

Frank Bascombe's Loss of Hegelian Familial Love in Richard Ford's *The Lay of the Land*

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Abstract

This article attempts to read and analyse Richard Ford's *The Lay of the Land* (2006), the third Frank Bascombe book, with a specific focus on Frank, the protagonist, in light of Hegel's theory of familial love. As Hegel's notion of familial love relies on the constant unison of family members as well as their individual involvement with self-consciousness as an unavoidable prerequisite of familial love, this article argues that one potential reason for Frank's unending feeling of loss and identity crisis might lie in the substantial influences of his divorce from his former wife, Ann Dykstra, who could be regarded as his Hegelian true, original source of love and the only origin of his self-consciousness. It is hoped that this article provides a different approach to examining family and identity crises not only in Ford's *Lay of the Land* and his well-known hero but in similar modern works of fiction through the lens of Hegelian familial love.

Keywords: Richard Ford, Frank Bascombe, *The Lay of the Land*, Hegel, love, family.

Introduction

Hegel's notion of familial love, along with the concept of self-consciousness, could still be of countless importance to our modern society, especially in terms of heterosexual marriages and nuclear families, since one can simply witness the current drawbacks of ignoring Hegelian principles within today's citizens' conception of family values at both social and individual levels. Realising the significance of these two concepts could possibly result in a remarkable improvement in a modern individual's personal as well as social life and his/her level of self-esteem. In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel views the family as an undeniable principle of every individual's life as every single person has the potential ability to successfully reach a descent definition of love, confidence and faith through his/her life in a small community – the family – in which the members can experience mutual love and, as a result, feel their own consciousness in the consciousness of each other (2001, 58). That is, once family members enjoy the existence of communal spousal as well as parental love, they are highly likely to witness the growth of each other's self-consciousness, which would simply lead to the emergence of their self-consciousness as they each proceed like the joint pieces of a chain.

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What is more, familial Hegelian love is essentially considered a proper means of achieving social existence through self-recognition (305), as it can urge individuals to tackle impending challenges in a much more complicated and larger community than the family: the society. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel contends that since individuals are finally obliged to navigate the outside world, familial love can perceptibly prepare family members to deal with a remarkably more expansive model than what they encounter in their family milieu (2019, 123). In other words, in Hegel's view, to perform properly in society and guarantee a promising social order, each individual is required to experience familial love – either at the spousal or parental level – and the resultant self-consciousness, which only springs from original love in one's family.

However, Hegel also notes that this achievement – either at an individual or social level – would never appear fully unless one experienced an accomplished self-exploration (60), an exploration that could possibly make him/her understand the essence of their self-consciousness and mental tranquillity depend on another individual's self-consciousness. In line with the above discussion, Hegel states,

‘Love is a distinguishing of the two, who nevertheless are absolutely not distinguished for each other. The consciousness or feeling of the identity of the two - to be outside of myself and in the other, this is love. I have my self-consciousness not in myself but in the other. I am satisfied and have peace with myself only in this other and I AM only because I have peace with myself; if I did not have it then I would be a contradiction that falls to pieces.’ (*The Philosophy of Religion* 1998, 26)

As one can see from the above lines (familial: parental as well as spousal), love and self-consciousness could not only save individuals from personal, social and mental confusion but also promise a well-structured, healthy and beneficial society. Thus, if this Hegelian principle fails to occur, one will likely suffer from critical identity delusion at both personal and social levels.

As a comprehensive example of the Hegelian study of familial love and its consequent concept, self-consciousness, one could refer to *Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love* (1999), in which Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos insist on the correlation of the aforementioned Hegelian concepts to maintain that familial love causes a certain unity among all family members, a unity which makes one self-conscious of their own individuality, interacting with others. Having already realised their self-consciousness through this dependent chain of close interactions, one can aim at a proper preparation for further social integration (132). Such is the conclusion that Alice Ormiston reaches as she suggests that Hegelian love could lead to an utterly ‘rational human community’ (4) because it obliges one to overcome their dissimilarities in another individual by sharing character reciprocally. Interestingly, the more differences they discover, the more sides of their characters they can spot, which mainly results in one's complete reunification with their own self-recognition capabilities (20).

