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INCEST AS INTERTEXT IN THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER, ERNEST GAINES AND TONI MORRISON

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ABSTRACT
The paper analyses the incestuous relationships that inform the texts in the pattern of the father-daughter. It makes a close reading of both the explicit and implied forms of incest even as it makes an analysis of the traces that each text supplements for the re-creation of the unspeakable relationships. The closed world of the American South has delimited intimacy between men and women giving way to incestuous obsessions in the family. The chapter contends that while in Faulkner incest operates by way of silences, deviations and trace, Morrison exposes it to the extent of a disturbing presence. On the other hand Gaines works through processes of substitution, projecting godmothers and father figures, but nonetheless hinting at incest even as his works seem to escape from it.

Keywords: Incest, Intertextuality, Deviations

In the history of American literature, incest was initially depicted as unconscious, leading to adverse consequences. Anne Dalke notes that:

> The first American novel and many of its most popular successors incorporate a striking motif: that of unconscious incest. Eight times before 1830, the early American novel raises the possibility of unwitting incest. The discovery usually results in madness or suicide; only once does the threat prove specious. By dwelling on such disastrous consequences, the earliest American novelists expressed no literal fear of wide spread incest, but rather a fear of the dreadful condition incest symbol- izes: the absence of a well defined social system. They used a story of thwarted love to express, obliquely, deep anxiety about ease of social movement. (Dalke 197)

The aim of this paper is to analyse the incestuous relationships that inform the texts in the pattern of the father-daughter, the cousin and inter-sibling incest. It makes a close reading of both the explicit and implied forms of incest even as it makes an analysis of the traces that each text supplements for the re-creation of the unspeakable relationships.

The paper will select for analysis William Faulkner's *Absalom,Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Go Down, Moses*; Ernest Gaines's *Catherine Carmier* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Home*.

II

The incestuous thinking, unfulfillment in the Sutpen-Judith relationship is a telling presence in the *Absalom, Absalom !* narrative. The Negro fight that was an everyday feature in Sutpens stable, was the incestuous urge that made Sutpen project his manhood before his own daughter Judith "That spectacle which, according to Miss Coldfield, his son was unable to bear the sight of while his daughter looked on unmoved" (30 *Absalom, Absalom!*).

Ellen understands or reconciles with the fact that Henry has to be exposed to such acts of manhood, therefore Sutpen brought him there. But she wanted to protect her daughter, her " Baby girl", from such disgrace.

When Ellen questions Sutpen, he replies surprised :

> "Judith?" he said, oh, he was not lying ; his own triumph had outrun him; he had builded even better in evil, than even he could have hoped. "Judith? Isn't she is bed?" (*Absalom, Absalom!* 21)

Sutpen makes his proposal to Rosa "The only available wife" in the war-ridden South. However, Rosa was proposed in his daughter Judith's bedroom. It may be noted that the narration does not apply the word room. Instead Judith's 'bedroom' mentioned twice suggest sexual undertones that are directed not towards Rosa but Judith. Rosa is an agent of substitution. This fact is stressed by the immediate shift of the narrative from Rosa to Judith. In the very next instant after Sutpen makes the proposal, he speaks to his daughter Judith, as Rosa gives her metonymic description:

> "and heard him speak to Judith now, Judith's fact, saw Judith's hand, not Judith" (*Absalom* 133)

The Raoul – Catherine relationship in *Catherine Carmier* is a more elaborated and substituted explanation intertextualisation of the Sutpen-Judith relationship. The *Catherine Carmier* narrative gives reference to what Catherine means to Raoul and how Mrs. Della Jones and later Jackson have been denied in the process. The relationship is first projected in the shape of Raoul's obsession for Catherine.

Madame Bayonne tells Jackson :

> "From the day he found out that Della's second child was not his; Catherine has been the only person in the world to mean anything to him. (*Catherine Carmier* 114)

And later Madame Bayonne says :

> "…. But he would not let Catherine out of his sight… And no one comes there to visit him. No relatives-and a boy is plumb out of the question. He feels that the boy might get her to leave, and when and if this happens, that will be the end of him."(*Carmier* 118)

Further,

> " If she goes for a visit, she must hurry back or he goes after her. When he's sick, it must be her hand which puts the medicine in his mouth." (118-119 *Catherine Carmier*)

However, the narrative makes a shift in the father-daughter obsession pattern and harbinges on an a sexual incestuous level. When Della questions her seeing Jackson, Catherine replies:

