Chapter One

Introduction

The Thesis Statement

This thesis is on the acquirement of language and the Oedipal conflict in Stephen King’s *The Shining* from a psycho-analytical perspective. Most of the critics are unanimous in the argument that language plays an important role in the formation of anxiety. The title “articulateness and intelligence” is inspired by Steven Bruhm’s statement in “On Stephen King’s Phallus: or the Postmodern Gothic” (1996):

The function of articulateness and intelligence in making one vulnerable is an *ide fixe* for King: those characters most vulnerable to horror are males on the threshold of some crisis with the world of language—Jack Torrance as a writer, who undergoes a block of crisis of productivity; they are young boys just on the cusp of full emergence into the symbolic order—Danny Torrance is learning to read. (56)

Bruhm does not develop the two words “articulateness” and “intelligence” further, and there is no psycho-analytic definition of them. However, I think articulateness and intelligence not only are the keys but also work upon the rivalry between Jack and Danny, because the definitions of articulateness and that of intelligence are highly helpful to the explanation of the manipulation of language as a determinant of their
fate as follows: articulateness means “the quality of being facile in speech and writing” (WordNet® 3.0), and intelligence means “the ability to comprehend; to understand and profit from experience” (WordNet® 3.0). In the process of learning language both articulateness and intelligence are essential. On the one hand, without intelligence, “the capacity to acquire and apply knowledge” (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition) and “the faculty of thought of reason” (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition), what one articulates becomes meaningless murmurs. On the other hand, without articulateness, “using language easily and fluently and having facility with words” (Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)), one cannot “express, formulate or present” what he/she comprehends in his/her mind “with clarity and effectiveness” (Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)). The level of one’s grasp of language can be evaluated through his/her articulateness and intelligence. Therefore, I choose articulateness and intelligence as a frame of reference to attest to a character’s development in The Shining.

Both of Claire Hanson and Steven Bruhm point out the importance of the passage from the imaginary order, the Oedipal moment, to the symbolic order from the perspective of psycho-analytic views. However, limited by the length of a journal article, their articles do not have enough space to provide enough textual evidence and
develop their arguments further. Yet, certain viewpoints are insightful to the
psycho-analytic reading of The Shining. I think that it is a pity that no other critics
elaborate upon these points, so to do this work is part of the motivation of the thesis.
The most important motivation of the thesis is not only to modify and go deep into
them but also to take advantage of the other critiques to affirm my arguments.

The blockage of the Oedipus complex is the reason why Hanson asserts that
Jack’s father’s image “haunts” Jack and Jack disrupts Danny’s male journey into the
symbolic order. How Jack is besieged by the blockage of the Oedipus complex and
Danny breaks through it are studied in terms of the clarification of the Law. Since the
passages of Jack’s childhood and Danny’s present situation suggest they are elder
than an Oedipal child, I cite Bruhm’s argument that they are on “a return to the
pre-symbolic imaginary childhood, a period before the castrating submission to the
paternal Law of language” to justify my application of the Oedipus complex (62).
However, to be careful, I still consult the definition of the Oedipus complex to
supplement my argument. The Oedipal stage is during the time from the child’s third
year to the fifth year, so Jack’s admiration for his father “uncritically” and “strongly”
at the age of seven has explained his irrefrangible identification with his father past
the Oedipal moment.
An ideal father is one who can set a proper model for his child to identify with and help his child come through the Oedipus complex. Yet, in *The Shining* Jack’s father is an improper model for Jack to identify with, and so is Jack for Danny to identify with. In this sense, *The Shining* can be viewed as a variation of the Oedipus complex. Whether they identify with their fathers or not depends upon their critical judgment, which can be acquired by language acquisition and lost by regression. As far as Jack is concerned, he inherits the idea of violence as reasonable patriarchal discipline from his father. In accordance with Freud’s Oedipus complex, Jack’s father represents the first item of the Law which Jack should obey. However, Jack does not have enough sober judgment to undergo the experience of “the clarification of the Law,” as Danny does, and this wages his struggle over the establishment of a free and stable self. Initially Jack considers his father’s abuse of violence the signified of the Law and then the signified of the law or the pact. Here the instability of *points de caption* leads Jack to be a paternal abuser of violence. Because of the signified of the law for him is acceptable but invalid for the public, I call it *the law of their own* and *the illegal but their own law*. For the public, the terms of *the law of their own* and *the illegal but their own law* would be the signifier of the law of Jack’s and his father’s. However, putting his faith in *the law of their own* and *the illegal but their own law*, Jack is unyielding in the correspondence between the signifier of the law and the
signified of the law of their own and the illegal but their own law. This cognitive discrepancy results in his being paranoid about the justification of his wrongdoings. His intelligence is distorted, he comprehends these outrages as allowable paternal instrument of wielding his authority. His distorted intelligence heavily affects his articulateness so that his command of “correcting” Danny and Wendy in terms of claiming himself to be the patriarch of the Torrance family is irrational. Several times he claims himself to be Danny’s father and Wendy’s husband so that he has the right to committing homicide. Traced back to Jack’s childhood, the blockage of the Oedipus complex is the spring of his twisted articulateness and intelligence.