Highlighting the essential sense of mutual self-consciousness, Hegel postulates that in the occurrence of natural love within the family, individuals reach their personal consciousness by means of the consciousness found in other individuals. Consequently, they can live out of their selves, and it is actually in this ‘mutual self-renunciation’ that they manage to survive (*The Philosophy of History* 58) through

what Hegel calls 'family love' in his *Philosophy of Mind* (48). According to him, this love is a kind of awareness present in us all, a feeling of absolutism in the form of the family that, combined with 'the temper of trust', would turn the human mind into a certain feeling (49). Put differently, familial love could be considered so vital that we all would return to it under any circumstances, even if amidst an extreme sense of alienation. That is to say, in Hegelian terms, we all seem to have no choice but to discover a particular interpretation of communal sense, which could only be reachable through love (Ormiston 2002, 4), leading to self-consciousness.

In this article, it is argued that a certain gap in the existing scholarship on Frank Bascombe in the third Bascombe book, *The Lay of the Land*, might require more attention, as it could not only shed some new light on Frank Bascombe's studies in this particular novel, but it also would hopefully provide a different reading of modern (American) fictions they mainly deal with prevalent social themes and concepts such as marriage, parenthood, remarriage, divorce, and so on. Applying Hegel's theory of familial love – along with the notion of self-consciousness as its resultant consequence – I argue that one of the main causative factors behind Frank's constant confusion and despair (at both personal and social levels) could be explained by highlighting the things he has lost after his divorce and leaving all other family-related essentialities, which play significant roles in one's state of self-recognition in Hegel's view.

Richard Ford's Frank Bascombe

Richard Ford (1944 -) is one of the most outstanding pinnacles of modern American fiction whose themes and concerns are usually categorised in a recent American literary movement called 'dirty realism'. As the only living author to have achieved Pulitzer and Pen/Faulkner Awards for *Independence Day* in one year (1996), Ford is considered, by many literary critics of the day, to be one of the few remaining pieces of a particular type of American fiction, mainly prompted by William Faulkner, in terms of dealing with a certain sense of place, scrupulously observant characterisation and illustrating a neo-naturalistic view of American modern society. Apart from his independent works of fiction, Richard Ford's part of current fame springs from his Frank Bascombe books, which start with *The Sportswriter* in 1986 and continue to *Let Me Be Frank With You* (2014) in the form of four novellas.

Most scholars and critics have described Frank Bascombe as a middle-class suburbanite everyman who moves from a just dishevelled condition in *The Sportswriter* (1986) to an absolutely lost state of being in *Let Me Be Frank With You* (2014). In a relatively extensive outlook, Elinor Ann Walker contents that almost all of Ford's male characters witness parental failure, undergo sexual despair and encounter consequent disappointment before raising questions regarding each and every one of these issues with no specific answer (Walker 2000, 121). However, more specifically, in his noteworthy book *Morality, Identity and Narrative in the Fiction of Richard Ford*, Brian Duffy depicts Frank Bascombe as a first-person narrator playing multiple roles such as ex-husband, father, divorcee, lover, suburbanite and a citizen who finds himself devoted to his country and holds a wide range of opinions regarding America from personal, social, economic and even political outlook (2008, 10-11). However, as I shall argue here,

he fails to notice love as another grave loss in Frank's post-divorce period, which could be contended to associate with his other failures directly.

It is noteworthy that regardless of different narratives and fictitious details in all these works, Frank Bascombe has actually turned into such a remarkable, outstanding fictive figure throughout contemporary American fiction – along with several other predecessors such as John Updike's Rabbit – who potentially develops into the manifestation of the typical US middle-aged middle-class white man of the 1990s or at least a 'Southerner's unique view of alienation' in modern American culture (Guagliardo 2000, xiii). Exploring Richard Ford's Bascombe books, William G. Chernecky argues that their main characters primarily manifest contemporary American figures who are no longer after personal redemption. He then continues to assert that Ford's symbolic landscapes and characterisation obviously reflect the significant rise in such peculiar rootlessness and despair among Americans (160). Indeed, the reputation of Frank Bascombe becomes so remarkable that many readers and even critics like Brian Duffy mostly identify Richard Ford with the Bascombe books (Duffy 2008, 9). Focusing on Richard Ford and his authorship, Duffy notes that the importance of Frank Bascombe lies in his first-person narration of his comprehensive attitude towards contemporary America, suburban lifestyle, the role of the economy in the culture of Americans along with the American history influence on modernised life (10). Overall, one might argue that Frank Bascombe could be described as a man with numerous titles with 'ex', lost an upheaval of misery and mirth simultaneously (Dupuy 1990, 93).

