

“HOW TO BE A MAN”  
AMERICAN MASCULINITIES, 1960-1989

by

Brad Congdon

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
March 2015

© Copyright by Brad Congdon, 2015

*To Krista, for everything.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1    “MEN” AS THE SUBJECT OF MASCULINITIES.....	5
1.2    “LEADING WITH THE CHIN”: <i>ESQUIRE</i> MAGAZINE AS HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY PROJECT.....	16
1.3    CHAPTER BREAKDOWN.....	25
CHAPTER 2: <i>AN AMERICAN DREAM</i> : MAILER’S GENDER NIGHTMARE.....	32
2.1    CRISIS! THE ORGANIZATION MAN AND THE WHITE NEGRO....	35
2.2 <i>AN AMERICAN DREAM</i> AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY .....	43
2.3 <i>AN AMERICAN DREAM</i> AND <i>ESQUIRE</i> MAGAZINE.....	54
2.4    CONCLUSION: REVISION AND HOMOPHOBIA.....	74
CHAPTER 3: COOLING IT WITH JAMES BALDWIN.....	76
3.1    BALDWIN’S CRITIQUE OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY.....	80
3.2    BALDWIN’S QUEER CRITIQUE OF RACE IN <i>ESQUIRE</i> MAGAZINE.....	94
3.3    “JAMES BALDWIN TELLS US ALL HOW TO COOL IT THIS SUMMER”.....	102
3.4    CONCLUSION.....	117
CHAPTER 4: LOW-RENT TRAGEDIES OF BESET MANHOOD: CONSUMER REALISM IN RAYMOND CARVER’S <i>ESQUIRE</i> STORIES.....	120
4.1    “THE MARKET REPRESENTS”: CARVER’S CONSUMER REALISM.....	122
4.2    “THE MAN ON THE WAY UP”: THE “GOOD LIFE” AND GENDER IDEOLOGY.....	128

4.3	CARVER’S FIRST <i>ESQUIRE</i> STORY: “NEIGHBORS” AND THE “SPACE” OF ADVERTISING.....	133
4.4	“WHAT IS IT?” AND “COLLECTORS”: REIFIED MASCULINITIES, DIMINISHED SELFHOOD.....	141
4.5	CONCLUSION.....	152
CHAPTER 5: TRUE MEN AND QUEER SPACES IN TRUMAN CAPOTE’S <i>ANSWERED PRAYERS</i> .....		155
5.1	<i>ESQUIRE</i> ’S QUEER 1970S.....	159
5.2	<i>ANSWERED PRAYERS</i> AS QUEER TEXT.....	173
5.3	FUGITIVES FROM THE GENDER ORDER: BEST-KEPT BOYS AND QUEER UTOPIAS.....	185
5.4	CONCLUSION.....	192
CHAPTER 6: SEXUAL FALLOUT IN TIM O’BRIEN’S <i>THE NUCLEAR AGE</i> .....		195
6.1	COLD WAR DISCOURSE AND GENDER TROUBLE IN <i>THE NUCLEAR AGE</i> .....	199
6.2	COLD WARRIORS AND COWBOYS: “SOMEWHERE THE DUKE IS SMILING”.....	205
6.3	RETRENCHING THE DOMESTIC SPHERE IN “GRANDMA’S PANTRY”.....	220
6.4	“OVARIES LIKE HAND GRENADES”: EMPHASIZED FEMININITIES IN <i>THE NUCLEAR AGE</i> .....	233
6.5	CONCLUSION.....	241
CHAPTER 7: DON DELILLO IN THE AMERICAN KITCHEN.....		245
7.1	“MEN IN SMALL ROOMS”: AMERICAN MASCULINITY, AMERICAN KITCHENS.....	250
7.2	“SUCK IN THAT GUT, AMERICA!”: JFK’S EXEMPLARY MASCULINITIES.....	262
7.3	GETTING A GRIP ON THE RUNAWAY WORLD: THE AUTHOR AS EXEMPLARY MASCULINITY .....	278

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION.....	289
WORKS CITED.....	297

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Cover of <i>Esquire</i> , July 1968, featuring an interview with James Baldwin.....	105
Figure 2	Fashion photography from <i>Esquire</i> .....	131
Figure 3	Advertisement for Stetson Shoes.....	132
Figure 4	Illustration accompanying “Neighbours” in <i>Esquire</i> .....	134
Figure 5	Illustration accompanying “What is it?” in <i>Esquire</i> .....	143
Figure 6	Cover of <i>Esquire</i> , December 1979, promoting Capote’s latest short story.....	155
Figure 7	Cover of <i>Esquire</i> , June 1975, featuring the first lines of “Mojave”.....	162
Figure 8	Cover of <i>Esquire</i> , May 1976, featuring Capote as his character from <i>Murder by Death</i> .....	163
Figure 9	Cover of <i>Esquire</i> , December 1976, featuring Capote with his character Kate McCloud.....	165
Figure 10	Cover of <i>Esquire</i> , April 1980, with John Wayne as an angelic cowboy.....	206
Figure 11	Cover of <i>Esquire</i> , August 1980, warning against Reagan’s “cowboy” presidency.....	211
Figure 12	Foltene Advertisement.....	257
Figure 13	<i>Esquire</i> , November 1962, Kennedy as Muscle Man.....	262

## ABSTRACT

The editors of *Esquire*, America's longest-running men's interest magazine, announced the publication's mission statement in its inaugural issue: "*Esquire* aims to be the common denominator of masculine interests—to be all things to all men." Throughout the majority of its publication history, being all things to all men has involved providing its male readers with fiction by canonical male authors. As such, this study examines the role of masculinity in works of American prose and fiction by canonical male authors, as they were originally published in *Esquire* magazine. *Esquire* can fruitfully be used as a tool for textual analysis, a lens through which historically and culturally specific arguments about particular constructions of masculinity can be made. In particular, I argue that situating these texts in the pages of *Esquire*, among its fashion advertisements and editorial content, is valuable for demonstrating how masculinities are constructed in relation to the marketplace. Reading specific texts within the frame of *Esquire*, I show that the works of contemporaneous authors—specifically Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, Raymond Carver, Truman Capote, Tim O'Brien, and Don DeLillo—are complicit with, struggle against, or attempt to subvert the masculine codes and behaviours promoted by the magazine. I demonstrate that gender is an always-present and always-contested factor in writing, sometimes obvious but sometimes subtle, and that the gendered subtexts of written works can be brought to the surface when read as part of a project dedicated to explicating "How to Be a Man." Furthermore, this study reveals the value of conceiving of masculinity in relation to hegemony—that is, in viewing the construction and maintenance of masculinities relationally, and as a part of a historic process inseparable from other historic processes, such as the processes of the marketplace, but that is in fact thoroughly imbricated in them. In so doing, "How to Be a Man" concludes that the market is a place in which the discourse of masculinity is contested, and that the prose and fiction of American authors contributes to, and shapes, that very discourse.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of many years of research, many drafts, and plenty of good advice. Thank you, first of all, to my advisor, Jason Haslam: your support, guidance, and patience allowed me to realize the project at the centre of all of this research, and your thoughtful criticism and encouragement always made it stronger. I would like to acknowledge, as well, the contributions of my committee members: Len Diepeveen, Anthony Enns, Lyn Bennett, and David Earle. Your feedback has been invaluable.

At different stages in its development, portions of this dissertation have been presented at the ACCUTE and the Canadian Association of American Studies annual conferences; the responses I received at those venues helped me iron-out some of the finer details contained within. Finally, I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council: without their generous support of a Doctoral Canada Graduate Grant (CGS), this study would never have come to fruition.



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*Esquire* aims to be the common denominator of masculine interests—to be all things to all men. This is difficult to accomplish, all at a crack, and we would be foolish to expect to work out the formula down to the last little detail, in the first issue. One of the things that are needed, for the ultimate shaping of this magazine into what will be its final form, is a frank reaction from the readers. We won't know how to please you in future issues unless and until you tell us what you think of the way we started out. The one test that has been applied to every feature that is in this first issue has been simply and solely: "Is it interesting to men?" How often were we wrong? Come on, let's have it—we're leading with the chin. ("As for General Content" 4)

"The Never-Before-Told Story of the World's First Computer Art (It's a Sexy Dame)," reads the title of a January 2013 article on *The Atlantic's* website. The article, written by Ben Edwards, details the history of what he claims to be the first computer-generated human likeness. In 1956, so the story goes, an unknown IBM employee programmed a \$238 million military computer to display the outline of a "Petty Girl," a recognizable, cheeky pin-up model illustrated by George Petty and associated with *Esquire* magazine.

Significantly, the story of "the world's first computer art" is a story of the military-industrial complex, Cold War institutions, and systemic sexism. It is a story about how men articulate their cultural dominance in inventive and surprising ways. It is

a story of “boys being boys,” even if those boys are men responsible for million-dollar equipment and the supposed security of the nation. It is a story about technologies for suppressing and objectifying women. It is a story that deftly illustrates the imbrication of masculinity, feminine subordination, and institutional power. It is also a story of *Esquire* magazine.

Founded in the 1930s, *Esquire* is America’s oldest men’s interest magazine, representing “the first thoroughgoing, conscious attempt to organize a consuming male audience” (Breazeale 1).<sup>1</sup> The brainchild of publishers David Smart and William Weintraub and editor Arnold Gingrich, upon publication it was viewed by *Time* magazine as *Vogue* for men (Merrill 31).<sup>2</sup> First published in 1933, and with a then-outlandish cover price of fifty cents, *Esquire*, rather counter-intuitively, was one of the few successes of the Great Depression. Central to its success was Gingrich’s editorial policy, in which he treated the magazine as a three-ring circus, the rings being “fashion, off-beat masculine writing, and sex” (Merrill 32). While the magazine has adapted its content throughout its eight-decade publication run, it has always desired, as stated on the magazine’s first-ever table of contents, to be “all things to all men.” This mission statement, while rarely so

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenon Breazeale’s “In Spite of Women: *Esquire* Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer” is the earliest, and the best, meticulous analysis of the construction of masculinity in *Esquire* magazine. The best subsequent study is Stefan Cieply’s “The Uncommon Man: *Esquire* and the Problem of the North American Male Consumer, 1957–63.” This study is thoroughly indebted to the work of these two scholars. <sup>2</sup> Hugh Merrill’s *Esquire: The Early Years at Esquire* provides, as its title would suggest, a good historical overview of the magazine under its first editor, Arnold Gingrich, from 1933 to the early 1950s. Gingrich himself provides an accounting of his time at *Esquire* in his autobiography *Nothing But People: the Early Days at Esquire, a Personal History, 1928-1958*. Carol Polsgrove’s *It Wasn't Pretty, Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun? : Surviving the '60s With Esquire's Harold Hayes* more-or-less picks up where Gingrich’s story leaves off, covering the editorship of the eponymous Hayes through the 1960s and into the 1970s.

blatantly expressed, has been rephrased throughout the decades, and in its current form exists as a phrase widely associated with the magazine: “How to Be a Man.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the magazine, one task expected of “being a man” is reading the works of American authors. Since its inception, *Esquire* has cultivated an impressive reputation as a place of publication. As *Esquire* historian Hugh Merrill has noted, *Esquire*’s fiction “has had more lasting impact than any other feature of the magazine” (155). The inaugural issue featured writing by Erskine Caldwell, John Dos Passos, Dashiell Hammett, and Ernest Hemingway, the last of whom became one of the most frequent contributors to the magazine during the 1930s. During its first decade, *Esquire* would also publish work by Ezra Pound, e. e. cummings, Langston Hughes, Aldous Huxley, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, among others. In the 1950s and 60s, *Esquire* published works from the likes of Gore Vidal, Dorothy Parker, Diana Trilling, Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, John Barth, Tennessee Williams, Thomas Pynchon, and John Cheever, to name only a few.<sup>4</sup> While by the 70s and 80s the magazine began to dial back on its publication of fiction, often focusing on publishing excerpts of works in progress, it had by that point been firmly established as a high-end literary marketplace.

The goal of this study is to examine the role of masculinity in works of American prose and fiction by canonical male authors, as they were originally published in *Esquire* magazine. As I demonstrate below, *Esquire* can fruitfully be used as a tool for textual analysis, as a lens through which historically and culturally specific arguments about particular constructions of masculinity can be made. In particular, situating these texts in

---

<sup>3</sup> “How to Be a Man” is a recurring feature of the magazine. Most recently, *Esquire* used it as the title of their 2014 handbook: *How to Be a Man: A Handbook of Advice, Inspiration, and Occasional Drinking*.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Baron’s *Author Index to Esquire, 1933-1973* has been an indispensable resource for this study.

the pages of *Esquire*, among its fashion advertisements and editorial content, is valuable for demonstrating how masculinities are constructed in relation to the marketplace. Readings of specific texts within the frame of *Esquire* will show that the works of contemporaneous authors were complicit with, struggled against, or attempted to subvert the masculine codes and behaviours promoted by the magazine. I will demonstrate that gender is an always-present and always-contested factor in writing, sometimes obvious but sometimes subtle, and that the gendered subtexts of written works can be brought to the surface when read as part of a project dedicated to explicating “How to Be a Man.” Furthermore, I demonstrate the value of conceiving of masculinity in relation to hegemony—that is, in viewing the construction and maintenance of masculinities relationally, and as part of a historic process inseparable from other historic processes, such as the processes of the marketplace, but which is in fact thoroughly imbricated in them. In so doing, I reveal that the market is a place in which the discourse of masculinity is contested, and that the prose and fiction of male American authors contributes to, and shapes, that very discourse.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> This study contributes to the field of periodical studies, and as such is deeply indebted to several sources in that field. Most pertinent is David Earle’s work: specifically, *Re-Covering Modernism*, in which Earle highlights the importance of the pulp medium through which much modernist work was circulated, and *All Man!: Hemingway, 1950’s Men’s Magazines, and the Masculine Persona*, in which Earle investigates the role of magazines in the construction of Hemingway’s famous, preeminent masculinity. Similar work is done by Erin Smith, whose *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* makes important connections between the content of pulp magazines and the social class of their readership. Moreover, Smith provides a model for reconstructing a magazine’s readership. “*How to Be a Man*” is similar to Smith’s study, in that it is concerned with both the ideological work done by the medium of the magazine and its connection to its readership; however, it differs in the type of magazine (a “slick” rather than a pulp) and the class of its readership (upper-middle-class rather than working-class). Both Janice Winship’s *Inside Women’s Magazines* and Joke Hermes’ *Reading Women’s Magazines* provide crucial analyses of the role of lifestyle magazines in constructing a defining gender; this study differs in its focus on masculinity, but also on its primary attention to fiction.

