The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture · Vol 19.1 · December 2025 · 143-159.
DOI: 10.30395/WSR.202512_19(1).0007

A Hegelian Reading of Frank Bascombe's Self-consciousness in Richard Ford's *Independence Day*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide a close-reading analysis of Richard Ford's *Independence Day* (1995), the second Frank Bascombe book, preceded by *The Sportswriter* (1986) and followed by *The Lay of the Land* (2006), *Let Me Be Frank With You* (2014) and *Be Mine* (2023), in the light of Hegel's theory of self-consciousness. According to the primary definition of Hegelian self-consciousness, one is required to gain their recognition of their self through another individual's self-consciousness, most preferably an individual in a deep spiritual as well as emotional relationship, of which, in Hegel's view, one's family members could serve as the best example. This article argues that one possible reason for Frank Bascombe's constant feeling of loss and identity crisis in *Independence Day* might lie in the fact that his divorce from Ann Dykstra, his supposed Hegelian source of self-consciousness as an *other*, has separated Frank from his only origin (the family union), from which he could gain his self-consciousness through familial love. Thus, this article attempts to offer a Hegelian reading of Frank Bascombe in *Independence Day* by pinpointing the significance of his family loss, along with proposing a different model for interpreting Bascombe with regard to the importance of Hegelian self-consciousness within the family.

KEYWORDS: Richard Ford, *Independence Day*, Hegel, self-consciousness, family

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[*] Received: May5, 2024; Accepted: February21, 2025
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黑格爾視域下的弗蘭克・巴斯康布自我意識研究——以理查・福特《獨立日》為中心

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摘　要

本文旨在以黑格爾（G. W. F. Hegel）的自我意識理論為理論框架，對理查・福特（Richard Ford）1995 年出版的《獨立日》（*Independence Day*）進行細讀分析。該小說為「弗蘭克・巴斯康布（Frank Bascombe）系列」的第二部，前有《體育記者》（*The Sportswriter*，1986），後續包括《現狀》（*The Lay of the Land*，2006）、《讓我坦率地說》（*Let Me Be Frank With You*，2014）及《屬於我》（*Be Mine*，2023）。依據黑格爾關於自我意識的基本定義，個體須通過他者的自我意識來實現自我之確證，而這種他者關係最好建立於深層的精神與情感紐帶之中; 在黑格爾看來，家庭成員正是此類關係的典型代表。本文認為，弗蘭克・巴斯康布在《獨立日》中反覆出現的失落感與身份危機，可能根源於他與安・戴克斯特拉（Ann Dykstra）的離婚——即他失去了做為「他者」的黑格爾式自我意識來源，從而與唯一能通過家庭之愛獲得自我認同的原初場域（家庭共同體）相分離。因此，本文試圖從黑格爾自我意識理論的角度，重新解讀弗蘭克・巴斯康布在《獨立日》中的自我追尋，揭示家庭喪失對其主體建構的深遠影響，並提出一種基於黑格爾家庭自我意識重要性的全新闡釋路徑。

關鍵詞：理查・福特、《獨立日》、黑格爾、自我意識、家庭

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[*]本文 113 年 5 月 5 日收件；114 年 2 月 21 日審查通過。
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I. Introduction

This paper focuses on *Independence Day* (1995) by American author Richard Ford (1944-), the second instalment of his Frank Bascombe series, aiming to explore the protagonist's constant sense of loss and confusion from the lens of Hegelian self-consciousness. As an addition to all the previous research carried out on Ford's works, it is my hope and intention to draw attention to a particular gap in Frank Balcombe's personal as well as social interactions after his divorce. To do so, I propose that Frank's unceasing sense of loss could be associated with his lack of Hegelian self-consciousness, which functions as a significant outcome of familial love and original family orbit. Alice Ormiston, providing a well-balanced reading of Hegelian self-consciousness in consideration of familial love, remarks that one's consciousness is practically stimulated by the awareness of love, which can be observed in Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*. To put it simply, Hegel is of the view that once one is fully aware of the experience of love, s/he would be able to get to know her-/himself entirely (40-41).

