

**“FROM MAD SCIENTISTS TO MOB BOSSES”  
THE TRANSFORMATION OF  
DAVID CRONENBERG’S NARRATIVES THROUGH  
*SPIDER, A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE, EASTERN PROMISES***

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**“From Mad Scientists to Mob Bosses”**  
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### Abstract

David Cronenberg has been known as a leading director of body horror genre for a very long time. When he shot *Spider* (2002, David Cronenberg) in the year of 2002, it turns out to be a big transformation because whereas the former films of the director usually set in fantastic worlds full of monstrous creatures, horrific scientific discoveries and chaotic events where the Symbolic system totally collapse, *Spider* unusually shows a way out of the chaotic settings of classic Cronenberg films. In this way, *Spider* breaks all the common expectations from a Cronenberg film and the coming works of the director such as *A History of Violence* (2005, David Cronenberg) and *Eastern Promises* (2007, David Cronenberg) preserve this ‘new’ approach.

This dissertation makes textual analyses of the last three films of David Cronenberg, *Spider*, *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* and examines the transformation of Cronenberg’s narratives. By using a psychoanalytical methodology, it claims that the main reason of the transformation in Cronenberg’s narratives is his last three films’ emphasis on the Symbolic order whereas the former films of the director ends with the ultimate destruction of the Symbolic laws. In this manner, the dissertation tries to solve the mystery of the transformation in David Cronenberg’s narratives and analyzes the films in order to determine the Symbolic law makers within the diegetic worlds.

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## Introduction

During the last seven years, the narratives of the Canadian director, David Cronenberg, have changed in a distinctive way. Whereas most of the early and the medial films of the director display fantastic worlds which are destroyed through the monstrous creatures and horrific scientific discoveries that are created by the scientist figures, his last three films point a way out of these chaotic environments.

David Cronenberg's last three films change the rotation of the classical narratives of Cronenberg by indicating a transformation of the menacing figures and their destinies comparing to the director's former works. The scientists who are responsible from the creation of the monstrous characters and the destruction of the diegetic worlds in early Cronenberg films turn into lawless criminals in the director's last three films. However, whereas in the former films of Cronenberg, the deadly creations of the scientists cause the diegetic world to collapse, the lawless criminals of his last three films pay the price of their deadly acts.

The main aim of this thesis is to examine the transformation of Cronenberg's narratives by making textual analysis of the director's last three films, *Spider* (2002, David Cronenberg), *A History of Violence* (2005, David Cronenberg) and *Eastern Promises* (2007, David Cronenberg) and to explain how the menacing figures are eliminated from the diegesis. But before start making the textual analyses of the director's last three films, the characteristic qualities of David Cronenberg's cinema can be laid on the table.

David Cronenberg is known as a leading director of body horror genre, especially by his early works. Kelly Hurley defines body horror as

A hybrid genre that recombines the narrative and cinematic conventions of the science fiction, horror, and suspense film in order to stage a spectacle of the human body defamiliarized, rendered other. [...]The narrative told by body horror again and again is of a human subject dismantled and demolished: a human body whose integrity is violated, a human identity whose boundaries are breached from all sides.<sup>1</sup>

As a combination of horror and science fiction genres, Cronenberg films like *Shivers* (Cronenberg, 1975), *Rabid* (Cronenberg, 1977), *The Brood* (Cronenberg, 1979), *Scanners* (Cronenberg, 1981), *Videodrome* (Cronenberg, 1983), and *The Fly* (Cronenberg, 1986) display the transformation or the mutation of the main characters' bodies into something dangerous and destructive because of the discoveries and unusual experiments of scientist figures in the narratives.

For example, the penis shaped parasite formed as a consequence of a strange experiment in *Shivers*, Rose's mysterious organ created by an experimental surgery in *Rabid*, the psychological therapy of the psychiatrist figure that transforms the body and produces physical tumors in *The Brood*, the medicine named ephemerol that is discovered by a scientist and makes people telepathic rulers in *Scanners*, the brain tumor which is caused by a special television program as the creation of an army related scientific organization in *Videodrome*, the teleportation devices which causes a horrible human-fly mutation when an experiment of the scientist goes wrong in *The Fly* are signs of the biological mutations and transformations in Cronenberg cinema caused by science and created by perverse scientists who are represented as mad or disturbed figures and punished for their ambitions or curiosities.

By quoting Jacques Jouhaneau, Christopher Frayling says "the savant, who is mad, cursed, or homicidal [...] becomes much more stereotyped than his heroic adversary, to whom he serves merely as a standard of value."<sup>2</sup> By commenting on Jacques Jouhaneau survey on the representation of science in cinema, Frayling states that the survey

Attempts to bring issues of 'scientific realism' and 'social value' into equation: where 'social value' is concerned, Jouhaneau admits that 'this inevitably brings a more subjective evaluation into play'. And the survey attempts to relate its findings to the image of scientists 'in the mind of the spectator'<sup>3</sup>

In reference to Frayling's words, the stereotypical representation of mad scientists as non-heroic figures can be related to the notions like social value and order. Roslynn Haynes says



The 'mad scientists' uncovers knowledge that threatens social order (sometimes the whole planet) either to malicious designs of evil people or by accident. [...] The fear of science is about power and about change that leaves the ordinary person disempowered and confused, unable to control either the ideas or the people who may exploit them. Unlike rulers and military juntas, knowledge cannot be overthrown; it cannot be put back into the box.<sup>4</sup>

Roslynn Haynes's words are juxtaposed with the idea that Cronenberg films always display a threat that attacks the social order and create a paranoid atmosphere through the creations of the mad scientist stereotype. In Cronenberg's body horrors the threat is always coming from inside and is literally embodied which gives the idea that the social order is threatened by an internal entity. Unlike the technological alterations of science fiction films that cause the characters to become alienated to their bodies, the embodied threats are represented as the parts or limbs of Cronenberg's characters in his earlier films and that is what makes the threats personal and even surprisingly familiar for the characters.

Although the spectators look at the transformations within the characters' bodies as an unfamiliar, terrifying mutation, the main characters adopt to these alterations. When Nicholas Tudor first meets the parasite while he is lying in his bed in *Shivers*, he addresses as if it is his child. The camera stands in a position that displays Nicholas from his groins till his head and when the parasite starts to crawl inside his body, it moves in his pants and the spectator can be easily convinced that the moving thing is his penis instead of the parasite. Besides, when the parasite breaks through Nicholas's body for the first time the camera focuses on his face and from this angle the parasite becomes a substitute for his tongue.

*The Brood* is full of examples that the personal fears and traumas of the characters create dangerous tumors and organs in their body and these creations that constitute serious threats for other people can be assimilated like a good, old friend as in the case of Nola. There are many other examples in Cronenberg's films that designate the personalization of the threats because especially in early Cronenberg's cinema the threats are parts of the characters' identities. This is why it is not surprising that after Seth Brundle turns into a fly-human mutant in *Fly*, he says "I'm an insect who dreamt he was a man and loved it."

The personalization of the threats in Cronenberg films indicates that the threats already exist in social order and when the characters start to identify with those threats they lose their social identities once and for all. The embodied threats turn them into an outsider and a danger that terrorizes the unity and continuity of social order. The more their bodies are demolished and transformed the more the characters keep their positions as social threats.

As Murray Smith says “the physical horror of deformed and dysfunctional materiality is related to another bodily fear upon which Cronenberg consistently plays in *The Fly* and elsewhere: the loss of bodily integrity (wholeness, oneness, unity).”<sup>5</sup>

The notions like ‘loss of bodily integrity’ and ‘demolishing of identity’ are favorite subjects of Cronenberg’s horrific pictures. Cronenberg films constantly focus on the unstable or hidden identities of the characters, their search for a new life by renovation and their struggle with the ruins of their pasts throughout his career. When he highlights these notions he also creates a paranoiac atmosphere caused by

Blurring of boundaries between self and other, to the extent that the other becomes a version of the self returned, with interest, in the form of hostility. This blurring of boundaries depends precisely on the fear of a return, for something which has been expelled may well come back, half-expected, from the other side or beyond.<sup>6</sup>

The unstable characters of Cronenberg films basically battle with their traumatic pasts or hidden identities that return from repressed by creating mayhem and hatred. Through the manifestation of the ‘return of the repressed’, the characters face their hidden identities, traumatic pasts or uncertain futures.

In Cronenberg’s early and medial films, the characters are not able to renovate themselves and reach the bright future they always desired. These films such as *Videodrome*, *The Fly*, *Dead Ringers* (Cronenberg, 1988), *Naked Lunch* (Cronenberg, 1991), *Crash* (Cronenberg, 1996), and *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999) end with the destruction, constant dissatisfaction of the main characters or the collapse of the whole world like in *Shivers*, *Rabid* and *The Brood*. The former films of the director present that fatal creations of mad scientists

are unbeatable, uncontrollable and unstoppable which causes the destruction of their own or sometimes the whole world.

However, in his last three films, the threats which are aimed to destroy and demolish the substantial identities of the main characters as a classical move of David Cronenberg's cinema can be overthrown with clever moves. Although these threats may cause deadly events that directly affect the main characters and the people around them there are many ways to destroy and eliminate the monstrous characters from the diegetic world.

Besides, whereas the mad scientist figures are presented as the cause of the destruction of the diegesis in the early Cronenberg films, in the last three films of the director the cause of the deadly and destructive events are indicated as the criminals and the criminal minds who are ready to kill, rob and change the regulations of the social order. Beginning with *Spider*, in Cronenberg's films, the threats that attack the social order are not the creations of an ambitious scientist who produce deadly creatures with curious intentions and be a victim of his own creation. Cronenberg's new narratives display the evil creatures who are generated by the social system spontaneously which carries this thesis into the framework of psychoanalysis.

When the notions such as the return of the repressed memories, the creations of the threats which are produced by the social system automatically and the conversion of the laws and regulations of the social order come into question the psychoanalytic paradigm can be a predominating way to explain those concepts. This is why this thesis will use psychoanalytical methodology to analyze changing face of David Cronenberg films' narratives.

Thus, psychoanalytically speaking, the dangerous figures who attempt to redefine the regulations of the social order correspond to the non-Symbolic threats that attack the Symbolic order which is described by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who will be the leading theorists of this thesis.

In *Spider*, the non-Symbolic threat becomes the main character itself who creates a monstrous mother figure with a phallic presence by surfacing his Oedipal obsessions with his mother and his hatred towards his father.

In *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises*, the mob bosses who turn out to be primordial father figures with their non-Symbolic existences rule the narrative and endeavor to change the Symbolic stability of the main characters' lives. Both of the films reflect the secretive or uncertain pasts of the characters and force them to face the primordial father figures in order to regain their Symbolic stability.

Throughout all three films, as a consequent of the non-Symbolic attempts, the phallic figures become transformed and the characters drift into identification dilemmas by facing the danger of losing their Symbolic existences. The films bind to each other by ending with the re-establishment of the Symbolic order even though the non-Symbolic figures try to shake the diegesis. Therefore, all three films differentiate from the former works of Cronenberg with the inclusion of the Symbolic guarantors in order to eliminate the non-Symbolic figures.

Following chapters will focus on the textual analyses of the Cronenberg's last three films and explain the transformation of the phallic figures, the identification dilemmas of the main characters and the re-establishment of the Symbolic order in the narratives. In this way, they will analyze how the narratives of David Cronenberg's last three films are transformed and distinguished from his former works.

## Notes For Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Hurley, Kelly. "Reading Like an Alien: Posthuman Identity in Ridley Scott's *Alien* and David Cronenberg's *Rabid*." Posthuman Bodies. Eds. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. p. 203

<sup>2</sup> Frayling, Christopher. "The Scarecrow's Brain." *Mad, Bad and Dangerous?: The Scientist and the Cinema*. Reaktion Books, 2005. p. 42

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 42-43

<sup>4</sup> Haynes, Roslynn. "From Alchemy to Artificial Intelligence: Stereotypes of the Scientist in Western Literature." *Public Understanding of Science* 2003; 12; 243.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, Murray. "(A)moral Monstrosity." The modern fantastic : the films of David Cronenberg. Ed. Michael Grant. Westport, Conn. : Praeger, 2000. 69–83

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 1

### *Spider: From Mad Scientists to Psychosis*

You may train the eagle  
 To stoop to your fist.  
 You may train in veige  
 The Phoenix of the east.  
 The lioness, you may move her  
 To give o'er her prey;  
 But you'll ne'er stop a lover;  
 He will find out his way.<sup>1</sup>

From the early Cronenberg films till the director's later works including *eXistenZ*, the diegetic worlds of the films constantly collapse due to the transformation of the figures who challenge the power of the paternal authorities and end up creating destructive threats just for the sake of straining their limits and proving their power. Under the intimidating hazard produced by the consequences of their actions, the characters in the films lose their power, identity and sometimes their bodily integrity at the end.

Although *Spider* begins its journey correspondingly, different from Cronenberg's former works, it does not come to an end by displaying the ultimate victory of the monstrous, phallic figures but stressing on the importance of father's role as the Symbolic law maker and present the father figure (or his substitute, as in this case) as a rescuer.

In *Spider*, Cronenberg's narrative first concentrates on the main character's Oedipal obsession with his mother and how this obsession leads the diegesis into a chaotic reality where the identities shift very quickly and the narrative is blurred with the intrusions of the mirages and illusions. After that, different from Cronenberg's former works, the diegesis lets the father substitute interfere in the Oedipal conflict and allows him to take control.

#### I.

In the beginning of the film, a train is seen approaching a station. Camera slowly passes near the train and the passengers start getting off. The appearance of the train and the passengers reflect the present day or very near past. However, when the camera stops on the

main character, Dennis Cleg (Ralph Fiennes), he constitutes a contrast image with his threadbare clothes and old-style luggage by comparison to other passengers. This representation indicates Cleg's opposition with the daily reality and gives the feeling that Cleg is a visitor from the past.

After he gets off the train he inserts his hand into his pants which is experienced by the spectator as an inappropriate behavior to do in a public place because it seems like he is touching his penis. However, Cleg takes out a single sock from his pants, which is used as a cover to protect the box that includes Cleg's special belongings like his tobacco.

During the film, Cleg gets the sock out of his pants four times and uses the box on several occasions while he is smoking. But the most important appearance of the sock happens in a depth scene.

In the preparation of this scene, Cleg is seen while he is sitting in a café shop. Throughout the sequence, Cleg looks at a picture on the wall which exhibits an image of a field and a sheep flock. Cleg posits between two different pictures in this scene. One of them displays the field and the other is a poster that gives the message 'Keep Britain Tidy'.

Cleg turns his back to the poster which announces a duty of being a citizen in the social order of everyday Britain and looks at the imaginary field picture on the wall. This look carries the spectator into a depth scene where Cleg imagines himself in a field with two different characters who seem like symbolizing different reflections of Cleg's character.

This sequence is divided into three main camera shots and every shot displays different demonstrations to examine Cleg's relation with the sock. Each shot has a cumulative effect on creating a symbolic meaning throughout the sequence and understanding Cleg's commitment to the sock.

The first camera shot displays Cleg as he is getting the sock out of his pant and allows discussing Cleg's relation with the sock in terms of fetishism. Freud describes fetish as "a

substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up”<sup>2</sup> and Barbara Creed says that Freud's definition of fetish is interesting because “it holds equally true for either proposition – that woman is castrated or that woman is castrating.”<sup>3</sup> Creed adds that

On first realizing that the mother is without a penis, the boy is horrified. If woman has been castrated then his own genitals are in danger. He responds in one of two ways. He either accepts symbolically the possibility of castration or he refuses this knowledge. In the latter situation, the shock of seeing female genitals – proof that castration can occur – is too great and the child sets up a fetish object which stands in for the missing penis of the mother.<sup>4</sup>

The sock used in *Spider* may function like a corporal organ, a bodily extension, for Cleg because it is normally used to cover a ‘feet’ and due to the fact that it functions like a bodily extension it can also be said that it is replacing a Lack, a phantom limb, that makes him feel incomplete. The sock is Cleg's fetish object which allows him to protect his penis from castration and recreate his mother's penis in a figurative level. Besides, Freud says that “the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish—or a part of it—to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below, from her legs up”<sup>5</sup> which explains why Cleg chooses the sock for his fetish object.

In addition to that, during *Spider*, Cleg as a chain smoker not just absorbs the smoke of the cigarette but he sucks the cigarette like a nipple. His relation with the cigarette may indicate his oral needs that he expects from his mother and as well as Cleg uses the cigarettes as a substitution of his mother's nipple, he also conceals his needs and gives them a Symbolic cover under the disguise of smoking.

