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“Who is it that can tell me who I am?": *King Lear* and *Desire*
Under The Elms, when the Territory cannot tell Heroes who they
Are

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Introduction

One of the points that have called the attention of readers and critics alike regarding King Lear is the division of the territory performed by Lear in Act I, scene I. Are we truly expected to believe it is all reduced to a “mythic” beginning, obliterating Shakespeare’s genius? Questions come to mind if it were so, what is the meaning of the love declaration test? Why would not Cordelia just clarify her silence? What about the ecological references that are so subtly spread on King Lear’s territory? I sustain that territory should never be overlooked in *King Lear*, not only because it offers a gem of a beginning, but also because there lays the explanations to understand some aspects of the modern tragedy.

Interestingly enough, three centuries later, *Desire Under The Elms* beginning is rooted in the same dispute of a father who faces the problem of succession. Although, circumstances in both plays are very different, it is possible to establish a connection between them. Moreover, some of their similarities and differences clarify aspects of the modern tragedy that otherwise, will remain obscure. Indeed, both *Desire Under The Elms* and *King Lear* are each permeated by their times and they both communicate in ways that expands their own meanings. I will focus this study on the relationship that both plays suggest between the territory and the modern self.

Certainly, *Desire Under The Elms* and *King Lear*’s starting scenarios are the same: a family, a piece of territory, and the problem of making one of the family members to inherit the territory. Whether the said territory is a farm or is a kingdom, it does have particular meanings attached and the problem of inheritance has specific, but radical implications for the characters involved. I sustain that this is when territory becomes a problem for the self. My hypothesis is that characters’ attachment to the territory is so decisive that they have defined themselves and their relationships with others through the territory. In different words, their self-understanding and their understanding of others is grounded on their connection to the territory. Then, their relationship with the territory is turned into a mask for their selves that prevent them to acknowledge themselves and others, and which they are in need to deactivate to ever know what their true position is.

Moreover, when there is the threat of losing their territory, they are compelled to scrutinize, question and become aware of their own selves, which not only is the means by which they discover who they are, but also becomes the distinctive trait of a modern subjectivity.

Why do I go further and say that they are also modern tragic heroes? In this work, I will try to determine how this quest makes the main characters see themselves in a way that will make them acknowledge what their mistake was; thus, it would be absolutely necessary for the achievement of tragedy that they become aware of themselves and how they contributed to their own fall. I will also characterize the meanings that are attached to the territory, how the implications of those meanings interact in both plays and the way they shape the characters' understanding of themselves. Finally, I will elaborate on how the connections between both the territory and the self allow for the emergence of a distinctive modern tragic hero.

Although, I think Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a more complete study on the modern subjectivity, *King Lear*'s encoding of the same phenomenon is less evident, has been less studied, but it is equally interesting because it has a unique turn: the process of self-understanding happens via understanding humanity. On the other hand, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, not only is O'Neill's prime work, but the characters' masks have been better polished than in *Desire Under The Elms*, for instance, Jamie's cynicism. Nevertheless, from my perspective, *Desire* offers characters whose construction is much more complex and less explicit, since it is grounded on their oppressing tightness to the farm. This is why my primary sources for this study will be, as it was stated, *King Lear* by Shakespeare and *Desire Under The Elms* by O'Neill.

Theoretical Framework

Shakespeare's influence on different literary times does not come as a surprise. Certainly, what more can I say about his connection to Eugene O'Neill when books like *O'Neill's Shakespeare* have already been written? I will try to add to the discussion in relation to these author's echoes explicating their intertextual connections within the framework of a literary tradition as Eliot understands it. I will do so mainly from a New Critical perspective that I will complement with a New Historical one. My standpoint will be these two critical schools because, on the one hand, I will mainly try to elicit the meanings of the territory and the self that are encoded in the very structure of these plays, and how they interact to allow for the emergence of a modern tragedy and a modern hero within the modern literary tradition; but at times, I will have to rely on historical arguments for enriching or clarifying the historical and cultural meanings that each one of the play stirs, or the connections that might be established, always bearing in mind that "no artist of any art, has his complete meanings alone" (Eliot 37).

My use of both critical schools finds justification in the fact that the New Critical school has been found guilty of isolating the literary work from its historical and cultural context (Selden 27). However, I think it would be very difficult to talk about a modern tradition if we would not consider the contexts in which these two plays were born. When we say "the modern tradition" we take for granted the very existence of that tradition, we take for granted the three hundred year gap there is between the writing of *King Lear* and *Desire Under The Elms*, we take for granted the cultural milieu that have made possible to talk about the modern literary period. Indeed, these two plays owe a distinctive organic unity that I will try to elucidate. For instance, conceptualization of the territory will be mainly developed from the interconnectedness of meanings within the very same plays. Also, I will do close readings of passages to determine the images that language stirs and how they create tensions within the text and between the plays which will allow for more fruitful interpretations of my object of study. Still, there is the need of understanding the central conflict of the self as rooted in culture and having a development that embraced *King Lear* as an early play discussing the conflict, and *Desire Under The Elms* as a late play discussing the same issue. Moreover, to elucidate underlying meanings in the concepts of the self and the territory, I will need to draw connections with ongoing power discourses in the Elizabethan period that echo in 20th century America.

In relation to the play's intertextual connections, I want to emphasize how in spite of being two centuries away from each other, the English, Elizabethan playwright Shakespeare and the American playwright Eugene O'Neill meet in several aspects. There is a layer that is very patent, like O'Neill direct quotes from Shakespeare ("How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child", for instance), or topics such as child duty or madness that have some Shakespearean turns. But there are also more hidden layers in O'Neill's work that bring back Shakespeare's to mind.

From the other side, in spite of Eliot's idea that we "cannot value him [the artist] alone; [we] must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the death" (37), Shakespeare almost (if not) forges the occidental canon, thus, from my point of view, is never compulsorily in the need of intertextual references to be valued. However, if only "for sport", reuniting his work with historical conceptions of his time, as well as comparing side by side his own legacy in others, adds interesting reflections to Shakespeare himself, to the point of even changing our understanding of his plays, in particular, of aspects that could not be visible until the comparison with another later literary text. All of which proves the everlasting quality of his work.

Finally, while O'Neill's work certainly takes up several of Shakespeare's issues and even quotes, illustrating that "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 37), the reading of Shakespeare is also actualized and transformed when placed among the rest of the texts that generate the structure of the modern literary tradition. The intertextual network established by texts and in particular by the plays that are the primary sources of this study, creates and re-creates the meanings of these plays. They become mutually necessary if our aim is to say anything about the modern tragedy and the modern hero from a refreshed perspective. Still, what do we know about tragedy?.

In his work *What is a Shakespearean Tragedy?* Tom McAlindon explains that tragedy during the English Renaissance was an "intense exploration on suffering" (2) which usually involved a distinguished character who experiences a reversal of his situation and is made fall into misery (2). Additionally, the conflict also involves a struggle not between two moral positions, but two ethical powers, which resolution implied the restoration of some previously altered order (Hegel qtd. in McAlindon 2). Although, these characteristics are present in Shakespearean tragedy, one of the unique Shakespearean turn is that the outside conflict between

these opposing forces is projected inside the hero (Bradley qtd. in McAlindon 3). Then, the Shakespearean tragic hero is marked by an internal struggle that is strongly intensified by the discovery of how his/her environment, including values and people he/she thought to know, have changed (McAlindon 6).

In a different stand, critics have continually discussed the lack of consistency of 20th century, modern theater. Francis Ferguson says that modern theater is just a collection of dissimilar plays, which only happened to be written in the same period. This is so, because people lack a shared view of Man and history (qtd. in Kernan 17). Kirk also refers to an underlying idea in relation to modern tragedy: it seems that there is “no pattern for existence, no purpose in life’s struggles” (345). Nevertheless, he refutes the former arguments explaining that indeed, late modern playwrights do have a sense of struggling forces in tragedy, only that they named them “social/psychological/moral forces” instead of dwelling in their early modern abstraction (346). Necessarily, the former make emerge a particular type of hero. His/her former social nobility does not reside in some aristocratic name, but the nobility of the modern hero is precisely his/her resilience and his/her capacity to bear, even unsuccessfully, with the forces that strive against him/her in a changing world. Those forces that are not abstract, such as nature, but those forces that are tangible and find their expression in slaving work, poverty, social class struggle, etc. It is a consistently more human, more vulnerable hero, but not less magnificent, coarse, or having less dignity.

Adding to the discussion, King Lear’s nobility has been target of suspicions in literary criticism. Jaffa has found in Coleridge and Bradley’s criticism of Lear’s behavior in the opening scene a concealed argumentation that explains his act in terms of “insane vanity or folly” (408), which, of course, diminishes the necessary dignity that an early modern tragic hero should have to convey any sort of dramatic feeling on the audience. McAlindon reaches the same conclusion as Jaffa does: if he was not a noble character, if he was not magnanimous, how can we see Lear as a tragic hero? (McAlindon 7; Jaffa 408). Furthermore, McAlindon observes that the speed of the Shakespearean hero’s transformation is “a theatrical device emphasizing both the extremity of the change and the vulnerable nature of all love and nobility, indeed of all human worth” (8). However, let us not forget that the Shakespearean tragedy assimilates a paradigmatic Elizabethan

conflict over the self. Thus, the transformation of the hero is a theatrical device that serves to dramatize the destabilization of the self.

Additionally, the hero's fall in Shakespeare involves a "self-betrayal or loss of identity" that breaks down the balance of a noble nature; which implies that the aspect of the character that makes him/her magnificent, has a great capacity for "destructive excess" (McAlindon 9). This notion is taken up by the critic Harold Bloom. He asserts that King Lear is "the paradigm for greatness" (*Shakespeare* 478): he is the archetype of a type of man that simply does not (or even, cannot) exist anymore, with an incredibly "capacious soul" (*Shakespeare* 509) that is too prone to impatience, but at the same time is greatly loveable and loved (*Shakespeare* 477-479). When I mean that this hero cannot exist anymore, I precisely go back to the change in the noble nature of the hero that is apparent from the early to the late modern literature, and that is so clearly represented by the Cabot's in contrast to Lear. Indeed, what Bloom implies is that in the very core of Lear resides a feature that makes him great, but also vulnerable. The critic states that unlike other characters in Shakespeare's work (and unlike how other critics have portrayed this feature) Lear is not *transformed*, but his greatly capacious soul emanates "flashes of compassion and of social insight" (*Shakespeare* 509). This particular feature that incites his change is his "wholeheartedness" (*Shakespeare* 509).

Along these lines, Renaissance playwrights were strongly influenced by Roman and early medieval tragedies that depicted heroes with a strong sense of selfhood (McAlindon 4). Furthermore, a tragic hero should transit through a process of "recognition", by which the whole experience of the fall, guilt and fault is acknowledged (14). In this respect, Stanley Cavell's *The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear* illustrates acknowledgment –or the lack acknowledgment in *King Lear*: it actually does not occur, because everyone are avoiding recognition. In turn, this only makes every character to create a scapegoat of another in a "stage of fools", that further prevents recognition. If there is a dramatic solution for this, some hope, this is that "every refusal of acknowledgment, will be tracked down" (253). McAlindon again contributes, saying that although fate as a predetermined set of events is not definite (17) in Shakespeare "character is fate: one's own character interacting with that of others" (17). Then, the interaction or the avoidance of true interaction anyways has a dramatic consequence for the destiny of the hero –it will anyways become fate.

Another aspect that McAlindon discusses, but that Bloom easily refutes in *King Lear* are “the positive aspects of tragic events” (13), in which he places the final restoration, a more or less a stable feature in traditional tragedy (13). The critic asserts that in most of Shakespeare’s tragedies, the social order is restored by the very end. This happens not only symbolically, but most importantly, the heroes themselves will be reunited in a symbolic way that transcends the conflicts that led them to catastrophe (13). On a different stand, Bloom asserts that “their deaths are meaningless –again, even Edmund’s, since his belated change fails to save Cordelia” (*Shakespeare* 485). Then, restoration and even, redemption are seriously called into question when the timing in the character’s changes cannot prevent a terribly catastrophic end, which horror is too large to be looked at. Surely, this will be one of the most important aspects I will try to elucidate in this thesis, in relation to the modern drama.

