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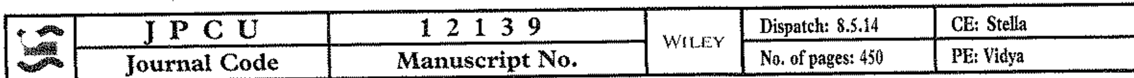
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Where Have All the Good Men Gone?: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Absent Fathers and Damaged Dads on ABC's *Lost*

MELISSA AMES

IT IS COMMONPLACE IN CULTURAL STUDIES TO CLAIM THAT EVERYTHING is constructed. Therefore, to state with an air of certainty that fatherhood is a constructed role formed from the images and expectations of any given society at any given time would hardly surprise many. In fact, the argument itself is not new. Luigi Zoja, the former President of the International Association for Analytical Psychology, has studied the figure of the father and argued that the father's underlying image, at least in the Western world, has been profoundly shaped by Greek mythology, Roman law, Christianity, and both the French and Industrial revolutions (9). As a Jungian psychologist, Zoja contends that there is more to the formation of father imagery than just historical and contemporary forces aligning to assist in its construction. Part of that construction runs much deeper, exists on a subconscious level, and is archetypal. So, despite the shifting parental trends occurring in the 21st century—the change in the father's role as head of the household for example—part of the image of the father figure remains static and unchanging, the product of centuries of solidification.

Jungian psychologists in particular are fascinated with what they call "the collective aspects of man's nature" (Samuels 4). Andrew Samuels explains that this part of human makeup is "formed from collective material such as myth, legends, and recorded/observed patterns" (4). In studying the father in particular, he explains that "behind the personal father whom we know and to whom we relate,

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lies an innate psychological structure which influences the way we experience him" (23). Therefore, beneath one's images of his or her father is a combination of "archetypally and culturally determined expectations [. . .] and the personal, historical experience of the idiosyncrasies of a particular man. The flavor of one's image of father depends upon the personal father's mediation of the archetypal father" (Samuels 23–4). The reason psychologists from all schools of thought have spent such time theorizing this particular role is the stock they place in the father's overall ability to affect the psychological maturation of their patients, making him "a powerful inner agent in the emotional life of" his offspring (Samuels 2). Even Carl Jung himself cautioned that "parents should always be conscious of the fact that they themselves are the principal causes of neurosis in their children" (*Collected Works*, 17). Many times this stems from parents placing their personal baggage, and projecting missed opportunities, upon their children in an attempt to live vicariously through them. Jung writes: "what usually has the strongest psychic effect on the child is the life which the parents (and ancestors too. . .) have not lived" (*Collected Works*, 17). Jung explains further:

> Generally speaking, all the life which the parents could have lived but of which they thwarted themselves for artificial motives is passed onto the children in substitute form. That is to say, the children are driven unconsciously in a direction that is intended to compensate for everything that was unfulfilled in the lives of their parents. (qtd. in Samuels 49)

According to Ralph Layland, fathers who sidestep this common pitfall would fall into Jung's category of the "the loving father"—one "who can accept that it is the (child's) right to bring to him all its needs, wishes, fantasies and feelings, but does not expect the (child) to deal with his own mainly unconscious needs, wishes, fantasies or feelings that are inappropriate to that relationship" (156). Quite obviously, the personal father's impact on his child—good or bad—is not one that should be underestimated.

The father figure remains more than just a representative of the personal father, the individual man known to his son or daughter. This figure also becomes a symbol standing in for all authority figures, for order, law, and government. Michael Bader argues that the

nation, an ultimate authority for many, is often viewed as "a metaphor for a family" and that "we project onto ever-expanding forms of social authority the longings originally satisfied by parents" in our childhood (582). He continues that "on a symbolic level, we look to our leaders to provide the protection and strength usually associated with fathers" (582). Even the terminology utilized for government heads, phrases like "the Founding Fathers," reveals this conflation (Bader 582). With this dual layer to the father figure, it should not be surprising that narratives across popular culture are ripe with complex father figures and offer up a multitude of telling father issues. In American texts at least, this bombardment may likely be the result of two completely unrelated conditions: the changing status of the father in the 21st century and the national crisis in authority and security after the 9/11 attacks.