So, he recreates the state in which he was united with his mother's body that feeds and meets his oral needs at an Imaginary level. In this way, he actually reconstructs her mother's penis and diminishes his castration anxiety.

The second camera shot displays an old man as he is getting off his artificial teeth from the sock and putting it into his mouth. This demonstration opens up a new discussion



topic which allows examining Cleg's case under the framework of 'vagina dentata' which is the toothed vagina. Barbara Creed defines vagina dentata as

An expression of the dyadic mother; the all-encompassing maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal period who threatens symbolically to engulf the infant, thus posing a threat of psychic obliteration. [...] The image of toothed vagina, symbolic of the all-devouring woman, is related to the subject's infantile memories of its early relation with the mother and the subsequent fear of its identity being swallowed up by the mother.<sup>6</sup>

The teeth hidden in the sock and gets out from the old man's pocket signifies that he carries the threat of castration around his penis all the time. However, although the man carries the castration threat around his penis all the time when he puts the teeth into his mouth, he actually tries to indicate that he possesses the vagina dentata which is described as "the mouth of hell – a terrifying symbol of woman as the devil's gateway"<sup>7</sup> and chooses "to castrate rather than be castrated."<sup>8</sup>

The third camera shot displays a middle aged man as he is putting his hand into his pants and moving it around like he is searching for something. Shortly, he gets off his hand from his pants and it is seen that his hand is empty. Due to his malicious laughter and facial expression, it is understood that the middle aged man's aim was not to get off something inside his pants. He just wanted to touch his penis and enjoy it. His behavior indicates that the reason of the castration threat which is stressed in the former two sections may be Cleg's masturbatory habits and his sexual desires.

The object of Cleg's sexual desires becomes revealed during the second depth scene in the field. Throughout the scene Cleg is displayed as he is getting off a photograph from his tobacco box. The photograph exhibits two naked women sitting on a bar. Cleg touches the women on the photograph and makes them change into Yvonne's (Miranda Richardson) appearance which is actually his mother's figure. Cleg's illusion on photograph explains his Oedipal obsession with his mother.

Besides, during Cleg's illusion on photograph, two other men who accompany him in the field are talking about their sexual fantasies. When two men are talking about a woman

with three ‘tits’, Cleg focuses on his tobacco box which juxtaposes with the idea that Cleg uses his smoking habit as a substitute for his mother’s nipple. When the conversation starts to focus on a mother one of them says that his mother had three tits and she liked to ‘have it off with sailors’. The juxtaposition of Cleg’s focus on the photograph with the conversation of two men reveal the phallic character of the mother figure who is presented as a woman with ‘three tits’ as well as it exposes Cleg’s repressed sexual desires to his mother and his obsession with her.

## II.

Cleg’s obsession with his mother is felt its strength beginning from the first scene of *Spider* because the film already starts in Cleg’s mother’s womb at a figurative level. When Cleg gets off the train, he steps into a place which is surrounded by his childhood memories and may be named as ‘birth place’ or ‘motherland’. Besides, the symbolic meaning of the notion of train station also nourishes this definition.

At this point it will be suitable to mention about the observations of Melanie Klein on “the case of Dick” that is emphasized by Lacan in *Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954*.

During the case, the child

Possesses a very limited vocabulary, more than just limited in fact, incorrect. He deforms words and uses them inopportunately most of the time, whereas at other times it is clear that he knows their meaning. Melanie Klein insists on the most striking fact – this child has no desire to make himself understood, he doesn’t try to communicate, his only activities, more or less playful, are emitting sounds and taking pleasure in meaningless sounds, in noises.<sup>9</sup>

Cleg also cannot speak very well. He cannot arrange a full sentence properly and speaks with a limited vocabulary. Most of the time, he murmurs to himself and communicates in body language. When he starts to arrange a sentence, he just murmurs a few disconnected words and cannot finish what he tries to say. If he starts to speak in an understandable language time to time, he ends up in murmuring in an inconceivable speech similar to baby

talk which strengthens Cleg's Imaginary position and makes his condition to be discussed under the framework of Dick's case.

Lacan affirms that all of the symptoms in Dick's case show that he seeks refuge in his mother's body. He says that

Speech has not come to him. Language didn't stick to his imaginary system, whose register is extremely limited – valorization of trains, of door-handles, of the dark his faculties, not to communication, but of expression, are limited to that. For him, the real and the imaginary are equivalent.<sup>10</sup>

Lacan explains Melanie Klein's experiences with the child concerning their play on a model train. He clarifies that “when he picks up a little train for a while, he doesn't play, he does it in the same way he moves through the air – as if he were an invisible being, or rather as if everything were, in a specific manner, invisible to him.”<sup>11</sup>

Klein focuses on the child's relation with the train and tells him ‘Dick little train, big train daddy-train’. Afterwards the child begins to play with the train and utters the word ‘station’ and Klein replies him by saying ‘the station is mummy. Dick is going into mummy’. The verbalization of the symbols tells us that Klein makes the child express his object cathexis and this expression clarifies that for Dick the train symbolizes his father and the station symbolizes his mother.

In terms of the similarities between the conditions of Cleg and Dick, Dick's relation with trains allows the opening scene of *Spider* to be analyzed in a different way and have a figurative meaning.

When Cleg ‘leaves’ the train and steps into the ‘station’ it may be considered as a sign of Cleg's welcoming in his motherland where his obsessions with his mother arouses and this arousal leads Cleg to explain his obsession with his mother in a concealed way.

While Dick conceals his obsession with his mother by refusing to communicate and hiding his desire under his play with trains, Cleg tries to veil his obsession with his mother by

explaining his childhood memories in a distorted way. Analyzing the castrating mother figure in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), Barbara Creed asserts that

Freud said that the story of the child's early history with the mother was not 'difficult to grasp... grey with age and shadowy' and in this sense the mother's story is not really 'hers'; it is ultimately the son's story. Perhaps this is why Freud found the mother's story so difficult to detect – hers is always part of another story, the son's story.<sup>12</sup>

Barbara Creed's words on *Psycho* may be suitable for *Spider* as well. Because Cleg's childhood scenes also constantly indicate that this is 'the son's story' as psychoanalysis always explains.

Beginning from the first childhood scene, the continuity of the childhood memories are broken by the scenes that display Cleg while he is writing on a notebook in a coded language which constitute not from symbols and mostly looks like scrawling. These scenes function like parenthesis that warns the spectators that they are about to enter Cleg's story written in the notebook.

In the first scene where Cleg is seen while he is writing in his notebook, the frame is divided into two; on the left Cleg is seen as leaning on the dresser and the right constitutes from a complete darkness as if the pellicle of the film is damaged. In the section named *A Black Hole in Reality* in *Looking Awry*, when Žižek comments on a scene in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, he says that

If we look at a thing straight on, matter-of-factly, we see it 'as it really is', while the gaze puzzled by our desires and anxieties ('looking awry') gives us a distorted, blurred image if we look at a thing straight on, i.e., matter-of-factly, disinterestedly, objectively, we see nothing but a formless spot; the object assumes clear and distinctive features only if we look at it 'at an angle', i.e., with an 'interested' view, supported, permeated, and 'distorted' by *desire*.<sup>13</sup>

The darkness that is displayed on the other half of the frame designates the 'disinterested', 'objective' look at Cleg's childhood memories. However, after the 'black hole' dissolves and the memory sequence begins, the story becomes distorted by Cleg's desires and anxieties. Therefore, Cleg's desire to unite with his mother and his obsession with

her happen to be the number one factor that causes the childhood memories to have a distorted character.

On the other hand, during the childhood scenes, Cronenberg constantly divides the frame by using the thresholds of the doors and windows which is a narrative technique frequently confronted in Rene Magritte's paintings. In his paintings such as *The Field-glass* (Magritte, 1963)<sup>14</sup>, *The Human Condition I* (Magritte, 1933)<sup>15</sup> and *The Unexpected Answer* (Magritte, 1933)<sup>16</sup>, Magritte uses the doors, windows and canvases to separate the inside from the outside. Žižek says that

La Lunette d'approche [The Field-glass], the painting of a half-open window there, through the windowpane, we see external reality (a blue sky with some dispersed clouds), while in the narrow opening that gives direct access to the reality beyond the pane we see nothing but a dense black mass. The frame of the windowpane is, of course, the fantasy frame that constitutes reality, whereas the narrow opening between the panes opens onto the 'impossible' real, the Thing-in-itself.<sup>17</sup>

The childhood scenes' resemblance with Magritte's paintings makes Cronenberg usage of the doors and the windows emphasize the fantastic character of the scenes. After the first scene that displays Cleg while he is writing in his notebook and shares the frame with a complete darkness, he enters his first childhood scene. In this scene, he walks in a deserted street at night, approaches a window in the backyard of a house and when he opens the curtains he drops into a different scene where a little boy and his mother chat in a kitchen. This scene which appears behind the curtains reminds 'the black hole' in Rene Magritte's painting.



**Figure 1: René Magritte's *La Lunette d'approche* and a screenshot from *Spider***

After Cleg preserves his place near the window, the camera enters the kitchen that Cleg stalks and Cleg who is seen behind the window starts to repeat the dialogs of the little boy before him. The camera angle allows seeing both the kitchen table where the mother and the little boy sit and Cleg who stalks the scene from outside the window.

From this angle the colourful scenery of the kitchen and Cleg's position outside the window creates a great contrast and this differentiation puts Cleg into the position of 'the black hole' within the picture. Whereas the kitchen setup where the boy and the mother are chatting demonstrates a 'fantasy frame' as in Magritte's painting, it also puts Cleg's into an Imaginary position that turns its face into an open access to the 'impossible' real.

The great harmony between the boy and the mother and their position of being in the kitchen strengthen the fantastic character of this scene which is crooked by Cleg's desires and yearnings. The kitchen where the boy spent time with his mother alone and is 'nurtured' by his mother unconditionally may be considered as a place that allows Cleg's desire to create his union with his mother once again.

Besides, during the scene, the little boy plays with a string which signifies an important point about Cleg's desires and also his obsession with his mother. The boy's commitment to the string may be explained by examining a case that D.W. Winnicott mentions.

In this case, Winnicott tells the story of a boy who is obsessed with strings. When they start a drawing play he immediately begins to draw string based things such as a lasso, a whip, a knotted string and a yo-yo string and his parents say that he constantly ties different belongings to each other at home. At the end, Winnicott attaches the boy's obsession with strings to his separation from his mother. He also adds that the boy had a little sister a short time ago and afterwards due to a surgery his mother was hospitalized for two months. The boy's separation from his mother caused him to produce an obsession with strings as a transitional object.<sup>18</sup>

In another case that Winnicott explains, the boy named Edmund who is extremely devoted to his mother produced an obsession with strings. During a therapy session, Winnicott realizes that Edmund sits nearby his mother and plays with a ball of string in his hands. He does not just hold the string but touches his mother's leg with the edge of the string as if he is trying to be plugged to his mother while she is speaking. With this behavior, Winnicott understands that Edmund uses the string to symbolize his separation and desire for reconnection to his mother.<sup>19</sup>

These two cases may exemplify Cleg's childhood version's obsession with the string. The boy who does not want to be separated from his mother recreates the connection with her via the string. More importantly, when the mother comments on the boy's playing with the string in the kitchen scene and says that he is so good with his hands, the boy replies her by telling that he is making it for her.

Besides, as the cases of Winnicott illustrates, the string that Cleg's childhood version becomes obsessed with, can also be called a fetish object. Richard Allen says that

The fetish, in this more general sense, hearkens back to the moment of primary identification in which the child first separates from the mother and differentiates the me and the not-me [...] referred to Winnicott's analysis of the transitional objects that acts as a comforter for the child to maintain the fantasy that the objective world conforms to her subjective reality.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, the boy's fetishist relation with the string is a desire to make his obsession with his mother veiled and confirmed by the objective world. Like Cleg's relation with the sock, the string is used as a disguise to conceal the boy's Oedipal obsession with his mother.

### III.

The kitchen scene where the boy and his mother are presented in a great harmony is disrupted when the mother tells the boy to go to the pub and bring his father to the table. The boy knows that the father will ruin his union with his mother and shows a resentful attitude while he is leaving the kitchen because he does not want him to interfere in the picture that displays the harmonized unification of the boy and the mother.

When he arrives at the pub, this space is introduced to the spectator as a place that belongs to the father and it creates a significant contrast with his mother's kitchen. Whereas the kitchen produces a heavenly atmosphere between the boy and the mother, the pub is introduced as a phallic space with penis shaped beer pumps and lots of men. In this place, every appendage gains a phallic meaning. When one of the only three women in the pub shows the boy her breast, the breast is also perceived as a phallic organ like penis and the woman turns into a phallic female figure unlike the mother displayed in the kitchen.

On the other hand, one of the most important points at the comparison between the kitchen and the pub is Cleg's position in those scenes. Whereas Cleg preserves his stalker position as an outsider in the kitchen scene, he becomes a part of the setup in the pub.



When Žižek interprets Mark Rothko's paintings produced in the 1960's which constitute a set of colour variations and sometimes a simple black square on a white background he says that "if the square occupies the whole field, if the difference between the figure and its background is lost, a psychotic autism is produced."<sup>21</sup> Regarding to Žižek's words, it can be said that when Cleg, as a figure, has lost his distinction from the background and becomes a part of the setup, the scene not only gains an autistic quality but also gains an ambivalent character. Because when Cleg becomes a part of the setup, the splitting between the past and the present, the inside and the outside get blurred as well. In this way, the diegesis turns into a pre-mirror stage state that is surrounded "by the interplay of projections, introjections, expulsions, reintrojections of bad objects."<sup>22</sup>

This inclination may turn *Spider* into one of Cronenberg's former works where the diegesis totally collapses with the intrusion of Imaginary creatures, transformations and mutations. However, different from Cronenberg's former films, before the diegesis completely collapses, the father figure instantly strengthens his position in *Spider*.

In the beginning of the film, where Cleg first arrives at Mrs. Wilkinson's nursery a bathroom scene begins. In this scene where Cleg lies in the bathtub and curls up in the foetus position, he keeps the half of his body in the water and the other half out. Whereas the foetal position of Cleg signifies that he is curled up as if he is in the womb of his mother, the brownish water in the tub figuratively indicates the amniotic fluid which keeps the baby nourished in its mother's womb.

The half inside, half outside position of Cleg in the bathtub connotes that he is in a very traumatic situation of displacement. This situation may be explained by the statement of Jerrold E. Hogle which stresses that

The most primordial version of [this] in-between situation is the multiplicity we viscerally remember from the moment of birth, at which we were both inside and outside of the mother and thus both alive and not yet in existence (in that sense death).<sup>23</sup>

Cleg's foetus position and in-between situation in the water figuratively emphasize that Cleg is neither alive nor dead.

Following the bathroom scene, Cleg is presented lying in his bed in the foetal position again and counting some street names which evokes the idea that he describes a definite location. There is nothing but the sound of the rain or water throughout the scene which connects it to the bathtub scene and turns Cleg's image lying in his bed into a figurative representation of his mother's womb. After Cleg repeats the name 'Kitchener Street' and says 'my mum' it is understood that he tries to repeat his mother's location and emphasize his separation from his mother's body.

Next day Cleg gets out from the nursery for a walk and when he passes the canal and arrives at the allotment he lies down to the ground and mourns for his mother. During the scene, Cleg seems like he wants to take out something buried under the ground, most probably his mother and bring his union with her mother back to life.

On the other hand, in the bathroom scene discussed above where the bathtub is full of brownish water, a little detail can be underlined. Away from all the figurative meanings, the main reason of the water to be brown may be the fact that the plumbing system of the house is damaged, the pipes are rusty and the system should be repaired by a 'plumber' such as Cleg's father because it is understood that the only person who can repair the system is Cleg's father.

However, one of the most certain things that are displayed in the film is the fact that the boy cannot accept his mother's relation with his father. The boy usually ignores his father and the mother seems like encouraging his behaviours.

In one of the dinner table scenes in the beginning of the childhood sequences, when the boy makes an annoying sound with his knife the mother breaks into a possible conversation between the father and the boy and warns the father to say nothing to the boy. This behavior indicates her overprotective character and her prevention of the boy's

identification with his father and his rules. However, it should be underlined that the childhood sequences tell the son's story as psychoanalysis always does. Therefore, the overprotective character of the mother basically reflects Cleg's desire of how she wants to be.

Cleg yearns for a mother who avoids the father's position and existence in order to unite with her child. He wants a mother who controls her sexual appetite and does not share her love with another man. Cleg's Oedipal jealousy forces him to create an ideal-mother for himself and exclude the father from his relation with her mother.