Up to this moment, the self is somehow present in the definition of Shakespearean tragedy and hero. The self destabilization, because of its vulnerability, provokes the necessary changes within the hero that cause his/her fall. The hero will have to recognize his/her fault if he/she wants to achieve restoration. However, no word is mentioned about the territory. Certainly, it is not that in every play the territory has a significant role. But I think that in *King Lear*, as well as in *Desire Under The Elms*, territory plays a crucial role to promote the destabilization of the self. Thus, it becomes a necessary constituent for the achievement of tragedy. Now, in the following lines I will discuss our object of study: the territory and the self.

In the chapter *The Liberation of the Self* from the book *The Waning of the Renaissance*, William Bouwsma largely discusses a paradigm change in relation to the conception of the self during the Renaissance. He says that medieval self constructions based on God’s cosmic order, truth and invariability were debated, giving birth to a more complex self, whose nature was, nonetheless, ultimately mysterious (23). Thinkers perceived changes, disturbance, motion, and all sorts of mutations in the self, that did not let them talk about “being”, but “passing” (Montaigne, qtd. in Bouwsma 24). Accordingly, senses located in the body that were previously thought to be dominated by passions (thus, mutable) were prized and respected, being both the sight and the ear the most salient ones (27). This new conception of the self brought about some positive revisions, as the ones concerning the body and senses, which allowed for the flourishing of creativity and arts (28-29), but also pose a threat to the self’s anchor.

The fact that senses became central for knowledge in Renaissance thought is also supported by Andrew Bozio in his work *Embodied Thought and the Perception of Place in King Lear*. He claims that Renaissance' "phenomenology turns embodied location into the foundation of our knowledge and experience of our environment" (2), which required the body to be "the material connection between the mind and its environment" (2). Briefly, reconstruction of places not only needs people to be there, but more importantly, their corporality should be present. The reconstructive activity puts at stake people's selves as much as they can recognize that they are in a place, by making use of their senses.

What the two authors propose is that in the early Renaissance there was a revision of the medieval conceptualization of the self that allowed for the pricing of aspects that were formerly invisible, considered a threat or simply not very important. Those aspects were primarily related to the senses, which opened up the discussion for how the self is located in space. But the discussion also put at stake the stability of the self, since there was the notion that the very same aspects that allowed for the location of the self were dominated by mutable passions, that not also were unstable in themselves, but changed from person to person. Then, the Renaissance self became defined by fluidity and instability.

Indeed, in the chapter *Renaissance Theater and the Crisis of the Self*, Bouwsma continues the discussion of the self centered on theater as a "symbol, catalyst and focus for what was felt—if not understood—to have gone deeply wrong in the culture of the age" (142). It seems as if all freedom achieved for the self had become too large to have an order, provoking the self to become "fluid and problematic" (135). Certainly, one of the major threats, represented in drama and very extensively in metadramatic discussion as well, was that of authenticity of the self (135). Hypocrisy, understood as the concealment of a "true" self, was a significant concern in drama and explains the rising of major villains, character's self-fashioning, and plots where one character gradually reveals his/her true identity (134-137). Drama staged a "multitude of choices made available by the diverse possibilities of human condition" (Bouwsma 137) that after a period of excitement, questioned the truthfulness and integrity of the self.

Indeed, Bouwsma recollects Burton's critic to theater: "To see a man . . . having a several face, garb & character, for everyone he meets" (142), where the writer revolves around the idea of lack of authenticity, dangerously playing with deceiving. The resemblance of these lines to the

prime, 20th century modern character, J. Alfred Prufrock is patent: “There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet” (Eliot 26-27). Both excerpt put under the scope the integrity of the self, advocating for its mutable and ultimately mysterious nature. The fact that one echoes the other after an almost three hundred year gap reveals how much unsolved but relevant the topic continued to be well into the 20th century.

Accordingly, introspection became an important, though distressing tool for developing the self (Bouwsma 136-137). The major concern of scrutinizing oneself found its reflection in drama through soliloquy. The literary critic Harold Bloom gives credit to this idea by reflecting on Hamlet’s capacity to overhear himself (*How to Read* 203-204). This is consistent with what we have already discussed in relation to the importance of ear and sight. Following the critic, overhearing is the great tool by which Hamlet is made aware of himself and by which he can develop, though with no definite answers, his consciousness (*How to Read* 212).

Yet, what is a soliloquy but a dialogue with oneself? In the essay *Transformation of the Self in Desire Under the Elms*, Xie Qun accounts for how dialogue leads Abbie and Eben to a recognition of their true selves, thus, to a transformation where they leave aside their previously utilitarian, egotistical and possessive selves (their “hypocritical” selves, in early modern terms). If we follow the author, the ear and dialogue accomplish the function of soliloquy, at least in its purpose of transforming the selves by hearing. But also the sight, as they both need to see each other for their sexual interest to be stirred, because this one of their strongest source of attachment.

While hearing would become the most important means for recognition and self-recognition in *Desire Under The Elms*, Cavell has debated a parallel phenomenon in *King Lear*: sight is the mean by which characters recognize and are recognized (220). In this sense Cavell establishes the importance of the Other and the need of an interconnectedness of characters within the play. Deaths and the tragic outcome, thus, show how characters make scapegoats from other characters in order to keep their “hypocritical” selves (250-251). What is important in Cavell’s work to my intended purpose is that it highlights the importance of others in the act of self-recognition, how the other (‘s sight) puts forward self-examination, and so, allows the rising of a self-aware subjectivity.

Finally, in this discussion I pointed out how during the Renaissance there was a revision of the medieval idea of the self towards a modern conception of the self. This reconstruction places emphasis on aspects of the self that allowed variability between individuals, promoting fragmentation and mutability as its defining trait, a conceptualization that extended well into the 20th century. Symptomatically, authenticity problems pervaded theatre and dramatized the threat of hypocrisy and lack of authenticity in the self, all of which accounts for the importance of soliloquies and the Other to develop self-awareness, self-examination, and that can finally provoke the emergence of a modern subjectivity. However, this was not the only concept that was cracking in modern drama. Also a parallel discussion was developed in terms of spatial conceptualizations which led to new territorial conceptions.

Both *King Lear* and *Desire under the Elms* are founded on a conflict over the division of the territory. But what does *territory* mean? As Elden suggests, *territory* was not a frequently used word in early modern English (160) and its meaning in Shakespeare's work is usually indistinguishable from the meaning of *land* (148). When traced back to Latin, some etymological sources point out to *territory* as being related to *terrere* which is derived from the same source as *terror*. Hence, from this source, the word *territory* means "grounds from which one is warned to keep away" (Shipley 854). Additionally, Turner exposes how the map in the division scene represents a "'modern' idea of space as a quantifiable and measurable geometric abstraction" which has the power to transform space into property (172-173), all of which is certainly in agreement with the etymology of the word *territory*.

Both definitions give a sense of spatial conception and its implications for the definition of territory. On the one hand, there is a spatial area which becomes enclosed. It is the act of enclosing what makes it turn into territory, because only then it becomes a quantifiable and measurable portion of space (and so, likely to be represented cartographically) that demarcates what is "watched over" from what is not –or in different words, what is *owed* from what is not. Consequently, the act of demarcating contours grants the word a more political sense, since the area from which one should stay away, should necessarily be considered a private area of land.

Interestingly enough, the more native and common word *land* can be traced back to Old Celtic, deriving in the meanings of "enclosure" in Irish, "enclosure or church" in Welsh, "open space" in Cornish, "heath" in Breton and also worth mentioning, Old English "ridge in a

ploughed field”, “strip division of a field”, among others (Onions, Friedrichsen, Burchfield 513). Clearly the meanings of both land and territory are in obvious contradiction at times (such as “open space” and “enclosure”), but for the attentive reader, they all should call to mind passages in both of our primary plays (*King Lear*’s heath, open space; *Desire*’s enclosure of the farm, fields, church, etc).

What remains from our survey and for the purposes of my thesis is that in both *King Lear* and *Desire Under The Elms* the territory is understood as a enclosed political area of land, in which somebody exercise a type of dominion, and that becomes all the more valuable as it is arable. Indeed, Archer, Turley and Thomas have found that the struggle over the territory involves “sustenance, security, and legitimacy” concerns (542) and that ecological and food references encode political conflicts, all of which reveals how the territory is not only an area of land privately owned, but a battlefield arena when both the meanings of sustenance and ownership overlap –Issues of fertility, crops, and mundane matters are in alignment with power, sovereign, banishment, inheritance, etc.

The Territory as a Mask for the Self

Right in the beginning of the play, King Lear has gathered a great crowd, including foreign kings and dukes of parts of his kingdom, along with his daughters and servants to make known a decision he has already made:

Know that we have divided
 In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent
 To shake all cares and business from our age;
 Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
 Unburthen'd crawl toward death. (2)

Although it seems to me that Lear is very far from dying when this scene starts, he is apparently sensing some sort of finitude. Maybe the “future strife” (2) he then refers to, is related to a problem of succession and inheritance, better than mere (and background) discord between the two dukes as some scholars have tried to remark. This idea is more consistent with the last lines of his speech, where the king highlights “death” (2) as the motive of his resolution. Besides, there is an intention on having everyone gathered to hear King Lear’s announcement: he needs to make public and secure an uncustomary succession in the framework of the love bribe plan.

While Regan and Goneril had husbands, Cordelia is in a different stand. She has no husband at the moment of the gathering and again, the territory division occurs before she is engaged to one of his suitors. It is my personal hypothesis that King Lear wanted to succeed on Cordelia. Let us not forget that King Lear has only daughters, from which group, only the eldest could rightly inherit (Jaffa 416).

Moreover, the King makes his two eldest daughters speak first because there is the need of presenting the division of the territory as based on the love protestations, so it seems that each one of the daughters was responsible for “earning” their share. Yet, Cordelia alone, facing plainly the size of the remaining portion, “knew her speech was not needed to establish her share . . . that Lear, far from demanding that she heave her heart into her mouth, was making his own love protestation to her” (Jaffa 417-418). Even “the third more opulent” (3), that might sound as Lear exposing his plan of benefitting Cordelia, can be subsumed to this narrative: Goneril and Regan, to the eyes of the crowd, got a portion according to their protestations; the subtraction of

their two portions to the total territory is of a smaller size (as if the eldest sisters' protestations were of little value and granted them too small a portion), that *inevitably* Cordelia has to make hers. Whatever she said was enough to grant her the "third more opulent" (3) –whatever, BUT *nothing*.

Desire Under the Elms tells a different story. Ephraim Cabot has three sons and has recently got married for the third time. All of the characters, including Ephraim himself and Abbie claim a share on the farm for different reasons. Besides, there seems not to be any favoritism from the head of the family towards any other member as to make this person his lawful inheritor, which throws their bonds into a crisis.

Similar to Goneril and Regan's quantifiable portions of the kingdom, Simeon and Peter assert that "two-thirds [of the farm] belong t' us" (7). But this time, their claims on the territory are based on their work, instead of some love protestations: "We've wuked. Give our strength. Give our years. Plowed 'em under in the ground, –(*he stamps rebelliously*) –rottin' –makin' soil for his crops! (*A pause*) Waal –the farm pays good for hereabouts" (4). They equate the consumption the farm has made of their strength to a portion of the land. In this sense, their conceptualization of the farm is much more that of a commodity than any other character in *Desire* and even in *King Lear*. While Goneril and Regan, for instance, exchange declarations of love for territory; Simeon and Pete exchange their work for at least two-thirds of the territory comprehended by the farm. Still, although their idea of the farm allows for measurement, quantity and exchange, their labor has taken much more of them that they can foresee.

Their half-brother Eben claims the farm for a different reason. While he has also worked and spends his time and energy in farm work, he has performed a different kind of endeavor: the one corresponding to his deceased Maw. Still, he does not claim the farm for his work as his eldest brothers do. The former has only opened his eyes to his Maw's suffering: "It was on'y arter she died I come to think o' it. Me cookin' –doin' her work –that made me know her, suffer her sufferin'" (8). The work he performs in the farm is the way by which he came closer to his mother, the way he got to know her after she died, and a source of identification with her. Anyways, he identifies with a particular aspect of his mother: her suffering. Labor does not produce the fruits it produces for Peter and Simeon who work the land –the good pay for

hereabouts. On the contrary, work opens up a channel of communication with his mother, from which her suffering is confessed.

