arbitrary and inexorable way these leaders exercised their power—although they often posed determined, sometimes to the extent of sacrificing masses, to ensure the continuance of the old established order. Žižek attempts to explain the reason why totalitarian regimes emerged at a certain moment and place in history through what I have called “the deadlock of desire” above. With the collapse of the symbolic regulations of the social order and the prohibitory laws that tell us what (not) to do, we find ourselves in an impasse: we are driven to seek enjoyment—live it at its fullest—but this destroys the very possibility of enjoyment. For the subject, enjoyment makes sense only when it is prohibited as enjoyment is only produced in its transgression.

The solution to avoid this deadlock of desire is often in the form of finding a new,

\textsuperscript{110} Žižek, \textit{The Ticklish}, 314.
\textsuperscript{111} Žižek, \textit{The Metastases}, 206.
powerful father figure who can restore the father’s Name; however, due to the structural failure, this new father only turns into a primordial jouisseur. The loss of protection against enjoyment ultimately creates a push to look for father substitutes who are disguised as traditional and moral agents, but are just imposters with no real substance or truth to their claims.

CONCLUSION

There are many representations of the father in psychoanalytic theory. Rather than indicating a lack of consistency in thought, the plurality and diversity of these representations reflect how psychoanalytic theory was intimately bound up with the historical and social contexts of its age, as it detected and recorded the mutations in the status of authority (and as such the status of society and subjectivity) with the sensitivity of a seismograph. When we look at Freud’s, Lacan’s, and Žižek’s renditions of the father, we see a clear cooperation between the three thinkers that spreads beyond the boundaries of time and space. Lacan builds upon Freud, and Žižek builds upon both when they are developing their own theories, and in this way each brings out the true potential of the one preceding him. Even though there is not a clear line of progress, we can say that in their theorization of the father they follow an axis that shifts from Imaginary-Symbolic to Symbolic-Real, which is in parallel with the shift from modernity to postmodernity, and, in relation to the father’s status, from the Oedipal to the obscene father.

When Freud theorized about the father, he was more interested in his (declining) position in the imagination of the child. His fantasy of the strong, menacing father, which he supported through the universality of the Oedipus complex safeguarded by the primal father myth, operated in the imaginary realm rather than in the actual world. The fantasy of the ideal father was Freud’s solution to offset the psychological effects of what he
conceived as a decline in the position of the father in patriarchal family. It worked through an installation of the ideal omnipotent father in the imagination of the child—in the very position where the child needed him. This orthodox Freudian remedy was clearly illustrated in the case study of Little Hans. Freud’s intervention to reinstall the ideal patriarch in Hans’s imagination was an attempt to close the gap between the pathetic reality (the fact that Hans’s father was a passive father who abdicated his role in the family—the big giraffe) and the exalted ideal in his theory of the Oedipus complex. As Verhaeghe argues, Freud thus wanted to answer the hysteric’s dream of seeing the father in full force. However, we can very well argue that Freud was a hysteric himself in search of a potent and infallible father which explains his “informed illusion” about the fantasy of the omnipotent Oedipal father. The fantasy would never provide an ultimate solution to the problem of the Oedipal ambivalence because there is, in reality, no complete identification with the father—no full implantation of his imaginary ideal to thoroughly cover over reality.

Lacan shifted the focus from the imaginary to the symbolic realm by offering a structural reconsideration of the father’s status in psychoanalysis. He distinguished between the biological father and his representation in the imaginary and the symbolic, insisting that what was important was the symbolic “function” of the father rather than his material reality. By highlighting the function, Lacan thus proposed to view the father as a title or a metaphor—as the Name-of-the-Father. He first conceptualized the Name-of-the-Father as a transcendental signifier; however, starting in 1960s, he started to conceive it as a cork that fills in the hole of emptiness in the symbolic order, summarized in his maxim: “There is no Other of the Other.” With this change, Lacan’s focus shifted from the symbolic to the Real. He discerned that the symbolic was a structurally lacking order,
and so was the Name-of-the-Father. Its function was only performative: to prevent the subject from being invaded by the Real by continuing the illusion of stability. This implies that since the function of the Name-of-the-Father is so frail, the possibility of the subject’s being invaded by the Real is quite high. In short, we all risk falling into psychosis. While Freud offers an illusory solution to the hysteric’s outcry by bringing the father’s function closer to his reality, Lacan shows that the issue is not simply bridging the gap between the ideal and the real, but lies in the realization that there is no bridge (no “privileged” Name-of-the-Father), which makes the matter rather worse than better.

Žižek brought out the full implications of Lacanian theory by investigating further the repercussions of the crisis of symbolic structures when they fail to function properly. He focused on the creeping advent of an obscene, malicious element, which is related to “the return of the Real,” into different spheres of contemporary life. He discussed this uncanny supplement around the ferocious, excessive figure of the superego, and in particular the superegoic father-\textit{jouisseur}, who guarantees—different than the symbolic-dead Name-of-the-Father who only knows of prohibition—full unconstrained enjoyment. Today efforts to bring back the traditional father, or fit real fathers into their empty symbolic function will ultimately prove to be futile because there is a structurally determined failure in authority—we have fathers, but no symbolic basis to legitimate their claims to authority. This means that the efforts to bring back the traditional father will not result in the return of the traditional fathers, but will result in the emergence of new father figures who might appear traditional, but are in fact \textit{jouisseurs} who are only after their own enjoyment; in other words, primal fathers.

Hence, we come back to where we have started. All the mutations in the status of paternal authority in psychoanalysis are encapsulated in Freud’s myth of the primal
father. By situating patricide at the center of the constitution of a (modern) collective order, it becomes a key narrative position giving an allegorical account of the impasse of paternal authority in contemporary society. Freud’s scenario follows a chronological sequence whereby, first, the primal father is murdered, and then, it is replaced by identification with the dead father. It shows how the very substance of the father, his materiality and integrity, is destroyed, and split between the external normative authority of law and the internalized moral authority of the superego. The father turns into a symbolic function, which is basically preparing the ground for his decline. Against this order of succession, Žižek reads the “primordial father” as a “later, eminently modern, post-revolutionary phenomenon, the result of the dissolution of traditional symbolic authority.”

Instead of preceding the establishment of symbolic law, Žižek posits that the primal father is a recent figure emerging in the absence of symbolic law; he is not symbolic-dead, but Real-alive in all his violent and obscene dimension in postmodernity. Even though this was not his intention, Freud unknowingly narrated the crisis of modernity in his myth of the primal father while at the same time foreseeing what was to come in postmodernity. That is to say, he predicted that the symbolic father would eventually collapse (because its power is solely based on the symbolic performativity) and the primal father figures in all their aliveness and ghostly presence would take over the social landscape. Therefore, Freud’s primal myth reflects in its small space all the transfigurations that the father has gone through in psychoanalytic theory: he changes from dead and symbolic to “too real” and “too alive” which gives him an uncanny quality that makes his “(non) presence” more unsettling than ever.

112 Žižek, The Metastases, 206.
CHAPTER 2

THE PURE FORM OF THE LAW AND TOTALITARIAN ENJOYMENTS IN FRANZ KAFKA’S THE TRIAL

INTRODUCTION

In his letter to his father, Kafka recalls a particular incident which took place in his early childhood. One night, when he was supposed to be sleeping, he woke his father by wailing for water. He did it in the way of a child who wants attention: to be pampered and indulged. However, contrary to his anticipation, his father lifted him out of his bed and put him on the back porch of their door. When he shut the door, little Kafka was left there alone, in his nightshirt, probably feeling stunned and scared. This distant memory sets forth the typical way Kafka’s father treated Kafka, with severity and lack of compassion. Because of this, Kafka grew up with a predominant fear of his father and it largely characterized his relationship with the man. In the letter, Kafka describes his father as a man who is harsh in his remarks, formal in his behaviors, and hot-tempered in his manners. He uses threats and admonishments as an instrument of control. When he says, for instance, “I’ll tear you apart like a fish,” Kafka does not doubt for a second his capability of doing it. As much as being strong in influence, his father is also a strong man in appearance—a “giant” as Kafka calls him. That is why Kafka feels weighted down by his father’s mental as well as physical force. He expresses this feeling vividly at the end of his letter when he writes, “Sometimes I imagine the map of the world spread out and you stretched diagonally across it. And I feel as if I could consider living in only
those regions that either are not covered by you or are not within your reach. And, in
keeping with the conception I have of your magnitude, these are not many and not very
comforting regions.”\(^1\)

Of course, such a statement (which is only one of many in a similar vein) makes
Kafka’s letter ripe for psychoanalytic interpretation, especially in terms of the Oedipal
dynamics. Kafka feels greatly intimidated by his father. He cites his “strength, health,
appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance,”
among others, as the reason for his fear, but the same traits also make him develop a filial
veneration for his father for being someone (a higher self) that he is not. Thus, his mixed
feelings for his father exhibit, in its best form, the Oedipal ambivalence of love and
rejection. It is important to remember at this point that we see Kafka’s father exclusively
from Kafka’s eyes; therefore, even though the focus seems to be on the father (and his
“tyranny”), what the letter really conveys is the father’s mental image in the son’s
thoughts, specifically, the way Kafka “prefers” to see his father.\(^2\) As we have seen in the
previous chapter, Lacan puts forward the theory that aggressivity against the father
(inherent in imaginary identification) lies in the imagination of the child—it is the
aggressivity felt against the imagined other—and does not take as its origin the presence
of a powerful father figure. Kafka’s view of his father, in the same way, derives from his

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\(^2\) Confirming this view, Kafka makes a couple of remarks in his letter which shows that he was aware that
he did not portray his father in a complete way, but spoke “only of the impression you made on the child”
coupled with some exaggeration and a bit of distortion (118). In his biography of Kafka, his best friend and
confidant Max Brod supports this idea by writing that “when confronted with the sober facts,” the content
of the letter “remains in spite of everything ambiguous and ambuscaded. … Here and there I feel the
perspective is distorted, unsupported assumptions are occasionally dragged in and made to fit the facts; on
what appear to be negligible, immediate reactions, a whole edifice is built up, the ramifications of which it
is impossible to grasp as a whole, which in fact in the end definitely turns out on its own axis and
contradicts itself, and yet manages to stand erect on its own foundations.” See *Franz Kafka: A Biography*
internal reservoir. Then, why does Kafka experience his father as a truly terrifying figure? Why does he continue his fight with him throughout his life? Why does he fail to break away from his influence?

What is important to realize is that the Oedipal solution Freud develops in the form of a strong, menacing father clearly does not work in Kafka’s case. Even though Kafka has the perfect embodiment of the Oedipal father right in front of his eyes, he still cannot possess full manhood and maturity. That is, having an omnipotent father does not guarantee the successful resolution of his Oedipus complex, and instead of settling the conflict, it sustains it. This tells us that we should redirect our attention to someone other than the father: the son. As Lacan observes, by building up an absolute master, the son wants to create an obstacle in the way of the satisfaction of his desire. He likes to believe that only if the father is gone out of his way, he will be free to gratify his desire. This means that the Oedipus complex is a symptom of the son. However, we should consider this symptom not as an individual symptom (manifestation of personal abnormality i.e. neurosis, hysteria), but as the very indication of a structural anomie. Understood in this way, the symptom is “a point of breakdown” that exposes the inconsistency and incoherence in the symbolic order.\(^3\) It is the surplus element that escapes the Name-of-the-Father’s suturation, and in this way becomes the proof that it has failed to function as a cork to fill in the lack in the Other. This is what Lacan means in his motto, “There is no Other of the Other,” which Žižek recaptures in his maxim, “The big Other no longer exists.” Then the question arises: what does exist? Lacan’s answer is the symptom. The only thing we are left with following the decline of symbolic structures and their

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efficiency is the symptom.⁴

*Father as Symptom as Sinthome*

The symptom is, as Lacan develops in the final years of his teaching, what allows the organization of *jouissance* around which an imagined identity is constructed. What better way to organize *jouissance* than to sustain the belief in the Name-of-the-Father? Hence, the existence of the symptom furnishes a guarantee for the existence of the Name-of-the-Father (without lack), which is itself a guarantee for subjective consistency. The hysterics’s symptoms, for example, demonstrate that he can see the truth that the Name-of-the-Father is not working properly, but he still desperately wants to maintain the belief that it is. In other words, the hysterics can see that the Name-of-the-Father has a lack, but the symptom gives him the possibility to repudiate what he sees and instead hold on to a fantasy construction that masks this troubling truth. In this way, in Verhaeghe’s words, “a belief in the symptom implies a belief in the Other of the Other, namely in the primal father [or the Name-of-the-Father] and the guarantee he is supposed to provide.”⁵ Why is such a belief in the father very important? It is because the father covers over the reality of the impossibility of *jouissance*. He hinders the subject from realizing this impossibility through the imposition of the threat of castration. Father as symptom, then, is what turns the impossibility of *jouissance* into a prohibition, and as such enables the subject to continue to desire in the pursuit of its fulfillment and completion. In this sense, symptom “is a form of satisfaction”: it is not a disease or a diagnosis, but a source of enjoyment.⁶

Kafka’s symptom is his father (aka father/Oedipus complex). Kafka creates a

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⁴ Ibid., 78.
⁶ Ibid., 95.
mental image of the man as a figure of unprecedented power, depicting him as a “tremendously authoritative man” and a master who has the capacity to “trample … [him] underfoot.” In this way, he believes his father to be the absolute Other of the Other—the one truly without lack. Through this aggrandizement, Kafka builds his father as the greatest obstacle in his way to a happier, more fulfilling life. He blames him for his feelings of low self-esteem, worthlessness, and guilt. In one place in the letter, he writes to his father, “[T]his feeling of being nothing that often dominates me … comes largely from your influence.” In another place, he bemoans, “I had lost my self-confidence where you were concerned, and in its place had developed a boundless sense of guilt.”

Even though he is under his overwhelming pressure, Kafka cannot free himself from his father’s influence by establishing a separate identity, one not defined by his conformity to his standards, but by his own parameters. As he expresses: “I have made some attempts at independence, attempts at escape with the very smallest success.” We have every right to doubt, of course, the sincerity of these attempts; that is, if Kafka really wants to break away from his father. Because by sustaining the belief that his father is the only reason for his failure and there is no way to get away from his control, Kafka creates a rationale for his existence. In his biography of Kafka, Peter-André Alt comes to a similar conclusion, summarized in Saul Friedländer’s words: Kafka “cultivated his fear of the father with obsessive pleasure because it was for him the very condition for his existence.” Kafka erected a self-imposed prohibition which stood in his way to full

7 Ibid., 118.
8 Ibid., 120.
9 Ibid., 144-5.
10 Ibid., 164.
enjoyment because this was his way (the only way) to ensure his enjoyment. The construction of a powerful father was his desperate attempt to cling to the last vestige of meaningful existence when he was too close to rolling down into the abyss of the Real.

Isn’t this desperate attempt on the part of Kafka to hold on to his father the very manifestation of the decline of the symbolic function of the father? Isn’t it an expression of Kafka’s fear of being confronted with the intensity of his desires (excessive jouissance) without the mediation of the Name-of-the-Father due to its structural failure? In the absence of an anchoring point, the subject finds himself at the mercy of the whim of his own desire, which is not desirable, as Lacan states, “[M]an’s desire is the desire of the Other”—desire to be possessed and mastered by the Other in order to evade the impossibility of desire. In the same way, without the imagined threat of his father’s castration, Kafka risks being invaded by the Real. It is because of this reason that he creates and sustains a mental image of his father as a tremendously powerful figure, someone who evokes Freud’s primal father construction in his physical and mental proportions. By seeing his father in this way, Kafka builds a dam that helps him keep the free floating of the Real in and out of his self and that prevents him from drifting into psychosis. This idea of the father as symptom is related to the idea of symptom as sinthome in Lacan’s nomenclature: a self-created fiction that “allows one to live.”

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being-in-the-world.”\textsuperscript{14} 

\textit{Sinthome} is the very thing we hold on to before falling into a psychotic breakdown. It is the last resort we have to avoid the debilitating deadlock of desire in the failure of the efficiency of the symbolic fiction. Thus, our attempt to find a symptom/\textit{sinthome} is our attempt at survival.

\textit{The Failure of Symbolization}

If \textit{sinthome} represents the final fortress before the encroachment of the Real upon the subject, then this signals that the subject has come too close to the Real, and dangerously so. Remnants of the Real, which cannot be covered up by the symbolic order, have seeped into the social domain in a manner of “the return of the repressed.” To go back to Kafka’s letter, we see an attempt on the part of Kafka to make his father assume the power and authority of the omnipotence his function as the Name-of-the-Father is supposed to confer upon him; however, this same attempt is nullified by the fact that his father is permeated with the Real. He cannot be an absolute ruler because his authority emanates directly from his person, and not from his sacred/symbolic title as the “father”—which instantly turns him into a “tyrant.”\textsuperscript{15} In other words, what Kafka experiences in his personal relationship with his father is an inability to see his father other than who he “really” is. Even though he wants to continue venerating his father, he cannot \textit{not} observe him as a disturbing figure: someone who condemns cursing and swearing in other people, but does it himself and who instructs his children on proper behavior at dinner table, but does not follow his own instructions. This makes Kafka’s father, in \v{Z}ižekian terms, an obscene \textit{jouisseur} “insofar as he is not yet ‘transubstantiated’

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\textsuperscript{14} \v{Z}ižek, \textit{The Sublime Object}, 81. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Kafka, “Letter to His Father,” 122.
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into a symbolic function and remains what psychoanalysis calls a ‘partial object.’” As Žižek explains in his reading of Kafka’s letter:

What bothers Kafka is the excessive presence of his father: he is too much alive, too obscenely intrusive. However, this father’s excessive presence is not a direct fact: it appears as such only against the background of the suspension of the father’s symbolic function. … [I]t is not that his father’s excessive vitality undermines his symbolic authority; it is rather, the other way round, namely, the very fact that Kafka is bothered by his father’s excessive vitality already presupposes the failure of symbolic authority. Therefore, Kafka’s failure to accept his father as a (dead) name (instead of “seeing” him in his person as indecent, vulgar, and unjust) is a structural failure: it is the failure of symbolic transubstantiation whereby father cannot become more than himself. Due to this failure, Kafka sees his father in unsubstantiated form as an obscene and intrusive father—as father-jouisseur who only seeks out his own enjoyment.

The failure of symbolic transubstantiation in the domain of authority is a sign of a broader failure of symbolization, which attests to the exposure of the lack in the “big Other.” This failure, which Eric Santner calls “investiture crisis,” is symptomatic of the breakdown of the symbolic resources in the late nineteenth-century. As Santner writes, these resources are what “human societies depend upon to assure their members that they are ‘legitimate’.” As he continues, “The rites and procedures of investiture whereby an individual is endowed with a socially intelligible status and filled with symbolic mandates

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corresponding to that status function not only as compelling reassurances for those individuals but for the society as well. The smooth functioning of these procedures assures the community that it, too, *exists*.”\(^\text{19}\) When these procedures stop functioning properly, it is experienced not only as social disaster, but also as psychological disorder, giving rise to such mental ailments as neurosis, hysteria, and psychosis. As Santner explains, “The social and political stability of a society as well as the psychological ‘health’ of its members would appear to be correlated to the efficacy of these symbolic operations.” As such, their collapse “can be experienced as the collapse of social space and the rites of institution into the most intimate core of one’s being. The feelings generated thereby are … anxieties not of absence and loss but of overproximity, loss of distance to some obscene and malevolent presence,” which explains Kafka’s affliction with the symptom of his father.\(^\text{20}\) Due to the failure of symbolization as screen masking the Real, Kafka is left pray to his father in his “Real” dimensions: a lawless intruder who does not know of any boundaries and limits.

We see the disorienting excess of the Real not only in Kafka’s relationship with his father as we extract from his letter, but also in almost all his writings which are full of insoluble riddles, obscure symbols, and ambiguous mysteries. In particular, *The Trial* depicts a nightmare world dominated by corrupt guards, obscene lawyers, and cruel torturers, a world which is stained by traumatic and excessive enjoyment that can hardly be contained. In his essay on Kafka, Walter Benjamin conveys this feeling of corruption through his depiction of the court officials as dirty, filthy, and lousy, and argues that the world of the officials and the world of the fathers are the same, sharing, as they do, decay

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 144-5.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., xii.
and degeneration: “There is much to indicate that the world of the officials and the world of the fathers are the same to Kafka. … [I]t consists of dullness, decay, and dirt. The father’s uniform is stained all over; his underwear is dirty. Filth is the element of officials.”21 Drawing on Benjamin’s reading, Eric Santner points to the rottenness of law: Kafka’s nightmare world “is a world … exposed to something rotten in law, but that exposure takes place from the opposite side—from the side of the judge rather than that of the supplicant to the law.”22 In this chapter, I will explore the manifestations of this rottenness in the domain of law in *The Trial* (1925) which, as I see it, tells the story of a world where symbolization—and symbolic paternal authority—has irrevocably failed. This failure renders the hole in the symbolic order too visible, which is to say visible precisely in the novel’s nonsense and absurdity that make the readers feel disturbed and disoriented all the time by shaking their sense of certainty. In the following section, I will offer a noncontingent reading of the symptoms of the suspension of the Name-of-the-Father in *The Trial* as they manifest themselves in the domain of law. They reveal that there is an unbridgeable gap between what law appears to be (universal, neutral, consistent) and what law is (incomplete, incompetent, immoral). In the glaring existence of this gap, law loses its meaning and turns into an irrational joke that makes sense to neither the protagonist nor the reader. With the erosion of its ideological construction of meaning, it becomes the spawning ground of transgression and obscenity which smear the so-called “legal duties” of the guards, judges, and lawyers. In the next section, I will provide a contextual background for an understanding of *The Trial* within its historico-

political framework. Drawing on one of the dominant streams of interpretation that sees Kafka’s work as a prophecy of totalitarianism in general and Nazism in particular, I will look at how *The Trial* uncannily foresees some of the ghastly effects of the collapse of symbolic authority by highlighting its subterranean resonances with the totalitarian state apparatus of the Third Reich.

**WHAT YOU SEE IS THE ONLY THING YOU GET:**
**IRRATIONAL AND IMMORAL LAW IN *THE TRIAL***

In one of the most famous openings of any novel in modern literature, the narrator of *The Trial* makes a disquieting speculation: “Someone must have slandered Joseph K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested.” When he wakes up at 8 am as usual to go to work, Joseph K. finds two officials in his bedroom who are there to announce his arrest. Even though this sounds irrational to K. based on his logical reasoning that he did not commit any illegal act, he still cannot clear himself from the gratuitous guilt inflicted upon him. Consequently, he finds himself enveloped in a bizarre proceeding in which he seeks to prove his innocence without knowing what he is guilty of. In an act of resistance, K. tries to find out the nature of his crime to make sense of his arrest, but no matter how hard he tries, he remains in the clutches of the court, waiting for a rational explanation that never quite materializes.