What's more, following the dinner table scene, Cleg's child version and her mother are seen sitting on the table. The mother is putting on lipstick in front of the mirror while the boy hears a story that she tells about spiders and Cleg continues to stalk the scene from the threshold of the door.

In the middle of the story the boy passes behind the mother in order to comb her hair and this position allows the mother to stand between the mirror and the boy. In this position, if the boy sees himself in the mirror, he sees his mother, too and during his secondary mirror stage process the boy cannot separate his ego from his mother's.

The story that the mother tells the boy belongs to the mother's childhood and it is about her experience with spiders. She says

I remember how I'd go across the fields in the morning... And I'd see the webs in the trees. Like clouds of muslin they were. Spider's webs... then look up close. I'd see they weren't muslin at all. They were wheels. Great big shiny wheels... If you knew where to look, you could find the spider's egg bags. Perfect little things they were. Tiny little silk pockets she made... to put her eggs in.

After the boy asks her mother what happens to the spider after she laid her eggs the mother replies that "she just crawled away without looking back once." From their conversations it is understood that this is not the first time the mother tells the boy the story of the spiders and the boy especially likes the part where the spider leaves her eggs and

crawls away. At the end of the story the boy asks “and then she died?” and the mother answers “her work was done. She had no more silk left. She’s all dried up and empty.”

Following the mother tells the spider story, the boy stays at home to guard the house as his father said to him and the mother leaves the house with the father. As well as the boy stays alone with the feeling of exclusion, he witnesses a sexual encounter between his parents while he stalks their leaving from his bedroom window. This incident adds his abandonment jealousy and hatred.

With the feelings of envy and abandonment, the boy experiences ambivalent fluxes that focus on the idea that the mother threatens the boy’s union with her by choosing the father as her sexual partner and leaving the boy at home as if she prefers to be with the father rather than the boy. The mother becomes a castration threat for the boy due to the fact that she tries to break off her bond with her child and “crawls away without looking back once.” Due to her abandonment, she may deserve to die like a dried up and empty spider.

Robert C. Lane says that

Lane and Chazan (1989) described three symbols—the spider, the witch, and the shark—that represent the phallic mother and her bisexuality. All three of the symbols are oral sadistic: The spider entraps and eats its victims [...] With such a mother, the child feels brutalized, teased, bullied, and beaten.<sup>24</sup>

R.C. Lane’s statement explains why the spider story of the mother has such an important in the course of the film because it makes the phallic mother that is Yvonne Wilkinson visible.

Cleg gives his mother two different identities in his childhood memories. In one side, the mother is introduced as a devoted character who chooses to protect the boy from his father and preserves her union with the boy as in the dinner table scene.

The humble mother first appears in the film while she is cutting some potatoes with a little knife. Although the knife seems like a good castrating device and produces a castration

threat for the boy in a literal way, the humble mother is never suspected to be a castrating figure throughout the film.

On the other part Yvonne appears as a monstrous feminine, a bloody murderer and a hussy. She is a woman without any rules. She does not respect anything. She is a law-less monster, a castrating mother figure. This is why when she cooks for the first time in the humble mother's kitchen she puts a snakefish on the table as if the fish represents the castrated penis of the boy.

According to the boy, Yvonne is the symbol of the feared castrator who "sees into his heart and uncovers his guilty secrets, his sexual desire."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, although Yvonne is a feared figure who can punish the boy due to the fact that she can see right through the boy and awakens his "unconscious fears of the mother as parental castrator"<sup>26</sup> her lawlessness and her boundless sexual appetite can also make everything possible, even incest. This is why the first sexual relationship between Yvonne and the father becomes a primal scene fantasy for Cleg.

Primal scene fantasy is "the name Freud gave to the fantasy of overhearing or observing parental intercourse, of being on the scene, so to speak of one's own conception."<sup>27</sup> Constance Penley says that this fantasy is being both observer and one of the participants in the scene.

Cleg's position in his parents' false memories directly fits this description. In the film, Cleg literally actualizes this fantasy when he replaces his father's position while he is having sex with Yvonne under the gate beyond the canal.

During this scene after Yvonne satisfies the father she comes through the camera in order to throw the semen in his hand to the canal. Then when Yvonne gets away from the camera, Cleg appears in his father's position and answers Yvonne's questions instead of him.

This is a literalization of the primal scene fantasy where Cleg both observes and participates in the act. In this way Cleg indicates that everything is possible with Yvonne's lawlessness.

Through Yvonne's intrusion to the diegetic world with her lawless character which shakes the authority of the Symbolic rules, the narrative becomes open to Imaginary threats and a psychotic collapse. However, at this point, the narrative makes Cleg's disturbed character visible by pointing the misleading nature of the childhood scenes and appoints Cleg's psychiatrist as a father substitute to take him out of his Imaginary position and give him a place in the Symbolic law.

While Cleg is seen turning his back to the camera and writing something in his notebook as if he is completely buried into his own reality, the narrative turns back to the days that Cleg spends in the mental institution.

During the asylum sequence the man who claims that his mother has three tits in the second depth scene that passes in the field is seen as one of the patients in the institution. The old man who holds a piece of broken glass in his bloody hand, constantly threatens the doctor with 'cutting' his heart. The doctor who tries to calm the old man down is the head of the system and the lawmaker. The patients obey his rules and trust his cure in order to leave the mental institution and depart from their ambivalent states. Different from the doctor characters in Cronenberg's former films, the psychiatrist as a scientist is presented as an equilibrant instead of a figure who spread mayhem to the diegetic world.

In this way, the doctor turns into a mediator in charge of breaking the bond between the patients and their Imaginary ties and this duty makes him to function as the father who is the regulator of the Symbolic system. Therefore, the old man's threat pointing the doctor may be perceived as a castration threat to attack the authority, the power and the position of the doctor.

When the old man shouts his threats, Cleg stalks the scene behind the doctor. Cleg's position in the scene underlines the fact that Cleg is on the side of the doctor instead of being on the side of the old man.

After the camera fluxes between Cleg's look and the broken glasses on the floor Cleg is seen sitting on a bench. He slowly gets a piece of glass from his shirt sleeve and tries to cut his wrist. However, although the spectator expects to see Cleg's suicidal attempt, in the next scene he is seen standing in front of a door frame before the doctor. Cleg takes out a piece of glass under his shirt sleeve and returns it to the doctor. The doctor takes the piece to the next room and completes the block of the glasses. The shot/reverse shot formation during the sequence designates that Cleg is identified with the doctor and accepts his authority.

The doctor says 'take your eye out that would' while he puts the piece into the big puzzle of glasses which look like an eyeball and also a spider web at the same time.

Freud says

The fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible one in children. [...] Anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration.<sup>28</sup>

The doctor's words about the glasses and Freud's assumption on the anxiety of one's eye indicate that when Cleg returns the piece of glass and identifies with the doctor he accepts his power and surrenders his gaze which leads him to castration. Following this scene it is understood that Cleg is released from the mental institution when he commits himself to a father figure (which is the doctor) and his rules that separates him from his Imaginary position where he lives with the substitutes of his mother.

However, when the story returns to the present time of Cleg where he goes for a walk from Mrs. Wilkinson's nursery it is traced that Cleg does not make any progress by himself away from the doctor's gaze and returns to his delusional state once again.

Following the sequence at the mental institution, Cleg is seen sitting on the café shop and when he realizes that he is very close to the home where he lives in his childhood he goes for an investigation. When he arrives to his former home he stands on the sidewalk and stalks a mother and her baby who come out from the house.

After that when Cleg arrives at the pub which is coded as the father's space within the childhood scenes he cannot go through the sidewalk. Cleg's paralysis on the sidewalk signifies that he cannot step into the 'fatherland' by leaving the 'motherland' he is living in.

This is why the ambivalent mirages and the shifting identities of the Imaginary order start to interfere in his daily life once again. After this stage, Cleg begins to perceive every 'feminine' power figure in his life as Yvonne Wilkinson. The phallic mother figure of his childhood becomes the one and only authority for him and Cleg experiences the castration anxiety and the extreme fear from the maternal authority once again.

When commenting on Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Barbara Creed says

In terms of Norman's portrayal of his mother, we learn that she controlled all aspects of his life. He presents her as a castrating figure, a mother who did not trust her son, particularly in relation to his sexual desires. [...] Mrs. Bates is a harsh moralist, a castrating maternal figure.<sup>29</sup>

Creed's assumptions on *Psycho* once again become discussable in terms of *Spider* as well. Cleg's transformation of Mrs. Wilkinson into Yvonne Wilkinson, a castrating figure, may be the result of her position in the nursery. Mrs. Wilkinson is the ruler, the 'tyrant queen' of the nursery as Terrence (John Neville) points out. She nurtures and takes care of all the patients as if they are her children. She controls their every move and dictates if it is necessary.

In the bathroom scene where Cleg is first arrived at the nursery, he is seen sitting on a stool with a shy attitude while Mrs. Wilkinson prepares the bathtub for him. When Mrs. Wilkinson approaches Cleg and asks in a motherly attitude why he is not undressed yet, Cleg steps back in a very hostile way. Subsequent to Cleg's attitude, Mrs. Wilkinson feels



aggrieved and leaves the bathroom by saying that she leaves Mr. Cleg to his own devices. Cleg's hostility towards the motherly attitude of Mrs. Wilkinson indicates his aggression to her position.

Besides, as Cleg starts to perceive Mrs. Wilkinson under the image of Yvonne, he steals Mrs. Wilkinson's keys in order to execute his master plan. This incident causes Mrs. Wilkinson to interrogate Cleg and show her distrust against him. In reference to Barbara Creed's words, Mrs. Wilkinson turns into a moralist; an interrogator that questions and gazes Cleg's every move and after all of these behaviors she becomes a maternal castrator in the eyes of Cleg. Therefore, Cleg takes action and chooses to castrate rather than being castrated.

However, although the narrative of *Spider* starts to drift into a chaotic environment that is threatened by a non-Symbolic castrating figure like in Cronenberg's former films, it does not end with the dominion of the castrator because the father figure interrupts the course of events as a Symbolic lawmaker and stops Cleg after he finally recalls his memories about his mother.

Freud says that repetition is the patient's way of remembering the forgotten and repressed things in his unconscious and "from the repetitive which are exhibited in the transference we are led along the familiar paths to the awakening of the memories."<sup>30</sup>

While Cleg tries to kill Mrs. Wilkinson, he repeats the same processes once again while he kills his mother. However, when he is located near Mrs. Wilkinson's bed, ready to kill her, he wakes up with Mrs. Wilkinson's gaze at him and remembers his position as a castrator.

Mrs. Wilkinson's gaze functions as a secondary mirror stage for Cleg. Mrs. Wilkinson who occupies the role of the Other in this sequence re-shapes Cleg's image of himself by functioning as a reflection device and Cleg sees himself as a castrator, a murderer when he looks at her. Although, *Spider* is surrounded by the maternal castrator all the time, when Cleg

comes face to face with Mrs. Wilkinson under her own, accurate image it is understood that Cleg is the creator of the maternal castrator just like the mad scientist figure in Cronenberg's early films.

Cleg's confrontation with Mrs. Wilkinson keeps him shocked and stops him from killing Mrs. Wilkinson. In addition to that, with the intrusion of Cleg's psychiatrist as a father substitute; the castrating threat which is Cleg as the creation of the phallic figures becomes completely eliminated.

At the end of the film, Cleg is seen sitting in a car by his psychiatrist in the same way as he is taken to the hospital in his childhood after he kills his mother. The psychiatrist inquires Cleg if he is ready to come back or not and Cleg asks him if he got any cigarettes.

In this way, it is assumed that Cleg gives up carrying his tobacco in his pants or he leaves his tobacco box in the nursery. So, he abandons his fetish object when he starts to encounter with the father substitute that means he accepts his constant Lack and surrenders Symbolic castration.

This surrender is the key concept that differentiates the last three films of Cronenberg from his former works because whereas the previous films of the director come to an end with the total victory of the phallic figures and their creations who spread their castration threat all over the diegetic world or assist the characters to turn into a pre-mirror stage state as in Cleg's case, the last three films of Cronenberg eliminates these figures and highlights the notion of the Symbolic father which is the key concept of Cronenberg's following film, *A History of Violence*.

## Notes for Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous. *Love Will Find Out the Way*. 17th Cent.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, S. "Fetishism." The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, p. 147-158

<sup>3</sup> Creed, Barbara. "Medusa's Head: The Vagina Dentata." The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism Psychoanalysis. Oxon: Routledge, 1993. p. 115-116

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 116

<sup>5</sup> Freud, S. "Fetishism." The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, p. 147-158

<sup>6</sup> Creed, Barbara. "Medusa's Head: The Vagina Dentata." The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism Psychoanalysis. Oxon: Routledge, 1993. p. 109

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 106

<sup>8</sup> Creed, Barbara. "The Castrating Mother: Psycho." The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism Psychoanalysis. Oxon: Routledge, 1993. p. 148

<sup>9</sup> Lacan, Jacques. "The Topic of the Imaginary." Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954. New York: WW Norton & Company Ltd, 1991. p. 81

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 84

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 140 – 141

<sup>13</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "From Reality to the Real." Looking Awry. US: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991. p. 11-12

<sup>14</sup> Gablik, Suzi. Magritte. New York, N.Y. : Thames and Hudson, 1998. p. 90

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 85

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 91

<sup>17</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. “Kantian Background of the *Noir* Subject.” Shades of Noir: A Reader. Ed. Joan Copjec. London; New York : Verso, 1996. p. 219

<sup>18</sup> Winnicott, D.W. Oyun ve Gerçeklik. İstanbul: Metis Ötekini Dinlemek, 1998. p. 34–37

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 62–63

<sup>20</sup> Allen, Richard. “Voyeurism, Fetishism, and Sexual Difference.” Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and Impression of Reality. Cambridge University Press, 1995. p. 149

<sup>21</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. “From Reality to the Real.” Looking Awry. US: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991. p. 19

<sup>22</sup> Lacan, Jacques. “The Topic of the Imaginary.” Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954. New York: WW Norton & Company Ltd, 1991. p. 74

<sup>23</sup> Hogle, E. Jerrold. “Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture.” The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction. Eds. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p. 7

<sup>24</sup> Lane, R.C. “Anorexia, Masochism, Self-Mutilation, and Autoerotism: the Spider Mother.” *Psychoanal. Rev.*, 89, 2002. p. 104

<sup>25</sup> Creed, Barbara. “The Castrating Mother: Psycho.” The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism Psychoanalysis. Oxon: Routhledge, 1993. p. 145

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 149

<sup>27</sup> Penley, Constance. “Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia.” Fantasy and the Cinema. Eds. James Donald. London : BFI Pub., 1989.

<sup>28</sup> Freud, S. “The Uncanny.” The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works, 1919. p. 217-256

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<sup>29</sup> Creed, Barbara. "The Castrating Mother: Psycho." The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism Psychoanalysis. Oxon: Routledge, 1993. p. 142-143

<sup>30</sup> Freud, S. "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, 1914. p. 145-156

## Chapter 2

### *A History of Violence: From Mad Scientists to Criminal Fathers*

“He hung onto the barrel and shuts his eyes until finally he was able to look again. In the barrel were the remains of his father. Bits the father-thing had no use for. Bits it had discarded.”<sup>1</sup>

After *Spider*, Cronenberg’s cinema continues to focus on the battle between the non-Symbolic and Symbolic figures by highlighting the position of the Symbolic father in the narrative which strengthens the difference among the director’s former works and his last three films. In this manner, *A History Violence* which is Cronenberg’s next film after *Spider* is significant to explain the transformation in David Cronenberg’s narratives because as well as focusing on the essential role of the Symbolic father figure in the narrative *A History Violence* makes a reference to the fantastic era in Cronenberg’s cinema and proclaims this era’s end at the same time.

#### I.

Scott Loren says that the family’s image in *A History of Violence* is a “portrayal of American mythology” about nuclear family and a “false nostalgic yearning”<sup>2</sup> by stating that

The narrative concerns itself not only with the past as a historical condition, the ‘actuality’ of the past upon which a present is contingent but with fantasies and phantoms of the past as they are related to American mythologies. [...] In one of numerous references to American mythology that Cronenberg makes regarding the film, he states ‘the reality in this movie is [...] a fantasy of a reality. It’s kind of a gesture towards that American yearning for a naïve innocent past of the 1940’s 1950’s that possibly never existed’.<sup>3</sup>

“Reality is always framed by a fantasy, that is, for something real to be experienced as a part of ‘reality’, it must fit the preordained coordinates of our fantasy space.”<sup>4</sup> This means that when Cronenberg says ‘the reality in this movie is a fantasy of a reality’ he may be trying to emphasize the fact that Stalls’ are living in a reality that is formed by their desire to reach a

nostalgic past and the ‘ideal’ family picture which causes them to experience an identification dilemma.

