

# ***Don Álvaro* or the Force of Paternal Impotence**

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Although the biological father of Rivas's best-known protagonist never appears on stage in *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino*, scholars have devoted considerable attention to the beleaguered *mestizo*'s relationship with the paternal authority. Some have argued that Leonor's father the Marquis of Calatrava is the symbolic displacement of the biological father and, accordingly, as don Álvaro's love object and the source of tension between the two men, Leonor is the symbolic displacement of don Álvaro's mother (Larsen 205; Materna, "Prodigal Sons" 14). For these same critics, the Marquis's death at the end of the first act, as well as his sons' deaths in the third and fifth acts, does not signify the paternal order's demise. Rather, because don Álvaro consistently seeks death rather than expiation of sin through suffering, his persistent survival when confronted by the de Vargas men suggests that the paternal order consistently triumphs over don Álvaro by prolonging his life "only the more to exercise its torment" (Cardwell 562).

For Linda Materna, don Álvaro's prolonged suffering at the hands of the paternal authority serves as his punishment for his having embraced and internalized the "dangerous feminine," which is "expressed as an erotically inaccessible woman, repressed erotic instincts, and rebellion against the patriarchal social and political orders" ("Prodigal Sons" 614). Moreover, the fact that don Álvaro dies not at the hands of the father but by suicide "in the womb (grotto) of the mother (Leonor) highlights the danger of the feminine" and causes the paternal order to be "unrelenting and inevitable" in carrying out its vengeance against him (614-5). Materna's interpretation of don Álvaro as "the prodigal son whose father refuses to forgive him" (605) and as the victim of the paternal order's vengeance echoes Jo Labanyi and Karen Rauch's assessment that Spanish dramatists, in concluding many of their dramas with the son's death and the hands of the father, thereby reversing the Oedipal paradigm, held an even more negative view of paternal authority than Freud would a century later (Labanyi 16; Rauch 493).

In drawing from Freud, Materna, and to an extent, Labanyi, overlook the limits of the Oedipal/reverse Oedipal model and its application to don Álvaro's relationship with the paternal authority. Namely, this model fails to explain how don Álvaro's conscious concealment of his father's identity, and his motivations for this concealment, can be explained using the Oedipal/reverse Oedipal paradigm. Nor do their models adequately explain why don Álvaro persistently seeks death at the hands of the father, or why his attempts to do so are always thwarted. Is it because the paternal order wants to prolong don Álvaro's suffering, as Cardwell and Materna have argued, or is it because the paternal order is impotent, unable to carry out its desire for vengeance against its prodigal son? In addition to applying an inadequate model to reading *Don Álvaro*, by interpreting don Álvaro's relationship with the authority in a negative, antagonistic light, these scholars who have drawn from Freud have overlooked the other aspect of the father-son relationship that Freud describes in several of his essays: that of the child's longing for the omnipotent, protective father who can provide him with "protection from the dangers one knew" (*Future of an Illusion* 21). In Jessica Benjamin's analysis of Freud, she

argues that much of the “dangers” that Freud describes in his essays is the danger the mother poses to the son’s masculine development, for once the Oedipal complex is resolved in the son the father

in whatever form [...] always represents difference and enjoys a privileged position above the mother. Her power is identified with early, primitive gratifications which must be renounced, while the father’s power is associated with development and growth. (159)

As I hope to make evident in this essay, it is a longing for the father’s power, particularly for his ability to keep the mother’s influence “in check” that characterizes don Álvaro’s relationship with the paternal authority. When this becomes impossible, and when he is confronted by the various symbolic displacements of father—the Marquis of Calatrava, Carlos, and Alfonso—don Álvaro prefers his own death to that of the symbolic father’s. After all, the latter would signify the destruction of the same paternal order of which he wants to become a part. Unfortunately, don Álvaro’s longing for the omnipotent father constantly finds itself in opposition to, and eventually conquered by, the father’s inevitable defeat, which the de Vargas men’s deaths, as well as don Álvaro’s father’s imprisonment, demonstrate. Accordingly, I argue that the *sino* that haunts don Álvaro is not the all-powerful paternal authority and its unrelenting vengeance, as Materna has argued. Nor is the paternal authority merely indifferent, as Cardwell has alleged. Rather, as I hope to demonstrate, what plagues the *mestizo* is his longing for the powerful father who, throughout the drama, consistently proves himself ineffectual. The source of this paternal impotence can be traced back to don Álvaro’s father so, for that reason, my argument will begin with a close reading of don Álvaro’s relationship with his father.

### **Coming to Terms with the Biological Father**

*Don Álvaro* opens in Seville at the Triana Bridge, where various townspeople discuss the protagonist, a recent arrival to town whom they only know to be a wealthy *indiano*. Despite don Álvaro’s mysterious origins—one townspeople describes him as an “ente misterioso” (67) and the Canon reminds the townspeople that nobody knows who he is—for many of the townspeople, his appearance of nobility as a valiant bullfighter, who is wealthy and generous, deems him “todo un hombre, muy duro con el ganado y muy echado adelante” (66). The gypsy Preciosilla believes that don Álvaro is “digno de ser marido de una emperadora,” and certainly worthy of marrying his lover Leonor de Vargas, whose family is part of the decaying aristocracy (66). [1] Tío Paco reminds everyone that don Álvaro’s mysterious origins do not necessarily signify that he is not noble, since “cada uno es hijo de sus obras” and, after all, “fuera de Sevilla nacen también caballeros” (68).