## 1. “Men” as the Subject of Masculinities

Before turning to the specifics of my study, it is necessary for this introduction to first outline the theories of gender informing “*How to Be a Man.*” In *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu prescribes the type of historical analysis that needs to be done in the realm of gender, arguing that “one must *reconstruct the history of the historical labour of dehistoricization*, or, to put it another way, the history of the continuous (re)creation of the objective and subjective structures of masculine domination, which has gone on permanently so long as there have been men and women, and through which the masculine order has been continuously reproduced from age to age” (82). In other words, patriarchy (what Bourdieu calls “masculine domination”)<sup>6</sup> has appeared continuously throughout history, to such an extent that it appears natural and ahistorical. If it passes as natural, then masculine domination is an integral, and therefore unalterable, aspect of social relations. But this is not the case. To critically analyze masculinity is to return it to history, to view it as a product of historical forces, and, more to the point, to reveal the “historical labour” that has gone into making it appear natural. To do so is also to reveal patriarchy as changeable, and to open new pathways, new escape routes from masculine domination. I propose that analyzing masculinity in the context of a men’s magazine facilitates Bourdieu’s goals, as the monthly format and

---

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this study I use the terms “patriarchy” and “masculine domination” interchangeably. Neither are completely satisfying terms, but both express the correct idea regarding the unequal distribution of power in contemporary gender hierarchies. As Gayle Rubin has argued, “patriarchy” is a specific term which loses its analytical power from being used too broadly (40-41); however, the frequency of its use in feminist discourse makes it useful. Furthermore, the more provocative term “masculine domination” perhaps obscures the other, more subtle ways hegemony is established through negotiation and complicity, rather than force.

targeted advertisements reveal the historical labour that goes into the maintenance of patriarchy and the construction of certain masculinities.

Raewyn Connell's influential theorization of masculinities offers the best basis for performing the type of historical analysis of patriarchy prescribed by Bourdieu, while simultaneously accounting for theories of gender forwarded by feminist and queer theorists such as Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Halberstam.<sup>7</sup> Connell defines gender as "social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, [though] it is not social practice reduced to the body ... Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does *not* determine the social" (*Masculinities* 71). Connell's theory—widely identified as Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, as a short-hand for the theory as a whole—provides a powerful framework for the analysis of masculinities.<sup>8</sup> Connell's theory recognizes masculinity as a historical, cultural construct, one which is open to contestation, while also focusing on the hierarchical organization of social relationships among men and between men and women ("Hegemonic" 90).<sup>9</sup> Connell's theory is useful in no small part because it recognizes the multiplicity of masculinities—

---

<sup>7</sup> Connell's theory offers the best basis for analyzing masculinities according to the four interrelated concepts pertinent to gender as an active part of social relations, as identified by Joan Scott: "culturally available symbols"; "normative concepts"; social institutions and organizations; and "subjective identity." See "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."

<sup>8</sup> No doubt because of its prevalence, Connell's theory has been subjected to numerous critiques. See, e.g. Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, who argues that Connell's theory of hegemony needs to be more rigorously Gramscian. Stephen Whitehead, on the other hand, argues that hegemonic masculinity is too vaguely defined (88-94), but finds more promise in Connell's concept of the gender order (95-6). Connell's theory nonetheless provides a powerful conceptual framework (e.g. the terms introduced below), useful to any historical approach to the construction of masculinities, one which highlights the relational construction of gender and power.

<sup>9</sup> For recent reviews of the development of the theory of hegemonic masculinity, see Alex Hobbs, "Masculinity Studies and Literature" and Connell's "The Study of Masculinities." Perhaps the most comprehensive review and reformulation of the concept can be found in Connell and James Messerschmidt's "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept."

both the difference in masculinity at different historical junctures and the hierarchized organization within masculinity—while emphasizing the role of power and institutions in maintaining patriarchy and ordering gender relations. Connell has written on this theory in various different forms for three decades now. Reviewing her work, as well as the work of those who best use the theory, reveals a number of terms pertinent to my own study: “hegemonic masculinity” and gender hierarchy; “gender regimes” and the “gender order”; the “patriarchal dividend”; and “exemplary masculinities.” Each of these concepts is demonstrated in *Esquire* magazine and in the prose and fiction discussed in “*How to Be a Man*.” In particular, my study frequently focuses on how hegemonic masculinity is renegotiated within the pages of the magazine, often through the circulation of exemplary masculinities. Indeed, exemplary masculinities are central to the arguments made in chapters two, three, six, and seven of this study, and one goal of this study is to elaborate on this underdeveloped aspect of Connell’s theory. However, before turning to exemplary masculinities, this introduction must map out the rest of Connell’s theory, to demonstrate their relevance.

Connell’s most cited contribution to the study of gender, and masculinities in particular, is her adaptation of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Connell uses Gramsci’s theory to account for masculinity’s historical mutability, but also to explain the gender hierarchies which result in unequal power distribution *between* men. It is therefore an understanding of gender that is profoundly relational. More specifically, for Connell, hegemonic masculinity is “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination

of women” (*Masculinities* 77). Stephen Whitehead is correct to argue that the concept is often vaguely defined in Connell’s writing (88-94); however, Connell’s description of hegemonic masculinity as a “configuration of gender practice” points to the fact that the term does not refer to actual men, but to a type of social practice in which certain men might engage. Hegemonic masculinity operates most coherently in the cultural field, but “real” men can still practice hegemonic masculinity in face-to-face social relationships. Its operation is perhaps clearer in earlier articulations of the theory, in which Connell compares hegemonic masculinity to earlier theoretical views of an idealized “male sex role” (“Iron” 83). Identifying hegemonic masculinity with the “male sex role” indicates that it should be thought of as an ideal, and thus symbolic, but also a role, and therefore something that nonetheless can be performed.

Moving from Connell’s specific definition to how the term has been most beneficially used is illustrative. Surveying the field of masculinity studies, Rosemary Ricciardelli, Kimberley A. Clow, and Philip White explain that,

hegemonic masculinity is represented via discourses of appearances (e.g., strength and size), affects (e.g., work ethic and emotional strength), sexualities (e.g., homosexual vs. heterosexual), behaviors (e.g., violent and assertive), occupations (e.g., valuing career over family and house work) and dominations (e.g., subordination of women and children). (64-55)

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore made up of cultural codes and behaviours which men can put into practice. This does not mean that it is entirely symbolic and unrelated to the “real” world: men in dominant positions—e.g. government, business, the military—put hegemonic masculinity into practice. This is why Connell refers to masculinities as



“projects, not fixed patterns” (“Hegemonic” 94). Outlining the type of masculinity its readers should practice, *Esquire* engages in a hegemonic masculinity project.

Hegemonic masculinity is practiced by the dominant form of masculinity in a given set of gender relations. Consequently, many other forms of masculinity are “subordinated” to this dominant form. Connell provides an American example of subordination, noting that “Gay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices,” including “political and cultural exclusion,” “cultural abuse,” “legal violence,” “street violence,” and “economic discrimination” (*Masculinities* 78). Subordinated masculinities find themselves at the bottom of the masculine gender hierarchy—but still, Connell would argue, in a position of dominance over women.

To account for the majority of men who are not practicing the hegemonic form of masculinity—or at least not practicing it completely—but who still benefit from masculine domination, Connell uses the term “complicity.” Complicit forms of masculinity still benefit from the subordination of women, without obtaining, or fiercely defending, hegemonic masculinity (*Masculinities* 79). Beate Kraus, discussing Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination*, explains that complicity in gender hierarchy can “only be achieved when both agents, dominants and dominated, have integrated into their habitus the symbolic order that generates the corresponding actions” (122). Hegemony cannot exist without complicity—it is established not through violence, but through negotiation. *Esquire* is one place where this negotiation happens, as it reflects and shapes the symbolic order in which specific forms of dominant and complicit masculinities are generated.

If through negotiation dominant forms of masculinity remain dominant, then complicity is achieved by other masculinities receiving the “patriarchal dividend,” a term Connell uses to describe “the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order” (*Gender* 142). All men receive the patriarchal dividend, though they do not receive the same share (Bridges 90). Dominant men receive the lion’s share, but other masculinities receive enough of the patriarchal dividend to purchase their complicity. The patriarchal dividend goes some way to explaining the endurance of the structures of patriarchy: though many men do not actively participate in the marginalization of other men based on race or sexuality, or in explicit acts of subordinating women, all men benefit from being men in a male-dominated society. Perhaps they are not racist, sexist, or heterosexist, but the racism, sexism, and heterosexism of other men contribute to their (relative) dominance within society. For a man to fight against these systems of dominance, he would have to be willing to give up this dividend.

Hegemonic, subordinate, and complicit forms of masculinity are highly visible within institutional settings. Connell uses the term “gender regime” to describe “the state of play in gender relations in a given institution” (*Gender & Power* 120), but which, I argue in chapter five, might be associated with specific social spaces. Connell argues that a gender regime is “a pattern in gender relations” such as “who was recruited to do what work,” “what social divisions were recognized,” “how emotional relations were conducted,” and “how these institutions were related to others” (*Gender* 72).

Furthermore, different gender regimes engender different gender relations and different values (Bridges 92). Importantly, though, gender regimes are not autonomous, but should be understood as part of the social spaces in which they exist. As Mike Donaldson notes,

all social relations occur “inside” gender (653). Not only are gender regimes part of social spaces, but they are connected to the larger social and economic patterns—they do not exist independent of other historical forces.

The movement from a gender regime to a “gender order” is the movement from the micro to the macro: Connell refers to the gender order as “wider [gender] patterns” which “endure over time” (*Gender* 73). Connell uses the gender order to discuss the pattern of gender relations in, for instance, the United States, rather than in a particular institution. It is in many ways harder to “think” the gender order without recourse to stereotypes and generalities; however, it is helpful to think of the gender order as reflective of the often “additive or complementary” relationship *between* regimes (*Gender & Power* 134). To use America as an example: if the institutions which have the most influence in a state—that is, what Louis Althusser called the Repressive (e.g. the army, the police) and Ideological State Apparatuses (e.g. politics, the family)<sup>10</sup>—are themselves dominated by men (and each one dominated by a particular form of hegemonic masculinity), then we can posit that the larger gender order is one characterized by masculine domination.

Exemplary masculinities function, in part, to relate the larger gender order to local gender regimes, and vice-versa. Exemplars of masculinity, transmitted through the symbolic order and valorized by institutions, establish and solidify hegemonic masculinity, since “To be culturally exalted, [hegemonic masculinity] must have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes” (Connell “Iron” 94). Furthermore,

---

<sup>10</sup> See “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”

exemplary masculinities may be constructed (e.g. in commercial sport) which do not correspond closely to the lives of the majority of men, or even correspond closely to the actual lives of the richest and most powerful men, but which in various ways express ideals, fantasies and desires, provide models of relations with women and solutions to gender problems and above all ‘naturalize’ gender difference and gender hierarchy. (Connell, “Hegemonic” 90)

That is to say that while exemplars of masculinity are often real men constructed in specific gender regimes, they become symbols when taken up as exemplars of masculinity—they are “models of admired masculine conduct” circulated by the media and exalted by masculinist institutions such as *Esquire*.

Moreover, exemplars of masculinity are not necessarily like most, or the richest, men, and men from marginalized and subordinated groups can even be held up as exemplary. Connell calls this latter process “authorization”; examining the American context, she provides the example of wealthy black athletes, who are held up as exemplary but whose statuses do nothing to benefit the social status of black men more generally (*Masculinities* 81). That is to say that exemplars of masculinity benefit hegemonic masculinity as symbols of masculine superiority: they tend to embody an aspect of hegemonic masculinity which can be used to symbolically buttress men’s statuses more generally. However, Connell fails to consider that exemplars of masculinity can also reinforce the subordination of some men, such as the “black athlete” in the above example, who could be made to signify the supposed physical superiority of men

generally while also denying the reality of “black intellectualism.” One goal of this project is to add some complexity to Connell’s otherwise insightful term.

Because most gender orders and regimes are patriarchal, most do not feature what could be called hegemonic femininity. This lack is because hegemonic masculinity is predicated on the ultimate subordination of women, meaning that women are denied hegemonic status. Instead, Connell refers to a symbolic gender position comparable to exemplary masculinities, which she refers to as “emphasized femininity.” Connell defines emphasized femininity as a form of femininity “defined around compliance with [its] subordination and ... oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (*Gender & Power* 183). Similarly, when discussing gender, Bourdieu argues that “femininity” is often just a set of behaviours meant to indulge real or imagined male expectations (66). Emphasized femininity can therefore be thought of as the configuration of gender practice for women that is best thought to benefit and indulge hegemonic masculinity, and in the symbolic order it plays a similar role to exemplary masculinity. Just as *Esquire* circulates exemplars of masculinity, so too does it construct emphasized femininities in the cultural field.