For a time period that stretches to a year, K. endeavors to discover his crime which simultaneously means his acquittal. Gradually, his endeavor turns into an attempt to apprehend the system of law (and the system of society) that operates on a different plane than he does. Throughout this attempt, we observe that there is something incomprehensible and unintelligible about the legal structures—something incapable of

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being reduced to rational explanation. Hence, we identify that there is “something rotten in law,” which, regardless of the fact that it normally remains hidden, manifests itself exuberantly in *The Trial*. This “rottenness” indicates that the law is not only rational, objective, and neutral. It sustains an image of a universal mechanism that ensures justice and equality, but this image works to obliterate its inherent moral impurity. The law in *The Trial* is, then, radically split between its public face and its disavowed supplementary force, and this is conveyed through the incommensurability between the visible action (statement) and the underlying meaning (enunciation), through which we hear the unconscious speak. And when the unconscious speaks, what we get is sheer corruption and decay, which is nothing less than what a society in degradation generates as it goes through the collapse of its values and institutions at the peak of its development. In the novel, this finds manifestation in the insensible eruption of the Real—which can neither be contained nor comprehended—into the domain of law, causing its infiltration with obscenity and turning its representatives into perverted superego figures who only know of enjoyment. Thereupon, *The Trial* becomes emblematic of our world in which symbolic paternal authority has lost its performative power, and in its aftermath, the Real takes a hold of the social and discursive structures.

*The Impenetrable Door of the Law*

There is a story in *The Trial* about a man who waits at the door of the Law and dies at the door of the Law, believing all this time that the doorkeeper guarding the entrance will admit him inside it. It is told by a priest who seeks to explain to Joseph K. the nature of the court that decides to proceed with his trial. The story—known as “Before the
Law”—is found, as the priest informs K., “in the introductory texts to the Law” and illustrates the way the Law works (or does not work) in the bizarre world of the book, and, by extension, in our world, where the inefficiency of the Law becomes symptomatic of the failure of the symbolic paternal function to sustain a meaningful, coherent, and comprehensible sense of self and environment.

According to the story, a countryman goes to the door of the Law and asks the doorkeeper permission to enter through it. “It’s possible,” answers the doorkeeper, “but not now.” Taken by surprise at this answer—because “the Law should be accessible to everyone at any time”—the countryman nevertheless does not fight with the doorkeeper, and decides to wait for a better time for trying his chance. Meanwhile, the doorkeeper informs him that he is “only the lowest doorkeeper” and there are other stronger guards inside the Law. This confounds the countryman, but does not dishearten him, so he decides to stay and wait. In this way, days, months, and years pass as he continues to hope that one day he will be able to pass through the door of the Law. During this time, the countryman memorizes every small detail of the doorkeeper. He comes to know the fleas on his fur coat, and even begs them to help him persuade the doorkeeper to change his decision. However, he soon loses his strength and energy. He grows very old and knows that he cannot last long. Finally, just before he dies, all of his experiences before the Law condense into a single question that he has never asked the doorkeeper: “Everyone strives to reach the Law … [H]ow does it happen, then, that in all these years no one but me has requested admittance?” The doorkeeper sees the man is about to give his last breath, so he hastily answers: “No one else could gain admittance here, because

this entrance was meant solely for you. I’m going to go and shut it now.” This determines both the end of the doorkeeper’s service and the story.

The priest tells K. that there are two competing interpretations of the story. He delivers the first interpretation against K.’s claim that the doorkeeper is an imposter because he deceives the countryman by giving him the impression that he can be accepted into the Law. He tells K. that this is not so much a deception as an effort on the part of the doorkeeper to fulfill his duty:

[H]e was only a doorkeeper and as such fulfilled his duty … The story contains two important statements by the doorkeeper concerning admittance to the Law, one at the beginning and one at the end. The one passage says: ‘that he can’t grant him admittance now’; and the other: ‘this entrance was meant solely for you.’ If a contradiction existed between these two statements you would be right, and the doorkeeper would have deceived the man. But there is no contradiction.”

According to the priest, the reason why what the doorkeeper says does not count as deception is simply that he was implementing his duty. At the moment, his duty was to turn the man away, so he carried it out, and he did even more than that, too. As the priest expresses, “One could almost argue that the doorkeeper exceeded his duty by holding out to the man the prospect of a possible future entry.” It is not that his duty required the doorkeeper to exceed what was expected of him, but that the exceeding came from his very character, however disguised under the form of duty. In other words, when the doorkeeper dons the uniform of a doorkeeper, he becomes someone else: the voice of the Law. As such, whatever comes from his mouth is deemed as the direct word of the Law,

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26 Ibid., 217-8.
27 Ibid., 218; my emphasis.
and considered a part of his duty or title. In this way, by ascending into the domain of the Law, the doorkeeper becomes superior not only to the countryman but to his “very own” self. Everything he utters, by definition, becomes the expression of the highest authority of the Law.

Against this reading, the priest proposes the second interpretation of the story, according to which it is the doorkeeper who is deceived. As he explains:

[The second interpretation] is based on … the simple-mindedness of the doorkeeper. It’s said that he doesn’t know the interior of the Law, but only the path he constantly patrols back and forth before it. His ideas about the interior are considered childish, and it’s assumed that he himself fears the very thing with which he tries to frighten the man. Indeed he fears it more than the man, for the latter wants nothing more than to enter, even after he’s been told about the terrifying doorkeepers within, while the doorkeeper has no wish to enter, or at any rate we hear nothing about it.\(^{28}\)

The doorkeeper follows his duty, but he does not know anything about “the interior of the Law.” This means that he follows a duty whose content he has no idea about. He simply obeys orders, guarding the gate and preventing the countryman from entering through it. However, while obeying the “exterior” orders, he does not get any access to their “interior” meaning: why he needs to patrol the door, or why he needs to bar the countryman’s way. In the priest’s words, “[H]e knows nothing about the appearance and significance of the interior, and is himself deceived about it.”\(^{29}\) He is deceived exactly because his duty does not have any interior: any content, any essence, any meaning. For

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 220.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
this reason, he is in a position lower than the countryman. For, even though the countryman cannot enter the Law, he is a free man. He stays at the entrance of the Law on his own free will: he can go wherever he wishes and do whatever he wants, but he chooses to stay. The doorkeeper, on the other hand, is a bound man. He is “bound to his post by his office; he is not permitted to go elsewhere outside, but to all appearances he is not permitted to go inside either, even if he wishes to. … It can be assumed that for many years, as long as it takes for a man to mature, his service has been an empty formality.”

According to the second interpretation, then, the doorkeeper is not superior to the countryman by virtue of being the mouthpiece through which the Law speaks. Instead, he is subordinate to him, but he does not know it. He obeys the demands of the Law as a part of his duty, which is only “an empty formality,” that is to say, without meaning and purpose, and as such glaringly absurd.

Even though the two interpretations of the story appear conflicting, one can inquire whether they also complement each other—whether the former intimates the latter. As a matter of fact, the doorkeeper’s superiority and subordination both originate from the same source: his call of duty. According to the first interpretation, the doorkeeper is superior because he is not just an ordinary man; he is transubstantiated into the heteronomic figure of the Law. In Žižekian terms, this makes the doorkeeper a man “more than himself”: insofar as he becomes the figure of the Law, the doorkeeper is no longer the doorkeeper, he is someone more than the doorkeeper himself. He embodies some non-X—referring to his symbolic function as the signifier of the Law—which

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30 Ibid., 221.
31 Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (London: Verso, 2008), 133.
makes him more present in his abstract duty than his physical presence. However, exactly because he becomes a signifier, the doorkeeper loses touch with the referent, the real content, “the interior of the Law.” This is what the second interpretation draws upon, since it focuses on how the doorkeeper’s duty turns into a mindless obedience to the authority of law. When the doorkeeper assumes a symbolic title, he acts as an appendix of that symbolic title. As such, he is reduced to a form devoid of substance. Therefore, he becomes subservient to both the countryman and the Law itself. At the end, what makes the doorkeeper superior in one interpretation and subordinate in the other is the same obedience to duty. Precisely because he obeys his duty (in a way he becomes his duty), the doorkeeper transcends the materiality of his body through the prosthesis of his symbolic title. However, again, precisely because he obeys his duty, he turns into a form (because he is a signifier) with an empty content.

Does not the confluence of the superior and subordinate positions of the doorkeeper in Kafka’s parable allude to the splitting of the single notion of law into two separate units: the public, symbolic Law (the Law of the Name-of-the-Father) and its hidden, obscene supplement? Does it not, in this way, indicate that behind the public face of the symbolic Law, there is a superego injunction to transgress? The interpretative dilemma raised by the parable presciently points to the structural crisis of modernity when the neutral face of the Law fails to mask its extralegal component, and this gives rise to the saturation of the entire domain of law by the obscene superego. In other words, when the symbolic structures lose their efficiency—when the Name-of-the-Father as fiction cannot be sustained any longer—the Real rises to the surface with an excessive, eruptive force. If we go back to the parable, we can see an illustration of this. The doorkeeper’s duty is imposed upon him by the Law, so its authority cannot be questioned. However, since the
Law does not function properly, the duty has no real content to provide meaning to the doorkeeper’s actions and utterances. Ultimately, this meaninglessness produces an excess or surplus of signification, whereby the doorkeeper can do and say whatever he wants, but as long as he wears his uniform and carries the insignia of the Law, all his actions are justified as part of his act of duty. For example, when the doorkeeper gives extra information to the countryman, implying that he might be allowed to enter the Law later, he performs a surplus duty which is not outperformance but misuse (he uses his authority to humiliate the countryman). Is this “surplus duty” not the obscene superego supplement of the Law? We can actually see in the enjoyment the doorkeeper gets from exceeding his duty the direct representation of the surplus enjoyment derived from his strict adherence to the Law.

For its universal applicability, Kafka’s parable “Before the Law” is viewed as “the parable of the [twentieth] century—comparable … to Andersen’s story ‘The King’s New Clothes’—the parable of the nineteenth century.” While “The King’s New Clothes” shows us—through the child’s statement that the King has no clothes on—what is behind the mask of ideological reality by laying open its falsity, “Before the Law” shows us that the real revelation is not what is behind the mask, but, in Žižek’s words, “the ‘efficacy’ of the mask … [that] [i]f we ‘tear away the mask’ we will not encounter the hidden truth; on the contrary, we will lose the invisible ‘truth’ which dwells in the mask.” Thus, “Before the Law” conceives what “The King’s New Clothes” renders as symptom as sinthome: the mask—the symbolic lie—is the only truth we have; it is “literally our only substance,

33 Žižek, For They Know, 247.
the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the
subject.” In the story, the Law is exposed as meaningless, devoid of any content or
essence, but it is still adhered to—even though mindlessly—by the doorkeeper because it
is the only thing that gives substance to his existence; therefore it is necessary for his
survival. This is what the priest highlights at the end of his long discussion with K.:
“[Y]ou don’t have to consider everything true, you just have to consider it necessary,” to
which K. responds: “A melancholy conclusion … it turns lying into a universal
principle.” In her essay on Kafka, Hannah Arendt argues that it is precisely this
“appearance of necessity” which reveals the force of the bureaucratic machinery K. gets
cought. Its force is such that “[l]ying for the sake of necessity appears as something
sublime,” and obedience without faith in what you do (in other words functionality)
appears as an act of omnicompetence. In such an environment, the category of truth
becomes inappropriate if not impractical and preposterous. What remains is an empty law
which is inadequate in its representation of truth, which appears as an arbitrary entity
without substance, and which acquires authority through force, particularly the force of its
empty and tautological injunction “Do your duty!” At the end, the door of the Law holds
the illusion that it is impenetrable, but, as it happens, the reality is more brutal than the
illusion. The belief in the impenetrability of the door is the sinthome, the last support the

34 Žižek, The Sublime Object, 75.
35 Kafka, The Trial, 223.
37 This is the categorical imperative of Kantian moral law. According to Kant, to act morally, you do
something because it is your duty. This moral duty is expressed in a categorical imperative: “Do this.” If
you ask, “Why do I do this?” the answer is simply because it is your duty. However, as psychoanalysis
shows us herein, in this emptied out, pure injunction to do one’s duty lies a secret, hidden motive to enjoy
one’s desire. The imperative to do your duty gives you an excuse to evade the responsibility for your
perverse acts. We will discuss this point in more details in the following sections.
countryman (and perhaps the doorkeeper) holds onto before discovering the fact that there is nothing inside it.

*Own Your Guilt—Or Die!*

The transformation in the nature of the Law generates a transformation in the nature of guilt. When the Law turns from substantive content into pure form, the sense of guilt we feel changes from indelible shame to indefinite indictment. It evolves into a purposeless and vague feeling we continually experience: we feel guilty without knowing what we are guilty of. Gilles Deleuze inquires into the interplay of this feeling of guilt with law:

The law no longer has its foundation in some higher principle from which it would derive its authority, but that it is self-grounded and valid solely by virtue of its own form ... Clearly THE LAW, as defined by its pure form, without substance or object of any determination whatsoever, is such that no one knows nor can know what it is. It operates without making itself known. It defines a realm of transgression where one is already guilty, and where one oversteps the bounds without knowing what they are, as in the case of Oedipus. Even guilt and punishment do not tell us what the law is, but leave it in a state of indeterminacy equalled only by the extreme specificity of the punishment.\(^{38}\)

The Law is stripped of its ethical underpinnings because of the separation of its positive content from its (empty, frustratingly arbitrary) form. Without reference to a higher principle, which serves as a bridge to connect the two components, the Law takes the form of an unconditional injunction to do one’s duty. However, this injunction also

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contains the impossibility to do one’s duty because its content is vacuous (without any reference to its purpose). Thus, even though one tries his best, he can never live up to the unreasonable expectations of his duty. This is why, under the authority of the Law one is doomed to always be “a priori guilty”:

[S]ince, in the case of the Law, its Dass-Sein (the fact of the Law) precedes its Was-Sein (what this Law is), the subject finds himself in a situation in which, although he knows there is a Law, he never knows (and a priori cannot know) what this Law is—a gap forever separates the Law from its positive incarnations. The subject is thus a priori, in his very existence, guilty: guilty without knowing what he is guilty of.\(^3^9\)

Whether he obeys the Law or not, the subject is always guilty, guilty in advance and guilty interminably, because he can never know where he stands with respect to the Law’s incomprehensible and irrational rule.

*The Trial* presents us in the protagonist Joseph K.’s absurd dealings with the figures of the Law a narrative embodiment of this sense of guilt. From the moment of being arrested in his bedroom, K. never stops questioning his alleged accusation. When the two guards inform him that he is arrested, the first thing K. does is to make sense of his sudden arrest, by asking them questions such as “Who are you?” or “Why am I being held?” in response to which he receives no answers. When he demands an answer, the guards tell K. that their duty does not concern appraising the accused of the nature of the charge against him, but consists only of the act of letting him know that he is guilty. They expect K. to do the same, to follow their orders and not ask any questions. “Good

heavens!” says one guard, “you just cannot accept your situation.” “You’re behaving worse than a child. What is it you want? Do you think you can bring your whole damn trial to a quick conclusion by discussing your identity and arrest warrant with your guards?” says the other guard.\(^{40}\) They tell K. that they are only “lowly employees” who barely know about the workings of the legal system. They seem as clueless as K. about how the rule of law operates—even though they are a part of it—but they nevertheless seem content with fulfilling their duties by providing obedient service to the Law.

When after some time their supervisor comes into K.’s room, K. gets excited about the prospect of finding a rational man who can give answers to his questions; however, he soon sees that the supervisor is no different than the guards in terms of his lack of knowledge of the details of his arrest. When K. addresses him the same inquiry, he gets a similar answer: “These gentlemen and I are merely marginal figures in your affair, and in fact know almost nothing about it. … If, as a result, I can’t answer your questions either, I can at least give you some advice: think less about us and what’s going to happen to you, and instead think more about yourself. And don’t make such a fuss about how innocent you feel; it disturbs the otherwise not unfavorable impression you make.”\(^{41}\) The most K. can get from the supervisor is a piece of advice not to question his case and to act compliantly. To K.’s dismay, neither the supervisor nor the guards seem to know or care about the higher significance of their actions. They mindlessly obey the obligations of their duty without an understanding of how the Law works. The only explanation as to the functioning of the Law comes from one of the guards when he says that the Law “doesn’t seek out guilt among the general population, but … is attracted by guilt and has to send us

\(^{40}\) Kafka, \textit{The Trial}, 8.  
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 14.
This bizarre explanation captures the essence of what Žižek means by being “a priori guilty.” The Law is there to let people know of a fact that they are (or should be) already well aware of: that they are guilty, guilty without having done anything wrong, guilty for their very existence.

When the Law notifies you of your guilt, what it expects from you is, of course, to immediately own your guilt. When the guards show up at his bedroom to inform him of his arrest, K. is expected to take it placidly as if he was waiting for it all along. But this is not what K. does. He instead defies the Law by saying, “I don’t know that law.” He insists on finding validity and reason in law; and as he fails in this quest, he refuses to own his guilt. For example, on his first cross-examination, K. vocally criticizes the way his proceeding is conducted. He tells the court that he was very much bothered by the way the guards treated him—they attempted to eat his breakfast, steal his clothes and undergarments, and strip him of his money—and the way they ignored his plea to know about his arrest. He then avows the corruption of the guards as a sign of the unscrupulous, incompetent legal system in which everyone from high to low officials is equally nonsensical:

[T]here can be no doubt that … there exists an extensive organization … that not only engages corrupt guards, inane inspectors, and examining magistrates who are at best mediocre, but that supports as well a system of judges of all ranks … And the purpose of this extensive organization, gentlemen? It consists of arresting innocent people and introducing senseless proceedings against them.44

42 Ibid., 8-9.
43 Ibid., 9.
44 Ibid., 50.
K. finishes his speech by announcing that he is innocent because he has acted all along with the dictates of reason. By doing so, he naively expects that he will win the support of the people in the courtroom. However, he soon realizes that when the crowd were applauding him, they were only pretending to give him false confidence. All in all, K. tries to convince the court of his innocence by drawing on reason. However, the court wants K. to own his guilt even though it does not make “sense.” This is the only way that the Law can function, or at least maintain the appearance of functioning. Therefore, what is at stake in K.’s inability to own his guilt is the Law’s very failure to own its own guilt.

According to Žižek, Joseph K.’s inability to own his guilt is a sign that ideological interpellation does not work in the realm of the book. If we are to understand interpellation, following Žižek, as Lacan’s letter that always arrives at its destination, we can contend that the letter hardly ever makes it to its addressee in The Trial. For Louis Althusser, interpellation acts in a manner of the policeman (or teacher, priest etc.) calling to a person on the street: “Hey you there!”—it asks the person to recognize himself in the call. When the person turns around in response, he is interpellated and thus becomes a subject because “he has recognized that the call was ‘really’ addressed to him.”45 In Althusser’s account, then, interpellation is followed almost instantly by identification. However, Žižek points out that for the interpellative letter to arrive at its destination (interpellation > identification), the subject needs to recognize and accept it as the letter. This is, as Ernst Pawel writes, also a precondition for “obedience to the spirit of the

law.”

However, this is not always the case (as it is not the case with K.). Žižek takes into account the sense of guilt as a part of this process. He writes that when the subject is called “Hey you there!” he turns around because he is afraid of being found guilty: “[W]hy me, what does the policeman want from me? I’m innocent, I was just minding my own business and strolling around.” Therefore, interpellation, according to Žižek, is accompanied by “an indeterminate Kafkaesque feeling of ‘abstract’ guilt, a feeling that, in the eyes of Power, I am a priori terribly guilty of something, although it is not possible for me to know what precisely I am guilty of, and for that reason—since I don’t know what I am guilty of—I am even more guilty; or, more pointedly, it is in this very ignorance of mine that my true guilt consists.”

When the subject does not understand what the Other wants from him, he cannot identify with the call of the Other, so he is filled with a feeling of abstract, indeterminate guilt. The subject is expected to overcome this sense of guilt by recognizing himself in the Other, which enables him to achieve some kind of redemption by recognizing his own guilt.

The stage of identification—which “naturally” follows interpellation—is what is missing in Joseph K.’s being summoned by the Law. Since he cannot identify with the call of the Other/Law, K. is left with a primitive sense of guilt. It is important to note that this sense of guilt is different than the guilt (as psychoanalysis often understands it) that originates in the subject’s entrance into the symbolic order: when the subject internalizes the authority of the Other and gives up his desire for the desire of the Other, he is filled with a sense of guilt. This sense of guilt enables his enjoyment in the dissatisfaction of his

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desire. Therefore, it is constitutive: it is both the root of the subject’s discontent and the cause of his enjoyment. However, this constitutive sense of guilt is different than the abstract, indeterminate sense of guilt that is so characteristic of Kafka’s *The Trial*. The latter is a symptom of the failure of interpellative identification. It “confronts the subject with an impenetrable call that precisely prevents identification, recognition of one’s symbolic mandate.”\(^{48}\) When the subject fails to recognize himself in the call of the Other, he cannot properly be integrated into the symbolic order. He, thus, cannot properly be subjectified. What is at stake, then, in the impasse of interpellation in *The Trial* is the structural failure of the Name-of-the-Father, the locus of truth and meaning. When it fails to act as a quilting point—by halting the inherent sliding of signification—the correlation between form (the signifier) and meaning (signified) becomes increasingly illogical. Because of this, the subject finds himself caught in an irrational and senseless signification process and therefore cannot answer the call of the big Other. Joseph K., who endeavors to extract meaning out of the most absurd and incoherent circumstances, who takes for granted the existence of the Name-of-the-Father, and who, as such, does not answer the call of the irrational law and own his guilt, finds himself executed at the end, and dies, in his own words, “[l]ike a dog!"\(^{49}\) Arendt reads K.’s squalid execution as an indication of his submission to law as necessary (his giving up of the search for a meaningful ground constituted by the Other) and, for this reason, “anything more charitable can hardly be said than the words which Kafka concludes *The Trial*: ‘It was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him’.”\(^{50}\)

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\(^{48}\) Ibid., 61.

\(^{49}\) Kafka, *The Trial*, 231.

\(^{50}\) Arendt, “Franz Kafka,” 71.
The Law of the Obscene Superego

When law turns into an empty form, what is left of it is pure force. In other words, when law becomes a tautological truth: “law is law,” it is not experienced as natural and spontaneous but enforced; that is to say, its otherwise hidden violence under the guise of its public pretense is brought into view. In this case, its sanctioning power remains—it can tell you that you are guilty—but because there is no recourse to its meaning, it appears as pure punishment. Žižek finds at the core of this punitive quality of law a secret injunction to enjoy: “enjoyment itself, which we experience as ‘transgression’, is in its innermost status something imposed, ordered—when we enjoy, we never do it ‘spontaneously,’ we always follow a certain injunction.”

Jodi Dean similarly points to the intimate interrelationship between law’s command and its imposition of enjoyment: “[T]here is no difference between the injunctions to ‘do your duty’ and ‘enjoy.’ Why? Because duty can provide an excuse that allows one to get off without taking responsibility: ‘Oh, I didn’t intend to harm or humiliate anyone; I was doing it for the good of the community, for their own good …. I was just doing my duty.’” The parable “Before the Law” offers a perfect example of the infiltration of duty with enjoyment in the way the doorkeeper makes the countryman cling to the false hope that one day he might be admitted into the Law. Of course, the doorkeeper knows that he will never be admitted, yet he does not refrain from “exceeding” his duty by relaying surplus information to the countryman. Behind this act done within the confines of duty we can see that the doorkeeper is guided by the impulse for enjoyment, for tricking or humiliating the countryman. This is a sign that the Law no longer serves a higher

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51 Žižek, For They Know, 9.
52 Jodi Dean, Žižek’s Politics (New York: Routledge, 2006), 156.
purpose; rather it serves to fulfill superego’s want of enjoyment. Therefore, as Dean writes, “Procuring enjoyment and obeying the law are the same thing [because] the law is stained with … [the] obscene [superego] supplement.”