In view of that, this paper aims to read Frank Bascombe's display of vulnerability in connection with his own lack of self-awareness. This way, it could be argued that his ubiquitous sense of alienation and persistent feeling of regret throughout *Independence Day* might be deeply rooted in his loss of self-recognition. That is, the moment he loses touch with his true familial love, he also loses the power of recognising his self-consciousness, making him vainly compensate for the damage with unstable, unhelpful friendships, a rather confused remarriage and fruitless relationships with fateful shortcomings. Despite his high hopes of reaching a new style of managing his post-divorce life without constant contact with his ex-wife and children, Frank ends up suffering from an omnipresent sense of perplexity, despair and distraction, which, in the end, turns him into an "ex-husband, ex-father, ex-lover, and ex-writer" (Dupuy 93).

Undoubtedly, the immediate implication rising from Hegelian philosophy and dialectic would mostly be associated with the Christian faith and perspective. However, I propose that one cannot simply disregard the fact that Hegel serves as a versatile thinker (or the philosopher of contradictions, as some would say) whose philosophy could be looked at from many different perspectives. For some, he is a Romantic critic of the Enlightenment, while

for others, he challenges the principles of Romanticism by supporting the values of a modern individual. On the other hand, Hegel might be regarded as merely a theological scholar, upholding Christian orthodoxy, while certain other scholars might regard him as a radical reductionist. Looking at Hegel from a different view, I attempt to apply a more secular, modern Hegel in debating self-consciousness in this article, hoping to highlight the modern side of Hegel's philosophy in terms of reason, rationality and universal human morality with a particular focus on modern individuals' self-consciousness as a direct consequence of (familial) love.

In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel regards the family as an incontestable value of every individual's life, as every person possesses the prospective capacity to successfully grasp a proper definition of love, confidence and faith in this small community in which the members can enjoy reciprocal love and, as an undeniable consequence, feel their own consciousness in the consciousness of each other (58). Put differently, once family members benefit from the existence of spousal as well as parental love, they will likely be able to experience the growth of each other's self-consciousness, which would lead to the emergence of their own self-consciousness. Furthermore, familial Hegelian love is principally viewed as a suitable means of gaining social existence through self-recognition (305) as it makes individuals deal with imminent challenges in a more complicated and larger community than the family: the society.

Similarly, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* indicates that since individuals are ultimately obliged to explore the outside world, familial love can perceptibly prepare family members to handle a more extensive model than what they experience in their family environment (123). In other words, in Hegel's view, to function correctly in society and hope to reach a beneficial social order, each individual is required to taste familial love—be it at the spousal or parental level—and then enjoy the subsequent sense of self-consciousness, which can only derive from the original love in one's family. Reading Hegel's notion of familial love and self-consciousness from the same point of view, Frederick C. Beiser notes, "The family counts as an instance of immediate unity because love is the principal bond that unites its members and makes it possible for them to have a collective will, each regarding the good of the family as his own good" (222). In other words, this intimate bond between family members by means of love would bring about self-sufficient

subjectivity or self-consciousness in Hegel's terms (223). In line with the above discussion, Hegel notes,

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

The above lines (familial: parental as well as spousal) show that love and self-consciousness not only help individuals to deal with personal, social and mental distress but also signify the need for a well-constructed, strong and advantageous society. For that reason, if this Hegelian standard is not encouraged, one will be bound to face severe identity delusion at both the personal and social levels, as one would be functioning as a loveless creature, without the required sense of self-consciousness each individual needs to possess to gain success and achievement.