Interestingly, Edward Dupuy regards Frank as a man of losses', who always carries a long list of titles beginning with 'ex' – ex-fiction writer, ex-husband, ex-lover, ex-professor, ex-father to his oldest son, Ralph.' (1990, 93). However, Ehrenreich tends to take Frank's 'private tensions' as part of a total 'process of internalization', which essentially helps him 'abstract patterns from people and events' (58), quite similar to the way Chernecky believes this might increase his level of solipsism as a result of distancing from the world around him (159). In addition, from a rather different perspective, Tamaz Dobozy elaborates on Frank Bascombe in his comprehensive article, 'How Not to be a Dickhead', more politically and highlights Frank's views on the Republican party as well as the consequent binaries in his life due to his political standpoints, which, of course, is not the main concern of this paper.

However, Guagliardo points to Frank Bascombe's use of language, claiming that Frank truly represents an impeccable understanding of language use in order to stand his frequent loneliness and loss (2000, 6), which could be considered a new reading of the Bascombe books for the sake of drawing attention to his critically constant state of confusion and self-loss. Yet, as mentioned earlier, this article aims to depict one of the potential reasons behind Frank Bascombe's recurrent feeling of loss and despair from the view of Hegelian love and self-consciousness theories regarding family relationships. In other words, focusing on Frank's lack of true love (due to his divorce and not having his ex-wife, Ann Dykstra, beside him), I would argue that suffering from the lack of self-recognition, caused by losing Frank's Hegelian *other* as the only source of love and self-consciousness (Ann), one could possibly explain a significant part of his vulnerability and constant trauma of loss and purposelessness in the hope of providing a new reading of Richard Ford's renowned protagonist in *The Lay of the Land*.

Lack of Frank Bascombe's Hegelian Love in *The Lay of the Land*

The Lay of the Land mainly revolves around a completely different phase in Frank's life regarding (re)marriage, casual affairs, parenthood and career. Despite Frank preparing for Thanksgiving dinner – together with his son Paul and his temperamental lesbian daughter Clarissa – in his place in New Jersey, he and his second wife Sally have already begun their steady life in the British Isles and seem to have turned over a fresh page of their marital life. Meanwhile, Frank's first wife, Ann, is back to live in New Jersey following the death of her second husband. One could argue that one of the distinct features of *The Lay of the Land* might relate to the way readers observe Frank's new struggles, including his own prostate cancer, his former wife's current tense circumstances, the worrying state of his children not to mention the challenges concerning home buyers, referring to his new real estate agency managed by him and his originally Tibetan employee, Mike Mahoney.

I proceed on the assumption that although Frank, in *The Lay of the Land*, appears to lead a different life in comparison with the previous two Bascombe books, one could witness the existing sense of loss and confusion in his current state as he confesses that, '80 percent of divorced people feel this way – bewildered.' (Ford 2006, 109) In fact, he curiously regards himself as 'the bewildered'. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel points out that it is rather impossible to view human beings as mono-dimensional owing to the fact that they willingly confine themselves to the *other*. Incidentally, it is through this particular constraint that they obtain the ability to know one another's consciousness. In addition, Hegel realises that individuals reach a certain sense of mutual understanding within shared empathy and love by simply observing the *other*. (34). That could explain the reason why Hegel views true love as the only way to attain 'absolutely free subjectivity' (Walker 2000, 63). From this stance, a remarkable way a (heterosexual) individual would be able to enjoy this freedom could occur by marrying one's true love. In this vein, one could possibly explain why Frank continues to feel bewildered, wondering, 'What is it about marriage that it won't end?' (Ford 2006, 109) That would be why, despite his second marriage, Frank's sense of disintegration is still prevalent.

Discussing our current society's modernism in his article 'Heart of Darkness: Modernism & Its Historians', Robert Wohl indicates that the modern world is no longer a non-steady reality, including our image of image and love: a being holding contradictory elements such as good and evil or self-creation and self-destruction at the same time (2002, 607). On a similar note, Frank's soliloquy in the above excerpt is an instance of his life over the course of recent years, and one could regard him as a victim in Wohl's definition. Once he remembers his old days with Ann, Frank admits she fell for him. At the same time, he still felt like an 'aspiring (and failing) novelist', doubting if the capitalist perspectives – or any particular culture formed by the power of recent material and cultural reproductions (Schulte-Sasse 1999, 15) – would explain her disinclination toward his current character and daily life as a real estate agent.

