Chapter Two

The Oedipal

A Male Journey through the Oedipus Complex

Claire Hanson states that “The Shining follows a male journey through the Oedipus complex, the journey of Danny,” because Jack, the father, and Danny, the son, are rivals within the framework of the Oedipus complex (145). Although Danny’s age is much elder than the child at the Oedipal stage, in whom “the Oedipus complex emerges in the third year of life and then declines in the fifth year” (Evans 127), Danny is learning to read at five and thus is on “a return to the pre-symbolic imaginary of childhood, a period before the castrating submission to the paternal Law of language”—he is “presented as in the process of acquiring the symbolic” (Bruhm 62). In this way, Hanson views The Shining as “a male journey through the Oedipus complex” (145):

In The Shining King is concerned again with the origins of being, with the construction of the subject in the unconscious and conscious mind, with the interplay between what Lacan would call the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real in the construction of that subject. The text plays with images of disintegration and doubling, images of the dissolution and
dispersal of the individual subject, but what is striking about the text overall is its strong recuperative thrust. (145)

Here I assume that for Hanson it is “its [the text’s] strong recuperative thrust” that recovers the Oedipal balance from “images of disintegration and doubling, images of the dissolution and dispersal of the individual subject” by means of “the whole project of the novel,” that is, “to place Danny securely in the symbolic order and to insert him equally securely into the social world” (145). I partly agree with Hanson’s statement in that “the symbolic is the realm of the law” and that “the Oedipus complex is the conquest of the symbolic order” (Evans 129). However, in this case, Jack, the father, does not successfully wield the authority, in Freudian terms, the Law, over Danny, the son, as a father we expect him to do within the framework of the Oedipus complex, so I would rather view The Shining as a story of the clarification of the Law. Generally speaking, a boy in the early years must experience the Oedipus complex to move into the symbolic order, the world of social relations and innumerable laws. The first item of the Law the child runs into is his father’s prohibition against his incestuous desire towards his mother. Although Jack and Danny do not fight for Wendy’s love apparently, the fact that they are rivals partly fits in with the form of the Oedipus complex.
The reason why I choose the framework of the Oedipus complex is that “Freud argued that all psychopathological structure could be traced to a malfunction of the Oedipus complex” (127). I argue that at the Oedipal stage the rival whom they “wrongly” identify with affects their development strongly. Ideally speaking, the parent of the same sex should provide the child with an appropriate model. On the one hand, Jack’s downfall can be traced back to his own “emotional life;” which is “run by gender anxiety born of bad parenting and expectation about a basic formula: how and where to be the man” (Davenport 310), that is to say, Jack fails to be an ideal patriarch through his ability to identify with his father. To further worsen the situation, Jack not only fails to fulfill his role as a father in helping Danny undergo the Oedipus complex but also unyieldingly obstructs Danny’s entry into the symbolic through the “disruption of the symbolic” (Hanson 145). On the other hand, Danny’s survival can be viewed as the avoidance of becoming immersed in the cycle of “the wounded-son narrative” (Davenport 310), and he does come through the Oedipus complex by means of the acquirement of language, the index of the symbolic order. Above all, I consider The Shining to be a variation of the Oedipal case, in which Danny, the son, does not merely destroy the rules of Jack, the father, but also treads on him as a sacrificial offering in order to grow up. In this chapter, I will approach
Jack’s decline and Danny’s growing up from the viewpoint of the Oedipus complex.

As for Danny’s learning language, I would leave the issue to the next chapter.

**Jack’s being Continually Haunted by the Image of His Father**

Based upon Sigmund Freud’s statement that “all psychopathological structures could be traced to a malfunction of the Oedipus complex” (Evans 127), this section elaborates upon how Jack’s father haunts Jack as “an irrational white god” (King 251).

I believe that it is the dereliction of duty by Jack’s father that leads to “a repeating pattern going back from Jack and his father and so on, in which feelings of social insecurity combine with or give rise to irrational behavior and drunkenness” (Hanson 140). This is because “the parent of the same sex” whom Jack identifies with, his father, set a false model for him. 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.