Adding to the slaving work that killed her, from Eben's perspective, there is the issue around whose farm was it on first place. Eben insists on the fact that Ephraim took the farm from her, received all the income from its exploitation and subdued Maw and her work to the farm's everyday life, as if she was part of the farm's inventory with no benefits. Nevertheless, just as Cordelia when she returns to Britain to claim Lear's status back, when Eben claims the farm to him, he does so on his death mother's behalf. "O dear father, / It is thy business that I go about" (xx) / "It's Maw's farm agen! It's my farm!" (14). When the eldest brothers sign the documents to yield their rights to the farm on Eben, his words indicate that his only interest in doing so is to restore a univocal succession lineage for his mother's property. He gets the farm, because he happens to be his mother's only son. This way, his interest on the property is not that much benefitting himself, but to regain his mother's right on the farm based on the presumed seizure of her rights and slaving confinement by Ephraim Cabot: his interest is to fulfill a child's duty.

Abbie's presence comes to undo what Eben had agreed and secured with his eldest brothers by means of money. Or from a different point of view, she comes to question the agreement's legitimacy, because they sold Eben something they "never git nowhow" (13). In spite of her relationship with Eben, she has her own reasons to insist on her ownership of the farm. One of her first lines is "A women's got t' hev a hum!" (18). I think this very simple line compresses her whole philosophy and accounts for her motivations to behave and act as she does. It is only the true, effective, material possession of the farm regarded as a home what will make of her a true woman. She met the need of marrying Ephraim to gain access to the property, but as soon as she became his wife, she was in a stand to "fight fur what's due [her] out o'life" (22). Indeed, her life as she retells has been a succession of miserable events that have turned her into a thwarted wife, house-wife, and mother. Just as King Lear pretends to "set [his] rest / On [Cordelia's] kind nursery" (5), I think Abbie's plan was the same in relation to Ephraim's farm. Nevertheless, her needs and reasons are solely hers. If she had to marry Ephraim to get a home, that was only a way to obtain what she needed to be, herself, complete. Thus, the rights that Abbie claim on the farm are due to her marital relationship with Ephraim, but only and

exclusively to have herself fulfilled: to have *her* bedroom, to have *her* kitchen, to wash up *her* dishes—all of which, combined, create the illusion of a home.

On the other hand, Ephraim has built the farm through time and with great effort. He is an intense, Puritan, New England farmer, reason why he attaches scatological meanings to the farm: “The voice o’ God sayin’: “This hain’t wuth nothin’ t’ Me. Git ye back t’ hum” (31). Ephraim’s farm is a manifestation of his service to a severe God. Head-down, he had accepted the toil thinking that the farm is a command of God, and that the more he suffers in the building of it, the more God will be pleased. From his point of view, his farm is his lifework, the ultimate reason for his existence; although, it should not reward himself, but it should be a pledge for God. Accordingly, as His servant, he must lead his family, including his wives, along the same path of suffering for all of them to be redeemed by God. The farm work is their redemption. Indeed, there is a mysterious and very intimate meaning in his work and in the possession of the farm which the rest of the family members have not been able to decipher, although they work as hard as he does: “They [Simeon and Peter] coveted the farm without knowin’ what it meant” (32).

The former is what prevents Ephraim to give away his dominion. If anyone is to inherit his lifework, they should know what it means. They should desire it for its ultimate meaning and not for his temporary, short-termed meaning. In any case, all of the family members have a reason to claim ownership, although they all, to different extents, think of Ephraim as the actual owner: “But if Paw’s hitched we’d be sellin’ Eben somethin’ we’d never git nowhow” (13). As Simeon states, there is a decisive connection between Ephraim and the farm that prevents anyone to assert ownership if the old man is still alive. Not their work, nor their need, nor their child duties, not even the money that Eben pays Simeon and Peter for their shares are valid commodities to break the spell of Ephraim’s one-on-one connection with the territory. Ephraim himself strengthens this relation by establishing that he must leave the farm to somebody that is essentially the same as he is: “A son is me –my blood –mine. Mine ought t’ git mine. An’ then it’s still mine –even though I be six foot under. D’ye see?” (29). We will discuss the implications of this passage further on.

On the other hand, King Lear’s succession process is much more straightforward: he compels his daughters to account for their love by means of words; the love bribe is the parameter by which he will make known and appoint his successor.

Which of you shall say doth love us most?

That we our largest bounty may extend

Where nature doth with merit challenge? (2)

By doing so, he puts his daughters at stake, although he starts from a supposition that no father would question –that his daughters naturally love him and that all of them will speak, in a meritorious speech, his true feelings. He has no reasons to believe his eldest daughters to be evil, and he is not being fool, nor candid or senile –he is being as true to himself as he can. Nevertheless, his plan to benefit Cordelia above her sisters, to turn her into his successor, was thwarted. Not only he took for granted Regan and Goneril’s love, but also, he took for granted what Cordelia could not do in the end: provide a large and convincing speech of love, which will make her the owner of the largest piece of territory and will make her the sole and legitimate successor. Why was King Lear deceived about his eldest daughter’s “natural love”? And if he knew Cordelia, why was he so wrong as to press her to a task she could not fulfill?

To answer these questions, I need to provide some background information on a metaphor largely extended in medieval and early modern political treatises: that of the king’s two bodies. It was a well-known metaphor in Shakespeare time the one that the king owed two bodies. The first body is the natural one, which the king shares with all other mortals. It is subject to bad judgment, sickness and death. The second body, the one that is exceptional to the king, is the body politics. This one is an immaterial body not affected by time, corruption or weakness (Plowden qtd. in Kantorowics 7). The king is fashioned as the head of the latter, because in him resides the power to decide for the welfare of the kingdom; while subjects are depicted as metaphoric members of the body, that are animated, guided and directed by their head (Dobski and Gish 182). One aspect of the metaphor that is particularly relevant for our discussion is that there is a certain corporation to the bodies by which the body politics is perfect and its perfection permeates the body natural (Kantorowics 9). It even grants its imperfect counterpart immortality, in the shape of a successor who can give continuity to royal lineage.

Then, according to both Jaffa and Cavell, Cordelia’s silence exposes Lear. For the former, she exposes Lear’s inability to know (recognize) truth in others, which is “the limit of politics” –the best *king* can never fully achieve knowledge on human truth, “he has denied

humanity, to serve humanity” (Jaffa 422). For the latter, “she threatens to expose both his plan for returning false love with no love, and expose the necessity for that plan –his terror of being loved, of needing love” (236).

I think both exposures are complementary: if Lear is to be a good king, that is, a good politician, he has to abandon a good deal of his humanity claims. He needs to resign the quest for truth and knowledge, and relate to himself and others having a different conception of person at the base; he needs to do without people as individuals owing a unique subjectivity. From the moment he is invested king, the others become vassals and subjects, all gathered in the body politics. Then, *King Lear* is in charge of guiding and commanding them, though he will never know their true nature, as he will not know his own while his nature remains mystical.

However, that does not mean that Lear is above human claims; it is just that he does not know (he cannot know) how to effect them. As any other human being, in general, and as any father, in particular, he needs love. Maybe Cavell has gone too far when he affirms that King Lear simply “returns no love.” It is not that in his exchange of land for love-declarations there is no love, it is that love has become political. Love is mingled with succession, with inheritance, and power, and territory acts as a token of love from the standpoint of a King better than that of father. While Lear remains a king, all human matters will be political matters too: he will not be able to sympathize with humanity in others, neither with humanity in himself. That is the trick of the corporation of the king’s bodies, the lesser does not go to the better –only perfection can pervade the lesser body, while the lesser cannot transfer humanity to the better. Lear’s recognition of himself and of others is completely pervaded by his political duty, so he would need to resign the crown and deactivate his political mask to recognize others in human terms, and himself in terms of the *body natural* –the one that he shares with the rest of the people.

It is an interesting and enriching historical fact that a model of the English body politics was imported to New England by the first settlers, although with some important changes (Herzongenrath 54). The body politics becomes an organization much less hierarchical than the one in the English metaphor. The head is not the sole governor of the functioning and coordination of the rest of the body member. Each one of those is given a central importance as parts of the body without which the body could not emerge. This time, *ligaments* are what create

the flexible bond between the members, and their core is the love of Christ (Herzongenrath 64), a unifying and democratizing bond.

Nevertheless, Ephraim's religious fervor cannot be said to be based on the New Testament *soft and simple* love of Christ, but on the Old Testament's wrath of God. That is his true source, as we will discuss it is also partially King Lear's one. Adding to the discussion, instead of Ephraim being created at God's image, Raleigh has found in Ephraim's God aspects of his own personality that make of God, Ephraim's own projection (qtd. in Waterstradt). Following this reading, we then can assert that the equalizing, anti-hierarchical New England body politics is transferred to Ephraim's farm corrupted. Certainly, a number of disjointed, not-overlapping, and mutually exclusive sets of visions are laid over the same body (the same realm of power). The personal visions of Eben, Abbie, Simeon and Peter on the same farm are not fully subsumed by Ephraim's one, not that much because they are not united in God or Christ, but because the farm as a command of God is ultimately Ephraim's own mask.

God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones! Build my church on a rock –out o' stones an' I'll be in them! That's what He meant t' Peter! (*He sighs heavily –a pause*) Stones. I picked 'em up an' piled 'em into walls. (31)

The hardness of God is symbolized in the hardness of the stones. It is not only that the weight and solidity of the stones is the ideal ground where to create the church, in other words, the body; but the impenetrability of stones solidifies Ephraim's private dominion. The walls, that should only serve to demarcate the Cabot's farm, have ended up enclosing their selves into Ephraim's patriarchy on the excuse of God. Needless to say that God is a totally real entity for Ephraim, although from a different stand point, God is the "somethin' –drivin' him [Ephraim] –t' drive us! [the Cabot's]" (6).

God's harshness and the farm's rocks build up Ephraim's blindness to the "appalling humaneness" (2) to the "life of man" (2), that on the contrary, the elms grieve about. The farm as a command of God is comparable to Lear's kingdom in that both territories prevent their owners to become in touch with human life as it is. Not that much because the act of encircling demarks who they become in touch with, but because they regard themselves from the titles conferred by the territory, and so, they cannot look into themselves and into others. Indeed, Eben's accusation

against his brother's coldness towards his Maw's perishing is as follows: "An' makin' walls – stone atop o' stone –making' walls till yer heart's stone ye heft up out o' the way o' growth onto a stone wall t' wall in yer heart" (7).

Indeed, the walls serve to petrify their hearts to human understanding within the extension of a body politic that is grounded on the territory. They have been so absorbed by the construction of the wall, thus, the organization of the body politics that they neglected the fact that Maw was dying –they even neglected the fact that their hearts were becoming stones. Ephraim is far beyond this process. His constant complaint, but resignation to "loneliness" is the atrocious reflection of how much his personal stone church, his body politic, all under the name of God, has hardened his capacity to see and acknowledge himself and others.

That is why I disagree with Waterstradt when she makes an apology of Ephraim by saying that he "is the only one who knows who he is; that he has a sense of his own identity and realizes how and where he belongs" (Waterstradt). On the contrary, we will see that Cordelia knows who she is; King Lear, when he is able to see himself without the mask of the kingdom, the mask of a political self, learns what his position is. But Ephraim never resigns the farm, he never appointed a successor, and if there was the slight chance that he could, his requisite is that this person was his child. This is very important because the child is not only the continuity to his body politics in the shape of legal inheritance, but it is also a continuity of Ephraim's body natural through blood ("my blood –mine") (29).

As it was stated, the rest of the Cabot family is also reached by Ephraim's stone walls. However, I want to particularly refer to Eben's own mask. He also prevents human contact by means of covering himself with a construction that is his own personal stone wall. Unlike Ephraim, who never finally deactivate his mask, Eben does so in a complex process of back and forth movements, but most importantly –because of Abbie.