Despite Tío Paco, Preciosilla, and the townspeople’s sympathy and admiration for don Álvaro, the Canon, the lone member of the aristocracy in these initial scenes, reminds the others (and the audience) of the realities of the existing social order in eighteenth-century Spain.[2] First, though don Álvaro might be worthy of Leonor, ultimately “los padres tienen derecho de casar a sus hijas con quien les convenga” and their decisions should not be questioned (67). Moreover, while don Álvaro’s behavior and carriage suggest a noble stature, only noble origins, indicated by the proper last name, truly affirms one’s nobility. Consequently, the Marquis has

acted “como persona prudente” by not allowing don Álvaro to marry his daughter (68). The canon is not the only aristocrat with this attitude. In the fourth act, Leonor’s brother Carlos reminds don Álvaro that in addition to causing his family dishonor, the protagonist is “un desconocido [...] Sin padre, sin apellido [...]” and therefore not worthy of his friendship (139).

The fact that don Álvaro is marginalized because of his lack of noble origins likens him to several other Spanish Romantic heroes. In the opening act of García Gutiérrez’s *El trovador*; for example, the Conde de Luna’s men describe Manrique the troubadour as “un hombre sin solar” or lineage, and therefore less worthy of his beloved Leonor than his rival Nuño, a noble count (115). In another drama by García Gutiérrez, *El paje*, Ferrando laments that he is unworthy of his beloved Blanca because he does not know the name of his grandparents (88). Indeed, most Spanish Romantic heroes begin their journeys as orphans, underscoring the Romantic emphasis on man’s loneliness and the “folly” of the Enlightenment belief in the brotherhood of man (Mansour 241). This sense of loneliness is perhaps best captured by *La conjuración de Venecia*’s Rugiero, who laments that he is “solo, huérfano, sin amparo ni abrigo . . . sin saber a quiénes debo el ser, ni siquiera la tierra en que nací” (213).

In addition to highlighting what Mansour describes as “the fatal loneliness” of the Romantic hero, the hero’s orphaned state and mysterious origins most often lead him to unwittingly take up arms against his father or another male member of his family. In García Gutiérrez’s *El trovador*, for example, Manrique and Nuño are both political enemies and rivals for Leonor’s affections, unaware that they are brothers. In Martínez de la Rosa’s *La conjuración de Venecia*, Rugiero’s long-lost father Pedro Morosini is the Venetian Doge against which the hero is conspiring. In both cases, the father or brother inadvertently causes the hero’s death. *El trovador*’s Nuño orders Manrique’s death, believing that Manrique is the gypsy Azucena’s son, and it is only after Manrique’s death that Azucena reveals that Nuño has, in fact, killed his own brother. Pedro Morosini discovers that Rugiero is his long-lost son only moments after he has sentenced him to death. For Mansour, the fact that most Romantic heroes are victims of fratricide or filicide serves as an extension of the Romantics’ pessimism, for it demonstrates that “bonds that exist to order the family unit have been violated, and thus symbolize the destruction and disorder at the societal level” (246). Likewise, Karen Rauch notes that the son’s death at the hands of the father or father-substitute “is the Romantics’ fate: a tenacious past which dooms its future” (493).

Although don Álvaro’s mysterious origins likens him to other Spanish Romantic heroes, unlike them don Álvaro is not tragically ignorant of his noble origins. Nor does he unwittingly battle against his father or another male member of his family. Rather, as he reveals in his famous third-act soliloquy, he has been forced to conceal these origins because they signify, in his own words, “un crimen” (118). Moreover, instead of battling against his father, don Álvaro has come to Spain to *rescue* his father, for he tells the audience:

[...] en la edad de la razón,  
a cumplir la obligación  
que un hijo tiene, acudí;  
mi nombre ocultando, fui  
(que es un crimen) a salvar

la vida, y así pagar  
a los que a mí me la dieron,  
que un trono soñando vieron  
y un cadalso al despertar. (118)

Don Álvaro does not merely refer to his noble origins when he is alone. In his interactions with the de Vargas sons, don Álvaro repeatedly alludes to his noble origins and his desire to reveal them. When Carlos confronts him in the fourth act of the drama, for example, don Álvaro laments, “si un secreto misterioso romper hubiera podido, ¡oh...cuán diferente [habría] sido...!” (139). Later, when Carlos reveals that Leonor is still alive, don Álvaro states his desire to reveal his origins more directly, telling Carlos:

¡Oh!...Yo os ofrezco, yo os juro  
que no os arrepentiréis  
cuando a conocer lleguéis  
mi origen excelso y puro. (142)

Don Álvaro also attempts to tell Alfonso about his origins moments before their duel when he tells him “si caigo es forzoso que sepáis en este trance a quién habéis dado la muerte” (173). His frequent allusions to his noble origins are not indicative only of his desire to reconnect with his biological father, the fact that he tries to reveal them to the de Vargas men in particular suggests that he wants recognition from the paternal order. It is only during Alfonso’s revelation that the audience learns why this recognition will never take place: while living in Peru and serving the king, don Álvaro’s father rebelled against the Spanish monarchy by establishing an independent viceroyalty and, because of his rebellion, has spent the past several years in prison. In fact, don Álvaro initially came to Spain in the hopes of obtaining a pardon for his father from the king, but he became distracted from his mission by falling in love with Leonor de Vargas.