Setting a personality for Jack to follow, Jack’s father ostensibly plays the role of the model for the seven-year-old Jack to identify with after the Oedipal stage:
His [Jack’s] relationship with his father [Jack’s father] had been like the unfurling of some flower of beautiful potential, which, when wholly opened, turned out to be blighted inside. Until he had been seven he had loved the tall, big-bellied man uncritically and strongly in spite of the spankings, the black-and-blues, the occasional black eye. (King 249)

An ideal father is one who enables the child to undergo the Oedipus complex by setting a good example in terms of his conduct. In this manner, the child can identify with the father and grow up healthily. Likewise, what Jack’s father originally should do at Jack’s Oedipal moment is to point the way for Jack, like “some flower of beautiful potential.” However, “the unfurling of some flower of beautiful potential” “turned out to be blighted inside.” I argue that what mainly makes the unfurling of the flower blighted inside is not “the spankings, the black-and-blues, the occasional black eye,” all kinds of child abuse, but Jack’s aspiration for “the tall, big-bellied man uncritically and strongly” at the age of seven, because “the Oedipus complex emerges in the third year of life and then declines in the fifth year” (Evans 127)—Jack’s indiscriminate love for his father at seven has explained his irretrievable identification with his father past the Oedipal moment.

Jack’s father teaches Jack how to take advantage of violence as a way of relieving his pressure and anger: “In those days it had not seemed strange to Jack
that the father won all his arguments with his children by use of his fists” (King 250).

Jack increasingly gets used to the inappropriate values of solving the arguments “by use of his fists.” I think that the reason why Hanson states that “Jack exists in an ambivalent relation with his father” (146) is that “his own love [Jack’s] should [my italics] go hand in hand with his fear” (King 250). Take the elevator game for instance:

His father would sweep him into his arms and Jacky would be propelled deliriously upward, so fast it seemed he could feel air pressure settling against his skull like a cap made out of lead, up and up, both of them crying “Elevator! Elevator!”; and there had been nights when his father in his drunkenness had not stopped the upward lift of his slabmuscled arms soon enough and Jacky had gone right over his head like a human projectile to crash-land on the hall floor behind his dad. But on other nights his father would only sweep him into a giggling ecstasy, through the zone of air where beer hung around his father’s face like a mist of raindrops, to be twisted and turned and shaken like a laughing rag, and finally to be set down on his feet, hiccupping with reaction. (King 249)

The passage demonstrates how Jack becomes addicted to the ambivalent pattern of relieving pressure. I consider the elevator game as Jack’s initiation into the
predilection for violence. On the one hand, the way he feels like being “propelled
deliriously upward” by his father makes him enamored of the elevator game, in this
way he feels relieved by “air pressure settling against his skull like a cap made out of
lead, up and up.” On the other hand, sensing his father’s brutality somehow, Jack
seems to have no alternative but to identify himself with him ambivalently. The way
“his father in his drunkenness had not stopped the upward lift of his slabmuscled arms
soon enough” is to treat Jack as “a human projectile to crash-land on the hall floor
behind his dad.” Jack perceives the potential danger behind the elevator game, but he
admires his father for its indulgence. Even “beer hung around his father’s face,” his
father still revels in wielding the power to “sweep him into a giggling ecstasy”
without respect to Jack’s safety. It is no wonder that “it had not seemed strange that
his own love should go hand-in-hand with his fear:”

fear of elevator game which might end in a splintering clash on any given
night; fear that his father’s bearish good humor on his day off might
suddenly change to boarish bellowing and the smack of his “good right
hand” and sometimes, he remembered, he had even been afraid that his
father’s shadow might fall over him while he was at play. (King 250)

Ostensibly it seems that Jack has perceived the potential peril in his father, but I
detect his being covetous of his father’s privilege of imposing upon him and the
other family members the fears of every description. On the one hand, he is in terror of “a splintering clash” and his father’s “boarish bellowing,” and he “had even been afraid that his father’s shadow might fall over him while he was at play.” “His father’s shadow,” which “might fall over him,” has a connotation that he is afraid of not merely being abused by his father but also following his father’s pattern, that is, to become a child abuser. His father’s shadow does fall over him on and on.