Hegel regards self-consciousness as an element of "universality that unites the Being of substance with itself' and perceives proximity or insight as thinking (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 42), which essentially plays the role of a "transfigured essentiality": the reflection that is for itself immediacy as such, a Being which is a reflection into its own self (46). Borrowing a complementary part of the argument from Anaxagoras, Hegel then refers to the importance of understanding in connection with the self-consciousness of substance, the determination of substance as it simply is. In other words, he attempts to indicate that "Being-there," "equal-to-itself" or "determinate simplicity," is nothing but one's determinate thought (63). What is more, since the notion of infinity is regarded as an object for this definition, Hegel affirms that consciousness is also an element of difference in the form of something that is immediately sublated as well: consciousness for its own sake or self-consciousness (123). Put differently, Hegel views an individual's self-consciousness as an utterly independent entity and as different from that of another individual's that, at the same time, grows larger and enables its

possessor to act as a social being, too. He, then, elaborates on the more individuated dimension of this concept and writes:

> I differentiate myself from myself, and in this it is immediately for me that what is differentiated is not differentiated. I, the like-named, repel myself from myself; but what is differentiated, posited as unlike, is immediately, now that it is differentiated, no difference for me. Consciousness of an Other, of an object in general, is of course itself necessarily self-consciousness, reflectedness into itself, consciousness of itself in its otherness. (147)

The novelty of the above form of consciousness lies in the fact that it necessitates the being and essence of another consciousness that is not only independent and distinct from one's own consciousness but also defines and determines it as an unavoidable element. In other words, it always takes two to achieve a fulfilled model of Hegelian self-consciousness, empowered and fed by love.

To relate Hegelian self-consciousness to Frank Bascombe's situation, one may refer to the loss of this crucial interdependence after his divorce, which deprived him of the chance to get to know himself without benefiting from the self-consciousness of his *other*, Ann Dykstra. To elaborate further, one could refer to the way Hegel describes his interpretation of self-consciousness in *The Philosophy of Right* in terms of individuation, asserting that every single individual is required to see themselves in their own self-consciousness. In his view, everyone should find the ability to abstract themselves from all that they are so that they could prove to be able to set every "content" within themselves (30). The reason Hegel highlights the aforementioned consciousness could be observed in the matter of ultimate universality. That is to say, every self-consciousness, in Hegel's view, immediately knows itself as universal and as particular with a static "object or aim." Accordingly, I argue that Ann, Frank's ex-wife, could be taken as his definitive aim, which is sometimes invisible but periodically resurfaces throughout the whole novel. As Hegel writes, this unity of self-consciousness with that of the other is the key ground for providing sufficient input for creating the final, desirable unity of one's self-consciousness with itself or

recognising the existence and essence of it in the form of the famous Hegelian equation "I = I" (44).

The present article is thus aimed at investigating Frank Bascombe in Richard Ford's *Independence Day* in light of the Hegelian notion of self-consciousness, hoping to present a different reading of Richard Ford's well-known protagonist by excavating another aspect of Hegel's undeniably versatile philosophy. To this end, and as reading Frank Bascombe from Hegelian perspectives has not been underlined by many Richard Ford scholars and critics, the study draws upon the prerequisite for the emergence of an individual's Hegelian self-consciousness—familial love—to explore the feeling of loss and confusion behind Frank's behaviour patterns.

Due to their major themes and concerns, Ford's works are usually categorised as "dirty realism," a recent North American literary movement in which writers are said to represent the more routine aspects of modern everyday life in spare language. As the only living author to have achieved Pulitzer and Pen/Faulkner Awards in one year (in 1996 for *Independence Day*), Ford is considered to be one of the few remaining representatives of a unique type of American fiction, mainly prompted by William Faulkner, in terms of dealing with a certain sense of place, scrupulously observant characterisation and illustrating a neo-naturalistic view of American modern society (Walker, *Richard Ford* 16). Apart from his independent works of fiction, Richard Ford's current fame springs from his Frank Bascombe pentalogy. However, each of these five books can be read separately as they are both parts of a chain and independent works of fiction.