At first glance, don Álvaro’s father’s rebellion might not seem so unusual. After all, political strife is a common motif in Spanish Romantic drama, and many of them take place against the backdrop of some type of war. García Gutiérrez’s *El trovador* and *El paje*, for example, are set during wars of succession in fifteenth-century Aragon and fourteenth-century Cordoba, respectively. Hartzenbusch’s *Los amantes de Teruel* and Larra’s *Macías* take place during the Christian Reconquest of Spain in the thirteenth century and in *La conjuración de Venecia* Rugiero attempts to topple the oppressive rule of the Tribunal de los Diez in fourteenth-century Venice.

Notably, however, while Spanish Romantic dramas are often set during wars or political strife, the heroes engaging in political rebellion rarely seek to become independent rulers themselves. Rather, they frequently fight on behalf of a monarch seeking power during a war of succession or against an ethnic or religious outsider who has usurped political power in Spain. In García Gutiérrez’s *El trovador* and *El paje*, both Manrique and Ferrando defend different pretenders to the crown. *Los amantes de Teruel*’s Diego Marsilla fights on behalf of the Christians during the Reconquest of Spain in the thirteenth century. Don Álvaro himself defends a monarch, Carlos III, against imperial German troops during the third and fourth act of the drama.

Don Álvaro's father's motives, however, are different from that of most Spanish Romantic heroes. Indeed, there was a war going on during don Álvaro's father's time in Peru when the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs were fighting for the Spanish crown (1700-1714). However, he did not fight on behalf of either royal family. Rather, as Alfonso notes, don Álvaro's father took advantage of the King's distraction with the War of Succession and attempted to establish his own independent viceroyalty in Peru (174). Don Álvaro's father's rebellion is made worse by the fact that he colluded with the Incans, ethnic and religious outsiders, and he even married one (don Álvaro's mother). Indeed, don Álvaro's father's true contrast to the typical Spanish Romantic hero engaging in military service lies in his relationship with the foreign other. For although it is common for Spanish Romantic heroes to engage in military service in exotic locales—*Los amantes de Teruel's* Diego, for example, spends time in Muslim Spain fighting for the Christian Reconquest—the purpose of the hero's military service in exotic locales is to obtain subjectivity by simultaneously proving they are like their comrades in battle (the Christians) and unlike the cultural outsiders against whom they are battling. In Labanyi's words, "[t]he heroes need to assert their prowess in war and military conquest, for their subjecthood depends on their ability to subjugate or eliminate the Other" (16). In the case of don Álvaro's father, however, he has not subjugated the other. Rather, as Alfonso points out, his rebellion was carried out "con su esposa" (174). Accordingly, don Álvaro's father lacks subjectivity if we take into account Labanyi's assertion. The fact that don Álvaro's conceals his last name, and that it is never uttered on stage, further underscores his lack of subjectivity in the paternal order, for as Luce Irigaray reminds us:

it is his proper name, the name of the father, that determines ownership for the family, including the wife and the children. And what is required of them—for the wife, monogamy; for children, the precedence of the male line, and specifically of the eldest son who bears his name. (*The Sex Which is Not One* 83)

The fact that the father never even appears provides additional evidence of his ineffectual state. Spanish Romantic dramas frequently end with the son's *rapprochement* with the biological father or a father stand-in (as we see in the case of *El trovador*), during which the hero is finally recognized as an acceptable member of society, albeit moments after his death (Labanyi 17). *La conjuración's* Pedro Morosini and *El trovador's* Nuño order the murder of their son and brother respectively, and discover their mistake only moments after their victims have died. While, as we have stated earlier, none of these dramas offers a positive view of paternal authority they nonetheless call attention its resilience. Don Álvaro's father, however, is markedly absent from the final scenes of the drama, despite the fact that, according to Alfonso, he has been pardoned and is once again an acceptable member of Spanish society (176). The nature of the father's pardon, moreover, emphasizes further his inadequacy: he was unable to obtain one from the King directly; instead, he has been forced to rely upon his son, don Álvaro, and, later, his brother to prove his innocence (176).

Lacking subjectivity, don Álvaro's father is thus unable to bestow it upon his son by granting him a proper last name which would make don Álvaro an acceptable member of Spanish society and, most importantly, a suitable match for his beloved Leonor, a noblewoman. Because don Álvaro lacks a last name, the townspeople can only speculate that he is of noble origins, but have no way to prove their speculations. The other way that don Álvaro's father has

failed him is by not limiting the influence that don Álvaro's mother, as a sexual and racial other, has over her son. According to Freud, the father's ability to limit the mother's influence is essential for the son's development. In several of his essays, Freud cites the absence of a strong father and the presence of a strong, domineering mother as the cause of several psychological maladies such as love for a prostitute, a married woman, or even another man ("A Special Choice of Object Made by Men" 392; "Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" 462).