Similar to Cleg’s desire to re-shape her mother’s image by his sexual desires and obsession in his childhood memories, Stalls are forming a reality that allows them to act like they have reached their ideal-family image. However, as a consequence of this desire they drift into an identification dilemma where they experience a secondary mirror stage process.

Malcolm Bowie states that according to Lacan “the Imaginary is the order of mirror images, identifications and reciprocities.”<sup>5</sup> During the mirror stage, basically the infant between the ages of six and eighteen months begins to recognize its image in the mirror. As Lacan puts into words, mirror stage is “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image –whose predestination to this place in the subject is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*.”<sup>6</sup> This transformation leads the infant to create an Ideal-I by looking its image in the mirror because what it sees in the mirror is a whole, separate body; apart from its mother that can provide the infant to gain a bodily mastery all by itself.

However, the image that the infant sees in the mirror has a misleading character because although the infant looks at a totally independent body in the mirror this is not what it feels apart from the image in the mirror. Therefore, the infant struggles to reach the ‘ideal’ image that is seen in the mirror during the mirror stage as well as it encounters with the conflicting feeling it senses about its fragmented body image.

Consequently, Imaginary order is about these fluxes that the infant experiences what it is willing to reach and what it actually feels. These fluxes give the Imaginary order an ambivalent character and surround it with misleading mirages, illusions and shifting identities.

*A History Violence* is a film which concentrates on these Imaginary fluxes. From beginning till the end, the narrative forces the characters to face oppositions, conflicts and

confrontations by creating a dualism at every level and once again, different from the former Cronenberg films, although the diegesis faces Imaginary struggles and threatens by non-Symbolic monsters, the narrative reaches a resolution when the Symbolic father figure regains its strength and eliminates the non-Symbolic threats including the fantasy space of the family itself.

In the opening sequences of *A History of Violence* the camera slides over the doors of a motel. The sound of a cricket accompanies the sliding and the camera stops in the image of two men getting out of a door. The old man named Leland (Stephen McHattie) wears a black suit and the young man named Billy (Greg Bryk) wears a white t-shirt and a pair of jeans. These clothes highlight that as well as they stand for different traditions and generations, they represent different parts of a personality which means that they can only act together as a whole. This representation supports the dual characters of the film which is structured by the conflict of the opposites.

When the camera pulls back and frames the two men behind a sports car with their bags, it is understood that these men are about to check out and hit the road. So, Leland goes to the reception and the camera stays in the car with Billy. There is nothing but the sound of the cricket and the highway throughout the time that the spectator spend with Billy. After Leland gets back to the scene, Billy goes into the reception of the motel.

The camera enters the reception following him and as it slowly follows Billy it also directly focuses on the footprints of a slaughter. When it stops following Billy and stands still at the crime scene Billy openly interferes in the movement of the camera and in order to remind it his existence he even rings the bell on the bench in the room. With this warning the camera continues to follow Billy and he starts to show the crime scene to the camera by lifting the objects that closes the camera's point of view. This circuit fills the ellipsis concerning



what Leland does when he disappears for a while and indicates that the most violent acts can happen when the spectators are not looking or hearing a sound.

Following the inactive image of the brutal slaughter, the scene becomes active with the appearance of a little girl. The girl, who looks frightened and shocked, enters the scene and Billy slowly directs his gun at her. At the moment, the image that displays the directed gun cuts to the frame of another little girl named Sarah (Heidi Hayes) who is seen while she is screaming insanely. The 'cut to' between the screaming of the little girl and the possible slaughter of another one tries to link these two scenes to each other and create a cause and effect relation among them each. This link tries to signify that the inner scream of the little girl in the motel who is paralyzed by the horror of the slaughter echoes in Sarah's bedroom.



**Figure 2: Two screenshots from *A History of Violence***

The framing and the camera angles of these two scenes bind them to each other as it seen in the Figure 2. When Billy directs his gun to the little girl, the camera focuses on the gun and the gun makes an almost sixty degrees angle with the camera. This narrative technique creates the illusion that the criminal takes aim to a specific point in the off-screen space on the right. After this image, Sarah is positioned in the middle of the frame and looking through an off screen space on the left. When Cronenberg binds these two images with 'cut to', the scene that displays Sarah in bed functions as the off-screen space of the previous frame that shows the gun in focus and Sarah happens to be the direct target of the gun in a figurative way. This means that whereas the 'cut to' ties the space of the criminals

and the family to each other, it also makes these two different frames each other's mirror images and notifies the reciprocal character of the diegesis which is also emphasized when the family members come in Sarah's room after her screaming.

After Sarah wakens up, the first person that comes in her room is her father, Tom, (Viggo Mortensen) which designates the importance of the father's position in the family as the protector. The father's consolidation of Sarah and his role to take her back to the daily reality from the dream state where she is drifted also strengthens his position. However, although the father has a masculine position in his relation with Sarah, it is underlined that his compassionate attitude and domestic approach makes his position hesitant. This illustration feeds the reciprocal character of the diegesis as it questions the role of the father within the family.

The hesitance and the duality about the father's role come clear when Sarah's brother Jack (Ashton Holmes) interrupts the scene. When the father asks Sarah what happened, she says that she saw monsters that come out from the closet and hide in the shadows. When Jack appears on the doorway he suggests turning the lights on in order to make the monsters go away. He says that the monsters cannot do anything when 'the lights' are on. Jack adds that the monsters are scared of the light and in reliance on this information, Sarah turns her night light on in order to be protected from the monsters. After this point, the use of light becomes one of the key *mise-en-scene* elements to reflect the ambivalent, reciprocal character of diegesis.

In the family gathering in Sarah's bedroom where the main characters are first appeared in the film, the lighting stresses on the duality of the characters. During the whole scene, the high contrast lighting of the bedroom exposes the characters with their shadows and when Jack comes into the room with his suggestions of making the monsters go away it appears that the personal monsters of the characters are hiding in their shadows as well

because the light is the number one factor that affects the creation of the shadows.

Accordingly, the high contrast lighting of the sequence makes the characters double-sided and uncertain.

The same duality caused by lighting appears in the scene where Jack is forced to confront the bully named Bobby (Kyle Schmid) in the dressing room after the baseball match. In the beginning of the scene Jack is seen undressing his gym class outfit by himself. The camera makes more or less sixty degrees angle with the light and Jack is displayed with his shadow in a distinctive way. At that moment, Bobby sneaks behind Jack's back and starts to assault him. While the assaults are continuing, Jack turns his face to Bobby and the light softens the textures as well as it creates a clear contrast. Under this light just like Jack said to Sarah his shadow, his monsters, the duality in his character disappear. He passes over Bobby's assaults with intelligent moves and instead of solving the problem with violence he handles it by using his mind.

On the other hand, although the angle of the lighting makes Jack's dual character vanish, the 'yellow' color of the light keeps the duality of the scene. Whereas yellow is used to define a specific color, it also means 'coward' in slang language. So, the film spots Jack who becomes completely exposed to the yellow light as a coward in this scene as well as it makes him virtuous and intelligent due to his denial to fight. In this way, once again Jack becomes dually represented in a figurative way.

The same kind of lighting is seen in the first sex scene of Tom and his wife, Edie, (Maria Bello) as well. In the preparation of this scene where Tom closes the diner the light becomes an important element. The scene begins with a frame that is divided into two. One half contains a huge display of the sign of the diner and the other half has a ceiling lamp which is turned on. In this frame the lights start to be turned off and in the next scene Edie is seen waiting by the car and looking to the diner. The diner's lights turn off one by one except

the ceiling lamp and Tom goes out from the diner, stands under the lamp. The light of the lamp that comes from the top divides Tom's face into two which stresses the duality of his personality. After they get in the car, they stay in complete darkness and Edie takes Tom in a secret place. When he asks her where they are going, she complains about they never have the chance to be teenagers together and she says that she is going to fix that.

In the next scene Tom and Edie are seen in a bedroom while Tom throws some stuffy animals out of the bed. The light comes just through his face and his shadow is reflected to the door behind him. When he sits on the bed his shadow is reflected to the door completely and he faces his shadow in this position. After he looks at his shadow he turns of the lampshade as if he becomes anxious facing it and his body stays in the darkness. This image disappears when Edie opens the door. A light which seems like coming from her lightens half of Tom's body which marks Edie as the light bearer.

When the camera starts to shoot Edie who wears a cheerleader outfit her shadow is seen reflecting to the wall of the room. Tom asks "what have you done with my wife" and she answers "no wives in here, mister." Whereas this conversation indicates the shifting, multiple identities of the characters, the 69 position they prefer while they are having sex makes Tom and Edie look like the symbols of Yin and Yang. This position marks them as a unity of opposites and gives them a duality which can be completed only by being together.

In all of those scenes, with the help of the lighting elements, the narrative points out the identification dilemmas of the characters by emphasizing their duality and representing them with their reflections which stresses that the characters are surrounded by their reflections and opposite images all the time. This narration technique leads the characters to experience a secondary mirror stage where they face their own reflections and drift into an identification dilemma.

However, although Stalls are forced to experience an identification dilemma in the scenes explained above, it can be said that they are also “in a flutter of jubilant activity”<sup>7</sup> like an infant who meets with its mirror image for the first time. The family members are not aware of the misleading character of this identification process. They do not know that even though they feel ‘complete’ and independent under the ‘ideal’ family image, this does not mean that they embody this completeness and independence. Nevertheless, they continue their jubilant activities by reflecting an ideal family image and drift into a dream-like fantasy space where they recognize themselves under the appearance of their Ideal-egos. However, during the identification process of the mirror stage “recognition precedes misrecognition.”<sup>8</sup>

#### According to Lacan

The mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world, if we go by the mirror disposition that the *imago of one's own body* presents in hallucinations or dreams, whether it concerns its individual features, or even its infirmities, or its object-projections: or if we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the *double*, in which psychological realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested.<sup>9</sup>

In the further scenes of *A History of Violence*, the frames start to become divided into two sides with specific borders by the usage of the mise-en-scene elements such as lighting and decor or with the help of specific camera angles. In this way, the narrative creates a setup which ‘goes by the mirror dispositions’ and functions similar to the mirror apparatus. So, in reference to Lacan’s words, the narrative allows the characters to enter in a visible world where their recognition turns into misrecognition.

In the scene where Billy and Leland get into the diner, Tom is seen standing behind the bench with all other employees in front of the background that is constituted by the domestic setting of the kitchen. After the criminals enter the diner they sit on the other side of the bench by facing Tom and in this way, the bench start to constitute a border between the domestic background of Tom Stall and the stranger criminals come from outside world which may allow the bench to function as the surface of a mirror.

Following the aggressive behaviors of Billy and Leland, Tom preserves his gentlemen attitudes when he is behind the bench. However, when he jumps over the bench, in other words when he passes to the other side of the mirror, he turns into a killing machine with serial and reflexive moves which corresponds with the idea that when Tom is placed on the other side of the mirror he automatically gains an unlimited motor capacity. This ability carries Tom one step further to reach his Ideal-ego because with the help of his unlimited motor capacities he turns into a town hero. However, the following scenes underlines the fact that although Tom's Ideal-I identifies with the image of a town hero Tom does not feel like corresponding with this image.

Following the robbery attack, Tom is seen at the hospital room watching TV. At this moment, the sign of the diner is seen on the television screen once again after it appears in the scene where Edie is waiting in front of the diner to take Tom into her parent's home. The comparison between two different scenes where the sign of the diner is seen warns the spectator about the fact that Stall's living may be equal to the television reality. After that, the people who are seen in the television start to talk about Tom Stall's heroic action in the diner and mark him as a role model of a responsible citizen. The television screen in the scene functions as a mirror and reflects the Ideal-ego that Tom wants to measure his 'actual' ego.

The dialogues of the people on television echo the scene when Tom's name is first heard in the film. The night after Sarah has a bad dream; Tom is seen as he is walking to his diner in a regular work day. First he stops in a mail box and sends his mails and than he slowly walks along the street. While he is slowly walking, people are saluting him by calling his name and this narrative indicates that as well as Tom is an accepted and respected citizen in this town he is identified with the public's gaze on him.

Tom is what public sees in him and wants him to be; a good father, a hard working small business owner and a responsible citizen. However, while he is posited across the

television and hears the flattering opinions of the people about him, his unresponsive facial expression signifies that he is not identified with public's gaze and his ideal-ego anymore. In other words, Tom does not respond to the image he sees on the television screen which means that he does not recognize himself in his Ideal-I.

Therefore, Tom's heroic actions in the diner cause him to misrecognize himself as a responsible citizen, a good father and a respective small town business owner because although Tom's unlimited motor capacities allow him to be described as the town hero they also let him recognize his past identity. This is why during the attack, when Billy falls backward with bullets in his chest and passes through the door which is made of glass, the sound and the image of shattering becomes the symbol of the smashing of Tom's mirror image, his Ideal-I.

After the family gets home from the hospital the narrative strictly underlines that the borders are shattered and there is no escape from the disavowed memories of the past. Following Jack's appraisal of his father's 'heroic' actions Edie looks through the window. The camera shoots her image by standing outside the house and the dusty surface of the glass and the light coming from inside gives this image an Imaginary, even a nostalgic appearance.

Besides, even though the camera stands outside the house and stalks inside from the point of view of an invisible spectator, the audience can still hear Edie's sound as if the camera is locating in the same place with her. The running engine of the car can be heard as the same way when the camera is outside or inside the house. This means that it does not make a difference if the camera is in or out.

The unrestricted access of the camera also affects the dual character of the film because as well as it stresses the two-sided structure of the narration it makes the border between the two sides get blurred. In terms of the mirror stage process, this blurriness lets the border

between the two sides of the mirror happen to be indistinguishable which causes the identification process of the characters to become hesitant and ambivalent.

Besides, the unrestricted access of the camera to the family's living signifies that the family is under the gaze of a higher authority which stalks every level of the diegetic world. The all-knowing gaze of the invisible spectator takes the control over the family and tries to shape the course of events as it wants which is one of the essential reasons to make the characters' positions hesitant and ambivalent.

After the attack, when Tom's former acquaintance Fogarty (Ed Harris) and his associates come to the diner the hesitant and the ambivalent character of Tom's identification process is felt its strength.

When Fogarty and his associates enter the diner they go along the bench and stay in a position that allows them to sit face to face with Tom and Edie who posit behind the bench. Because of the fact that the bench also functions like a surface of a reflection device, the position of Fogarty and his associates against Tom and Edie makes them function as the mirror image of Tom and Edie.

During the sequence, Fogarty insists on knowing Tom and always calls him 'Joey' which forces Tom to recall his past identity. However, Tom verbally refuses to identify with it because if he accepts to identify with Joey Cusack, he also accepts his violent past, his hidden identity, and this identification causes him to break his union with his Ideal-I and his Imaginary existence for real.

However, Cronenberg's use of the shot/reverse shot formation throughout the dialogue between Tom and Fogarty also forces Tom to identify with Fogarty who symbolizes his violent past. Malcolm Bowie says that

If the ego can be thought of as having components, as capable of 'coming apart' into building materials that are smaller and simpler than itself, then the infant's earliest identifications are those components. The identification of oneself with another being is the very process by which a continuing sense of selfhood becomes possible.<sup>10</sup>



In reference to Malcolm Bowie's words, it can be said that the continuity of Tom's existence is only possible when he becomes identified with Fogarty.

As a matter of fact, once Fogarty interferes in Tom's life he has no choice other than identifying with his past identity and tearing his Ideal-I apart. This is why when Tom is seen sitting at the diner by himself early in the morning after Fogarty and his associates leave the diner he only sees the image of Fogarty's black car outside the glass window. During the sequence, Tom sits on the other side of the bench where Fogarty and his associates locate the previous day and looks outside through the glass frame of the door which is shattered when the young criminal passed through it. Tom's position against the rebuild glass signifies his position in the identification process and when he looks through the glass he just sees Fogarty's black car which is waiting outside.

When Tom leaves the diner the black car is seen passing all the way through the street and it is understood that Tom's mirror image is occupied by Fogarty and the criminal past that he symbolizes and there is nothing else to see for Tom when he looks at his reflection.

## II.

The ambivalent fluxes that Tom experiences during his identification process shake his position as the Symbolic lawmaker in the narrative as well. However, it can also be said that Tom's position as a father figure is hesitant from the beginning of the film and starts to tear apart 'literally' after the attack at the diner.