> "I' am not married to Daddy, Mama" (131, *Catherine Carmier*)

There are other instances in the text that stand as evidence to this pattern:

> Raoul continued to look at her.The two of them had been around each other so much that each could tell when the other was holding back something. Raoul did not say any more. (134 *Catherine Carmier*)
>
> But she had waited up tonight for a special reason. Tonight she wanted to look at Raoul closely. She wanted to decide whether her entire life should be devoted to him, or whether she should be free to look at someone else. (135 *Catherine Carmier*)

The strategic mention of "someone else" in the narrative is suggestive of the fact that Raoul, Catherine's father, is a replacement of or in the position of her first husband from whom a divorce or a break-up is not easy or probable. After meeting Jackson for a few days, Catherine is restrained by her devotion to her father and she stops seeing him. She tells Jackson:

> "I thought we ought to stop", she said. (154 *Catherine Carmier*)

Jackson asks her if her reason is Raoul :

"Is it Raoul, Catherine?" (159 *Catherine Carmier*)

Jackson's interrogative sentence which is also in the mood of a rhetoric question implies that Catherine has rejected Jackson because she already has a man in her life. The narrative of the Catherine-Raoul relationship gradually takes an implicit sexual turn. When Catherine goes to the fields to meet her father, worried, partly because he had not returned so late, and partly because she had to meet Jackson after Raoul comes, the conversation between the father and daughter suggest an unspoken/ unacknowledged incestuous longing.Catherine runs to her father crying and asking after him what had kept him so late in the fields. She stands on tiptoe and kisses him. Raoul chides her, "But he liked what she had done, and he was laughing as he said it." (153 *Catherine Carmier*)

Catherine tells her father about the perfume she wears and hints to him that she may have a boy friend. Raoul warns her about the rattlesnakes around in the corn field. A passage follows this conversation that has strong sexual connotations. Raoul mentions the danger of the rattlesnakes and it is in this context that Catherine looks around at the ground:

> Catherine looked down at the ground at the broken-down corn stalks and weeds around her. There were not a clean space of ground anywhere in sight.
>
> "You better go on back," Raoul said
>
> "Can't I do anything ?"
>
> "Not in those clothes." (154 *Catherine Carmier*)

In the above conversation Catherine asks her father if she could help him in his work but her father shows her the impossibility of it. But given the condition that the quoted lines are not in the context of the corn-picking, the sexual suggestions are undeniable. Catherine's looking "down at the ground" for a "clean space of ground anywhere in sight,", has the implied subconscious urge that is longing for physical union with her father in any piece of clean ground it if can be afforded. But the father forbids this unspeakable relationship, because nothing can be done "in those clothes." He bids her to go back. She goes back but to return to her father again:

> "Oh, Daddy," she said, laying her head on his chest. "Oh, Daddy. Do you love me, Daddy? Do you love me, Daddy? " He held her close and awkwardly. " I love you so much, Daddy. I love you so much." (154 *Catherine Carmier*)

The Raoul-Catherine relationship has its intertextual repetition in the Doctor Foster – Ruth Foster relationship, in Tom Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. The father-daughter bonding in this text is treated as sexual, and addressed in direct terms. When Macon Dead approaches, the doctor asking for his daughter Ruth's hand, Foster feels grateful and relieved:

> In fact the doctor knew a good deal about him and was more grateful to this tall young man than he ever allowed himself to show. Fond as he was of his only child, useful as she was in his house since his wife had died, lately he had begun to chafe under her devotion. Her steady beam of love was unsettling, and she had never dropped those expressions of affection that had been so lovable in her childhood. The good night kiss was itself a masterpiece of slow-wittedness on her part and discomfort on his. At sixteen, she still insisted on having him come to her at night, sit on her bed, exchange a few pleasantries, and plant a kiss on her lips….More probably it was the ecstasy that always seemed to be shining in Ruth's face when he bent to kiss her-an ecstasy he felt inappropriate to the occasion. (23 *Song of Solomon*)

The awkward feeling in Raoul Carmier generated by his daughter's excessive affection is relatable to Doctor Foster's discomfort" in having to entertain his grown up daughter's "ecstasy that always seemed to be shining in Ruth's face when he bent to kiss her" (23 *Song of Solomon*). *Song of Solomon* gives an illustration of what could have probably happened between Dr. Foster and Ruth. Macon Dead tells his son Milkman about his wife and her father's (Macon's father-in-law's) relationship:

> "Then I thought about his delivering Ruth's babies I am not saying that they had contact. But there's lots of things a man can do to please a woman, even if he can't fuck. Whether or not she was in that

