

Father Knows Best

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“Marx based his theory on a rejection of *homo oeconomicus*,” wrote Louis Althusser, “Freud based his on a rejection of *homo psychologicus*.” Lacan has seen and understood Freud’s liberating rupture. He has comprehended it in the full sense of the word, taking it in its full rigor and constraining it to generate—without reservation—its own consequences. Like anyone, he may err in details, or even in his choice of philosophical bearings. What we owe him is the “*essential*” (“Freud and Lacan” 181). The “*essential*” is the understanding of rupture that places Freud in a triumvirate with Marx and Nietzsche, the other two “*Natural*” children of the end of the nineteenth century. Sharing a philosophical fatherlessness, these bastards represent not only a break in philosophical tradition, but also a break in the very idea of tradition, legacy, and the continuation of the name of the father.

Beginning his 1964 essay “Freud and Lacan” with an extended metaphor of paternity, Althusser casts the “history of Western Reason” as a family affair:

When a young science is born, the family circle is always ready for astonishment, jubilation, and baptism. For a long time, every child, even the foundling, has been the reputed son of a father, and when it is a prodigy, the fathers would fight at the gate if it were not for the mother and the respect due her. (181)

That Althusser should celebrate the eruption of genius, defined as the founders of the critical ruptures by which the science of modern criticism is born, in the terms of a conservative patriarchal tradition is not too suspect, except insofar as one might wish to critique the identification between philosophy and patriarchy. Althusser’s five paragraphs about the absence of paternity and legitimacy, however, point, in an over-compensatory manner, to the nature of the legitimizing gesture Althusser is about to make in regard to Lacan, one he began to make in 1963. But the problem of father and son neither begins nor ends with Althusser in this family circle. Rather, we owe it to Carsten Strathausen for revealing the paternal politics inherent to any gesture of appropriation.

Althusser’s notion of the interpellated subject owes much to his misreading of Lacan, argues Strathausen in his essay, “Althusser’s

Mirror.” Outlining the parallels between Althusser’s notion of the interpellated subject and Lacan’s analogy of the mirror stage, Strathausen demonstrates both Althusser’s debt to Lacan and “the positive potential of any appropriation of Lacanian psychoanalysis for the understanding of ideology” (61). Using his own analogy of the mirror, Strathausen argues that Althusser’s concept of interpellation “rests on the idea of the ‘mirror-stage’ as the founding moment of the imaginary” (66). The temporal paradox inherent in Lacan’s mirror stage—the idea that only after an infant gains a certain (anticipated) mastery can it understand the chaos from which it came—situates the mirror stage as the moment from which origins can be perceived as origins and can be enjoyed no longer. As a response to the question of when an individual is interpellated as a subject in ideology the mirror stage is clearly inadequate, but its model of interpellation, resting as it does on a gestalt, suggests a beginning point for the intersection of the nascent subject and the outside world.

The mirror stage is the figuration of a process by which the subject comes to be constituted in history and ideology, but the mirror stage is not quite emblematic of the kind of mirroring logic Strathausen proposes between Althusser and Lacan. In a temporal ellipse and material eclipse, Strathausen tries to load Althusser’s interpellated subject into the mirror stage as a figure by which subjectivity is completely constituted. And to maintain his mirror, more parallelism than might actually exist is necessary. Paradoxically, Strathausen’s forced parallel between the mirror stage and the interpellated subject forecloses the intricate dynamics of Lacan’s quadrated subject, the very dynamics that might in fact provide some understanding of the relation between psychoanalytic and material conceptions of the subject. The mirror stage is only a point of departure (and not even really a point) to which the developing subject comes and from which the split subject continues to develop in its relation to the Other, to the others of culture, ideology, law, and to itself, existing simultaneously in the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. This is very different, even in its vastly paraphrased form, from Althusser’s claim of only a portion of Lacan, and curiously, in Strathausen’s analysis, only the extra-linguistic portion.