On the other hand, on top of the difficulties provoked by modern life and their potential influence on Frank Bascombe from the third book of the series on, *The Lay of the Land* highlights the notion of Hegelian reciprocal love in light of its resultant self-consciousness and along with further subsequent merits at both personal and social levels distinctively. That is to say, *The Lay of the Land* reveals distinct

relationships, such as the one between Frank and Ann's dying husband, which allow Frank and Ann to engage in their occasional but significant conversations:

'You're a kind man,' Ann says from the team bench.

I blink at her. 'I *am* a kind man. I was a kind man in 1982.'

'I didn't think so,' she says stoically, 'but maybe I was wrong.'

I, of course, resent being declared something I've always been and should've been known to be by someone who supposedly loved me, but who wasn't smart or patient or interested enough to know it when it mattered and so divorced me, but now finds herself alone and it's Thanksgiving and I conveniently have cancer' (Ford 2006, 118).

As the above lines illustrate Frank's and Ann's mixed feelings toward each other as well as their on-and-off unspoken dependence on and perceptible need for one another throughout the years (since *The Sportswriter*), one could argue that neither seems to have been able to deal with their life after divorce as their post-divorce life lies have not proved sufficient enough to keep them happy. Hegel notes that the principal reality of ethical fulfilment hugely springs from love, only found in the family where individuals go beyond their 'prudish personality' to reach the required consciousness within a suitable entirety (1896, 51). That explains how Hegelian familial love might be considered a limitless 'blessedness', making its way toward an individual's self on the one hand and his/her *other* on the other (Pinkard 1991, 35). In fact, the most essential companions of every modern human, in Hegel's eye, are their sense of friendship and love, bestowing them an unconditional source of consciousness (Goldstein 2006, 45). Regarding the same mutuality explained in Hegelian love, Ann remarks:

'You told me. I'm kind. What else? I accept your apology.' Ungiven.

'I wanted to tell you that I love you.' Both her hands are flat down beside her on the bench, as if she or the bench were exerting an upward force. Her gray eyes have trapped me with a look so intent I may never have seen it before. 'You don't have to do anything about it.' Two small tears wobble out of her eyes, although she's smiling like June Allyson. Sweat, tears, what next? Ann snuffles and wipes her nose with the side of her hand. 'I don't know if it's again, or still. Or if it's something new. I don't guess it matters.' She turns her head to the side and dabs at her eyes with the heel of her hand. She breathes in big, breathes out big. 'I realized,' she says mournfully, 'it's why I came back to Haddam last year.' (Ford 2006, 119)

The excerpt above could imply Hegel's description of the community frame between one individual and the *other*, depicting a sense of 'mutual asseveration of consciousness, resulting in further good intentions and reciprocal happiness. As a matter of fact, the members of this union benefit largely from the 'luxury' of self-knowledge and self-assurance, cherishing themselves to their heart's content just after relying on their mutual existence (1896, 128) That is, Hegelian mutual self-recognition through an essential filter, called love, helps both individuals to develop their own 'self-hood' throughout their

shared lifetime (Ormiston 2002, 50) Here I argue that could be why Frank and Ann – even long after their divorce and experiencing remarriage – cannot discard their potential true love for each other.

Furthermore, *The Lay of the Land* provides a different means for Frank to reveal his incessant yearning for his lost family union: this time, he asks his ex-wife – his Hegelian lost 'natural' love and source of self-awareness – Ann Dykstra to join his Thanksgiving dinner he seems to have been preparing. Frank mentions 'us' and 'the children' to highlight their past and, simultaneously, existing commonality throughout their post-divorce years. Interestingly, that is precisely when he deduces Ann must have realised how lonely he feels (Ford 2006, 121). Hegel arguably asserts that love functions as the only unity of oneself with another as no individual is detached and isolated. However, they are always required to seek their self-consciousness and independence to unite with one another, a unity which only feels practical if it develops in the shape of a nuclear family, fed by true (spousal, parental) love (1896, 139). The other important side of this equation lies in the fact that this Hegelian value of family foundations not only develops one's personal life but also it makes one succeed through future social interactions as well (Goldstein 2006, 20) as it guarantees a promising society, made up of loving, self-conscious individuals. In a like manner, since Frank himself realises that his divorce was indeed a 'sad' experience throughout all those seventeen years, he struggles to recover his lost love and, at the same time, hopes to have his family back for good. That is why he confesses that his soul has just 'become tired' and then refers us to a large extent of disenchantment and uncertainty. To put it differently, if *Independence Day* attempts to look into the boundaries of pragmatism, *The Lay of the Land* regularly seems to reject it altogether (McGuire 2015, 74).