The father's ability to keep the mother's influence in check, according to Freud, begins with the Oedipus complex, which is, in his words, "typically masculine" (*Group Analysis and Psychology* 106). Upon the son's development of his Oedipal complex, during which the son "notices that his father stands in his way with his mother," the son's identification with the father "takes on hostile coloring," according to Freud (105). However, because the son fears the father—the bigger, more powerful version of himself—he soon learns to repress his desire for the mother and substitute for it a heroic idealization of his father, a man he simultaneously loves and fears. [3] According to Gayle Rubin, this fear of the father and the repression/renunciation of the mother reinforce the paternal order, for

the boy affirms the relationships which have given mother to father and which will give him, if he becomes a man, a woman of his own. [...] The only thing required of him is a little patience [...] The social contract to which he has agreed will eventually recognize his own rights and provide him with a woman of his own (193).

Because don Álvaro has been forced to turn away from his father, the Oedipal crisis and its resolution has never taken place. Accordingly, neither don Álvaro nor his father has fulfilled Rubin's "social contract," which would affirm both of their positions in the paternal order. Following the logic of Freudian analysis, one would conclude this to mean that don Álvaro's mother still maintains an undue influence over her son, since he has never "turned away" from her. The drama's imagery, always dark and enclosing when don Álvaro is on stage, suggests that his bond to his mother is tenacious. In the first act, as don Álvaro enters, the stage goes completely dark, according to the stage directions (69), indicative of both the dark fate that surrounds don Álvaro and "the maternal symbolism of darkness" (Tressider 61). Later on in the third act don Álvaro reappears in "una selva en noche muy oscura" (116); as Tressider reminds us, the "moist, earthy, womb-like darkness" has been linked to the maternal and the feminine (85).

Perhaps the most frequent symbolic reminder of don Álvaro's maternal heritage is the frequent allusions to water, since, as Carl Jung argues, "the maternal significance of water...is one of the clearest interpretations of symbols in the whole field of mythology...from water comes life" ("Symbols of the Mother" 218). At the end of the fourth act, for example, Carlos tells don Álvaro that "un mar de sangre" runs between him and Leonor, something don Álvaro reiterates after Carlos' death (142; 151). Likewise, Don Álvaro describes himself as being "como el naufrago que sale por un milagro a la orilla" (167). Before the final scene, Hermano Melitón comments "va a llover a mares," and later "estamos de marea," as water pours heavily down over Alfonso and don Álvaro (171). As Freud has argued, dreams of being in water are based upon

fantasies of “the existence in the womb and of the act of birth” (*Interpretation of Dreams* 435). Carl Jung shares this view, noting that the sea in particular, along with the underworld, which don Álvaro begs to swallow him, is said to signify the more destructive symbols of the maternal (*Four Archetypes* 15).

The final act finds don Álvaro in a monastery, a place not necessarily associated with darkness, but one that nevertheless emanates the enclosure and protection that can be found in the womb. Upon leaving the monastery with Alfonso, and moments before don Álvaro confronts his true identity, the aforementioned darkness that surrounds don Álvaro is revisited, and appears more haunting than before, as the stage directions indicate:

*el teatro representa un valle rodeado de riscos inaccesibles...sobre un peñasco accesible con dificultad y colocado al fondo habrá una medio gruta, medio ermita, con puerta practicable...se irá oscureciendo lentamente la escena y aumentándose los truenos y relámpagos. (173)*

The final scene thus finds don Álvaro outside of a grotto or cave, a symbol of the womb in dreams and the creative unconscious, according to Freud (*Interpretation of Dreams* 435). Notably, this grotto is situated in a valley surrounded by “riscos inaccesibles” (173), echoing the terrifying feeling of entrapment and barriers between the womb and the outside world through which, as Freud points out, the son is only saved by the mercy of his mother’s strength in childbirth (“A Special Type of Object Choice Made by Men” 393). It also presages the violent confrontation between don Álvaro and Alfonso when the latter reveals that don Álvaro’s true identity, reminding him that despite “lo ilustro” of his family name, don Álvaro is still nothing more than a “mestizo fruto de traiciones” (177). Don Álvaro, reacts, according to the stage directions “[e]n el extreme de desesperación” and stabs Alfonso, actively committing murder for the first time in the drama (177).

According to Walter Pattison, it is don Álvaro’s *mestizo* identity that is the true source of the tragedy in this drama. For as much as he longs to be with Leonor, Pattison alleges, there is a part of him that is aware of the fact that this can never happen. Consequently, “instead of confessing to himself that there is no chance for him, a *mestizo*, to break into the crusty society of Spain, he rationalizes about the cause of his adverse destiny, substituting a less painful reason for the true one” (70). Most scholars, however, believe that don Álvaro’s *mestizo* identity should be read in a symbolic way, as a means of providing dramatic credibility for the heroes’ persecution, but more important for the fact that they represent “non-conformity, unorthodoxy, [and] a challenge to the traditional view of the universe and its structure” (Cardwell 566). [4] After all, don Álvaro’s *mestizo* identity cannot account for the unhappy accidents that plague don Álvaro throughout the drama, such as the gun that accidentally goes off and kills the Marquis instead of don Álvaro, the friendship that develops between don Álvaro and Carlos, only to conclude with the latter’s death, and the tragic fact that don Álvaro discovers that and Leonor have been living alongside one another for several years only moments before her death (Cardwell 566).