Most scholars have described Frank Bascombe as a middle-class suburbanite everyman who moves from a dishevelled condition in *The Sportswriter* (1986) to an absolutely lost and solitary figure in *Be Mine* (2023). In an extensive overview, Elinor Ann Walker contends that almost all of Ford's male characters witness parental failure, undergo sexual despair, and encounter consequent disappointment ("Redeeming" 121). Nevertheless, more specifically, in his monograph *Morality, Identity and Narrative in the Fiction of Richard Ford*, Brian Duffy depicts Frank Bascombe as a first-person narrator, playing multiple roles such as an ex-husband, an ex-father, an ex-lover, a divorcee, an actual suburbanite, and finally a citizen who finds himself devoted to his country and holds a wide range of opinions regarding America from personal, social, economic and even political outlook (10-11).

In line with the above research, Frank Bascombe, in contemporary American fiction, may be compared to several other predecessors, such as John Updike's Rabbit, who potentially develop into manifestations of typical US middle-aged, middle-class, white men of the 1990s, or at least a "Southerner's unique view of alienation" in modern American culture (Guagliardo, Introduction xiii). Exploring Richard Ford's Bascombe books, William G. Chernecky argues that their main characters mostly manifest contemporary American figures who are not after personal redemption any longer. According to Chernecky, Ford's symbolic landscapes and his matchless style of characterisation obviously reflect the significant rise of such peculiar rootlessness and despair among Americans (60). In fact, the undeniable reputation of Frank Bascombe becomes so remarkable that many readers, and even critics like Brian Duffy, mostly identify Richard Ford with the Bascombe books (Duffy 9).

In the same manner as Duffy, Edward Dupuy stresses Frank's state of loss and confusion in respect of his family and career breakdown and regards Frank as "a man of losses," who always carries "a long list of titles beginning with 'ex—ex-fiction writer, ex-husband, ex-lover, ex-professor, ex-father to his oldest son, Ralph'" (93). However, Ehrenreich takes Frank's "private tensions" as part of a total "process of internalization," which essentially helps him "abstract patterns from people and events" (58), quite similar to Chernecky's viewpoint, suggesting that this might increase his level of solipsism as a result of distancing from the world around him (159). What is more, Philip J. Zaborowski II correlates the root of Frank's problems with his "obsolete model of white masculinity" (4), as Frank struggles to build up his post-divorce life upon a false identity, he never gets to form which he calls "solipsism" (5). From a relatively different perspective, Huey Guagliardo points to Frank Bascombe's use of language, claiming that he develops an impeccable understanding of language use in order to bear his frequent loneliness and loss ("Marginal People" 16). This could be considered a novel approach to the Bascombe saga because it draws attention to Balcombe's critically constant state of confusion and self-loss.

II. Frank Bascombe in *Independence Day* and the Problem of Hegelian Self-consciousness

One remarkable image in *Independence Day* regarding Frank Bascombe's further contemplation about his lost true love and family could be observed in the recurrent reminders of this loss throughout the whole novel. These reminders are widespread within the entire book and function as a guide toward the essence of Frank's loss of self-recognition. The significance of these reminders they all seem to confirm the Hegelian notion of self-consciousness, an entity which "exists for another" and urges an individual to recognise themselves by recognising the other (Desmond 145).

Frank continuously attempts to bring his ex-love into his sporadically random thoughts and daydreams, as though he cannot do away with his ubiquitous sense of loss to the extent where he admits missing "real talk—the kind you have with a loved one, such as your former wife back when you were her husband" (Ford 64). Furthermore, while speaking of his place to one of his clients, Phyllis, Frank again prefers to present the place help from the image of Ann Dykstra, saying, "I do live in my ex-wife's former house" (64), as if he feels he is unavoidably obliged to employ Ann's name in his daily conversations and thoughts as a so-called protective shadow, which functions as a certain type of placebo that could be regarded as his lost self-recognition. Although Hegel remarks that each self-consciousness, in the first place and before maturation, tends to abstract itself from its own entity in the hope of gaining all the required successive phases, it needs to acquire universality, which will not be gained unless through seeking another self-consciousness (*Philosophy of Religion* 33). Hegel goes on to discuss that in the family domain and before one is supposed to be prepared to step into society as a larger community, this universality and interaction between two potential self-consciousnesses occurs through spousal and then parental love (110). Perhaps that would explain why *Independence Day* could be considered a novel openly about loneliness and the hardship of mixing different sets of private independence with a broader range of emotional involvement (McGuire 33).