Only when Danny acquires language competence can he avoid and bypass identifying with the improper model Jack sets for him. Language offers a direct road to the symbolic and social order. To become socialized, that is, to move from the imaginary order, which is languageless, into the symbolic order, which is the child’s entry into the network of social relations and language, Danny has to go through the Oedipus complex, which is “the conquest of the symbolic order” (Evans 129). I partly agree with Hanson’s statement that “its [The Shining’s] concern is to establish Danny in a particular (white, American, male) social and symbolic order” (145). However, I do not think The Shining is such a “conservative” and “regressive” text as Stephen King, Hanson, Linda J. Holland-Toll, and Karen A. Hohne argue,
because Danny does not follow a traditional way of identification with Jack but leads to “the establishment of a stable and unified self” by “splitting his own image of his father” (Hanson 148). Language acquisition is the way Danny splits his own image of his father as a result of language’s being a tool for the endless compensation for the lack in the unconscious.

Jack’s dereliction of duty as the paternal agency to help Danny undergo the Oedipus complex causes Tony and Hallorann to come to Danny’s assistance for the “establishment of a stable and unified self” (Hanson 148). Steven Bruhm argues that “King represents Tony as the discourse of Other, the barely audible voice that proceeds from the space opened up in the mirror stage” (59). Based upon Lacan’s argument that “the unconsciousness is the discourse of the Other” (Ecrits 16), my inference is that Tony represents Danny’s unconscious. Therefore, to decipher the signs given by Tony is a task of dealing with Danny’s unconscious. I believe that Tony’s function of Danny’s growing to maturity is to serve as a bridge between the imaginary order and the symbolic order. The discourse of the Other represented by Tony has to be “audible” and “intelligible” enough so that Danny can have his sense of radical alterity from the Other. To be more precise, the signifier of the discourse of the Other represented by Tony, the voice of the word, has to be “capable of being heard,” while the signified of that, the concept of the word, has to be “capable of
being understood.” Within the framework of the mirror stage to separate himself/herself from the wholeness of his/her image in the mirror is the challenge to be dealt with.

The agony of self-splitting is what both Danny and Jack have to suffer from. To endure this, one has to differentiate between the Other and the other. According to Dylan Evans’ definition of Lacanian Other/other, Lacan assumes that “big Other designates radical alterity,” and he “equates this radical alterity with language and the law” (133). As for the little other, “the little other is the other who is not really other, but a reflection of the EGO….The little other is thus entirely inscribed in the imaginary order” (133). To undergo the “mirror stage,” Danny has to suffer the radical alterity, “the state or quality of being other (Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary),” from not the little other but the big Other. Only when Danny perceives his alterity from the Other can he acquire language. Therefore, although Tony does help Danny learn language through giving him signifiers to decipher, Danny has to separate himself from Tony to have the sense of his alterity from the Other.

The Overlook’s role is to challenge if the resident could bear the agony of self-splitting. What the Overlook delivers appears to be the discourse of the Other, while it is the discourse of the evil other in essence. On the one hand, the discourse of the Other delivered by the Overlook is like language, because it “proceeds from
castration, from the spältung (splitting) that plagues every human subject” (Bruhm 60). Jack has to endure self-splitting so he can establish himself as a stable person.

Yet, Jack is not sober enough to tell if the discourse the Overlook delivers is of the Other or of the evil other. The Overlook’s intention to “trick” Jack into being a pawn and “taking all of” his family members translates the discourse that it delivers into the discourse of the evil other. Jack cannot come through the radical alterity from the Overlook so that he is doomed to comply with the littler other, which is “entirely inscribed in the imaginary order” (Evans 133). Thus, he is in a dreadful plight of insanity—he follows the commands issued by the discourse of the evil other so that he is willing to “get rid of the woman and his snot-nosed kid first” for the purpose of not being “distracted.”

**Structure of the Thesis**

In Chapter One, “Introduction,” I would summarize the previous critiques of *The Shining* so as to explore the common ground that Jack and Danny are contenders at the Overlook—Jack, the father, goes insane and is frozen to death under the control of the ghost house, the Overlook, while Danny, the son, flees away from the Overlook and grows to maturity with the companionship and advice of the mentor figure, Halloran. Following this common point, I have issued my thesis statement that aptitude for articulation and intelligence of the signification determines each of Jack’s
and Danny’s destinies. Chapter One also consists of the methodology I employ in the
analysis of *The Shining*. That is, how I apply Sigmund Freud’s and Jacques Lacan’s
theories, Fruead’s Oedipus complex, and Lacan’s three orders, language as the
discourse of the Other, and points de caption to this study of *The Shining*. In part
based on Bruhm’s arguments in “On Stephen King’s Phallus” and Hanson’s in
“Stephen King: Powers of Horror,” this chapter offers my comments and
modifications.