This first motivating force means that fictional fathers stand in for real fathers and that the narratives in which they appear are trying to work through problems of domesticity and patriarchy in the family —private zone issues transferred into the public space of mass mediated entertainment. For example, the past century has seen a rethinking of the role of the father and traditional male expectations in general. Samuels credits the 1970s women's movement for assisting in this re-visioning (3). Psychologists now report seeing a "new kind of man" with new kinds of problems:

> He is a loving and attentive father to his children, a sensitive and committed marital partner, concerned with world peace and the state of the environment; he may be vegetarian. Often, he will announce himself as a feminist. He is, in fact, a wholly laudable person. But he is not happy—and bids fair to stay miserable until either the world adjusts to him or he manages truly to *integrate* his behavioural and role changes at a level of psychological depth. (Samuels 3)

Part of this adjustment the father has had to make, one that conflicts with centuries of cultural training, stems from a shift that has occurred within the past few decades from viewing the father as "the head of the family" to viewing him as a "co-parent" (Zoja 9). And, in more and more families, with the father's financial responsibility as the head of the family becoming less necessary and divorce becoming more common, "it has been said that the father is becoming a luxury"

(Zoja 225). Zoja explains that "his traditional psychological functions are exercised to an ever slighter degree. His material tasks are conferred to mothers or institutions. His erosion as a psychological figure is often now accompanied by physical disappearance" (Zoja 225). Studies have tracked this trend of the disappearing father in The United States throughout the last decades of the 20th century and into the 21st. Although this disappearance is often physical, in many cases it is simply emotional. It has been reported that American fathers "spend an average of seven minutes a day with their children" (Zoja 225). This lack of quality time spent between father and child is viewed by many as a failure to fulfill the parental role.

However, the personal father is not the only authority figure being accused of failing to live up to his obligations. The second motivating force behind the plethora of failed father figures plaguing fictional narratives might be indicative of other larger authorial failures: for example, governmental failures post-9/11. This would mean that these fictional fathers are allegorical in nature, and that these storylines are working through problems of national concern. ABC's groundbreaking television drama, *Lost*, offers a multitude of father figures that suggests not only a crisis concerning the role of the father in the 21st century but also the crisis of national security experienced by Americans after the attacks. In particular, the program showcases three specific types of troubled father/child relationships: those in which the father is absent and/or dead, those where the father is portrayed as abusive and/or evil, and those where the father and child are estranged and/or their relationship is severely damaged.

The Importance of "Dead" Dads in Narratives Across Media

Scholars have long been fascinated with the problematized father/child relationship and its portrayal in narrative works. Of particular interest is often the representation of the absent and/or dead father. Roland Barthes boldly suggests that the absent father is almost a prerequisite to narrative success, stating, "every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the absent, hidden or hypostatized father" (10). Other scholars have agreed that for both narrative and character development to happen, fathers must be absent. Jason Bain-

bridge, for example, argues that "for a great variety of stories, from *Oedipus Rex* to *Harry Potter* to *Equus* to *Dexter* to any of the Pixar movies, it is the absence of the father that initiates the narrative and, in many cases, forces the protagonist to assume the role of the hero" (1). However, it should be cautioned that for the absent father to really have a narrative affect, he must be more than simply absent and missing from the storyline; "he must be alluded to, represented (often metonymically), and affect the action" (Dervin 53).

This figure of the dead father is often analyzed through a Freudian or Jungian lens. One common way that academics read such narratives is through Freud's discussion of father-murder and father-rescue —the theory that children simultaneously long to bring about their fathers' downfall and salvation. Michael Zeitlin analyzes Donald Barthelme's *Dead Father,* claiming it is involved in a complex (and direct) commentary on this Freudian notion (197). Zeitlin draws attention to this moment within the text: "On the rescue of fathers... When you have rescued a father from whatever terrible threat menaces him, then you feel, for a moment, that you are the father and he is not. For a moment. This is the only moment in your life you will feel this way" (198). In this passage Zeitlin claims that "Barthelme is following and reiterating the original Freudian explication of the rescue fantasy: 'All [the son's] instincts, those of tenderness, gratitude, lustfulness, defiance and independence, find satisfaction in the single wish *to be his own father*'" (198). Barthelme's novel explicitly addresses Freud's belief that many children long for the death of the father as much as they wish to be his savior in passages such as this one: "We w*ant* the Dead Father to be dead. We sit with tears in our eyes wanting the Dead Father to be dead" (5).