The most glaring disparity between Althusser and Lacan in Strathausen’s presentation is evident in Strathausen’s attempt to parallel their accounts of the subject, which he consistently envisions within the frame of an historical dialectic. Rereading Lacan’s notions of the “Je” (Es) and Moi (ego) as stages in a process of splitting, Strathausen misses the one thing that radically separates Lacan from Althusser: the

notion of the unconscious. Though as Strathausen warns, "it is . . . crucial to distinguish between the 'I' (Je) and the 'ego' (moi)," he conceives of the former as "the split subject of the signifier" and the latter as "the imaginary self-identity of the subject" (68). In Lacan's subject, the Je and Moi exist as parts of a dynamic that exists in relation to the Other and to the others of culture, ideology, and law. The "je" is the speaking subject, split indeed, but rarely aware of it, split in fact by the co-presence of the "Moi," "the unconscious subject of identifications and narcissism" (Ragland-Sullivan 42). Apart from omitting entirely the Other (other) parts of the quadrature, Strathausen's account also implies an order, first Je then Moi, which makes too literal Freud's statement "Wo Es war, soll Ich werden" and which situates half of a split subject as a temporal structure rather than a structural dynamic.

Strathausen parses the subject in this way in order to make a comparison between Lacan's split subject and Althusser's idea of interpellation as a "hailing," a turning around. If the subject is always "turning around" within itself, as a function of its own first-Je-then-Moi splitting, then the psychoanalytic subject is already analogous to the interpellated subject: "inside" mirrors "outside," psychoanalysis and ideological critique cooperate, being like to like. While contriving parallels entails considerable stretching, here on the part of Strathausen, Strathausen himself simply mirrors some of the stretching gestures of Althusser in his assessment of Lacan's contribution to critical science. If Strathausen molds Lacan to an Althusserian mirror, Althusser molds Lacan to the mirror of a curiously detached Symbolic with which Althusser is preoccupied and which is central to his own analysis of the interpellated subject.

In "Freud and Lacan," Althusser avows that "the most original aspect of Lacan's work" is "that this transition from (ultimately purely) biological existence to human existence (the human child) is achieved within the Law of Order, the law I shall call the Law of Culture, and that this Law of Order is confounded in its *formal* essence with the order of language" (193). In this passage Althusser recognizes the crucial function of language (though not its structural contribution) as well as the absolute link among the subject, language, and the Law of Culture. Althusser identifies the Law of Culture with the Symbolic Order which he sees (finally) as "the emblem of the Father, the emblem of right, of the Law, the fantasy image of all Right" (196-97). For Althusser, the concept of the Symbolic as Law is necessary as the locus of ideology—as "the repressive apparatus" that reproduces the "conditions of production" ("Ideology" 131). And he conflates this ideology identi-

fied with the Symbolic with the unconscious precisely through the aegis of the family reproductive scenario ("Ideology" 165).

The identification of the symbolic order with the Father and the Father with Law and right again points to Althusser's paternal subtext, the text with which he begins and ends. Althusser employs a version of the family scenario as a way to illustrate how it is that "individuals are always-already subjects" (73). Through the operation of family ideology and the predestiny of the "father's name," "the child is therefore always-already subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial configuration which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived" (165). Thus, through a paternity that equals the Symbolic, the individual is the already-interpellated subject whose unconscious and ideological frame are the same. This certainly makes a lot of paternity as Althusser locates it as the prime signifier of the Symbolic.

Why is Althusser preoccupied with the Symbolic in his essay on Freud and Lacan, especially when one of Lacan's most insistent concepts is the *co-existence* of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real orders? One clue lies in Althusser's link between the Symbolic and the term "Right" connected to the father's right to the mother and by extension to the order of legitimate offspring (197). Devoting the vast majority of the portion of the essay on Lacan to a discussion of the Symbolic as it relates to Right: to the Right of the father, to the Right of culture, to the Right of psychoanalysis to claim itself a science, Althusser's repetition reveals the fixation that structures his approach to Lacan. By creating a new "family" of critical science and by legitimizing therein its critical sons (such as Lacan) then his own project is also legitimate, as another son of the new order. But while the process of filiation would seem to extend from Lacan to Althusser in the logic of the mirror employed by Strathausen to renew Marxist thought, Althusser also situates himself as the father to a Lacan he is attempting to salvage from the ignominy of illegitimacy.