Freud says that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface."<sup>11</sup> When Tom is stabbed by Leland his body becomes pierced and in reference to Freud's words, his ego gets damaged which is juxtaposed with the blurriness of Tom's Ideal-I. Besides, being stabbed from the feet is significant because like in *Spider*, feet as a bodily limb resembles with penis, and accordingly the

phallus. Therefore, Tom's stabbing from his feet signifies the fact that his authority and his position as the Symbolic father are attacked.

After Tom sees a black car outside of the diner, he calls Edie and orders her to get the shotgun. During Tom's anxious run to arrive home Edie takes out a shotgun from the 'closet' with Tom's order which can be connected with Sarah's nightmare about monsters which come out the 'closet'. When Tom enters the house after a long run he comes face to face with Edie who is directed a shotgun at him. This encounter underlines Tom's hesitant position as a father figure who is implicated as an Imaginary threat rather than the Symbolic lawmaker.

Following Tom's entrance, Edie and Tom start to be seen from a frame which is constituted from the threshold of a door. Although the spectator looks at the scene from a specific point of view, the owner for the gaze is kept invisible. After a while, the camera turns to Jack's confused face and paralyzed body who is watching his parents' unusual anxiety through the threshold of the door. Once again the shot/reverse shot formation between Jack and his parents regulates the sequence which allows emphasizing Jack's identification with his parents and his misrecognition of himself in the picture that displays his parents with a shotgun.

In the following scene, Jack enters the anxious state of his parents and learns the presence of the threat. The conversation between Tom and Jack is displayed with the shot/reverse shot formation during the sequence and accordingly, Tom and Jack turn into each other's mirror images. However, when Jack holds the shotgun Tom interferes in Jack's willing to hold the gun and takes the gun into his own hands by stressing Jack's inability and unfamiliarity of using a gun. This behavior may be understood as Tom's eagerness to keep the control in his hands and prove Jack his power and paternal authority at the same time. Besides, when Jack asks Tom what they are going to do if these men continue to chase them Tom answers by saying "then we deal with it." While he is telling this sentence he

simultaneously closes the trajectory of the gun as if he tries to keep his paternal power even though it is threatened from all sides.

Tom's behavior makes Jack irritated. His eagerness to keep the shotgun in his hands and his threatening attitude seem like a challenge for Jack. Although the shot/reverse shot formation during their conversation makes Jack identify with his father, it also invites him into a contest where he is forced to prove his power and ability is enough to conquer with his father. This is why in the further scenes he beats up Bobby who provokes him by saying "your old man's some kind of tough guy, what's he think of his wimp son" and when his father disdains his beating up Bobby he dares to his father's paternal statue with insults which signifies the mutation both in Tom's paternal figure and his identity.

Tom's position as a father figure becomes threatened once again when Fogarty and his associates come to attack him in his own house. During the attack, Tom gets shot from his arm which causes his body to pierce and demolish. At the moment when Fogarty directs his gun at Tom ready to kill him, Jack shoots Fogarty from his back but still continues to hold the gun which is held still directed at his father a few second long. As soon as he makes eye contact with his father he drops off the gun but keeps on holding it as if he tries to protect himself from his father. When Tom gets closer to Jack with a cruel look on his bloody face and takes the gun off Jack's hands it is understood that his position as a father is changed completely.

When Žižek is commenting on Hammett's detective fiction, *The Glass Key*, he focuses on a mutation in the paternal figure and says that

Instead of the traditional father – guarantor of the rule of Law, i.e., the father who exerts his power as fundamentally *absent*, whose fundamental feature is not an open display of power but the threat of potential power- we obtain an excessively *present* father who, as such, cannot be reduced to the bearer of a Symbolic function.<sup>12</sup>

In reference to Žižek's words, it can be said that when Tom encounters with Fogarty and his associates in the yard, he appears to be not the bearer of Symbolic function but his

pierced and penetrated body marks him as a figure under the attack of another potential power.

While commenting on the dual attribute of the father image in *Hamlet*, Bülent Somay says that the healthy (neurotic) Oedipal individual discovers the bad and good qualities of the father image in one person and this is what makes him hesitant and reciprocal.<sup>13</sup> In Tom's case, this subject becomes uncertain because whereas all the good qualities of a father figure gather in Tom, all the bad qualities are collected in Joey. This separation may cause the narrative to turn into an open access to psychosis as in Cleg's case in *Spider* but because of the fact that Tom's division happens to be in the same body and under the same appear it just transforms Tom's paternal position.

Somay continues that Hamlet completes this psychotic splitting by making the good father who appears to be a ghost feminized and combines the image of a good father and the mother in the same character. It is very important that one of the major points that leads Hamlet's good father image to feminize is the fact that he is stroked by a phallic figure like snake. This situation makes the good, 'vaginal' father one of the elements of the mother, but he does not lose his fatherhood as well.<sup>14</sup>

The wounded, pierced body of the father causes him to become closer to a feminine subject because he is also the only character who experiences penetrative activities like being shot or stabbed all the time. Whereas these incidents signify the fragmentation of Tom's body image, they also indicate Tom's feminized paternal character which is under attack of an obscene father figure. Therefore, even though Tom seems like an obscene father figure for Jack, he is also a son who is programmed to kill the obscene father that is returning from his past.

This is why Tom chooses to ignore his violent past and acts out like he is experiencing a long term blackout in the beginning of the film. Žižek says that the solution to

accomplish the act destined to elucidate the ambiguous relationship with the obscene paternal figure is at the price of an eclipse, a blackout.<sup>15</sup> However, this blackout causes the subject to leave his/her Symbolic position and in order to get it back the subject should follow a successful recollection. According to Žižek amnesia is a deficiency measured against a standard of integration into the field of intersubjectivity, of Symbolic community and “with the help of a successful recollection I organize my life experience into a consistent narrative, I exorcise the dark demons of the past.”<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, after the incident where Tom encounters with Fogarty and his associates, every scene turns out to be a repetition such as Edie’s visit to the hospital, Jack’s welcoming Tom in front of the home, the Sheriff’s visit at Stalls’ house and the sex scene between Edie and Tom. The reason of these repetitions which happen after Tom confesses his past identity may be the fact that as Freud says repeating is a way of remembering of the repressed thoughts.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the repeating scenes try to indicate that Tom starts to remember and recollect his violent background in order to overcome his actions in the past like Cleg does in *Spider*.

However, in this way, the Ideal-I of Tom and his family totally collapse. This is why when Edie comes into the hospital room to visit Tom for the second time she begins to yearn about her life, her name and her past do not make sense anymore. While Žižek comments on a very similar situation as Edie experiences, he says that

When I risk confrontation with this hard core, ‘the story I have been telling myself about myself no longer makes sense’, ‘I no longer have a self to make sense of’, or, as Lacan puts it in his *Seminar VIII*, the big Other (the Symbolic order) collapses into the small other, *objet petit a*, the fantasy object.<sup>18</sup>

This description intensifies the fact that the reality that the Stalls are experiencing before the acts of violence is surrounded by a fantastic yearn to reach an Ideal family image and with this understanding the film starts to eliminate the fantastic character of the narrative all by itself.

### III.

After this stage, Tom's paternal position completely changes. The Sheriff (Peter MacNeill) who represents the Symbolic law within the film comes to Stalls' house after Tom's encounter with Fogarty and starts to interrogate Tom about the incidents. After Edie comes home under the mask of an advocate the conversation between Tom and the Sheriff shifts to continue between Edie and the Sheriff. Tom who is the subject of the conversation sits on the couch and uses his right to be silent but his silence also signifies his position out of language. Tom's cynic attitude against the Sheriff signifies his impotence and his hesitant character as a father figure.

During the sequence while Tom's position as a paternal authority weakens Edie's position as maternal authority gains strength. Her strong attitude against the Sheriff and her struggle to protect her family turns her into a phallic mother figure. At the end of the conversation, Edie hides over Tom's shoulder and pretends to be crying but after the Sheriff leaves the house she immediately stops. In this way, Edie proves that she uses the cultural conventions about the feminine delicateness and fragility in order to make the Sheriff have mercy and leave the house.

Edie's immediate shift from a delicate, crying woman to an authoritative, powerful figure also indicates the shifting power dynamics within the family. Edie's becoming of a phallic mother figure shakes Tom's paternal position and this is why Tom's further move happens to be harassing Edie and possessing her sexually. Their rape-like sexual encounter signifies Tom's attempt to take over the authority as well as his tendency to become a primordial figure.

The subject of primordality comes into question with the telephone call of Tom's brother, Richie (William Hurt). Richie invites Tom to come and visit him in Philadelphia and threatens him if he does not come to visit him he will come to Millbrook. Before, Tom

begins his journey to Philadelphia; he is seen while he is repairing his van. In the scene which displays Tom near his van a horse is seen standing at the background. The horse and the van connect to each other due to the fact that they both are used for transportation.

When Tom is seen getting in his car and preparing to go off the road to Philadelphia after Richie's call, the camera displays him from the point of view of an invisible viewer as if he is stalked. The stalker position of the camera is juxtaposed with the position of the horse in the previous scene which means that the spectator may be looking at Tom's leaving from the point of view of the horse.

The symbolic meaning of the horse helps the narrative to connect the camera's position in the place of the horse with the gaze of the primordial father. Nolan D. C. Lewis says that "the horse is the archetype of sexual power. [...] Horses in mythology represent a powerful procreative, fructifying force—sexuality in all of its gross vigor, both in a phallic sense and in a refined sublimated symbolism"<sup>19</sup> which corresponds with the primordial father's unlimited sexual effectiveness and his phallic attributes. As well as the mythological approach which marks horses as phallic objects Freud's observations on the case of 'Little Hans' strengthens the connection between the primordial father and the horse.

As Freud explains, after an accident in the park Little Hans develops a phobia against horses. Freud says that "he is afraid a horse will bite him in the street, and this fear seems somehow to be connected with his having been frightened by a large penis."<sup>20</sup> Little Hans's fear against horses exposes his fear against castration which supports the horse figure's connection with the castration threat of the primordial father.

Freud's connection between the mental lives of savages and neurotics makes this connection significant. According to Freud the primitive men in totemic system describe "the totem as their common ancestor and primal father" and "the animal struck the sons as a natural and obvious substitute for their father."<sup>21</sup> The emphasis on the horse figure in *A*

*History of Violence* allows the spectator to connect it with the primordial father as “a violent and jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up.”<sup>22</sup>

When Tom arrives in Philadelphia, he is seen getting in a bar which carries a ‘horse’ sign over its door. The words ‘track & turf’ that are written under the neon sign of the horse figure designates that the horse that gazes Tom when he is passing from the garage continues to gaze him when he arrives in Philadelphia. In this way, it is understood that Tom is about to enter the domain of the obscene father that is symbolized by the horse. Žižek says that

The ‘other father’ – the obscene, uncanny, shadowy double of the Name of the Father - [...] is distinguished by a series of features: he is all-powerful and cruel to the utmost, an absolute Master for whom there are no limits; yet, simultaneously, he possesses an insight into the very kernel of our (subject’s) being, our desire has no secret for him, he knows we are here to kill him and is resigned to it.<sup>23</sup>

In reference to Žižek’s words it can be said that Tom is followed by the obscene father who knows his every move and is waiting for his encounter with Tom who is aiming to kill him at the end of his journey in order to end his hegemony.

When Tom gathers with Richie in the snugery of Richie’s place the hidden power that is symbolized with the horse figure becomes juxtaposed with Richie’s very self because his snugery and his room are decorated with horse paintings. Besides, the distinction between the ‘actual’ horse representation in Millbrook and the pictorial representation of the horse figures in Richie’s room may seem like a simple comparison among nature and culture but Tom’s position in front of the paintings tells us that he passed across the other side of the mirror where his living appears as a pictorial, frozen reality.

Richie position as the absolute substitution for the primordial father becomes clear when he declares that he cannot stick to one woman while there are a lot of great looking women in the world. When he complains about the fact that he is about to lose his power in the underground world and Tom/Joey causes a lot of problems to him because of his lack of respect and trust it is understood that these complains signify a decline in his paternal figure



and a fear to lose his dominion to Tom/Joey. Following these complains Richie orders his men to kill Tom/Joey because of the fact that he wants to preserve his power and defeat the potential threat that shakes his authority.

However, Tom/Joey slips off from Richie's trap by beating all of his men. Tom/Joey ambushes Richie while they are looking for him and drags him outside of the house which represents his dominion. When Richie gets out of the house he becomes powerless and starts to look for the key to open the door. It is very significant that while Richie holds the keys to open the door, Tom/Joey is already inside and has access to the door which means that Richie lost his power and control over his dominion and Tom/Joey proves his impotence. At this point, Tom/Joey comes out and kills him by shooting him from his forehead, right between his eyes as a sign of castration.

Freud explains that

The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. [...] The tumultuous mob of brothers were filled with the same contradictory feelings which we can see at work in the ambivalent father-complexes of our children and of our neurotic patients. They hated their father, who presented such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires; but they loved and admired him too. After they had got rid of him, had satisfied their hatred and had put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him, the affection which had all this time been pushed under was bound to make itself felt.<sup>24</sup>

When Richie lies on the floor after he is dead, the camera pulls back and displays Richie and Tom/Joey together. They create a vertical angle while Tom/Joey is standing right before Richie's feet. This position turns Richie's dead body the other-half of Tom which proves Tom's identification with the primordial father figure and his admiration to him as well as his relief of killing him.

After Richie's death, Tom comes close to the water in the next scene. The camera displays his face from the ground and the gazebo at the background seems like it is erected similar to a statue. The camera's displaying Tom from the ground makes the roof of the

gazebo seem like a crown that is put over his head. The similarity between the crown shaped roof and the crown of the Statue of Liberty is connected with Richie's assumption about Tom's living the American dream.

Scott Loren says that

In the promise of the immigrant's American dream is the possibility for individuals to shed certain stereotypes and negative associations or experiences that adhered to who they were in the place they were from. In this sense, it encouraged individuals to 'start over', transferring their 'selves' into a next context, while at the same time upholding the myth of the autonomous humanist individual who has a core self that can be transplanted from one topological and cultural topography to another.<sup>25</sup>

This means that American dream promises a reinvention and self-fashioning. Loren asserts that in order to live the American dream the individuals cut all the ties with their cultural background and they become history-less. Tom who falls under the spell of this dream cuts all of his ties with his past but it causes him to lose his Symbolic place and turns the notion of 'American dream' into a literal dream. However, after Tom faces his violent past and beats the primordial father figure who threatens his Symbolic existence he returns to his family as a Symbolic subject who is recollected his hidden memories and placed his life line into a continuing narrative. In this way, Symbolic father returns to his place by disrupting all of his past and becoming an 'empty' subject.

The film's ending on the dinner table following the death of the primordial father also reminds the totemic traditions which happen after the father's destruction. Freud says that

Totemic religion not only comprised expressions of remorse and attempts at atonement, it also served as a remembrance of the triumph over the father. Satisfaction over that triumph led to the institution of the memorial festival of the totem meal, in which the restrictions of deferred obedience no longer held. Thus it became a duty to repeat the crime of parricide again and again in the sacrifice of the totem animal, whenever, as a result of the changing conditions of life, the cherished fruit of the crime—appropriation of the paternal attributes—threatened to disappear.<sup>26</sup>

While Sarah passes the meat on the table to Tom during the last sequence of the film she invites him to eat a part of the primordial father and intensify his power and strength as well. The cooked meat on the table juxtaposes with the dead body of the primordial father as

in totemic traditions. Sarah's invitation for Tom to take a piece of the meat turns out to be a celebration of his triumph of beating the primordial father and gaining his position as the Symbolic father figure.

This triumph may indicate that the family will live happily ever after but as Žižek says while he is commenting on the end of Hammet's detective fiction, *The Glass Key*, they will “‘live happily ever after’, yet at the price of the broken, humiliated, removed father- all that remains after him is the empty frame, the trace of the retracted *objet a* which, by means of its withdrawal, renders possible the stabilization of reality.”<sup>27</sup>

The withdrawal of *objet a* from the narrative of *A History of Violence* signifies the end of an era in David Cronenberg's cinema as well because in this way the film exposes the fantastic character of its narrative all by itself. Whereas the former films of the director are derived from the triumph of this fantastic structure, *A History of Violence* destroys the fantastic part of its narrative by pointing out the fact that ‘American Dream’ on which the film based is a ‘literal’ dream where the primordial father rules rather than a Symbolic father. However, when the Symbolic father returns home the Symbolic order regains its strength. In this way, a new and more realistic era in Cronenberg's cinema begins and goes on.

