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Patrimony, Solitude and Obligation: Prodigal Sons and Absent Fathers

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Abstract

As a contribution to the verifiable moment that auto/biographical explorations of the father are undergoing in the first two decades of the 21st century, my paper focuses on four authors whose relational memoirs "go beyond the subject." In particular, I focus on a comparative analysis of three hybrid texts -Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), Philip Roth's *Patrimony* (1991), and Richard Rodriguez's *Days of Obligation: an Argument with my Mexican Father* (1992)--, and I include a parallel reading of Dutch author Henri J. M. Nouwen’s spiritual journey *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1992). My transnational, transethnic reading of these very disparate versions of what has been called "patremoir" (Andre Gerard, 2012) or "patriography" (Couser, 2011) will explore how these authors mix their own portrait with the extended portrait of their (real or metaphoric) father, applying different myths, borrowing forms and strategies from literary antecedents, transgressing norms of familial secrecy and privacy, but -in the end- paying homage to their paternal legacy.

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The Prodigal Son Receiving His Patrimony. Etching. Permanent collection. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Washington. About the work. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Follow. The Prodigal Son Receiving His Patrimony. Etching. Permanent collection. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Washington. Buy. Buying from Galleries FAQ Buying from Auctions FAQ Consign with Artsy. When the prodigal son returns to his father, something significant happens. While he is still at a distance, the father sees him, has compassion upon him, runs to him, hugs him, and kisses him. This is far from the humiliating reunion that the son might expect based on his previous audacious and insulting treatment of his father! The returning son must have been astonished! But he continues by beginning to recite his pre-scripted speech to his father, and he manages to get the first two parts of it out.