On the other hand, Jack is used to the “love,” which “began to curdle at nine, when his father put his mother into the hospital” (King 250). Stephen Davenport describes the time when his mother was caned by his father as “the signifying moment of unforgettable brutality, that which marked nine-year-old Jack’s full awakening to Torrance family dynamics” (310). Once “Torrance family dynamics” is fully awakened, Jack gets bogged down in the “wounded-son narrative” (310) in virtue of his inappropriate identification with the cane as a symbol of the Law:

One of his large freckled hands had dropped to the gold knob of his cane, caressing it….Jack knew exactly how many blows it had been because each soft whump against his memory like the irrational swipe of a chisel on stone….The doctor came and took Momma away to the hospital where Daddy had worked all of his adult life. Daddy, sobered up some (or perhaps only with the stupid cunning of any hard-pressed animal),
told the doctor she had fallen down stairs. …the doctor asked with a kind of horrid, grinning sarcasm. Is that what happened, Mark? I have heard of folks who can get a radio station on their gold fillings and I have seen a man got shot between the eyes and live to tell about it, but that is a new one on me. Daddy had merely shook his head and said he didn’t know; they must have fallen off her face when he brought her through the dining room. The four children had been stunned to silence by the calm stupendousness of the lie. (King 252)

Jack is “stunned to silence” by the “stupendousness,” of the lie given, that is, how “of astounding force, volume, degree, or excellence; marvelous” (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition), the whopping and deliberate lie is given. In Davenport’s words, the “long and black and thick and gold-headed” big stick (King 224) of Jack’s father “becomes in this scene his father’s scepter” (310): “If less mobile because lame, he [Jack’s father] is able with his cane to extend his reach over his family, demonstrating that the long arm of his law is as quick and effective as ever” (310). Jack is under the impression that violence is allowed to be used as a means of “demonstrating” the authority of a white patriarch as his father is. Although Davenport says that it is the caning scene that “haunts” Jack, but I would rather believe that it is the acquiescence in such a form of violence that
“haunts” Jack. Everyone is complicit in the misbehavior, including the doctor, who “asked with a kind of horrid, grinning sarcasm,” and even his mother herself, who “had corroborated their father’s story while holding the hand of the parish priest” (King 252). Such inappropriate values are like each stroke of the cane “engraved on his memory like the irrational swipe of a chisel on stone.”

What a father should bring to a child is the obeying of the Law and even the demonstration of the Law at the child’s Oedipal stage. Yet, in this case, Jack’s father is an inappropriate model for Jack to identify with. Although Jack himself perceives that “love began to curdle at nine” (King 250), he still approves of his father’s way of being “able with his cane to extend his reach over his family, demonstrating that the long arm of his law is as quick and effective as ever” (Davenport 310). Only when he is past the Oedipal moment does he perceive something wrong between his relationship with his father: “Until he had been seven he had loved the tall, big-bellied man uncritically and strongly [my italics] in spite of the spankings, the black-and-blues, the occasional black eyes” (King 248-249). That means at the Oedipal stage Jack also uncritically and strongly identified with “the parent of the same sex,” in this case, his father. Within the framework of the Oedipus complex the father enforces the first item of the Law, and thus leads the child to obey the Law:
It is the Father who imposes this law on the subject in the OEDIPUS COMPLEX; the paternal agency (or paternal function) is no more than the name for this prohibitive and legislative role. In the second time of the Oedipus complex the father appears as the omnipotent ‘father of primal horde’ of Totem and Taboo (Freud 1912-1913); this is the lawgiver who is not included in his own law because he is the Law, denying others access to the women of the tribe while he himself has access to them all. In the third time of the Oedipus complex the father is included in his own law, the law is revealed as a pact rather than an imperative. (Evans 99)