The exploration of the Oedipus complex for Jack and Danny is Chapter Two’s
subject matter. Jack’s downfall can be traced back to his own childhood, and Danny’s
survival can be studied in terms of the exploration of his own status quo. On the one
hand, Jack’s father haunts him and dooms him to be in a cycle of “the wounded-son
narrative” (Davenport 310). On the other hand, deriving from Hanson’s statement that
“what threatens Danny is Jack’s insecure hold on the symbolic: this insecurity is
expressed through his rejection of his wife and his failure to hold down his job as a
teacher, to fill his appointed social role,” my argument is that between the father-son
relationship, Danny’s role as a rival with his father makes him go through the passage
of the Oedipus complex. Although how Jack treats Danny and how Jack’s father treats
Jack are in much the same way, Danny avoids and bypasses “the threat of repetition
patternning and life-or-death dangers”(146), which Wendy is particularly sensitive to, in the process of Danny’s acquirement of language.

Chapter Three’s title is “As though His Life Depended on Learning to Read” (originally italicized by King himself), which is taken from one passage of The Shining. In this chapter, I discuss Danny’s progression from the imaginary order into the symbolic order and breaking away from “the wounded father-son cycle” (Davenport) in terms of his increasing acquirement of language. That is to say, Danny learns to decipher the signifiers and to make significations between the signifiers and the signifieds. Articulation and intelligence of such signifiers pave a divergent way for Danny as a survivor and an adult in the story.

Chapter Four’s title is “The Sleep of Reason,” which alludes to one of the epigraphs within The Shining from Goya: “the sleep of reason breeds monsters.” In this chapter I elaborate upon how The Overlook entrances Jack by means of the discourse of the Other/evil other and how Jack’s insanity can be manifested in terms of his regression from the symbolic order into the imaginary order. I will take advantage of one of the symptoms, failing in the grasp of points de captions, increasingly failing to catch the interdependent relationship between the signifier and the signified, to expound how Jack becomes paranoid and self-justified in his
wrongdoing and misbehavior, such as to murder Danny and Wendy in conformity to the former caretaker’s indication.

In Chapter Five, “Conclusion,” I make a close connection between the previous arguments. Articulateness and intelligence as standards of one’s capacity for language determine whether one can go through the Oedipus complex and distinguish between the voice of the Other/other. In this work of horror fiction, Danny does overcome the obstacles he faces in the process of growing up, while Jack sinks deep into the quagmire to become the scapegoat for the maintenance of essential humanity in horror fiction.

**Stephen King’s Life and Literary Evaluation**

Stephen King was born in Portland, Maine, on September 21, 1947, to Donald Edwin and Nellie Ruth Phillsbury King; Stephen King is a member of the baby boom generation. Earlier to Stephen King’s birth, the Kings adopted a son David Victor on September 14, 1945, because the doctors made a diagnosis that the Kings were sterile. One night when Stephen King was two years old, his father announced that he was going out to buy a pack of cigarettes for the purpose of walking away from the family forever. Forced to be a sole breadwinner, Nellie King brought her two sons to overcome economic hardships and frequent moves with herself.
Although Roland Barthes argues that the author is dead and that in this way the examination of King’s childhood does not exactly provide answers to certain issues, “elements of his childhood and early youth influenced his development as a writer and laid the groundwork for his later thematic fascination with family dysfunction, youthful innocence and youthful brutality, social injustice and the plight of ‘outsiders,’ the stubbornness of hope, and the inexorability of evil” (Coddon 16). It is these “fascinations” that make King not just “one of the most commercially successful novelists in the world, the author of more than thirty best-selling books of fiction, translated into thirty two different languages” (13). At the beginning of his career, King wrote for several pulp magazines. Even after his commercial success, his works are generally considered not “serious” or “literary” enough. As Karin Coddon points out, the reason why the evaluation of King’s work is so diverse is on account of “remarkably diverse readership” (13)—“different readers find different pleasures in King’s fiction” (13). For literary critics, King’s works are “serious” in that more and more critics attend to “his treatment of complex philosophical themes and discussing his place in a long literary tradition” (14).