As I explained early on, Eben claims ownership on the farm based on his Maw's right. He does so to reestablish a univocal succession on his mother side. But Abbie's presence as the wife of Ephraim makes Eben efforts vain, since "everythin'll go to her now" (11). Nevertheless, he did not count on ever falling in love with Abbie. When he said "wait'll see this cow the Old Man's hitched t'!" (12), he really thought his father's new wife should be a beast similar to them

all. And although Abbie has her own issues, O'Neill's accustomed stage directions in all of their meetings, from the very first one, are much more fluent, clearer and aware than Eben himself could be at this stage: “(*fighting against his growing attraction and sympathy –harshly*) An’ bought you—like a harlot! . . . And the price he’s payin’ ye—this farm—was my Maw’s, damn ye!—an’ mine now!” (22). The stage directions indicate that attraction is growing between them, which will subsequently give place to love. Still, Eben cannot yield to his emotions and feelings towards Abbie. He cannot even acknowledge them to himself while he still has to fulfill his self-imposed child duty: recovering his rights on the farm. Moreover, the quote illustrates how Eben not only *disavows* his emotions, but he protects himself from what she causes on him, by hurting her—a self-protecting device that O'Neill will more importantly exploit in *Long Days Journey's Into Night's* cynicism. This way, Eben's child duty towards his Maw is a wall against humanity, and it also petrifies his sincere feelings. It masks his true self from himself and from others.

While Ephraim will not deactivate his political mask, Eben and Lear will. This is one of the most salient aspects in which both plays echo: it is the possession of the territory and what it represents for each Eben and Lear, what has prevented them from scrutinize themselves and understand others. The kingdom and the farm have granted them both titles and duties that have thwarted the possibility of acknowledging themselves, as these mask their true selves. Part of the dramatic quality of both plays is bound to both heroes being able to deactivate these masks, and deal with what they have to face when they become able to acknowledge themselves and others

Now, the deactivation of Lear's political mask and Eben's child duty does take place in the play, when King Lear loses his territory and when Eben stops pursuing his mother's rights on the farm. It is so because there is a complex connection between territory and power that permeates their self-understanding and the way they see others, a relationship that I will further characterize in the following lines.

King Lear declares that he will shake of all “cares and business” (2) derived from the possession of the territory and will transfer them to a successor. Notwithstanding, what are King Lear's “cares and business”? Certainly, they are the ones corresponding to his title—that of a king. His declaration establishes a connection between kingly power and territory, as if who gets a portion of the land, gets a portion of Lear's power too (at his expense). This is further confirmed by his speech after Cordelia's negativity:

With my two daughters' dowers digest this third:

.....

Only we still retain

The name, and all the additions to a king;

The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,

Beloved sons, be yours: which to confirm,

This coronet part betwixt you. (5)

We should not take for granted the order in which events occur, especially when, despite King Lear's rage, the motive of this gathering is a *ceremony* of succession and investment. Hence, he first allows the division of Cordelia's share between the two dukes and only then he invests them. It follows that territory secures power as much as it backs it up. Let us clarify this with the lines that follow: what is there to take hold of, to get revenue from, and where to exercise power, if there is nowhere to do it? Territory is the antecedent and what legitimizes power—it is a metonym of monarchical power.

Although, there is a general commodity conception of the farm in *Desire Under The Elms*, it was highlighted how this commodity achieves different meanings for each one of the characters. They have different visions on the farm that coexist and create a complex network of tensions that sustain their antagonism. Nonetheless, it was remarked how, among all the set of perspectives and meanings attached to the farm, there is the prevailing idea that Ephraim currently owes it.

Actually, not only he owes it, but the farm and everything within its boundaries has become subdued to his dominion:

'R if I could, in my dying hour, I'd set it afire an' watch it burn –this house an' every ear o' corn an' every tree down t' the last blade o' hay! I'd sit an' know it was all a-dying with me an' no one else'd ever own what was mine, what I'd made out o' nothin' with my own sweat 'n' blood! (28)

It is clear how in spite of his sons' and even Abbie's expectations, he diminished their participation in anything related to the farm. Unlike Lear, whose old age moves him to

succession, Ephraim's life is tied but also cursed by the farm's life. His attachment is that of the farm being an extension of him –an oppressive extension, whose weight enslaves everything within its boundaries. The farm is certainly a metonym of Ephraim's patriarchy, and the farm walls have compressed his dominion from the very moment he placed the first stone for the wall, to the moment he will sense death and will burn this extension of his power, for it to die with him.

From Eben's point of view, his own success depends on dissecting Ephraim's body politic, the one that is sustained by the farm's dominion. He should give it a new course away from Abbie or any *other* legitimate inheritor: "I'm fightin' him –I'm fightin' yew –fightin' fur Maw's rights t' her hum!" (25). Although, from a dramatic point of view, the success of the tragedy and of him becoming a tragic hero depends on the complete opposite action –of him letting go his child duty.

I now want to highlight how the processes by which Eben and Lear achieve their status as tragic heroes are comparatively different. While Lear resigns his territory from very early in the play (even when it takes him some time to realize that he cannot define himself through the territory), Eben will not resign his business and his attachment to the farm until very late in the play. I will first discuss the implications for Lear of having yielded his territory. Then, I will explain how Eben's actions, in accordance with Abbie, on the contrary, strengthen his mask, and severely frustrate the possibility of becoming self-aware for a while.

To start with, when Lear gives up his lands, he is no longer able to retain either the name, or the additions to a king. Out of rage, he has resigned his territory which is exactly what allowed him to assert the crown over his head and legitimize himself as a king. In addition, he has not succeeded on either Albany, or Cornwall; he has just torn his power apart along with tearing his kingdom in two.

Indeed, even the most common meaning of the word "joint" (now and in Shakespeare's time) lead us to those parts of the body where *two* bones meet and move in contact with one another (Harper, "Joint"). All of which brings back to mind the equivalent *ligaments* that place this discussion in the general realm of the body politics:

I do invest you *jointly* with my power,
 Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
 That troop with majesty. (5, italics mine)

King Lear has expelled himself from the organization of the kingdom's body, being it now a duet between the dukes, instead of a triad that includes his crown. The adverb "only", in the following lines, represents the same idea. It just establishes an irresolute contrast with the emergent dual shape of the kingdom. The word intends to open up a place for the king, although it inevitably fails, since the king has given away his lands and there is no *placement* he could take, not even as a *ligament*. This is not a minor issue if we consider these facts under the light of the theory of the two bodies of the king: with no lands where to exercise his power, he has lost his political self. Anyways, this loss opens up the chance to regard the human in himself, by an acute self-awareness.

Certainly, this de-masking unfolds as a process in the play, the one which let us speak of at least two moments in Lear's self-recognition. I sustain that the first one is much clearer and it is highlighted when contrasted with the figure of Ephraim Cabot –that is, the stage when Lear still thinks of himself as a king, not having realized that when he gave up his territory, he could no longer assert his self from that stand. While the second stage in the process is when Lear faces his daughter's undutiful manners, that compel him to scrutinize himself for increasingly acquiring more human proportions. Correspondingly, the discovery of his *human side* is what turns him into a modern tragic hero. It forces him to consolidate a unique subjectivity, defined by self-awareness, which let him *see* his fault against Cordelia and let him recognize himself as Lear, Mendigo above Lear, Rey (Parra). I will now illustrate what this descent is about, by analyzing Lear's outrage speeches.

Bloom sees in the figure of King Lear a representation of the greatest patriarchs of the Old Testament (*Shakespeare* 477). An hypothesis that is further confirmed by the theory of the king's two bodies itself: according to Kantorowski, the metaphor was taken from religious realm, where the body politics was the church and the head of the body was Jesus (16), which also corresponds to the metaphor imported by New England settlers to found their political vision.

However, King Lear still has a too great capacity to embrace humanity. Indeed, if he ever tries to redeem his guilt towards the victimized Cordelia, is because in him resides a great sense of the human, which only needs cultivation. As Bloom says, Lear's change is not the product of transformation, but emanations of his wholeheartedness (*Shakespeare* 509) –the one that I would further describe as having a very human core. If Lear is a representation of a patriarch is only in this early moment, when he owes a kingdom and his proportions are enlarged. But the one that truly is, and inevitably stays as an Old Testament patriarch is Ephraim Cabot.

If he had been interpreted as a dry, unmerciful, vicious character, that is neglecting the depth of his intriguing personality. Surely, he does not know himself, he has build up a mask, he will never validate anyone, but that does not simplify his presence. He is as large as Lear, although he misses humanity. Ephraim's closeness to the savage God of the Old Testament sheds a blinding light on the most obscure aspects of his personality –so blinding that neither him, nor us will ever see the core of his hardness. If he appears unmerciful and dry, is precisely because his religious sense is so strong, his fear of God so appalling, that he will compulsively avoid humanity to prevent becoming in touch with its diverse and multiplying imperfections. This way, he resembles an Old Testament patriarch in that his God is too outrageous against human imperfections, and he will try to teach everyone what he knows about God even if to do so, he has to slave everyone to death.

Again Bloom insists in that “Lear the father . . . endlessly evokes God the father” (*Shakespeare* 513), which I only partially agree with. It is so only if God is the New Testament, loving father –if we go to the very end of the play when Lear acknowledges Cordelia. Otherwise, only Ephraim firmly evokes the Old Testament God, and King Lear will partially do so, when his personality is still attached to the kingdom. Just then I would agree with Bloom when he says that King Lear is “the ultimate representation of the Dead White European Male” (*Shakespeare* 478), because I think he refers to the early *King Lear*, the one that evokes God and who also resembles Ephraim.

Most surely, King Lear is not the representation of a man, he is the archetype of Man. If the Old Testament's Genesis preaches that “God created mankind in his own image” (BibleGateway, *New International Version*, Gen. 1.27), King Lear is the absolute man, who shares the perfection of God and does not know the imperfection of humanity. Likewise, he

mirrors the Old Testament's God's wrath, being this the source of his "poetics of outrage" (Bloom, *Shakespeare* 510).

Then, in the speech when he negates Cordelia he says:

The barbarous Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation messes
 To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
 Be as well neighbour'd, pitied and relieved,
 As thou my sometime daughter. (4-5)

The moment when King Lear says that both the Scythian and Chronos (the one that gorges his appetite with his generation) are *as well* neighbour'd, pitied and relieved *as* Cordelia *is*, Cordelia's denial is already a fact. King Lear needs not to finish the line, since the construction "as well as..." has already equated his daughter with those "foreigners". *The Norton Shakespeare* updates the following word, "sometime" as "former" daughter (Norton 2342), thus pointing to a past moment in the timeline of Cordelia's and King Lear's family relationship. Nevertheless, the "as well as" has turned time vain. There is no "former" daughter, because there was and there is no daughter in the beginning. King Lear, thus, speaks from a transcendental location beyond time and that creates time. Accordingly, he banishes Kent from the territory with these words:

If on the tenth day following
 Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death. (7, italics mine)

The italicized words again show how it is he who actualizes time. He does not say "*that* moment", the deictic being different from himself as it points to a future time. It is "*the* moment" as he creates that future time, and he is located there while he is also here.

This connection of time and territory is also present in *Desire Under The Elms*, although it is the reversed image of Lear's time:

Ye kin read the years o' my life in them walls, every day I hefted a stone,
climbin' over the hills up and down, fencin' in the fields that was mine. (31)

While King Lear's banishment sentences encode a placement beyond time, the stones in the walls give the Cabot's a much more grounded sense of time. The work of moving the stones to make the walls is painstaking and the action stirs the image of time that unfolds heavy and weighty, and also laboriously and toiling. The stone's hardness is everlasting as if eternal –as if immortal, but likewise, it prevents the emergence of anything alive as an incredibly arid land. Then, part of Ephraim's patriarchal dominion is also related to a time liminal area, where every stone tightens the family more firmly to the farm, but also petrifies their lives to eternity by the very construction of the farm.

As a summary, King Lear's outraged speeches of banishment illustrate how he is placed in a position that is beyond time, while the Cabot's farm has given the family a sense of time that is equally eternal, but subjugating. Still, it is the territory what in both cases allows for this expansion of time in the sense that it enlarges the figures of Lear and Ephraim to god-like proportions. Moreover, following the theory of the two bodies, if this expansion is to be continued, there is the need of both patriarchs to give away their lands to a successor. This is why the moment when King Lear forswears Cordelia is so decisive –it inevitably makes Lear give up immortality and achieve more human proportions.