In *The Trial*, the stain of the obscene superego supplement of law becomes too apparent to be covered over by the symbolic mask. Since the symbolic mask/Law (the level of ideological meaning) has subsided, its uncanny double (the level of superegoic enjoyment) has effectively taken its place, becoming the primary (and primitive) force that runs through the hideous world of guards, judges, and lawyers. In “normal” circumstances, the irrational and obscene element of law is repressed through the ideological meaning of the Law. However, the novel signals toward a lack of such repression. When there is no repression—when the gap is not sutured—what we get is the Real dimension of law. What does it look like? Žižek writes that when law does not prohibit, but instead encourages transgression by giving us the choice of doing whatever we want, it inflicts enjoyment through its superego supplement. In this sense, “The Kafkian Law is not prohibitive, not even intrusive or imposing: its repeated message to the subject is ‘You are free to do whatever you want! Don’t ask me for orders!’—which, of course, is the perfect superego formula.” By telling us we can do whatever we want, law gives us the image that it does not care about our actions; as such, it maintains a neutral, distant stance. However, in this very indifference lies its hidden omnipresence. Žižek calls this “mischievous neutrality” a quality of the superego and reads the priest’s explanation of the workings of law when he says “The Court makes no claims upon you. It receives you when you come and it relinquishes you when you go,” as the perfect

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51 Ibid.
The law pretends as if it does not care about what its subjects do or where they go, but in reality it follows them everywhere like a shadowy double. According to Žižek, the perplexity of the subject being confronted by this “mischievous neutrality” of the superego is caused by the fact that he “misunderstands the imperative of enjoyment which resounds here and perspires through all the pores of its ‘neutral’ surface.” Since the subject is deceived by law’s neutral appearance (its public face), he misinterprets its indifference as lack of control or compulsion (which he understands as the “enjoyment” of freedom), but in reality law is everywhere, its ghostly shadow, the superego, “resounds” and “perspires” through all its pores (which renders “enjoyment” impossible).

We see an example of this “mischievous neutrality” of law in *The Trial* throughout the whole trial process of Joseph K. From the opening till the end of the novel, we never see a “real” authority vested with the power to talk on behalf of the law. Everyone from the lowly guards to the high judges seems to be a trivial figure who is not knowledgeable or wise enough to know about the inner workings of the legal system. The lack of adept handling of the situation—and the lack of a palpable master—makes K. question the significance of his legal case. He feels unsure that he should take anything seriously. That is why he treats the whole process as a joke with a slightly teasing attitude. But, is it not exactly what the law wants? By assuming an appearance of lack of supervision and control, the law is telling K.: “You don’t have to take me seriously.” However, it does not shy away from punishing him for not following its opaque, obscure commands. Then, it is as if the law is telling K.: “You didn’t have to take me seriously, but you still have to pay

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55 Žižek, *For They Know*, 237.
56 Ibid.
the price for it.’” Whatever you do—whether you obey or you do not—you are always on the hinge of law. This mischievous quality of law is graphically illustrated in a painting which K. sees in Titorelli’s studio. It depicts a judge sitting on a chair in front of an allegorical figure who wears a blindfold over her eyes and holds scales in her hands, and thus, as K. recognizes, represents the figure of justice. However, the wings of her heels also show that she represents the goddess of victory, and as K. looks more closely, he realizes that “it scarcely still recalled the goddess of Justice, or even that of Victory, now it looked just like the goddess of the Hunt.”

The implication of the painting, according to Theodore Ziolkowski, is “consistent with the principles of the legal system K. has encountered—a justice that pursues its quarry without remorse until it achieves victory.”

Behind the appearance of justness, what the law really does is hunt, stalk, and ambush its subjects. Moreover, as Ziolkowski makes clear, though it chases down the wrongdoers, the statue of Justitia itself is blindfolded, so it is devoid of any sight (and insight into its workings). If it removed its “blindfold for greater clarity of vision,” it would have to “forsake the winks on her ankles in order to hold her balances steady.” The problem with the law in The Trial is that it chooses to remain blindfolded, but it still refuses to stay put in order to bring the scales into perfect balance. Thus, it turns into a pure hunter, running after its preys without knowing what it is hunting for or why.

The mischievous neutrality of law is coupled by its deceptive anonymity—the fact that it never acknowledges its presence. After K. is informed about his arrest, he is never taken to the police station or taken under custody. Instead, he is told to carry on his

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57 Kafka, The Trial, 146.
59 Ibid., 240.
“normal routine” as if nothing has happened. When the inspector says: “That’s enough for today, and we can take our leave, temporarily of course. No doubt you wish to go to the bank now?” K. asks in astonishment: “To the bank? … ‘How can I go to the bank if I’m under arrest?’” The inspector replies: “[Y]ou’ve misunderstood me; you’re under arrest, certainly, but that’s not meant to keep you from carrying on your profession. Nor are you to be hindered in the course of your ordinary life.” The law gives out the image that it is not watching; however, it is everywhere when it is nowhere; there is no escape from its radar. As Friendländer explains, from the very beginning till the very end of the novel, K. is creepily watched by an audience who, almost with a divine premonition, seems to know about his trial, and who, almost with utmost secrecy, seems to work for the court as spies:

At the very beginning of The Trial, as Joseph K. wakes up and before he has heard about his arrest, he notices ‘from his pillow the old lady opposite, who seemed to be peering at him with a curiosity unusual even for her…’ … Soon there are three observers at the window on the other side of the street, and the two warders have been joined by an inspector. Worse, as K. discovered to his amazement, three clerks from his bank have been present throughout his interrogation by the inspector, without his noticing them. And so it goes, to the very end of the novel, when the two men who execute the death sentence watch his last moment.

Under the law’s pretense of invisibility lies the fact that it is discomfortingly omnipresent—that it is what Santner calls a Luder, “obscenely involved in the affairs of

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60 Kafka, The Trial, 16-7.
61 Friendländer, Franz Kafka, 115.
sentient human beings: their sexual pleasures, their most private thoughts and dreams, even their bowel movements.”

Not just law but the figures of law are marked with the same obscene quality. The surplus of the superego over the law manifests itself as the surplus of pleasure over the legal duties of officials: guards, inspectors, judges, lawyers, and so on. For example, the guards offer K. to take care of his nightshirt and undergarments until his case is concluded in his favor. However, K. knows that they are actually after his possessions. Under the façade of legitimacy—under their “beyond-duty” offer—they are obscenely greedy for money. Their duty, then, is just there for their enjoyment. However, even when K. discloses the guards’ corruption to the examining judge and they are punished with flogging, the legal order does not seem to ensure justice. At this point, as Santner writes, “the performative force that pertains, at some level, to all institutions and the social facts they sponsor, has begun to leak beyond its ‘normally’ circumscribed space and to dissolve the institution’s capacity to provide a credible context of meaningful reality … which expands into a general state of rottenness and decay.” The law, even when trying to appear just, fails to be fair and reasonable. Since its symbolic mask, or performative force, has disappeared, it appears as nothing but sheer absurdity, “rottenness and decay,” imbued with an obscene enjoyment that manifests itself in the (sexual) act of flogging.

Another scene that represents the obscene enjoyment of law as literally as possible is the one that takes place during K.’s self-defense. As he tries to prove his innocence, K. is interrupted by “a shriek from the other end of the hall … It was the washerwoman … [A] man had pulled her into a corner by the door and pressed her to himself. But she

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62 Santner, My Own Private, 62.
63 Ibid., 43.
wasn’t shrieking, it was the man; he had opened his mouth wide and was staring up toward the ceiling.”

This description of the act of sexual intercourse at the court, as Žižek writes, “marks the moment of the eruption of the traumatic real, and the error of K. consists in overlooking the solidarity between this obscene disturbance and the Court.”

This obscene incident does not happen to be at the court; it is because it is the court that it takes place. In other words, it is a materialization of the stain of the obscene superego on the domain of law. K’s error is “to address the Court, the Other of the law, as a homogenous entity, attainable by means of consistent argument, whereas the Court can only return him an obscene smile.”

K.’s insistence on defending reason against a court that is vulgar and volatile is like sailing against a wind that carries nothing but dirt and filth. The judges are lustful. As K. finds out, they glance through pornographic pictures such as the one of a couple, a man and a woman “sitting naked on a divan” and read novels entitled “The Torments Grete Suffered at the Hands of Her Husband Hans.”

The lawyers are corrupt. Their main role is to “push their way in, bribing people and pumping them for information.”

The painter Titorelli is surrounded with little girls in a way suggests some kind of perversion. Therefore, the appearance of the signifier of law is just an attempt—which is not a very good one indeed—to mask the true nature of human beings: their obscenities, impurities, and vices. When the symbolic law fails to suture the inconsistency at its core, what smiles to our face from the crack is the superego: the moral agency in name alone that in reality serves only to itself, to fulfill its own selfish desires.

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64 Kafka, *The Trial*, 51.
66 Ibid.
67 Kafka, *The Trial*, 57.
68 Ibid., 115.
Therefore, smeared by this obscene agency, the law becomes an absurd, illogical, and incoherent jargon penetrated with enjoyment.

**THE PARASITE OF SOCIETY:**
**KAFKA’S PROPHECY AND THE ANTI-SEMITIC NAZI IDEOLOGY**

Kafka biographer Frederick R. Karl notes, “Except for occasional remarks, Kafka seemed almost indifferent to the historical occurrences, yet through his vision he captured the historic moment in his work, creatively responding to every aspect of decline, disintegration, and artistic revival.”  

This rather paradoxical situation—an ostensible unconcern with the present and a visionary prediction of the future—occasioned two main streams in the interpretation of Kafka’s work. One of them views Kafka as a writer detached from his social and political environment, producing works that deal with universal and metaphysical questions about the meaning of existence. The other one views him as a writer of his time, deeply embedded in its historical conjunctures and concrete political problems. Within the latter stream, there is a predominant line of thought which is to see his work, especially *The Trial*, “as a prophecy of totalitarian dictatorship in general and of Nazism in particular.”

The most prominent representatives of this line of thought are Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Hannah Arendt. In a letter he wrote to his friend Gershom Scholem in 1938, which would itself prove prophetic, Benjamin portrays Kafka as having potent prescience about the cataclysmic fate of European Jews: “Kafka’s world … is the exact complement of his age, which is

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preparing to do away with considerable segments of this planet’s population. In all likelihood, the public experience corresponding to this private one of Kafka’s will be available to the masses only on the occasion of their extermination.”\textsuperscript{72} According to Benjamin, such premonition did not require Kafka to be a prophet or a soothsayer, anticipating what is to come next, but it required him to have a good ear. As he wrote, “Kafka was not far-sighted, and had no ‘visionary gift.’ Kafka listened attentively to tradition—and he who strains to listen does not see.”\textsuperscript{73} For Arendt, on the other hand, who wrote a short essay on Kafka ten years later in 1948, Kafka did not have to listen too hard to anticipate the Holocaust because it was obvious: “In a dissolving society which blindly follows the natural course of ruin, catastrophe can be foreseen.”\textsuperscript{74} Therefore, “Kafka’s so-called prophecies were but a sober analysis of underlying structures which today have come into open.”\textsuperscript{75} Arendt thought that Kafka’s stories were blueprints of the existing world, exposing its naked brutality.

In his conversations with his friend Gustav Janouch, Kafka paints a picture of a man who is aware (and fearful) of the prophetic power of his writing. In an exchange cited by Russell Samolsky, when Janouch told Kafka that “Perhaps your writing is … only a mirror of tomorrow,” Kafka covered his eyes, rocked back and forth, and replied, “You are right. You are certainly right. Probably that’s why I cannot finish anything. I am afraid of the truth. But can one do otherwise? … One must be silent if one can’t give any

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Arendt, “Franz Kafka,” 416.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
help … For that reason all my scribbling is to be destroyed.” Kafka was afraid that his writing was more than mere fictional truth; that it had power beyond his control that somehow defied temporality. Viewed from this perspective, his dying wish, as he relayed to his friend Max Brod, to destroy all his unpublished work certainly grants views that tend to see him a prophet verification. However, for me another statement he made in his diary—one that is among the scanty few that hints at his relationship to his time—stands as a better testament of his clairvoyance. He wrote, “I have vigorously absorbed the negative element of the age in which I live [das Negative meiner Zeit], an age that is, of course, very close to me, which I have no right ever to fight against, but as it were a right to represent.” What Kafka means by “the negative element of the age” is quite ambiguous and has been interpreted in various ways. However, I agree with Mark Anderson’s commentary that Kafka’s negative relation to history is not a rejection of history, but rather is “a function of particular historical and cultural forces in his time.” In other words, his negativity “has a precise historical content,” and can be understood in relation to his Jewish identity.

As a people without home, Jews have always had a negative relation to history, standing outside its purview (which, of course, is a result of the long heritage of anti-

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79 Ibid., 21. Kafka grew up knowing very little about his Jewish background. This was, according to Ritchie Robertson, because of “his parents’ residual Judaism” which was “drained of its religious content and was merely part of the complex of Jewish middle-class values to which they adhered unquestioningly” (6). Kafka started to construct his Jewish identity after he made acquaintance with other Jews, especially the Yiddish actor Löwy, who provided him with “a burning desire to find out all he could about Jewish history and culture (17). This was, according to Guiliano Baioni, also his revolt against his father who preferred to remain indifferent to his Jewish origins. See Guiliano Baioni, “Zionism, Literature, and the Yiddish Theatre” in *Reading Kafka*. 
Jewish prejudice in the Christian world). As a Jew living in the tumultuous times at the heart of Prague, Franz Kafka was aware of the growing hostility against Jews. He sucked up all of its negative manifestations like a sponge, and spurted them in his only outlet, his writing. In an increasingly frenzied environment where Jews were seen as dangerous, threatening, and less than human, Kafka foresaw how their dehumanization combined with the anonymous forces of bureaucracy and the destructive power of military technology would achieve its evil apogee in the Holocaust. Below I provide a historical context to understand these tensions better within the German political and historical context in which Kafka was placed in. By providing such a context I hope to offer an insight into the futuristic visions of Kafka in *The Trial* whereby the rotten law in the book (which is stripped of its content and remains as pure form) makes more sense against the concrete historical background of deviant, perverted, and malicious Nazi ideology. At the end, it becomes obvious that the Nazi Law is the obscene, uncanny, and ghostly law which is represented as the Law of the superego in *The Trial*. It is the law that—in Žižekian terms—refuses to remain dead and instead indulges in excess totalitarian enjoyments directed at the Jews.

*Religious and Nationalist Roots*

In *A Brief History of the Third Reich*, Martyn Whittock states, “The anti-Jewish ideology of Hitler and the Nazis drew on a centuries-old tradition of scapegoating and persecution of an identifiable minority.”

This centuries-old tradition primarily refers to the long heritage of Christian doctrinal antagonism against the Jews which dates back to the crucifixion of Jesus. Although Jesus was crucified under the Roman procurator

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Pontius Pilate, as Lionel B. Steiman argues, the founding fathers of Christianity “interpreted history in the light of presumed Jewish guilt for the death of Christ” by shifting the blame from the Romans to the Jews.⁸¹ In this way, the whole Jewish populace was assigned to bear the hereditary guilt for the deed of “an angry Jewish mob” who purportedly called for Jesus’ execution.⁸² In the years to follow, Christians came to view the Jews “as deicides abandoned by God and permanently stained with the mark of Cain and as Satan’s henchmen.”⁸³ This gave rise to their demonization as “Christ-killers,” which stubbornly persisted for centuries fuelling popular antipathy and anger. This popular enmity took ever more delusionary forms in the Middle Ages when the old crime of deicide was coupled with the new irrational accusations of well poisoning, host profanation, and ritual murder. A great number of Jews were prosecuted and persecuted for contaminating water, desecrating the Eucharist host, and killing Christian children for their blood. Consequently, the diabolization of the Jewish people by early Christians as deicides and by medieval Christians as wicked magical practitioners made them victims of humiliation, discrimination, and expulsion. As Klaus B. Fischer writes, “By the end of the Middle Ages ‘the Jew’ had been lifted from actual human existence and transformed into a ‘dehumanized’ mythic figure of great evil.”⁸⁴ When, centuries later, the Nazis came to power, they did not have to build up hatred against the Jews from scratch; they only

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⁸² Ibid., 3. The image of an angry Jewish mob is rooted in the New Testament, specifically in Matthew’s claim that the death of Jesus was wilfully demanded by a fellow Jew, who, upon seeing Pilate vindicate himself from the crime, assertedly cried: “His blood be upon us, and on our children.” This served as a pretext for the belief that all Jews were collectively responsible for the murder of Christ.
tapped into the deep reservoir of Christian dehumanization of the Jews and took it to the extreme with the Holocaust.

In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment belief in the primacy of reason, science, and education did not eradicate the deep-seated anti-Jewish intolerance. What it discarded was, perhaps, its religious aspect which it replaced with the notions of culture and race. As Steiman notes, “Now enlightened minds no longer regarded Jews as Christ-killers or allies of Satan, but continued to attribute to them all manner of detestable social qualities, which they ascribed to their culture, or more ominously, to their race.”

In the nineteenth century, religious anti-Judaism gradually morphed into secular anti-Semitism, powered by the two most effective ideologies of the era: nationalism and racism. The aspiration to build a nation-state endowed with common citizenry based on racial premises required, as Steven Beller writes, “a profound change in the Jews’ situation, and a need to integrate them into society in a much more direct way than previously, as individuals rather than as members of a quasi-separate community.”

Previously, within the Christian community, the Jews were seen as a tolerated minority. They were separated (and discriminated) from the rest of the community, but they were at least able to maintain their own autonomous status. However, the rise of national consciousness brought a new ideal of national identity based not on religion but on race, as a result of which, “the differences between the various nations … took on sharper edges.”

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85 Steiman, *Paths to Genocide*, xiii.
86 Ibid. Most scholars distinguish anti-Semitism (as a modern political movement and ideology) from anti-Judaism. The concept of anti-Semitism was arguably coined in the nineteenth century by Wilhelm Marr in order to provide a more secular alternative to the religiously-based Christian hostility toward Judaism and the Jews.
Shmuel Almog contends, “[T]he Jews, if they wished to become part of society, were obliged to identify with the people among which they lived, to the point of merging seamlessly to the nation.” Such a harmonious assimilation was in itself an almost impossible deed because the Jews’ difference now stood out more than ever as they were thought to have bad genes which were unconvertible (unlike religion). The common view of the European Jews in this period, as summarized by David Berger, was that they “were an alien nation, a state within a state, no more deserving of citizenship than Frenchman in Germany or Germans in France.” This view caused a tension between the Jews and their host countries out of which the “Jewish Question” materialized.

According to Beller, the region where the “Jewish Question” had the most potent hold was “German-dominated Central Europe.” As he explains:

[This was] due to the way in which the initial argument for the integration of Jews, and their emancipation from pre-modern discriminations, was framed. Whereas in Western Europe, emancipation was based mainly on the principle of individual human rights, which were deemed to be inherently due to Jews as citizens and human beings, in Central Europe Jewish emancipation came early on to be seen in terms of what David Sorkin had described as a grand *quid pro quo*: Jews would be given their rights once they had proven they could earn them. That is to say, Jews would have to deserve their claim to equal treatment by giving up their ‘Jewish’ ways which Christian Germans found so repellent.

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89 Ibid.
It proved harder for the Jews to be absorbed into the existing German society. What was it about Jewish difference that was so threatening to the Germans? As Eliza Slavet suggests, “Germans defined their national identity by cordonning it off from the Other: To be German was to be not Jewish.”92 This attitude is often seen as a derivation from the German tradition of Volkskunde (the study of the lifestyle of the Volk, which initially meant “folk” but became synonymous with “race”) which was a part of the Romantic movement, understood in the most simplistic words as a return to the roots, but gradually became the driving force for the formation of xenophobic and exclusionist ethnic nationalism among the Germans. In their return to the roots, German Volkish thinkers drew on ancient Roman sources for inspiration, in particular Tacitus’s Germania, “as proof that they were an Urvolk, an original people not stained by race mixture, that they spoke an Ursprache, a pure and original language.”93 This belief nourished the fundamental claim that Germans, descendants of the ancient Aryans, were superior to all others, especially the Jews, whom they had to rid themselves of in order to remain pure and unmixed. Consequently, although the Volkish idea of nationalism started out as a romantic vision of a unified German Volk, it inevitably turned into an exclusive phenomenon, “intensifying internal fanaticism, and fanning intolerance” directed time and against at the Jews.94

By the end of the nineteenth century, the already existing burden of the religious clash between Christians and Jews was supplemented—and intensified—by the new national clash between Germans and Jews. The image of the Jews as evil and dangerous

93 Perry and Schweitzer, Antisemitism: Myth and Hate, 89.
94 Almog, Nationalism & Antisemitism, 10.
demons inherited from the medieval period persisted in the modern secular age, magnified by the *Volkish* nationalist ideology that marked the Jews as a threat to Germany and the whole civilization. As Perry and Schweitzer state, anti-Jewish sentiments “did not perish with the weakening of Christianity in modern times. … Ironically, the weakening of Christianity … made possible the emergence of an antisemitic (and anti-Christian) pagan ideology that had no qualms about total extermination.” 95 Within Christendom, religion (or religious delusions) spurred violence; however, this violence never exhibited genocidal intent. As Fischer explains, “The medieval answer to the Jewish question … was either conversion or expulsion. … The reason Christian Europe did not resort to genocidal activity in solving the Jewish question was that its Christian ethic … did not permit the perpetration of such a godless deed.” 96 What prevented the mass massacre of the Jews in pre-modernity, according to these authors, was the presence of a God/Christ-centered ethics. With the death of God—with the dwindling of tradition—what was before inconceivable would become possible. The notion of the nation as a sacred/mystical entity that needed to be conserved in totality would sanction genocidal violence against Jews in Nazi Germany. But what is it that is inherent in the idea of nation that makes such atrocity possible? Kafka’s *The Trial* presents a futuristic answer to this question. By showing how modern law (which is devoid of any foundation in some higher source) turns into pure form of duty, the novel anticipates its perversion at the hands of the Nazis who use it instrumentally to fulfill their own mad fantasies. Benjamin writes that what is “in the precise sense crazy about Kafka” is that his anticipation of catastrophe—his vision of humanity as overwhelming alienated

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96 Fischer. *The History of an Obsession*, 37; my emphasis.
and mechanized calling for its own doom—“comes to him by way of the mystical tradition,” in other words, by way of his internalization of the collapse of tradition and its consequences. As Benjamin writes, “Kafka’s work represents a sickening of tradition,” and it is exactly this “sickening of tradition” that makes him receptive to the barbarity that is to follow.

Nazi Anti-Semitism and Racial Laws

Volkish nationalism which developed in Germany during the nineteenth century and transmogrified into a chauvinistic and racist nationalism in the years before the First World War was “the seedbed of Hitler’s ideology.” Hitler inherited from Volkish nationalism the belief in the racial superiority of the Aryan Germanic race, that they were a chosen people with a special destiny in the perfection of human civilization. “If we divide mankind into three categories—founders of culture, bearers of culture, and destroyers of culture,” he wrote in his autobiography Mein Kampf, “the Aryan alone can be considered as representing the first category. It was he who laid the groundwork and erected the walls of every great structure in human culture.” Drawing upon these racist sentiments, Hitler was able to treat the Jews as members of an inferior group by casting them as Ostjuden: “a dark and inferior race corrupting the Germanic blood.” Moreover, he was able to furnish justification for his treatment by reference to Social Darwinism that viewed the conflict between races as a part of the struggle for existence. He explained the central premise of this worldview in Mein Kampf by writing that it is the iron law of Nature “which compels various species to keep within the definite limits of their own life-

98 Ibid., 326.
99 Perry and Schweitzer, Antisemitism: Myth and Hate, 86.
100 Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1939), 226.
forms when propagating and multiplying their kind."  