The concept of “exemplary masculinity” is important to an analysis of masculinity such as this one, which is focused on prose and fiction and therefore on the symbolic, discursive formulation of masculinity. Exemplary masculinities are one powerful way hegemonic masculinity is inscribed in the symbolic order; indeed, Michael Messner has argued that it is only in the symbolic that a seemingly intelligible and fixed form of hegemonic masculinity can be represented (463). Exemplary masculinities provide models for social practice and reinforce notions of masculine domination. They can do

this even if their particular configuration of masculinity is not necessarily viable in every gender regime.

Having established this framework for an analysis of masculinity and gender power, it remains to introduce two concepts that are central to the construction of masculinity itself, and which recur throughout the prose and fiction discussed in this study: homosociality and violence. The sociologist Michael Kimmel, echoing, among others, Sedgwick, insists that “Manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance” (“Homophobia” 186).<sup>11</sup> Kimmel’s contention, then, is that masculinity is a homosocial construct: its rules are chosen and shaped by men, and how each man measures up is judged primarily by other men. Kimmel’s theory needs to be understood as complementary to Connell’s theories—for example, within a given gender regime, a type of masculinity is practiced for other men’s approval, and men in that regime are able to judge it (and accordingly the judgement could be different in different regimes).

Kimmel goes on to explain the important role of fear in the construction of masculinity. This fear has, at its root, homophobia, “the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men” (“Homophobia” 189).<sup>12</sup> Because gender is ordered hierarchically, and this hierarchy is historical and malleable, one’s position in that hierarchy is always

---

<sup>11</sup> For Sedgwick’s analysis of male homosociality, and the role of homophobia, see *Between Men* (especially 1-5) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (especially 67-90).

<sup>12</sup> Here, I want to distinguish between two related terms: “homophobia” and “heterosexism.” Homophobia, in its popular usage, is a misnomer: far from referring to a fear or phobia, the term is usually used to describe the discrimination against (or heterosexism toward) homosexuals. The problem with this misnomer is that by misattributing hatred as a phobia, it might legitimate the response of the heterosexist (e.g. “I don’t hate homosexuals, I’m only afraid of them.”) Kimmel’s definition of homophobia has the advantage of identifying a specific fear—the fear of being identified as homosexual and therefore subjected to heterosexism, which includes marginalization.

contestable. Masculinity has to be continually reasserted, and marginalization is always a possibility, even for men previously practicing some form of hegemonic masculinity. As Sedgwick argues, homophobia should be understood as a tool for regulating masculine behaviour, making it a “disproportionately powerful instrument of social control” (86). Fear is the internalization of this social control.

Considering the centrality of fear to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity—or at least to the subordination and marginalization within a patriarchal gender hierarchy—it should not be surprising that violence is also central to many practices of masculinity. Most masculinities scholars, whether historians, sociologists, or criminologists, have found a powerful connection between masculinity and violence. Male violence is directed at all genders. Citing Messerschmidt, a criminologist, Connell argues that violence plays a role in the construction of some masculinities, and that it is often used as a means of asserting dominance (“Hegemonic” 95). Messerschmidt has even come up with a term to explain certain violent interactions between men. He labels a “masculinity challenge” those “contextual interactions that resulted in masculine degradation. Masculinity challenges arise from interactional threats and insults from peers and from situationally defined masculine expectations that are not achievable” (298). As this study will demonstrate, male characters often react violently when faced with such masculinity challenges.

Violence plays out in gender not only in face-to-face social relations, but also in other categories pertinent to gender, already discussed: violence can be both institutional and symbolic. For example, Butler argues that the concept of the normative—pertaining, in her usage, to “the norms that govern gender”—also describes “the mundane violence

performed by certain kinds of gender ideal” (*Gender* xxi). Institutional violence operates in a similar fashion, described by Slavoj Žižek as “objective violence,” which is “precisely the violence inherent to this ‘normal’ state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent” (2). While hegemonic masculinity is not achieved solely through violence, but instead primarily through negotiation and normalization, it is always supported by deep structures of violence, and the threat of violence is always present in struggles of dominance.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. “Leading with the Chin”: *Esquire* Magazine as Hegemonic Masculinity Project**

Using Connell’s theories as the primary framework onto which other gender and related theories of power are added, I turn to *Esquire* magazine. “*How to Be a Man*” argues that men’s magazines are privileged sites for analyzing contemporaneous shifts in hegemonic masculinity; for examining how supposed gender problems are “solved” in the marketplace; and for interrogating how and why men feel their relationship to masculinity and the patriarchal dividend is changing. In other words, men’s magazines can provide a snapshot of the state of play in a certain gender regime, or even the larger gender order, which fruitfully can be used to analyze the use of power and the acts of domination and subordination at work in the practice of hegemonic masculinity.

Published monthly, aimed at particular male audiences, and attuned to historic shifts and trends, men’s magazines provide an excellent venue for a study of gender keyed to the multilevel analysis of hegemonic masculinity. The research of several

---

<sup>13</sup> This is in keeping with Althusser’s argument that ideological state apparatuses function primarily through ideology, but rely on a substrate of threat (112).



magazine scholars supports this assertion: as Bethan Benwell argues in the introduction to *Masculinity and Men's Magazines*, the specific concerns of men's magazines are crucially related to wider cultural concepts of masculinity (6). That is to say that while a certain magazine may have a limited circulation and a specific male audience in mind, it nonetheless responds to shifts in the larger gender order and can even represent certain aspects of local gender regimes.

Not only are men's magazines responsive to the larger cultural discourse of masculinity, but they also demonstrate how contemporaneous formulations of hegemonic masculinity are being renegotiated. Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson, and Kate Brooks assert that "magazines provide men with a kind of conceptual map for navigating safely through their contemporary gender anxieties, whether in relation to their health, their careers, their sexual relationships or their place in 'consumer culture' more generally" (14). Men's magazines therefore provide men with an understanding of their relationship to the world as men—that is to say, all relationships are understood primarily through the lens of gender. After quoting the same passage, Ricciardelli, Clow, and White summarize Jackson, Stevenson, and Brooks' results as follows: "Overall, such magazines were found to symbolize a commodification of the gender troubles men experienced and open a venue for change all while employing devices—such as humor, defiance and irony—to distance men from any significant commitment to collective or personal change" (67). Accordingly, while magazines register supposed threats to masculinity, they also offer consumption, rather than significant change, as the means by which these threats can be neutralized. After all, magazines are in the business of making money, and they primarily

do so by selling advertising, meaning that changes within gender regimes, or to the larger gender order, can also function as marketing strategies.

These arguments regarding men's magazines generally are pertinent to my particular study of *Esquire*. The magazine is an ideal text for a historical analysis of the changing forces that shape hegemonic masculinity. Connell's theory is primarily concerned with the hierarchical organization of social relationships *among* men; Kimmel argues that masculinity is a homosocial construct; and *Esquire* is a homosocial space, inasmuch as it is primarily written by men and for men. "*How to Be a Man*" therefore focuses on the works of male authors published in the magazine, to demonstrate the workings and tensions *internal* to hegemonic masculinity. A first contention central to this study is that since its inception *Esquire* has been engaged in a hegemonic masculinity project, one which is not a fixed pattern but continually open to renegotiation. My second, related contention is that reading works of prose and fiction as they were originally published in *Esquire* reveals how male, American authors reacted to hegemonic masculinity in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

*Esquire's* hegemonic masculinity project is designed for an ideal reader. Who is *Esquire's* ideal reader? Which is to ask, to whom are the editorial content and advertisements directed? Despite an 80-year period of publication, involving numerous changes in marketplaces and culture, the target audience has remained reasonably stable: *Esquire's* ideal reader is a member of what John and Barbara Ehrenreich called the Professional-Managerial Class (PMC), that is, "a distinct class in monopoly capitalist society" comprised of, for instance, "technical workers, managerial workers, 'cultural' producers, etc." (9). Additionally, the Ehrenreichs define this class as those "whose major

function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations” (12).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, *Esquire*’s ideal reader is straight, white, and interested in leisure and sophistication. Speaking of the magazine in the 1930s, Kenon Breazeale notes that the magazine “sought to create a comprehensive set of expectations about what constitutes a desirable upper-middle-class identity” (6). Furthermore, this ideal readership was foundational to the magazine’s success: launched in the 1930s, during the Great Depression, the publishers chose a men’s fashion magazine because men who could afford fashion represented a group that was prosperous, materialistic, and more-or-less depression-proof (Breazeale 6). Affluence is central to the *Esquire*-reader’s masculine identity.

Stefan Cieply’s analysis of *Esquire* from the late Fifties to the early Sixties reveals that the magazine targeted much the same audience as it did several decades earlier. Referring to a marketing survey from 1963—30 years after the period discussed by Breazeale—Cieply notes that 90% of the readers were men, 80% were professionals or executives, and the majority were in their late thirties and early forties. The same survey asked men to describe the *Esquire* reader: 33% selected the descriptor “sophisticated, urbane, up-to-date,” and 23% identified the magazine’s readers as “intellectuals, eggheads, well-educated” (161-162). Cieply further points to an advertisement for *Esquire* which was run in *Time*, proclaiming that “Like Russian caviar, Dutch gin, and Swedish movies, *Esquire* isn’t for everybody. To be precise, it is edited for only one man in 59.4” (162). *Esquire* therefore made itself attractive by advertising its audience as elite, sophisticated, and affluent—all desirable categories.

---

<sup>14</sup> Barbara and John Ehrenreich have recently revisited this influential class marker, and discussed its history, in their article “The Real Story Behind the Crash and Burn of America’s Managerial Class.”

Discussing *Esquire* in the 1980s, Denise Kervin argues that the magazine “has always had a specific male audience in their late 20s to 40s age group, middle to upper-middle class, educated beyond high school, and holding a white-collar job” (56). This description of the readership matches *Esquire*’s current narrative of their readership. Based on polling data published in 2013 and used for promoting the magazine to potential advertisers, the magazine claims that “Only *Esquire* readers have both the influence and wealth to serve as luxury brand promoters, affecting the purchasing decisions of other consumers—their family, friends, and colleagues” (“Affluence & Influence”). They claim that *Esquire* readers have the highest median net worth when compared to the readership of other men’s magazines (i.e. *Men’s Health*, *Men’s Journal*, *GQ*, and *Details*) (“Wealthiest Adults”). Additionally, the statistics regarding their male readership find that 78.8% are college graduates, 37% have studied at the postgraduate level, 63% are in professional/managerial positions, and 24.7% are defined as “Top Management” (“Male Profile”). Today’s *Esquire* readers, like the original *Esquire* readers, are members of the Professional-Managerial Class.

*Esquire* characterizes its own ideal readership in a number of ways: affluent, educated, and influential. Reading widely from the magazine, and noting the ways the reader is hailed, or even constructed as a fiction, reveals that the ideal reader is also white and heterosexual (and this remains true in current issues of the magazine). Given their choice of reading material, these ideal readers are also interested in “how to be a man.” That is to say that they are interested in practicing hegemonic masculinity in their given (white collar, professional-managerial) gender regimes.

Just as importantly, one of the primary ways they practice hegemonic masculinity is through *consumption*. If this were not obvious from the medium of the general interest magazine itself, it would become clear from a quick review of the scholarship: Breazeale sees *Esquire* as the “first magazine presenting an appeal to the desiring male subject (i.e., consumer) as a systematically developed editorial formula” (3); Tom Pendergast believes that early *Esquire* articles “rescued consumerism for a male audience” (217); Bill Osgerby discusses how *Esquire* furnished “upwardly-mobile male consumers with a repertoire of cultural codes and meanings ... which made intelligible their relationship with style, desire and commodity culture” (74). Indeed, *Esquire*’s signature phrase “How to Be a Man” might more accurately be rephrased as “How to Consume Like a Man.”

Stefan Cieply’s analysis of *Esquire* from 1957 to 1963 makes a convincing case for the study of consumerism in relation to masculinity:

how men define themselves as consuming subjects is directly implicated in the reproduction of the gender order. As men clothe their bodies, maintain their appearance through exercise, body products and/or cosmetic surgery and surround themselves with material goods, they look to mediated images of exemplary masculinity in their project of constructing the self. Thus, an analysis of how cultural intermediaries frame, produce and articulate masculinity is as vital to our understanding of the male consumer as the activities of actual male consumers. (152-3)

Building off of Cieply’s analysis, it follows that while *Esquire* was invested in the renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity, its masculinity project takes place squarely in the realm of consumption. *Esquire* advertised a particular hegemonic masculinity project

as a lifestyle—that is, “an assemblage of disconnected consumer dispositions and proclivities that are brought together to express an individual style” (Cieply, “Uncommon” 162). Moreover, this study is concerned, following Mike Featherstone, with a “consideration of the production of lifestyle tastes within a structured social space in which various groups, classes and class fractions struggle and compete to impose their own particular tastes as the legitimate tastes, and to thereby, where necessary, name and rename, classify and reclassify, order and reorder the field” (85). This is not to say that men’s relationship to consumerism is always unproblematic. Indeed, despite *Esquire*’s longstanding investment in constructing a male consumer, this study will show that authors depict men—some men—struggling with their relationship to consumerism and domestication. Moreover, as Cieply argues, in a capitalist society, men’s relative comfort or discomfort with consumption is one aspect of the struggle for hegemonic masculinity (153). No matter how fraught the relationship between consumerism and masculinity, it is through the marketplace that *Esquire*’s hegemonic masculinity project would proffer its readers solutions to the “problem” of patriarchy.

Despite my focus on one particular magazine, and my insistence, throughout, that masculinity must not be thought of as universal, but local, I argue that my findings are relevant not only to those interested in *Esquire* magazine, but that the magazine itself is representative of wider cultural trends. In particular, my study of *Esquire* demonstrates how hegemonic masculinities are negotiated in relation to the wider market and to the act of consumption, making it pertinent to the study of gender in the twentieth century and in particular our current neoliberal moment. Additionally, my focus on canonical American authors should demonstrate that questions of masculinity, no matter how specific, have

larger cultural implications. While I rely on sociological theories of masculinities, “*How to Be a Man*” is not ethnography. It is not about all the potential reading practices of all the possible readers. While *Esquire* may target a particular ideal readership, the sheer number of possible or even probable readerships would make such an undertaking quite daunting, though no doubt valuable. Rather, my focus in this study is to identify how *Esquire* formulates a hegemonic masculinity project, and the ideal reader to whom this project is addressed (or assumed as its practitioner). These are symbolic, ideological constructions, well-suited as models for an analysis of prose and fiction.