Here I disclaim all my paternal care,

Propinquity and property of blood,

And as a stranger to my heart and me

Hold thee from this for ever. (4)

Now Lear has most severely turned his back on Cordelia as daughter, on the basis of a political (-thwarted) plan. Nevertheless, while we glimpse through Kent's and the Fool's advise how Lear has frustrated his political body, it takes him almost the entire play to realize on his

fault. That is why, even when his “doom” has been set in motion, in this speech images of territory still emerge. Deictics “here” and “this” have usually been read as pointing to time, but I think they could also point to place, particularly to the territory Cordelia has just lost. Then, “stranger” acquires the meaning of “foreigner”, which is much more related to the Scythian as the people who are neighbor to Lear’s heart: they are not within him, as in “a son is me –my blood –mine” (O’Neill 29), but their place is out of Lear’s self, at his side. “Propinquity and property of blood” further realizes the image of territory as a patriarchal dominion from which Cordelia has been refused. Most significantly, it is not that Lear has just *denied* Cordelia, but he has done the contrary of *claiming*, that is, he has turn his back on his role, relationship and ultimately, himself in all what Cordelia means (a child, a successor, immortality, etc). *Disclaiming* is cancelling the I, neutralizing the position of the self in relation to the world.

What is more, Archer, Turley and Thomas have established an interesting connection between Cordelia, Queen Elizabeth I, and the goddess Ceres in its identification with Virgo-Astraea (538-542). Part of their argumentation is that Cordelia’s justification to inherit and govern is based on the association of women to fertility (538). Let us not forget that Cordelia is most surely virgin (“No unchaste action . . . hath deprived me of your grace and favour”) (8), thus, her body is the ideal body politics, which can most certainly and unequivocally give continuity to Lear’s lineage and kingdom. Summarizing, this is how King Lear has compromised his transcendental placement in time: by his forbidding speeches, he has cancelled his relationship with both the territory, the metonym of power; and Cordelia, his way to immortality.

I will now continue with a complementary aspect of the discussion on King Lear as an Old Testament patriarch that is encoded in his poetics of outrage and has to do with the connection between the self and the territory. I have insisted on how the territory shapes the self, but there is also an inverse connection where the territory is shaped by human intervention. The tensions between both exchanges give rise to new ways of understanding their connection.

Somehow subverting Juliet’s what’s-in-a-name philosophy, the early King Lear is all words, but words that break up and create realities –powerful words, like the words of God in the Genesis. While God says “Let there be light” (BibleGateway, *New International Version*, Gen. 1.3) and indeed there is light, King Lear says “Of all these bounds, even from this line to this, / With shadowy forests and with champains rich’d” (3), and there they are laid open. The abstract,

unquantifiable and mute territory, once and for all achieves a shape, organization and a value through his words.

When it comes to *Desire Under The Elms*, the Cabot's means to create the farm is precisely their own condemnation: their farm work.

SIMEON *(stamps his foot on the earth and addresses it desperately)* Waal –
ye've thirty year o' me buried in ye –spread out over ye –blood an' bone an'
sweat –rotted away –fertilizin' ye –richin' yer soul –prime manure, by God, that's
what I been t' ye. (4)

Arable land is profitable only at the expense of the brother's youth and strength, that is, there is an inverse proportion between the life of the farm and that of its denizen. Further, the images of soil, rottenness and disintegrated organic material, stir images of death and decomposition, but, unlike *Hamlet*, the decomposed organic material ultimately infuses life to the gothic farm. It is as if the farm had a life of its own, whose vital energy is taken from the organic beings within its boundaries, and diminishes their humanness for its own sake.

Moreover, “that's what I been t' ye” marks how the brother's have defined themselves in relation to the land. This is reinforced by the tension that is built around them when they decide to give up their work in the farm. It is difficult to choose a single dialogue to illustrate this since, very O'Neill-like, tension is mainly built by stage directions (they sigh, they become restless, they drink). The brothers do not conceive themselves as different from farmers and as detached from their responsibilities with the land –they are slaves as much as the farm needs care. They have given away a part of themselves, they have subsumed to the farm's life and their identities fuse with that of the farm—their are agrarian selves.

In this respect, O'Neill's stage directions are very eloquent: indeed, the brothers have become an integral part of the farm's inventory: “*(They turn, shouldering each other, their bodies bumping and rubbing together . . . like two friendly oxen toward their evening meal)*” (5). Just as the stone walls grant their quality to the image of time within the farm, the extenuating care of the farm gives the eldest brothers an animal shape. Moreover, it is central how they are not any animals, but oxen. These have historically been used for agrarian work as burden beasts. And indeed, the description of the brothers' corporality and relation to each other in this passage,

the way their shoulders rub, is just as two oxen that are tighten together by the yoke, ready for plowing a field. Again, animalization is the reverse of humanity (or is the base of humanity, as Lear will discover with Tom O'Bedlam) and it occurs at the expense of the brothers for the farm's sake.

In addition to the eldest brothers' animalization, there is Eben's identity issue. We have already discussed how Eben doing his Maw's work has opened up a channel of communication between them both. But I would like to emphasize that his embodiment and performance of his Maw's duties has take its toll on Eben's own self. Just before he is seen serving his brother's dinners, when a compliment is made about his Maw, he replies: "I be thankful t' ye. I'm her –her heir" (6). I think this pause is not to be taken for granted as it reveals where he sees himself in this early stage of the play (as King Lear's poetic of outrage reveal his position). What he first says is "I am my mother;" only then he corrects himself to say "I am my mother's heir." It is not only that he communicates with his mother, but he completely identifies with her while he is tight to the house work that once was her duty. That's why he also claims his mother's rights as his rights on the farm. Cleverly enough, Eben has been performed in this scene as dressed in his deceased mother's apron (Kennedy 100), which I think is a very appropriate way to reflect on what his self-understanding is in this early moment of the play –the particular farm work he performs models his self and alienate him from understanding himself in any other way.

Then, in both *Desire* and *King Lear* characters are created as much as they create the territory with their intervention. While the brother's have made of the farm a valuable commodity through their brutalizing work, King Lear's kingdom is also a commodity created with words. Nevertheless, just as Eben's particular farm work has confused and alienated himself from his self; the commodity Lear has created has confused and alienated him from his daughter's selves, while his daughter speaks of commodities that sound like the one he is offering: the kingdom's rivers and champains match Goneril's "love that makes breath poor and speech unable" (3), even though her words are just mockery.

The contradictions are evident: King Lear has evidenced the fertile territory and has turned the territory into a discrete, quantifiable, valuable and fruitful land with his words, while his eldest daughters' exchanged words are just mock fertility. How can Goneril even say anything, if she declares that her love is so ponderous that it makes her speech unable? Her own

words lay open the falsehood of her love. But again, how could the King know his eldest daughters were not true, if he was hearing his own political language in their words –If he was hearing of space, value and metals? The territory is again where to look for. It becomes symbolic of the general conflict of the play. It crystallizes King Lear’s blindness and each one of the daughter’s positions in the general drama through a symbolism that is encoded in the plants it grows. In other words, the territory’s ecological references offer a perspective to understand King Lear’s situation after the division (what happens to his political mask and what his blindness is about), and it also offers a language that evinces each one of the daughter in their good or bad intentions.

As it was stated in a previous chapter of this thesis, in early modern England there was an emblematic inquiry for the self and more particularly, for the true self, which in *King Lear* is also discussed from characters that mirror each other from opposite stands. Archer, Turley and Thomas retell a typology of field plants relationship from the time, which includes names such as “Fool, Kin and Bastarde” plants (529), the former being a plant that “imitate, but [is] inferior to, and which exploit –to its detriment– another plant” (529). They also establish a convincing connection between wheat and darnel (Fool plants, but in *King Lear* also Bastard plants) and Edgar and Edmund (529). I think their argument can successfully and more appropriately be extended to Cordelia and her sisters, since (maybe taking further Turner’s discussion on spatial conceptions) although Gloucester’s family is also struggling for an inheritor, Gloucester’s territory appears as a still abstract and undefined space. We only know that Gloucester owes a palace and some theoretical extension of land in which he exercises power, although always subdued to Albany’s will. Then, Edmund’s “Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land” (12) is no more than a speculative assertion, which needs to earn Albany’s will (previously, King Lear’s will) to consolidate. It resembles the Cabot’s farm in that each one of the characters asserts his/her ownership, but they are all subjugated to Ephraim’s will, that still cannot subdue all visions.

Most surely, little attention has been paid to ecological references in *King Lear*, despite the admitted importance of territory. Later in the play, editorial mistakes have made Lear enter the stage “*fantastically dressed with wild flowers*” (91), dislocating Lear’s madness by evoking a different image, which certainly does not work: that of Ophelia (Archer, Turley and Thomas

522). The iconic mad Ophelia suggests a different and misleading set of values to Lear's madness: he is not "a childlike and innocent" victim of plotting (Archer, Turley and Thomas 522); he is not detached from himself the same way as Ophelia is detached from herself. His madness is still a self-aware madness, a madness that allows an insight of what to be a human means, and so, build up on Lear's self-understanding.

Moreover, following this stage direction is diminishing Cordelia's meticulous description. She has clearly stated that Lear's crown is composed of the "idle weeds that grow / In our sustaining corn" (86), and then she orders that he is searched for in "every acre in the high-grown field" (86), all of which suggests that King Lear's England was a fertile, fruitful, and happy kingdom, which used to grow corn and was populated by fields; but that after tearing apart the territory, the land in the kingdom has grown "idle weeds" to feed its people, it is a kingdom in its dark ages. A similar idea of production reversal can be traced in *Desire Under The Elms*. Even when the Cabot's farm is apparently always active and flourishing, there is also a reversal of its products and of the quality of the house the more Eben is attached to his child duty.

Ephraim has always complaint about the house' coldness since he arrived. Cold and a strange feeling he gets inside the house, has moved him to visit the barn in several occasions. The barn becomes his refuge, his shelter, Lear's hut in the storm. The cows are not the product of their work, Ephraim does not take care of them. On the contrary, the cows take care of Ephraim:

ABBIE: (*surprised*) Whar air ye goin'?

CABOT: (*queerly*) Down whar it's restful –whar it's warm down t' the barn.
(*Bitterly*) I kin talk t' the cows. They know. They know the farm an' me. They'll give me peace. (32)

This adds to our former discussion on animalization, but my main interest is to point out how the house has become a hostile place for its owner, and how the barn and the cows keep Ephraim's self together. While he is rejected from part of his territory, and the house is in dispute between his patriarchy and Eben's intention to (re)establish a matriarchy, Ephraim can only rely on the cows to reassure him who he is, as the Fool does in relation to Lear. Ephraim's dominion is under threat by a presence he cannot define, but that is reversing the right functioning of his body politics.

Only late in the play he is able to define that presence:

If he [the killed baby] was Eben's, I be glad he air gone! An' mebbe I suspicioned it all along. I felt they was somethin' onnateral –somewhars –the house got so lonesome –an' cold –drivin' me down t' the barn –t' the beasts o' the field. (54)

Even when, Eben convinces Abbie, and he himself believes so too, that the presence is his Maw, I think Ephraim is much more right. Somehow, the place that Eben had so carefully take care of was able to be changed by his work, and it reflects on Eben's actions. The presence was Eben's revenge on Ephraim –the baby. As I stated, the more Eben concretizes his revenge, thus, his child duty, the more Ephraim finds it compulsory to be away from the house. And the baby is the ultimate and more tangible way to fulfill his duty, to frustrate Ephraim's body politics. I will return to this point.

Along these lines, in other Shakespeare's plays, for instance, *Hamlet*, the kingdom is corrupted by poisoning because the king himself is killed by poisoning. Even in traditional usage of the metaphor of the king's two bodies, when politics were corrupted, people talked about *poisoning* of the political body. On a different stand, *King Lear* refreshes the metaphor by using the image of infested crops. The political body was healthy when the crown was on King Lear's head; but when he divided the territory, it appears contaminated by weeds and "Lear's head is adorned with a crown crafted *from* the land . . . when he should be wearing a crown symbolic *of* the land" (Archer, Turley and Thomas 523). The refreshed poisoning metaphor is relevant to our discussion because the fertility of the land now serves for reproducing *Bastarde* plants. This is no less than a reflection on Lear's issue with his daughters. In this manner, the fruitfulness versus the infestation of the land provides a unique metaphor for Lear's blindness: he is incapable of realizing that Cordelia is "wheat" and Gonreil and Regan are "weeds." All of which returns to the territory as a mask of Lear's true self that prevents him to understand human nature.

Adding to the discussion, in this sense *Desire Under The Elms* has a very precise figure to lend *King Lear*: the Cabot's are all farmers. The good functioning of their farm, the success of their harvest, depends on their ability to produce good crops; and if they become infested, on their ability to prune the field. As it was explained, their selves are defined by their agrarian work. On the opposite side, there is Lear, whose lack of training does not allow him to recognize

infestation. From the point of view of *Desire*, Lear is the figure of an untrained, “hoof-handed” farmer.