Otherwise, as Hitler warned with high confidence, the superiority of the higher species will not only diminish but also degenerate “leading slowly and steadily towards a progressive drying up of the vital sap.”  

When applied to races, Hitler was afraid that the mixing of Aryan blood with the Jewish blood would cause the defilement and even destruction of the former. This was the motivation behind his use of parasitical analogies in his description of the Jew as “a parasite, a sponger … thriving on the substance of other nations.”  

Benjamin sees a manifestation of the same abject quality in the court officials in The Trial. He writes that “Uncleanliness is so much the attribute of officials that one could almost regard them as enormous parasites.”  

Uncleanliness here conveys the corruption and transgression of the officers, and by extension the decomposition and degeneration of the social order. It reflects a blurring of the neutral, benevolent face of law and its immoral basis resting on violence. Acting as the agents of this blurring—exposing (and being exposed to) something rotten in law—the officers function as parasites, as abject figures crossing boundaries that demarcate rational from irrational, reality from fiction, and truth from deception. As such, they conjure up the Nazi image of the Jew as “a foreign body introducing corruption into the sound social fabric.”

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102 Hitler, Mein Kampf, 222.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 224.
105 Ibid., 238.
107 Žižek, The Sublime Object, 142. There is, of course, a more direct reference to Hitler’s anti-Semitic language in Gregor Samsa’s transformation into vermin in Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis.” Frederick Karl
Hitler viewed the Jews not only as a biological threat to the survival of the German people but also as a political threat to his nationalist aspirations. “In his mind, the Jews dominated the world through their control of the two forces of Bolshevism (Russian communism) and world capitalism.”\textsuperscript{108} The apparent contradiction in his accusation did not prevent Hitler and his Nazi followers from blaming the Jews for being both communists (preparing the groundwork for the Bolshevik Revolution) and capitalists (preparing to dominate the world through finances). As Whittock writes, “This astonishing conspiracy theory was widely accepted by many anti-Semitic groups and it gave coherence to the otherwise mutually irreconcilable twin hatreds of the lower middle class: communism and capitalism.”\textsuperscript{109} Another reason for the popularity of this conspiracy theory among the common folk was that it was backed by the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a medieval myth about the Jewish scheme to take over the world that resurfaced in the twentieth century documents. According to Perry and Schweitzer, Germany’s defeat in the First World War “made many Germans receptive to the Protocols message [because] [i]n their twisted view, the Protocols provided convincing evidence that the Jews were responsible for starting the war—Jewish bankers saw an opportunity to enrich themselves; for American entry on the side of the allies; for Germany’s defeat—the ‘stab in the back’.”\textsuperscript{110} Thence, after the war, Hitler and his Nazi Party “were able to gain power, at least partly, by convincing their defeated nation that

\textsuperscript{108} Whittock, A Brief History of the Third Reich, 13.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Perry and Schweitzer, Antisemitism: Myth and Hate, 103.
the defeat was not of their own doing, but was the result of treason and betrayal by … the Jews.”

By blaming the Jews for Germany’s defeat, Nazis were able to turn the tide of failure in their favor to implement their own plans to get rid of the Jews in order for Germany to recover and thrive. However, as Anthony Amatrudo states, “Such an analysis obviously did not find universal acceptance in Germany and the Nazis knew it.” That is why “The German nation had to be systematically subjected to propaganda.”

This propaganda aimed to single out the Jews as a biological threat to contaminate the Aryan race and a political threat to dominate the world, which steadily exhausted the possibility of their acculturation. The Jews were Jews and there was no way to stop them from being a Jew as long as they carried Jewish blood in their veins. After eliminating assimilation, expulsion and extermination would be the only course left to solve the “Jewish Question” once and for all, as we will see below.

Some historians claim that Hitler did not initially intend to exterminate the entire Jewish population. According to Paul Johnson, the First World War played a crucial, if not a primary, role in the turn towards violence. As he writes, “It had the effect of stunning the German nation. They entered it confidently just as their ascent to greatness was reaching its apogee. After fearful sacrifices, they lost it, conclusively. The grief and fury were unhinging; the need for a scapegoat was imperative.” Furthermore, the war “transformed the way in which Germany conducted its business. Pre-war Germany was the most law-abiding country in Europe. Civil violence was unheard of, un-German. …

The war changed all that. It accustomed men to violence everywhere, but in Germany it

111 Steven Leonard Jacobs and Mark Weitzman, Dismantling the Big Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2003), 12.
113 Johnson, A History of the Jews, 471.
induced a violence of despair.” The two outcomes of the war—the search for a scapegoat and the cult of violence—were combined in Hitler’s anti-Semitic propaganda in the years following the war in which he made the Jews the focus of his (and the nation’s) struggle towards an exclusively German state. This struggle took a decisive step forward with Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933 when he was appointed Chancellor of Germany with the task of forming a coalition government. In power, Hitler became more antagonistic against the Jews. He took measures conducive to their discrimination in the form of inspection of their homes, confiscation of their property, and censorship of their books—all done quite legally and with constitutional authority.

As Alan E. Steinweis and Robert D. Rachlin notes, crimes committed against the Jews by the Nazi government might appear as a sign of arbitrary rule—of “lawlessness.” However, as they also point out, the Nazis were able to implement most of their racist-nationalist ideas, regardless of how perverted they were, through the help of law:

In a country where the legislative function of the parliament had been rendered meaningless by the imposition of dictatorship in 1933, law was decreed directly by Hitler and members of his cabinet. The main responsibility for the drafting of new laws and the revision of existing ones often fell to legally-trained civil servants whose task was to translate the political will of the Nazi leadership into the language of the legal code.

114 Ibid.
116 Ibid., 3.
Behind the “neutral” face of law, what was really carried out was the *Führer’s* will, and his will was set in stone about the elimination of the Jews because it was the only way to achieve his grandiose goal of creating a pure Aryan nation free of the Jewish parasite. Therefore, when Hitler increased his legislative and executive powers, he passed an Enabling Law so that his dictatorship was “legal”, or legally sanctioned—and so was his segregation of the Jews. Following this, the Nuremberg Laws were proclaimed, and thus the exclusion of the Jews from the rest of the population was institutionalized. German-Jewish intermarriages and extramarital sexual relations were outlawed, and during the years that followed, the Jews were forced out of their businesses and subjected to boycotts.117 Against this background, what provided the last spark was Germany’s entry into the Second World War. Systematic mass murder of the Jews was carried out during the war by the paramilitary units which were established with the purpose of carrying out the “Final Solution” as a result of which six millions Jews were killed.118

*The Two-Faced Nazi Law*

Hitler grounded his virulent anti-Semitism on two-thousand years old, church-motivated antagonism against the Jews, but he far outstripped what came before him, morphing it into a deadly weapon, into genocide, which, different than previous cases of persecution and murder, was systematically carried out by a government who consciously propagated hatred and fanaticism against the Jews, conveyed through political, media, and other channels. In order to understand what makes Hitler’s anti-Jewish hatred

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118 The term “Final Solution” was “first used in March 1941 in a memorandum by Reinhard Heydrich,” a high-ranking naval officer, and soon became the secret word for the eradication of the Jews. See Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118.
different than its previous (mostly religious) incarnations, one should understand, according to Zygmunt Bauman, the dark underside of the Enlightenment legacy and modernity itself. As Bauman argues, the Holocaust was not merely an irrational eruption of animality, but was a form of rational “social engineering”:

The most extreme and well-documented cases of ‘social engineering’ in modern history … all their attendant atrocities notwithstanding, were neither outbursts of barbarism not yet fully extinguished by the new rational order of civilization, nor the price paid for utopias alien to the spirit of modernity. On the contrary, they were legitimate offspring of the modern spirit, of the urge to assist and speed up the progress of mankind toward perfection that was throughout the most prominent hallmark of the modern age.119

The Holocaust exposed the destructive potential inherent in the modern spirit (of social progress through science and education, of human perfection etc.). Bauman employs the metaphor of gardening as a way to illustrate this destructive potential with regards to the process of modern state formation. He likens the modern state to a garden which needs to be constantly tended so that “sweet and seemly things may grow, wide and beautiful vistas open, … [but this requires] weeds and foulness [to] disappear.”120 If the beautiful garden represents the German state which sought to bring a divine sense of order and harmony to society, the hostile weeds represent the Jews who “spoiled the landscape and thwarted the efforts of the planner.”121 What Bauman suggests through such a metaphor is that the nationalist vision of a total and uniform society inheres the capacity to exclude,

120 Ibid., 34.
121 Ibid., 35.
suppress, and even eliminate those who remain unassimilated—the “weeds” which ruin the unsullied beauty of the garden by taking the place of better plants. Atrocities are done in the name of a utopian idea, a mad fantasy, and not, as Bauman emphasizes, a regression, but an inevitable outcome of the highest development.

Hitler’s dream of a pure, hybrid-free, and totalitarian world order was what impelled him to employ the most extreme measures in the way of eliminating the parasitical element that stood in his way to achieve his dream. It culminated in the execution of a systematic and calculative mass murder of Jews during the years 1933 and 1945. As mentioned previously, Hitler was able to enact his dream after he came to power with the help of law—by creating legislation for the ostracization of the Jews from society. This was, as Steinweis and Rachlin explain by drawing upon Ernst Fraenkel’s 1941 book *The Dual State*, the lawful way, perpetrated under the guise of a “normative state” consisting of “the traditional legal order, including the codes of German law, the Ministry of Justice, and the courts, transformed after 1933 by an infusion of Nazi laws.”

In contrast to the legal system, there was also an extralegal system of terror, the “prerogative state” in which “the Nazi regime wielded arbitrary power over the freedom and lives of its subjects.” Steinweis and Rachlin suggest that “[M]ost of the mass atrocities for which the Nazi regime is most notorious … were carried out mainly by organs of the ‘prerogative state,’ most notably the SS,” paramilitary units headed by the notorious Heinrich Himmler.122 This apparent duality of the state under the Nazi rule—between the legal and the illegal organization—was not really a duality; it was rather a complementarity in which each was dependent on the other. According to Benjamin, as

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he expounds in his essay “Critique of Violence,” there is ultimately no distinction between law and violence; violence lies at the very foundation and functioning of the law. Similarly, Žižek claims that law is inherently split between its public letter and its obscene supplement: “the notion of the obscene superego double-supplement of Power implies that there is no Power without violence: Power always has to rely on an obscene stain of violence.” Behind the neutrality of law (bolstered by what they presented as objective, value-free, and scientific theories), Nazis were able to implement their murderous programme. Their symbolic bureaucratic structure worked to camouflage the reality of their perverse jouissance in torturing, gassing, and killing their victims. This perverse jouissance is what pervades the corrupt world of The Trial, and comes out in the surplus enjoyment the officers extract from their strict obedience to law, a law that is neither infinite nor absolute, but rotten in its innermost core.

According to Arendt, the problem with the officers in The Trial is that, they do not understand this rotten aspect of law; instead they continue to see it as a mystical phenomenon: “It is true, Kafka depicted a society which had established itself as a substitute for God, and he described men who looked upon the laws of society as though they were divine laws—unchangeable through the will of men.” Because of their inability (or unwillingness) to distinguish the human law from the divine law, the officials in The Trial become functionaries of necessity. That is, they follow their duty not because it is the right thing to do but because it is necessary. Furthermore, in their complete

identification with their jobs, they try to achieve some kind of superhuman example of perfection. Arendt believes that it is this misconception—this deification of arbitrary/human laws—that has the potential to cause catastrophic consequences. As she writes, “[T]he process of ruin itself is accelerated” by the belief “in a necessary and automatic process to which man must submit” because in this process accountability is bestowed upon a power that is arbitrary yet treated as divine or necessary.\textsuperscript{126} Kafka’s so-called prophesy lies in his anticipation that horrible atrocities would “be committed in the name of some kind of necessity or in the name—and this amounts to the same thing—of the ‘wave of the future’.”\textsuperscript{127} According to Arendt, then, Kafka foresaw the terrifying potential inherent in the belief that affirms law as necessary without being true, summarized in the priest’s words: “[Y]ou don’t have to consider everything true, you just have to consider it necessary.”

Psychoanalysis makes it clear that when law turns into necessity, it becomes a fertile ground for transgression and perversion, which takes us to the dimension of the superego. As Alenka Zupančič advances in her essay “The Subject of the Law,” in a world where there is no higher ethical Good, the ferocious superego remains as the only ethical agency we are left with. As she explains, “[a]s far as it has its origins in the constitution of the superego, ethics is nothing more than a convenient tool for any ideology that tries to pass off its [pathological] commandments as authentic, spontaneous, and ‘honorable’ inclinations for the subject.”\textsuperscript{128} Such ethics provides a basis for the instrumental use of law to fulfill the immoral demands of the superego. And such ethics

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 71.
was what made the mass murder of the Jews at the hands of Hitler and his Nazi party possible. The unethical moral law is also insinuated in The Trial in terms of the surplus enjoyment the adherents of law produce in their obedience to their duty. The guards who come to inform K. of his arrest are actually after his nightshirt and undergarments; the judges who hear his appeal glance through pornographic books instead of studying the law; the lawyers who defend his case pay bribes to people to extract information. Also the court painter Titorelli, as Ritchie Robertson points out, “is plagued by young girls with unsavoury erotic overtones.” In Kafka’s world of law officials, everyone is doing something to indicate transgression. Disguised under the obligation of legal duty, they pursue the superegoic injunction to enjoy themselves. As Zupančić makes clear, the belief in the ready-made duty is what makes it possible for the subject to develop a perverse attitude by “justify[ing] his actions by saying that they were imposed upon him by unconditional duty,” and thus hiding “behind the moral law and present[ing] himself as the ‘mere instrument’ of its will.” This perverse attitude finds embodiment in the justification Adolf Eichmann offered for his evil actions, saying he was only a functionary. As Arendt describes him, he presented himself to the court as “a ‘joiner,’ a ‘conformist,’ a ‘leaf in the whirlwind of time,’ who was only concerned, if not obsessed, with being ‘duty-bound’ to almost fanatic proportions.”

This twisted sense of duty bears a chilling resemblance to the way the figures of law conceive of their legal obligations in The Trial.

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All in all, *The Trial* contains, in its uniquely cryptic way, resonances of the Nazi indoctrination and dehumanization of the Jews. Joseph K. wakes up one morning to find two guards in his bedroom who has come to arrest him for no apparent reason. They do not tell him the nature of his guilt. In fact, they expect him to know of it. Even though he seems indifferent at first, K. progressively becomes consumed with worry about his case. He spends days and nights penning an account of his life, explaining why he did what he did, in a way trying to find justification for his survival. All of these appear as the surreal (but all-too-familiar) echoes of what the Jews went through under the perverse Nazi rule. Moreover, what Titorelli tells K. about the possibilities of acquittal evokes the cruelly restrictive laws that deprived the Jews of any sense of “real” freedom. As Titorelli recounts, there are “three possibilities: actual acquittal, apparent acquittal, and protraction.”  

Actual acquittal—true freedom—exists only in legends of the past and therefore is impossible to obtain now (that makes us ponder about the time when the Law made sense—when its content and form were inseparable). That leaves the two remaining possibilities as the only chance for K.’s resolution of his case: ostensible acquittal and indefinite postponement. Even though they seem like two separate options, they are actually not that different from each other. They both indicate that the defendant can never achieve freedom to acquit himself from the indictment brought upon him. These rather absurd options foreshadow the peculiar situation of the Jews under Nazi domination. Those who were branded as a Jew would never enjoy freedom in a true sense. There was only acquittal in appearance, which can be interpreted as the false sense of protection and security the Jews fell victim to; or else, there was protraction, which can

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132 Kafka, *The Trial*, 152.
be interpreted as the postponement of their predetermined path to death. At the end, K.’s fate seems to resonate the collective fate of the Jews: being killed like a dog, the final step in their dehumanization. Consequently, Kafka’s depiction of a nightmare world in The Trial, which was regarded as a prophecy of what is to come by the scholars in 1940s and 50s, becomes “a real possibility whose actuality surpassed even the atrocities he describes.”

CONCLUSION

In Enjoy Your Symptom! Žižek writes that in the final years of his teaching Lacan narrowed down the choice of the modern subject to the alternative of “le père ou pire” (the Father or worse): the choice being not between good and bad, but between bad and worse. The forced choice of the social contract requires the subject to subordinate to the authority of the Name-of-the-Father, and is, according to Žižek, “bad” since, “by means of it, the subject ‘gives way as to his desire,’ and thus contracts an indelible guilt.” This indelible guilt, although the primary cause of our discontent, is constitutive of desire because desire can only be sustained when it is not satisfied, when its satisfaction is constantly postponed. Thus, even though the subject constituted by the Name-of-the-Father is fundamentally divided or barred, he is still able to satisfy his desire through unsatisfaction (through the prohibition of the father). On the other hand, when the Father option is eliminated, when the (necessary) barrier to enjoyment is lifted, the resulting upsurge of unwanted desire is the “worse” option. This upsurge of desire is nothing other than objet petit a, the leftover of the horrifying Real. That is why, as Žižek argues, “le

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133 Arendt, “Franz Kafka,” 75.
134 Žizek, Enjoy Your Symptom!, 87.
‘père ou pire’ ultimately amounts to the alternative ‘Father or the objet petit a.’\textsuperscript{135} It is a choice between the symbolic debt (guilt) and the traumatic object of desire (jouissance), between the intersubjective space and the domain of the Real, and eventually between sanity and insanity.

In \textit{The Trial}, Kafka depicts a nightmare world where humanity is directed toward the worse choice following the breakdown of paternal authority into the brutal force of the obscene superego. The irrational legal procedures, impervious bureaucratic workings, and immoral interpersonal dealings all point toward the fact that the symbolic Law (the Name-of-the-Father) has become inefficient and impotent having failed to provide a stable platform for the construction of subjectivity. It has been reduced into pure form whereby its orders and rules are followed only because one has to follow them and not because they represent Truth or Wisdom. As the priest tells K., one does not have to accept law as true, one must only accept it as necessary. However, behind this “necessity” lies a dark and dangerous potential for catastrophe. When one follows the imperatives of his duty because it is his duty to do whatever his superior commands—just like the officers in \textit{The Trial} do although they do not have a clear superior—it becomes a perverse act because in this way the person evades responsibility and thrusts it onto an arbitrary law, which is nevertheless treated, as Arendt highlights, as a divine cause. This is what makes enjoyment possible as there is essentially “no difference between ‘do your duty’ and ‘enjoy’”; between obeying orders and fulfilling desire.\textsuperscript{136} It is at this point that we can see a connection between the empty/necessary law as the source of enjoyment in \textit{The Trial} and the atrocities performed by the Nazis in the name of the sacred task of saving

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 88.

\textsuperscript{136} Dean, Žižek’s \textit{Politics}, 156.
the German nation. There are enough parallels to suggest that the state under the Third Reich is the terrifying embodiment of the law depicted in *The Trial*. The ideological fantasies of nationalism and racism that fuelled the virulent anti-Semitism of Hitler and his Nazi party could hardly cover the surplus enjoyment derived from the persecution and murder of the Jews in fulfillment of duty (Hitler, as he believed, was also duty-bound to protect the German nation from racial impurity).

Therefore, *The Trial* becomes an exploration of the social symptoms arising from the breakdown of paternal authority when read against the backdrop of the political history of German anti-Semitism and the Nazi Holocaust. It demonstrates that when the symbolic/paternal resources cannot be sustained any longer, the very existence of society as a meaningful, ethical collective becomes questionable. As Žižek makes clear, anti-Semitism is a symptom of the failure of society, of the fact that “Society doesn’t work, and the social mechanism creaks.”

This is related to the decline of the father because it is he who upholds the illusion that society does *indeed* exist. With the suspension of his function, then, what has always been inherent in the symbolic order comes out to the surface: that it is a structurally lacking order. Jewish hatred emerges as a part of the desire to cover over this failure by displacing it onto a group of people. In other words, the impossibility of achieving a smooth-functioning, unified society purified of any internal divisions and conflicts (where the Father is properly functioning) is projected onto the Jewish community as the potential reason why this vision is not realized (why the Father is not really functioning). *The Trial* is able to see, with prophetic ability, the inherent inconsistency and instability of the symbolic order under the function of the Name-of-the-

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137 Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 143.
Father. It reveals its traumatic kernel in the uncanny surplus of law and the official duties of the officers. The excesses and enjoyments it depicts as a part of and even as necessary to the legal system makes us recognize the truth about our society and about ourselves. It is within this context that *The Trial* anticipates the truth about the coming totalitarian regime and its perverse ideology.

Kafka was able to tell the truth because he lacked what most people naturally had: the protective screen of the symbolic order, which, in other words, is the shield of deception. As Milena Jesenska, his unrequited love, stated, “Frank does not have the capacity for living. ... For, obviously, we are capable of living because at some time or other we took refuge in lies, in blindness ... But he has never escaped to any such sheltering refuge, none at all.”  

Jesenska makes it clear that what sustains living for us people is the belief in the existence of the fiction of the symbolic order which is an order of lies. Therefore, our capacity for living depends on our competency at lying. Apparently Kafka did not possess this competency. He rejected any lie and self-deception “to the point of pain and semi-madness.” As he himself admitted, “Everything is deception ... Can you know anything other than deception? If ever the deception is annihilated, you must not look in that direction or you will turn into a pillar of salt.” Before he himself turned into a pillar of salt, Kafka showed us the bitter truth about our social world.

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138 Quoted from Brod, *Franz Kafka*, 229-30.
139 Ibid., 214.
140 Quoted from Anderson, *Reading Kafka*, 64.
CHAPTER 3

THE EMPTY SIGNIFIER OF THE CLOCK AND THE TRAUMA OF MODERNIZATION IN AHMET HAMDİ TANPINAR’S THE TIME REGULATION INSTITUTE

INTRODUCTION

In an absurdist manner reminiscent of Franz Kafka’s The Trial, the narrator of The Time Regulation Institute finds himself thrown into a legal proceeding where he is accused of stealing something he invents out of his own imagination. In a conversation with a sly friend, Hayri İrdal makes up a story about a rare diamond to deceive him into thinking that he should try to obtain something that does not exist. Nevertheless, in his attempt to fool his friend, İrdal becomes the one who is fooled. As the story of the diamond is spread through the neighbourhood, the fiction turns into reality, and İrdal is brought to the court to account for this undeclared possession. His efforts to tell the truth to defend himself in front of the court do not negate the presence of the diamond, which becomes more real than real. Soon he develops a reputation for sounding crazy, and is sent to a medical facility for evaluation. However, there he finds himself in a more absurd situation at the hands of a clumsy psychoanalyst named Dr. Ramiz.