> bed sucking his fingers, and if she do that when he was dead, what'd she do when he was alive?" (74 *Song of Solomon*)

Ruth Foster visited her father in his graveyard at Fairfield, because, as she reasons to her son Milkman, for her, her father was:

> "The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died.… And for that I would do anything. It was important for me to be in his presence, among his things, the things he used, had touched. Later it was important for me to know that he was in the world. When he left it, I kept on reigniting that cared for feeling that I got from him". (124 *Song of Solomon*)

Closed in the small world of her father's and now her husband's house, she had little contact with the outside world. Thus, when her husband Macon distances her from his own life she goes to her father as the last resort:

> "But he [Macon] did move into another room and that's the way things stayed until I couldn't stand it anymore. Until I thought I'd really die if I had to live that way with nobody touching me, or even looking as though they'd like to touch me. That's when I started coming to Fairfield. To talk. To talk to somebody who wanted to listen and not laugh at me. Somebody who was… interested in me. For my own self. I didn't care if that somebody was under the ground. You know, I was twenty years old when your father stopped sleeping in the bed with me. That's hard, Macon. Very hard. By the time I was thirty…. I think I was just afraid I'd die that way."
>
> (125 *Song of Solomon*)

Ruth Foster's desperation for company cannot be denied. The fact is however she wishes to fill this blank in her life by a person who is interested in her, "Somebody who was…interested in me" (125 *Song of Solomon*) The space, the gap and Ruth's momentary silence between "Somebody who was" and "…interested in me", generates a series of questions. It is this hesitation on the mother's part to tell her son that she believed that her own father was " interested" in her. It explains for the sense of guilt that has been lurking in her mind about the type of relationship that she had with her father. The silence is the moment of incest-thinking. Like Catherine Carmier who could not separate from her father despite the strong presence of Jackson, Ruth continued her relation with her father after his death. Ruth wanted her father "For my own self" (ibid).

Ruth's life is deprived of sex and she wished to fill this loneliness or sexlessness by communion with her father, posthumous though it may be. Ruth says that she was left without anybody to touch her. And immediately after his, she says that was then, that she started visiting her father in the Fairfield graveyard Ruth. As she tells her son, she is a "small woman" and her small world, made smaller by Macon's rejections, knows only her father who meant everything to her, to the extent that he could fill the vacant space in her sexless life.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* The Sutpen-Judith relationship pattern is depicted by the father killing the suitor of Judith, Charles Bon. The Raoul – Catherine relationship in *Catherine Carmier* intertextualising the Sutpen-Judith relationship makes the father Raoul attempt to kill his daughter's suitor Jackson and goes a step ahead by making the father accept defeat in the hands of the suitor. The intertextual reversal in *Song of Solomon* makes the suitor and husband of Ruth, Macon Dead the killer of Ruth's father, Dr. Foster. In these three relationships however, the daughters' remain their fathers'. Judith could never become the wife of Charles Bon. The narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* describes Sutpen and Judith as though they were one and the same person like lovers are. Mr. Compson notes :

> "They did not need to talk. They were much too alike. They were as two people become now and then, who seem to know one another so well or are so much alike that the power, the need, to communication by speech atrophies from disuse and, comprehending without need of the medium of ear or intellect, they no longer understand one another's actual words" (97 *Absalom, Absalom!*)

Raoul and Catherine *(Catherine Carmier)* repeat a parallel kind of relationship:

> Raoul continued to look at her. The two of them had been around each other so much that each could tell when the other was holding back something. Raoul did not say any more. (134 *Catherine Carmier*)

Ruth Foster continued to be her father's daughter. Her identity, even after years of marriage remained associated to her father. Her husband Macon Dead remarks:

> "Anna Djvorak don't even know your name! She called you *Dr. Forster's daughter!* I bet you one hundred dollars she still don't know your name! You by yourself aren't nobody. You your daddy's daughter!"
>
> "That's so", said Ruth in a thin but steady voice. "I certainly am my daddy's daughter". She smiled.
>
> (67 *Song of Solomon*)

Catherine Carmier did not go with Jackson even after her father allowed her to go after he fell defeated in the hands of Jackson. Ruth, even as she was married to Macon Dead, wanted to feel her father's presence in her life. Thus when the father dies the large water mark in their mahogany dining table becomes a symbol of what her father was to her, apart from the posthumous relations that she maintains with him.