**Stephen King’s The Shining**

*The Shining* (1977), Stephen King’s third novel, explores one of the horror genre’s characterizations, the ghost story. Genre generally refers to what both the
author and the reader expect to develop in a literary work. Sharon A. Russell gives a convincing reason why she considers *The Shining* a ghost story: “In the ghost story the origin of the horror comes from evil spirits who usually haunt a specific location” (45). The reader expects the ghosts to become visible and to influence the people in the haunted house. Ghost stories are often set in a remote old mansion where the characters increasingly perceive their isolation, and this isolation makes the interaction between former occupants and current residents become possible. King separates the central characters from the outside world in a resort hotel, the Overlook, closed for the winter. By degrees, the Overlook undergoes a transition from voiceless drowsiness to being alive with the ghosts of the past, and an evil place becomes alive.

Above all, King not only takes a conventional image of “the haunted house” but also “gives it new credibility” (Russell 51). According to Michael R. Collings, what makes the Overlook Hotel “miles removed from” Shirley Jackson’s *Hill House* (1959) or Anne Rivers Siddons’ *The House Next Door* (1978) “both physically and psychically” is “a malevolence and sentience” with which it tries to set itself apart from “the stereotypically horrific” (51-52).

**Plot Summary of *The Shining***

Jack Torrance is a capricious and high-strung writer, who spares no efforts to reconstruct his own and his family’s life after his intemperate alcoholism results in his
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breaking of his four-year-old son Danny’s arm, his revengeful raid upon the

schoolboy at a New England prep school, and therefore the loss of his teaching

position. Having given up drinking ostensibly, he takes the job as winter caretaker at a

large, isolated Colorado resort hotel with a bloody history, which is not to be divulged

to non-residents. Proving that he himself has been free from alcoholism and is a

trustworthy breadwinner, he moves into the Overlook along with his wife, Wendy,

and his four-year-old son, Danny.

Shortly after the Torrances’ arrival at the Overlook, Danny and the Overlook’s

Chef, Dick Hallorann, become familiar with each other soon. To Halloran’s surprise,

Danny shares the same gift as his, telepathy. They have a private talk about telepathy

and the sinister omen at the Overlook. Hallorann tells Danny that Halloran’s

grandmother called such a precognitive ability the “shining.” Hallorann also cautions

Danny against coming into Room 217. Prophesying what would happen in the baneful

environment and reassuring Danny of his passage through it, Hallorann informs

Danny of what he will see are like “pictures in a book” and that “I don’t think those

things (referring to what Danny might see) can hurt anybody.” Before their bidding

farewell to each other, Hallorann says to Danny that “If there is trouble…you give me

a call” (King 98).
The Overlook is the real source of much of the action in the novel. According to Robert T. Curran, the Overlook’s evil, arises from its historical past: “It stems from a ‘chemistry’ (the huge storage battery) with omnipotent power that is sustained by the waters of the ‘myth pool.’” King himself also assumes that many haunted houses store up this energy and gain the “reputation of being Bad Places (Underwood and Miller 265),” and he believes those reputations “might be due to the fact that the strangest emotions are the primitive ones—rage and hate and fear” (King, Danse Macabre, 265).

Danny, with the help of telepathy and the warnings from his invisible friend, Tony, has a premonition of impending and looming dangers to him and his family, and he begins to see visions of the Overlook’s hideous past and the ghosts as if alive. Comprehending the fact that Jack’s job as a caretaker of the hotel is his last hope for holding the family together, Danny has no choice but to tolerate the frightening visions.

Having difficulty possessing Danny, the Overlook transfers its target from Danny to Jack. Frustrating Jack’s work as a playwright and enticing him into drinking alcohol again, the Overlook succeeds in making the unstable Jack its piece in the board game. Eventually the Overlook convinces the possessed Jack into slaying Wendy and Danny. Wendy and Danny, who still entertain a faint hope of Jack’s recovery from insanity, lock Jack in the walk-in paltry, but the ghost of the former
caretaker, Delbert Grady, who also slaughtered his wife and two daughters and then committed suicide, releases Jack. By this time Wendy finds they are totally isolated from the outside world, because Jack has discontinued the radio line and has damaged the snowmobile. Jack at the ferocious and malignant Overlook’s command manages to wield the roque mallet to break three of Wendy’s ribs, to break her kneecap, and to shatter her vertebrae, and at this moment she stabs him in his back with a large butcher knife. Escaping from Jack’s assault, Wendy locks herself in the bathroom.

By this point, Hallorann, summoned by Danny’s shining, comes to Danny’s help. Shattering Hallorann’s jaws and slashing him with the roque mallet, the possessed Jack leaves Wendy in the bathroom and turns to Hallorann. To break away from Jack in pursuit, Danny reminds Jack of the jeopardous boiler on the verge of explosion in the basement. Jack rushes to cellar, while at the same time Danny, Wendy, and Hallorann flee away from the Overlook as it bursts. The novel ends with Danny and Wendy, spending a summer vacation at a resort in Maine where Hallorann is the head chef.