This notion of family reunion is so crucial that not only *Frank* longs for it to happen, but his daughter, Clarissa, also believes the foundation of their family has already failed to survive simply due to the divorce of her parents:

'If Mom came back from the dead, would you invite her over for a visit?'
'Your mother is not dead,' I said irritably. 'She's living in Haddam.'
'Divorce is kind of like death, though, isn't it? Three moves equal a death. A divorce equals probably three-quarters of death' (Ford 2006, 185).

It is in these lines that Clarissa openly raises the issue of her parent's divorce, describing it as 'death'. I suggest that this figurative picture of death, in her view, might denote the death of both the personal and social selves of the family members. That is, divorce seems to have prevented Frank's family members from practising their actual familial roles, enjoying their original sense of self-recognition, experiencing mutual love and, as a result, taking the necessary steps for further participation in society as accomplished 'citizens', according to Hegel's definition of familial love. This practical Hegelian importance of the family relates to other similar Hegelian concepts of 'inner essence' or 'existing-in-itself', which not only develops one's attitude towards the world but also constructs their sense of independence before playing their social roles as beings in a more extended society (Hegel 2019, 247).

In the above excerpt, Clarissa appears to challenge Frank, reminding him of his life-changing tragic flaw, his divorce. Interestingly, in Hegel's view, individual members of a family possess the potential to

transform into a 'self-dependent person in terms of both feeling and reality if and only if s/he receives and comprehends the right of their position through feelings and love long before receiving further social roles concerning financial issues, survival skills or educational matters (1896, 139). Similarly, Hegelian philosophy of family morality and consequent commitment to society lies in the stability of marriage: Hegel strongly contends that once one gets divorced and loses the touch of their (natural) family; instead, one loses track of their selfhood and familial ethnicity, which make them interact with other human beings either in private or social life (Goldstein 2006, 158). Given that, reading Hegel from the mentioned perspective, Adams remarks that marriage is not simply the wife and husband, but the relation between these two is considered a third part, which helps their self-recognition survive (9).

Interestingly enough, in his 2015 interview with Louisiana Channel about his non-Bascombe novel, *Canada*, Richard Ford elaborates on the concept of love and asserts that life with love is the kind of life that should always be... this love, this unconditional love (Ford 2012). Likewise, Frank Bascombe also believes, 'Truthfully, love seems to cover the ground best of all.' (Ford 2006, 364) One might argue that he, too, is after the unconditional love he has already lost. Indeed, part of Frank's and Ann's dissatisfaction with their second marriages and spouses could be due to the conditioned, bounded love they tried to recreate for themselves, while they both needed to love unconditionally, which happens only if one maintains and protects their natural, true love. This sense of frustration appears more than ever when Frank finds himself lonely with Sally, planning to get back to her own true love:

'She went to bed early again—after I asked if maybe she should call Blumberg on Monday and schedule a work-up. Maybe she was anemic. She said she would, then went to sleep at nine and slept twelve hours, emerging downstairs into the kitchen Sunday morning, weak-eyed, sallow and sunkshouldered—where I was sitting, eating a pink grapefruit and reading about the Lakers in the *Times*—to tell me she was leaving me to live with Wally in Mull, and that she'd decided it was worse to let someone you love be alone forever than to be with someone (me!) who didn't need her all that much, even though she knew I loved her and she loved me. This is when she said things about the "circumstances" and about importance. But to this day, I don't understand the calculus, though it has a lot in common with other things people do' (Ford 2006, 150).