Additionally, among the weeds Cordelia names, there are cuckoo-flowers. From which bird we have already heard something: “The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long, / That it’s had its head bit off by its young” (24). In this quote, the Fool is making allusion to the cuckoo’s habit of laying eggs in nests that are not its own (Archer, Turley, Thomas 523). But not happy with only that part of the story, the Fool’s baby cuckoo decapitates its *step-parent*. Then, the weeds in Lear’s crown and fields not only serve as a metaphor of Lear’s own blindness, but they also successfully extend to Ephraim’s blindness and Eben’s deception.

This way, also *King Lear* as a figure with which to complement *Desire Under The Elms*. On the one hand, Lear can be said to have fed cuckoos who executed him –that is what the Fool meant. On the other hand, the metaphor is much more appropriate to describe Ephraim’s situation. Then, it is not only a metaphor, but an analogy: Ephraim has definitely fed and cared for a baby that was not his, and who was placed in his nest to decapitate his body politics, to stop his lineage. Treachery occurs from within and his patriarchy is threatened –there is a shadow tied up by Maw’s ghost, who concentrates both Eben’s expectations and Ephraim’s anxieties, and becomes increasingly more dominant the more Eben and Abbie fall in love.

All this causes both Lear’s and Ephraim’s dominions to be called into question. The territories of the kingdom and of the farm come into a crisis and their ability to define the selves is threatened. Lear and the Cabot’s have only two options two: either they let their masks crack and begin to scrutinize themselves to know who they are; or they can resist self-acknowledgment by tightening their relationship to the territory and further prettifying their masks.

The Process of Unmasking the Self

Certainly, the conflict when Lear attends Albany's castle is that he seeks confirmation of his political self, but nobody is able to assert it, because he is no longer a king. This is the beginning of his descent.

“[LEAR.] O, you sir, you, come you hither, sir: who am I, sir? (20). His question is dangerous because it evinces uncertainty in relation to the self. By merely asking, Lear is questioning the solidity and unequivocal meaning of the self and evinces its nature –It is something that can be answered from many different and even contradictory perspectives. The fool provides the most accurate answer to his question: “Thou art an O without a figure . . . thou art nothing” (23). Without the quantifiable figure of the territory, his self is not enhanced, but is worthless. At least it is so, while he does not discover what his own nature is, and how he is made of that “same self metal” that others are made of.

32 Evidently, he has laid open the question over his own self, and all what was attached to the territory is questioned –even the relationship he sustained with Goneril and that allowed her to get an opulent third. He asks Goneril: “Are you our daughter?” (24), because, although Cordelia and Kent knew the sister's true nature, Lear did not. Only now, that he does not have the protection of the political mask, he begins to acquire knowledge on human matters. Little by little, he begins differentiating wheat from darnel. Surely, when he is waiting for his horses to be saddled to leave Albany's castle, amidst the fool's talking, he reflects: “I did her wrong” (29). Of course, Lear is talking about Cordelia. After experiencing Goneril's mistreatment, some intuition glimpses at truth. The assertion is double: Lear senses his own mistake; but also, he senses Cordelia's true heart.

The following speech is the most relevant to understand what Lear is experiencing and glimpsing at:

Doth any here know me? This is not Lear:

Doth Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?

Either his notions weakens, his discerning

Are lethargied –Ha! Waking? ‘t is not so.

Who is it that can tell me who I am? (24)

I want to highlight how this speech reveals Lear’s incredulity to his daughter undutiful manners. To me, this only speech is enough to prove that he really did not know his eldest daughters’ evil intentions, that when he encouraged them to declare their “natural” love in the first scene, he truly believed in their love and in the truthfulness of their selves. His “Waking? ‘tis not so” is the exact assertion where his incredulity is evinced: he cannot convince himself he is awaking to the real Gonreil; he cannot believe that Gonreil’s mistreatment is true. Along these lines, I think this speech goes back to the general images of *blindness*, but interestingly enough, his words reveal that he is beginning to wake up to truth. Furthermore, they are the words of Lear referring to himself (even in third person), that is, Lear thinking *about* himself: his senses are, indeed, lethargied by the political mask. His eyes cannot see humanity in its goodness and evil, his notions towards human truthfulness are weak and his discerning of the *bastarde* from the real plant is not yet reliable. But among all the lethargy, he is discovering himself –he is discovering that he cannot assert he is who he used to be.

All what I have discussed in these paragraphs about *King Lear* is completely the opposite of what takes place in *Desire Under The Elms*. In this play, Eben, Abbie and Ephraim are constantly pushing each other’s boundaries with the consequence of becoming, avertedly or inadvertently, even much more defensive towards their selves. I will now contrast two scenes that illustrate this point: these are the storm scene in *King Lear* and the parlor scene in *Desire Under The Elms*. While both scenes are comparable in some aspects, for instance, their anti-locative qualities or how close they manifest their protagonists’ mental states, they also disclose the means by which they do or do not become aware of their own avoidance.

To start with, we learn about Lear’s whereabouts by a gentleman who, answering to Kent’s question “Where’s the king?” asserts: “Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn / The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain” (55). It is clear enough that Kent has lost track of Lear’s steps and the gentleman’s answer points out to an intimate place, which cannot be located within Britain. Certainly, it has been established that another editorial mistake has been made in relation to the storm: neither in the Folio or the Quarto, the storm takes place in “A Heath” (Turner 164).

There is actually no reference to the exact location where Lear is when he suffers the storm and this enriches our interpretation of Lear's madness.

Giving away his territory put Lear's self definition into a crisis. He definitely thought he could claim a king's welcome when he visited Gonreil and later, Regan, but he just found their indifference and mistreatment. The territory that opens up when he faces his daughter's indifference, is not the place he created with his words in the first scene: the fertile land, with champains, rivers, forests, and most importantly, with quantifiable measures and limits. It is not the welcoming and happy place it was under his reign, but it is an un-nameable space that cannot be located, and that by its very un-epistemological nature, menaces the integrity of the I. Then, Lear's I, that was rooted in the land (the Kingly I) is once and for all un-rooted, abandoned and *disavowed*. The gentleman's words should be taken further: it is not only that Lear's physical body sways with the elements, it is his self that struggles to survive the cosmological disorder, the self he has newly discovered –his self as a man.

The Parlor in *Desire Under The Elms* has completely the opposite consequences for its protagonists. It has some of the storm characteristics: for instance, its un-locative characteristics such as its timelessness. Certainly, this is the place in the Cabot's territory where time compression and petrification is more acute. So much so, that the presently living meet with the past dead: according to Eben, his deceased Maw's spirit inhabits the place. The former, added to the fact that nobody has opened the room since Maw's funeral, sheds light on how this place is a unique area, highly confusing, whose diffused time and space boundaries pose a threat on the integrity of the living, especially Eben's.

Certainly, although Abbie and Eben are finally able to recognize their love, it is still not a free love, a love based on their true and acknowledged selves. On the contrary, as I have insisted, it is a love and a scene that strengthens their masks and more acutely blinds them to their selves. On the one hand, there is Abbie who inadvertently assumes and identifies with Eben's Maw to get Eben's love. On the other hand, (and the character on whom I want to focus) there is Eben, who can only see in his love the crystallization of his child duty towards his Maw: "I see it! I see why. It's her vengeance on him –so's she kin rest quiet in her grave! . . . An' I love yew, Abbie! –now I kin say it!" (37).

For Eben, his love for Abbie can only be acknowledged if it subsumes to the narrative of vengeance. The child he finally bores from Abbie is simply the way he fulfils his duty: it returns the territory a succession lineage on his mother's side through himself. It prevents Ephraim to continue with his patriarchy, to sustain his body politics, that is, it transfers the title and the additions of the territory to Maw through the baby, who becomes the inheritor. This way, Eben is completely the contrary of Lear: while in the parlor scene, the latter becomes more attached to his mask and more unable to recognize himself; the former becomes a destitute in the storm, but this is what let him leave behind his political self and the territory.

Moreover, while in previous scenes Lear's understanding of humanity is only an intuition, in the storm he recognizes in himself "A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man" (58), along with recognizing he has "two pernicious daughters" (58). Further, his words in "No, I will be the pattern of all patience; / I will say nothing" bring to mind Cordelia's humbleness and pathos. Indeed, Lear's position in the storm is that of a suffering human and not that of a powerful king, all of which accounts for the emergence of a modern self, one that is able to scrutinize itself, to become aware of its own existence and the existence of others, beyond any investiture. Consequently, Lear's tragedy is not to have mistaken Cordelia's intentions, but to become increasingly aware of his fault by divesting himself from the mask that blinded him to become conscious of it. In other words, Lear's tragedy is modern because it is absolutely necessary within the tragedy the emergence of a self-aware subjectivity. And Lear's tragedy is bound to his destitution as a king, and to his restitution as a man. The same applies to *Desire Under The Elms*: the modern tragedy happens only when Eben is able to let go his child duty, when the farm never minds anymore. This way, he is in a stand that lets him acknowledge his love towards Abbie and his fault in the baby's death. He can finally face his own position in the general drama, even if it means punishment.

It is important to highlight that this self-acknowledgement in Lear comes along with an understanding of the human that at times touches the conceptualization of the human derived from *Desire Under The Elms*. The passage when Lear meets Tom O'Bedlam is central to understand this point:

Is man no more than this?

.....
 Thou art the thing itself: unaccomodated

Man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. (64)

Without any backing power, without lands, Lear recognizes how little is there inherent to man: all the “additions to a king” that he used to have are simply “accommodations”, and without them, there is not much left. Tom and himself are as bestialized as Simeon and Peter are. In this point he thinks that humanness can be reduced to this –“the thing itself”, but these words recall another moment: “If aught within that little seeming substance . . .” (7). Is Cordelia all there is? Is Cordelia animalized as Tom, Lear, Peter and Simeon are? She is certainly not, but Lear finds that out only after discovering that possession is not all; there is also love and forgiveness which can make of himself and Cordelia, even without lands and power, *dowries in themselves*.

This understanding of the human as something valuable in itself, that is in the core of *King Lear*, and that when discovered allows the consolidation of Lear’s human self, finds two opposing veins in *Desire Under The Elms*: Ephraim’s and Eben’s.

“I’ll set fire t’ house and barn an’ watch ‘em burn . . . I’ll will the fields back t’ God, so that nothin’ human kin never touch ‘em!” (57). These are Ephraim’s words when the truth about the baby and the murder come to light. It is a thought he always returns to that of burning his farm if he is unable to appoint a successor by the moment of his death. Certainly, the connection between death and a successor has obsessive proportions for Ephraim because, as it was previously stated, from his point of view the farm ultimately belongs to God. Nobody has proved to be worthy of God as he has, that is the real struggle. It is not only that Eben, the only rightful successor is “a sinner –nateral-born” (28), or that Abbie has not prayed enough, but that they do not regret of their sins: “I don’t repent that sin! I hain’t askin’ God t’ forgive that” (10) –they are insolent and proud of their sins. The farm, which is Ephraim’s stone church for God, which construction and slaving work should redeem them, should never be passed to a sinner. Nothing human should touch it if it is contaminated, if it is sinful, if it is not a pledge for God, if it is not afraid of God.

This way, Ephraim is completely the opposite of Lear in terms of their intrinsic humanity. While Lear rightly establishes the connection between himself, his fault against Cordelia, and his humanness, and he will try to redeem his fault by seeking Cordelia's forgiveness; Ephraim will get lost in his own lonesomeness, and will never pass the farm on anyone to find redemption. He would rather burn it. That is why, also highlighted by Bloom, Lear seems so enlarged, so magnificent, but at the same time so human. It is the way the tragedy concludes what let us see Lear's human, fatherly side; while Ephraim will stay an Old, atrocious Patriarch.

The other perspective of humanity in *Desire Under The Elms* is the one developed by the vision of Eben. "My sin's is as purty as any one of 'em!" (10) –there is much more we can say about this quote! The moment in which it is said and the way it is stated implies re-appropriation. Eben is saying that everyone sins, that sinning is imprinted in human nature, and so, he should not be ashamed of it. Certainly, he is humanizing sin, because ultimately sin is not a matter of God, but it is a matter of the human. Furthermore, what is more striking is how human imperfection, implied in sinning, is turned into an aesthetic value. Eben plays down on the beauty of perfection, to actually establish the beauty of imperfection, thus, the beauty of the human. He recognizes the value of human action, even if it is imperfect, and gives it a centrality that has not had before. Indeed, until the very end of the play, he will never negate nor be ashamed of sinning, even if that act is from a different standpoint horrid and corrupted: murder.