Dr. Ramiz sets to employ the theories of psychoanalysis to understand İrdal’s illness. After engaging in a rather one-sided conversation with İrdal, where he is both the listener and the speaker, Dr. Ramiz confidently declares his diagnosis: “What you have is a typical case of a father complex … a grave illness which could have been worse … A
typical case, but harmless.”1 İrdal instantly denies it; however, every word he utters in denial of the diagnosis becomes a new proof for the physician to prove his conviction. Dr. Ramiz does not waver in his opinion that the source of the problem is rooted in İrdal’s father complex: “You never liked your father, and instead of eventually taking his place, you have never stopped looking for new father figures. In other words, you never fully matured. You’re simply still a child!”2 Dr. Ramiz identifies the conflict at the heart of İrdal’s father complex as a troubled relationship with his father; however, he is also confused as to the nature of this conflict: is it a “grave illness” or a “typical case”? While claiming that İrdal’s illness is unique, he also insists that it is universal, that “in today’s world almost all of us suffer from this condition. Just look around: we all complain about the past: everyone is preoccupied with it. This is why we seek to change it. What does this mean? A father complex, no?”3

Dr. Ramiz’s dilemma conjures up the ambivalence rooted at the inception of the Oedipus complex as to whether it is pathogenic or normative. As highlighted before, this ambivalence points to a larger issue, which is that the Oedipus complex does not emanate from internal neurotic conflict, but has its origins in the external world. Consequently, it is not an individual problem but a social one. The author Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar employs the complex in the same way to illustrate, in an emblematic way, the Turkish experience of modernity. He designates it as the individual manifestation of a more general crisis of Turkish society stranded between the backward pull of the past and the forward push of the future, which is typically associated with the conflict of tradition with modernity.

2 Ibid., 113.
3 Ibid., 118.
Thus, the Oedipus complex, or the father complex, becomes symptomatic of Turkish society which, in its race toward modernization, has fractured its relationship with its past and its ancestry. I believe that this constitutes the most significant thematic element in Tanpınar’s novel *The Time Regulation Institute*. Tanpınar uses the findings of psychoanalysis as a modern, secular discourse to humorously foreground what he considers the major problem of modernization in Turkey: Turkish people’s convoluted relationship with their past. In one of his essays, he states, “If I could venture, I would argue that we have been going through an Oedipus complex, that is to say, the tragedy of a man who unknowingly killed his father, since the Tanzimat.” He writes this in the year 1951. Only a decade later, in 1961, his novel *The Time Regulation Institute* is published, and one can see that he does indeed venture in his last book to talk about the traumatizing experience of the long process of modernization, starting in the last Ottoman century and accelerating during the Republic, through the lens of the Oedipal drama which becomes an emblematic narrative that characterizes Turkey’s rooted conflict with the *ancien régime* and its paternal head.

*Tanpınar and the Problem of Turkish Modernization*

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, considered to be one of the most influential authors of modern Turkish literature, was born in 1901 in İstanbul at a time when the Ottoman Empire was dissolving, and, as a result, there was widespread poverty, sickness, and death. Tanpınar was quite familiar with this general sense of decay as he spent his childhood and youth moving from one poor, war-torn region to another (including Kirkuk and Mosul, which were a part of the Ottoman territory then). In one of his letters, he

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states that the most dominant feeling he remembers from his early years was that of death.\(^5\) He recounts a scene where he watched a man in ragged clothes with a dirty yellow face, elongated teeth, and bulged eyes die in the middle of a market place. This dark image, which was stuck in his mind even after thirty years, becomes evocative of the state of disintegration the Ottoman Empire plunged itself in its last days. As Tanpınar explains in a letter, in the August of 1918 as the First World War was nearing its end, İstanbul had turned into a horrible place: “The war that lasted four years gnawed at the city both from within and from without. Everything was worn out, diminished, changed, and poverty stricken. A big, a very big thing which was outside the realm of the individual was like dead.”\(^6\) As the empire continuously lost territory, and was threatened by the imperial ambitions of the great powers, people became fearful of losing their country and the protection, security, and peaceful conditions that were guaranteed by it. Tanpınar conveys this sense of loss and despair by resembling it to “a sense of orphanhood” in his letter. According to Hasan Bülent Kahraman, this sense of orphanhood (which, as we will see, has its origins in the Oedipal tragedy) remains as one of the most important elements that makes up his identity as an author and a historian.\(^7\)

After Tanpınar came to İstanbul in 1918, he decided to study literature under the influence of a major literary figure, Yahya Kemal, who, by acting like a father-substitute, helped him dispel his sense of orphanhood, at least to an extent. He writes that “As I listened to Yahya Kemal’s lectures, my inner world which was in turmoil found order.”\(^8\)

Yahya Kemal provided Tanpınar conceptual tools for thinking about the social change

\(^6\) Ibid., 302.
\(^8\) Tanpınar, “Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar Anlatıyor,” 304; my translation.
that was brought about by the modernizing reforms of the Tanzimat period. These reforms, which were meant to curb the threat of dissolution through the adoption of the Western model, inevitably led to a clash between the old, existing Islamic order and the new, modern Western culture. This clash, which continued into the Republican period, produced social, cultural, and most notably psychological divisions. Tanpinar points to this in one of his essays: “This duality [inherited from the Tanzimat] first began in public life, then it split our society in two in terms of mentality, and in the end, deepening and changing its progress, it settled within us individuals.”

For Tanpinar, the process of modernization initiated in the Tanzimat period was a faulty and deficient attempt at Westernization. It started out without a clear plan and vision. It lacked deep knowledge about the source object. Therefore, it could not go beyond mere imitation. Moreover, it did not seek to harmonize the old and the new without stirring up enmities. This was the point Tanpinar was the most critical about. As he states, “The Tanzimat’s main fault was that it did not want to reconcile the two worlds,” that of the East and the West.

Consequently, the sense of continuity and wholeness was dramatically ruptured, resulting in the disconnection of a whole society from its historical and material past. As Tanpinar expresses in a metaphor, “suddenly we found ourselves in the situation of a man who lost

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9 The word Tanzimat means “reorganization” or “regulation” and refers to the efforts in the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire to shift from a declining and disintegrating empire to one that is in line with European ideals and standards as a means of survival. One of the initiating reforms of the Tanzimat period was the Imperial Rescript of 1839 (Gülhâne Hatt-ı Hümayûnu). This rescript attempted to modify the Ottoman legislation, administration, and military to comply with the European standards. The second phase of the Tanzimat period was followed by the Imperial Rescript of 1856 (İslâhat Hatt-ı Hümayûnu) which reaffirmed but also extended the scope of the former edict. All in all, the attempts to modernize the Ottoman Empire in the Tanzimat period remained limited, and instead of strengthening the state, they led to breakages not only in the center but also in the periphery.


his memory in the middle of a crowded street.”

Tanpınar regarded the one-dimensional process of “civilizational and cultural exchange” (medeniyet ve kültür değiştirmesi) as the most urgent problem of his day. The solution he offered to offset the consequent duality was, evident in most of his essays and literary works, to cultivate a culture of reconciliation. He believed that establishing a synthesis between the old and the new, the past and the present, the traditional and the modern was the only way to avoid the unsettling sense of dislocation that emerged as a result of the incomplete implementation of modernization. Tanpınar was schooled in Western philosophy and civilization. He read and admired several Western poets such as Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry. He was influenced by Western thinkers such as Henri Bergson, Gaston Bachelard, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche. He was indeed a self-proclaimed Westerner. However, besides Western thought, Tanpınar also derived from the rich tradition of Ottoman poetry represented by poets such as Şeyh Galip and Nâ'îlî. Advancing what he learned from his teacher Yahya Kemal, he cultivated a literary taste that blended Eastern heritage with Western intellectual paradigms. It should be noted that his literary taste did not only remain an aesthetic experience, but shaped his worldview, especially his perspective on nation and culture. For this reason, Tanpınar is often considered a conventional thinker. His

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12 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, “Kendimizin Peşinde: Çok Mühim Bir Mesele” in Mücevherlerin Sırrı: 54-9, 54; my translation.
15 For Tanpınar, discontinuity from the past does not only hamper modernization, but more importantly, it prevents national culture or national life from flourishing. He believes that what makes up a civilization is the whole of the customs and values inherited from the past. This sense of civilization (which is very much historical) constitutes the basis of his understanding of nation, national culture, and national consciousness. What creates national unification, according to Tanpınar, is to have a shared culture/past which molds as well as holds together a civilization. What is at stake when connection with the past is severed, then, is the very chain that binds the people together.
conventionalism lies in his insistence to facilitate linkages with tradition, and constitutes the basis of his attempt to ameliorate the negative heritage of the process of modernization that started with the Tanzimat and resulted in serious discontinuities and breakdowns.

**Tradition, Loss, and Oedipal Metaphors**

The individual becomes the site where the effects of these discontinuities and breakdowns most manifestly come into play. The external conflict of Eastern and Western, old and new values reverberates internally in the form of self-division and self-alienation which Tanpınar expresses with the words “mental levelling” (zihni terazileşme) and pinpoints as the source of the modern feeling of “guilt” (vîcdan azabı). When Tanpınar conjures up the Oedipal experience, what he tries to convey is the sense of loss and melancholia that arise from this feeling of guilt, and that he expresses symbolically through the (unknowing) killing of the father. Here the father is almost synonymous with the past, understood as tradition. Therefore, the sense of Oedipal loss is connected to the sense of severance with the past, with the legacy of the old order. This makes sense because as Jacques Alain Miller puts forth, “The father figure is not a concept that was born in psychoanalysis. It is a figure inherited by psychoanalysis, coming to it from tradition.” Miller specifies that “The Name-of-the-Father stems from a tradition and that this Name-of-the-Father, whatever the logical, structural function one might want to give it, does not belong to the discourse of science as such, but to a tradition said to be uninterrupted for over 5,700 years, the Jewish one and which, curiously, is the support of

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16 For example, Kahraman reads Tanpınar and his work within the framework of “conventional modernity” in his essay “Yitirilmemiş Zamanın.”
17 Tanpınar, “Medeniyet Değiştirmesi.”
the Occidental tradition.” Lacan’s Name-of-the-Father is not a scientific concept, but one that is derived from religious tradition, more precisely from biblical tradition. However, what is important is that while maintaining links with tradition, the Name-of-the-Father also denotes its interruption, or end of reign. The word “name” already reveals the fictitious quality of the father. He is not an ideal of undivided, invincible power. He is only a function, no more than a name. Lacan’s shift from the Name-of-the-Father as singular and absolute to the Names-of-the-Father as plural and limited in his later teachings and writings confirms this position of the father as a whole with a hole.

In The Time Regulation Institute, Tanpınar engages in a brilliant fictionalization of this sense of disconnection from tradition and the decline of paternal authority through the use of the concept of time. As Kahraman explains, “Tanpınar considers the ideas of memory, recollection, past, and present through the concept of time. This concept appears in different places in different meanings in Tanpınar’s work. Sometimes he mentions a ‘kernel of time’; sometimes he defines time as ‘the unfragmented flow of a unified, vast moment’.” However, different than the notion of “cosmic time” found in his poems, Tanpınar delineates time primarily as fragmented and discontinuous in The Time Regulation Institute. It appears as an artificial concept borrowed from the West and imposed on the real world for mostly practical reasons. Therefore, it represents disconnection from the past through the loss of a holistic sense of time as well as of community and identity. Kahraman affirms this by saying “Tanpınar internalizes the loss of time. … He approaches time from a perception of time that he believes has been lost. He is always in search of [the lost] time, but he never thinks about finding it and he

19 Ibid., 25-6.
expresses this clearly. … The reason for his occupation with the concept of time is because he has experienced the loss of tradition.”

Tanpinar employs the clock as the socially constructed symbol of time to convey the sense of orphanhood which is related to the sense of loss that accompanies the Oedipus complex. In other words, he illustrates the rupture opened between the past and the present as a result of civilizational exchange by depicting time as a fragmented continuum, something that is monitored and controlled; bought and sold. The clock becomes the way Tanpinar exposes the traumatic nature of modernization in Turkey that severs its connection to memory and history, and therefore inflicts a relentless sense of loss on the community.

According to Berna Moran, the process of modernization is portrayed in The Time Regulation Institute in four stages that corresponds to the four chapters: “Great Expectations,” “Little Truths,” “Towards Dawn,” and “Every Season Has an End.” “[T]he first part addresses the pre-Tanzimat period [before 1839]. The second part is about the Tanzimat period [of reforms, 1839-1876] and the third and fourth parts are about the beginning of the Republican period and its continuation.”

Even though the protagonist Hayri İrdal’s birth is at the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century (in 1893, to be exact), Moran thinks that his early life still represents “an unrealistic age before the Tanzimat, directed to religion in which people were not aware of scientific and economic developments in the West.” However, I believe that the book never depicts a pre-modern period. Or rather, pre-modernity appears as nothing other than

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21 Ibid., 29; my translation.
23 Ibid., 5.
a fantasy (of the modern imagination) that sustains the belief in an untainted innocence. This is because of the fact that the introduction of the Western (fragmented) sense of time which happens early on in the novel when İrdal is gifted a watch marks the end of the sense of wholeness by initiating the feeling of loss. Later on, this feeling of loss is associated, within the psychoanalytic discourse of Dr. Ramiz, with the experience of the Oedipus complex, and from then on, colors İrdal’s relationship with authority. Consequently, the clock, coming from and representing the West, impairs the unified and holistic view of the world by introducing duality between the old, existing and the new, modern values through the promotion of the ideas of order, progress, time discipline and valuation. With the foundation of the Time Regulation Institute, it transforms into an empty signifier embodied in the pointless effort of time synchronization. Through the empty signifier of the clock, Tanpınar illustrates that by instituting an irreducible gap between what we experience and its inadequate representation—between the Real and the symbolic reality—the modern socio-symbolic order becomes deeply interwoven with lack. Fathers who are an appendix to the symbolic dimension (in the book, too, the fathers are always appended to the clock) are also lacking and incomplete.

I will start this chapter by providing a historical sketch of the process of modernization within the context of Turkey’s move from an empire to a nation-state. Since it is impossible to comprehensibly cover the history of such a long period in such a short compass, I will only try to highlight the points that I believe are important to facilitate understanding of the novel. I will particularly call attention to the symbolic violence inherent in the Western ideas of equality, freedom, and nationhood that in part leads to the incomplete, inconsistent and at times coercive implementation of modernization in Turkey. Then, I will move on to the analysis of The Time Regulation
Institute and discuss, in light of this historical context, some of the ways in which its rewriting of the Turkish history through the symbol of the clock makes us reconsider the relationship between tradition, modernity, and nationhood. While Kafka, in his own prophetic way, foresees the tragic culmination of modernization in the Holocaust, Tanpınar, in his own retrospective way, exposes the tragic importation of modernization in Turkey. He does this by tracing its history within the lifetime of Hayri İrdal that starts in the last decade of the nineteenth century when the Tanzimat reforms have already created deep cleavages in society and continues through the Republican period when these cleavages have evolved, with some gaining importance and some losing ground. The tragedy of Turkish modernization transpires in the book as an Oedipal drama, which, as mentioned, becomes a symptom of the traumatic severance of the connection with the past and the propagation of the discontinuity with the legacy of tradition. But it also points to the impossibility of ever fully re-establishing the link between the old and the new because, as psychoanalysis tells us, there is no complete resolution of the Oedipus complex as there is no complete identification with the father.

**A HALF-HEARTED MURDER: TURKEY'S TRANSITION FROM EMPIRE TO NATION-STATE**

Freud’s final sentence of his *Totem and Taboo* reads: “in the beginning was the Deed.” And the deed, as we all know, was not a virtuous deed. It was a violent crime enacted by the brothers of the primal horde who killed and devoured their father. From this patricide and the consequent guilt was born all civilization. As discussed in the first chapter, Freud’s myth of the primal horde, which purports to be an account of primitive

times and peoples, presents a very modern notion of the concept of civilization. It tells an allegorical tale of the establishment of legal, civilized order. Most importantly, it posits the killing of the father as the only real requirement for the imposition of this order. As it suggests, every modern structure seeks to get rid of the father in order to create a society based on liberal and egalitarian principles. In this sense, we can read Freud’s primal father myth as an anachronism for the French Revolution of 1789: the civilians (the brothers) formed a conspiracy to overthrow the monarch (the father) to replace his absolute monopoly with a new social system. In this new system, the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity were taken as the basis of the democratic order, governing not only the activity of the officials but also the citizens. In the span of a hundred years, these principles inherited from the French Revolution would induce the re-enactment of the same scenario in the Ottoman Empire, crumpling its patrimonial structure and ultimately bringing its destruction.

Psychoanalysis’s origin story “presents the birth of the law as a crime story,” and this is what makes this otherwise frivolous narrative so influential.\(^25\) It situates violence—the killing of the father—at the core of the modern legal order. I find this a good starting point to talk about Turkey’s transition from empire to nation-state because the same paternal crisis marks the traumatic inception of modernity in Turkey. Bernard Lewis attributes the fall of the Ottoman Empire to the long-reaching effects of the French Revolution.\(^26\) However, it is important to note that the Turkish Revolution, although influenced greatly by the French Revolution, was different in many respects from the

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Most importantly, it did not originate with the goal of deposing the monarch; there was no simmering discontent with the sultan that would fuel the eruption of the revolution, as was the case in the French Revolution. Jale Parla also stresses that “the determining factor in Tanzimat thinking was not the killing of the father, but was the effort to resuscitate the dying father.” Even when Mustafa Kemal abolished the sultanate to turn Turkey into a republic, there was still much controversy around the subjects’ continuing loyalty to the sultan, and it was not easy to give up this orientation. Therefore, the murder of the father, which precedes the establishment of the modern order in Freud’s mythic narrative, became an obligatory—and not an initiatory—act in the case of Turkey, performed as a part of the process of modernization and westernization. In other words, the father had to be deposed in the course of the civilizational process; however, it was rather an enforced deposition, a half-hearted murder, than an organic and spontaneous act, as in the French Revolution.

Then it is no surprise that the killing of the father is situated as a traumatic event that lies at the founding of the Turkish Republic. For this reason, modernity in Turkey has always been equated with loss and dispossession, especially that of the father. As Orhan Pamuk puts it, the concept of “modern” has typically been understood as “not inherited

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27 For a comparison of the French Revolution with the Turkish Revolution, see Şerif Mardin, “Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2 (1971). Summarily, Mardin argues that 1) the Turkish Revolution was not a popular movement brought about by mass support, but was launched by the elite; 2) even though the ground was being prepared, “sudden and violent overthrow of an established order” was not the case.
28 Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1990), 20; my translation.
29 This becomes transparent in the following example: in response to Mustafa Kemal’s decision to break off links with both the sultanate and the caliphate, Rauf Orbay, one of his close associates and an artisan of the revolution, said: “I am bound by conscience and sentiment to the Sultanate. My father was brought up under the benefaction of the monarch and was dignitary of the Ottoman State. The gratitude of those benefits is in my blood. I am not ungrateful and cannot be. I am obliged to remain loyal to the sovereign.” See Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), 56-7. At this point strong ties with the sultan weaved over many centuries still continued and opposition was seen as ingratitude and disobedience.
from the father.”

This is because of the contested relation of modernity to the past. This relation is unfolded in the following sections in terms of Turkey’s shift in power from traditional domination to bureaucratic domination, and thus from a world order based on filial piety to one based on abstract legality. With a twist in Freud’s assertion, I argue that in the beginning was not the deed, but the ideas that paved the way for the deed, and set out to explore the impact of these ideas in the collapse of the ancient Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

*In the Beginning were the Ideas*

For more than five hundred years, from the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the thirteenth century to its gradual eclipse in the nineteenth, Ottoman pride persisted unabated, reasserting itself with each military victory and territorial gain. It would not be wrong to say that the Ottomans based their worldwide dominion on military might and that their path to disintegration was paved with a weakening in this field. Still, what really set in motion the empire’s decline was not in the realm of the material world; it was rather in a realm completely foreign to the Ottomans: the realm of ideas and knowledge (which were characteristically secular). Lewis writes that Ottoman pride, the conviction that the people of the universal Islamic Empire were superior to the “benighted and barbarous infidels” of Europe, worked to inhibit the Ottomans from keeping pace with the changing world, especially the progress of Western Europe. He contends that “the peoples of Islam continued to cherish the dangerous but comfortable illusion of the immeasurable and immutable superiority of their own civilization to all others,” and did not seek to

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31 Lewis, *The Emergence of*, 52.
adopt European ideals and practices up until the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{32} Earlier Western influences consisted of borrowings in the form of weapons, reflecting the Ottoman concerns about falling behind the enemy in combative techniques. Cultural and artistic reforms in the West, on the other hand, were often overlooked, and “the great western movements of ideas passed without even an echo in the lands of Islam.”\textsuperscript{33}

This situation eroded gradually, beginning with the French Revolution and its reverberation in the Eastern lands. The immediate effects of the Revolution were not obvious. The Ottomans saw it as an international crisis that would hopefully set Europeans against each other to their benefit. However, in the long run, the ideas growing out of the French Revolution, epitomized in the great watchwords of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” would prove disastrous for the empire’s integrity and social coherence. Out of these concepts, perhaps the one with the most long-reaching effect was liberty because it generated a completely new attitude toward the relationship between the sovereign and the subjects. Before the specific French meaning of the word started to be adopted in the nineteenth century—through translations of French documents and manifestos—the classical Islamic usage of liberty denoted the opposite of slavery (in a legal/social sense) and the opposite of predestination (in a philosophical sense).\textsuperscript{34} It did not designate the individualism of current usage, which is largely the legacy of the French Revolution. What was so radical about the new meaning in the Ottoman context was its audacious secularism: liberty meant, first and foremost, freedom from the arbitrary rule of the sovereign who no longer was a mystical entity. It came to be seen as the antithesis of

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 129.
tyranny. As such, it paved the way for a gradual transformation from community to individual rights.

Individuality and autonomy were foreign concepts in traditional Ottoman/Islamic society. We can understand this as an outcome of centuries of patrimonial governance.\textsuperscript{35} The Ottoman sultan as supreme arbiter was akin to a father: like the patriarchal head of a family, he was personally responsible for the welfare of his subjects. What sustained this patrimonial form of domination, though, was the subjects’ filial loyalty to the sultan—as both their father and religious leader (as the Caliph). Piety toward the sultan was equal to piety toward tradition, so the sultan’s authority was exclusively derived from traditional and Islamic institutions. Sharia, holy Islamic law, provided the foundation for the legal edifice of the Ottoman Empire, and remained as the only power existing independently of the authority of the sultan/state. Even the sultan’s personal law (\textit{kanun}) had to accord with Sharia for “there could be no legislative power in the state, since law came from God alone and was promulgated by revelation.”\textsuperscript{36} Thus, the Ottoman sultan’s exercise of authority, which was regulated and demarcated by Islamic law, diverged from Max Weber’s type of patrimonialism based on the exercise of power which is entirely discretionary. The sultan was primarily an intermediary between God and the community; this, in a way, restricted his power (as God’s servant just like everybody else), but it also tied him more to his subjects. Veneration for the sultan was the same as veneration for God. In return for reverential duty, the subjects could expect the same just treatment from the sultan as they would from their Creator. The issue of the just and the unjust continued

\textsuperscript{35} For a discussion of patrimonialism in the Ottoman Empire, see Şerif Mardin, “Power, Civil Society and Culture in the Ottoman Empire,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 11 (1969): 259-264 and “Ideology and Religion,” 200. Mardin argues that modern Turkey would encounter problems in the practice of democracy because of the legacy of the patrimonial structure.