Reading don Álvaro’s *mestizo* identity on a symbolic, rather than realistic, level also calls attention to the protagonist’s aforementioned inextricable tie to his mother, who is the source of

this marginalized identity. Her role in don Álvaro's demise is presaged by the opening scenes of the drama, when the townspeople link don Álvaro's marginalized status to her, discussing the rumors that he is the son "de un grande de España y de una reina mora" and, ironically, an Incan mother and a Spanish father, something which even the Canon abruptly dismisses as "sandeces" or nonsense (67). Notably, in both cases the mother is the suspected cause of don Álvaro's marginal identity. This relegation of the mother is common, according to Freud, who notes that while the son tends to idealize his mother in unconscious imaginings of her as an Empress or Queen ("Family Romances" 300), he also has other less favorable impressions of her once he becomes aware of her sexual relationship with his father. "He tells himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is not after all so very great, since basically they do the same thing" ("A Special Choice of Object" 391-2). According to Labanyi, as an Incan princess, or as a suspected "reina mora," don Álvaro's mother "is a perfect example of this contradictory objectification which declares her inferior and superior, but not a subject of equal standing" (17).

While the mother is relegated as an object in both of the opening-scene rumors, don Álvaro's father is rumored to be "un grande de España" (67). This exaltation of don Álvaro's father, even during the opening scenes of the drama, suggest an unconscious desire on the part of the villagers, not just don Álvaro, to present paternal authority in a positive light. After all, don Álvaro's appearance of nobility can be traced back to his allegedly noble father, who also happens to be Spanish. However, throughout the drama the father's absence demonstrates that he has failed to live up to the ideal, although don Álvaro never consciously admits it. Instead, as I hope to make evident in the following section, don Álvaro's actions suggest that he unconsciously seeks out his ideal father through his relationship with the Marquis, the King of Spain, and God Himself.

### **Breaking with the Biological Father and the Search for the Ideal Father**

In the sixth scene of the first act, don Álvaro's lover Leonor laments to her servant Curra that she is torn between her filial loyalty to her father the Marquis of Calatrava and her passion for don Álvaro. Curra empathizes with Leonor's plight, and assures Leonor that her plan to run away with don Álvaro is the best one, since by marrying don Álvaro she will be "la adorada esposa [...] del más adorable, rico y lindo caballero que puede en el mundo hallarse" (76). It is Curra who offers Leonor a solution to her dilemma: Leonor should run away with don Álvaro, get married, and live in Flanders. All the while, Leonor should maintain constant contact with her father and, immediately after marrying don Álvaro, she should conceive a son. Once the son is born, she should write to inform her father. Once the Marquis discovers that there is a child "que tiene sus mismos ojos, empezará a consolarse," causing him to welcome his daughter back "con banquetes y bailes" (77).

Notably, the *sus* in "sus mismos ojos" refers to the Marquis, not don Álvaro, the supposed father of the child. In this fantasy scenario, accordingly, once the Marquis casts his gaze upon the child and sees his own eyes rather than don Álvaro's, he will immediately recognize his grandson and this recognition will console him. Moreover, having a male grandchild with his eyes will allow him to reclaim Leonor as his daughter without having to acknowledge the shame of her transgression. Since this solution is the only one Curra provides,



one can conclude that Leonor will be redeemed only through mothering this grandchild: a male heir to wash the metaphorical stain to the family honor that she has committed.

Curra's narrative not only allows Leonor to fulfill her Oedipal fantasy, according to Freud ("The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" 665), it is also particularly telling because of its implications for don Álvaro's role in this father-daughter relationship. Because the de Vargas family is a noble one, and because don Álvaro would be considered part of that family, presumably Spanish society would eventually accept him, at least if we are to believe that Curra's plan would come to fruition. Don Álvaro would achieve this entry into society, however, by becoming even less instrumental than Leonor. While Leonor needs don Álvaro to conceive this child, the child will not be allowed to look like him, nor can it reflect don Álvaro's sexual act with her. Through looking like the Marquis, the child's eyes reinforce the Marquis's relationship with Leonor rather than don Álvaro's. Accordingly, while Leonor becomes the instrument through which don Álvaro can gain acceptance into this family, don Álvaro can only gain this acceptance through simultaneously marrying her and denying her as his love object (i.e. seemingly present the Marquis with his own child).

Interpreting don Álvaro's actions as an attempt to become a part of the de Vargas family allows for the possibility that he is trying to live out his Freudian "Family Romance" by replacing his biological father (the anonymous Spanish nobleman) with a man of higher social standing (the Marquis of Calatrava). Significantly, Freud notes that in this act of replacing the biological father "the child is not getting rid of his father but exalting him" ("Family Romances" 300), so once again don Álvaro's actions are not to be interpreted as rebellious acts, but as ones which demonstrate his desire for social integration. Taking the analysis further, one could interpret his complicit behavior with the Marquis as an attempt to become a non-threatening son to the Marquis so as to comply with Rubin's "social contract," which will affirm both the Marquis and, eventually, don Álvaro's new identity. After all, don Álvaro is only aggressive in seeking reassurances of Leonor's devotion when the two are alone, marking his only true rebellion against the paternal order, as Materna has observed ("Prodigal Sons" 613).