My second, related contention in this study follows from the first, and it is that reading works of prose and fiction as they were originally published in the context of this highly ideological, homosocial masculinity project reveals the many ways that male American writers contributed to, complicated, or subverted hegemonic masculinity. As Stefan Horlacher, quoting Connell’s “The History of Masculinity,” argues, “literary discourses still remain a privileged site for registering patriarchy’s ‘loss of legitimacy’ and how ‘different groups of men are now negotiating that loss in very different ways’” (4). Texts by American authors, contextualized in *Esquire*, reveal the many ways hegemonic masculinity is renegotiated, and the anxieties surrounding this process: they show how exemplary masculinities and emphasized femininities circulate in the cultural field; they probe the relationship between masculinity and consumerism; they demonstrate the violence, overt or ideological, underpinning hegemonic masculinity projects; they critique such projects, or are complicit in them.

This is not to say that each piece of writing published in *Esquire* is primarily or overtly about masculinity. The fiction and long-form essays published in *Esquire* were

chosen less for their overt content than for their prestige value. To put it another way, *Esquire* did not publish works by James Baldwin or Raymond Carver because of what those writers had to say about masculinity; rather, *Esquire* promoted a type of masculinity that was sophisticated and well-read. Men should read these authors because they were important American writers, and men needed to be knowledgeable about such things. *Esquire* was much more interested in the prestige of its fiction. This is to say, the stories themselves were conceived of as items to be consumed, for the purpose of providing *Esquire* readers with the right kind of cultural capital.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Breazeale notes that, when *Esquire* was first being dreamed up, the actual editorial content was an afterthought (5). It was Arnold Gingrich who wanted to develop the magazine's reputation by publishing quality fiction from modernist authors like Hemingway and Fitzgerald (Breazeale 5). In the 1960s, *Esquire* became one of the homes of New Journalism, and published experimental, postmodern fiction from authors such as John Barth and William S. Burroughs. In the 1970s, the magazine hired Gordon Lish, publisher of the avant-garde literary magazine *Genesis West*, who used *Esquire* to usher in a new style of fiction largely associated with Raymond Carver and popularly identified as dirty realism. This brief outline is offered only to suggest that *Esquire* was interested in new, influential, and sometimes challenging fiction, because one way its readers practiced hegemonic masculinity was by being knowledgeable of the new, the influential, and the sometimes challenging.

---

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu's term is usually traced to *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Others have offered concise definitions of the term. For example, Richard Jenkins defines cultural capital as "primarily legitimate knowledge of one kind or another" (85), and Chris Barker defines it as "the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status" (37).



### 3. Chapter Breakdown

In “*How to Be a Man*,” I analyze the works of six American authors whose writing appeared in the pages of *Esquire* magazine over a three-decade period: 1960-1989. During this period, articulations of American masculinity responded to changing social, cultural, and economic landscapes. This period witnessed, in brief (and with no pretense to absolute coverage): the Civil Rights movement; Second-Wave Feminism; the increased visibility and cultural prominence of homosexual and queer masculinities; the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan; the rise of neoconservatism; and the process that Susan Jeffords has identified as the “remasculinization of America.”<sup>16</sup> Just as profoundly, the same period saw the super-concentration of capital in the hands of the very wealthy, and the redistribution of wealth upwards. The middle-class became increasingly associated with the Professional-Managerial Class (PMC); industry and manual labor was increasingly marginalized, while white-collar and service work became more central;<sup>17</sup> America moved from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy, and Neoliberalism was established as the dominant paradigm. Consequently, the period witnessed a number of historical forces which called for a renegotiation of hegemonic formulations of masculinity and which therefore affected men’s relationship to masculinity and the patriarchal dividend.

*Esquire* partook of, commodified, and made intelligible the changing discourse of masculinity during this period. To examine the ways writers engaged with this renegotiation of masculinity, I have selected male authors who regularly published with

---

<sup>16</sup> Jeffords, *Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*, and *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*.

<sup>17</sup> See Andrew Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work*.

the magazine during the decade under discussion. Furthermore, to take full advantage of *Esquire* as a particular “lens” through which to view changing definitions of masculinity, I have selected authors whose names are associated with the magazine. That is to say that I have not chosen authors who only occasionally published with the magazine, but those authors who had sustained relationships with the magazine. Norman Mailer and James Baldwin, for instance, both regularly published with *Esquire* during the 1960s; Mailer, in particular, even had his own regular column, entitled “The Big Bite.” Raymond Carver’s development as an author owes much to his relationship with *Esquire*’s fiction editor, Gordon Lish, and *Esquire* was the first popular, national magazine to publish his work. Truman Capote’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* was first published in *Esquire*, and the magazine was the sole place of publication during his lifetime of his unfinished novel *Answered Prayers*. Both Tim O’Brien and Don DeLillo established a connection with *Esquire* by regularly publishing with the magazine over a number of decades; indeed, as was the case with Carver, *Esquire* was the first national, popular magazine to publish DeLillo’s fiction, and five of the stories which make up the core of O’Brien’s most popular work, *The Things They Carried*, were originally published in the magazine.

“How to Be a Man” is divided into three periods, with two chapters forming the analysis of each period. The first period is the 1960s, which, for the magazine, were characterized by African American civil strife and the so-called post-War “crisis of masculinity,” brought on by the increased social mobility of women and the rise of white-collar work. Chapter two focuses on Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream*, which was originally published in *Esquire* in a series of installments throughout 1964. Shortly after its publication, the novel was decried as misogynist by critics, notably Judith Fetterley,

Kate Millett, and Mary Ellmann, and in subsequent years even its defenders commented on its sexism. Examining *An American Dream* as it was published in serial form in *Esquire* magazine, and noting its differences from the Dial Press version, which was the first printing of the novel as a book, I argue that the magazine version provides openings through which a reading of a more radical gender project is possible. In particular, I focus on the novel's different introductions to demonstrate how the *Esquire* version offers possibilities for identification with feminine role models and "other," specifically queer, masculinities, while also highlighting the role of homophobia in the construction of dominant forms of masculinity. The *Esquire* version therefore troubles its protagonist's heterosexual performance, and demonstrates the instability central to hegemonic masculinity projects.

My third chapter turns to the nonfiction writing of James Baldwin. Baldwin may have been published in *Esquire* as a voice of the Civil Rights movement and as a commentator on the so-called "Negro problem," but, as fitting the focus of the magazine, he continually framed his discussion of race as a discussion of masculinity. I argue that aspects of Baldwin's critique of hegemonic masculinity—especially the role it plays in enforcing and maintaining racism—are present throughout Baldwin's *Esquire* articles, in particular in two early essays from the 1960s: "Fifth Avenue, Uptown" and "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy." Making this argument in the pages of *Esquire*, Baldwin indicts those complicit with the contemporary construction of the gender order and encourages a radical change to conceptions of American masculinity. Furthermore, I closely analyze one issue of *Esquire* magazine from the late 1960s, to demonstrate the ways the magazine attempted to diminish his counter-hegemonic critique through racially

charged textual strategies that reinforce the dominant form of white masculinity and reinscribe the subordination of black masculinity. Baldwin's contributions therefore demonstrate how *Esquire* provides a field in which hegemonic formulations of masculinity are always contested, and where subordinated masculinities are incorporated or resisted.

The 1970s see both declining wages for the working classes and an increased visibility of queer masculinities. In chapter four, I analyze the short fiction of Raymond Carver. Carver's protagonists represent the increasingly alienated lower-middle and working classes, who do not live the good life promised in *Esquire* and cannot afford to consume the cultural codes and meanings advertised. If consumption is posited as one of the few avenues available for practicing a hegemonic masculinity project, then Carver posits that those men who cannot afford to consume the "right" things logically feel their economic constraint as a constrained masculinity. To narrate the affective condition of this constrained masculinity, Carver uses an aesthetic I call "consumer realism," a category of capitalist realism that does not just comment on capitalism, *per se*, but on consumerism more specifically, where the individual is not just alienated from the product of his or her labor, but is in fact hollowed out, replaced only with consumer product-identification. In the context of the magazine, Carver's work can be read both as warning men against buying into a consumer-based hegemonic masculinity project and as confirming *Esquire's* project by demonstrating what life would be like without purchasing the products advertised.

Complementing Carver's focus on the role of consumption in the practice of hegemonic masculinity is Truman Capote's *Answered Prayers*, a novel which follows the

exploits of a jet-set gigolo. While Carver's working-class protagonists cannot afford to practice the hegemonic masculinity project offered by *Esquire*, and therefore suffer subordination, Capote's characters are able to escape domination and launch their own masculinity projects in two related ways: first, by commodifying themselves, and becoming objects of exchange in the marketplace, and second, by entering extremely affluent social spheres (gender regimes) in which masculine domination holds little sway. In both chapters, men are posited as consuming subjects who renegotiate their place in the gender order via consumption.

The 1970s, and the concern with consumerism which characterized its fiction, gives way to the 1980s, which saw the election of Ronald Reagan and a cultural retrenchment of masculine domination. Chapter six reads Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age* as a reaction to what Susan Jeffords calls the "remasculinization of America." The novel delineates and criticizes the way hegemonic masculinity mobilizes conservative, ideologically charged symbols (i.e. exemplars of masculinity and emphasized femininities) and creates social spaces (i.e. the bomb shelter) which buttress institutional authority and masculine domination. The novel's protagonist, William, questions his sanity because he finds himself alienated from patriarchy: though practicing a complicit form of masculinity, he finds himself continually denied what he considers his fair share of the patriarchal dividend. The novel presents these problems as contributing factors to his insanity, since William has been culturally indoctrinated to believe that patriarchy has been naturalized, and that as a man he has certain rights and privileges which guarantee his dominant place in society, especially over women. Instead, his patriarchal authority is constantly threatened, resulting in his own feelings of obsession and paranoia.

This study's seventh chapter turns to Don DeLillo's *Libra*. *Libra* demonstrates the ways in which, in the American cultural consciousness, Kennedy's assassination is a privileged site in which hegemonic masculinity is reshaped, contested, and potentially fragmented. Moreover, by reading *Libra* along with the excerpts published in *Esquire* magazine, and by viewing the novel alongside DeLillo's previous publications in the magazine, it becomes clear that the role of the author is implicated, by *Esquire*, as an exemplar of masculinity, perhaps the most exemplary masculinity for the postmodern era, since only the author has the capacity to control and make sense of the world. With *Libra*, DeLillo provides an entire masculinist metanarrative, one which diagnoses the problems of twentieth century American manhood. Subsequently, *Esquire*—in a way that DeLillo might distrust, but implicitly authorizes—prescribes a type of remedy to those problems in the figure of the author himself.

Coming from different backgrounds, writing in different periods, and describing different gender regimes (albeit all within a late twentieth-century US patriarchy), each of these authors narrates and complicates contemporaneous hegemonic masculinity projects. Each author reveals in his male protagonists deeply felt gender anxieties, including fears of real or imagined emasculation, and views masculinity primarily as a system of domination, a problem which, perhaps, cannot be solved. Moreover, even as the decades chart a deeper and deeper engagement with late capitalism, and despite *Esquire*'s role in commodifying masculinity, each author finds a problematic relationship between masculinity and consumerism. Again and again, violence is revealed as a structure that undergirds all notions of masculine domination, and utopian enclaves somehow “outside”

of the gender order are imagined. Taken together, the authors published in *Esquire* offer a much more complex, thrilling, and often horrifying idea of “*How to Be a Man.*”

## Chapter 2

### *An American Dream: Mailer's Gender Nightmare*

One could hardly maintain the courage to be individual, to speak with one's own voice, for the years in which one could complacently accept oneself as part of an elite by being a radical were forever gone. A man knew that when he dissented, he gave a note upon his life which could be called in any year of overt crisis. No wonder then that these have been the years of conformity and depression. A stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve. The only courage, with rare exceptions, that we have been witness to, has been the isolated courage of isolated people. (Mailer, "White Negro" 338-339)

Written in 1957, Norman Mailer's essay, "The White Negro," served as a kind of prescription for the individual: identifying the malaise of the era as "conformity and depression" caused by a "failure of nerve," the author looks, for guidance, to the figure of "the hipster," whom Mailer alternately refers to as a "White Negro" or a "psychopath."<sup>18</sup> For Mailer, the "White Negro" is "a revolutionary individual, [who] has the power to alter society because he exists, in Mailer's radical pun, 'without roots'" (Leigh 85). Seven years later, in the pages of *Esquire*, Mailer would publish *An American Dream* in serial form. Beginning in the January 1964 issue and continuing until August of that year, Mailer's novel illustrated his philosophy of radical individualism. *An American Dream*

---

<sup>18</sup> For the sake of clarity, "The White Negro" (all words in quotation marks) refers to the essay, while the "White Negro" (with "the" omitted from the quotation marks) refers to the figure Mailer describes in that essay.



follows its protagonist, Stephen Richard Rojack,<sup>19</sup> over the course of 32 hours. Beginning with the murder of his wife, and ending with Rojack exiting society altogether, the story shows Rojack strip away his connections to the various institutions that have taken control of his life—politics, television, the academy—until he reaches a rootless state as a free, autonomous individual. Rojack’s journey not only grants him more autonomy, but improved agency. Read on its own, the novel shows that Mailer’s radical individualism, while successfully countering institutionalization and conformity, nevertheless reproduces a heteronormative narrative through the workings of hegemonic masculinity. The limitations to Rojack’s radical individuation, then, is his final inability to escape gender as an institution shaping his identity.