In a Jungian reading there might be a valid reason to "want" the father dead. Only in that (ideal) form, it seems, can the father ever reach his full potential. Barbra Greenfield explains, "For Jung the father is a mental spiritual principal that is 'above' and 'beyond' the material world [...] a sort of divine perfection [...] beyond the reach of mortals still tied to the physical world" (204). When he is portrayed as bodiless, as a deceased father would be, he can represent more than he was; he can stand for the Law, for the Idea of authority, for the Symbolic realm as a whole. Bainbridge analyzes villainous father figures in popular culture, reading them against the theories of fatherhood proposed by Freud and Jung, theories which he finds to

be problematic in nature (1). He concludes that narratives "evince a desire to return their bad fathers to this Jungian state through death," and that in doing so "they all become literally bodiless (leaving the trappings of their materials selves and the blame for their crimes behind them) to become truly Jungian-like and redeemed" (8). Bainbridge argues that only in absence, in death moreover, can "the good father be truly made present again" after he has fallen from that pedestal of perfection within narrative spaces (8).

Getting the Picture on the "Small Screen": Televisual Critiques of Failed Fathers

ABC's *Lost* is quite unique in its extensive, critical portrayal of multiple father figures. While other contemporary television programs have included similar critiques of fathers, these have existed on a much smaller scale. In *Masculinity and Popular Culture*, Rebecca Feasey analyzes a variety of late 20th and early 21st century television programs for the ways they portray male characters. Her comprehensive project covers much ground: representations of gay men on sitcoms; gender bending in science fiction; and masculinity as defined by sports media, reality television, and advertising. Most relevant, however, are the moments when she focuses on television fathers. For example, in studying the soap opera, Feasey notes that the recurrent theme of unknown paternity currently challenges the importance of the fatherly role (16). Her discussion of the failed father figures found on contemporary adult animated sitcoms—such as *The Simpsons*, *King of the Hill*, and *The Family Guy*—can be related to *Lost*. Feasey argues that these programs make it clear that the principle male characters —portrayed regularly as incompetent family men—are not to be viewed as upstanding "role model[s] of masculinity, fatherhood or parenting" (36). Although without a doubt ineffectual, the fathers in these programs differ greatly from those on *Lost*: while their parenting practices may occasionally qualify as neglectful, they are rarely depicted as purposefully abusive, and, unlike the majority of the fathers on *Lost*, they remain in the household as members of relatively traditional nuclear families.

Although many popular culture texts, televisual and otherwise, have housed problematic fathers, no narrative to date has showcased

as many flawed father figures as *Lost*. The program offers a running commentary on father-child relationships; this focus even appears in episode titles like "All the Best Cowboys Have Daddy Issues" (1:11). Perhaps this focus on the father can be partially attributed to the show's use of character backstory—its flashback-heavy narrative form that pairs events from the present with crucial scenes from the past. In fact, these storylines may be necessary because "stress between parents and children drives many of the personal histories of the characters on *Lost,* and is the reason many of these people were on Oceanic 815," the flight that would land them on the island where the narrative unfolds (Wood 23). But, whatever the reason for this plethora of father-child storylines, their purposeful inclusion is hard to miss. In season one, 18 episodes included references to father-child relationships. In season two, 13 episodes developed such storylines. Season three included 13 episodes with this focus. Season four, a shortened season due to the 2007 writers' strike, had 8 of 14 episodes touching on this motif. In season five, almost all of the episodes—12 of 16—further developed father-child conflicts, or even introduced new ones. And in season six, even as the series reached its close, *Lost* continued its steadfast commitment to father-child storylines by expanding upon existing relationships and debuting new ones in 9 of its final 16 episodes.

Fathers who "Lost" their Lives: Murder, Mayhem, and Magic

Lost offers viewers storylines that fall within the most outrageous of this category: fathers who died at their children's hands. Three storylines are devoted to the murder of evil fathers on the program: John Locke, who arranges for the murder of his con man father, Anthony Cooper; Benjamin Linus, who murders his abusive and neglectful father, Roger Linus, leaving his body unburied; and Kate Austin, who murders her father, Wayne Janssen, in an attempt to save her mother from his perpetual physical abuse. While the deaths of these men and their physical absence from their children's lives are important, more important is the influence they wield from beyond. These murdered men are alluded to frequently within the series, appearing in the memories of their children via flashbacks, and ultimately

influencing their actions (and therefore the plot more broadly). One such example of the dead father's lingering presence can be seen in the storyline devoted to Kate and Wayne Janssen. Kate is haunted, quite literally, by the memory of murdering her father. He appears in visions in the form of another character on the island and in the unlikely form of an unexplained horse which wanders around the tropical landscape. This notion of father haunting carries over, becoming a reoccurring plot line for a major father-child relationship arch on the show—that of the relationship between Jack and Christian Shephard. The latter relationship, between Jack and his father, results in regular visions, or seemingly hallucinations, of the dead man's presence on the island and later, post-rescue, off the island as well.