Even when he rebels, moreover, don Álvaro is merely mimicking the Marquis's words from two scenes earlier. The Marquis calls Leonor a "santa del cielo" (71) don Álvaro calls her an "ángel consolador" (79); the Marquis calls his daughter "mi amor, mi consuelo, mi esperanza, mi alegría" (71) while don Álvaro calls her "mi bien, mi Dios, mi todo" (79). As Linda Materna has argued, both men define Leonor in terms of themselves, affirming her object status in the drama ("Ideología" 20). Her object status, moreover, is dual in both cases: she must be a daughter/love object for her father and a mother/love object for don Álvaro.

The audience learns that Leonor's mother died several years before and that she was not remembered favorably, for as Curra notes:

Mas vana que el señor era;  
señor, al cabo, es un ángel.  
¡Pero ella!...un genio tenía  
y un copete...Dios nos guarde. (75)

Just like don Álvaro's mother, Leonor's mother is absent (having died), noble (she was a Marquise after all, and inferior (according to Curra she was vain and had a temper and a snootiness to her), a stark contrast to the angelic, abnegating, even tempered angel that was upheld as the ideal mother in nineteenth-century Spain. Her mother's absence and inferior status causes Leonor to be a substitute wife for the Marquise of Calatrava, as Linda Materna has argued ("Ideología" 21), making up for her mother's lack, which also helps to account for the linguistic similarities between the Marquis's words and don Álvaro's. In her relationship with don Álvaro, Leonor is both the love object and the mother-substitute in don Álvaro's "Family Romance": she makes up for don Álvaro's mother's lack by being Spanish and possessing the necessary "limpieza de sangre" that would make him an acceptable member of the Spanish aristocracy, but she is also the source of tension between him and the other de Vargas men.

Leonor affirms her object status in both her relationship with her father and don Álvaro by suppressing her true feelings when she is with them. For example, in the tender scene between father and daughter before don Álvaro appears in her chambers, the Marquis chooses to delude himself into believing that his daughter is happy, despite the fact that the stage directions indicate that she is "*abatida y turbada*" (72). The Marquis goes on to dismiss Leonor's tears as the "cariñosos extremos" of a "muchacha obediente," even though the audience learns moments later that her tears are indicative of her conflicting loyalties to her father and her lover (73). Leonor says nothing to dispel her father of his delusions. In fact, when asked for her opinion she states "dejarlo será mejor a su gusto delicado" (72). In like manner, when don Álvaro insists that the twosome run away to Flanders that very evening, Leonor eventually quells her hesitation to run away with don Álvaro when he becomes angry, and instead avidly expresses her devotion to him, going as far as calling him her "esposo" before they are officially married (83). Both of Leonor's interactions with these men support Jessica Benjamin's claim that daughters, in identifying with a mother defined as an object, learn to give recognition to men without receiving it or asking it in return (78).

If don Álvaro were to fulfill his "Family Romance" fantasy, however, Leonor must remain her father's love object and never become don Álvaro's, unlike the daughter who can eventually be given to the "right" man in the Freudian scenario. Accordingly, Leonor can never become don Álvaro's wife because that would signify don Álvaro's triumph over the father (the Marquis). Perhaps aware of the impossibility of his desire, when the prospect of confronting the Marquis arises, don Álvaro immediately surrenders to the paternal authority from which he so desperately wants recognition. Upon attempting to leave the house, Leonor and don Álvaro hear noises outside her bedroom; don Álvaro takes a pistol, reassuring his nervous lover that he plans to use it to destroy himself, not her father (84). Then, when the Marquis discovers the couple together moments later, don Álvaro immediately assures him that Leonor remains "más pura que el aliento de los ángeles que rodean el trono del Altísimo" (85), getting down on his knees rather than confronting the Marquis at eye level. He supplements his physical submission with a declaration of unconditional surrender:

La sospecha a que puede dar origen mi presencia aquí a tales horas concluya con mi muerte; salga envolviendo mi cadáver como si fuera mortaja... Sí, debo

morir... pero a vuestras manos. (*Pone una rodilla en tierra.*) Espero resignado el golpe, no lo resistiré: ya me tenéis desarmado. (85)

It appears that for don Álvaro, death is preferable to rebelling against the father, displaced here in the figure of the Marquis. Like Jessica Benjamin's Oedipal son, don Álvaro "is one who cannot bear the wish to unseat his father, because its fulfillment would deprive him of the authority who protects him, the ideal that gives him life" (142). Unfortunately for don Álvaro, his desire to marry Leonor, along with the fact that she acquiesces, calling him her "esposo" before they are married, disrupts the very relationship that don Álvaro has hoped to have with the Marquis. The only way to reconcile the contradictory nature of don Álvaro's desire (to replace his father and to marry Leonor/replace the Marquis in her eyes) is the solution don Álvaro provides: the son's death at the hands of the father.

*El sino*, however, understood as the impotence of the paternal authority, causes the gun to go off accidentally and kill the Marquis. Having failed to live out his "Family Romance" with the Marquis, consequently, don Álvaro seeks another form of refuge during the third act: military service. Don Álvaro has completely concealed his previous identity and is now known as don Fadrique de Herreros (122); likewise, Leonor's brother don Carlos has changed his name to don Félix de Avendaña (121) because he believes his family name to have been tainted by his sister's transgression and his father's death. The men's concealment of their true identity, ironically, allows them to be equals on the battlefield and, along with the fact that both of the men save one another's lives, allows them to develop a strong friendship before discovering one another's true identity.