Additionally, his assertion is inevitably insolent—not against God, but against his father. It is Ephraim who is attached to God and whose patriarchy is affected by sin, while his farm is the farm of God. "EBEN It's purty! It's damned purty! It's mine! (*He suddenly throws his head back boldly and glares with hard, defiant eyes at the sky*) Mine, d'ye hear? Mine!" (14). Although we cannot assert if Eben is talking to God or not in this scene, at least Ephraim had been seen talking to God by looking at the sky (22). Then, Eben is mimicking his father's devotion only to defy him, to challenge him. If his father prays the farm is God's, and he prays that God in the sky to "smite the undutiful sons with Thy wust cuss" (22), Eben contravenes his father by standing in the same spot, looking at the same sky, but asserting that the farm is his. His action is not a challenge against God, but with God as his witness, he is defying his father. By doing so Eben once and again reaffirms his duty towards his mother, at the same time that he demarcates his father's *disclaim* over him. While Lear does so against Cordelia, Eben reverses

the situation by being himself who disavows Ephraim's "propinquity and property of blood" (Shakespeare 4). Eben himself challenges his father's kinship.

Certainly, latent in both plots is a concern about reproduction. Both plays develop the most disturbing consequences of kinship to its ultimate extents. On the one hand, the Cabot's claim and disclaim ownership over others only to assert their property and their masked selves. On the other hand, Lear becomes increasingly aware of the fact that reproduction can replicate the imperfection of the human: misery and failed duty, which the play reacts to in what Bloom calls "horror for female sexuality" (Shakespeare 497).

Down from the waist they are Centaurs,

Though women all above:

But to the girdle do the gods inherit,

Beneath is all the fiends'. (93)

In her essay *The Body of Ophelia*, Cavarero point out how the carnality of the body natural shows its signs in the body politics in *Hamlet* (137) –a thought that also concerns *King Lear* and illuminates *Desire Under The Elms* in this respect. The evil, deform moral nature of women's sexual organs imprints its deviousness on the creatures they bear. Once more, the semantic field of the territory/land sheds light on the core of the conflict: the monstrous shape of female *fertility* organs give birth to evil offspring. Moreover, the perfect body politics is a female one, since the problem of continuity is solved by a body that is invested in power and smoothly can create a lineage of succession, that way, grating immortality to the natural body of the queen (/king) and to the kingdom (Cavarero144). Ephraim's words perfectly signify this: "Sometimes ye [Abbie] air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew . . . Me an' the farm has got t' beget a son!" (30). Abbie is equated with the farm, thus, her body is invested with the power that will let Ephraim have a child on which to succeed. In different words, Ephraim's patriarchal power is invested in Abbie's body to allow for continuity. The problem is that female sexuality is evil, fiend-like and this quality is inevitably transferred to her offspring.

Accordingly, in the storm scene Lear bets the thunder to "Crack nature's moulds, all germins spill at once / That make ingrateful man!" (57). As it is stated, the mould for the human

is not God, but is the human itself; and these seeds (germins) are tainted by evil conferred on them by women's organs –the malformed seeds are those darnel and weed seeds that germinate into *bastarde plants*. Ephraim's quoted words are echoed: "Lord God o'Hosts, smite the undutiful sons with Thy wust cuss!" (22). Both fathers discover that they bore insurrected children whose defiance cannot be subdued, and pose a threat on their patriarchal order. They both are impotent towards the way their children turn out to be at their backs. Images of cracking and smiting illustrate how both fathers not only pray for control, but for annihilating undutiful behavior which is imprinted in the mould of the human –a mould that resides in female reproductive organs.

Along these lines, Lear's speech in act I, scene IV is the most direct discourse in relation to female fertility and corrupted children:

Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!

Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend

To make this creature fruitful:

Into her womb convey sterility:

.....

That she may feel

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is

To have a thankless child! (26)

The female body is paradoxically seen as a tool to secure power but also as threat to power as it can clearly bear undutiful, *bastarde* successors. By removing fertility from the body of Gonreil, that is, by sterilizing her body, Lear is subjugating the insurrection from it, at the same time that the female body is tuned into a power dominion that he will try to control. Indeed, the territory imagery is transferred to the female body not only as a semantic field, but also in symbolic ways we will continue exploring. The consequence of sterilization is to remove the malformed seeds (thankless children) –only that a source for the continuity of the kingdom is also cut off this way.

A similar kind of domination is exercised over selves in *Desire Under The Elms*. While Eben and Ephraim are looking for a succession to their own lineages (patriarchal/matriarchal), the play's motto materializes: "dead spit an' image" (9, 26, 44). What characters create is a network of resemblances and recalls that produce new ways in which they refresh their masks. It is not only that they physically recall a family member, but it is that their selves are mirrored, and the resulting image confounds and distorts the true self. So, Abbie tells Eben the baby is "E-zactly like [him]!" (44), to which Eben replies "I don't like lettin' on what's mine's [the baby] his'n [Ephraim]" (44). Because of resemblance, Eben establishes his ownership over the baby (his "propinquity and property of blood"/dominion), expropriating the baby from its own individuality, and subjugating it to his individuality: the baby does not mirror itself, but mirrors Eben. This way, the bond that Eben had established with his Maw (his child duty) is renewed, because the baby now incarnates the matriarchal lineage that passes through and belongs to Eben. At the same time, if we analyze Abbie's perspective, the baby shares some of Cordelia's "silence:" it is a tangible insurrection against Ephraim that she keeps in a secret; an incarnated, deformed seed, whose truthfulness to real love (Eben's) proves fruitful in an unexpected way¹.

In *King Lear*, Cordelia's insurrection was her silence: an expression of sterile love, that is, an undutiful response according to King Lear. But his motto "nothing will come of nothing" (4) is proved wrong in several ways: the territory that was exchanged from the fertile-but-*bastarde*-in-nature discourse of Gonreil and Regan, a discourse of love that was nothing in its bottom, was doomed to grow darnel among wheat: darnel and weeds will come out of nothing. On the other side, Cordelia's nothingness proved the most fertile and worthy love: her silence, her inability to make sumptuous her already rich real feelings was neglected by King Lear. Just as her sister's body is a potential insurrection, her virginity is the image of a land that is pure, healthy, that has never grown nor wheat nor darnel, whose silence is the promise of a fruitful harvest. But again, his father being a king, could not appreciate her richness and mistook her

¹ From my point of view, this is the true meaning for the title *DESIRE Under The Elms*. It is not about desiring the farm, or desiring sex as in lust; it is a desire that cuts through the material realm but reaches far beyond. It is a desire for owning, controlling, and subjugating all within the boundaries of the farm. A desire for a patriarchy/matriarchy that could penetrate into the intimacy of things and subdue them. And the desire exists because the crisis of the self has reached such an urgency, that Eben, Abbie and Ephraim need to compulsively assert their dominion to know who they are.

silence for sterility (a commodity “whose price has fallen”) (7) and whose presence, being not fruitful for the king and the succession of power, must be erased from the place where it should serve: the territory.

Furthermore, her silence is the proof that she knows her feelings, she knows her voice and she cannot mimic –she let us see who *is not*, because she *is* from the very beginning. In this sense, Abbie does have something from Cordelia: although she has pretended not to love Eben, she has pretended *because* she loves him. She had been using strategies to avoid her feelings, always knowing that she owed those feelings. Abbie is aware of herself like Cordelia is. Still, Abbie masks her own self, and prevents self-acknowledgment, while Cordelia simply *is*. She cannot carry on this subjectivity quest because she *is* from the start; she “cannot heave / [her] heart into her mouth” (4) if she knows her love so well, and she knows so well that she cannot pretend. Then, of course, there is no dramatic position that she can fulfill *meanwhile*. My answer to Richard Knowles inquiry for “Why Cordelia returns?” is that, firstly, she did not have much to do *meanwhile*, so her presence should not be compromised in the plot while the plot *occurs* (she “returns” because she leaves). A counter and complimentary example is Cavell’s reading of Edgar *delay*. Cavell discusses that Edgar avoid his father’s recognition (22), which causes him to procrastinate the revelation of his true self. Still, this can happen because Edgar needs time to acknowledging what he has to acknowledge in front of his father (Cavell 230). On the opposite side, Cordelia did not need the time span that other characters (such as Edgar, Abbie, Eben and Lear) need to disclose their selves. Secondly, she needs to return because Lear needs her. To exemplify, (the death of) Ophelia moves the “play’s dramatic machinery” (Cavarero 149), that is, her presence hasten Hamlet to stop his whereabouts and fulfill his fate. Reciprocally, Lear needs Cordelia to finally recognize himself as a man, and to achieve his position as the modern dramatic hero when he fulfills his fate. Nonetheless, Cordelia should not be considered as any sort of allegorical character. It is evident how she does go through a change when she disappears from the audience’s sight. Her love is the same, her nature is the same, only that now, for an unknown reason, she is able to express her love.

It is in this framework when Cordelia’s following words reconcile her child duty in a unique way that was not available to her in the beginning:

All blest secrets,

All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,
 Spring with my tears! Be aidant and remediate
 In the good man's distress! . . . (86)

In the beginning of the play, Cordelia could not fulfill Lear's command of expressing in words her love. Although she does not do it now either, she has found the means to express it: crying. Her tears are as eloquent as a large speech of love. And they are also equally fertile –from them, the remedies necessary to restore Lear's wits will spring. Not owing the territory, her connection with it is much more significant than the one King Lear wanted to establish between them two – because of the possession and re-claiming of the territory is that their two lives are reunited in the same scenario. Their connection with the territory is that of a father and a daughter that have been both cast out, but also of a father that is in need of acknowledging the daughter he has banished *because of* the territory; and of a daughter that needs to fulfill one ultimate filial duty: re-gaining and restoring Lear's position as a father by making herself available to be acknowledged. In this sense, her love has some sacrificial coloring. In spite of Lear's cruel rejection, humiliation and arbitrary banishment, her love is too great to abandon him. As I said, she *is*, her love *is* and for that reason she needs no excuse to make herself present, not even an apology (“No cause, no cause”) (101).

In *Desire Under The Elms* there is a real sacrifice that make the heroes present. There is a sacrifice that gathers them together to acknowledge and become acknowledged. At first, the baby's murder made Eben more defensive towards his love, Abbie, and even the baby itself as his child, and not as his *child duty*.

Ha! I kin see why ye done it! Not the lies ye jest told –but ‘cause ye wanted t’ steal agen –steal the last thin’ ye’d left me –my part o’ him –no, the hull o’ him – ye saw he looked like me –ye knowed he was all mine –an’ ye couldn’t b’ar it –I know ye! Ye kill him fur bein’ mine! (52)

In an insane rage, he sees himself as dispossessed from everything and fearfully unable to recognize himself. It seems as if he had always distrusted Abbie, because his words illustrate how he thinks Abbie had been always stealing. Accordingly, she finally was able to steal the

baby's life that symbolized the territory's matrilineal ownership, thus, Eben's own self-recognition as his Maw's child. The image Abbie "stole" with the baby's death was Eben's distorted self-image, the one that lie among the territory, his Maw, and *desire*. Certainly, she took away from him every possible veil that prevented him to recognize his own truthful self and his position in relation to Abbie and the baby.

That is why for the tragedy, the baby's murder is not actually a murder, but a sacrifice. Similar to what we have discussed about Cordelia. The sacrifice of the innocent baby, of the virgin territory, gives an end to the circle of ownership, malformed seeds, child duty/undutiful behavior, and false projections. Every distorted reflection is torn down and for heroes, there is only one way out: self-scrutiny and acknowledgement.

Along these lines, it is remarkable how the tragedy concludes with Eben pricing sin not as a defying act, but as a bond:

EBEN I'm as guilty as yew be! He was the child o' our sin.

ABBIE (*lifting her head as if defying God*) I don't repent that sin! I hain't askin' God t' forgive that!