In this case, I argue that Jack’s father as “the lawgiver who is not included in his own law because he is the Law” brings up points de caption for Jack because the signified behind the signifier of the Law of Jack’s father [my italics] cannot correspond to the signified behind the signifier of the Law. Thus, I argue that Jack’s father conducts a false law and misleads Jack into recognizing the false law as the Law. The signified of the Law in Lacan’s work “refers not to a particular piece of legislation, but to the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations” (98), but the Law of Jack’s father is false because of its being “a particular piece of legislation,” which is twisted. Being unable to distinguish between the Law and the Law of his
father, Jack misrecognizes the Law of his’s father as the Law as a result of his being confused by this kind of points de caption. What makes matters worse, in the third time of the Oedipus complex, the law in which Jack’s father is included, is a pact, which Jack must obey and cannot denounce in the future. Even after the Oedipal stage, the Law of Jack’s father becomes a pact, and Jack accepts the pact as a law he should stick by:

If Jack accepts the cane as a viable tool of parental discipline, he accepts it as a son and condones his father’s behavior; if he uses it, he passes the memory, the legacy of the violence visited on his mother, to his son, In short, he becomes a monster and turns his son into a potential one.

(Davenport 317)

Thus, I assume that it is Jack’s coercing Danny into accepting the highly problematic pact that “threatens Danny” by “Jack’s insecure hold on the symbolic”(Hanson 147)—Needless to say, “the legacy of violence” is prohibitive and should be corrected in the symbolic order, “the realm of laws.” Again, points de caption arise in terms of the opposition between Jack and Danny. For Jack, he considers the legacy of violence a law as his father passes on to him, but the law of “the cane as a viable tool of parental discipline,” in fact, is an invalid pact in a civilized world. Jack is of the opinion that the signified of his law is legitimate because the law is he and his father’s
pact, that is to say, he misunderstands the signified of his law as that of the law. The
point de caption results in that he feels fully justified in passing “the memory, the
legacy of the violence visited on his mother, to his son.”

In addition, I assume that Jack’s being “insecure in his place in the
symbolic/social order,” which “seems to be obscurely linked with a revulsion from
the feminine or specifically from the wife as mother” (Hanson 146) can be traced
back to the blockage of the Oedipus complex:

The third ‘time’ of the Oedipus complex is marked by the intervention of
the real father. By showing that he has the phallus, and neither exchanges
it nor gives it (Lacan, Seminar Book III, 319), the real father castrates the
child, in the sense of making it impossible for the child to persist in trying
to be the phallus for the mother; it is no use competing with the real
father, because he always wins (Lacan, Seminar Book IV, 208-9, 227).

The subject is freed from the impossible and anxiety-provoking task of
having to be the phallus by realizing the father has it. This allows the
subject to identify with the father. (Evans 129)

However, in this case, although the phallus Jack’s father has does make Jack realize
that it is impossible for him “to be the phallus for the mother,” Jack does not “persist
in trying to be the phallus for” his mother. Jack views “the phallus for his mother” as
the instrument of authority used by his father to punish his mother at his will without
displaying any matrimonial affection. In this way, “he could begin to sympathize with
his father” (King 427), that is to say, he justifies his way of treating his matrimony
cruelly and harshly as his father does:

    The thing he’d never asked himself, Jack realized now, was exactly what
    had driven his daddy to drink in the first place. And really…when you
    came right down to what his old students had been pleased to call the
    nitty-gritty…hadn’t it been the woman he was married to? A milksop
    sponge of a woman, always dragging silently around the house with an
    expression of doomed martyrdom on her face? A ball and chain around
    Daddy’s ankle? …Mentally and spiritually dead, his mother had been
    handcuffed to his father by matrimony. Still, Daddy had tried to do right
    as he dragged her rotting corpse through life. (King 427-428)