Because Rojack is seemingly so invested in his masculinity project, *An American Dream* has been decried as misogynist since its first publication, by critics such as Judith Fetterley, Kate Millett, and Mary Ellmann. Indeed, Fetterley neatly summed up the feminist consensus on the novel when she called it “sexism gone berserk in a metaphoric frenzy” (155). Even the contemporary critical discourse on the novel has not resolved this issue, with scholars seemingly divided over whether the novel promotes or deconstructs a hegemonic masculinity. For example, Mike Meloy’s 2009 essay “Tales of ‘The Great Bitch’” situates the novel in a Cold War discourse of masculinity that sought to counter conformity with hypermasculinity (as I do, below). In doing so, Meloy argues that Rojack acts as a role model for men who want to rise above the “feminine and potentially homosexual American public” (341). In contrast, Justin Shaw argues that Mailer

---

<sup>19</sup> There are several provocative similarities between Mailer and Rojack, including their status as Harvard graduates, WWII veterans, and political aspirants. Mailer had recently stabbed his wife; Rojack murders his. For a discussion of these similarities, see, e.g., Richard Poirier (122-23); A. Wilson (57); Parker (412-13).

represents misogyny only to critically compare Rojack's sexual conquests with the exploitative processes of late capitalism (46). Both critics situate the novel in the 1950s discourse of masculinity in crisis, and both view Rojack as an enactment of "The White Negro," but both come to very different conclusions about the results of Mailer's masculinity project.

Neither Meloy nor Shaw read the novel as it was originally published, in the pages of *Esquire* magazine. In fact, Hershel Parker is the only critic who has explicitly discussed the serialized *Esquire* version. Parker's principle concern is not with the novel's portrayal of gender, but with changes between the *Esquire* and Dial versions which, in his eyes, lessen the overall impact of the novel (409). However, Parker does address masculinity, albeit cursorily, when he identifies the original version as a courageous exploration of masculinity (412). Accordingly, Parker suggests that it is through studying *An American Dream* in *Esquire* that a more complex and significant analysis of American masculinity can take place.

Aside from local, stylistic revisions, Parker highlights the major omissions from the Dial version. These include three of Rojack's memories of Harvard (Parker suggests that they may have been too autobiographical); a set of passages that deal with Rojack's fears; and passages that relate Rojack's thoughts on homosexuality (411-12). Parker does not address the completely revised introduction; the *Esquire* version included a roll call of nonconformist individuals and an extended description of Rojack's relationship with John F. Kennedy. Combined, the omissions noted by Parker and the original introduction demonstrate the ways the *Esquire* version presents a more contradictory and complicated masculinity than the one that has been studied by subsequent scholars.

My contention, in this chapter, is that situating *An American Dream* in the context of its publication in *Esquire*, and noting the changes made to the novel and its larger material context as presented in the magazine, greatly strengthens studies such as Shaw's that find in the novel a possible subversion of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, I argue that the serialized novel provides openings through which a more radical gender project is possible, and that the *Esquire* version of the novel subtly offers possibilities for identification with feminine role models and "other," specifically queer, masculinities, while also highlighting the role of homophobia in the construction of dominant forms of masculinity, two openings in the text that were closed off by Mailer in his subsequent revisions. To do so, I first contextualize the novel in the popular discourse of the supposed "crisis of masculinity" in the 1950s, and explain how such crisis discourse is mobilized to retrench hegemonic masculinity. Next, I discuss how *An American Dream*, especially in its Dial version, responds to—and potentially complicates—this crisis discourse. Finally, I turn to the *Esquire* version to analyze the ways it troubles Rojack's rigidly heterosexual performance, and calls into question the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>20</sup>

### **1. Crisis! The Organization Man and the White Negro**

The depiction of gender in Mailer's novel should be understood as stemming from a larger discourse propagating a supposed crisis of masculinity during the 1950s. As many critics have noted, the popular discussion of this crisis can be seen in a number of

---

<sup>20</sup> For ease of reading, this chapter will refer to the serialized version of *The American Dream* as the *Esquire* version, while the revised, published novel will be referred to as the Dial version, identifying the revised edition with its original publisher.

influential books of the period, most notably David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* (1955), and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956).<sup>21</sup> Each of these works, either implicitly or explicitly, deals with the supposed problem of being a man in an affluent, white-collar culture.<sup>22</sup> The white-collar worker, or what, following Whyte, I will call the "Organization Man," was a representative of "square" society. For Whyte, the Organization Man is a personality engendered by organizations; as Cieply explains, he "longs to be part of the group. In this sense, he willingly sublimates his own desires and needs to that of the group" ("Lineaments" 180). Timothy Melley finds at the root of *The Organization Man* a "story of declining individualism ... driven by a masculinist fantasy of resistance in which the only actors are 'the individual' and 'the organization'" and sees Whyte's prescription as "nothing so much as a healthy dose of masculinity" (*Empire* 57). Mills most clearly sees conformity as a specifically masculine problem, comparing white-collar workers to eunuchs (xviii). These commentators identify 1950s American society as one in which men—largely divorced from production, labour, and land-ownership—have lost agency because of the movement toward an advanced capitalist society and white-collar work.

---

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, a discussion of these works as they relate to the masculine figure of the "square" in James Penner (100-104). For a discussion of the Organization Man as a problematic male figure, see Stefan Cieply, "Lineaments" (176-190) or Bill Osgerby, "Two-Fisted" (179-83); Barbara Ehrenreich (29-37) includes a discussion of how the issues discussed by Riesman led to increased misogyny. See, in particular, James Gilbert (34-61).

<sup>22</sup> Other pertinent books include 1960's *The Decline of the American Male*, published by the editors of *Look* magazine; Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955). For a more modern take on the discussion of the role of the organization and individual agency, see Andrew Hoberek. Hoberek argues that "this discourse of constrained agency is best understood as a product of the transition from small-property ownership to white-collar employment as the basis of middle-class status. In brief, the postwar period constitutes a tipping point in the history of the middle class, when PMC [professional-managerial class] efforts to rewrite individual and class agency in managerial terms give way to skepticism about organization as such and nostalgia for the putative autonomy of the property-owning old middle class" (8).

Perhaps no story dramatized the masculine melodrama of conformity more blatantly (and problematically) than Mailer's *An American Dream*, a novel in which Mailer fictionalizes the masculine fantasy figure he describes in his 1957 essay "The White Negro."<sup>23</sup> In that essay, published just one year after Whyte's *The Organization Man*, Mailer defines the identity necessary for breaking the stultifying bonds of social conformity, which he associates with the figure of the "square." Mailer makes the dichotomy clear, stating that "One is Hip or one Is Square ... one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life, or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society, doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed" ("White Negro" 339).<sup>24</sup> Set up against this square, conforming figure is Mailer's hero, the hipster, an "American existentialist" (339).<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> The protagonist of *An American Dream*, Stephen Rojack, is discussed in relation to "The White Negro" by several Mailer scholars, including, for instance, Philip H. Buftis (68). Speaking of the "White Negro," Stanley Gutman assures his reader that "this concept of the authentic, heroic, modern man was the controlling factor in the creation of Stephen Rojack" (105). Nigel Leigh sees things slightly differently; in his eyes, Rojack is not the "White Negro," but "an uprooted, deracinated and alienated self" (Leigh 89). Still, Leigh sees that Rojack's position is at least comparable; like the "White Negro," Rojack is in an "existential" position, "because he can locate no categories for his actions as he performs them" (92). Leigh continues this comparison by noting that "In 'The White Negro' and *An American Dream* the individual, once he achieves a radical/rootless condition, can presage social change. It is not the working class but the psychopath that has the loop to history" (94). Leigh sees Rojack as rootless, alienated, and a psychopath, capable of social change. It is not clear from his discussion, then, how Rojack differs from the "White Negro," but the point remains that Rojack is a character closely associated with the "American existentialist" that Mailer calls for in his famous essay, and *An American Dream* is a treatment of such an identity.

<sup>24</sup> In comparing the "White Negro" to a "frontiersman," Mailer summons up the classic ideal of American masculinity, the cowboy, an exemplary form of masculinity discussed in several subsequent chapters of this study.

<sup>25</sup> Mailer's (frequent) use of the term "existentialist" is idiosyncratic. As Nigel Leigh explains, "Deracinated, pushed to the margins of culture—radicalized, individual responsibilities become even more acutely felt. Mailer is fond of labeling this condition existential, but it is a mistake to conclude from this that he is greatly influenced by such European thinkers as Sartre, Kierkegaard and Heidegger ... his use of the term consistently emphasizes the individual's problem of knowledge, his epistemological gaps, and the uncertainties of agency" (92).

The anxiety surrounding the role of men and their agency in a white-collar society, as it was described by Mailer, Wright, and Mills, was of great interest to *Esquire's* audience. Appearing in the November 1958 issue of *Esquire*, the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s article "The Crisis of American Masculinity" sought to address men in this new historic context.<sup>26</sup> Beginning his essay by asking "What has happened to the American male," Schlesinger states that "there are multiple signs, indeed, that something has gone badly wrong with the American male's conception of himself" (63). Schlesinger finds a more stolid form of masculinity in older literature, specifically in the works of Dreiser, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway (all *Esquire* authors). Similarly, he finds examples of confused masculinity in the modern world when looking at contemporary literature, such as Tennessee Williams' play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (63). The reasons he gives for this crisis are standard fare for the period: men are increasingly performing "female duties" in the household, women are taking over higher-paying jobs, and homosexuality is "enjoying a cultural boom new in our history" (63). Modern heroes are "castrated" (64), because "the conditions of modern life make the quest for identity more difficult than it has ever been before" (64). This essay is significant, not only because it responds directly to the supposed, contemporaneous "crisis of masculinity," but also because it directly addresses *Esquire's* ideal male reader. As Cieply explains, Schlesinger "neatly, if unintentionally, defined *Esquire's* imagined readership: a cadre of intelligent, sophisticated and well-rounded men eager to break the chains of conformity" ("Uncommon" 151). The goal for *Esquire's* readers was to define themselves in opposition to the "Organization Man" (Whyte) or "the man in the gray flannel suit"

---

<sup>26</sup> For Cieply, this essay is crucial for defining *Esquire's* male readership. See "Uncommon" (151) and "Lineaments" (54-55).

(Riesman), who represented conformity and appeared, at least superficially, as simply another iteration of a generalized, “castrated” male society—“castrated,” because the agency of the individual is believed to have been sacrificed to become part of the whole, a cog in the machine.

As discussed, the popular discourse of the 1950s, including Mailer, Whyte, Riesman, and Mills, and which Schlesinger contributed to in *Esquire*, identified the rise of white-collar work, the reorganization of labour, the rise of consumerism, and the increasing social and cultural visibility of women as the cause of a “crisis of masculinity.” However, each of these causes needs to be understood as a symptom, visible in the realm of gendered social relations, of a larger economic shift affecting America during the postwar period. As Andrew Hoberek argues in *Twilight of the Middle Class*, the postwar economic boom resulted in “a relatively equal distribution of *income*” while concealing the “an ongoing concentration of *capital* continuous with the current unequal distribution of wealth” (10). These economic shifts affected American society generally, but it was the effect of these changes to the gender order specifically that prompted a gendered discourse.

Several scholars have rightly objected to the reliance on crises discourses in studies of masculinity;<sup>27</sup> however, rather than propagating a myth of masculine crisis, gender historians need to understand the popular discourse of masculine crisis as an ideological tool for hegemonic masculinity.<sup>28</sup> That is to say that this “crisis” discourse is

---

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Bryce Traister, “Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies,” and Stephen Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities* (47-59).

<sup>28</sup> Judith Halberstam makes a similar point, arguing that “This notion that the destabilization of masculinity results in crisis and, that crisis demands the immediate re-consolidation of male authority, underpins much of what I am calling imperial masculinity” (“Thugs” 155-56).

mobilized so as to prompt a contemporaneous renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity. The “crisis of masculinity” asks men to renegotiate their masculinity in such a way that it is understood as a better “answer” to the “problem” of patriarchy. Men, responding to the “crisis” discourse, find new ways to establish dominance within their gender regimes, and to feel comfortable in their relative positions in the gender hierarchy. This process is achieved in two ways: first, while “crisis” discourse recognizes underlying causal factors to the changes in contemporaneous masculinity, it asks men to understand that the problem is with masculinity, not with the economy. Despite identifying changing labour conditions as a cause, contemporaneous authors still label the crisis as a crisis of *masculinity*, not a crisis of capital. The second and related point is that this “crisis” discourse suggests that the solution to the crisis can be found in masculinity. That is to say that men need to change their behaviours and understanding of masculinity, rather than addressing the underlying economic factors.

In particular, *Esquire* suggests that the imaginary solution to this problem needs to be found in consumption. *Esquire*’s masculinity project suggests that men renegotiate hegemonic masculinity in the marketplace. *Esquire*’s ideal reader was therefore what Barbara Ehrenreich called a “gray flannel rebel” (29). These “rebels” “cultivated an acute awareness of the problem of conformity—much as everyone else did—and achieved, through their awareness, a kind of higher, more reflective conformity” (31). It was for such a readership that Schlesinger advocated not radical action but three “techniques of liberation”: satire, art, and politics (65). In other words, the solution Schlesinger offered the readers of *Esquire* was for them to read more *Esquire*. More specifically, Schlesinger

---



believed that men could develop what he called their “lineaments of personality” (65) through engaging with the type of content that the magazine provided. Such a strategy offered *Esquire*’s readership the idea that societal change would not be a matter of class warfare, in which case *Esquire*’s ideal reader—who was after all, a white-collar worker, with a problematic relationship to labour—would be on the wrong side of the divide; rather, it made the argument that social change, even radical social change, could be affected by the individual through the act of consumption. While the magazine attempted to offer its readers the possibility for “self-actualisation” (and thus a restoration of their masculinity) through its non-fiction articles and through the goods and services its advertisements offered, the fiction presented in the magazine—geared, as it was, to a masculine audience—often engaged with this same problem of individuation and conformity directly.