Interestingly, even when there is a third person in Frank and Ann's presence, Frank leans toward gaining privacy in order to "hypnotise" the third person so as to "have some time alone" with his ex-wife (Ford 81) in the hope of feeding his self-realisation and alienated dignity. In Hegelian terms, this is

how consciousness is required to feel isolated from itself so that the self could fall into the other's self for acquiring its real identification (Bates 143). However, this haunting shadow of the *other* for Frank would never be achieved without realising the essence of the lost thing, given that this process is not something simple, as it is the pure production of subject and object together. That is how consciousness is defined as a creature who is truly conscious of something (Bates 26).

Richard Ford has always tended to create protagonists on the verge of fate and loss, and Frank Bascombe is not an exception. One could say that although he feels his life is "played out on a stage in which she's [Ann] continuously in the audience (whether she is paying attention or not)" (86), Frank never manages to recognise his Hegelian complex and, as a result, falls victim to his ignorance of the irreplaceable value of his lost original family orbit. In a later scene, too, realising the gloom and torture of his loss, he regretfully admits that "Ralph, who died of Reye's, should also be alive (as he surely should) and we should all still be we" (16).

Frank's divorce, a "piece of sour meat you just won't swallow" (Ford 128), could serve as the major difficulty he needs to tackle through his post-divorce years. Yet, he constantly doubts the true existence of it and assumes that it has not provided any long-term privilege in his post-divorce lifestyle, as he persistently feels marooned and alienated and finds his even temporary hopes and desires unfulfilled. Given that, he soon comes to the despairing conclusion that divorce not only fails to "shed a goddamn thing" but makes you "find out the limits of your character" (144). In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel insists that the improvement of self-consciousness is the precise "modern narrative of freedom," which, in other words, would mean the solution to the question of modernity could be the development of modern self-consciousness so that individuals would be able to recognise their own selves through understanding the other's self (12). Richard Ford himself holds that literature functions as a tool to express the sense of alienation and help one to identify oneself in the world by forming a connection with others (Guagliardo, "Marginal People" 7).

Philip J. Kain's reading of Hegel's notion of otherness implies that the true meaning of Hegelian love largely depends on the unity of one's consciousness with that of another so that the consciousness of individuality would feel able to preserve each individual for him-/herself (95). That is why

Frank admits that once one gets divorced, one never seems to cease wondering about what their ex-spouse might be doing time and again. This, in Frank's view, reduces to the "function of your view of her view—like watching the salesman in the clothing store mirror to see if he's admiring you in the loud plaid suit you haven't quite decided to buy, but will if he seems to approve" (Ford 194). Since he has lost the touch of his true love due to his divorce before encountering a noticeable number of consequential harms in terms of familial bonds, Frank strongly feels estranged from what surrounds him because the thing which bestows identity on his real being has been distancing itself from its Hegelian canon of production (Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos 41). What this means is that, feeling estranged and overwhelmed by such pervasive thoughts concerning the loss of his true marital status and family orbit, Frank does not seem to find it easy to see the reason his ex-wife would intend to remarry anyone except him (Ford 195). Although he does feel this constant sense of loss and confusion throughout the novel, my contention is that Frank fails to locate the origin of his struggles and never succeeds in relating his post-divorce sense of estrangement to his growing distance from Ann and their previous family union. Correspondingly, Sally, Frank's second wife, also raises the same sense of loss in him when she suggests, "You just want something you're not getting, is my guess" (13). However, she confirms that "it's not unusual," which prompts Frank to think to himself that "[i]t would be untruthful to pretend that what Sally was wrestling with last night was some want or absence I didn't feel myself" (13). Yet Frank never manages to step further to pinpoint the origin of this absence, which I suggest could be associated with Hegelian love and self-recognition.