Hanson assumes that this passage suggests that “Jack thinks of the relation between
his mother and father with a kind of savage black humour” (146). I agree with
Hanson’s argument about Jack’s viewpoint of the wedlock, because the way Jack
considers the matrimony fits in with “black humor”— “in literature, drama, and film,
grotesque or morbid humor used to express the absurdity, insensitivity, paradox, and
cruelty of the modern world: ordinary characters or situations are usually exaggerated
far beyond the limits of normal satire or irony” (“Black Humor.” Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia). Jack treats his father’s relationship with his mother as an obligation against his father’s will: his mother is “mentally and spiritually dead” and “had been handcuffed to his father by matrimony,” and it is matrimony, the state of being married, that forces his father to “do right as he dragged her rotting corpse through life” (King 428). The misogynistic view on matrimony is the pact Jack inherits from his father. Thus, as a misogynist like his father, Jack considers Wendy to be worse than his mother. If Wendy is as passive as his mother is, “she is the equivalent of his mother, whose compliance in the face of his father brutality” (Davenport 323) makes her “a milksop sponge of woman, always dragging silently around the house with an expression of doomed martyrdom on her face” (427). Yet, Wendy fights against Jack, in Davenport’s words, she “intervenes,” (323) so for Jack she is a “milksop bitch,” always trying to think of “ways to drag [Jack] down” (King 415). Ironically, Jack assumes that his father “had tried to bring the four children [including him] to know right from wrong, to understand discipline, and above all, to respect their father” (428). In Jack’s eyes, these pacts inherited from his father are so unbreakable that he is self-righteously in a hurry to teach Wendy and Danny “to know right from wrong, to understand discipline, and above all, to respect” him.
**Jack’s Dereliction of Duty as the Paternal Agency**

Furthermore, Jack’s father convinces Jack into complying with “the illegal but their own law,” which Jack would impose on Danny. According to Davenport, “in Jack’s imagination, that of a child and later a writer, his father becomes a sculptor, a big-stick artist, the cane his chisel” (311). I believe that the idea of the cane as his father’s chisel, the tool for a sculptor to create his works, justifies his father’s acts of outrage. Here the cane is of phallic significance, and it becomes an excuse for commitment of acts of violence. However, as the father who has the only one real phallus, Jack could still be irritated by anything of phallic significance. Take the lost passkey for instance. When Jack makes a study of the history of the Overlook, he falls asleep and has a dream about the caning incident. In the dream, he discovers the hotel passkey is gone. The hotel passkey is a “key that secures entrance everywhere” (WordNet® 3.0) at the Overlook. As a caretaker, the hotel passkey is an imaginary phallus for Jack. Only Jack himself can have possession of the hotel passkey. As the hotel caretaker and the father at the same time, the most offensive act for Jack, the father, is that Danny, the son, steals the hotel passkey. Therefore, I do not completely agree with Davenport’s assumption that “the voice of his father urges him to take a cane to cane Danny for being the obvious culprit and using the key to abuse his father’s [Jack’s] authority” (311). I would rather view the voice of his past father as
that of his unconscious, that is to say, although he flies into a rage against Danny for
Danny’s “being the obvious culprit and using the key to abuse his authority,” he still
needs his father’s encouragement to strengthen the pact between him and his father:

--kill him [Danny]. You have to kill him, Jacky, and her [Wendy], too.

Because a real artist must suffer. Because each man kills the thing he
loves. Because they’ll always be conspiring against you, trying to hold
you back and drag you down. Right this minute that boy of yours is in
where he shouldn’t be. Trespassing. That’s what he’s doing. He’s a
goddam little pup. Cane him for it, Jacky, cane him within an inch of his
life…You have to kill him, Jacky, and her, too. Because a real artist must
suffer. (King 254)

What Danny is doing is “trespassing” for Jack, so Jack has to “cane him [Danny]
within an inch of his life.” The more “maddening,” “squealing,” and “petulant” (254)
his father’s voice is, the more Jack yearns for executing the law of their own, that is,
the pact between him and his father.

However, Jack struggles fiercely in order to distinguish between the Law
and “their own law.” As Davenport assumes, “Jack’s fear that he might
reproduce his father’s horrible behavior is mingled with a desire to correct his son’s
willful behavior” (311). I think of the minglement as a conflict between the Law
and the law of their own. On the one hand, “a desire to correct his son’s willful behavior” is also one to execute the law of their own. On the other hand, “Jack’s fear that he might reproduce his father’s horrible behavior” suggest that somehow Jack comprehends the gravity of following the law of their own, which is against the Law. “The voice of the Ghost-God, the Pig-God” (254) signifies Jack’s ardent desire to punish Danny through violence. I believe that Jack imputes his execution of the law of their own to “The voice of the Ghost-God, the Pig-God,” and in this way through repression, one of the mechanisms of defense, Jack feels relieved more or less: “No!” he screamed back. “You’re dead, you’re in your grave, you’re not me at all!” Because he had cut all the father out of him and it was not right that he should come back, creeping through this hotel two thousands miles from the New England town where his father had lived and died. (254)