A Critical Overview

Most of the critiques of King’s The Shining can be mainly divided into three approaches: the Bakhtinian approach (Holand-Toll and Hohne), the psycho-analytical approach (Killer, Curran, Hanson, and Bruhm), and the New-Historicist approach
(Davenport). All of them concur with the argument that Jack is the necessary scapegoat for the maintenance of the norms. Since my topic is upon the acquirement of language, I would summarize the related arguments as follows:

Both Linda J. Holland-Toll and Karen A. Hohne take Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin’s approach to *The Shining* through the examination of language. Holland-Toll suggests that there are both monolithic social values and a monolithic voice which can affirm societal values in horror fiction. The argument is supported by many critics, and among them, King himself, in *Danse Macabre*, claims that “horror fiction is as conservative as a Republican in a three piece suit (which is pretty conservative of late)” and that “this fiction works for the restoral of community norms by introducing disorder akin to Bakhtin’s carnivalization, and then containing and resolving the threatening disorder into order again” (42). However, Holland-Toll starts a candid discussion of the non-affirmative nature of *The Shining* in terms of polyphony, the plurality of voices, and heteroglossia, the multiplicity of social languages—there are so many “competing voices” in *The Shining* that the non-affirmative nature manifests itself in the double-sidedness of language. As for Hohne, she states that King’s work “is perhaps best known precisely for those narrators whose language is torn between the unofficiality of everyday spoken speech and the officiality of literary narration” (94), and I assume that it is the orality’s “double-sidedness” (93) that leads to the
reversal of the “authoritativeness” of Jack. For Hohne, the speech of Danny and Hallorann belongs to unofficiality, which “embraces otherness” (94), and “the only otherness unofficiality opposes is the otherness that wants to obliterate otherness—authoritativeness” (94). In this way, authoritativeness, represented by Jack, is much more marginalized than unofficiality, represented by Danny and Hallorann. It is no wonder that at the Overlook the various competing voices “entices Jack into ‘carnival mode,’ which ultimately destroys him” (Holland-Toll 135)—after the carnival in which “the constant array of voices competing for attention” (135), the voice of the restoral of societal values takes an upper hand. Therefore, I believe that Jack is the necessary sacrifice for the maintenance of community values in The Shining, because he cannot afford to deal with the deft play of language as Danny and Halloran can.

Claire Hanson, Bruhm, Roland T. Curran, and Robert Killer1 maintain that Jack experiences a regression from the symbolic order, the domain of language and rules, to the imaginary order, “the realm of image and imagination, deception and lure” (Evans 82), and that Danny becomes an adult mentally by the progression from the

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1 Although Robert Killer’s “All Roads Lead to the Abject: The Monstrous Feminine and Gender Boundaries in Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining” (2006) is mainly upon the adapted movie of King’s original work, I think some of the arguments are insightful and they are faithful to King’s The Shining.
imaginary order to the symbolic order. All of them also affirm that in *The Shining* Jack, the father, and Danny, the son, are rivals.

Hanson uses the Oedipus complex to explain the rivalry between Jack and Danny, because “the Oedipus complex is nothing less than the passage from the imaginary order to the symbolic order” (Evans 127). In this way, *The Shining* is a story of Danny’s breaking through the Oedipal moment and Jack’s being continually disturbed by and even haunted by the influence of his father, so for Hanson whether one can get around the Oedipus complex determines his destiny. So far as Curran is concerned, he employs Carl Jung’s theory of collective consciousness to explore “the archetypal dimension of evil,” which is located at the Overlook (Curran 34). Curran personifies the process of the interplay between “the intensification of Jack’s homicidal anger towards Wendy and Danny” and “his [Jack’s] control by and eventual absorption into the all-encompassing evil represented by the Overlook Hotel” (34). In Curran’s view, the Overlook is the personification of a developed “diabolic and destructive death energy, an archetypal dimension of human evil” (34). I believe that the rampant rage of self-destruction at the Overlook is to put Danny and Jack through both of their paces. Yet, Danny’s toleration of and Jack’s being enticed by the “destructive rage” seal each of them a divergent fate.
Bruhm and Killer treat the horror in *The Shining* from different psycho-analytical perspectives. Bruhm classifies King’s works as the representative of the Postmodern Gothic. During the discussion of the language of King’s works, especially *The Shining*, Bruhm argues that “Stephen King, clearly the monarch of America’s popular articulation of late twentieth-century horror, employs the anxieties over language as articulated by Lacan to discuss a postmodern condition” and that “this deployment signals in King’s characters, as it does in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a crisis of male self-definition that gnaws at the heart of gender stability and throws into question the very category of male heterosexuality” (56). For Bruhm, Twentieth-Century American horror can be best expressed in terms of Lacanian “anxiety over language,” and the most appropriate instance is the confronting opposition between Jack and Danny in *The Shining*. This kind of “anxiety over language,” in fact, is about whether Jack or Danny can withdraw from the imaginary order and move into the symbolic order. Whether Danny or Jack can survive the quagmire of the Overlook depends upon who is able to predominate over language, the index of the symbolic order. It is this uncertainty of the struggle for the verbal advantage that leads to the formation of horror. In contrast with Bruhm’s discussion of *The Shining* within the framework of the Postmodern Gothic, Killer assumes that the formation of horror is through “the monstrous feminine” (54), in his words, above
all the shining, the precognitive ability or telepathy. The exclusivity of the shining between Danny and Jack exerts pressure on Jack to fight against them, because for a white American patriarch, the shining, which is beyond Jack’s control and overseeing, is to give a challenge. Enraged by the challenge, Jack goes so far as to follow the instructions of the “emissary sent by the Overlook,” that is, to “correct” them. I assume that this is the reason why Killer evaluates Jack in a highly sympathetic tone—“However, The Shining presents us with a white patriarch who is convinced that he must discipline his family by killing and dismembering them with an axe” (54). To a certain degree, some critics, who are sympathetic to Jack’s predicament, like Robert Killer, Robin Wood, and Frank Manchel, mitigate the monstrosity of Jack by considering him “the victim of patriarchal forces that permeate the Overlook Hotel and American culture in general” (54).