I argue that the above lines could be an indication of Frank's miscalculation (to use his terms) in his second marriage to Sally, which leads to one of his important reorientations after his divorce and sporadic, futile relationships. After all those states of uncertainty and constant feelings of self-loss, Franks comes to realise that Sally has simply decided to leave him for her first husband, Wally. Sadly to Frank, this and the fact that he would be left alone might denote Hegel's emphasis on the significance of one's original source of love, the exact role of 'circumstances and importance' that Frank seems to have misunderstood throughout the novel. The true inner side of marriage is, of course, only monogamous in Hegel's eye, as the subjective form of the actual practical institution rises only out of a 'mutual renunciation' of personality, something that cannot be shared or provided elsewhere. Simply put, (true,

natural) Hegelian marriage gives the right of awareness to individuals through the *other* as long as this *otherness* emerges in a unit called family (1896, 145). Hegel has chosen love and sympathy to explain the sense of reciprocated acknowledgement and recognition to make the concept in question as comprehensible as possible (Navickas 1976, 98). Hence, Frank Bascombe could be argued to have been exposed to the severe disappearance of all the alternatives he has already selected in his post-divorce life and cannot help contemplating the reunion of his ex-wife and family members as he feels empty of a constant, consistent, and promising self-definition due to the loss of his *other*: Ann, their married life and their natural family orbit.

In his *Hegel & Modern Society*, Charles Taylor takes Hegelian reciprocal understanding and asserts that one's happiness, especially in terms of social relationships, relies on the elementary concept of a 'perfect mutual adjustment', which will not be achieved unless they benefit from their true love (2015, 1). Interestingly, Frank also learns about the same key to happiness and successfully observes it through his relations with others, including Clare, who is filled with a certain type of envy as he remarks, '- as I walk him back down and out to his only Connect truck. He's happy to be heading home empty-handed, happy to be going where someone loves him' (Ford 2006, 221).

Furthermore, reading Hegelian love from a social point of view, Ormiston writes that divorce works and does not disappoint one only when it guarantees adequate love elsewhere, somewhere, except the previous family. However, Frank constantly misses what he used to have before his divorce, not only throughout *The Lay of the Land* but also in the whole tetralogy: his wife (true love), his children, and a strongly lost sense of family bond and intimacy. What other studies on Bascombe seem to have neglected is to highlight the fact that all these omnipresent expressions of regret and confusion within the Bascombe tetralogy suffice to confirm the fact that Frank's divorce (happened right before the beginning of the first book, *The Sportswriter*) made him lose 'the basic experience of loving and being loved' (Ford 2006, 97) as he confesses that, 'one year after my divorce from Ann, a time when my existence seemed in jeopardy of fading into a pointless background of the onward rush of life' (228). And this is precisely the main concern of this article to relate this sense of loss in *The Lay of the Land*, as a pure example of the Bascombe tetralogy, to the Hegelian theory of familial love and self-consciousness, hoping to fill a particular gap in the Bascombe studies that have been carried out so far.

Examining the concept of the family from a Hegelian point of view, Stern contends that family plays a crucial role in one's life since what this small community can do would be beyond society's capabilities because one's family prepares him/her for their future (personal as well as social) life and does something which could be valued outside the realm of nature (136). Accordingly, Frank shows a helpless obsession with the image of his family members at his door after such a long time as he confesses that he not only carries the memory of his dead son, Ralph, with himself at all times, but he expects his other son, Paul, to turn up any possible moment and make his day from time to time (Ford 2006, 265). Sadly enough, Frank continues his self-pity and confession, admitting that 'What has developed is that my life's become alloyed with loss.' (265).

Out of despair, in one of the final scenes of the novel, Frank decides to ring Ann and finally bursts out, 'Listen, sweetheart, I've never been so in love with anybody in my whole fucking life' (Ford 2006,

287). In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel strongly stresses that the first component of natural love through marriage is that 'I will be no longer an independent self-sufficing person' and that 'if I were such a person, I should feel myself lacking and incomplete.' He continues to argue that the second element of this love 'is that I gain myself in another person, in whom I am recognised' just as s/he is in the *other*. No matter how contradictory this complex emotion might seem, Hegel regards mutual love in the form of married life as 'both the source and solution of this contradiction, as an ethical union' (1896, 139). Reading Hegelian love and the way it proves to be problematical, David Kolb calls this Hegelian absolute reconciliation or the highest negation of negative 'actual love' (52). Frank admits that he has learnt a lesson throughout all those stormy, unstable years after his divorce, and he declares, 'You don't abandon the love of your life' (Ford 2006, 289). Alternatively, if you do abandon the 'actual love' of your life, you are likely to encounter maddening illusions you may not get rid of, just like Frank when he finally seems even to doubt Ann's identity as he thinks to himself hesitantly in a scene, 'Ann my wife. Ann my not wife. Ann my never-to-be' (292). One can realise why Hegel gives such emphasis to familial love and regards it as 'the most fundamental identity we possess' (Brooks 2007, 84). That could be why when Frank remembers the past and his old, married life days, recalling regretfully, 'a neighborhood where I once resided, where Ann resides today and where once Paul and Clarissa were sweet children' (Ford 2006, 346). Interestingly, in the final pages of *The Lay of the Land*, Frank eventually comes up with his own definition of manhood and womanhood and claims, 'If man be a golden impossibility, his life's line a hair's breadth across, what is woman? A golden possibility? Her life's line a lifeline thrown to save me from drowning' (296).