Althusser had first encountered psychoanalysis in his own treatments for manic depression, but his interest in Lacan came as he "situated Freud's discovery at the heart of the historic continent opened up by Marx" in his attempt to revivify French communist thought (Roudinesco 377). In 1963 he began to teach Lacan's works in his own seminar at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Students read the works from a more philosophical and less clinical perspective, according to Elizabeth Roudinesco, and began to understand Lacan's structuralist readings of Freud as scientific rather than as "bourgeois," the epithet Marxists had previously extended to Freud. Lacan, who had been

began his own fledgling school, the Ecole Freudienne de Paris in 1964, the same year Althusser published "Freud and Lacan." By means of his acknowledgement of the importance of Lacan's work, Althusser had orchestrated a wider audience for a more "universalist" reading of Freudian theory. As Roudinesco observes, "for the 'symbolic' launching of that mobilization which would occupy a far larger stage than the ENS, Lacan owed everything to Althusser" (380).

Althusser also owed much to Lacan, whose analytical insights enabled Althusser to renew French Marxist thought and make Althusser famous within "a broad intellectual audience" (Roudinesco 381). While in a sense the history of the early 1960s casts Althusser as a father to Lacan, it is only as a son to Lacan that Althusser can forge new theoretical directions. His insistence in "Freud and Lacan," then, on Lacan's understanding of the role of the Symbolic and the right of the father has everything to do in context with the scientific "right" of psychoanalysis and its applicability to Marxist critique, the right of the father Althusser to appropriate psychoanalytic thought for Marxism, and ultimately the "right" of both Freud and Marx to father critical movements that engender a different sense of history. Althusser's recognition of Lacan retrospectively legitimates the bastards of the nineteenth century, making them the new fathers of a dissidence that becomes all too legitimate in its longevity in a kind of post-natal institutionalization.

This process of legitimation via the paternal, however, owes its "right" to the originary fathers' illegitimacy—their lack of paternity. Their genius is proved by their rupture, by their inability to find language or concepts in which they might express their own new visions of history, the subject, and the order of human events. If their legitimacy—their "right" to scientific prestige—comes from their lack of forbears, why does Althusser reinscribe them within a family circle he has already declared ideologically suspect? Is he simply another victim of ideology unable to speak the scientific language he claims for the fathers as a result of the very fact of his adopting them as his fathers (or sons)?

Althusser's insistent discussion of paternity and legitimacy at the beginning of "Freud and Lacan" would seem to have everything to do with his own legitimacy and the legitimacy of historical materialism in a metaphor that defies the very notion of scientific discourse Althusser insists upon. Premising the "right" of a discourse to the status of a science on the model of the law-of-the-name-of-the-father and hailing that science as a rupturing critique of the very law by which it is legitimized exposes the contradiction at the heart of patriarchy: that the law-of-the-name-of-the-father covers over the absence of certainty by

substituting the Symbolic for the scientific, by asserting a "right" where one may not exist. For Althusser, the name of the father by which right is authorized can never be the name of a father, but only the name of a son who becomes the father to the fathers, who rescues them from the illegitimacy their rupturing genius creates. Though the fathers of the new sciences have no fathers, they have sons, who, in the name of the father become self-fathering and self-authorizing, creating among themselves a mutual fathering that in the names of *their* fathers legitimates one another in a kind of critical cross-breeding. Curiously, however, in all of the fathering and "son"-ing, Althusser casts Lacan as neither father nor son, but rather as a midwife, the one who "constrains" Freud's "liberating rupture" to "generate . . . its own consequences." Lacan's midwifery—his obstetrics—sideline him only *in locus parentis*, while Althusser becomes the fathering son. Sibling rivalry?

The foundling Freud, the orphaned Marx are mirrored by their faithful bastard sons, the dissidents who walk in their fathers' dissidence, but who finally go one step farther by legitimating through one another the very projects by which their own fathers became bastards. This relegitimation, this re-inscription of the paternal line in the guise of a dissident critique reveals not only the most insidious conservatism, but also the way in which the sons create a new Symbolic in the place of the "scientific" language critical science can speak. Even thinking they might have exposed the folly of the name of the father, they return to it most seriously, insisting on scientific critique which has become covertly a truly paternal game enclosed in the trappings of issues of legitimacy, orthodoxy, and right that have in fact enveloped the legacies Althusser and Lacan. By making themselves fathers, fathers to their fathers, and fathers to one another, they have tightened the circulation of right to a father/son transaction, a reciprocal trade agreement by which history, culture, law, and the Symbolic may be transferred. Who better to understand the father than the son? And in a culture where the bastard sons have all become fathers, only one thing is true: Father knows best.

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