Along with the common views of Killer’s, Wood’s, and Manchel’s regarding Jack’s role as “the victim of patriarchal forces”, Stephen Davenport takes a New-Historicist approach to “a story of anxiety about family, work, and masculinity in twentieth-century America…in 1977, during the heyday of post-WWII feminism and the birth of the men’s movement” (308). To make The Shining and its historical context echo each other, Davenport quotes the characterization of Jimmy Carter,
during whose presidency *The Shining* is published, from Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette’s *The King Within: The King in the Male Psyche* (1992):

Emblematic of his weak thinking was his absurd attempt to dramatize energy by not lighting the national Christmas tree, an ancient symbol of eternal life and ongoing vigor. Of more consequence was his impotent reaction to the Iran hostage crisis. (173)

Davenport imputes Carter’s excessive softness to his commitment to “a weak action (i.e., he shut off a symbol of vigor) (131),” and his reluctance to deal with the brewing and overhanging problem: “he ‘sat around thinking’ when he should have been ‘doing’ (i.e., storming the Iranian castle like the Good Father come to rescue his children)” (309). Davenport in this way argues that *The Shining* “historicizes Twentieth-Century American masculinity by tracing gender performance and anxiety through multiple decades and generations of males” (309).

**Sigmund Freud’s Oedipus Complex**

According to Sigmund Freud’s account of the development of self, the child in the early stage of self is asocial. In order to move into the social order and life, he has to have a prior and foundational sense of himself as distinct from others.² The

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² In this case, the Freudian psychological analysis of *The Shining*, the child is a boy, Danny, so I choose the pronoun “he.”
advance into social life arises via the Oedipus complex, or the Oedipal moment. In

**The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex** (1924), Freud states:

The authority of the father or the parents is introjected into the ego, and there it forms the nucleus of the super-ego, which takes over the severity of the father and perpetuates his prohibition against incest, and so secures the ego from the return of the libidinal object-cathexis. (par.9)

In the early months of the child, he and his mother maintain a dyadic relationship, in which he cannot distinguish between self and (m)other. However, this temporarily content and heavenly state must be “intervened” by the father, who impedes and corrects the child’s incestuous desire towards the mother. At this point, the child becomes increasingly conscious of his being a self, and thus he is separate and discrete from the mother because of the mother’s absence and the father’s rules. For Freud, the origin of the self is fixed and established in this absence and sense of loss. The repression of the child’s desire for his mother is also the point at which the unconscious is formed, “as a place to receive that lost desire, and it is at this point of repression that the child’s early *transgressive* drives become organized and forced towards genital (and gendered) sexuality” (Hanson 136). The male child, under the threat of possibly being castrated by his father, ostensibly capitulates and renounces
his intense and ardent desire for his mother. Nevertheless, at the male child’s heart, he
never altogether forgoes the hope that at some time he can really achieve the status of
the father. The way he makes the theoretically hopeless hope comes true is through
his training himself to be an ideal and standard patriarch (Hanson 136-137).