Above all, what makes Frank face a more significant strike and adds more to his current anguish by threatening his so-called 'Permanent Period' is the fact that just after Sally departs for her long-gone husband, believed to be dead, Frank is diagnosed with prostate cancer and is partly made to return to his early circle of lonely days after his divorce. What is more, now with his second wife gone after losing his first, original wife (love) with an intention to revive the love and contact of their children, Frank reaches a different interpretation of death: he not only thinks of Ralph's death just like the two other previous Bascombe books, but he also contemplates his own death now, located some time in an uncertain spot in the future (McGuire 2015, 75).

Conclusion

In his analysis of familial love, Hegel regards individuals as vehicles to help each other reach self-awareness through the power of love, especially the familial type (Houlgate 28). As a characteristic of Hegel's philosophy, the separation of self-consciousness and alienation necessitates one's consciousness to depend on another consciousness (Feldman 54) so as to turn into self-consciousness in the end. Moreover, that is exactly why Frank, somewhat unconsciously, struggles to reunite his family orbit and reconcile with his ex-wife (his originally true Hegelian source of love and the other consciousness) to hopefully compensate for his access to his own self-recognition and finally feel his independent self and character.

Despite Frank's personal life predicaments and his private dilemmas throughout *The Lay of the Land* as well as the other Bascombe books, Richard Ford might have impeccably shaped this protagonist of his as a representative of modern fictional American social-cultural quandaries in terms of failed family relationships and parenthood. Speaking of national issues, Frank admits, 'America is a country lost in its own escrow' (314). This might remind one of Jeffrey J. Folks' argument, noting that apart from Richard Ford's main characters' struggle in search for an individualistic essence, they all seem to 'express an urgency' regarding the communal future of American society so that the absurdity of a denationalised explanation for the discontent of the whole American contemporary middle-class citizens would be clarified appropriately enough (73).

The criterion I have invoked in assessing Frank Bascombe in *The Lay of the Land* implies the potential fact that Frank, 'a man haunted by his past and troubled by his present' (Hahn, 174), not only fails to work out his personal sense of identity and living world but also finds his sense of parenting and his need of family union at a loss. Owing to the same sense of place throughout the Bascombe series in terms of delving into the American landscape, one could argue that Frank in *The Lay of the Land*, too, shows a telling tendency towards viewing his neighbourhood as a microcosm where he once lived, the same place Ann lives today, the where he once embraced Paul and Clarissa, his 'sweet little kids' (346), implying a true Hegelian family of love and mutual recognition.

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طالب دكتوراه في الأدب الإنجليزي، جامعة مالايا، ماليزيا

الملخص

يحاول هذا المقال قراءة كتاب (الوضع الراهن) لريتشارد فورد وتحليله، وهو ثالث كتاب لباسكومب، يسبقه (كاتب الرياضى)، (عيد الاستقلال) وتليها مجموعة من أربع روايات بعنوان (اسمحوا لي أن أكون صريحاً معك). باستخدام نظرية هيكل عن الحب (العائلي)، التي تستند إلى جزأين رئيسيين مستمدين من أيديولوجية هيكل ومفهوم الحب، تجادل هذه المقالة بأن السبب الرئيسي وراء الحيرة العقلية وأزمة الهوية لدى فرانك باسكومب يمكن أن يكون في الآثار المترتبة على طلاقه من زوجته السابقة (آن ديكسترا) التي يمكن اعتبارها حبه الهيكل الحقيقي والأصلي والمصدر الوحيد لاعترافه بذاته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ريتشارد فورد، هيكل، حب، فرانك باسكومب.

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