Lost's focus on the past might seem to conflict with a Jungian reading, or more accurately, Jungian analytical practices, that emphasize the here and now rather than the patient's past. However, the flashbacks (or memories) and hallucinations found in *Lost* are very much a part of the characters' "here and now." And it is largely through these memories, and more importantly the hallucinations, through which the characters work through their father issues. This is important because Jung saw value in hallucinations. One criticism that Jung had of Freud was that he made too great a distinction between hallucination and reality (Samuels 9). Jung's work was concerned with "psychological reality *as experienced by individuals* as opposed to what Freud termed 'actual reality'" (Samuels 9, emphasis added). The program often leads viewers to ponder the question, "What is reality?," leaving them with an answer close to Jung's—that reality is variable and individualized. Jung did not view the unconscious as an enemy to be thwarted but as a potentially empowering, creative, and helpful force within individuals (Samuels 9). Therefore, the characters' hallucinations on the show can be read as therapeutic and self-healing rather than as detrimental to their mental stability.

However, not all of the characters work through their father issues. Although *Lost* does provide detailed storylines devoted to the dead or murdered father, it offers up more examples of partially developed storylines hinting at the negative effects of the absent (although not always dead) father. This category would include numerous characters such as Claire, Hurley, Anna Lucia, Sawyer, Eco, Desmond, and Miles. Their absent fathers inadvertently impact the narrative

through their children. For example, Claire's lack of a father (both her own father as well as her child's father) results in her insecurity in raising the child she births on the island. This child and its well-being become a recurrent focus of the show. Another character with absent father issues is Sawyer. The suicide of his father drives most of his pre-island existence and shapes his renegade personality both on and off the island. And the absence of other characters' fathers simply leaves them with personal problems that they must resolve even after the crash of Oceanic 815. For example, Hurley's flashbacks indicate that his compulsive eating disorder stems from the day his father abandoned Hurley's family. In their analysis of paternal failures on *Lost,* Holly Hassel and Nancy Chick note another set of characters that would fit loosely into this group: Jacob and the Man in Black. They argue that since these twins are "at the heart of the island's origin story," their fatherless childhood is quite important as they then have "no model of fatherhood, or even manhood" (Hassel and Chick155). They claim that this "fatherless origin story retroactively explains the inadequacies of the (other) fathers on the show" (Hassel and Chick 169).

However, not all absent fathers impact their children in such negative ways. As Bainbridge's analysis of popular culture texts suggests, more often the absent father exists within a narrative to force the protagonist into the hero's role (1). *Lost* highlights this narrative function of the absent father in an early episode of season one devoted to the central father–child dynamic of Jack and Christian Shephard. In this episode a flashback reveals a confrontation between a ten year old Jack and his father after Jack has been severely beaten during his failed attempt to defend a school friend from bullies (1:5). Of his failure, his father remarks: "You don't want to be a hero; you don't want to save everyone, because when you fail you just don't have what it takes" (1:5). As is usual on the program, the flashback is relevant to the present happenings on the island since Jack is being called to the hero's role by the episode's end. In this episode, Jack's hallucinations start and he begins seeing his deceased father walking about on the island. He ultimately follows this supposed figment of his imagination through the jungle and ends up discovering a cove with drinkable spring water—something of which he and the other survivors are in desperate need. He returns with the good news and, despite his father's childhood warnings, rises as a leader with his infamous

speech: "If we can't live together, we're going to die alone" (1:5). Jack's words unite the survivors, and for the remainder of the series he remains cast as the central hero of the program.

Lost Souls: The Scars of the Evil/Abusive Father

When *Lost* does offer a father who remains in his child's life, it is often a father the character could have done without. These depictions would include: Sun's father, Mr. Paik, a corrupt businessman with mob connections; Penelope Widmore and Daniel Faraday's father, Charles Widmore, who systematically destroys his children's happiness; and Alex's father, the already mentioned Benjamin Linus, who becomes her surrogate father only after stealing Alex from her birth mother. The two latter fathers, Charles Widmore and Benjamin Linus, both eventually contribute to the deaths of their children, making them fall easily into the classification of "evil". Charles Widmore quite directly sends his son, Daniel, to his death by ordering that he travel to the island on a scientific expedition, knowing that he will be murdered once there. And, in a much more shocking scene, Benjamin Linus stands by and watches a mercenary shoot his daughter, Alex, in the head after attempting to call the man's bluff during a hostage situation. The last words Alex would have heard were: "She's not my daughter. I stole her from a crazy woman when she was a baby. She's a pawn. She means nothing to me. I'm not coming out there, so if you want to kill her, go ahead and do it" (4:9).