\textsuperscript{36} Lewis, \textit{The Emergence of}, 109.
to typically define the social and political relations of the Ottoman Empire well until its decline.\(^{37}\)

However, because of the personal and spiritual relationship between the sultan and his subjects, Şerif Mardin writes that “[a]ll Ottoman citizens stood in a direct rather than a mediated relationship to supreme authority.”\(^{38}\) There were no intermediaries between the state and the people, and as a result there was no development of “civil society” as an autonomous entity carving out its own space of activity independent of central government.\(^{39}\) Consequently, the secular ideas of the French Revolution could not find a base in the concrete reality of the lives of Ottoman civilians. Because of the lack of civil society, revolt against the father would not originate in the thrust of the masses, but in the trust of an emerging elite. This new elite group, formed in the beginning of the nineteenth century, emerged to meet the need for an informed body knowledgeable in European languages and affairs to help with the reformist initiatives. During the Tanzimat Period, “efforts at elite formation expanded, spilling over into educational reforms” including the opening of new institutions and academies for training.\(^{40}\) Soon a new bureaucratic system evolved around the sultan—composed of civil officers, governors, ministers, grand viziers and so on—which would slowly change the locus of power from the sultan as the patrimonial ruler to rational bureaucratic administration. In the end, the sultan’s efforts to raise an educated elite class would turn to his disadvantage. The elites’ knowledge of the Western ideas would propel them to undermine their faith in the sultan’s own legitimacy.

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\(^{37}\) For a discussion of the just and the unjust, see Mardin’s article with the same title “The Just and the Unjust,” *Daedalus* 120 (1991).

\(^{38}\) Mardin, “Power, Civil Society,” 279.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 264.

As Carter Findley notes, “[i]f Ottoman sultans wanted new elites to serve them personally, the new ideas these men discovered in school led them to shift their loyalties from the person of the sultan to their own ideal of what the state should be, a fact with major consequences for the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic up to the present day.”

_Toward Rupture: Libertarian Movements_

The creation of a governing elite in the second half of the nineteenth century slowly brought about a change in the legitimation of domination. The new elite based its legitimation substantially on knowledge, and this was something new on its own. Moreover, the imported ideas from Western Europe (materialism, scientism, pragmatism, and positivism, to name a few) instilled a new way of seeing the world. This new worldview precipitated a discreet displeasure with the concentration of power at the hands of the sultan, leading to demands of a constitution that would limit his sovereignty. Written by a group of statesmen and ideologues, the first constitution was promulgated by Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1876. However, it was part of a short-lived experimentation with representative government in a land where there was no politics outside the sultan’s circle. It placidly ended with suppression by Abdülhamid himself who was veering back toward autocracy. As a result, new forces of constitutionalist opposition emerged among Ottoman intelligentsia who mounted a liberal critique of the sultan. The rise of opposition also coincided with the rise of nonofficial journalism: newspapers and journals provided a

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41 Ibid., 91.
42 Mardin, “Ideology and Religion,” 201. In his book _Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri, 1895-1908_ (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1983), Mardin also mentions that it became obvious in the new, modern era that brute force (_kava kuvvet_) could no more be used to flaunt one’s superiority. Now it was the force of knowledge (_fikir kuvveti_) that enabled the conquest of countries. And this new force was not in the exclusive possession of the sultan, but was held by a group of people outside the center (190-1).
venue for propagating political and constitutionalist ideas. Even though Abdülhamid gave full measure in the way of censorship and suppression of dissent to centralize power once again on himself, the propagandizers of libertarian ideas both inside and outside the empire continued to publish newspapers and journals to spread their message, and thus was sparked “disguised subterranean rifts of great magnitude which contributed directly to the formation of the Young Turk movement.”

As the first organized opposition group, the Young Turks founded a new committee called “Union and Progress” (İttihat ve Terakki) in 1889. The committee was composed of government employees, military elites and intellectuals, but the real force of resistance came from political prisoners and exiles abroad in Paris, Geneva, and Cairo. Like their forerunners, the Young Ottomans in 1865, the Young Turks were devout Muslims and believed in the superiority of Islam and Holy Law. Even though the libertarian ideas they were influenced by were characteristically secular, the Young Turks frequently consulted Islamic sources such as the Qur’an and the Hadith to find legitimation of these ideas. For example, patriotism, emphasizing service to the country rather than the sultan, was legitimized through religious explanation: “The love of one’s country is part of the faith”—an idea inherited from the Young Ottomans and especially Namık Kemal’s brand of patriotism. We can argue that it was this “intoxicating patriotism” that propelled the Young Turks toward revolutionary action. As Mardin notes, one of the most recurring themes in their publications was “the loss of the empire”, and their preoccupation was with saving it rather than taking benefit from its demise as was evident in their insistence

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44 Lewis, *The Emergence of*, 154-5.
Thus, even though the sultan’s unlimited power was criticized (and his person was disparaged as a tyrant), loyalty to the dynasty and the sultanate continued. In other words, personal dislike against the sultan did not affect the legitimizing institution of his power, at least not presently.

Well until the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Islam retained much of its legitimizing force. Notwithstanding the penetration of ideas from the West, deeply embedded Islamic traditions and precepts did not allow the rationalist secular thought to flourish and persist. The absolute truth still lay in the Qur’an and the Hadith. Reforms were tolerated only within this framework. However, the firm grip on Islam did little in the way of saving Islam (or the empire) from being caught in the web of politicization. In his analysis of the publications of the Young Turks, Mardin observes that Islam showed signs of losing its sacred character when it started to be used as a political tool. This registered a considerable change compared to the previous generation of Young Ottomans. According to the Young Ottomans, the core values of Western civilization could be adopted without compromising Islamic principles. They presented meticulous syntheses of Eastern and Western cultures, and argued that they could be coalesced. Conversely, the writings of the Young Turks showed “ineptitude” in the use of Islamic sources. Islamic knowledge increasingly became more superficial and elementary. According to Mardin, the beginning of secularization could be discerned under the surface of this “sham Islamism”

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45 Mardin, Jön Türklerin Siyasi, 51.
46 For a detailed discussion of Islamic absolutism during the Tanzimat, see Parla, Babalar ve Oğullar, in particular the chapter called “Mutlak Metin” (The Absolute Text).
47 Mardin, Jön Türklerin Siyasi, 91.
48 Ibid., 92.
49 Ibid.
In The Time Regulation Institute, Tanpinar depicts this sham Islamism through various paternal figures. The beginning of secularization is represented by the adoption of the clock (as well as Western cultural values) and manifested in the pseudo-forms of religious spirituality performed by such figures as Nuri Efendi and Seyit Lutfullah.

As the hold of religion weakened, it was supplanted by other ideological surrogates. The idea of nation (millet) and national unity (milli birlik), which remained for many years in the vocabulary of the Ottoman intellectuals, started to replace the role of Islam as the social glue. In the Young Turk journal Mizan, the subject of national culture was considered as an important aspect of the preservation of the nation. However, while the breakdown of cultural unity previously meant the disintegration of Islamic law, in Mizan cultural unity was no longer construed as a palpable element along the lines of Sharia, but an abstract entity connotating the nation’s “soul,” “spirituality,” and “essence.” In Şura-yı Ümmet, another Young Turk journal, it was indicated that what held society together was not grounded solely in “religion,” but could also be provided by “culture.” Another important point was that the sense of communal bond was slowly shifting from religion to society. The sanctity of religion was being transposed onto an abstract sense of nation, made up of different groups of people which nonetheless composed a totality. What Tanpinar insinuates in The Time Regulation Institute with the penetration of the Western idea of time into the Ottoman social structure is the enervation or emptying out of tradition that consequently turns into a pseudo-form. This enervation results in not only

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50 Ibid., 121.
51 Ibid., 90.
52 Ibid., 203.
the weakening of the religious doctrine but also the destruction of the cement of social life. As Kahraman writes, for Tanpinar, religion is not only a set of beliefs and exercises, but it is a cultural concept, a sociological reality, and even an aesthetic category. Being Muslim is “almost the only source that unifies Anatolia and that enables the formation of aesthetics.”

53 For this reason, when its social function is vitiated, it constitutes a problem because the organic bond that creates collective consciousness is broken. In *The Time Regulation Institute*, Tanpinar suggests this through the symbol of the clock. The clock becomes representative of the artificial construct of time, and as the story moves on, bears resemblance to the ideal of nation replacing religion. According to Tanpinar, the whole problem seems to stem from “pseudoization”—from the fictitious nature of the symbolic realm. Both Kafka and Tanpinar unmask all too disturbingly this fictitious quality in their own unique ways.

*A Nation Rising: The Establishment of the Turkish Republic*

The emergence of national consciousness gave way to the emphasis placed on the preservation of the state more power than the people that constituted the nation. In this sense, the nationalists ideologues continued “the Ottoman tradition that the state counted more than did individuals,” and this concern for the state was gradually “transformed into an ideology of nascent nationalisms,” the most tenacious one being the movement spearheaded by Mustafa Kemal. Mustafa Kemal, born in Salonika in 1881, spent the most of his youth as an Ottoman soldier. During his service in the Ottoman army, he fought in distant corners of the empire, including Damascus in Syria, Monastir in Tunisia,

53 Kahraman, “Yitirilmemiş Zamanın,” 26; my translation.
54 Mardin, “Ideology and Religion,” 202. The authority of the father was thus transposed onto the authority and power of the state. This can be read as an extension of the Ottoman’s patrimonial structure into the alternative regime experiments, and eventually into the Turkish Republican regime. The yearning for the father would continue to determine the political conduct and choices of the new government.
and Tripoli and Derna in Libya, where his leadership and courage were unequivocal. By the time he gained renown as a commander at Gallipoli in 1915, he had already proved himself as ambitious and valiant, equipped for taking on the leading role in organizing the nationalist movement only four years later. Mustafa Kemal’s military success, however, could not prevent the empire’s falling into the imperial hands. By the end of the First World War, the once mighty Ottoman Empire was in complete disarray. The imperial capital İstanbul was occupied by foreign troops, the land was in chaos, and the people were impoverished. The empire was slowly being divided among the European powers.

The precipitators of this catastrophic climate were prominently the Young Turk leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), who had started a revolution in 1908 to restore the disintegrating Ottoman Empire, but ended up hastening its demise. Led by Enver Pasha, the Young Turks seized control during a political unrest and forced Abdülhamid out of power. They quickly reinstated the constitutional monarchy with the intention of replacing the absolutist regime of the sultan with the rule of law. Şükrü Haneloğlu argues that:

They envisaged a parliamentary democracy headed by a responsible government and administered by a meritocratic bureaucracy. They expected political parties to replace age-old institutions, such as notable houses and religious orders, as the principle mediums of political participation. They stood for a new fraternal Ottoman identity, united against European intervention in the affairs of the empire. They spoke of a free press, and of virtually unlimited individual liberties. Very few
of these things came to pass.\textsuperscript{55}

The nationalist desire of the Young Turks to conserve the empire developed into a staunch preservation of the state and its institutions. This meant, first and foremost, consolidating their own power which included the suppression of dissent, criminalization of political opposition, and elimination of non-Turkic nationalities. Soon the government under the Young Turks became as oppressive as, if not more than, the strict regime of Abdülhamid, “subordinating individual rights to the supreme interests of the state.”\textsuperscript{56} The ideas promoted with the restoration of the constitution—enshrined in the French Revolution motto “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”—turned into a tool at the hands of the Young Turks to legitimize their rule. The fundamental principles of a free society (elections, equal representation, free press) became self-serving and self-promoting instruments, providing a façade for the institutionalization of the state’s tight control. The new principles of equality, liberty, and nationhood could hardly camouflage the old reality of patrimonialism (the need for a strong father/state).

Meanwhile, the commander who emerged from the Gallipoli as a national hero was establishing his own nationalist struggle infused with the same passion for the conservation of the nation. Mustafa Kemal had been a prominent member of the CUP and an advocate of the restoration of the constitutional regime; however, his influence was not so great as he had hoped because he was not included “in the inner circles of the Committee.”\textsuperscript{57} Rather, his credentials were based on “his military accomplishments, his

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{57} Ahmad, The Making of, 48.
emergence from the war as an undefeated general." That is what he would instead rely on to initiate his own nationalist struggle against the occupation of Anatolian territory by the Allied forces (soon after the Ottoman defeat in the First World War and signing of the Armistice of Mudros). 19 May 1919, the day Mustafa Kemal landed at Samsun, is conventionally viewed as the beginning of the Turkish nationalist resistance. In the following days, a circular was published by Mustafa Kemal and his associates which sought to unify various resistance groups by local leaders in Thrace and Anatolia. It was ensued by congresses at Erzurum and Sivas, where these resistance groups were organized into the “Association for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia” (Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti) striving towards preserving the territorial integrity of the empire. At this point, there was no intention of separation from the Ottoman dynasty, and the goal of the new association was, before anything else, to safeguard the integrity of the nation and its borders (and nation still meant, to a greater extent, a religious community).

However, Mustafa Kemal soon made it apparent that he was intent on building something completely new. He was not to be restricted, like his predecessors (the Young Turks), by the persistence of the old regime which was beyond saving—having signed its own suicide note by allowing the partition of the empire through the Treaty of Sevres. He first resigned his military post, shedding any last association with the Ottoman government. He then spearheaded the establishment of a new parliament in 1920, known as The Turkish Grand National Assembly, which “evolved into the nucleus of a national

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58 Ibid.
59 In his book Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek-Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması (1923-1931) (İstanbul: Cem, 1989), Mete Tunçay lists the standing rules of the association, where its objective is stated to activate the nationalist forces and render sovereign the national will in order to protect the impunity of the integrity of the Ottoman nation as well as the sacred posts of the sultanate and the caliphate, 31.
government” at the center of Anatolia, Ankara. For a certain time, two rival governments existed, one in İstanbul and one in Ankara. Eventually, Mustafa Kemal’s new government was internationally recognized in the Treaty of Lausanne, and a few months after the treaty was signed, the Republic of Turkey was officially established on 29 October, 1923. Mustafa Kemal took off his military uniform, never to wear it again; he replaced his commander hat with a political hat he donned until the end of his life.

When Turkey was declared a republic with Mustafa Kemal as its elected president, the sultanate had already been abolished, and the annulment of the caliphate was on its way. At first, on November 1, 1922, the Ottoman sultan was stripped of the political power of the throne. Mustafa Kemal made it clear that what he envisioned for the new nation was a regime different than the age-old monarchy. He was in favour of popular sovereignty: government belonged to the people and the national assembly would serve as the people’s representatives. This new republican order was incompatible with the survival of the sultanate which led to its elimination. As for the office of the caliphate, its abrogation proved to be more compelling. In fact, there was a viable opposition within the assembly that advocated the nominal primacy of the caliph. The opponents emphasized the “the significance of the Caliphate to the world of Islam;” however, “[t]his was precisely the link the Kemalists wanted to break since it violated the spirit of the nation state embroiling it in crises outside its borders.” Moreover, the institutional separation of religion from politics constituted an essential part of the “the new regime’s secularist

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60 Findley, *Turkey, Islam*, 222.
Thus, on 1 March, 1924, the caliphate was abolished once and for all together with religious law and religious schools. This marked Mustafa Kemal’s Oedipal triumph over “the evil father,” that is the sultan, who was guilty of bringing “mother the country” to a destruction, and positioned him as a triumphant son who saved the country by replacing the sultan’s regime “with a more legitimate regime of his own creation and with himself in command.”

Paradoxes and Illusions of Nationhood

After the sultan was deprived of both political and religious authority, many in the Islamic world expected Mustafa Kemal to declare himself sultan and caliph. But the savior son would not follow in the footsteps of his father. He transferred the sovereignty, previously held exclusively by the paternal sultan, to the Turkish nation and rejected any royal rank for himself. The authors of his psychobiography, Vamık Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, suggest that Mustafa Kemal had an exceptional respect for established borders and territorial integrity: “what made him a genius was his ability to put limits (borders) to his grandiose expansion.” According to the authors, his realistic capacity was related to his earliest relationship with his father, his idealized image of the man as a chivalrous guard of the frontiers of his country. Stories of the border and the threatening bandits told among the family led Mustafa Kemal to develop a realistic awareness of his capacities and shrewd assessment of the consequences of his action, both of which were amply

64 Ibid., 233.
65 Ibid., 300.
demonstrated in his military career. His competence at containing “his passion for extraordinary achievements” made him different than other military and political leaders such as Hitler of Nazi Germany whose fantasies of glory were “boundless” in contrast to Mustafa Kemal’s restrained sense of superiority.66 Perhaps it was his restrained sense of reality that prevented Mustafa Kemal from developing nationalism into a dangerous and deadly weapon as it happened at the hands of Hitler. He did not pursue a grandiose policy of territorial expansion, but cultivated a respect for national boundaries established by the National Pact.

However, even though Mustafa Kemal was a person who was realistic in his appreciation of geographic limits, the idea of “nationhood” he subscribed to was an illusory construction. As Benedict Anderson has shown, the fundamental quality of the nation is that it is an “imagined community” because the inhabitants of a nation do not have a direct, face-to-face contact with one another and they build their communal link on an “imaginary” rather than a “real” sense of connection. As he puts it, the nation is “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”67 It should be pointed out, though, that for Anderson all communities are more or less imagined. They depend on bonds that are more symbolic than physical in nature. In that sense, we can argue that Ottoman society was imagined, too, but with a big difference. Religion formed the basis of an organic bond between people, and between the sultan and his subjects. As Mardin argues, one of the most

66 Ibid., 83.
important functions of religion in the Ottoman social dynamic was as a linkage between the “‘high’ or ‘palace’ culture” and “the ‘little’ or ‘folk’ culture.”[^68] Shared by Ottomans of both high and low status, Islamic customs and practices served as the glue by which people from different social milieux cohered.

When Mustafa Kemal opted for a radical break with the Islamic tradition in order to establish his nation on a modern, secular basis, this important function of religion as a social cement was disturbed, and greatly altered by a national consciousness—a sense of belonging to an imagined homogenous community of the nation. The new regime’s program of substituting religious identity with a national/racial one based on an imagined origin of the Turk’s past effectively worked to dissociate the country from its recent Ottoman heritage. This constitutes a major problem for Tanpınar. As stated earlier, Tanpınar views Ottoman/Muslim culture as the embodiment of the strongest link between Anatolian people. Therefore, what is liquidated with the institution of the Turkish Republic on secular grounds is this sense of religious tradition as social glue. Here I should note that Tanpınar is never against secularism when understood in its political sense, but culturally he sees it as the source of the disintegration within society. In this way, he reveals the problematic core of Kemalism. Even though it starts out as a grassroots effort to expel Western imperialism from Ottoman lands, it gradually turns into a top-to-bottom regime that estranges people from their spiritual and cultural heritage. The inherent complexity of Kemalism can be seen in Tanpınar’s conflictual statements about his own position: he states that he is a Westerner (in a way compulsorily) in that he finds Western culture richer and deeper than the Eastern one; however, he also locates the

source of the duality caused by the civilizational exchange in the harsh severance from the Islamic heritage. This is why I have previously referred to modernization in Turkey as a half-hearted murder of the father. Tanpinar’s view of modernization similarly employs a paternal metaphor: he expresses the feeling of loss experienced as a result of modernization as one of “orphanhood.” As he expresses in another novel, “There is no East. The East is dead. We are all orphans.”

The Time Regulation Institute becomes the tale of this sense of orphanhood through the metaphor of the Oedipus complex.

A NEVER-ENDING OEDIPAL CRISIS: EMPTY CLOCKS AND INEPT FATHERS IN THE TIME REGULATION INSTITUTE

Atatürk’s vision of the Turkish nation was based on the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but these ideas were embedded with symbolic violence when they functioned as ideologies, and this found embodiment in the republican regime, too. The efforts to create a strong, centralized state exerted pressure on all citizens to give up their distinctiveness and submit in the same way to the ideal of the leader. It took a very strong will to resist the demand to conform to the common standards of conduct. It was not just because of fear of social rejection or lack of acceptance, but because one could not easily recognize alternatives to the existing system, that is, the belief in the tenets of Kemalism, and by extension the West, because it was claimed as the best and the only expedient to bring modernity to Turkey. I believe that Tanpinar’s dilemma, which is reproduced within the novel, must be understood within this context. On one hand, Tanpinar was a supporter of nationalist sentiments, synthesizing them with knowledge and ideas from the West. He was a parliamentary representative of Atatürk’s party and always talked in praise of him

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69 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar, Mahur Beste (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1998), 106.
as the embodiment of a true hero.\textsuperscript{70} However, on the other hand, he did not possess
typical Kemalist views on the repudiation of the Ottoman legacy and the (cultural,
linguistic etc.) homogenization of the nation. He perceived the failings of the regime in
cultivating more integrative and accommodative policies. Thus, he was suspended in the
middle, not being able to live peacefully among the herd, so to say, and not being able to
articulate comfortably his opposition to mainstream politics—in public, and perhaps even
in private.

In \textit{The Time Regulation Institute}, this ambivalence is construed in Oedipal terms
through Hayri İrdal’s father complex. In explaining his diagnosis of İrdal with this
“illness,” Dr. Ramiz says that he has never liked his father, yet “a father should always be
loved—should be someone who is always respected … whether you like it or not.”\textsuperscript{71} He
sees İrdal as an irreverent son who refuses to show unconditional love to his father, and
therefore remains immature for failing to resolve his Oedipus complex. The way he can
attain an adult status is only through the resolution of this complex, which becomes
possible when he meets Halit Ayarcı, a new father figure who is more smart, charismatic,
and charming than his true father. İrdal identifies him with his ego-ideal and raises him in
his own estimation. In this way, he seems to resolve his Oedipus complex and become a
“normal” grown-up man; however, in reality, his father complex still runs deeply. His
subversive servility and cynical gratitude towards Ayarcı manifest a profound
ambivalence with respect to his authority. In this sense, it echoes Tanpınar’s own failure
to achieve a thorough identification with the father(s) of the republic. Like his character,

\textsuperscript{70} For example, see his writings on Atatürk: “Mucizeli bir Ömür” and “Kahraman ve Ölüm” in \textit{Yaşadığım Gibi}, 87-92; 93-95.
\textsuperscript{71} Tanpınar, \textit{The Time Regulation}, 117.
Tanpınar is inhibited by a father complex, being stuck at an earlier phase of identification where ambivalence toward the father still prevails. Even though he shares the same love for the leader which binds him with the others, he also stands apart from the others because his partial, ambivalent identification with the father allows him to cultivate a more critical attitude toward authority. However, this inability to thoroughly identify with the father, as *The Time Regulation Institute* shows, is a structural failure. That is, it has its roots in the social/symbolic structure. In the book, this is shown through the symbol of the clock. The clock symbolizes the modern social order which is imported during the civilizational exchange between European and Ottoman societies. As such, it demonstrates the emptiness at the heart of this order through the gap between reality and the Real. It also demonstrates the ineptitude in the functioning of the fathers (as the embodiment of the symbolic authority) in this new modern order.

*A Relic of the Lost Freedom: İrdal’s Early Childhood*

Hayri İrdal is born in İstanbul in 1895. He recalls his childhood as a time of unalloyed innocence and joy. He writes, “The privilege I most treasured as a child was that of freedom.”