Jacques Lacan’s Three Orders

Jacques Lacan establishes further connections between the Oedipal moment and
the child’s entry into language, which he terms “the symbolic order” (Hanson 137).
Based on Dylan Evans’ definition of “Oedipus complex”: “Since the symbolic is the
realm of the law and since the Oedipus complex is the conquest of the symbolic order,
it has a normative and normalizing function” (129), how the Oedipus complex “is
essential for the human being to be able to accede to a humanized structure of the
real” (Lacan, Seminar Book III, 198) can be comprehended. According to Lacan, the
unconscious is created and language is acquired at the same time when the child
cannot help but repress his desire for his mother for the fear of possibly being
castrated by his father. Lacan develops his classic thesis that “the unconscious is
structured like a language” (Seminar Book XI 20). Only when he perceives the
absence and the difference of his mother can he have the motivation to name it. That
is to say, language, like the unconscious, is founded upon the loss and the absence,
which is a tool for the endless compensation for the lack in the unconscious. Lacan
has an insight into the fundamental opposition between the pre-Oedipal state and the post-Oedipal world; he terms the former the “imaginary,” which is languageless, and the latter the “symbolic,” which is the entry into the network of social relations and language. Claire Hanson points out that Lacan’s comprehension and intelligence of the essential opposition between the imaginary order and the symbolic order is beneficial and advantageous to the understanding of *The Shining* (137).

The symbolic order is where the child has to “master” language, which “in its [language’s] symbolic dimension is the discourse of the Other, the unconscious” (Evans 98), and it is the progress into the symbolic order that facilitates the child’s sociality and socialization (Hanson 137). Dylan Evans provides the definition of “law:” “since the most basic form of exchange is communication itself, the law is fundamentally a linguistic entity—it is the law of the signifier” (98). That is to say, Lacan develops the Law\(^3\) as the order of the communicative signifiers:

This law, then, is revealed clearly enough as identical with an order of language. For without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos that bind and weave the yarn of lineage through succeeding generations. (Lacan, *Ecrits*, 66)

\(^3\) Lacan often writes “the Law” with a capital “L” (Evans 98).
In order to be social and socialized, the child must obey the Law, which disciplines and governs not only the conduct of the child but also that of human beings, in general. The first enforcement of the Law the child confronts is his father, who prohibits and constrains the child’s desire for his mother. The first item of the Law, the child’s father, is the microcosm of the innumerable and countless laws, that of the Law. Being unable to observe the first item of the Law, the child is doomed not to move into the symbolic order, a well-organized social system, but into a chaotic world with the breakdown of the Law. Otherwise, the child has to obey the first item of the Law, his father, whose role at the Oedipus moment is to help the child learn and acquire language, the discourse of the Other, and then go through the passage of the Oedipus complex.
Adapting Ferdinand Saussure’s concept of the sign to his “linguistic turn” in psycho-analysis during the 1950s, Lacan argues that the relation between the signifier and the signified is exceedingly inconstant. In contrast with Saussure’s posited reciprocal implication between the signified and the signifier, Lacan breaks down the union between the signified and the signifier. These two elements constitute the sign: one is a conceptual element (which Saussure baptizes the signified), and the other is a phonological element (which Saussure baptizes the signifier). Lacan contends the “existence of an order of ‘pure signifiers,’ where signifiers exist prior to signifieds; this order of purely logical structure is the unconscious” (Evans 183). Lacan’s modification of Saussurean mutually interdependent signifier and signified brings the disintegration of the sign, and in this way it makes the two ingredients of the sign, the signifier and the signified, not always correspond to each other. Thus, for Lacan, a

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4 I take the Saussurian sign from Ferdinand de Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics (1916).
language consists of not signs but signifiers. To modify the Saussurean sign, Lacan replaces Saussure’s diagram of the sign with an algorithm: S/s. The bar between the signifier and the signified does not betoken union anymore but the resistance inherent in signification. As a result, Lacan claims that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is far more precarious, and he considers the bar between them in the Saussurean algorithm “not a bond but a rupture (185),” a “resistance” to signification (Ecrits 164). The primacy of the signifier makes a world of the play of signifiers produce signifieds, and it is the slip that constantly slides the signified beneath the signification produces such points de caption:

The only things that detain this movement temporarily, pinning the signifier to the signified for a brief moment and creating the illusion of a stable meaning, are the points de caption. The points de caption are points at which “signified and signifier are knotted together” (Seminar Book III 268). Lacan introduces the term in his 1955-6 seminar on the psychoses to account for the fact that despite the continual slippage of the signified under the signifier, there are nevertheless in the normal (neurotic) subject certain fundamental “attachment points” between the signified and the signifier where this slippage is temporarily halted. A certain minimum number of these points are “necessary for a person to be
called normal,” and “when they are not established, or when they give way” (Seminar Book III 268-269) the result is psychosis. (Evans 149)

Indeed, there must be certain points de caption for us to distinguish between who is relatively and comparably normal and who abnormal. The slippage of the “anchoring point” between the signified and the signifier in fact is in relation to one’s capability for articulateness and intelligence; that is to say, one’s hold on the correspondence between the signified and the signifier, which is intelligible to him/her, makes himself/herself decipher the signifier and then articulate the signified behind the signifier due to Lacan’s contention that signifiers are prior to signifieds.