## Notes for Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> Dick, K. Philip. "The Father-Thing." The Philip K. Dick Reader. Citadel Press, 1997. p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Loren, Scott. "Self-fashioning, Freedom, and the Problem of His-story: the return of *noir*."

*European Journal of American Studies*, EJAS 2008-1, [Online], put online Jan. 28, 2008.

URL:<http://ejas.revues.org/document1842.html>. Consulted on May. 16, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Kantian Background of the *Noir* Subject." Shades of Noir: A Reader. Ed.

Joan Copjec. London ; New York : Verso, 1996. p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 94

<sup>6</sup> Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Écrits: A Selection. London: Routledge Classics 2001. p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 1

<sup>8</sup> Allen, Richard. "The Lacanian Subject." Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and Impression of Reality. Cambridge University Press, 1995. p. 28

<sup>9</sup> Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Écrits: A Selection. London: Routledge Classics 2001. p. 3

<sup>10</sup> Bowie, Malcolm. "Inventing the 'I'." Lacan. London: Harvard University Press, 1991. p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, S. (1923). "The Ego and the Id." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923-1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, p. 26

<sup>12</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Why Are There Always Two Fathers?." Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 158

<sup>13</sup> Somay, Bülent. "Hamlet Kuşağı." Çokbilmiş Özne. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2008. p. 94–

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Why Are There Always Two Fathers?." Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 161

<sup>16</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Kantian Background of the *Noir* Subject." Shades of Noir: A Reader. Ed. Joan Copjec. London ; New York : Verso, 1996. p. 202

<sup>17</sup> Freud, S. (1914). Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, 145-156

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 162

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, N.D. "Theriomorphic Symbolisms and Mechanisms in Ancient Literature and Dreams." *Psychoanal. Rev.*, 1963-64. p. 7-24

<sup>20</sup> Freud, Sigmund. "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume X (1909): Two Case Histories ('Little Hans' and the 'Rat Man')*, 1909. p. 22

<sup>21</sup> Freud, Sigmund. Totem and Taboo. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII (1913-1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, 1913. p. 131- 144

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 141

<sup>23</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Why Are There Always Two Fathers?." Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 158-159

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 142

<sup>25</sup> Loren, Scott. "Self-fashioning, Freedom, and the Problem of His-story: the return of *noir*." *European Journal of American Studies*, EJAS 2008-1, [Online], put online Jan. 28, 2008.

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<sup>26</sup> Freud, Sigmund. Totem and Taboo. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII (1913-1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, 1913. p. 145

<sup>27</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. “Why Are There Always Two Fathers?.” Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 161

### Chapter 3

#### ***Eastern Promises: From Mad Scientists to Mob Bosses***

*Eastern Promises* which is David Cronenberg's next film after *A History of Violence* celebrates the new era of the director's cinema. Whereas the former films of Cronenberg come to an end with the victory of the non-Symbolic figures, *Eastern Promises* finalizes with the re-establishment of the Symbolic order and in this way, it chooses to follow the new tradition of Cronenberg's narratives which begins with *Spider*.

*Eastern Promises* reflects the difference between the director's former works and his last three films by displaying the transformation of the menacing figures like *Spider* and *A History of Violence*. During the film, the absolute absence of a father figure and the ultimate presence of another one force the characters to beat the obscene father in order to fulfill the regulations of the Symbolic order and throughout this struggle, *Eastern Promises* concentrates on the shifting identities of the characters, the ambivalent alteration of the spaces and the characters' encounter with the primordial authorities.

#### **I.**

The film opens with the gaze of an absent viewer who focuses on the image of Azim's barber shop's signboard with an emphasis to the scissor on the sign. After that the camera cranes down and focuses on Ekrem (Josef Altin) who runs through the barber shop. The camera gets in the place earlier than the young boy and displays his passing through the door, closing the curtains. After that a sudden cut takes the camera out of the barber shop. The boy puts the 'closed' sign on the door and pulls the window shade through the camera.

However, although the camera is positioned outside and cannot display what is happening in the shop, Azim's (Mina E. Mina) voice can be heard clearly. Following that, the camera gets inside the shop and proves that there is no way to keep the gaze outside the shop because it can overcome every obstacle. This means that the camera functions like an 'all-

knowing' gaze during the whole sequence and it represents the power of the absent gaze which rules the narrative with its all authority.

Commenting on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, Jacques Lacan calls attention to the difference between the eye and the gaze and says

What we have to circumscribe, by means of the path [Maurice Merleau-Ponty] indicates for us, is the pre-existence of a gaze – I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides. [...] The spectacle of the world, in this sense, appears to us as all-seeing.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, our gaze is limited to one point of view and Lacan says that this inability returns as “the lack that constitutes castration anxiety.”<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the all-seeing gaze that is emphasized in the beginning of the film is a reminder of the fact that the characters are under the surveillance of a certain figure. Whereas the all-knowing gaze emphasizes the castration anxiety of the characters by reminding their limited point of views and knowledge it also underlines the fact that the characters' behaviors are controlled and tested all the time. Besides, although the all-seeing gaze reminds its presence all the time, the owner of this gaze is never revealed. Therefore, it can be said that the all-seeing gaze remains absent throughout the whole film which feeds the figurative meaning of this narration technique.

First of all, the absence of the owner of the all-seeing gaze juxtaposes with the function of the-Name-of-the-Father which is “the symbol of an authority at once legislative and punitive.”<sup>3</sup> The-Name-of-the-Father gives the characters the sense that they have to obey the rules of the Symbolic order because if they do not they can be punished. Accordingly, the-Name-of-the-Father may function like an invisible self control mechanism for the characters and cause them to suppress their desires and obsessions.

Secondly, the absence of the owner of the all-seeing gaze allows binding this absence with an absent character which is the main character's father. This connection also creates a relation between the absent father figure and the-Name-of-the-Father.



As a fabula character who is felt his presence in the conversations of the main character, Anna (Naomi Watts), and her mother but never shows his face, Anna's father preserves his presence with the help of the camera's 'position' under the cover of the absent gaze and this idea allows defining Anna's Russian father as the-Name-of-the-Father because the-Name-of-the-Father is not an actual existence but a position or a function as well.

When Anna visits the Russian restaurant called Trans-Siberian for the first time Semyon (Armin Mueller-Stahl), the owner of the restaurant, invites her to taste from the Borscht soup he makes. When Anna and Semyon are talking in the kitchen, the absent gaze takes position on Semyon's over-shoulder and shifts between two characters throughout their conversation. After Anna tastes the soup that is offered by Semyon persistently, she reacts by saying 'my dad made borscht just like that'. Following this reaction, the image of Anna's motorbike which is a Russian brand vehicle and belongs to Anna's father is seen outside the restaurant. With this narrative technique, the bike unites with the 'absent' gaze and the bike's designation to Anna's dead father figure allows thinking that the gaze is connected to Anna's father.

The lack of Anna's father and the presence of the absent gaze particularly emerge in the scene where Anna, her mother (Sinéad Cusack) and her uncle named Stepan (Jerzy Skolimowski) eat Christmas dinner. After Anna comes home from the Russian restaurant she, her mother and Uncle Stepan are seen gathered around the dinner table. It is very significant that although they are just three at the table, the table is prepared for four people and one of the chairs stays empty. The camera looks through the scene from the point of view of the empty chair as if an 'absent' character is gazing at the dinner table behind the camera. This representation stresses the absence of the father figure notably and clarifies that the absent gaze in the narrative belongs to the 'absent' father.

This identification signifies the fact that Anna is living under the gaze of her father all the time. However, his absence in the narrative and Anna's everyday life also underlines his inability to interrupt the course of events. Anna's father cannot fulfill his duties as a Symbolic father and Anna does not help him as well.

Anna is identified with her mother's image and cultural background most of the time. At the beginning of the film, she is introduced as a character who is moved back to her mother's home which may be interpreted as her return to the symbiotic union with her mother that she experienced when she is a child.

Anna's identification with her mother and her connection with her becomes significant when the Russian identity of her father is emphasized because Anna's identification with her mother also indicates her identification with her mother's English background. This assumption gains its strength when Anna starts to correct her Russian uncle's grammar while he speaks English. Anna's correction of her uncle's English proves her tendency to protect her 'mother' language instead of the language or accent of her father. Under this conditions Anna's every move brings her closer to her mother and her mother's English identity.

After the death of a Russian girl at the hospital during Anna's shift she arrives home and wakes up in the morning in her bed. Following Anna's awaking she is seen in the kitchen with her mother talking about Uncle Stepan who is seen from a window which looks like a picture frame hanged on the wall. Throughout the conversation between Anna and her mother, Anna admits that she cannot read Russian which is her father's mother language. After that she leaves the kitchen and takes her place in the picture frame near Uncle Stepan. When Anna enters the picture, her mother turns her back to the camera and stands parallel to Anna who is seen in the same position with her mother in the picture frame. This framing reminds Rene Magritte's painting named *Not to Be Reproduced*<sup>4</sup> which represents a man who is seen from

his shoulders, looking into a mirror or another painting that creates the exact same image in the painting itself.



**Figure 3: René Magritte's *Not to Be Reproduced* and a screen shot from *Eastern Promises***

The resemblance between Magritte's painting and the representation of Anna and her mother may designate "the gap between the inaccessible object-cause of desire."<sup>5</sup> Regarding Žižek's words, it can be said that Magritte's painting may represent an impossible, inaccessible desire of a man to see his own self as a whole like *Others* see him from outside that is to become the gaze of the Other which the subject actually uses to define him/herself. This desire can cause a splitting in subject's identity and as in Magritte's painting it may turn into an open access to the Real and accordingly psychosis and this is why it is counted as impossible.

Therefore, the parallel representations of Anna and her mother designates that they desire to see themselves as a whole and recreate a symbiotic union. They are willing to own an all-knowing gaze which allows them to identify only with each other. This idea makes

them function as mirror images and their position that resembles with Magritte's painting signifies that their relation causes them to have an enclosed union.

Besides, Anna's identification with her mother attracts our attention in another scene where her mother explains Tatiana's actual story. While her mother tells Anna that Tatiana ended up in the hands of the *vory v zakone* (i.e. the thieves in law) Anna is seen positioned in front of the mirror. Even though Anna stands in front of the mirror in this scene, there is no reflection of her in the mirror. Instead of looking at the mirror, Anna looks at her mother's face as if she is her mirror reflection which proves that Anna is identified with her mother's mirror image more than with her own. This idea also confirms that although Anna has a dual identity, half Russian and half English; she chooses to identify with her mother's English half and repress her Russian background.

Anna hides her Russian identity behind her mother's Englishness but at the end, she is Anna Ivanovna which means she is the daughter of Ivan, a Russian father. But the absence of her father does not allow her to reproduce a Russian identity.

Throughout the Christmas dinner scene where the absence of the father figure is emphasized strongly a family conversation turns into an argument due to Stepan's comments on Anna's relationship with her ex-boyfriend who is a black man. Stepan says that it is not natural to mix race and adds that this is why Anna's baby died inside her. Stepan does not give a chance to a hybrid generation but he forgets that his own nephew has a hybrid identity as well. However, Stepan does not consider Anna as a hybrid character, because, although her mother pronounces her name as 'Anna', Stepan calls her 'Anya' which is the Russian version of her name.

However, this distinction also signifies that Anna and her Uncle do not speak the same language and share a joint name. After Stepan's racist assaults, Anna leaves the dinner table. With this scene, it is understood that Stepan is not a good father substitute and cannot fulfill

the empty space of Anna's father although he is Anna's only connection with her father. His failure causes the family to become dysfunctional and Anna's union with her mother's cultural background preserves its strength.

This is why following the dysfunctional portrait of Anna's family; a cut takes the spectators to another family dinner in the Russian restaurant as if it tries to make a comparison. In this scene, the absence of the father figure is fulfilled with another one who is Semyon. During the scene, Semyon manages the waitresses with a great harmony. He ensures the order of the table and instead of being a disruptive object like Uncle Stepan, he functions as a consolidative figure and fills the empty position of the father which is absent in the narrative. Malcolm Bowie says that

The Name-of-the-Father was a symbol of an authority at once legislative and punitive. It represented, within the Symbolic, that which made the Symbolic possible, [...] without it, metaphor, in the form of 'voices' and visual hallucinations, comes at the subject from without, from a 'Real' that is perfectly delusional yet cruelly concrete in its impact. [...] There, it becomes not a law-maker but a tyrant, not one who maintains the threat of judicial punishment but one who exercises and withholds punishment in accordance with its own unfathomable whim.<sup>6</sup>

At the first sight, Semyon seems like the symbol to fulfill the empty space of the Name-of-the-Father but in the further scenes it is understood that he is a very authentic figure to signify the bisexual character of the primordial father.

## II.

The national personification of Russia as a Mother creates a common tradition to call the country as 'Mother Russia'. Joanna Hubbs says that the little Russian dolls called Matrioshka "remains a symbolic embodiment of Mother Russia." According to Hubbs,

Matrioshka's ancient significance is clouded, but the habit of mind which sees the mother as the 'Nest' where the children find refuge and identity remains strong. This is apparent in the 'umbilical' love of Russia as motherland by her Soviet children. But the unusually deep attachment to the country as a mother is everywhere to be found, most strikingly, perhaps, in the representation in popular tradition of the Russian countryside, which seems to recall prodigal children to their primordial home. The historical Mother Russia and the mythological Mother Earth unite in the creative power still attributed to the land.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding to Joanna Hubbs's comment on the notion of 'Mother Russia' it can be said that the Russian restaurant turns into a perfect reflection of Mother Russia. The cloistered atmosphere of the place creates a sound and light proof environment which is very similar to a mother's womb "where the children find refuge and identity remains strong." However, Semyon's dominion at the restaurant creates an ambiguity.

Semyon possesses the womb and adopts the expatriate children of 'Mother Russia' as if he is the mother himself. But the dual identity of Semyon allows separating him into two different positions. One of these positions is his domestic and protective role in the restaurant and the other one is his lawless position against the Symbolic order as a mob boss.

Bülent Somay says that a massive father figure may expand the misery that the people experience when they are about to become separated from their mother. The misery may turn out to be so unbearable that people may choose to ignore to confront with the massive father. Accordingly, they may try to separate the father figure into different pieces and instead of internalizing him as a whole people may choose to absorb him in pieces. They may try to accept one piece of him as theirs or identify it with their mother. However, when people choose to internalize the father piece by piece, the external parts of the father which remain outside during this process returns to them as a part of the Real.<sup>8</sup>

Semyon's transformation from the domestic and consolidative father to the lawless mob boss fits in Somay's words. Semyon functions as the protector and pursuer of the nostalgia of Russian culture and provides his customers to embrace the Mother Russia even if they are miles away from her. Semyon allows his customers to re-create the umbilical union with their motherland and the customers internalize him as a part of the 'Mother' Russia.

This is the reason that turns Semyon into the primordial father because he loses his function to separate the symbiotic union between the mother and the child. Semyon becomes both the father and the mother for the Russian characters. He materializes all the positions of

masculinity and femininity in his massive nature which gives him an ambiguity. Accordingly, he prevents the characters from creating an individual ego for themselves apart from that of their Mother.

This situation repeats in Anna's case. Anna internalizes his father as a part of her mother, an English citizen. Anna cannot read her 'father' language even though she is half Russian. However Malcolm Bowie says that Symbolic order "is the realm of language"<sup>9</sup> and because of the fact that Anna is unable to speak her father's language, her father's Symbolic substance returns to her in the form of the primordial father who is

The father from before the incest taboo, before the appearance of law, of the structures of marriage and kinship, in a word, of culture. The father is the head of that hoard whose satisfaction, in accordance with the animal myth, knows no bounds.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, Anna's relation and commitment to Tatiana come into question and affects her relation with the primordial father figure because Tatiana turns into another version of Anna in the course of the film. Tatiana becomes standing for Anna's Russian half and Anna knows that if she was born and raised in Russia she might be at the same position with Tatiana. Therefore, she personalizes and embraces Tatiana's experiences as if they are her own experiences.

After her death, Tatiana appears as a voice-over character within the narrative. The spectators hear her voice for the first time when Anna opens the diary and finds the card of Trans-Siberian. Although the voice-over functions as the translator of Tatiana's story within the narrative it also creates different meanings.

When Anna opens the diary the voice-over juxtaposes with Anna's image while she is holding the diary and seems like she is reading it from inside. However, the diary is written in Russian and Anna cannot read Russian as she admits. Consequently, this juxtaposition creates a feeling that Tatiana's voice-over is possibly a hallucinatory reflection of Anna's mind. In

other words, Anna may be creating a fictive story over Tatiana's diary. So, when Tatiana's voice-over juxtaposes with Anna's image, the voice-over loses its reliability.