Sadly for him, this privilege does not last very long. With the political language of freedom being disseminated in the Ottoman lands, he loses the genuine experience of wholeness, happiness, and fulfillment, and never attains it again in his life. “Today we use the word [freedom] only in its political sense,” he bemoans, and continues:

I fear that those who see freedom solely as a political concept will never fully grasp its meaning. The political pursuit of freedom can lead to its eradication on a grand

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72 Ibid., 18.
scale—or rather it opens the door to countless curtailments. It seems that freedom is the most coveted commodity in the world: for just when one person decides to gorge upon it, those around him are deprived. Never have I known a concept so inextricable from its antithesis, and indeed entirely crushed under its weight. I have been made to understand that in my lifetime freedom has been kind enough to visit our country seven or eight times. Yes, seven or eight times, and no one ever bothered to say when it left; but whenever it came back again, we would leap out of our seats in joy and pour into the streets to blow our horns and beat our drums.\footnote{Ibid.}

Freedom in its political sense is the product of a specific social formation. It presumes a universal language that appeals to the needs and interests of everyone, but is in fact embedded in a set of assumptions, originated in the liberal beliefs bequeathed by the French Revolution. According to Renata Salecl, the empty form of the universality of freedom as a human right functions in the same way as the Lacanian matheme: “something that can be inscribed or constructed at some Real place, but whose content cannot be defined or displayed in reality.”\footnote{Renata Salecl, \textit{The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism} (London: Routledge, 1994), 132.} Its workings can be seen in the difference between the meaning of the words “exist” and “ex-sist.” In order for something to exist, it needs to be articulated in language; however, when we put it into words, we make it ex-sist: exist outside of our reality. Outside is in the sense that it ex-sists (or insists) in the Real. For Salecl, this is exactly how human rights function. “As long as they are a construct, an empty universal, human rights as such do not exist, they can only ‘insist’;
i.e. as a substitute for something fundamental which the subject has lost.”\textsuperscript{75} That is why, as she continues, “there will always remain a gap between positive, written rights, and the universal idea of human rights.”\textsuperscript{76} The result of our desire to represent what can only be inadequately represented by language, that is the idea of freedom, is that we lose the feeling of freedom which is reduced to a tool of political discourse, and which, as such, becomes an empty formality. This is also what happens to law in Kafka’s \textit{The Trial}. Because it does not refer to any ideal content, it remains a purely empty formality.

In this sense, what is lost in İrdal’s life is the real freedom, the unlimited and unquantified feeling of freedom, replaced by its false image, which can never quite fill its lack. In a paradoxical way, the coming of freedom in his world means the disappearance of the very same thing. This is what İrdal humorously points to when he describes freedom as “the most coveted commodity in the world: for just when one person decides to gorge upon it, those around him are deprived.” İrdal’s farcical commentary on freedom brings to mind Kafka’s short story “A Report to an Academy,” where an ape, who is “free” in the most basic sense of the world in his own kingdom before his capture, recounts his introduction to the idea of “freedom” as a socially constructed reality. He shows that the fact that freedom is so valued in the human estimation is an indicator that it is what humans lack the most. They lack freedom because they are able to talk about freedom. And the language of freedom is a culturally instituted political language characterized by the binary divisions of presence and absence (it is present in some countries and absent in others). Both narrations, then, that of Tanpınar and Kafka, criticize how politicization of freedom kills the very thing it is supposed to cultivate in

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
their respective societies.

It is important that Tanpınar starts his account of İrdal’s life with a description of his earliest childhood memory of losing his freedom (or sense of completeness). This is a strategic move in terms of foreshadowing the direction of the novel, as it hints what the rest of İrdal’s life is going to be like: in futile search of the treasure he lost as a child. The brief time period when he had a total and holistic view of life in his childhood would remain as the only time he was truly happy. Because henceforth his life would be outweighed by what is lost, resonating the unacknowledged nostalgia pervading his era. In the book, clocks become the symbol of this sense of loss and longing. With their abstract, mechanical workings, they cannot quite replace the indigenous time that was known before, but nevertheless serve as a substitute for it. İrdal remembers that he was given his first watch by his uncle as a circumcision gift around ten years old. It instantly changed his outlook on life: “Hayri İrdal’s true date of birth was the very day he received this watch. From the moment they placed it on my pillow … my life changed, its deeper meanings suddenly emerging. First the little timepiece nullified my little world, and then it claimed its rightful place, forcing me to abandon my earlier loves.”

Even though İrdal marks the day he received his first watch as his “true date of birth,” as if his former life had been utterly meaningless, we know that he means just the opposite: his life took a twisted turn after he received the watch. He was compelled to surrender the state of bliss and the privilege of freedom of his early childhood. He was left with a profound sense of lack that would plague him throughout his life. This lack marks his symbolic castration and places him in the domain of the Name-of-the-Father, the representative of the

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77 Ibid., 20.
symbolic order. The fact that he is given the watch on his day of circumcision hence gains more significance.

For readers who may think that he had never seen a watch until gifted one by his uncle, İrdal explains that his life has always been dominated by the clock (although the wristwatch was still a novelty). He tells us that the clock was used by Muslims to calculate prayer time for decades, which made them “the best customers of Europe’s clockmakers.”

It “dictated all manner of worship: the five daily prayers, as well as meals during the holy month of Ramadan, the evening iftar and morning sahur.” It thus “offered the most reliable path to God.” However, we can notice a mocking, ironic tone in these remarks. How can a mechanical invention lead to a way to find God? How can the materiality of clock correlate with the spirituality of prayer? From what İrdal tell us, we understand that Muslims adapted the European clock to their own religious needs and faith traditions (although it was not produced for that purpose), but even though clocks were domesticated in this way, they were still foreign objects. So, the result of using clocks for the arrangement of religious time was a rather odd synthesis between the mechanical and the metaphysical. İrdal hints at this odd synthesis when he writes: “To listen to a watch was to listen to the waters that ran from the ablutionary fountains in the mosque courtyards; it was the sound of an infinite and eternal faith, a sound like no other that reverberated in this world or the one beyond.” By comparing the ticking sound of a watch to the inner voice of faith, he exposes the disharmony evident in the amalgamation of the two. He implies that in this commingling one would corrode the other. Specifically,
the ideas coming from the West would slowly weaken the tradition of Islam in the Ottoman world. If Islam represents the (pre-modern) sense of wholeness and integrity, during the modernization process, this sense would be replaced by a debilitating sense of lack (symbolized by the clock).

Echoes of the Past: İrdal’s Early Father Figures

Much of İrdal’s personality is shaped by his childhood experiences, which notably include his receiving his first watch. During his adolescence, the influence of timepieces still continues, but paternal figures outside home come to hold more importance. Nuri Efendi, Seyit Lutfullah, and Abdüsselam Bey all become father substitutes for him, each corresponding to a different period in his life. Nuri Efendi is İrdal’s first father substitute. He starts working at his clock workshop when he is 13 years old. Nuri Efendi does not only repair watches and clocks, but also makes a philosophy out of them. He does not regard them simply as mechanical gadgets telling time, but associates their repair with ethical conduct. This is what sets him apart from other clock repairmen. For him, a broken clock has a big share in driving people to sin. This makes his job more meaningful because by saving clocks from rusting away he believes that he saves people from sin. İrdal describes him as a good-intentioned, devout Muslim; however, his ironic tone should make us contemplate further. What İrdal tells us about his alternative approach to timepieces suggests that Nuri Efendi has adopted a modern understanding of time, directed by the clockwork ethic: punctuality, efficiency, and productivity.

Perceptions of time and temporal order underwent a subtle change with the gradual adoption of equal time in the Ottoman Empire around the middle of the nineteenth
Before this time, mechanical clocks were already in use (they first made their way to the palace in the late fifteenth century and from there spread to the homes of the civilians\textsuperscript{82}), but they were subordinate to the pre-existing conventions of time.\textsuperscript{83} The Ottomans customarily measured time by dividing the cycle of day and night into twelve equal portions. They used sundials to measure the length of each portion, but because the sundials tracked the diurnal movement of the sun across the sky, it varied day to day, and season to season. Correspondingly, the duration of work periods, school sessions, and social/religious activities such as the times of beginning and breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan, the five set daily prayers etc., which were arranged in line with this native hour system, differed according to location. Thus, the time Ottomans used was not standard across the country. It was rather governed by the shifting motion of celestial bodies. The spiritual perception of time “as part of a divinely created … system [and] not a human-made structure that can be manipulated” certainly contributed to the way time was structured and organized in this way.\textsuperscript{84}

When the Ottomans started using clocks to keep equal hour time in late nineteenth century, they still continued the practice of temporal hour, so both systems existed together, interacting with each other as well as with their environment, down to the fall of the empire.\textsuperscript{85} Mechanical clocks were typically used for practicality, as an aid in determining the right time for prayer. Their homogenized, abstract representation of time was not wholly assimilated into the existing tradition, so they continued to serve the

\textsuperscript{81} Avner Wishnitzer, “‘Our Time:’ On the Durability of the Alaturka Our System in the Late Ottoman Empire,” \textit{International Journal of Turkish Studies} 16 (2010).
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 48-49.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Wishnitzer, “Our Time,” 51-52.
Islamic purpose. In this way, as Mehmet Bengü Uluengin writes, “the Ottomans constructed a consensus between the religious sociotemporal order—still dependent on the natural rhythm of the sun—and the abstract, mathematical hours of the mechanical clock.”86 However, this consensus between traditional and modern temporal constructs was not always free of complication. As the popularity of the clock increased, the modern perception of time as rigid and constant disseminated, casting a shadow on the old unequal hour system the Ottomans had been using for centuries.

In particular, when the Ottoman administration implemented clock-regulated schedules in government offices, and civilian and military schools during the last decades of the nineteenth century, a new time consciousness slowly spread among the young students and clerks.87 The administration wished to impose order and coherence on the various activities to reduce sluggishness and increase efficiency, so they applied time-tabled programs to manage the start and end times at work as well as the length and duration of instructions at school. This was the first time that clock time was used for a secular reason, a reason other than calculating prayer times. The by-product of this new temporal orientation was “the formation of new elites that identified temporal order with progress, patriotism, and modernity.”88 While outside the official buildings, people still lived their lives precariously, organizing their daily activities according to the traditional fluctuating hour system, the elites trained in state institutions developed a stable and regimented sense of time discipline. As an effect of their education on time, they associated the clock with the ideas of punctuality and uniformity, hard work and progress.

88 Ibid., 29-30.
However, even though the Ottoman state wished to improve productivity and support development in this way (by inculcating the young with the value of Western time), their efforts ultimately worked to produce backlash against their own regime. Most graduates of Ottoman schools had already adopted western dualistic thinking. Their association of clock-regulated time with productivity and progress resulted in a marginalization of the old hour system, which was now seen as backward, primitive, and cause of disorder. This fostered the assumption that the Ottoman state was fatalistic and stagnant, and that it was destined to fall behind the European civilization. It was not a coincidence that the use of clock-setting metaphors to describe the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire flourished around this time. One good example is Fuad Pasha’s statement that “Islam, for centuries, in its environment, was a wonderful instrument of progress. Today it is a clock that is behind time and must be set.” Clocks, borrowed from Europe as material objects in service of Islamic principles, ultimately turned into abstract symbols representing order, progress, and development, ideals associated with the highest level of European civilization and by which the old standards of the Ottoman Empire were judged.

In this historical context, Nuri Efendi’s utterances and practices make more sense. In his compulsion to repair every broken clock and unset watch, we can notice a fastidious concern with punctuality and time thrift, attesting to his internalized time discipline. Moreover, we can see the manifestation of an anxiety associated with the backwardness of Ottoman society. His obsession with saving time thus reflects a far more substantial concern with saving the empire by utilising modern technologies and

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89 Ibid., 23.
90 Findley, *Turkey, Islam*, 76. Another example for the use of such metaphors includes Dr. Cevdet who likens human intelligence (specifically Muslim intelligence) to a broken clock that needs to be repaired. See Mardin, *Jön Türklerin*, 175.
practices. As much as a modern sage for his insights on time discipline, Nuri Efendi is also an adherent of Islamic values and norms. He creates a synthesis, blending the modern notion of time with the old system of Islamic practice. This is reflected in his adages that establish parallels between God, humans, and clocks: “The Great Almighty made man in his image, and men made watches in theirs” or “Man must never forsake his clocks, for consider his ruination if forsaken by God!” However, as I have mentioned in the previous section, such syntheses cannot avoid appearing odd in their commingling of the metaphysical and the mechanical even in the discourse of a “quasi saint” such as Nuri Efendi. They appear to serve a religious purpose, as when Nuri Efendi equates fixing a dying watch with bringing people back to the true path of God, but they are only in appearance so. Nuri Efendi’s love of timepieces which seems to originate from his spirituality is only a disguise—an ideological cover—for his appreciation of progress and modernity. After all, as Uluengin notes, there was in practice no need of clocks for the Islamic people because they were already able to read the day’s passage from the sundials and the calls to prayer.

The clock as a symbol of progress and civilization guides Nuri Efendi’s thinking. He does not merely use watches and clocks as practical tools to calculate prayer times, but is ingrained in the knowledge and philosophy of where they come from. In this sense, Moran’s contention that Nuri Efendi never becomes an object of İrdal’s criticism should be revisited. Nuri Efendi indeed becomes an object of both İrdal and Tanpınar’s criticism. He is portrayed as a good-hearted Sufi dervish, but the ideas he advocates

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91 Tanpınar, *The Time Regulation*, 29.
belong more to secular institutes than faith traditions. What is criticized here, though, is perhaps not so much the person in question, but the whole process of modernization which starts with the Tanzimat and produces such hybridizations between the old and the new. It also changes the essential character of religion, making it appear more and more inauthentic. From this perspective, we can argue that Tanpınar presents Nuri Efendi as similar to, and not different from, Halit Ayarı. It is no surprise that Ayarı feels very close to Nuri Efendi and uses his sayings in the promotion of his own time-setting institute because he is in a way his double reflection, a product of the same modernization process. While one uses religion as a masquerade for his own pursuit of modern technologies, the other removes the cover all together, emphasizing the capitalist ethic of time that equates it with money; however, in the end, they both evidence an identification with, and an incorporation of, the new ideas from the West—though often partially or repressively.

The same mixing of traditional and modern values can be detected in İrdal’s other early father figures, particularly Seyit Lutfullah. Seyit Lutfullah works as an imam at a local mosque before the Tanzimat. He has such strong convictions, which are founded on Sharia law, that he prohibits “most everything in life save prayer, going so far as to place restrictions on eating, drinking, and sometimes even speaking.”94 Then, after his wife dies, he leaves İstanbul. When he comes back after ten years of traveling, he is not the same person. As İrdal recounts, “[o]ne of his eyes had turned entirely white, his lips were slightly parted, and his body was at the mercy of a tic that left his primary motor functions intact but sent a continuous series of short, awkward, involuntary spasms

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through his entire body.”⁹⁵ His physical mutilation is only an outward manifestation of an inner transformation. Seyit Lutfullah is no longer a religious teacher who advocates strict discipline, but a medium who communicates with the spirits from other realms. He is not interested in the material provisions of religious law, but is after the knowledge of the spiritual or mystical world. He suggests that his impairment is a result of his pursuit of this knowledge, as he is attacked by a group of mean spirits because of meddling with their world. In his new personality, İrdal writes that he appears as “a ghostly shadow in the void, a mask on loan, a living lie: Imagine the lead actor in a fantastical play who—still wearing his costume and cloaked in his assumed personality—springs off the stage to continue his performance in the crowded city streets. Seyit Lutfullah was such a man.”⁹⁶

In this statement, İrdal reveals an important aspect of Seyit Lutfullah’s character. He suggests that he is a man who does not have anything of substance behind the mask, that he is the mask. In the same way, his spirituality is a form with an empty content that has no real base or depth. This is linked to what I have discussed earlier in terms of the Lacanian matheme: the empty signifier which takes the place of the real object, but cannot quite serve as a compensation for it. In the case of Seyit Lutfullah, his mystical pursuits “unmask” the emptied, superfluous practice of religion under the influence of the introduction of Western modernity. There is also the fact that Seyit Lutfullah’s esoteric knowledge carries the effects of Western occultism. For example, we can see a confluence of the traditional evocation of spirits and the modern science of parapsychology in his spiritual aspirations, such as his clairvoyance in the invisible realm.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 40.
⁹⁶ Ibid., 39.
of the charming spirit named Aselban. While Seyit Lutfullah’s earlier version of religious practice is fundamentally based on jurisprudence, his later spiritualism presents a mixing of traditional faith-based and modern science-based approaches, and in that it entails a pseudo-integration and a pseudo-religion. Thus, Seyit Lutfullah, just like Nuri Efendi, comes to represent an inauthentic form of Islam, which has undergone a major change as a result of the adoption of modern reforms during the Tanzimat.

Other characters in the book such as Abdüsselam Bey and Aristidi Efendi also view Seyit Lutfullah as a charlatan, but they still rely upon his spiritual exercises for material gain. Through their humorous search for an imaginary treasure (the treasure of the emperor Andronikos), Tanpinar reveals how spiritual wisdom is entangled with monetary ambition to the extent that it becomes a means of achieving financial security rather than a salvation to be attained. The title of the first section “Great Expectations” refers to this collective striving for wealth and property, and thus covertly alludes to Charles Dickens’s book with the same name, as the protagonist Pip is governed by the same desire for making fame and fortune (his great expectations), which at the end proves to be not wholly satisfying. Consequently, İrdal spends his adolescent years in the company of such colourful figures as Nuri Efendi, Seyit Lutfullah, Abdüsselam Bey and Aristidi Efendi, each leaving a trace on his life. Even though he begins the account of his life with Halit Ayarcı, saying that he did not have a life prior to meeting him, he nevertheless acknowledges the influence of all these father figures in the moulding of his personality. He could well have started his memoirs with an account of his meeting Ayarcı or

97 For more information on the incorporation of Western occult practices into the Eastern context during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Thierry Zarcone, “Occultism in an Islamic Context: The Case of Modern Turkey from the Nineteenth Century to Present Time,” in Occultism in a Global Perspective, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen, 2013).
founding the institute (as the title suggests, the book is about its history), but he still hangs onto his past. This is an important aspect of his character. Even though İrdal appears as a novelty seeker, “applaud[ing] the modern man, and … enjoy[ing] modern comforts and modern architecture,” he retains his links to his past and its legacy. However, he is far from determined in his attitude. He expresses his dilemma by writing: “But why have I burdened my chronicle of the Time Regulation Institute with these distant reveries? And why have I allowed myself to be seized by these shadows of the past? … I myself am now far too old to take pleasure in visits to the past … there is no disputing the fact that from the moment Halit Ayarcı came into my life I became a new man.”

We can notice an ironic distance between what he says and what he does. He says that he does not find past worth mentioning, but he devotes nearly one third of the book to his past memories. Even though he does not portray the past (Ottoman legacy) in an uncritically positive light, he stresses its importance in the construction of identity by making it known that his early father figures have greatly contributed to making him who he is today. This conveys Tanpınar’s own view on national identity. Tanpınar believes that what makes up a nation is its historical heritage; without history, there is no nation. He emphasizes this in relation to the sense of continuity that must be felt with the past, and on the personal level, this is expressed through İrdal’s reconnection with past memories while constructing his own history, or the history of Time Regulation Institute.

The Bemusement of an Idealist: İrdal For & Against Ayarcı

As İrdal transitions to adulthood (he goes to war, gets married etc.), father figures from his adolescence slowly disappear and leave a void to be filled by a new father.

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98 Tanpınar, The Time Regulation, 50.
figure. This father figure turns out to be Halit Ayarcı. İrdal’s relationship with Ayarcı differs greatly from his past relationships with authority figures though. İrdal does not cease to extol him and overemphasize his influence on himself and others. He even says that the reason behind penning his memoirs is not to record his own life, but to honour Ayarcı’s memory: “No, when I say I am writing my memoirs I don’t mean to say I have set out to describe my life. I simply wish to record a series of events I happened to witness. And in so doing remember—to honor—the saintly man we laid to rest three weeks ago.”\footnote{Ibid., 7.} He downsizes himself by reducing his role to a mere scribe, and in this way, exalts his adopted father. This attitude is an effect of his imaginary introjection of Ayarcı’s authority through which he sets him up as his ego-ideal. Therefore, the separation between his self and Ayarcı dissolves, making them one and the same. However, we also know that under İrdal’s guise of an innocent man, there is a motivation for subverting authority.

İrdal makes Ayarcı’s acquaintance through his psychoanalyst Dr. Ramiz. He recalls his first impression of him as that of a man with an instrumental mindset: “‘What an arrogant man,’ I thought. ‘He sizes people up as if he might buy them … He studied people with the same detachment he might accord an object. He wished only to understand the thing before his eyes, nothing more.’”\footnote{Ibid., 195.} Even though he finds his treatment of people too inconsiderate at first look, İrdal cannot stop himself from trying to impress him. When Dr. Ramiz introduces him to Ayarcı as a man who has extensive knowledge in “ancient sciences,” he plays along in an effort to appear useful to Ayarcı because it is the same as having any value in his eyes. When he is given a chance to repair
Ayarcı’s broken watch, he carries out a performance and acts like a guru who knows everything about timepieces; he philosophizes about them by comparing the way they work to the way the human body works. In this way, he hopes to gain acceptance from Ayarcı by “recycling material” from the repertoire of his past master Nuri Efendi. At the end, he is able to spark an interest in Ayarcı in time measurement. Ayarcı transforms this interest in no time into an enterprise and founds a new establishment called The Time Regulation Institute. His instrumental mind, when combined with İrdal’s knowledge of the past, gives birth to the construction of an entirely new project, which is the first of its kind across the country.

İrdal mentions that The Time Regulation Institute is grown out of an idea, an idea of Ayarcı:

I spent years at his [Ayarci’s] side. I watched the way he worked. I witnessed how an idea would suddenly catch fire in his mind and take shape, like a tree sprouting shoots and branches, before coming into being. It was in this spirit that I witnessed the Time Regulation Institute—perhaps the greatest and most important organization of this century—evolve from a sudden spark in his eyes to the splendor it enjoys today, or did, rather, yesterday.\textsuperscript{101}

This little commentary says a lot about the nature of the new institute. Its development is not driven by concrete social realities, to address the demands of the people or to serve the needs of the community, but is guided by an idea which is first formed in the mind of its creator and then disseminated to the crowd with a centripetal force. This does not only bring forward the question of necessity and extravagance with respect to the purpose of

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 7.
the institute, but also unveils its authoritarian character, with power flowing from top to bottom. In this respect, certain similarities are shared by Ayarç’s Time Regulation Institute and Atatürk’s Turkish Republic, as both are rooted in an ideal vision of a uniform community, which informs the regulation of unsynchronized public clocks in one and the promotion of assimilation into the homogeneity of the nation-state in the other. To illustrate the transformation of the idea into ideology within the context of Turkish politics, we can look at the Turkish artist Zeki Faik İzer’s painting İnkilap Yolunda (On the Path of Revolution) which is modeled after Eugène Delacroix’s famous painting Liberty Leading the People. In comparing the two paintings, we can see how an idea of liberty, which is symbolized by a liberated/nude woman, turns into a political ideology in its imitation, where the woman is no longer a symbol, but a representation of the republic. While she rises above the dead dispelling darkness and restoring light in the original painting, in İzer’s copy, the woman stands on a marble block that says 1923 and looks at Atatürk for guidance (Fig. 1 and 2). Consequently, the birth of the Time Regulation Institute from an idea into reality (and not vice versa) alludes to the problematic core of the Republic which is based on ideological postulates that may easily lead to authoritarianism.
Figure 1. Zeki Faik Izer, *Inkilap Yolunda [On the Path of Revolution]*, 1933.