**My Application of Freud’s Oedipus Complex and Lacan’s Three Orders**

The reason why I apply Freud’s Oedipus complex and Lacan’s three orders to the analysis of Jack’s and Danny’s flaws is in part based upon Steven Bruhum’s argument:

This arcane understanding is, in Lacan’s terms, a return to the pre-symbolic imaginary of childhood, a period before the castrating submission to the paternal Law of language (although King’s boys are much older than Lacan’s mirror stage child: Danny is learning to read at five, and Thad is learning to write at eleven; yet both are presented as in the process of acquiring the symbolic). What Danny remembers—and
what Jack forgot—is that if the caretaker does not let off some steam
from the antiquated boiler in the basement, it will explode and destroy the
Hotel. (62)

That Danny remembers to let off the steam from the boiler while Jack forgets to do
this determines who survives or fails at the end. However, their result can be traced
back to each of their childhood. On the one hand, Jack’s father haunts him and dooms
him to be in a cycle of “the wounded-son narrative” (Davenport 310):

Jack’s early closeness to his father ended when his father (associated
repeatedly with phallic emblems: a gold-headed cane, an elevator)
“suddenly” and “for no reason” beat his mother, his cane whistling
through the air. From that point on Jack exists in an ambivalent relation
to his father, who still has power over him (or perhaps because of)
alcoholism: after his father’s death he is haunted by him, as an “irrational
ghost god.” (Hanson 146)

Through all this we can observe a “repeating pattern gong back from Jack and so on,
in which feelings of social insecurity combine with or give rise to irrational behavior
and drunkenness: the father, in other words, seems to be insecure in his place in the
symbolic/social order, and this seems to be obscurely linked with a revulsion from the
feminine or more specifically from the wife as mother” (Hanson 146). On the other hand, deriving from Hanson’s statement that “what threatens Danny is Jack’s insecure hold on the symbolic: this insecurity is expressed through his rejection of his wife and his failure to hold down his job as a teacher, to fill his appointed social role,” I argue that between the father-son relationship, Danny’s role as a rival with his father makes him go through the passage of the Oedipus complex. Although how Jack treats Danny and how Jack’s father treats Jack are in much the same way, Danny avoids and bypasses “the threat of repetition patterning and life-or-death dangers,”(146) which Wendy is particularly sensitive to, in the process of his acquirement of language.

**Lacanian Other/other**

According to Bruhm, “the function of articulateness and intelligence in making one vulnerable to horror is an ide fixe for King: those characters most vulnerable to horror are males on the threshold of some crisis with the world of language—Jack Torrance as a writer, who undergoes a block of crisis of productivity; they are young boys just on the cusp of full emergence into the symbolic order—Danny Torrance who is learning to read” (56). In the domain of language after Lacan, the ego is not consigned to the verbal ascendancy, which is over the unutterable repository of instincts. That is to say, for Freud, it is the id itself, “that locus classicus of Gothic activity” (56), that contains “the whole structure of language” (Ecrits 147). The
authoritatively and categorically verbal site is where the unconscious and its discourse
register a crisis in the self’s taking shape (Bruhm 57). I would hypothesize that
whether one can tell his/her own self from the Other is the source of terror and
determines his/her own degree of lucidity. Bruhm argues thus:

This incipient madness, this source of great terror, is, as for Lacan, a
voice of Otherness that produces flickers of signification but that are
unintelligible to the analysand: “Since Freud the unconsciousness has
been a chain of signifiers that somewhere (on another stage, in another
scene, he wrote) is repeated, and insists on interfering in the breaks
offered it by the effective discourse and the cogitation that it informs”
(Ecrits 297). That “somewhere,” that inevitable space constructed by the
split of self-referentiality that Lacan calls the Other, is the overwhelming
alterity from which the King hero suffers his horror. (58)

Bruhm modifies the conventional Gothic double or Doppelgänger to explain the
variation in King’s case, so, for Bruhm, Doppelgänger is “not a projection of
repressed desire so much as a discourse, the discourse of the Other, that is for Lacan,
the language proceeds from castration, from the Spältung (splitting) that plagues
every human subject” (60). The nature of Gothic fiction makes such device of
doubleness a representation of the evil force to which the protagonist is opposed; “in
King’s case, the discourse of the Other becomes the discourse of the other,” such as “the Overlook Hotel which, like Danny, has the ability to read others’ minds and to absorb the emotions and discourse of the people who stay there” (60). That is to say, the discourse of the other the Overlook delivers is pretended to be the discourse of the Other.