EBEN Nor me –but it led up t' the other –an' the murder ye did, ye did 'count o' me –an' it's my murder, too. . . (56)

This time, it is Abbie the one who takes up Eben's defiant pride, but not against Ephraim. He is not mentioned and he does not matter anymore. Just as it happened with Eben, her sin is kept as something valuable; as something that may be wrong, but from which God is kept apart. Sin is humanized –for Abbie and Eben, it is humanized as a bond; for the tragedy's sake, humanized as a sacrifice and not as plain murder. It is the baby what "led one to the other", that is, what let them acknowledge each other, including their crime and love.

Indeed, not only in the very final scene Eben is able to acknowledge his love with no more bounds than the love itself, but he also becomes aware of what he had done. Exactly like Cordelia, who experiments a decisive change offstage, Eben leaves for the sheriff completely defensive, shut down in his own mask; but he returns totally broken down, de-masked, opened-up:

I woke him up. I told him. He says, wait ‘till I git dressed. I was waiting. I got to thinkin’ o’ yew. I got to thinkin’ how I’d loved ye. It hurt like somethin’ was bustin’ in my chest an’ head. I got t’ cryin’. I knowed sudden I loved ye yet, an’ allus would love ye! (56)

It is noticeable how he, unlike Cordelia, needed time to achieve self-awareness. It is the pause when he waits for the sheriff “to git dressed”, the moment when the vortex of events (not only the murder, but his whole life with Abbie) is finally comprehended. “Our foster-nurse of nature is repose” (Shakespeare 86). Repose opened the necessary gap that made him scrutinize his feelings and acknowledge his love. But just as Lear towards Cordelia, Eben also becomes aware of the way he had been blind to Abbie all this time, to her truthful love. Her thought in his repose made him become self-aware, just as Cordelia’s presence restores Lear’s wits:

[LEAR:] I will not swear these are my hands: let’s see;

I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured

Of my condition!

COR: O, look upon me, sir,

And hold your hands in benediction o’er me.

No sir, you must not kneel.

LEAR: Pray do not mock me:

I am a very foolish old man,

.....

For, as I am a man, I think this lady

To be my child Cordelia. (101)

Before Cordelia’s voice caught his attention, nothing could reassure him on who and where he was, not even the sight of his hands. The doctor said that Lear needed some rest to be restored, but that rest was useless if Cordelia was not there to tell him who he is (“who is it that can tell

me who I am?") (24). Indeed, her humble presence, needing nothing to herself but her father's welfare, allows Lear to lastly consummate his reflections, to crystallize his self-awareness. He becomes restored as a man ("as I am a man") and as a father ("my child"). Of course, this restoration does not happen to his kingly self. Not only because they lose the fight that could have returned them the territory, but because for the tragedy's sake, the dismissal of the territory and the development of a self-awareness is crucial for the modern hero.

This is exactly why Ephraim, in the end, is not a hero. Unlike King Lear in which self-awareness is timely unfolded throughout the play, until the moment when Lear meets Cordelia and this quest is materialized; I have tried to point out how in *Desire Under The Elms*, self-awareness is developed in back and forth movements: movements of partial acknowledgement, defensiveness, until the very punctual and critical moment in which Eben and Abbie are synchronized. While these two characters acknowledge and are acknowledged, the only character that stays unchanged is Ephraim.

"Ye'd ought t' loved me. I'm a man. If ye'd loved me, I'd never told no Sheriff on ye no matter what ye did, if they was t' brile me alive!" (55). Ephraim's "I'm a man" is in no ways similar to Lear's "As I am a man". The latter asserts his manhood to find a position from which to acknowledge his daughter: "The wheel is come to full circle: I am here" (113). Indeed, he had reached the end of the wheel; he got to recognize what his mistake was and what it caused. Lear is here and now, as a man, to recognize his daughter and his fault against her. On the other hand, Ephraim just asserts his manhood to invalidate Eben and to further dominate Abbie. Blinded by a patriarchal set of values, he cannot recognize that true love and true manhood (as Lear preaches) is not about a subjugating loyalty, about "if's", but simply about acknowledging the other and being available to be acknowledged.

When Abbie and Eben recognize their crime against the baby and decide not to escape is also a way of acknowledgment. They "take their punishment" because they know they have killed an innocent baby. No matter whether they regret or not (the "moral" judgment is not really important for the tragedy) the baby has become the sacrifice that allowed them to be freed from the farm, and also a bond that brought them together. "I want t' share it with ye, Abbie –prison r' death r' hell r' anythin'! . . . If I'm sharing with ye, I won't feel lonesome leastways" (56). Prison is the place that belongs to them now, the new territory that they do not need to own for it to be

fertile. It is here where they will share the bond created by the baby and where the possibility to redeem their selves emerges. Sharing prison paradoxically is freeing their selves from all the forces within the play that created the necessity of masks.

Along these lines, the scene where Lear invites Cordelia to prison should be read in similar ways as *Desire's* prison.

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:

We two alone will sing like birds I' the cage:

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down

And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,

And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh

At gilded butterflies . . . (107)

Prison is comparable to the territory of the first scene in that it is an expression of love, but while the territory was the demonstration from a king, prison is the gift of Lear, the man. As it is stated, Lear's prison is the image of a happy sanctuary where he can redeem his guilt and amend his fault against Cordelia. Now, he knows he is not the great, magnanimous, violent king he was; he does not owe more than his self-recognition and the acknowledgement that he has done wrong. He is just a man that is inevitably going to be put into prison with his daughter, and his present is simply to make this punishment the most amiable for her, who has turned a victim of his power. After the whole process of self-awareness that he has gone through, he knows what he has caused and the only relief he can have is her welfare, knowing that he is there, available to acknowledge his fault.

Now there is a crucial divergence between *King Lear* and *Desire Under The Elms*. While the latter, we have studied, offers a resolution to the tragedy, which implies redemption and restoration; the former is frustrated in this sense. Even when Abbie and Eben are caught by the sheriff, they had the possibility to acknowledge each other. Indeed, they will take their punishment with resignation, but also with some kind of joy: they know they will share it, they will be together (in jail or in death). They have evaded, particularly Eben, that lonesomeness they

were formerly so attached to and so condemned to. There is another one –one that has experienced the same, that has shared a sin, and that has recognized and acknowledged the other to its last consequences. The bond has been created and cannot be broken. But in *King Lear* this redemption never comes. And that is, from my perspective, the real source of the tragedy:

This feather stirs; she lives. If it be so,

It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows

That ever I felt. (116)

But the feather does not stir, and Lear is never given the chance to “forget and forgive” (102). The end comes too soon for any forgiveness. The consequence is that Lear is condemned to carry his guilt knowing that he “[has done] her wrong” (29), but more importantly, that from the very beginning he “might have saved her” (116). The core of the tragedy of *King Lear* is that he goes all the way down from Lear, Rey to Lear, Mendigo (Parra); while in the process he acquires an understanding of his own mistake by understanding himself a human, and that this understanding is crystallized by Cordelia’s presence. But when he finally is in a stand to be able to compensate for his wrong, to come to terms with the most painful part of his self-knowledge and recognition, the object of his guilt, but also his redemption, dies. In this respect, I very much agree with Bloom’s idea that in *King Lear* “love is a tragedy in itself” (*Shakespeare* 484). Definitely, it is love what provokes the tragedy: King Lear compelled his daughters to declare their love, but the only one who really love him could not; and the ones who could, did not love him. And Cordelia’s love, in the end, could not save Lear either.

Conclusion

Bloom asserts that in *King Lear* love becomes an aesthetic value (*Shakespeare* 506). But up to this point, I am biased to think that the true decisive and peculiar aesthetic value in modern tragedy is the human. The human as an aesthetic value. Certainly, in Elizabethan era there was a persistent obsession with the self, which developed into a scrutiny of what is that that makes us all humans and that makes us all different too, and that was taken to drama as a subject and as a dramatic device. *King Lear* not only offers the self-awareness of *Hamlet*, but that self-awareness necessarily penetrates into the core of a vision of the human that is singular and that is probably ahead of its time –that is why it echoes so persistently in every corner and in every character (even when they are not heroes) in a late modern play such as *Desire Under the Elms*. The human is divested from all what is not inherently his/her. The territory is what I focused on in this thesis.

The territory constituted a mask that allowed every character to avoid his or her human nakedness. Because of the territory Lear could assert he was a king –he had a kingdom. Eben could affirm he was his Maw’s child –he had the duty of seizing the farm. And Abbie could finally seek completion –she had a home. But what happens when the territory can no longer tell them who they are? That is the real struggle in these two modern tragedies: when the territory is put at stake, the protagonists lose their selves. And their heroism resides not that much in killing the antagonist, or performing a great deed –It consists in having the courage and the greatness of searching their image in an empty mirror.

At first, Lear was completely reluctant to look into that mirror. He was so close to God, he was so comfortable being a king! But then, there was his eldest daughter’s disdain and he was forced to recognize a new state of affairs: he was not a king anymore –and of course, he was not a loved father either. What happens to heroes when the territory cannot tell them who they are? They spend a night in the storm and, no matter how painful, they learn what is covered by their masks. However, there is also Abbie and Eben. They were even more reluctant to look into that mirror. The very presence of each other made their bond to the farm even tighter. What happens to heroes when the territory cannot tell them who they are? They spend a night in the parlor and, when some unsafe truth like love comes out, they further mask their selves to remain comfortable, even if that comfort is based on falsehood.

However, it is not possible to maintain falsehood for so long –things begin to collapse, including the territory itself. Its fertility only serves to reproduce malformed versions of itself: with weeds and wheat, animals that take care of humans, birds that feed fraudulent baby birds, and dependencies that become menacing and cold. Even its denizen become polluted: they abandon and disclaim their kinship, they adopt shapes that do not correspond to themselves, they are insolent and proud, and they murder. Now, can they be judged for being like this? It is apparently imprinted in human nature to be so. But then, what is the core of the modern hero's grandeur that makes him/her actually a *hero* if human nature has revealed so imperfect?

It is implied in both Lear's, and Eben and Abbie's unmasking processes that the modern hero necessarily needs to grow as a good farmer: he/she needs to train him/herself to distinguish wheat from darnel, and to prune their crops. I do not intend to be cryptic, that is, to me, the central and most illuminating image: the modern hero need to recognize who is from who is not. The trick is that to achieve this knowledge, the modern hero first needs to become aware of his/her own situation, that is, he/she needs to become self-aware. How could have Lear know Gonreil and Regan were evil if he had not found himself cast out? How could have Eben recognized Abbie's love if he had not thought about his feelings while waiting for the sheriff? How could have Abbie accepted her punishment if she had not know her love was greater? It is the recognition of themselves what makes them recognize others. Mirrors are reconstituted only once they have an image on their own which to reflect.

However, the tragic feeling is more complex than this. On the one hand, the modern hero needs to acknowledge his/her situation and courageously accept whatever his/her fate is. It might happen that this can restore the hero and/or a situation that was somehow disrupted –the situation we do not know, because it was only an option beyond the territory. Lear is awakened to his wits and to a manhood he had never had before, or Abbie and Eben's love that had been kept in a liminal, hidden realm. Nevertheless, this study has shown how restoration might not come aligned with redemption, and this fact deepens the tragic feeling.

It was stated how both Lear, and Eben and Abbie are offered prison as a new sort of territory, where they do not owe, but acknowledge and are given the chance to live and explore their self-achievements. Nevertheless, only in *Desire Under The Elms* characters find redemption in this offering, because Cordelia dies before Lear can acknowledge and redeem his fault. It

might sound like I am implying that Lear is something like a failure of a hero –but we all know he is not. On the contrary, we met Lear when he was an outrageous, God-like patriarch, perfect, transcendental, powerful, and immortal –Lear, el Rey. But then, we see him at his worst, struggling with a growing sense of his fault, becoming more human than ever, naked, suffering, at times trying to avoid the unavoidable, and distilling the essence of the human to acquire knowledge –Lear, el Mendigo. And just when we pray for things to get better, he faces the death of his most loved and most scorned daughter. “It’s a-going t’ be lonesome now than ever it was afore” (O’Neill 58) is his most perfect line. Lonesome because there is no mirror anymore, there is nothing but pain and fault, which becomes the real source of tragedy in *King Lear*. While *Desire Under The Elms* offers a sense of tragedy as a self-contained whole, which has its crisis and the answer to that crisis in the very same structure of the play, *King Lear*’s sense of tragedy is open-ended and thus, profoundly comfortless.

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