On the other hand, according to these assumptions it can be said that Tatiana's inner voice starts to become Anna's inner voice as well. While the rhyme of their names indicates the duality of these two girls, the usage of the voice-over also drags them into a shared existence.

In fact, every character has a similar double within the narrative. During the film, the different identities of the characters appear as their past identities. For example, in many scenes, Uncle Stepan uses his possible background in KGB as a weapon of defense and creates a younger and tougher version of his self while he is in Russia or whereas Nikolai (Viggo Mortensen) is presented as a character without a past or particular background, he turns out to be an agent for the Scotland Yard. A similar shifting happens in Semyon's case. When he first appears he seems like a domestic father figure. However, when his past comes into daylight through Tatiana's diary it is understood that he is the obscene father with a lawless character.

All of these incidents indicate the shifting in the characters' identities as well as their Imaginary positions which leads the narrative into an ambivalent and uncertain atmosphere. As a consequence of this atmosphere, every place and every position in the film start to clash and quarrel which creates certain boundaries between the positions of the characters and the places they belong.

For example, when Anna is seen while she is playing with Tatiana's baby in the hospital room, Semyon suddenly appears on the door of the newly born unit. When he enters the room Anna's first sentences happen to be "how did you get in here" and "you're not allowed in here." However, Semyon returns her warning by saying "there are always open doors."



When Slavoj Žižek mentions the mythical narrative that is used by Western films and adventure novels, he focuses on the Greek word *até* and says that

There is a fundamental ambiguity to this term: *até* simultaneously denotes a horrifying limit that can never be reached, the touch of which means *death*, and *the space beyond it*. The crucial point here is the primacy of the limit over the space: we do not have two spheres (that of reality and that of pure fantasy) that are divided by a certain limit; what we have just reality and its limit, the abyss, the void around which it is structured. The fantasy space is therefore strictly secondary, it ‘gives body’, it materializes a certain limit or, more precisely, it changes the *impossible* into the *prohibited*. The limit marks a certain fundamental impossibility (it cannot be trespassed across, if we come too close to it, we die), while its beyond is prohibited (whoever enters it cannot return, etcetera). We thereby already produced the formula of the mysterious reversal of horror into bliss: by means of it, the *impossible limit* changes into the *forbidden place*. In other words, the logic of this reversal is that of the transmutation of the real into the symbolic: the impossible-real changes into an object of symbolic prohibition.<sup>11</sup>

By considering the boundaries that is created during the narrative of *Eastern Promises* it can be said that *até* is the limit that is reached by Tatiana when she becomes a part of Semyon’s dominion. This is why when Anna starts to spend time around the Russian restaurant she is warned to stay away from by different people several times.

First of all, after Uncle Stepan reads Tatiana’s diary, he says ‘you don’t go to anyone with this’ and Anna’s mother informs her about Tatiana’s relation with *vory v zakone*. Secondly, Nikolai warns her to stay away from people like him and explains to Anna that she is in a ‘very wrong place’. However, Anna does not listen to them and after she reads the whole diary she starts to wait in front of the restaurant for facing Semyon and telling him that Christina is his daughter. At this point she is warned by Nikolai for the second time to stay away from the restaurant. But it is significant that Anna never enters the restaurant after she delivers the diary to Semyon at the beginning of the film. She always threatens Semyon or Nikolai outside the restaurant because the restaurant represents the impossible limit that she has to stay away from. This prohibition protects Anna from surrendering the psychosis although she starts to encounter with the primordial father as a non-Symbolic figure.

Nikolai becomes another motive for Anna that prevents her from facing the psychosis. The sentence “there are always open doors” repeats itself when Anna, her mother and Uncle

Stepan wait for Nikolai who is assigned to bring the original copy of Tatiana's diary to Semyon. Anna, her mother and Uncle Stepan are seen sitting in a café shop which looks like a modern church with the imperceptible crucifix designs on its walls. This design turns the place into a shelter where the family comes to be saved from evil. It seems like they search shelter in God, accordingly in the Symbolic order because the café shop, as a public place, represents the authority of the Symbolic order and its contract with the social reality.

However, when the outside door of the café opens it is understood that there are always open doors for the characters who does not obey this social contract because as soon as Nikolai sits on the table he proves that he creates a great contrast with Anna and her family and indicates that he does not belong to their space.

On the other hand, when the family is seen around the table in the café shop, they once again sit on a table that is prepared for four people although they are just three. One seat stays empty for a second time as in the Christmas dinner scene. After Nikolai enters the café shop, he comes and fills the empty chair. However, Nikolai's act does not include just filling an empty chair but replacing a position.

Nikolai turns out to be the one who will fill the absent position of Anna's father and he becomes the bearer of the Symbolic order. It is also significant that when Nikolai leaves the café shop Anna follows him. At this point, Nikolai warns her about her being in a very wrong place and he says that she belongs in there by pointing the café shop. Anna belongs to the Symbolic order which is represented through the church-like design of the place in the scene. Besides, this warning strengthens Nikolai position as the Symbolic lawmaker by keeping Anna away from the primordial father which makes Nikolai's position in the narrative more significant.

Besides, Nikolai carries a tattoo that exhibits the portrait of crucified Jesus. When Nikolai and Kirill (Vincent Cassel), Semyon's son, visit a brothel that belongs to *vory v*

*zakone*, Kirill forces Nikolai to have sex with one of the girls in order to prove him that he is not a 'queer'. While Nikolai is having sex with a girl (Tereza Srbova) under the gaze of Kirill Tatiana's voice-over is heard. She tells that when she was little, London was like a place in the Bible for her and she wasn't even sure if it was real. Tatiana appraises London with these words and marks the city as a holy place, even the city of God and the Holy Spirit.

What is seen in the scene creates a big opposition with Tatiana's imaginary assumption about London. When Nikolai and Semyon are talking about the rumors about Kirill's being a drunk and a queer in the further scenes, Semyon says "it never snows in this city. It's never hot. London is a city of whores and queers. I think London is to blame for what he is." With these words, Semyon tries to take Nikolai's attention to the ambivalent character of the city. London is an Imaginary space of "mirror images, identifications and reciprocities."<sup>12</sup> In this Imaginary state, the identities of the characters clash and disperse in each other which avoid the characters to re-establish the Symbolic stability of their livings.

In this chaotic environment, Nikolai turns into the saver of the Symbolic order. At the end of the brothel scene, when Nikolai asks the girl's family name and origin, the camera displays him over his bust and emphasizes his tattoo that exhibits the portrait of crucified Jesus. These framing stresses Nikolai's position as a rescuer and marks him as the messenger of the Symbolic father figure like Jesus Christ. His presence assures the authority of the Symbolic order because "when there is no God nothing at all is permitted."<sup>13</sup> Whereas Semyon tries to take over God's place which is the ultimate symbol of the-Name-of-the-Father, Nikolai functions as the guarantor of the Symbolic order and he tries to re-establish the Symbolic character of the narrative.

Nikolai's association with Jesus Christ becomes significant considering the relation of Anna's father with Christmas. In the scene where Anna is seen awakening before she goes to visit the Russian Restaurant she wakes up and asks her mother if she is okay or not. Her

mother answers, “of course not, it’s Christmas.” Because of the fact that Anna’s father is not alive it is assumed that Christmas reminds Anna’s mother the absence of her husband and this is why she is not okay.

Since Christmas represents the birth of Jesus Christ, its remembrance of the death of Anna’s father designates that the lack of the Symbolic figure in Anna’s and her mother’s life. This is why when Nikolai becomes associated with Jesus Christ he also reminds his position as the guarantor of the Symbolic order who is assigned to eliminate the non-Symbolic figures like Anna’s father who supposed to function as the Symbolic law-maker but cannot do it due to his absence.

At this point, it will be suitable to explain Nikolai’s relation with Kirill and the associations of Kirill’s name. Throughout the Christmas dinner table sequence in the Russian restaurant, the camera slowly slides beyond the happy faces of the family members and displays their conversations that reflect a great harmony. After that the camera focuses on Kirill who is bringing a new plate from the kitchen to the table. Suddenly, his cell phone rings and the spectators witness Kirill’s clumsy conversation possibly with Nikolai away from the dinner table and his secret deal with Nikolai that may challenge his father’s absolute authority.

During the conversation between Nikolai and Kirill, the most important thing is that Nikolai cannot understand what Kirill says. When Kirill asks him if the coast is clear or not, Nikolai does not understand it, because he does not know the meaning of this English expression. Therefore, Kirill makes an explanation about what he just tried to say and asks him if there is police or not. This clumsy dialogue between Kirill and Nikolai proves that they are not capable of managing the English language and although they are using English expressions in their daily lives, it makes their communication get confused instead of making it easier. This may also mean that Kirill and Nikolai cannot survive in the Symbolic order of

the English language. Besides, when the association between Kirill's name and the ancient linguist Saint Cyril who is the developer of the Cyrillic Alphabet is expressed, Kirill's relation with language becomes much more notable.

Saint Cyril and his brother Methodius were Christian missionaries in the Great Moravia and the creators of a new language system which is used as the Old Church language in Slavonic nations. Cyrillic alphabet "as arranged by Cyril, is founded on Greek. In adjusting it, Cyril employed all the Greek characters; although a few of them have so much altered their shape in the course of time, as hardly to be recognized in their present form" and he also "took [letters] from other oriental languages, whenever he could find similar sounds."<sup>14</sup> According to George C. Soulis, "Bulgaria saved the fruits of the labor of the two brothers both for the Slavs and the Europe."<sup>15</sup>

During the reign of the Bulgarian emperor *Symeon I*, "Slavic was approved as the official language of the State and the Church. [...] The acceptance of the new official language was followed by the introduction of a new script, the so-called Cyrillic alphabet, which come to replace the Glagolitic and served as the prototype of the modern Bulgarian, Serbian and Russian alphabets."<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with the missionary works of the brothers the easiness of the Cyrillic alphabet helped the brothers who translated the Bible and the other Christian texts to Slavic to spread the Christianity to the masses. Louise von Therese Alber Jacob Robinson says that

The first attempts to convert portions of Slavic race to Christianity were probably made before seventh century. [...] but as this fact appears to have had no further results, we must still consider the ninth century and Cyril's translation of the Gospels as the beginning of their literary history, the dawn at least of a brighter day.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, Saint Cyril and his brother Methodius did not only change the language of Christianity and transformed the religion of polytheist community by missionary activities but they also changed the language of the-Name-of-the-Father through religion.

The relation between Kirill and Saint Cyril signifies that by using English language which is occasionally combined with single Russian words, Kirill also changes the language of the primordial father because this means that Kirill does not prefer to use the (mother)language of the primordial father but speaks the language of another authority.

Besides, Cyrillic alphabet was approved during the reign of *Symeon I* whose name is just another version of the primordial father figure, Semyon, because this relation strengthens the figurative connection between Kirill and Saint Cyril as well. This connection underlines the fact that just as Saint Cyril changed the language of the Symbolic order with Cyrillic alphabet during the reign of *Symeon I*, Kirill is obliged to change the language of the present system throughout the dominion of the primordial father, Semyon.

Therefore, Kirill and Nikolai are forced to struggle with the obscene father who is capable of everything. In the world of Kirill and Nikolai, the Name-of-the-Father turns out to be a tyrant who exists just to destroy the law-making mechanism of the Symbolic order. In order to regulate the rules of the Symbolic order and make the present system favorable for themselves, Kirill and Nikolai should attempt to shake the absolute authority of Semyon, change his language and bear him down. In this way, they will be able to re-establish the Symbolic order.

Nikolai's relation with Anna's motorbike is also significant to explain Kirill's and Nikolai's mission to overthrow Semyon because the motorbike is the key object that unifies the-Name-of-the-Father and his absent gaze. When Anna meets Nikolai for the first time in front of the restaurant, their primary conversation focuses on the motorbike. Nikolai tries to communicate with Anna via the motorbike and starts the conversation by saying "Nice bike." After that he talks about the brand of the bike and asks Anna how much she wants for it. Nikolai's desire to own the motorbike after he learns that it belongs to Anna's father signifies the fact that he is willing to take over the position of the Symbolic father figure as well.

However, Anna rejects Nikolai's offer by saying the motorbike has a sentimental value and designates that Nikolai has to earn the Symbolic position he desires.

The motorbike attracts attention after Anna makes a deal with Semyon as well. Following Anna's leaving the restaurant; Nikolai and Kirill come into the place and Kirill gets beaten up by his father which allows us to meet the obscene face of Semyon. After that, Nikolai finds Anna in the alleyway near the restaurant while she is trying to make her motorbike function. Before Nikolai approaches Anna, she says 'Christ' as if she calls Nikolai for help in terms of Nikolai's figurative relation with Christ and Nikolai appears behind her. He asks for permission to try to make the engine work and after a little effort he says "you've got water in it."

This sentence becomes extremely significant in terms of Anna's symbiotic union with her mother because whereas the motorbike represent the phallic presence of Anna's father in the narrative, the water may refer to the amniotic fluid which is a watery liquid that allows the infant to survive in the womb of his/her mother and it may represent the symbiotic union of the infant with the mother. Therefore, combining the water and the motorbike in the same sentence turns into a symbolic expression of Anna's internalization of her father as a part of his mother because when Anna gets water in the motorbike she allows her symbiotic union with her mother to destroy the Symbolic function of her father.

Besides, due to the fact that the motorbike does not function anymore it is not important if it is broken because of the water or not. It may turn out to be a joke as Nikolai points out. Anna's internalization of her father as a part of her mother already damages the phallic presence of the father figure and permits the primordial father to rise.

More significantly, after Anna and Nikolai realize that the motorbike is broken, Nikolai offers Anna to take her home with his 'car'. In this way, it is understood that Nikolai replaces the position of Anna's father within the narrative because when the presence of the

Symbolic father figure gets damaged, Nikolai appears to take its place. On the other hand, Nikolai is the one who fixes the motorbike in the further scenes. This may mean that Nikolai also will be the one who will terminate Semyon's authority and re-establish the Symbolic stability.

In this manner, the bathhouse scene becomes very significant to clarify Nikolai's position in the narrative. When Azim and Nikolai enter the bathhouse, Azim says that Semyon recommends this place for business meetings because everyone can see a man's tattoos in a bathhouse. If the tattoos of a man are visible, this may mean that his identity is revealed with his past and his presence.

Nikolai's position as the guarantor of the Symbolic order is exposed in this scene. Because of the fact that he is used as the substitute of Kirill, the star tattoos on his chests and knees present a fake identity. After one of Soyka's brothers attacks him with a knife, first thing he does is cutting Nikolai's tattoo on his backside which displays The Kremlin. After that they cut him in his rib where the fatal and the last wound of Jesus Christ were placed. Therefore, this attack is perceived as a deadly assault to the Symbolic order as well.

During their fight Nikolai gets stabbed in many places. The more he gets stabbed the more he turns into an empty shield. The blood that is running from his scars covers his tattoos and re-modifies his body. All of these stabbing incidents also create a castration threat over Nikolai and when he becomes completely naked this threat loses its symbolic meaning and occurs as a real danger. However, when Nikolai turns into a castrating figure rather than being castrated, he strengthens his position by stabbing one of the brothers in his eye which reanimates the scene where Odysseus blinds Polyphemus.

The relation between this act and the story of Polyphemus may also be underlined because in this myth Odysseus tricks the one-eyed giant by giving up from his identity and introducing himself as 'nobody'. After Odysseus and his crew enter the cave of Polyphemus in



order to steal food from the giant, they get stuck in this place when Polyphemus returns. While they are making plans to escape, some of Odysseus's crew fall a prey to Polyphemus.

Following that Odysseus commends his men to sharp a pole and keeps it ready for the evening. After Polyphemus catches two more men from Odysseus's crew, it speaks to Odysseus and asks his name. Odysseus replies it by saying '*outis*' which means 'nobody' in Greek and offers the giant a full goatskin of wine. Following Polyphemus drinks the wine it falls asleep and Odysseus puts his plan to action. He and his men attack the giant's eye with the sharpened pole and make it blind. While Polyphemus screams louder and louder because of the pain, the neighboring Cyclopes ask it "who is hurting you?" Polyphemus answers them "nobody is hurting me" because it thinks that Odysseus's name is nobody. However, the other Cyclopes think that Polyphemus is punished by the Gods and leave it.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, Odysseus beats the one-eyed giant and continues his journey. His struggle with Polyphemus also teaches him if he gives up all his identities and positions he may achieve to pass into another level. Nikolai's ribbing the eye of one of Soyka's brothers allows him to continue his journey as well because after this violent event Nikolai transforms into 'nobody'.