Ernest Gaines and Toni Morrison make an elaboration on the father-daughter incest, dealing with it an intimately as possible. Milkman Dead thinks about the relationship that his father, mother and his mother and grandfather must have had. He feels that probably his father was refused money by Milkman's grandfather and therefore Macon Dead makes up an incestuous story involving Ruth and Dr. Foster. It is in this context that, Milkman thinks about his mother, father and grandfather:

> " If he'd [Dr. Foster] given you those four bankbooks to do who you [Macon Dead] liked, to buy up the Eric Lackawanna railroad, he could have had her [Ruth] all he liked, right ? He could have come right in your bed, and the three of you could have had a ball. He'd [Dr. Foster] get one tit and you'd [Macon Dead] get… the … other …..(77 *Song of Solomon*)

This vulgar intimacy is textualised in *Catherine Carmier*. When Jackson sees Catherine drive her father Raoul to the gas pump, he felt like accusing her and her father of committing incest:

> For a while Jackson would not look at Catherine. He knew if he had, he would have gone out there, jerked her out of the car, and knocked her to the ground. He felt like calling her all the dirty names he ever heard anyone call a woman. He wanted to tell everyone out there that she was Raoul's lover. (175 *Song of Solomon*)

It is this imagined intimacy that materializes in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. In these two novels, incest is not in the mind but accomplished in all its physicality. Tomasina, daughter of Carothers bears a son Turl with her own white father Carothers, in *Go Down, Moses.* In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly Breedlove rapes his daughter twice, and Pecola conceives. Pecola is an ugly black young girl, deprived of love living with her parents – the ugly Breedloves. Pecola seeks blue eyes according to the white female normative for beauty. The incest in the novel is detailed, graphic and guiltless on Cholly's part. When Cholly sees his daughter, he is moved by protectiveness and tenderness. More than rape, the act seemed as one of love that the father wanted to give to his ugly daughter Pecola:

> "The tenderness welled up in him and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. Crawling on all fours toward her, he raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke. Pecola lost her balance and was about to careen to the floor. Cholly raised his other hand to her hips to save her from fatting. He put his head down and nibbled at the black of her leg. His mouth trembled at the firm sweetness of the flesh. He closed his eyes, letting his fingers dig into her waist. The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy daughter had been. The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his was surrounding all of this last was a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck her tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon. (128 *The Bluest Eye*)

As the act unravels, it becomes one of mixed memories excitement, lust, hatred and yet the tenderness of fatherhood is desired by Cholly. Cholly Breedlove, "Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father,…" (126 *The Bluest Eye*) led an erroneous life in and out of prison. It was in a drunken state he sees his "young, helpless, hopeless" (127 *ibid*) eleven-year old daughter washing dishes in the sink. He felt that she looked "whipped," when as a child she should have been happy. For Cholly "her misery was an accusation." (127 *The Bluest Eye*). He wanted to help her out of her misery:

> What could he do for her-ever ? What give her ? What say to her ? What could a burned out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven year old daughter? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile? (127 The *Bluest Eye*)

The narrative seem to justify that Cholly's act was not a crime, not a rape, but an act of love. Pecola's unhappiness moved Cholly to commit incest. Rejected by the outside world and by his own wife, Cholly turns to his own flesh to give her happiness and derive pleasure out of the incest. Cholly Breedlove does, what Sutpen felt but could not do to his daughter Judith. Pecola was the only female available to Chollly, who could not protest and take him with all his ugliness and deviance. But as Claudia relates, Chollly loved her:

> And Cholly loved her. I'm sure he did. He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her. But his touch was total, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death. (163 *The Bluest Eye*)

Cholly rapes his daughter a second time, while she was reading in the couch. Pecola becomes pregnant, is unloved, and enters into a state of madness. *The Bluest Eye* elaborates on the father-daughter relationship, delineating the emotions involved in the act as well as its consequences. Cholly and Pecola's child dies. In *Go Down, Moses*, L. Q. Carothers McCaslin has a son Turl with his own daughter Tomasina. This truth is however written as a record in history which had to be gathered from a ledger book and the pieces put together by the young Issac McCaslin. The incest in the Morrison novel is discussed, analysed and graphically presented. In Faulkner, the entire incident is presented as part history and partly as Issac's conjectures about his great grandfather's circumstances:

> There was the old man, old, within five years of life's end, long a widower….There was the girl, husbandless and young, only twenty three when the child was born: perhaps he had sent for her at first out of loneliness, to have a young voice and movement in the house, summoned her, bade her mother send her each morning to sweep the floors and make beds and the mother acquiescing since that was probably already understood, already planned: (257 *Go Down, Moses*)