What is interesting to note is that all of the "evil" fathers on the show occupy leadership positions: Both Benjamin and Charles are the leaders of the island at different times, and both Charles and Paik are corporate powers off the island. Each of these men's political or business success comes at the expense of their children's happiness and/or lives. In this way, the series echoes the claims that Feasey makes in *Masculinity and Popular Television* concerning medical heroes, like those found in *ER* and *House,* and crime heroes, like those found in *24* and *Spooks,* who all sacrifice family for career accomplishments (68–93). However, there does remain a noteworthy difference: the characters of Feasey's analysis all work in fields where their sacrifice ultimately is for the greater good of others; this is not the case for the powerful fathers portrayed on *Lost*. Also, in choosing the most powerful men to

be the most evil fathers, *Lost* sets up an interesting analogy: the abusive, evil father as the corrupt, failed governmental leader.

The Estranged/Strained Father-Child Relationships

While many of the fathers on *Lost* cause their children serious emotional and physical damage, others exist to show less dramatized examples of strained father-child relationships. The motif of the estranged father-child relationship began in the very first episode of the show when viewers were introduced to Michael Dawson and his son Walt Lloyd, arguably one of the most important father-son dynamics the show offers next to Jack and Christian. Their fellow survivors on the island witnessed their struggle to cope with becoming father and son after years apart and often engaged in an ongoing commentary about their relationship struggles. Although Michael ultimately goes to extreme lengths to see that his son is able to leave the island, his initial frustration and discomfort with fatherhood is noted by his fellow castaways. In one episode devoted to this father–son duo, a passing comment from Hurley to Jack showcases this fact: "He seems to hate it, doesn't he? Being a dad" (1:14). While Michael and Walt's relationship sparks the earliest conversations on the show concerning this theme, other characters reference their strained father-child relationships as the series progresses. This list would include: Charlie, Sayid, Claire, Tom, Miles, and Ilana. Out of all the estranged father-child relationships on the show, the only one that nears repair is that of Hurley and David Reyes—a father who abandoned his child for 17 years only to reappear when his son won the lottery. One additional relationship that hints at a father–child reconciliation is that of Miles and his father, Dr. Pierre Chang. It turns out that Chang did not abandon his child for selfish reasons but sacrificed his relationship with him (and perhaps his life) to save both him and his mother. This revelation in season five potentially shifts his father from this category and into the next to be discussed, the suffering good father. With its plethora of absentee fathers, *Lost*'s familial depictions mirror realistic societal patterns. In many ways these fictional fathers align with Zoja's research concerning the disappearing role of the father in American society during the 21st century and studies concerning the current crisis of masculinity. Concerning

the latter, David Magill argues that, indeed, *Lost* is "a meditation on masculinity" (137). He also reads the show's "narrative of wounded white masculinity" as symbolizing "the wounds of war" felt by all of America post-9/11 (Magill 137, 141). In this way, his analysis of the show hints at the way *Lost*'s fathers represent post-9/11 fears.

One final father–child relationship that could be classified as estranged is one that is also an anomaly since the father was actually, for the majority of the character's life, a caring, consistent presence in his child's life. Jin was raised by Mr. Kwon, a fisherman in a poor village. Jin is so ashamed about his background that he lies to everyone, even his wife, about his past, claiming that his parents are dead. Viewers are unaware of what type of father Kwon was until Sun, Jin's wife, learns of his existence and visits him. He explains to her that he had been involved with a prostitute who left Jin in his care as an infant. Although Kwon never knew for sure if the child was actually his, he raised him as his son (3:18). Quite obviously, against the backdrop of horrific father figures, Kwon represents one of the few good fathers that *Lost* depicts. He also aligns with most of these good fathers in another interesting way: most of them are not fathers in the traditional definition. Most of the positive paternal figures are father stand-ins—stepfathers or surrogate fathers. Another example would be Sam Austen, Kate's stepfather. Sam raises Kate as his own, concealing that the abusive, alcoholic Wayne Janssen is her biological father—a fact that he knew would hurt her. Although much of Kate's past is linked to pain, she and Sam have a very positive relationship during her childhood, and she looks back upon it fondly during her time on the island.