Figure 2. Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830.
In the book, the force of idealism is manifested through the absurdity of the purpose of the institute, which undermines the meaning of the work undertaken there. İrdal finds that his job as the assistant manager of the institute has no content that determines his regular activity. He writes that “I had a job but no work. This new job was unlike any other I had known. It seemed to have nothing to do with people or even life itself, for that matter,” citing people’s faith in the abstract idea of regulating clocks as the only source of legitimacy of the institute. Even though the office space is soon staffed by assistants, a secretary, and an accountant (most of whom are people from Ayarç’s own relatives and friends) like a full operating institution, İrdal still finds that neither his job nor the staff’s has any purpose. Likewise, the institution has no function or meaning although it is branded as an “invaluable institution.” Thus, when we consider what the institution does with the time it endeavours to save by coordinating the public clocks, it stands in stark contrast to the ideas Ayarç propagandizes, employed in slogans such as “Shared time is shared work,” “A true man is conscious of time,” and “The path to well-being springs from a sound understanding of time.” Therefore, we see a considerable gap between the ideas used in the legitimation of the institution and the reality expounded by the meaninglessness of the job. The same gap “between the ideality and the reality of the Republican reforms” can be observed which results in “a bifurcation of the Republican everyday into two orders of things, one comprising the formal authority of a pure national society of appearances, the other, the externalized interiority of the disavowed ‘Ottoman’

102 Ibid., 239.
103 Ibid., 240.
104 Ibid., 238.
along with … the remainders of the Kemalist Revolution.”¹⁰⁵ This explains the deep conflict between the political elite and the common people inherited from the Republican regime.

The disparity between reality and ideality often comes into prominence in the conflicts between İrdal and Ayarcı based on differences in approach to life. While İrdal relies on his vision (what he “sees” with his own eyes) to make sense of his situation, such as when he thinks that his job does not require any work or his sister-in-law has an awful voice, Ayarcı seems to view the world through the spectacles of practicality and feasibility, where everything seems viable as long as it is profitable. In this sense, we would expect to see İrdal being condemned for being too realistic by the greatest idealist Ayarcı, but there is a contrary situation. Ayarcı criticizes İrdal for “lack[ing] entrepreneurial spirit … [and for being] an idealist.” As he explains, “you’re old-fashioned. A shame, what a terrible shame! If only you had a shred of realism in you, just only so much, a wee bit.” To this, İrdal reacts angrily and retorts, “It seems to me that I am the only one who sees things for what they truly are. Indeed I am too much of a realist, I’ll have you know—so much that it pains me.” Then, Ayarcı gives a memorable answer:

Look now, Hayri Bey, I have already decided on it. From now on we shall work together. This is why we must agree on certain things. Being a realist does not mean seeing the truth for what it is. It is a question of determining our relationship with the truth in the way that is most beneficial for us. What do you achieve by accepting reality as it is? What will that offer apart from a slew of petty decisions that are

neither meaningful nor valuable on their own? … You, Hayri Bey, are a man poisoned by words, which is why I said you were old-fashioned. But the realism of today’s man is something else. What can I make with the material at hand, with this very object and all it has to offer? That’s the question to ask.¹⁰⁶

By turning the truth on its head, Ayarcı reinvents reality as corresponding to an adoption of what is most beneficial for us. He says that it is a part of keeping up with the world today, as modern man has learned to use “the material at hand” instrumentally, for his own interest and advantage. Ayarcı’s version of truth is about imaginary ideas taking a precedence over real conditions, which is the main source of his clash with İrdal who still equates truth with the capacity to prove something by way of reference to the outside world and who thus cannot escape from being labeled as an “idealist” for holding onto an old, and what seems to Ayarcı an ideal, form of truth.

The contrast between these two versions of the truth comes to a climax in the building of the Clock Houses. Ayarcı holds an open competition for the design of the new residential building for the personnel of the institute. He makes it a requirement that each contestant creates “an original and new style in harmony with modern-day realities and the institute’s name,” to which İrdal makes the addition: “and in a manner that embodies its name inside and out.”¹⁰⁷ Many entries are submitted; however, Ayarcı insistently rejects them all, saying that none complies with the last condition, that is, reflects the inner and outer workings of a clock to his satisfaction. At the end, İrdal takes the duty in hand and sets out to design his own building. He first discovers that inventing a building that embodies the concept of a timepiece means that the building loses its very essence as

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 233.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 368.
a building; upon relinquishing its function in reference to the real world, the building can be molded into any desired shape. After this discovery, İrdal tries to find the most appropriate shape for the building. With the help of Pakize, his wife, he realizes that the building does not have to be constructed in the shape of a round timepiece. He takes the Blessed One as his model and designs “a long rectangular shape in the shape of a grandfather clock.”\(^{108}\) And, to nobody’s surprise, he impresses Ayarcı and wins the competition. The fact that the design of the building is based on the Blessed One has a double meaning. First, as the family heirloom, the Blessed One stands as a reminder of ancestry. So, the new architecture has its origins in the past. However, we, the reader, also know that İrdal’s aunt has replaced the clock years ago although she has not told anyone. Hence, the Blessed One is not actually the original clock, but a clock in its appearance and in its properties. This shows the degree of severance from the past. İrdal’s father disliked the clock because it reminded him of his inability to carry on the tradition passed down from his grandfather—the thing always stood in intimidating grandeur in front of him as the reminder/remainder of the past. However, with respect to Ayarcı and his new building, direct reference to the past is inhibited because the materiality of the clock is only a fake appearance. There is no real or original clock anymore; what is left is only a re-presentation of the past. Thus, in the modern world, the Blessed One assumes another meaning: it represents a simulacrum of the past where representation and real, past and present become indistinguishable. Ayarcı’s insistence to erect a building that is in conformity with modern ideas of time results in the construction of a new, innovative architecture which is nonetheless emptied of function and content, embodying the past as

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 374.
a false image and the clock as a vacant signifier.

The Clock Houses, representative of a process in which function is dissociated from form, present an image of a present which is built upon a distanced and disconnected past, and thus cannot survive and collapses in no time. At the end of the book, the clock turns into a decorative ornament which is purposeless, functionless, and meaningless—which is pure form. Ayarı’s hopes that “it will create its own function” never ripens into reality, neither with the institute nor its supplementary building. He cannot find a single friend who agrees to live inside the newly constructed Clock Houses. Everyone, even the most zealous supporters of the institute, refuses to move to his/her new home on the grounds that it is not safe as a result of focusing too much on aesthetics/form over function/substance. As İrdal writes, “When public funds were involved, they were generous, enthusiastic, proud of my work, and enthralled by its innovation, but when it touched on their personal interests, they flipped sides. Indeed they even stopped listening to Halit Ayarı … All in all, people showed their true colors.”

In this respect, everyone proves to be the same but Ayarı. He still cannot believe that people who represent themselves as harbingers of the new and the modern can run away like this with a quick change of attitude. He cannot bear to see that they have never believed in him, that he has struggled for nothing, and that everything has been a lie. He states in desperation that “This institute is no longer mine! Now I’m just like everyone else here.” Indeed, he has always been like everyone else. What makes him different than the others has always been a fictitious separation between him and them; what sustains his authority has been a lie legitimized by the Time Regulation Institute (which turns out to be the lie). This

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109 Ibid., 386.
110 Ibid., 388.
poignant realization brings the destruction of both the institute and Ayarcı, who is forced to abandon his faith and confront reality with unmediated eyes. The ending suggests that any construction—whether it is concrete like a building or imagined like a nation—cannot endure the test of time if it is built upon a false foundation.

At the end, İrdal seems to have found the perfect embodiment of paternal ideal in Halit Ayarcı. As Freud believes, this is the hysteric’s dream solution: finding a powerful father who can enable the construction of a consistent and stable identity. However, İrdal’s identification with his love object is solely based on “appearance,” and has no legitimacy or permanence. We can understand this from İrdal’s ironic posture and cynical perspective toward Ayarcı’s authority which exposes the absurdity embedded in the latter’s logic. As a figure appended to the clock, Ayarcı becomes, just like the clock itself, a deficient, empty, and lacking father with whom complete identification is an impossible dream. In this way, Ayarcı represents the function of the Name-of-the-Father; however, it is not in the classical sense. He is not an ideal father. He is instead a symptom, a father who is not whole but “sitting on a hole.”

He does not act as a quilting point weaving the symbolic order into seeming wholeness. Rather he reveals the hole in the symbolic order, the empty shell of national ideology. In a way, we can argue that all the father figures in the novel function in one way or another as Names-of-the-Father because they are all figures of deficiency, and as the book shows through the symbol of the clock, this deficiency is structurally determined following the importation of modernization in Turkey. Kahraman writes that by the 1940s Tanpinar realized that his struggles to bring two civilizations together yielded no concrete results as he understood that the past would

always remain an ideal constituent of the present that people would always long for but never have. Even though the effects of the civilizational exchange preoccupied his mind since the end of his life and he always argued for a rooted sense of nation and national identity, Tanpınar also acknowledged the difficulty and even the impossibility of ever reconnecting with the past or regaining the lost sense of wholeness. This is what transpires in *The Time Regulation Institute* through Hayri İrdal’s failed attempt at full identification with Halit Ayarcı which indicates that there is no final resolution of the Oedipus complex and that it continues, as a never-ending process, to be the symptom of the flaws and limits of the symbolic modern order. The sense of orphanhood, estrangement, and unrest remain as the irremovable stains of this social process.

**CONCLUSION**

When Tanpınar states that “we have been going through an Oedipus complex, that is to say, the tragedy of a man who unknowingly killed his father, since the Tanzimat,” he presents the Oedipus complex as a symptom of a social malaise, which is engendered by processes of social, material, and cultural transformation following the introduction of modernity into the Ottoman Empire—of what he calls the civilizational exchange. In particular, he interprets the adoption of the dualistic orientation of modern thought in terms of being caught up in a perpetual Oedipus complex, being stranded in a state of ambivalence and conflict. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the problem of dualism emerged as a result of the lengthy period of reforms in the Tanzimat era. These reforms brought a tidal wave of not only foreign goods, but also foreign ideas, which, in their secular nature, slowly intruded into the existing worldview of Muslims. While the “old” worldview, which was strictly defined by the incontestable truths of the Qur’an and the Hadith, continued to be upheld more or less until the demise of the empire, a “new”
worldview, which was formed through the assimilation of Western values, had struck roots among the elites and the bureaucrats. This new worldview was imbued with dualistic dividedness; it created a rift between the Western values and the Islamic practices, and also contributed to the perception that the Ottoman tradition was an outmoded relic of a past that needed to be pushed aside for the coming of the new. In the novel, this rift between the past and the present pervades İrdal’s childhood and adolescent years. Through his early father figures such as Nuri Efendi and Seyit Lutfullah, we witness how the incorporation of modern technology had already started to change the nature of Islamic belief at the end of the nineteenth century, creating odd hybridizations of the religious and secular. The Western symbolic structures (with their lack) have been imbued in their minds, as was shown through the adoption of the clock.

If we view the Tanzimat period as a historical counterpart of the Oedipal period, displaying the same dynamics of ambivalence and fluctuation, then we can argue that the Republican period represents the resolution of the Oedipal conflict through identification with the father/leader. In the Republican regime, identification takes the form of internalization whereby the members of the nation incorporate the leader’s own values and attitudes as their own. They cathect their libidinal energy onto him; therefore, he becomes the substituted object for their individual ego-ideals. This cathected love (of submission) provides a basis for group cohesion, uniting and binding the individuals to each other and to the nation. In one of his essays, Tanpınar makes a commentary that supports this view. ⁴¹² He writes that the battle between the old and the new (and the splitting of lives between the alluring appeal of the Western culture and the emotional

attachment to the Eastern heritage) continued in full force from the Tanzimat to 1923. Only with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 that their unequal conflict was eliminated: “when we wrote off the half-dead life forms living inside us and the residues of the old institutions which had lost their function in the new order, we suddenly started seeing it [the conflict between the old and the new] in its truth. Today there began a rightful appreciation of the past.” Tanpinar suggests that the establishment of the modern nation provided a sense of closure to the value conflicts—the Oedipal ambiguity—of the Tanzimat period. Thus, he implies that the conflict with the father was resolved and order was restored.

However, the fictional narrative in *The Time Regulation Institute* casts a doubt on this. It shows that it is rather wishful thinking, or self-deception to believe that the father complex is resolved with the (apparent) introjection of the leader into the psyche (as ego-ideal). İrdal’s wavering relationship with Ayarcı, in which he subtly ridicules him while praising his wit and intelligence, stands as proof of how identification with authority is a make-believe; it works only as long as one is good at pretending and performing (as İrdal endeavours to do). In this, it reveals the superficial and fragile core of authority in modern society. Rather than having noble status in their own right, authority figures receive legitimation from institutional mechanisms. As Paul Verhaeghe also notes, being a signifier (as the-Name-of-the-Father) makes them no more than an emblematic appendage in service of symbolic structures. It is for this reason that Halit Ayarcı cannot survive after he loses his institution (as well as his faith in the institution) because what sustains his authority is its legitimizing power, which is based on the “enlightened” ideas of

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113 Ibid., 41.
114 Paul Verhaeghe, “Enjoyment and Impossibility,” 43.
progress, order, and rationality. The same situation can be observed with respect to the governing authority in the Turkish nation-state. Atatürk abolishes traditional/Islamic institutions of the sultanate and caliphate in favour of a secular institution founded upon the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. He becomes the father of this new institution; however, his authority depends on the efficacy of these principles and stands at the mercy of the symbolic structures that are contingent on these principles. So, all in all, in modern society, father figures are only a (superficial) replacement of the lost father. They stand as proof that the “real” father is gone; that there is no “real” resolution of the Oedipus complex; and that we are all stuck in an early stage of development where conflict and ambivalence reign. It is only the ones who are good at pretense—the ignorant, the silly, and the liar—that maintain the illusion of normalcy.

If what is normal is fake presented as real, then as Kurt Vonnegut famously observes, “a sane person to an insane society must appear insane.”\textsuperscript{115} In the upshot, İrdal’s dilemma emanates from this. He treads a fine line between sanity and insanity, being able to see the superficial quality underlying the normative appearance, but trying hard to negate it through the habit of lying. He, in this way, chooses to be insane in order to remain sane. This situation is made even more complicated in a letter Tanpınar dictates to his student, Turan Alptekin, which is addressed to Dr. Ramiz by Ayarçı, and which portrays Hayri İrdal as a psychotic patient.\textsuperscript{116} This letter, as Alptekin explains, was meant to be incorporated into the book, and thus change its whole meaning as the product of a crazy mind. Some critics have argued that this would nullify İrdal’s entire account of his

\textsuperscript{116} Turan Alptekin, \textit{Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar: Bir Kültür, Bir İnsan} (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 64-73.
life and call into question his observations about the other characters, especially Ayarçi. However, I believe that, on the contrary, it reinforces Tanpınar’s thesis that in order to be able to reach truth in unmediated form, one must be crazy. As we have seen in the previous chapter with respect to Franz Kafka’s vision of the world, in a social environment where lie has become the norm, there is no way to tell the truth but through a tearing down the mask of the symbolic order at the risk of confronting that there is nothing other than the unbearable Real—the traumatic core of the social antagonism.
Like the Biblical story of the Fall, Freud’s myth of the primal father is a narrative of loss engineered for the modern audience. The sons’ killing of the primal father stands as the earliest trauma of loss, followed by a mounting sense of shame and guilt, and ultimately leading to the search for new paternal figures. As also expressed in the epigraph, this search is a part of the desire to rebuild the fallen father although he never shines as before. And the child’s world is never quite complete again. Once the father is gone, all the efforts to bring him back are doomed to be futile and meaningless.

Nevertheless, as Freud also emphasizes, as long as the longing for the father remains unappeased, man will consistently try to reinstitute him. The Oedipus complex is a part of this attempt to revive the all-knowing and all-powerful father; it is the child’s endeavor to disavow the reality of the decline of paternal authority by taking shelter in the imaginary construction of an omnipotent father who obliterates his impossible relation to the fulfilment of his desire. This need to believe is what Slavoj Žižek captures in his notion of “subject supposed to believe” which is “the constitutive feature of the symbolic order.”¹ He gives as an example our willing participation in the ritual of Santa Claus for the sake of sustaining the children’s belief in it: “We go through the ritual of Santa Claus, since our children (are supposed to) believe in it and we do not want to disappoint them;

they pretend to believe so as not to disappoint us and our belief in their naivety (and to get presents, of course).”

2 We probably need to believe in our children’s naivety more than they need to believe in Santa. Therefore, we might be the ones who are “supposed to believe” more desperately, which makes us still children in ourselves. In this sense, as Maria Aristodemou writes, “[D]espite having been ‘men’ or ‘women’ enough to kill God, we are still in essence children … indeed very childish, whining children in need of reassurance, and especially reassuring delusions.”

3 It is no wonder why Freud focuses on children (as well as primitive people) in his psychoanalytic theory and practice. Because even though we dispose of the father in modernity, we are still “whining children” continually hammered with the feelings of shame and guilt. We try to bring the father back by building imaginary constructions (ideologies) that take his place such as Law, State, Nation, Democracy, and Human Rights. These constructions, “varied as they are,” “all share the attempt to fill the gap as well as create a limit to regulate our existence.”

4 However, under the guise of either neutrality or universality, they hide their illegitimate origins through which they sustain themselves. Consequently, the father’s death does not bring liberation from his tyranny; it leads to the emergence of new forms of violence, authoritarianism, and obscenity as the surplus of symbolization.

Both Franz Kafka’s The Trial and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar’s The Time Regulation Institute come to terms with this surplus of symbolization, and reveal, as such, a constitutional deadlock at the heart of ideological-social order. By exposing the yawning gap between (symbolic) knowledge and (subjective) truth through the use of absurdity,

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2 Ibid., 29-30.
4 Ibid., 9.
they confirm (and in a way anticipate) the Lacanian theory that the big Other is “crossed-out by a fundamental impossibility, structured around an impossible/traumatic kernel, around a central lack.”\(^5\) They thus demonstrate that “society doesn’t exist” in the sense of being a harmonious, coherent social system, that is, other than in the minds of people in the imagined communities of ethnic, religious, and national groups. It is only through the ideological fantasies these imagined communities create and sustain that the society is experienced as meaningful and sensible. Therefore, when these fantasies are exposed as lacking, the result is that society is exposed as non-existent: as empty, vacant, and shallow. As Žižek reminds us, “there is nothing ‘behind’ the fantasy; the fantasy is a construction whose function is to hide this void, this ‘nothing’ [non-existence]—that is, the lack in the Other … ‘[B]eyond fantasy’ there is no yearning or any kindred sublime phenomenon, ‘beyond fantasy’ we find only drive, its pulsation around the sinthome.”\(^6\)

Beyond fantasy, beyond the mask of symbolic register, there is no truth that we can reach (other than the truth of the Real). The only thing that is thence left is the sinthome, the last vestige of our existence, the final support we hold onto before we fall into psychosis. Both novels indicate that the hysteric’s desire to find an omnipotent father that enables him to resolve his hysteria through the resolution of the Oedipus complex is an impossible dream. They instead show that in postmodern society hysteric is replaced by psychotic—the one who fails in constructing a sinthome by forming a symptom of the Name-of-the-Father. Thus, they demonstrate that psychosis is a structural possibility that reflects the fundamental impasse of ideological-symbolic order in which the cork of the Name-of-the-Father cannot properly suture the gap anymore. In short, both novels

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\(^6\) Ibid., 148; 139.
implicate that the modern society has evolved into a system of chronic pathology, whereby it produces mental illness as a normative state, making insanity a forced choice for those who “see” the impossible “Real” surrounding the so-called “reality” of society.

After the death of the father—after the breakdown of his symbolic, law-giving function—the only possibility that remains is madness. I wish to recall here Lacan’s “la père ou pire” (the father or worse) which suggests that after the bad option (the law of the Name-of-the-Father) is eliminated, what we are left with is the worse option (unlimited jouissance, the objet petit a). It is possible to argue that fascism or any other forms of extreme racism, nationalism, and fundamentalism are the representations of the “worse option” following the collapse of the symbolic paternal authority. These perverse acts are governed by a mad fantasy of creating ethnically, racially, and religiously unified communities in which there is minimum tolerance for difference and dissimilarity. In their attempt to construct “impossibly” pure and authentic societies where there is no inconsistency that threatens to expose the void that inheres their mad fantasy, totalitarian ideologies demonstrate a desperate escape from the Real kernel of the social. As Žižek writes, “the source of totalitarian temptation” is to abolish “this imbalance, this traumatic kernel, this radical antagonism” of society, as “the greatest mass murders and holocausts have always been perpetrated in the name of man as harmonious being, of a new Man without antagonistic tension.”\(^7\) In a way, the totalitarian dreams of an absolute father, someone who can suture seamlessly the gap between the symbolic and the Real, but finds that it is impossible because of a structurally-determined failure. As Žižek contends, attempts to bring back the father are doomed to result in the appearance of a far more

\(^7\) Ibid., xxviii.
repressive figure of the anal-father (real-alive father) who only looks out for his own enjoyment.

Then, the question arises: how to get rid of the ethical deadlock inherited from the disintegration of the symbolic paternal function? According to Lacan, the great task for each of us is to identify with our own *sinthome*: come to terms with the piece of the Real that constitutes our very being. In other words, we should acknowledge the emptiness at the core of human subjectivity and social structure instead of attempting to fill it with fantasy constructions. As Aristodemou writes, “If reality is for those who can’t bear the Real, that is, for those of us who need fiction to tone down the rawness of the Real … then the ethical subject is the one who has to let go the spell of consoling fantasies, including the fantasy of belief … that some Thing can complete us.”

The ethical act, then, requires us to learn to live without the illusions of completeness and coherence that ideology sustains; to confront our capacity for aggressivity and violence instead of displacing it onto the other(s); and to come to know our raw being, our naked state, our dark side. The ethical act, as such, requires us to move away from the idea of ethical as socially determined and constructed. It requires us to reconsider ethics in the dimension of the Real. This is what Alenka Zupančič proposes in her book *Ethics of the Real*, that we should “situate the ethical act in a dimension which is neither the dimension of the law … nor the dimension of a simple transgression of the law …, but that of the Real.”

What Zupančič means by an ethics of the Real is the impossibility of being ethical: ethical act is not determined by some pre-existing, prevailing notion of good (that derives from the law or the rules of society), but defines it outside the context of the established knowledge of

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good and evil. In other words, doing something good in the name of law (or leader, duty, reason etc.) is not an ethical act; on the contrary, it is an excuse that absolves the subject from taking responsibility for his actions. The conclusion to draw from this is that there is no ethical act; that the ethical act is only in appearance. For this reason, the best thing to do for us is to move away from a notion of ethics based on the ideal of good to a notion of ethics based on the impossibility of good.

When we acknowledge the Real—that behind soothing fantasies there is nowhere to hide except the very “Real” of our being—this acknowledgement, according to Aristodemou, makes us free. As she writes, freedom “is the capacity to detach oneself from comforting illusions, fictions, from other people, and cults: ‘freedom is the possibility of isolation. You are free if you can withdraw from people, not having to seek them out for the sake of money, company, love, curiosity … If you can’t live alone, you were born a slave.’”\(^\text{10}\) However, this sense of freedom, she adds, shatters our very being: “This experience of freedom is hardly welcome for the subject; being free from the fictions making up our reality also means being lost.”\(^\text{11}\) Thus, freedom, just like the ethical act, is marked by impossibility because it requires our dis-being. Finally, this idea takes us back to where we have started: the biblical narrative of the Fall. The true ethical act is impossible because we are not angels as we have relinquished our right to “to not know” for a temptation “to know,” and as such fell from the Garden (the possibility of pure goodness) into the East of Eden (the impossibility of ethical act), where we can only learn to live with our sinhome.

\(^{10}\) Aristodemou, *Law, Psychoanalysis*, 134-5.
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 135.
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