Eunice, the mother of Tomasina and lover of Carothers McCaslin commits suicide on Christmas day, six months before her grandson Turl is born. As Issac McCaslin figures it out to be, old Carothers must have been Eunice's first love. Eunice, unable to bear the shock of betrayal as well as the incest, drowns, herself. Carothers, however, leaves a thousand dollar legacy for Turl. Thus Issac thinks that there was love between Carothers and his daughter Tomasina or probably Carothers had love for the miscegenated so Turl. There is mention of "Some sort of love" and just like Claudia presumes that Cholly Breedlove must have loved his daughter Pecola, Issac too reconstructs what must have been Carothers feelings towards Tomasina :

> So I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger he thought. Even if my son wasn't but just two words. But here must have been love he thought. Some sort of love. Even what he would have called love: not just an afternoon's or a night's spittoon. (256 *Go Down, Moses*)

The nature of incest in *The Bluest Eye* and *Go Down, Moses* is sexualized, with the physical consummation making the relationship concrete and in the context of Carothers and Tomasina the relationship is carried forward by the offspring born out of incest, Turl.

The unrealised incest in *Absalom, Absalom !* operates as a genotext for the other texts analysed in this chapter. *Catherine Carmier* takes from *Absalom, Absalom !* and the entire narrative is engaged with the father-daughter relationship to the extent that the question of the wife of Raoul Carmier, Mrs. Della Jones would uncomfortably pop in, in the context of the Raoul-Catherine relationship. The narrative constantly questions the status of Della Jones in her relationship to her husband Raoul who always seemed to be

engrossed with his daughter Catherine Carmier. Many a time, the narrative contends if Catherine was Raoul's wife. The text therefore sees the daughter as wife, where incest in the mind of the characters operate in the unrealised subconscious level. *Song of Solomon* makes the subconscious incest tangible, incest is discussed and to a great extent the strained relationship between Macon and his wife Ruth, is the consequence of the relationship that Ruth has (or Macon imagines to have) with her father Dr. Foster. The conversation between Macon dead and Milkman reveals Ruth's physical relationship with her father.

This is because Dr. Foster had delivered the first two children Lena and Corianthians, and Macon cannot accept the fact that a father should deliver his daughter's babies. Dr. Foster's discomfort in the sixteen-year old Ruth's ecstasy filled affection for him and Ruth's posthumous relationship with her father, all of which contribute to the incest inter text.

The Bluest Eye, with its meticulous presentation of the father daughter incestuous act becomes a phenotext for the Sutpen-Judith genotext. The consequence of this act however, turns fatalistic. The child in Pecola's womb does not survive, despite Frieda and Claudia's hopeless wishes, Cholly Breedlove goes to jail; Pecola steps into the world of complete madness. The circumstances of incest in the Carothers - Tomasina narrative, however becomes Edenic. The text hints at the love that might have existed between Carothers and Tomasina, which impelled Carothers to give a thousand dollar legacy to the child of incest, Turl. The intertextuality in all the mentioned novels also follow a certain pattern. In *Absalom, Absalom !*, as in *Go Down, Moses* the oedipal model is specifically male centered. Sutpen is seen to harbour incestuous feelings towards his daughter Judith (*Absalom, Absalom !*) and Carothers who is also the patriarchal slave master of Tomasina and her parents probably forces her to have a relationship with him. This Oedipal model is both repeated and revised in the Raoul-Catherine relationship. The repetition is seen in the father obsession for the daughter. The love, which is depicted as asexual, is duly returned by the daughter Catherine to the extent that she does not marry anybody, even her love Jackson, for her father's sake. The Raoul-Catherine narrative borders on the concept of a comfortable yet contending relationship.

Ruth (*Song of Solomon*) is poised as a daughter who is slow-witted and cannot understand the meaning of incest. Therefore, she is committed to her father like a lover and follows him even after death. The Oedipal model in this case is decentered, as focus is directed on the daughter, for whom the father is the most important man.

The silenced Carotheres Tomasina narrative serves as a genotext for the Breedlove-Pecola incest narrative. The Black American novel *The Bluest Eye* attempts to give voice to what must have happened between the white cotton planter Carothers and his own miscegenated slave daughter Tomasina. The Dr. Foster-Ruth and Raoul-Catherine relationship follow the same trajectory, though, without the relationship of a physical sexual relationship.

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