One of the mechanisms of defense starts up at the same time as “the reaction of the ego to certain interior stimuli which the ego perceives dangerous” does (Evans 165): in this case, Jack’s ego fiercely perceives the drive to “cane” Danny and Wendy, so he has to undergo the repression of such an evil idea. According to Dylan Evans’ definition of “repression”:
The concept of repression is one of the most basic concepts in psychoanalytic theory, and denotes the process of certain thoughts or memories which are expelled from consciousness and confined to the unconscious….Since repression does not destroy the ideas or memories that are its target, but merely confines them to the unconscious, the repressed material is always liable to return in a distorted form, in symptoms, dreams, slips of the tongue, etc. (the return of the repressed).

(165)

Jack comprehends the brutality of slaying his son and wife, which is against the Law, so he has to repress his ardent desire to execute the pact between him and his father beneath the unconscious. However, since he has accepted the pact between him and his father, his repression cannot “destroy the ideas or memories that are its target, but merely confines them to the unconscious.” What is confined to the unconscious, the repressed, can be “always liable to return in a distorted form, in symptoms, dreams, slips of the tongue.” The return of the repressed is through his father’s voice over the CB radio. Thus, the way the return of the repressed happens fits in with Jacques Lacan’s argument that “it is always a signifier that is repressed, never a signified” (Seminar Book XI 218). The signified of the law of their own law is articulated by his father word by word: “You have to kill him, Jacky, and her, too” (King 254).
Needless to say, the statement that “You have to kill him, Jacky, and her, too” is the signifier of the law of their own law. Jack resists the return of the repressed, that is, the call of his father, by declaring himself to have “cut all the father out of him and it was not right that he should come back, creeping through this hotel two thousands miles from the New England town where his father had lived and died” (254). The return of the repressed is so intense that Jack puts the repressed into action, that is to say, the repression as one of the mechanisms of defense malfunctions here, because Jack does not wholly repress the repressed, the desire to kill his son and wife, like clockwork.

Identifying with his father, Jack uses “the roque mallet as a crutch or a cane” (King 459) to castigate his son and wife as his father does. Feeling frustrated mentally by Danny’s and Wendy’s challenges, Jack takes advantage of the roque mallet as a phallic signifier to prevail over them:


The mallet came down again with whistling, deadly velocity and buried itself in her soft stomach. She screamed, suddenly submerged in an ocean of pain. Dimly she saw the mallet rebound. It came to her with sudden numbing reality that he meant to beat her to death with the mallet he held in his hands. (447)
The signified of the roque mallet, which Jack holds, is almost the same as that of the cane his father holds, that is to say, Jack is under the impression that as the patriarch of the Torrance family, he has the right to “beat her [Wendy] to death with the mallet he held in his hands,” as his father canes his mother. The pact between him and his father is so deep-rooted in Jack’s mind that he cannot but lapse into the pattern of his father:

And suddenly, in the darkness behind his eyes the thing that chased him [Danny] down the Overlook’s dark halls in his dreams was there, right there, a huge creature dressed in white, its prehistoric club raised over its head:

“I’ll make you stop it! You goddam puppy! I’ll make you stop it because I am your FATHER!” (376-377)

Here, as Davenport argues, “the prehistoric monster is both father and son, Danny’s father and grandfather collapsed into one figure, dressed in the whites of a nurse and given the dialogue Jack attaches to his father” (317). Yet, Danny’s awakening through the progression from the imaginary order into the symbolic order makes him avoid the implication for the blockage of the Oedipus complex, that is, “the sins of the fathers,” which “will be visited upon the sons” (317). Even under the circumstance of Jack’s dereliction of duty as the paternal agency to help him undergo
the Oedipus complex, Danny himself fortunately acquires language competence, which is “seen as structuring the social laws of exchange, as a symbolic pact, etc” (Evnas 97), to avoid the cycle of “the sins of the fathers,” which “will be visited upon the sons” (Davenport 317). That is to say, with the help of his language acquisition, Danny fortunately avoids becoming immersed in the vicious spiral.