Again, as noted earlier in this essay, military service is not uncommon in Spanish Romantic drama. In fact, it is often a means through which the hero, without a father to grant him subjectivity, could attain his subjectivity by proving his mettle on the battlefield. Because most of these heroes are fatherless, their defense of the kings could be interpreted as an unconscious desire to fulfill the longing for the father, since Freud has noted one more than one occasion that the son's fantasies about rescuing the father are often displaced onto kings, emperors, or other noblemen in the son's creative unconscious ("On Dreams" 170; "Family Romances" 300; "Totem and Taboo" 507). Certainly, the Romantic hero is not lacking in desire to have a connection to a father. *El trovador's* Manrique confesses to his mother Azucena "muchas veces digo yo: si, como mi afán desea, fuese un Lanuza, un Urrea. . . (148); likewise, don Álvaro laments that he is "sin nombre en extraña tierra" (118). Even *Don Álvaro's* Carlos confesses to having come to Veletri in order to restore his family honor (131).

For don Álvaro, however, this desire for a reconnection with the father is now a self-destructive one. As he reminds the audience in his famous soliloquy, he does not care if the King is victorious in this war:

¿Qué me importa, por ventura,  
que triunfe Carlos o no?  
¿Qué tengo de Italia en pro?  
¿Qué tengo? ¡Terrible suerte!  
Que en ella reina la muerte,

y a la muerte busco yo. (118-9)

Don Álvaro reiterates his self-destructive desires in his conversations with Leonor's brother Carlos, protesting vehemently when he learns that the latter has saved his life, "¡Ay, don Félix de Avendaña, qué grande mal me has hecho!" (126). Read in light of don Álvaro's longing for the father, his desire for death on the battlefield could be read as a desire to expiate his sins against the paternal order in the first act by dying while defending a more powerful father in the third act. Ironically, this only makes don Álvaro a more valiant soldier. As Carlos/don Félix remarks before knowing his comrade's true identity: "nunca vi tanta destreza en las armas" (130).

Once again, however, don Álvaro's wish for death at the hands of the father is frustrated. Not only does he fail to die nobly on the battlefield when Carlos saves his life, but fate intervenes once again when Carlos confronts don Álvaro and challenges him to a duel. While don Álvaro hopes to die at Carlos's hands, as the subsequent scene opens, it is revealed that it was Carlos who died on the battlefield, not don Álvaro, which the latter laments (148). While Carlos's death prolongs don Álvaro's suffering, it also demonstrates that, once again, the de Vargas family has failed in its attempt to punish don Álvaro and to restore its honor.

At the end of the fourth act, however, it appears that don Álvaro might get his wish to die at the hands of another father figure: the king of Spain. The captain visits don Álvaro in prison and reveals that King Carlos III of Naples has refused to grant don Álvaro a pardon and plans to execute him for his participation in the duel, despite the captain's protests about don Álvaro's/don Fadrique's exceptional record as a soldier in defense of the king. Don Álvaro accepts his fate, stating "la muerte como cristiano la sufriré; no me aterra" and lamenting only the fact that he dies as "un patíbulo infame" as opposed to an honorable soldier on the battlefield (154). Once again, however, don Álvaro's plans are thwarted when German troops invade Veletri and attack the Spanish and Italian soldiers hoping to burn down the king's palace (155). At this moment, the captain urges don Álvaro to escape, and the latter agrees, hoping this will allow him to die honorably on the battlefield (155). As the drama opens for the final act and don Álvaro is living in a monastery, however, it is clear that don Álvaro's wish to die at the hands of the king—through punishment or defending him on the battlefield—remains unfulfilled.

Having failed at seeking death on the battlefield, don Álvaro turns to Catholicism during the final act of the drama. Once again, don Álvaro takes on a new identity, this time as Padre Rafael, a monk who is described by his fellow monks as "un siervo de Dios a quien todos debemos imitar" (159). Don Álvaro's final resort to religious service is arguably presaged in his famous third-act soliloquy when he turns to God in the hopes of receiving some kind of consolation:

Mírame desde tu altura  
sin nombre en extraña tierra,  
empeñado en una guerra  
por ganar mi sepultura. (118)

This final step toward a monotheistic religion, as Freud would argue, is perhaps the strongest indication of his paternal longing, for

the terrifying helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection—for protection through love—which was provided by the father; the recognition that this helplessness lasts throughout life made it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one. (*The Future of An Illusion* 38)

Likewise, Freud posits in *Civilization and its Discontents* that both group and religious life is the completion of what began in relation to the father (96) and that even in early religions it gave the super-ego or totem the father's power "as though as punishment for the deed of aggression they had carried out against him" (95). As with don Álvaro's other attempts for paternal consolation or punishment, however, this too will fail him.