The prescription Mailer offers men in “The White Negro,” to liberate them from conformity, may seem substantially more radical than Schlesinger’s directions to engage in satire, art, and politics, but the logic is strikingly similar. Schlesinger offers consumption as a means to what Cieply calls self-actualisation, and so, in a sense, does Mailer, even if the self-actualized man of the former would be a sophisticate, the latter a psychopath. In this one-dimension fiction of African American identity, Mailer finds certain practices, attitudes, and performances which can be co-opted or mimicked—in a word, consumed—by white men: thus the “White Negro.” Mailer’s focus on consumption is especially obvious when one considers Mailer’s focus in the essay on the significance of jazz musicians and orgasms to the hipster’s identity,<sup>29</sup> no different than a magazine’s

---

<sup>29</sup> For jazz musicians, see, e.g.: 337, 341, 345. For orgasms: 341, 347.

focus on music and sex in its attempt to rescue masculinity. Furthermore, Mailer's identification of the hipster as a "philosophical psychopath" ("White Negro" 343) clearly points to the fact that freedom from conformity comes less from a new way of being and more from a new way of thinking. Even if Mailer intended his "White Negro" to be more of a revolutionary than the typical *Esquire* reader, this attitude he describes is something that a white, professional male audience could actually adopt (consume) "without going to the extremes of countercultural disengagement" (Cieply "Uncommon," 164)—the same promise implicitly made by the magazine. *Esquire* offered imaginary nonconformity through advertising individuality as a product for consumption: how a man dressed, and how he spent his leisure time, made him an individual. Furthermore, *Esquire* readers could counter conformity through consuming the right types of writing and fiction, such as the writing offered by Mailer and Schlesinger.

Thus, *Esquire* pulled off a neat trick: men were convinced that their masculinity was being challenged by their changing relationship to ownership and labour, and that the solution could be found in the consumption of goods. The supposed solution was to engage in consumer practices that propped up, rather than challenged, the very economic changes and social institutions that originally caused the so-called problem. It is therefore fitting that *An American Dream* was published in *Esquire*. Schlesinger suggested that men consume the right kind of art, and Mailer offered exactly that to *Esquire*'s readers: not only a work of art by an influential, contemporary American author, but also a work of art that specifically offered men an exemplary masculinity to help them negotiate this so-called crisis. However, *An American Dream* also complicates *Esquire*'s project, opening up the possibility of resistant readings that challenge hegemonic masculinity.

In the rest of this chapter, my argument pursues two linked paths. First, in section two, I argue that the Dial version of *An American Dream* dramatizes the above “crisis” of masculinity, by not only constructing a masculinity project—the “White Negro”—specific to the cultural context and meant to counter the crisis of conformity, but also by demonstrating that this project is so rife with inherent contradictions that the novel narrates its deconstruction. Next, in section three, I demonstrate how the original text of *An American Dream*, as it was published in *Esquire*, further complicates Mailer’s masculinity project, by highlighting the centrality of homophobia to Rojack’s masculinity, and by providing feminine role models worthy of emulation. Finally, I highlight how historical moments in which a narrative of “crisis” emerges can fruitfully be imagined as moments in which the contradictory and fragmented nature of hegemonic masculinities are most obvious, and the possibilities for new, less toxic versions of masculinity appear.

## **2. *An American Dream* and Hegemonic Masculinity**

*An American Dream* is a novel focused on this conflict between the individual and the organization, the hipster and the square. The novel’s protagonist takes up a masculinity project meant to propose a “solution” to this supposed “problem” of conformity. That is to say that the “White Negro,” as promulgated in Mailer’s essay of the same name, is a masculinity project that Rojack puts into practice. The “White Negro” is, to use Connell’s terms, an attempt to configure a “gender practice” meant to “answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (*Masculinities* 77). In this case, the “problem” of legitimacy is the one outlined in the discourse of masculinity in crisis:

that men have lost agency—been effeminized—via their connections to institutions and conformity. Rojack attempts to remasculinize his own version of masculinity through his “White Negro” project. In doing so, he not only commits all of the problems inherent in hegemonic masculinity (in particular, his practice of masculinity depends on the domination of women), but also discovers that such projects cannot succeed without institutional support.

Mailer’s novel narrates a movement away from “squareness,” away from a subject position that is fully imbricated in a number of institutions, to a “rootless” position, which is achieved through violent encounters with the Establishment. As Nigel Leigh argues, the novel conceives of American society as nothing more than the Establishment (88). Like the popular discourse of a “crisis of masculinity,” the novel is rife with what Melley calls “agency panic”: “intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control” (12).<sup>30</sup> At the start of the novel Rojack situates himself, and his subjectivity, within square society, explaining that, after nine years of marriage to Deborah, he had “learned to speak in a world which believed in the *New York Times*: Experts Divided on Fluoridation, Diplomat Attacks Council Text, Self-Rule Near for Bantu Province, Chancellor Outlines Purpose of Talks, New Drive for Health Care for

---

<sup>30</sup> Other critics have similarly contextualized the novel, though not always with the same focus; Michael Glenday, for instance, sees the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as being crucial to understanding the novel (89). This seems slightly problematic, since the first part of the novel had already gone to print in *Esquire* when the assassination occurred. Still, I would agree with Glenday that *An American Dream* should be viewed as a novel that “dramatized the national mood” (88); I would merely suggest that this particular dramatization of the national mood is best understood in light of the discourses on constrained masculinity.

Aged” (36).<sup>31</sup> Rojack sees himself as not only a member of square society, but also as actually speaking the language of institutionalized squareness.

Rojack is not only initially associated with squareness and the Establishment generally, but also more specifically with various institutions. Institutions apply and circulate power within a society, and they also, as discussed in this study’s introduction, propagate social hierarchies within the gender order. As Stephen Whitehead notes, “key structural entities such as the state, education, the media, religion, political institutions and business, being historically numerically dominated by men, all serve the project of male dominance through their capacity to promote and validate the ideologies underpinning hegemonic masculinity” (91). Rojack’s relationship with institutions highlights the paradox at the centre of the 1950s “crisis of masculinity”: while institutions are seen as effeminizing, it is also Rojack’s connection to institutions that first prove his masculine credentials.

Rojack’s ascendancy to power and prominence—the position from which his adventure begins—starts with his role as a soldier in World War II; subsequently, Rojack moves from war hero to congressman, and then to minor celebrity as a popular academic and television personality. Even in this late stage of his fame, he is planning a return to politics. So, before the main events of the novel even begin, Rojack is firmly associated with most of America’s major institutions, moving from what Louis Althusser would call “Repressive State Apparatuses,” which ultimately function by violence, to “Ideological State Apparatuses,” which function by ideology (109-11). The Repressive State Apparatuses to which Rojack initially belongs include the military and the government;

---

<sup>31</sup> Unless otherwise noted, citations will refer to the Vintage paperback edition of the novel, based on the Dial printing.

following his role in these institutions, he moves to the Ideological State Apparatuses of academia and the media. This movement is significant, because Rojack's masculinity project involves confronting, often violently, other hegemonic formulations of masculinity, most of which are associated with institutions and all of whom (except in the final instance of Barney Kelly) function by overt violence. Rojack's journey, then, implies a re-masculinization through physical conflict—the type of physical conflict which typified his time in the military.<sup>32</sup>

Rojack's murder of Deborah, in this reading, serves as a symbolic (and mental) severance between Rojack and square society. Deborah is immediately introduced as having a long connection with institutional power: "She was Deborah Caughlin Mangaravidi Kelly, of the Caughlins first, English-Irish bankers, financiers and priests; the Mangaravidis, a Sicilian issue from the Bourbon's and the Hapsburgs; Kelly's family was just Kelly; but he had made a million two hundred times. So there was a vision of treasure, far-off blood, and fear" (1). Unpacking her multiple family names, Mailer connects Deborah to the world of finance, the Church, European industry, and big business. Since Rojack was depending on Deborah's family connections for his return to politics (17), his future in government dies with her. Rojack feels effeminized by his reliance on Deborah's institutional connections, in much the same way that Mills, Riesman, and Whyte see the Establishment as an emasculating force. Significantly, Rojack murders Deborah when she mocks his masculinity and claims to be performing an undescribed sexual act on other men (23-32). Having murdered the supposed source of

---

<sup>32</sup> In this way, Rojack's story appears, at least initially, as yet another iteration of what Richard Slotkin has identified as America's national myth: "regeneration through violence."

his emasculation, much of the rest of the novel sees Rojack practicing a nonconforming, violent, physicalized masculinity.<sup>33</sup>

As previously stated, Rojack's project of radical individuation can be read as an enactment of the "White Negro." This connection can be seen in several key ways. In the most general sense, Rojack's goals are the goals of the "White Negro": he radically breaks from "square" society and moves towards a deracinated subject position. Moreover, there are several specific connections between Rojack's character and the project outlined in "The White Negro." Most obviously, Rojack's narrative begins when he "encourage[s] the psychopath" ("White Negro" 339) in himself when he murders his wife and proceeds to fight against all aspects of "square" society. Furthermore, Rojack demonstrates a seemingly supernatural sense of smell<sup>34</sup> and apparent (or possibly imagined) psychic powers.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, Rojack describes a heavenly city, which he sees several times during the novel: first, when he murders Deborah (31); next, when he climaxes with Ruta (46); and again, when he makes love to Cherry (128). In "The White Negro," Mailer explains that "the hipster moves through his life on a constant search with

---

<sup>33</sup> Several scholars see Rojack's murder of Deborah in symbolic terms. Leigh succinctly explains that "killing Deborah cancels Rojack's social contract with the 'dream' world of capitalist success, status and privilege" (105). Stanley Gutman discusses the murder at length (106-109), in particular stating that "Murder requires an extraordinary commitment to discover the self, since it violates the most basic mandates and taboos of society," and that in doing so Rojack "frees himself from the armature that was stifling his existence" (106, 107). Lost in this discussion is any notion of Deborah's personhood, and that Rojack's act is primarily a misogynistic act of homophobia (as will be discussed in this chapter).

<sup>34</sup> Rojack's narrative is punctuated by highly detailed descriptions of odors, usually associated with other characters. From Ruta, the maid, comes "a smell which spoke of rocks and grease and the sewer-damp of wet stones in poor European alleys" (Mailer 43); sitting in a room with one officer, Rojack notes that "an odor of violence came off him, a kind of clammy odor of rut, and O'Brien, on my other side, who had shown a pronounced smell already, oversweet and very stale, was throwing a new odor, something like the funk a bully emits when he heads for a face-to-face meeting" (74).

<sup>35</sup> These are perhaps most obvious during a rather bizarre section of chapter four, in which Rojack engages in a sort of mental duel with the denizens of Eddie Ganucci's night club (97-102), during which he develops "a small manufactory of psychic particles" (97) which he wields as "magic bullets" (98).

glimpses of Mecca in many a turn of his experience (Mecca being the apocalyptic orgasm)” (349). Gabriel Miller makes Rojack’s connection to the “White Negro” clear when describing Rojack as “a prototype of the heroic new individualist who will emerge in modern America to assault the repressive state” (80). Rojack is therefore an exemplary masculinity for “gray flannel rebels” and other professional, white-collar readers who somehow fear the castrating conformity of “square” culture.

*An American Dream* dramatizes Rojack’s dissociation from the Establishment, and attempts to prove the superiority of his masculinity project, by continually putting him into conflict with exemplars of masculinity indicative of highly institutionalized gender regimes. As Philip Bufithis argues, minor characters in the novel stand in for larger institutions (70). Suspected of murder, Rojack must fight against the police, especially in the form of Detective Roberts. He also immediately comes into contact with organized crime, in the form of mafioso Eddie Ganucci. Because conformity is viewed, in the discourse of the crisis of masculinity, as emasculating, it is important that Rojack have institutionalized versions of masculinity to face and best, to prove the superiority of his nonconformist masculinity project. As Barry Leeds has noted, while the men standing in for institutions are tough, their strength is based on their connection with Establishment, resulting in the corruption of conformity (158). Rojack must prove the superiority of his masculinity, and so the men he faces must be suitably tough and physically threatening, or else his victories would be too easy and prove nothing; however, because these competing forms of hegemonic masculinity are committed “to a corrupt system,” their masculinity can never quite contend. Rojack’s encounters with organizations must include intermediaries or representative figures with whom he can do



battle, either physically, or at the level of manly nerves. However he faces them, it is important that there is an embodied, male enemy whom he can best.

As well as Roberts and Ganucci, Rojack's opponents include the boxer Romeo and the jazz singer Shago Martin. While not representative of state apparatuses (repressive or ideological), the two nonetheless represent institutions central to American culture—sport and music respectively. Both men are physical threats to Rojack, but both are also regime-specific exemplars of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, Romeo is representative of masculinity's culturally held association between masculinity and violence, which is institutionalized in sport,<sup>36</sup> and Shago (as his name implies) demonstrates dominance over women via sexual prowess.<sup>37</sup> Besting both men, Rojack proves the superiority of the “White Negro” masculinity project.

Each of these encounters develops toward a final showdown with Deborah's father, Barney Oswald Kelly. Kelly represents a final major institution—business—but also much, much more. It is revealed, in the final chapters of the novel, that Kelly sits at the head of the Establishment: the mob, the CIA, and the government, all answer, in some way, to Kelly. Mailer's Establishment is institutional and totalizing, a paranoid image of society (Leigh 88). Rojack's confrontation with Kelly is not only a battle against a diabolic father figure, but against the ultimate Organization Man.