After Anna visited Nikolai in the hospital room and asks him if he is involved in the disappearance of Uncle Stepan, Nikolai meets with the chief of police on the roof of the hospital. During the scene, Nikolai reveals his secret identity as an agent for Scotland Yard and the reliability of all the information about him becomes completely dispersed. Nikolai turns into an empty shield like he emphasized in the initiation ceremony of *vory v zakone* at the restaurant. He becomes a motherless and a fatherless child as if he was never born. Like he said he is living in the zone of all times because he does not exist as a person but as a position.

Hereby, Nikolai becomes the absolute demonstration of the-Name-of-the-Father and sets the Symbolic stability of the narrative when he replaces Semyon's position in the restaurant. When Semyon loses his power as the primordial father figure and overthrown by

Nikolai, Anna's dilemma between her Russian half and her English part also becomes re-established. This is why at the end of the film; Anna's mother does not hesitate to call Christina "my matrioshka" in Russian. By identifying Christina with matrioshka, Anna's mother who is an English citizen also embraces Mother Russia that is identified with matrioshka as well and creates a unified identity.

In this way, the non-Symbolic threats are eliminated with the help of the Symbolic father figure in the narrative and the Symbolic stability is re-established once again as a characteristic of the new tradition that David Cronenberg follows. The identification dilemmas of the characters come to an end when the Symbolic father figure interferes in the identification process and creates a new language for the Russian/English characters in the narrative. Thus, the-Name-of-the-Father becomes able to accomplish its duties and preserves his function and celebrates the victory of the Symbolic figures against non-Symbolic mad scientists and the mob bosses.

### Notes for Chapter 3

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- <sup>1</sup> Lacan, Jacques. "The Eye and the Gaze." The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis. London : Penguin, 1994. p. 72-73
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 72
- <sup>3</sup> Bowie, Malcolm. "Symbolic, Imaginary, Real... and True." Lacan. London: Harvard University Press, 1991. p. 108.
- <sup>4</sup> Magritte, Rene. *Not to Be Reproduced*. Boymans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam.
- <sup>5</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Kantian Background of the *Noir* Subject." Shades of Noir: A Reader. Ed. Joan Copjec. London ; New York : Verso, 1996. p. 220.
- <sup>6</sup> Bowie, Malcolm. "Symbolic, Imaginary, Real... and True." Lacan. London: Harvard University Press, 1991. p. 108-110
- <sup>7</sup> Hubbs, Joanna. "Russia as Mother." Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture. Indiana University Press, 1993. p. xi-xiii
- <sup>8</sup> Somay, Bülent. "Hamlet Kuşağı." *Çokbilmiş Özne*. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2008. p. 95.
- <sup>9</sup> Bowie, Malcolm. "Symbolic, Imaginary, Real... and True." Lacan. London: Harvard University Press, 1991. p. 92.
- <sup>10</sup> Lacan, Jacques. "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar." Jeffrey Mehlman. *October*. Vol. 40. Television. Spring. 1987. pp. 81-95
- <sup>11</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Kantian Background of the *Noir* Subject." Shades of Noir: A Reader. Ed. Joan Copjec. London ; New York : Verso, 1996. p. 216
- <sup>12</sup> Bowie, Malcolm. "Symbolic, Imaginary, Real... and True." Lacan. London: Harvard University Press, 1991. p. 94
- <sup>13</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Cyberspace, Or, The Unbearable Closure of Being." The Plague of Fantasies. London; New York: Verso, 1997. p.

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<sup>14</sup> Robinson, Louise von Therese Alber Jacob. "Historical View of the Languages and Literature of the Slavic Nations." IndyPublish, 2006. p. 31

<sup>15</sup> Soulis, C. George. "The Legacy of Cyril and Methodius to the Southern Slavs." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 19, (1965), p. 21

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 24 -25.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, Louise von Therese Alber Jacob. "Historical View of the Languages and Literature of the Slavic Nations." IndyPublish, 2006. p. 7

<sup>18</sup> Leadbetter, Ron. "Polyphemus" Encyclopedia Mythica. 1997. November 14, 2008  
<<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/polyphemus.html>>

## Conclusion

When Edward Lawrenson claims that many of the themes and motifs in *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* are Cronenbergian, Cronenberg responds him by saying “the fans of the early horror films have said *Eastern Promises* is not Cronenberg enough, but there’s not much I can do about that. Certainly it feels like me to me.”<sup>1</sup> After that, Lawrenson asks Cronenberg a question about the resemblance of the Turkish baths scene in *Eastern Promises* with his early works and Cronenberg answers him by saying “if you’re a fan of the so-called body horrors [...] that scene would be too realistic: it’s without the invention of growths and tumors and extra organs that fans of my old films love.”<sup>2</sup>

In the previous chapters, Cronenberg’s last three films are analyzed in detail in order to explain what makes *Spider*, *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* different from the director’s former films.

All of the chapters focus on the occurrence of the non-Symbolic figures in the narratives which shakes the Symbolic stability of the main characters and their elimination from the diegetic world with the appearance of the Symbolic father figures as the guarantor of the Symbolic law.

The last scenes of *Spider*, *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* allow the films ending with the re-establishing of Symbolic stability. Whereas, the former films of David Cronenberg come to an end with total chaos and victory of the non-Symbolic figures, the last three films of the director continually suggest that the characters are able to carry on their livings.

As explained in detail during the former chapters, although the characters experience identification dilemmas, struggle with the repressed identities and memories by drifting into an Imaginary state every time they find a way to get out of this state by overthrowing the non-

Symbolic figures. During their struggle, their bodies get pierced and demolished but their wounds get healed and they find themselves surrounded with renewed identities and egos.

The identification dilemmas which cause the characters' bodies to be pierced and demolished resemble with Cronenberg's early body horrors because the more the bodies of the characters are torn apart the more they lose their former identities and psychic positions. However, whereas the former films of Cronenberg emphasize the non-Symbolic nature of these transformations which is very similar to mutation into the earlier forms of human beings, his last three films represent these alterations as a part of the renovation because in the last three films of the director the more the characters get pierced and demolished the more they leave their past identities and become closer to the way out of their chaotic environment.

When Slavoj Žižek comments on the logic-and-deduction novels, he says that

The logic-and-deduction novel still relies on the consistent big Other: the moment, at the novel's end, when the flow of events is integrated into the symbolic universe, narrativized, told in the form of a linear story (the last pages of the novel when, upon identifying the murderer, the detective reconstructs the true course of events), brings about an effect of pacification, order and consistency are reinstated, whereas the noir universe is characterized by a radical split, a kind of structural imbalance, as to the possibility of narrativization: the integration of the subject's position into the field of the big Other, the narrativization of his fate, becomes possible only when the subject is in a sense already dead, although still alive, when 'the game is already over', and in short when the subject finds himself at the place baptized by Lacan 'the in-between-two-deaths'.<sup>3</sup>

In the last three films of Cronenberg, the Symbolic stability is re-established with the possibility of narrativization; after all the identities are revealed, all the mysteries are solved and all the past events are formed in a linear structure, the Symbolic order regains its balance. However, in the former works of Cronenberg, the narrativization becomes possible only with the destruction of the main characters or the whole diegetic world. Besides, although the monstrous creatures are beaten, due to the fact that the burdens of their ruins still continue to destruct, the spectators keep on feeling that the monsters are out there and

ready to interfere in the Symbolic at any moment which keeps the diegetic world of the director's former films unfinished and apart from the Symbolic order.

Correspondingly, in the last three films of the director, the mob bosses and the criminal minds function as the figures who threaten the Symbolic stability and remind the mad-scientist figures in the early Cronenberg films. Similar to the mad scientists, the mob bosses and the criminal minds lose their power and authority at the end but different from the mad scientists they do not preserve their influences on the narratives. When the mad scientists are dismissed from the diegetic world they preserve their presence through their creations of destructive creators. However, when the mob bosses and the criminal minds are eliminated from the diegesis the characters are allowed gaining their Symbolic identities and preserving their livings by renovations.

However, although *Spider*, *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* have different characteristics comparing to Cronenberg's former film they can still preserve the qualities of Cronenberg films and create a harmonious relation with the former works of the director because even though they are distinguished from his earlier films in terms of their more 'realistic' approaches and different epilogues, they still focus on the same subject matters as Cronenberg's former works.

In reference to David Cronenberg's words which are indicated at the beginning of this chapter, *Spider*, *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* are still Cronenberg because they focus on the favorite topic of the director which is identity crises; whereas the early films of the director are surrounded by 'growths and tumors and extra organs' that destroy the whole world in a figurative way the last three films display the 'viruses' within the social order with a realistic approach.

The physical threats in the former films of Cronenberg become concealed and transformed into the social threats that the society creates naturally. This is why the mad

scientists figures of Cronenberg early works resembles with the mob bosses and the criminal minds in his last films because whereas the mad scientist destroys the social order with their scientific ambitions and monstrous creatures the mob bosses and the criminal minds attempt to demolish the social stability and continuity by annulling their social contract with society and disrespecting the laws of the Symbolic system.

Therefore, except their more ‘realistic’ approaches by extracting the fantastic characteristics of David Cronenberg’s cinema, the only difference that the last three films of the director reflect is their emphasis on the figures who symbolizes the guarantor of the Symbolic order in the narrative. In this way, with the help of these figures Cronenberg’s last three films concentrate on the Symbolic stability and continuity.

The question of why David Cronenberg has chosen to transform his narratives remains unanswered. When Brad Balfour asks David Cronenberg if his filmmaking style has changed with *A History of Violence* or not Cronenberg answers him by saying

I don't know if it changed. I'm always experimenting, which comes from the nature of the particular project. Each movie demands its own things, like a child. It starts to become something else. As the doting parents, I feed it what it needs so that it evolves into its own individuality. The movie tells me what it wants, which could be different from what cinema should be or from what my movies used to be; I can't think about all that stuff--I can only think about feeding this demanding child.<sup>4</sup>

Probably, after all of these analyses it can be said that Cronenberg’s cinema does not changed at all in a more general sense because David Cronenberg is a director who focus on human, human transformation and identity crisis in all his movies and this thematic unity keeps his works as a whole even tough the physical threats such as ‘growths and tumors and extra organs’ and the bodily mutations in his former works transform into social threats such as mob bosses and criminal minds and mutated identities in his last three films.

As Fatih Özgüven says

The only difference between Cronenberg’s former works and his last three films is that Cronenberg has been interested in rived – pierced flesh, the inflow and outflow of human body, the transformation of the skin which is coalesced with technology in a more general and philosophical way. (such as *eXistenZ*, *Videodrome*) Since *Spider*, he is



interested in identity as a body. In *A History of Violence*, it has been possible to put on the identity as if it has been an outfit. However, in *Eastern Promises*, he refers to a cultural identity which tries to conquer another one in a paranoiac way or he mentions on a cultural identity which is under the dominion of another one. Therefore, the glossy blacks, carved fingers, yellowish flesh and flowing blood which makes *Eastern Promises* seems like an anonymous, classy detective film at first is nothing but the old Cronenberg who finds himself a new channel.<sup>5</sup>

### Notes for Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> Lawrenson, Edward. "Written On The Body." Sight and Sound November 2007: p. 18

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "Why Are There Always Two Fathers?." Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out. New York: Routledge, 1992. p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> Balfour, Brad. "David Cronenberg: A Director Looks Violent America." November 3, 2005  
<<http://www.poptertainment.com/cronenberg.htm>>

<sup>5</sup> Özgüven, Fatih. "Ama ne karanlık!" Radikal Newspaper 6 December 2007, Internet Edition  
< <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=240820>>

"Onda esasen deęişen řu; eskiden yarılan-delinen etle, insan bedeninin giriş çıkış imkânlarıyla, teknolojiyle kaynaştı kaynaşacak tenin dönüşümleriyle daha genel, daha 'felsefi' biçimde ilgilenirdi. (Existenz, Videodrome, vb.) 'Örümcek'ten bu yana ilgilendięi şey ise bir tür beden olarak kimlik. 'Şiddetin Tarişesi'nde tüm bir kimlięi kılıf gibi giyininip soyunmak mümkündü. Bu filmde ise, bir kültürel kimlięin salgın gibi başka bir kültürel kimlięi ele geçirmesinden bahsediyor, paranoyakça. Ya da, bir 'kültürel beden'in istilası altında olan başka bir 'kültürel beden'den. Dolayısıyla bu filmi ilk bakışta anonim, şık bir polisiyeye benzeten parlak siyahlar, kesilen parmaklar, sarımtırak et, bol bol akan kan aslında kendine yeni bir mecra bulan eski Cronenberg'den başka bir şey deęil."

## Filmography

### *Spider*, 2002

Production Company:	Artists Independent Productions, Capitol Films, CBL, Davis Films
Executive Producer:	Jane Barclay, Charles Finch, Simon Franks, Victor Hadida, Zygi Kamasa, Martin Katz, Hannah Leader, Luc Roeg
Producer:	Catherine Bailey, David Cronenberg, Samuel Hadida
Production Manager:	Nick Girvan, Kelly Howard-Garde, Lynda McKenzie, Marilyn Stonehouse
Director:	David Cronenberg
Assistant Director:	Penny Charter, Jennifer Cote, Sara Desmond, Walter Gasparovic, Ben Howard, Jon E.A. Hunter, Mike Manzato, Alex Oakley, Abbie Weinberg
Script:	Patrick McGrath
Novel:	Spider
Director of Photography:	Written by Patrick McGrath Peter Suschitzky
Editor:	Ronald Sanders
Art Director:	Arvinder Grewal, Lucy Richardson
Music:	John Wriggle
Costumes:	Denise Cronenberg
Sound:	Tony Currie
Cast:	
Spider:	Ralph Fiennes
Yvonne / Mrs. Cleg:	Miranda Richardson
Bill Cleg:	Gabriel Byrne
Mrs. Wilkinson:	Lynn Redgrave
Terence:	John Neville
Dennis Cleg as a child:	Bradley Hall

Philip Craig, Gary Reineke, Cliff Saunders, Tara Ellis

Running Time: 98 minutes

*A History of Violence*, 2005

Production Company:	Benderspink
Executive Producer:	Kent Alterman, Cale Boyter, Josh Braun, Toby Emmerich, Justis Greene, Roger Kass
Producer:	Chris Bender, J.C. Spink
Production Manager:	Erik Holmberg
Director:	David Cronenberg
Assistant Director:	Tyler Delben, Aric Dupere, Walter Gasparovic, Elizabeth Parker, Jodi A. Tario, Bob Warwick
Script:	Josh Olson
Graphic Novel:	A History of Violence
Director of Photography:	Written by John Wagner, Vince Locke Peter Suschitzky
Editor:	Ronald Sanders
Art Director:	James McAteer
Music:	Paul Broucek
Costumes:	Denise Cronenberg
Sound:	Michael O'Farrell
Cast:	
Tom Stall:	Viggo Mortensen
Edie Stall:	Maria Bello
Carl Fogarty:	Ed Harris
Richie Cusack:	William Hurt
Jack Stall:	Ashton Holmes
Sarah Stall:	Heidi Hayes

Stephen McHattie, Greg Bryk, Peter MacNeill

Running Time: 96 minutes

*Eastern Promises*, 2007

Production Company:	BBC Films, Celador Productions, Kudos Film & Television, Serendipity Point Films
Executive Producer:	Jeff Abberley, Julia Blackman, Stephen Garrett, David M. Thompson
Producer:	Robert Lantos, Paul Webster
Production Manager:	Lisa Parker
Director:	David Cronenberg
Assistant Director:	Walter Gasparovic, Ben Howard, Andrew Mannion, Candy Marlowe, Jeremy Angel
Script:	Steven Knight
Director of Photography:	Peter Suschitzky
Editor:	Ronald Sanders
Art Director:	Rebecca Holmes
Music:	Paul Broucek
Costumes:	Denise Cronenberg
Sound:	Howard Shore
Cast:	
Anna:	Naomi Watts
Nikolai:	Viggo Mortensen
Semyon:	Armin Mueller-Stahl
Kirill:	Vincent Cassel
Stepan:	Jerzy Skolimowski
Helen(Mother):	Sinéad Cusack

Mina E. Mina, Josef Altin, Sarah-Jeanne Labrosse

Running Time: 100 minutes

*eXistenZ*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1999.

*Crash*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1996.

*Naked Lunch*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1991.

*Dead Ringers*. Dir. David Cronenberg. United States, 1988.

*The Fly*. Dir. David Cronenberg. United States, 1986.

*Videodrome*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1983.

*Scanners*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1981.

*The Brood*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1979.

*Rabid*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1977.

*Shivers*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Canada, 1975.

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