In addition to his lack of self-consciousness, Frank Bascombe might be said to be affected by the convulsively cruel tensions of modernity. Although Ford almost always tends to place the reader right in the middle of the bedlam, which the protagonist experiences (Funk 59) so as to obtain an utterly novel means of sympathetic feedback, he also enjoys depicting numerous scenes in his Bascombe books in which the modern world is presented as a dangerous place which individuals do not seem to be able to escape from. In this case, Guagliardo argues persuasively that Haddam (a fictional American small town Frank looks on as home) plays the role of a rigid microcosm for Frank, that it, "in short, has failed to protect its residents from the violence and uncertainty of the world. It is a community on the edge" ("Marginal People" 22-23).

Likewise, Frank's soliloquy in *Independence Day* about the downsides of modernity could imply the above argument. Frank, who wonders why Ann could have imagined other husbands loving their wives a great deal better than he himself did, finally declares that "it is probably not unusual in modern life, though untrue of ours"; however, he then continues and admits that "this is the final judgment on our ancient history: why love failed, why life broke into this many pieces and made this pattern, who at long last is to blame. Me" (198).

Divorce, then, has not only separated Bascombe from his true love and their children and consequential family orbits, but also distanced him from his own self-regard and identity. To put it differently, the separation period for Frank sounds so devastating that he would rather call it his "darkest despairing" (Ford 252). That is how Hegel insists that the only way an "unhappy consciousness" can set itself free of such individual separation and feel better is to benefit from a "mediator," the *other* whose self-consciousness would lead to the reflection of another self-consciousness, resulting in the self-recognition of the former individual: a loved one (Stern 48). This situation could occur due to the loss of "unity of thinking with the other," an exclusive type of unity which exists in itself (McCarney 19). Hence, although he feels his divorce has obviously destroyed his personal identity, Frank still fails to recognise the possible origin of the issue, as he helplessly remarks that "regret would like to find a way of reviving things" (Ford 14).

In the end of the novel, when Frank informs Ann about their son Paul's accident injury, he feels moved again and, once more, he grabs the opportunity of having some "privacy" with her to express himself, admitting that he always had wanted to "get whacked" after the death of their first son followed by their divorce (Ford 309). Frank seems desperate to seek his lost identity in occasional conversations with Ann in the hope of not losing the remaining chance of a possible contact with his original family thread. This might remind one of the ways Hegel regards the notion of identity as self-consciousness (Bates 28). That is to say, Hegel's notion of self-recognition relies on the achievement of self-consciousness, which, at the family level, would be reachable through spousal or parental love. In other words, once the individual experiences this love in the realm of their family, they are ready to move forward and step into society as already complete citizens to serve the state. And since Frank has already lost this notion, he constantly struggles to

draw a positive image of himself and his previous behaviour during his married life with Ann in order to throw all this huge burden away.

As discussed above, Hegel strongly emphasises the role of the "mutual mirror of the other," which provides the ground for alienated selves to discover their self-consciousness through "shared values" (Ferrarin 347). In other words, in Hegelian thought, if one is required to function as an independent "myself," it is also essential to have enough space for the consciousness of others to intervene. Accordingly, at the very end of *Independence Day*, one can simply witness the above mutuality between true lovers who have lost track of their dependent self-recognition, wandering unaware of the fact that they do need to feed each other by their own selfness:

> Ann paused again. "Do you remember I said it's not easy being an ex-spouse?"
>
> "Yes," I said.
>
> "Well, it's not easy not being one, either."
>
> "No," I said, "it's not," and then I said nothing. (323)

As a matter of fact, the only reason readers get to know a lot more about Frank's agony could lie in the point of view Richard Ford has selected for his narration. That is, if the novel was narrated from Ann's viewpoint, we could have possibly been exposed to *her* thoughts and monologues. Either way, the crucial point would be this collision of their frequent sense of alienation through the novel (as well as the whole pentalogy), since it highlights their far-fetched co-existence and independent Hegelian self-consciousness.