The Price of Playing the "Good" Father

While *Lost* makes such positive representations few and far between, it also combines them with a surprising narrative twist. Most of the good father figures are punished and/or meet their untimely demise. Two key examples are Charlie and Jin. Charlie had struggled throughout his early years with various problems. He often played a fatherly role to his drug addict brother, Liam, resolving the problems Liam caused during their early years spent playing together in the band, Drive Shaft. However, the roles eventually switch when Liam

goes through rehabilitation and becomes a functioning family man while Charlie takes over his role as a heroin addict. In the first few seasons on the show, Charlie constantly struggles to believe that he will ever be good enough to take care of someone other than himself. However, his friendship with a fellow castaway, the pregnant Claire, eventually develops into a romantic relationship wherein he becomes a surrogate father for her son, Aaron. Although the path is not problem free for the three of them in their island quasi-family, Charlie enters the role of a good father. However, his duration in that role is short lived as he soon becomes aware that he is destined to die. Rather than trying to dodge fate, he gives in to it when he realizes that his death can save all his friends on the island, most importantly, Claire and Aaron. In a touching scene before he dives to the ocean bottom to willingly enter his watery tomb, he takes off his ring, a family heirloom, and places it in Aaron's crib (3:21). This coupling of death with acts of fatherly protection is not isolated. Another character who shows the price a good father pays is Jin. Although he is only presumed dead (during a cliffhanger break between seasons four and five), his act of dying in an effort to stop a freighter from exploding, after ensuring that his wife and child make it to safety, again shows that no rewards are given to the fathers who act in the best interest of their children. Many questions arise from these few storylines. Why not let these positive father representations exist as foils for the numerous negative ones? After all, most narratives rely on such good versus evil character pairings. What exactly is the show suggesting by allowing these visions of the good father to be fleeting? What does it mean that these characters' efforts to protect their children result in their downfall and death? The answer may lie in the parallels that can be made between the fathers/leaders on the show and the figureheads/leaders of American culture. The answer may be that *Lost* is simply not interested in depicting positive father figures because the program is much more concerned with the negative ones existing both within and outside its narrative constraints.

The (Paternal) Hand of Fate

With 73 episodes devoted to developing father–child storylines and 23 characters with "daddy" issues, this is not an accidental motif but

a purposefully developed theme. But the question remains: Why? Why would a complex show like *Lost* develop so much of its narrative material through father-child dynamics? Such motivations may tie into its devotion to character development.

With its flashbacks, and later flash-forwards and flash-sideways, the program intentionally allows viewers to parse out the characters' motives for their actions and the experiences that shape their personalities. Some of the most influential experiences that shape an individual's life are those of father–child interactions, and the father's influence is tied to the child's fate. On this, Jung writes:

> If we normal people examine our lives, we too perceive how a mighty hand guides us without fail to our destiny, and not always is this hand a kindly one. Often we call it the hand of God or of the devil, thereby expressing, unconsciously but correctly, a highly important psychological fact: that the power which shapes the life of the psyche has the character of an autonomous personality [. . .] The personification of this goes back in the first place to the father. ("The Significance" 240)

For Jung, the actual, physical father may not have this all-powerful influence, but the father figure often becomes a symbolic representative of this imagined force. However, sometimes the actual, physical father does act in this direct role. For example, the majority of the program's fathers (the absent or dead fathers) would fall into Jung's category of the "non-existent" father. In his studies, Jung found that "without the father's emotional support [. . .] it becomes almost insurmountably difficult for a child to be properly born and confirmed in his own identity" (Seligman 81). Since many of the characters on *Lost* struggle with identity issues, the father issues are in place to account for these problems. Although the show's writers and producers may be as well versed in psychology as they are in philosophy and physics, an alternate explanation for their focus on the father figure exists.

Searching for a Savior

Lost is a show with salvation as a central theme. All of the characters are physically awaiting rescue from the island and are constantly in need of salvation from mysterious forces, outside threats, communal

disturbances; often they need to be saved from themselves (or their pasts). Most of the characters are waiting to be saved in one way or another. Symbolically, the figure who most often plays the role of savior in a person's life is a parent, or more stereotypically, a father.