The narrative of the novel, then, works to move Rojack from an institutionalized position bereft of courage, wit, ambition, and hope to one of absolute individualism and masculine violence, able to best men with fists or with his nerves, capable of bedding any

---

<sup>36</sup> See Michael Messner and Donald Sabo's *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*.

<sup>37</sup> Shago's character is highly racialized: Mailer seems to be parroting several racist notions of black men, and fear of black sexuality, to which James Baldwin responds in the next chapter of this study.

woman he wants, and gifted with seemingly supernatural senses. Such a separation between Rojack and the organizations that maintain power—and thus patriarchy—should have the potential for Rojack to be a counter-hegemonic figure. However, this is not the case, since Rojack’s journey toward individuality is, at every step, a chauvinist, masculinist quest. This is to say that Rojack is able to move from conformity to autonomy only through the use of violence, the exercise of his sexual virility, and acts of “courage.” Rojack’s journey involves defeating competing versions of masculinity, ones associated with the very institutions central to propping up patriarchy (e.g. the police, the government), but in their place he can only offer a masculinity project that is more violent, more physical, and more toxic. In breaking out of the Establishment, Rojack nonetheless reinforces patriarchy, by acting as an exemplar of masculinity who demonstrates masculinity’s privileged connection to domination through violence.

A critical response to *An American Dream* needs to question why Rojack’s journey of self-actualization must necessarily be expressed in such a misogynistic fashion, especially considering Mailer’s admission that “Hip” seems to be connected with bisexuality (“White Negro” 351), which would open the door for alternate configurations of masculinity and a possible subversion of a rigid, heteronormative gender hierarchy.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Mailer unequivocally notes that “many hipsters are bisexual” (351), while more ambiguously stating that “the condition of psychopathy” is present in “promiscuous homosexuals” (345), and that “the Negro” “discovered and elaborated a morality of the bottom” through, among other things, “perversion, promiscuity, pimping” (348). The

---

<sup>38</sup> As Penner has noted, the hipster differs from the traditional ideal masculine figure (what he calls “hard-boiled” masculinity) in two important ways: first, the “White Negro” is irrational, which is a characteristic traditionally associated with the feminine; second, the hipster is sexually ambiguous (118-120).

important difference between the hipster and Rojack, then, is that while the hipster might be sexually ambiguous—or, more specifically, bisexual or “perverted”—Rojack’s enactment of the “White Negro” takes an oppressively heterosexual form.<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that he is unproblematically heterosexual—as further discussion will make clear, Rojack’s heterosexuality is inflated with heterosexism, and possibly functions to efface what is obliquely represented as his own barely-sublimated homosexuality—but that Rojack’s actions, and the narrative of the novel, are strictly, rigidly heterosexual. This important difference between Mailer’s hipster and the novel’s protagonist has a major effect: it ensures that Rojack, in his new, “rootless” state, nonetheless reasserts masculine hegemony. Making Rojack too “straight,” Mailer subverts his most radical potentialities. Rojack reinscribes patriarchy in the potentially free liminal space he finds outside of “the Organization,” of “square society,” usually as a response to masculinity challenges prompted or exacerbated by homophobia. In attempting to describe the creation of a “rootless” hero, Mailer recreates a social situation based on patriarchy and masculine domination.

Though Rojack’s journey involves separating himself from the institutions which confine and define him, the one “institution” or construct he continually *refuses* to challenge is gender. Indeed, in the novel version of *An American Dream*, gender—especially masculinity—is viewed by Rojack not as a construct, but as a ground or base upon which other constructs—false constructs—have been erected. This is what Mailer means when he refers to the “White Negro” as a primitive (“White Negro” 341): he sees

---

<sup>39</sup> Gutman also notes that, while Rojack “fleshes out the vision in ‘The White Negro,’” he seems further divorced from the hipster’s world by his “intellectual acuity and his concern with the upper social and economic strata of American society” (96).

society as something that has gotten in the way of “natural,” “primitive” man, and the “White Negro” is an attempt to return to this primitive state. Holding such a view of a “primitive” man, Rojack—as an enactment of the “White Negro”—fails to see that masculinity is an institution, much like the other institutions that he seeks to avoid. Thus privileging masculinity, Rojack cannot help but pathologically reconstitute patriarchy, even as he attempts to break down society.

Rojack reconstitutes patriarchy in his supposed rootless space by taking advantage of the perceived privileged relationship between masculinity and violence. Simply put, men are supposed to fight, hurt, and dominate, or, at the very least, they have access to these actions in a way that women do not.<sup>40</sup> Rojack murders his wife (31-32), engages in seemingly consensual rough sex with Ruta that nonetheless is presented in terms of a violent rape (especially in relation to the seemingly forced anal penetration) (41-46), and brutally beats Shago Martin (192-93), and in every instance he gains from these experiences. Rojack’s continuous use of violence enacts this system of domination—to which white, heterosexual men have the easiest, most “justifiable” access—while at the same time revealing the fraudulence of the gendered order: patriarchy and male privilege are only maintained through violent acts, giving the lie to any notion that the hierarchy it enforces is “natural” or that it should even be seen as stable or naturalized. Perhaps Millett is correct to argue that “*An American Dream* is a rallying cry for a sexual politics in which diplomacy has failed and war is the last political resort of a ruling caste that

---

<sup>40</sup> As Connell states, physically violent men (especially in instances of violence against women) “feel they are entirely justified, that they are exercising a right. They are authorized by an ideology of supremacy” (*Masculinities* 83).

feels its position in deadly peril” (16); the novel implies that it is not masculinity that is in crisis, but patriarchy itself.

Rojack himself gains some small insight into the flaws in his masculinity project. In the final chapter, when Rojack meets Kelly at the Waldorf, he begins to realize that the violent, physical domination that he has practiced corresponds with the institutional violence with which he struggled. Shaw directs attention to the following passage from this section, in which Rojack ponders his surroundings:

Aristocrats, slave owners, manufacturers and popes had coveted these furnishings ... a field of force was on me here, an air rich with surfeit and the long whisper of corridors, the echo of a banquet hall where red burgundy and wild boar went down. That same field of force had come on me as I left Deborah’s body on the floor and started down the stairs to the room where Ruta was waiting. (235)

As his surroundings demonstrate, Kelly is the embodiment of the Establishment, as represented not only by his wealth and social position, but also by his privileged place within a history of institutional oppression. Rojack recognizes in Kelly’s chambers—a place he identifies as an “antechamber of hell” (234)—a legacy of institutional power and domination in which he has unwittingly participated. Shaw calls this “Rojack’s epiphanic meditation on the history of American power and oppression” (59). This is to say that Rojack now recognizes his own complicity in hegemonic masculinity and, further, he realizes that the patriarchal dividend for which he has fought is available to him only because of the institutions of domination against which he has set himself. In other words, Rojack has realized that masculine domination is not natural but historical, that

the historical forces that maintain patriarchy are the institutions from which he has tried to uproot himself, and that, in practicing a masculinity project intent on nonconformity, this practice has nonetheless extended, rather than countered, the supposed logic of hegemonic masculinity. Here, Rojack comes to understand the futility of trying to escape institutions while trying to reinvigorate masculinity: his nonconformist masculinity has simply reinforced the status quo.

Rojack's enactment of the "White Negro" results in a masculinist fantasy, in which Rojack "regains" masculine privilege and agency by radically uprooting himself from the Establishment. However, "hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual" (Connell *Masculinities*, 77). Rojack—a rootless, deracinated individual—cannot be, in the final instance, properly hegemonic, since he is so drastically opposed to—and alienated from—institutional power. Rojack reinforces hegemonic masculinity despite the fact that he appears to be challenging the institutions through which male domination is maintained. This is to say that the "White Negro" provides a masculine fantasy of agency in a world which is seen to be dominated by the Establishment, while the Establishment itself is most likely to be the home of actual masculine hegemony. A truly radical figure could pose a threat to this hegemony, but *An American Dream* does not—and it fails to do so because of Rojack's gender performance.

### **3. An American Dream and *Esquire* Magazine**

While Mailer's Rojack—and the "White Negro"—is not properly hegemonic, because of his radical nonconformity, he nevertheless helps to maintain, and perhaps even renegotiate, hegemonic masculinity. He does so by acting as an exemplar of

masculinity for his readers—in the first instance, the white-collar (a gray flannel rebel) reader of *Esquire*. This is to say that when *Esquire*'s ideal reader consumes Mailer's work, hegemonic masculinity is renegotiated in the marketplace. So, the question can be asked: how does *An American Dream* do just this?

Unlike Rojack or the “White Negro,” *Esquire*'s ideal reader is not likely going to do anything which is actually radical. These men are not going to live the type of adventure narrated by Rojack; they can, however, read about—consume—this radicalism from the safety of their home or office. At the end of the 1950s, and throughout the 1960s, *Esquire* in particular allowed its readers to engage in a counter-cultural discourse, not on the frontlines, but through the activity of consumption. *An American Dream* makes intelligible the particular masculine malaise that men felt, or were told to feel, and provided a fantasy of liberation from this dissatisfaction. Men were not so much suffering from a genuine loss of agency, but a *perceived* one, and *An American Dream* (and *Esquire*) offered a safe, culturally authorized way to feel that they had broken free from conformity while remaining in their white-collar jobs. The anti-establishment thrust of *An American Dream*'s angst can be stripped of its radical potential, and the desire for individualism and agency can be displaced onto the desire for consumer goods, which the magazine could offer. In this way, the political is transubstantiated into the aesthetic, and the politically resistant is transformed into the economically normative. White-collar readers might not attempt to absorb the “existential synapses” of African Americans (“White Negro” 341) by defeating a jazz singer in unarmed combat, but they might

consume their language and culture<sup>41</sup> ; they might not become hipsters by embracing their inner psychopath, but they might consume the experimental literature of Beat writers like William Burroughs or Gregory Corso. Institutionalized, hegemonic masculinities are thus propped up, and patriarchy as a whole bolstered, since potential sites of resistance are re-enfranchised through the act of consumption.

Perhaps the most obvious example in the magazine of the process by which individualism is repurposed as consumerism can be found in the July 1964 feature entitled “The New Sentimentality,” published in the same issue as the seventh instalment of *An American Dream*. Drawing a distinction between what they see as “Old” and “New” sentimentality, authors David Newman and Robert Benton delineate the tenets of a new masculinity, one that embraces individualism through consumption. Consider this section of the introduction:

The changeover came in the Fifties. Eisenhower was a key figure, perhaps the last bloom of Old Sentimentality. It was seen that the masses loved him as a father or maybe Gramps ...

Suddenly it was 1960 and John Kennedy was there, and the wise, the intellectual and the taste-making people did him homage. They didn’t think he was a father or Gramps. They liked him because he was tough, because he

---

<sup>41</sup> While jazz, and the figure of the jazz musician, were embraced by the magazine, anything related to African Americans that seemed politically threatening—dangerous to hegemony—was treated with hostility. The October 1964 issue of *Esquire* features a story by William Worthy entitled “The Red Chinese American Negro”; the blurb reads, “Radical Negro militants are turning to Mao Tse-Tung for support in overturning the U. S. Government” (132). The same issue contains an advertisement for the Mid-Century Book Society, highlighting one of their featured selections: *The Cradle of Erotica* by Allen Edwardes and R. E. L. Masters. The description reads, “A close scrutiny of the unusual and unrestrained sexual practices of Afro-Asian peoples as evidenced in their literature (which is copiously quoted)” (17). *Esquire* had a complicated relationship with African Americans during the Sixties, but there was a strong strain of fetishization, commensurate with a denial of actual political power. See the next chapter of this study for a more in-depth analysis.



was all pro, because he was a man who knew what he wanted and grabbed it. They loved that in him as furiously as the crowd loved Ike. They sentimentalized every power grab. And that was when the New Sentimentality came out in the open. (Newman and Benton 25)

The article may just as well refer to “Old Sentimentality” as “square” sentimentality: it belongs to the “masses,” while the “New Sentimentality” refers, more directly, to *Esquire*’s ideal readers: intellectual, “taste-making” people who, it should be noted, find in JFK a number of masculine features (toughness, professionalism, agency) to love.

The article continues to contrast these two different views. On the one hand, the “Old Sentimentality” had “values,” enumerated as “Patriotism, Love, Religion, Mom, the Girl” (25). On the other hand, the “New Sentimentality,” had a list of tenets, including “Sharpness,” “self-indulgence,” and the “ability to change.” Most interesting, though, is the discussion of “New Sentimentality’s” abiding motivation, personal interest:

In the Old way you had ideals, causes, goals that were in some way beneficent to all. In the New, your primary objective is to make your life fit your style. There is Professionalism above all. For example, the Old concept of “selling out,” which used to drive good men crazy, causing them to cry in their beer and bemoan their wasted talent (writing ad copy, for instance), has disappeared. Now we glory in what pros we are, and a man loves himself for writing the best jingle in the market. (25)

The “New Sentimentality,” then, outlines a new masculine project, one that distinguishes itself from square society (“Old Sentimentality”) and that is able to adjust to the Establishment so that individuality and agency comes through consumption, through

distinction, through excelling in the corporate world. In fact, the “New Sentimentality” is not sentimentality at all, but self-interest.<sup>42</sup> The New Sentimentalist is most assuredly an individual—not a Hipster, no, not something so potentially counter-cultural—but a taste-maker, one who can appreciate the sort of counter-cultural art *Esquire* provides as an object for consumption, and is thus someone who has begun to negotiate himself out of the “square” versus Hip dilemma. These New Sentimentalists (to keep using *Esquire*’s term) seem to be those who, in some way, responded to Schlesinger’s original call back in 1958 to develop their “lineaments of personality” not through radical means, but through the act of consumption. From the early days of 1950s “agency panic” to the publication of *An American Dream*, *Esquire* can be seen as negotiating this “New Sentimentality” for its readers. In this way, the “White Negro” and *An American Dream* can be seen as objects consumed by white-collar readers for just this purpose, and so act to renegotiate hegemonic masculinity for a new cultural context, while at the same time losing any radical political potential.