Apart from the importance of the above-mentioned sense of mutuality, Frank appears to be already obsessed with this notion of togetherness, this ubiquitous trace of inseparability from original love and its interconnected values, even though he has been divorced for a remarkable period of time in *Independence Day*. Interestingly enough, Ford himself claims to believe that only "those little moments of life, those little, almost invisible, certainly omittable, connections between people . . . save your life or don't," and that if and only if one succeeds in "seizing those little moments," then he thinks that "life can go on for you" (Ford and Bonetti 95-96; ellipsis in source). In a like manner, what Frank Bascombe seems to have lost are such "connections" and "moments" which might enable him to go on. Everywhere he looks, he just

remembers his previous married life with Ann Dysktra. In the final scene in *Independence Day*, after the apparent "good day for a fresh start" (343), Frank still continues to link his present environment with his first married life in terms of togetherness and lost intimacy, confessing that "two, make that two, full-size moving vans are parked prominently in front of two houses, side by side, on Loud Road this late holiday morning, just around the corner from my old once-happily married house on Hoving" (343). It is noteworthy that Frank not only highlights this notion of "Two" in most of his monologues, but also finds himself recalling the bygone times of union, including his family's old house, their dead son, and their living together as a real family.

In view of that, Rhoda Koenig argues that Frank Bascombe's spirits "run along" T. S. Eliot's contemplations in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" where the author maintains that "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (qtd. in Dupuy 86). In fact, feeling lost in bygone days in far-reaching despair, Frank admits, "I loved here, buried a son nearby, lost a fine, permanent life here" (Ford 345). One could possibly say that within the microcosm created in the majority of Richard Ford's works of fiction, especially those featuring Frank Bascombe, in which the importance of a cohesively fabricated narrative is demonstrated, American social and economic impasses are not escaped but only enlarged by the despairing, impaired, modernised West where Ford's protagonists live on the edge amidst uncertainties of social relationships (Folks 143).

In seeking to remember and comprehend the intensity of loss, Richard Ford—contrary to established European philosophical traditions—appears to propose that one should neither adapt to nor grow closer to it. Such a mode of thought, he suggests, would constitute a surrender to absolute morbidity and inertia, thereby negating the very vibrancy and specificity of life itself. Frank reveals to us that knowing that one day he would also be buried "at home" close to Ralph would "paralyze [him] good and proper" and prevent him from continuing his normal life until his actual death (McGuire 36). This is similar to how Ford himself has described *Independence Day* as "a novel explicitly concerned with isolation and the difficulty of combining private independence with a larger kind of emotional engagement" (Majeski 4).

III. Conclusion

This article argued that Richard Ford's distinguished hero, Frank Bascombe, in *Independence Day*, could serve as a reflection of Hegel's definition of familial self-consciousness. The Hegelian model makes it possible to highlight the most fundamental behavioural features observed in Frank's personal as well as social life. This framework allows us to comprehend and visualise the primary concept in Hegelian self-consciousness in Frank: the need for a unique prerequisite, a self-conscious *other* to help him realise his own self-consciousness through the power of love within the family before stepping into society. In line with the previous studies on the importance of Hegelian self-consciousness, this article has demonstrated that Frank Bascombe in Richard Ford's *Independence Day* can be regarded as an example of a Hegelian case, in that he encounters the fateful consequences of his divorce from his ex-wife, Ann Dykstra, who could be regarded as the only Hegelian feeding source for him. Since he relentlessly feels distressed and yearns for the revival of his lost sense of family as a lost husband and father who cannot help taking each chance to meet up with his ex-wife for different reasons, Frank, thus, seems to lack what Hegel defines as self-consciousness due to the loss of his familial love.

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