Part of the cultural mythos of the father is that he should be a strong empowering force able to protect and improve his family. According to psychological theory, when this cultural myth plays out correctly, the child's developmental process is a more positive one. When fathers fail to protect their children (either by absence, neglect, or abuse), these children grow up in a perpetual search for safety, mistrusting themselves and others. This is clearly seen in a host of characters on the show.

However, with the focus on these failed fathers, they must represent more than just a gathering of poor parents. It leads to the question: what do fathers represent or for what is fatherhood a symbol? Bainbridge argues that "the existence of fatherhood as a cultural construction [...] permits fathers to exist as father figures for a much wider group of people than just their biological offspring" (3). Therefore, father figures, persons not related to individuals by blood and perhaps not even connected to them, can take on the father's symbolic role and wield psychological power. This echoes Bader's argument that the nation, through its leader, takes on the symbolic role of a father and is sought for protection and strength (582). Assuming this transference to the national father is happening on *Lost,* the program is not simply critiquing individual fathers. As a cultural product of post-9/11 America, the show is instead making a more indirect statement about the "father" figures of the country.

Lost as a Product of the American Post-9/11 Cultural Climate

Cultural artifacts are often the product of their time, and *Lost* is the product of a "bad dad." It was written and produced when failing government and weak figureheads prevailed. President George Walker Bush was, arguably, a man with his own "daddy issues." The Bush administration had ulterior motives for entering into the 2003 war against Iraq, and an address President Bush made six months prior associates these motives with fatherly influences. Before the war,

when addressing the Senate on homeland security issues in 2002, Bush discussed the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. In this list, he included Hussein's failure to comply with United Nations' regulations; his advancement of chemical, biological and nuclear weapon programs; and his hatred toward The United States (King par. 13). In an aside, Bush said, "After all, this is the guy who tried to kill my dad" (King par. 14). Bush was referencing the alleged assassination attempt of former President Bush while visiting Kuwait during the Clinton administration (King par. 15). Revenge was not the primary motive for the Bush administration's declaration of war, but this affect-driven presidential afterthought is intriguing nonetheless. Zoja argues that "there is a relationship between the feelings that a leader awakens in his country's citizens and those which a father, in the same country and period, awakens in his children" (197). The most prominent feeling awakened in The United States during the Bush administration was fear—to such an extent that it was the shared national affect the first decade of the 21st century. Reflecting this fear, *Lost's* fathers provoke responses of fear and insecurity in their children on the small screen.

Lost remediates many post-9/11 fears throughout its run, discussing topics ranging from torture to biological warfare to the threat of governmental surveillance. In *Living Lost: Why We're All Stuck on the Island*, J. Wood explains how *Lost* accomplishes this:

> What *Lost* does so successfully is take these very real concerns straight off the front pages, abstract them into their psychological impression, and then crystallize that sense back into the framework of the narrative. These characters aren't being threatened by otherworldly aliens or vampires, creatures normally only seen on the screen or in pulp fiction; this situation involves the psychodynamics of terrorism that the contemporary audience experiences in the everyday world and plays it out on television 24 times a year. As such, *Lost* performs a very necessary function: It gives a narrative (and a safely distant context) to a real-felt sense of trauma. By giving these abstract ideas a tangible narrative with a beginning and ending each week, that sense of terror is contained by the show, and thus becomes something that might actually be manageable. (ix)

In Wood's reading, "the show abstracts and co-opts our very real concerns over the War on Terror" and becomes a sort of "repository

for the sense of distress that has been generated, rightly or wrongly, through our media, government, and the collective cultural response to such voices" (ix). As Sarah Burcon aptly points out, the program also acts as a sort of wish fulfillment, showcasing viewers' desire to return to a pre-9/11 state (126).

In this way, the series explores the notion of post-trauma survival. Wood notes that what the fictional survivors on *Lost* have that most Americans do not is a membership in a "group that has all survived the same unbelievable trauma to support both the individual and the individual's need to be part of the group [. . .] This aspect of the psychology of the show shouldn't look unfamiliar because it's what most people think happened after our own big plane crashes on September 11, 2001. But that kind of response doesn't just automatically" occur (54). Wood compares the sacrifices made following WWII to 9/11:

> [the same] things didn't really happen after September 11th, as we were told that our comfy lifestyles would not have to change and no sacrifices beyond simple symbolic gestures were necessary—just think of all the flags posted on gas-guzzling cars in the months after September 11th, while next to nothing was done to lessen U.S. dependence on a fossil fuel economy and its crazy market fluctuations due to events in the places that provide a good deal of those fossil fuels. In its own manner, *Lost* became a model for how we could have responded as a group after a trauma, but weren't able to or chose not to. (54)

Although *Lost* does offer a community united, it also delivers fear through narrative moments grounded in the problematic "us" versus "them" binary. Although this opposition has long been utilized to stimulate dramatic conflict, in *Lost*, it is tied to the media rhetoric of 9/11. Bader explains that the "feelings of insecurity and disconnectedness that plague us in our personal and social lives" are often "blamed on the actions of some 'other' who is then demeaned and attacked" (584). This problematic practice of "projection is deliberately used by conservatives to solidify their base. By creating an imaginary 'us' and 'them,' they can then promise satisfaction of deep and legitimate longings for a community safe from both real and illusory threats posed from the outside" (Bader 584). This us-versus-them binary also exists to nurture a superiority complex common to U.S. citizens.

In *Lost*, the us-versus-them binary showcases itself within the community of survivors but also externally between the community and "the Others." The inner group conflict begins in the second part of the pilot episode when Sawyer accuses Sayid of being a terrorist and having caused the plane to crash, simply because of his middle-Eastern background (1:2). But the mysterious "Others" exist as the dangerous "them" that sparks fear in the survivors throughout the first few seasons of the show. In fact, the island leaders sometimes capitalize on this fear to condone unethical behavior. For example, as the unofficial leader of the castaways, Jack allows Sayid to torture a captured "Other" (Ben) in order to extract information from him. And on the other side of the island, both Widmore and Linus (each a temporary leader of the "Others") participate in massacres to ensure their community's survival.

The term "Other" is packed with cultural baggage, but, in a post-9/11 American cultural text, does it necessarily mean "terrorist"? Wood answers this question directly: "Are the Others terrorists? Not exactly, not in the popular sense: Terrorists need to be dehumanized in the rhetoric used to describe them in order to reinforce their difference from us. This often comes in the form of turning them into animals and monsters. The Others don't use the same tactics we've come to associate with terrorism, like beheadings and suicide bombings. . ." (107–8). Michael Newbury likewise distances the behaviors of the Others on the program from that of terrorists in the real world. In his view, the Others behave like cold war nation-states, relying on the technological superiority of their military and surveillance systems (204). Overall, many scholars caution against simple readings of the show. Jesse Kavadlo argues that reading "*Lost* as a political parable risks reducing the show to a cardboard morality play" (232). Likewise, Wood clarifies: "it's not as if *Lost*'s writers and producers actively set out to create some sort of allegory of the times. When you're steeped in the culture (as an artist or consumer), some kind of reaction to events and circumstances will exercise itself through a work, whether directly, obliquely, or actively ignoring those circumstances" (121). Wood suggests that we are "stuck in a state of unconscious distress because we don't have any clear grasp on what it is we're supposed to be afraid of" and, therefore, "can't really confront that distress directly (because) we just don't know enough about it" (121–22). As a result, the fear we feel as a nation post-attack uncon-

sciously resurfaces and seeks resolution in narrative spaces through repetition. And, in the case of *Lost*, this repetition often comes in the form of quite telling father–child conflicts. Regardless, whether inadvertently or purposefully, the program ultimately reminds viewers of the source of their fears: the post-9/11 rhetoric concerning terrorism and the hyperbolic depictions of terrorists made readily available by government figures in the wake of the September 11th attacks. With its direct attention to "othering," *Lost* asks its viewers to contemplate the consequences of this practice and invites critiques of those who perpetuate it: governmental "fathers."

Conclusion

Twenty-first century fictional narratives like *Lost* are full of flailing father figures whose prevalence is indicative of cultural problems outside those fictive realms. For decades, scholars have been analyzing televised portrayals of fathers as simple familial symbols—the fictional representatives of cultural norms, or, more accurately, cultural desires. And while these characters may represent our societal wish list for a perfect family (as they may have in the days of *Father Knows Best* or *Leave it to Beaver*), and while some may exist to work through current cultural concerns about shifting familial structures (as in the declining presence and importance of fathers in the 21st century), today these fictional constructs may represent much more. Somewhere along the line there may have been an evolution from fatherly portrayals as familial symbols to fatherly portrayals as signifiers of national affective states. While a cigar may be just a cigar, it seems that in 21st century narratives a "father" is no longer just a father.

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