After four years of religious hermitage, another de Vargas son, Alfonso, finds don Álvaro in the monastery. Not only does Alfonso intend to kill don Álvaro, he also brings news from Lima, where he discovered the true identity of don Álvaro's parents, and that don Álvaro is "un mestizo, fruto de traiciones" (177). Upon hearing Alfonso's racial slur, don Álvaro finally embraces the role of outsider that the society has been attempting to impose on him since the beginning of the drama. Ironically, however, Alfonso too will suffer alienation alongside don Álvaro. Realizing that he is about to die, Alfonso begs don Álvaro, as a "ministro del Señor," to absolve him of his sins. Don Álvaro, however, rejects his previous role as a monk and reminds his enemy: "¡No, yo no soy más que un réprobo, presa infeliz del demonio!" (177). This statement not only signifies don Álvaro's embrace of his marginalized status—in this case, a spiritually marginalized figure—it also signifies that Alfonso, too, will die outside of the paternal order for having died without his last rites, according to the Catholic religion.

Moments later, when the community of Hornachuelos, including Padre Guardián, discover Alfonso and Leonor's cadavers laid in front of don Álvaro, the latter appears inhuman with a "*sonrisa diabólica, todo convulso*," who has rejected his previous identity: "busca, imbécil, al padre Rafael... soy un enviado del infierno, un demonio exterminador," shocking the religious community that has admired him for so many years (179). Fully embracing his role as an outsider, don Álvaro subsequently hurls himself off the highest point of the mountain, plunging to his death. This act of suicide, the ultimate taboo in Catholic religion, assures that his exile from the paternal order will be unalterable.

Richard Cardwell and, more recently, José Valero and Stephanie Zighelboim, have argued that don Álvaro repeatedly attempts to find refuge or social integration in the traditional institutions of the aristocracy, the imperial military, and religious life. All three of these institutions can be read as different forms of paternal authority, according to Freud: the aristocracy suggests the father of higher social standing that the son seeks in "Family Romances"; the military suggests service to the king or nobleman that Freud describes in "On Dreams" (170), "Family Romances," (300) and "Totem and Taboo" (507); finally, religious life suggests service to God the Father Himself, which Freud describes in *The Future of an Illusion* and "Totem and Taboo." All three of these institutions fail, however, both in protecting the son and in punishing him for his transgressions, demonstrating itself to be less effectual than it is in

*El trovador* or *La conjuración de Venecia*, when the hero dies at the hands of his brother and father.

In don Álvaro's case, once all three of these institutions have failed, the beleaguered *mestizo*, in Cardwell's words, "says no to purposive illusions, to God and God's universe" and subsequently decides to actively pursue the death that has eluded him throughout the drama (570). Yet, as Cardwell affirms, don Álvaro "does not cry out in protest against a God of anguish, suffering and death" (571). Instead, he appears to cast himself outside of God's order as an "enviado del infierno" or a "demonio exterminador" (179), suggesting that his final act of self-destruction is not a rebellion against God, but an act of self-annihilation that the father has failed to carry out, as well as a declaration of his own feeling of alienation from God the Father who has failed him all of his life.

Don Álvaro's persistent desire for the father's authority, as either a means of protection or punishment, could arguably reflect the author's own anxieties during the time he wrote the original French version of *Don Álvaro* in 1834. According to Materna, Rivas's longing for a return to the paternal fold that he had once criticized so vociferously is evidenced in such poems as "El desterrado," written early during his decade-long exile, as well as Rivas's reluctance to participate in the political life of the Spanish exiles in France ("Prodigal Sons" 611-12). No doubt the death of the tyrannical father Fernando VII in 1833, along with the disastrous Carlist war that ensued, contributed to the Rivas's growing sense of anxiety about the absence of paternal authority and might explain why *Don Álvaro* Rivas penned more conservative works such as his *Leyendas*, his *Romances históricos*, and his infamous prologue to Fernán Caballero's *La familia de Alameda*. Rivas's final drama, *El desengaño en un sueño*, is perhaps his strongest indictment of rebellion against paternal authority: the hero Lisardo, having suffered the consequences, at least in his mind, of rebelling against his father Marcolán, awakes from his Oedipal dream and, getting down on his knees in worship of his father, promises never to disobey him or separate from him. The fact that this drama was Rivas's favorite, according to Gabriel Lovett (140) suggests that like don Álvaro, Rivas was unable to bear the thought of a world in which paternal authority could not prevail.

### Notes

1. The beginning of the fifth scene of the first act of *Don Álvaro* describes Leonor's chambers as having "los adornos que se estilaban en el siglo pasado, pero todo deteriorado" (71). Likewise, Preciosilla describes the Marquis de Calatrava as "un vejete tan ruin" (67).
2. For Aristófañes Cedeño, the first two scenes of *Don Álvaro* comprise Bakhtin's carnivalesque environment in which outsiders or marginalized figures (in this case: Tío Paco, the gypsy Preciosilla, the town official, and two townspeople) have a voice and create social identity outside of the rigid traditional socio-economic boundaries of eighteenth century Spain. The Canon's words, however, remind the townspeople of the realities of Spanish society at the time and, with his intervention, the process of don Álvaro's destruction begins, "y se completará cuando el héroe se lanza al precipicio al final del drama" (439).
3. This is also known as the formation of the superego, in which the son represses his desire for his mother by erecting an obstacle within him to prevent him from desiring her. According to

Freud, this often retains the character of the father and later on, will take the form of a conscious or unconscious sense of guilt ("The Ego and the Id" 628-658).

4. These scholars include Joaquín Casaldero, David Gies, and Donald Shaw.

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