However, though *Esquire* encourages consumption as a process that renegotiates hegemonic masculinity, it is in the pages of the magazine that the potential for a more radical gender project can be found in *An American Dream*. Consider, for example, the opening paragraphs of the two versions of the novel. The first lines, as it was subsequently published in novel form, read, “I met Jack Kennedy in November, 1946. We were both war heroes, and both of us had just been elected to Congress. We went out one night on a double date and it turned out to be a fair evening for me. I seduced a girl

---

<sup>42</sup> *Esquire*’s use of the term “sentimentality” is indeed confusing, as the editorial makes little reference to affect. As Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler have shown, sentimentality has traditionally been feminized in popular American discourse; however, there remains a tradition of sentimental men pertinent to American literature. See their *Sentimental Men*.

who would have been bored by a diamond as big as the Ritz” (1). Compare this opening to *An American Dream*, as it was originally published in the January 1964 edition of *Esquire* magazine:

Every one of you finds yourself lonely, but you discover your loneliness by living a life which is like the life of everyone else; you are understood perfectly; it is just that nobody wants to listen. Still, you hear of men and women who have a life which proves to be their own; history records their name because they found no place. Ernest Hemingway is the first who comes to mind, and Marilyn Monroe. So too does Patterson, Floyd Patterson, and Liston; Edith Piaf and Dr. Stephen Ward; Christine Jorgensen, Porfirio Rubirosa, Luis Miguel Dominguin. So too do I—to myself at least. For I take from this second species of loneliness a property which is peculiar to us: we believe in coincidences and take our memory from meetings. I know I measure my life by such a rule. I met Jack Kennedy, for instance, in 1946. We were both war heroes and were both Freshmen in Congress. Congressman John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Democrat from Massachusetts, and Congressman Stephen Richards Rojack, Democrat from New York. We even spent part of one night together on a long double date and it promised to be a good night for me. I stole his girl. (Jan. 77)<sup>43</sup>

The original opening begins by addressing “you.” This is not the first time that the reader has been directly addressed in the magazine. Indeed, the reader of *Esquire* is constantly hailed by advertisements: “Reduce the Size of *Your* Waistline” (RelaxAcizor), “*You* Can

---

<sup>43</sup> References are to the 1964 issues in which *An American Dream* was serialized.

Have a HE-MAN Voice!” (Perfect Voice Institute) and “I’ll Make *You* a Mental Wizard in One Evening!” (Executive Research Institute, emphasis added). Combined with the advertisements, the story’s opening lines work to interpellate<sup>44</sup> the individual reader into *Esquire*’s imagined ideal reader. The “you” of the story’s opening lines is the same as this imagined reader, who suffers from the conditions of the modern world, which leave him less an individual and more a simple member of the crowd, since he lives “a life which is like the life of everyone else.” In short, the original opening acts as a diagnosis of the “agency panic” associated with the figure of the Organization Man, the Establishment, and the “square,” and the discourse of constrained masculinity with which it is associated. The fact that the reader is assumed to be “lonely” but like “everyone else” brings to mind the title of Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*.

This imbrication continues as Mailer’s narrator holds up, by way of contrast, examples of individuals who can act as role models, “who have a life which proves to be their own,” two of whom are *Esquire*’s favoured exemplars of masculinity: Ernest Hemingway and JFK. Others fit archetypal, and largely hegemonic, masculine types: the war hero, the politician, and the boxer. Rojack, the narrator, then includes himself in this list, clearly identifying himself—in a way that is never made explicit in the novel version—as an exemplar of masculinity, as a fantasy figure capable of breaking from the masculine malaise of the 1950s and 60s.

The original, longer introduction does two further things which the revised version does not. First, it highlights the degree to which the novel focuses on the competition between Rojack and other men—specifically a competition over women.

---

<sup>44</sup> For “hailing” and “interpellation,” see Althusser “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”

Second the original introduction acknowledges feminine role models such as Monroe and Piaf and, perhaps more transgressively, Christine Joergensen. Feminine power and agency is deemphasized throughout the novel, and part of that de-emphasis is the result of the erasure of these feminine role models from the beginning of the novel. As previously mentioned, and as this aspect of the introduction indicates, the *Esquire* version of the novel creates a greater potential for a more radical gender project.

Rojack's implied competition with JFK over Deborah inaugurates one of the novel's most enduring patterns: the repeated conflict between Rojack and other men over women, which is ostensibly a repeated battle meant to "prove" Rojack's superior masculinity.<sup>45</sup> The original introduction makes clear that Rojack was in competition over Deborah with none other than JFK himself: not only did he compete with the future (and, at the time of publication, recently assassinated) President, but that this was a competition he won.<sup>46</sup> This contest further connects the figure of Rojack to Mailer, who, in writing *The Presidential Papers*, had been in a sort of one-sided contest with the President (Silverstein 37). It also proves Rojack's masculine credentials, right from the outset. This anecdote also clearly states what is at stake in contests between men: women. This initial masculine contest sets the tone for the rest of the novel, wherein Rojack's masculinity project takes shape through a series of masculinity challenges, and his masculinity is understood only in relation to other versions of masculinity.

---

<sup>45</sup> Many scholars have noted this pattern in Mailer's work; for instance, Howard Silverstein notes that "becoming a man in Mailer's fiction implies competing with and defeating other men" (V), while Herbert similarly claims that "What counts as heterosexual desire in Rojack is a pattern of impulses governed by the effort to assert his manhood in competition with other men and by his need to overcome the contradictions that threaten to collapse that manhood from within" (151).

<sup>46</sup> This contest foreshadows the way JFK will be held up as an exemplar of masculinity in Don DeLillo's *Libra*. See chapter seven.

One of the more disturbing of these excised passages takes place on the streets outside of Deborah's apartment. When Roberts insists that they—Rojack and the other policemen—go to the precinct, Rojack has a startling thought:

As they stood up, I was aware of a mood which came up from them. It was the smell of hunters seated in an overheated hut at dawn waiting for the sun to come out, drunk from drinking through the night. I was game to them at this moment, but in about the way a naked whore would be game if she were dragged into their hut on the dawn and they took her one by one rather than ripping overpowered charges of Magnum into ducks sitting on the water fifteen yards away. As I stood up to go with them, I felt a weakness go through me, and no adrenalin followed. (Mar. 144)

Rojack's comparison of the police officers to hunters remains in the Dial version, but the metaphor comparing Rojack to a "naked whore" is omitted. The Dial version puts the police in the masculine role of the hunter, and implies that Rojack is prey, perhaps even drawing an implicit comparison which questions Rojack's masculinity, while the *Esquire* version explicitly illustrates that Rojack views the police in a sexually threatening way, one that renders him not only feminine, but also a passive female victim of their violent sexual advances. Rojack feels feminized particularly by the presence of other, dominant men. Moreover, in this passage Rojack views male sexuality as predatory, at least in others. In his metaphor, the hunters have sex with the "naked whore" in place of killing ducks, which they would have done not for meat or for trophies, as the ducks would be destroyed by "overpowered charges of Magnum," but for the sheer pleasure of destruction. In this omitted passage, Rojack recognizes the violence that can undergird

sexual relations between women and men who practice hegemonic masculinity.

The Dial version omits a further passage from the same section of the narrative, one that similarly involves Rojack reconceptualising his masculinity in relation to different situations and different men. In the novel, when faced with the possibility of being tried and convicted for Deborah's murder, and locked up in a prison, Rojack ponders the future: "I would lie in a cell at night with nothing to do but walk a stone square floor" (87). As it was originally published, the same sentence includes an important mention of Rojack's desires: "I would lie in a cell at night with nothing to do but walk a stone square floor and dream through heats of desire for one of the girls in the men's wing of the prison, one of those girls with all but a woman's body (and a man's organs) and I would die through endless stupors and expired plans" (Mar. 148). The figure of the prison "queen" points to performativity, seeing gender ("one of those girls") as disassociated from sex ("with all but a woman's body"), complicating Rojack's seemingly essentialist view of gender. Unlike the passage with the hunters, in which Rojack views himself as the passive, effeminized victim, here he imagines himself as active and masculine. When confronted with a more aggressive, more physical version of masculinity—as is the case with the police officer, representatives of a Repressive State Apparatus—Rojack fears emasculation, while when in the marginal institution of the prison, Rojack would attempt to reassert his dominance in the gender hierarchy. As Stephen Donaldson has argued, "manhood" in prison is "always subject to being 'lost' to another, more powerful or aggressive, Man" (119), and queens are subordinated in the prison's sexual hierarchy. By taking up with a queen, Rojack would be reasserting the superiority of his masculinity within the gender regime of the prison. However, Rojack's

desire for a queen nonetheless complicates his masculinity by focusing on a nonnormative object of desire.

These two omitted passages demonstrate the degree to which Rojack views masculinity as something that is given by (or taken from) other men. Moreover, Rojack only understands masculinity as a project of dominance. This is most clear in how Rojack views women. As Kimmel argues, in the homosocial construction of masculinity, the “conquest” of women meant to improve men’s social standings in relation to other men (“Homophobia” 186-87). Rojack's murder of Deborah, and his sex with Ruta (who calls him a "genius") and Cherry (who has her first orgasm), gain new significance when viewed as instances of an ongoing competition with Barney Oswald Kelly. In this way, the women in the novel are less important as objects of masculine desire than, as Kimmel puts it, a sort of currency in a homosocial economy.

As noted in the introduction to this study, if masculinity is understood as a homosocial contest, then its most pertinent emotion is fear. Significantly, Parker has noted that most of the major differences between the *Esquire* version of *An American Dream* and the subsequent Dial version deal with fear (411). Fear still plays a major role in the novel version, but fear is given greater prominence in the *Esquire* version. All told, Mailer deleted roughly three dozen references to Rojack’s fear (Parker 417), thus weakening the correlation between masculinity and homophobia present in the *Esquire* version.

Rojack’s homophobia is brought on not only by the presence of men, but the presence of women as well, as demonstrated in another omitted section of the *Esquire* version, in which Rojack confides in Cherry:



I nodded. "I'm always afraid of a woman," I said. It was not altogether true. It had certainly not been true with Ruta, and many a time I had not felt a thing, but for a hundred fifty of some two hundred women there had first been a quarter hour of dread which arrived when I found myself alone with them and left me afterward familiar with the intimate feel of my cowardice, normally sealed in as deep upon itself as the mouldering center of a vegetable. (*Esq* April, 148)

The difference between these passages can lead to importantly different readings of the text. Discussing this line as it was published in the novel—"I'm always afraid" (118)—Stanley Gutman sees it as "the undirected fear that grows out of a man's sense of his own mortality" (103). As it was originally published, it is clear that Rojack's fear is in fact more specifically focused on women. Here, homophobia is not provoked by the proximity of men, but that of women. When Rojack initiates sex with most women, he experiences an intimate feeling of cowardice that he believes is normally "sealed" deep inside of him. His fear of failing in bed can be seen as a fear of failing in his performance of heterosexual masculinity, or as an anxiety about his own suitability for this performance.

Additionally, in the same passage, Rojack's (eventually omitted) admission that he had slept with "some two hundred women" brings to mind Judith Halberstam's contention that "excessive masculinity turns into a parody or exposure of the norm" (*Female* 4). The excesses of Rojack's masculinity are seen not only in this number of sexual conquests and the exaggerated reaction women have to him, but also in the many masculine roles he wears at different points in the story: super-soldier, boxer, public

intellectual, and so on. In this passage, Rojack's hypermasculine exterior is exposed as having, at its centre, a "mouldering center" of cowardice and homophobia. Each of Rojack's masculine actions is meant to reassure himself (and other men) that he is, indeed, an "authentic" man: acts of sex, and acts of violence (not always clearly differentiated) are a direct result of Rojack's homophobia.

Indeed, Rojack's excessive masculinity—combined with the unending, overwrought nature of his similes, which are the primary feature of his narrative voice—open up the possibility that *An American Dream* can be read as a criticism of such a hegemonic masculinity project. While the supposedly straight (that is, the obvious and heterosexual) reading that the novel demands is reinforced by its placement in *Esquire*, as a site of cultural (and masculine) hegemony, the magazine also opens up the possibility of resistant readings. It is therefore possible to see the novel as masculinist camp. Indeed, whether it is intentional or not, Mailer's novel presents elements that share an articulation with camp, pointing to the slippery and unstable nature of hegemonic masculinity as such.

As George Chauncey argues in his study of "the making of the gay male world," camp was a "cultural *style* and a cultural *strategy*" that "helped gay men make sense of, respond to, and undermine the social categories of gender and sexuality that served to marginalize them" (290). It did this through "irony, incongruity, theatricality, and humour ... sometimes exaggerating convention to the point of burlesquing it" (290). Rojack's ability to outperform all other men, his ability to bed any woman he wants, comes off as exaggeration verging on parody, and when combined with the previously noted critiques of masculinity found in the novel (e.g. the connection between masculinity, violence, and

the Establishment), suggests that *An American Dream* might fruitfully be read as a multifaceted criticism of hegemonic masculinity, especially as it was originally published in *Esquire*.

Chauncey's analysis of camp as a culture and a strategy specific to gay men supports the arguments of Michael Snyder, Howard Silverstein, and Andrew Gordon, who argue that Rojack is compensating for his unacknowledged homosexuality.<sup>47</sup> The *Esquire* version adds further credence to this claim. In the same passage in which Rojack admits to fearing women, he explains to Cherry that he had been a breech birth: "They had to go in with forceps and pull me out. It must be that my preference then was to die in the womb rather than enter life. I must have been more attached to where I had been before than to where I was going now" (Apr. 148). Pertinent to this passage is the belief in psychiatry, widely held at the time of Mailer's writing, the male children who identified too much with their mother risked becoming effeminate or homosexual (Penner 123). When he discusses his birth, Rojack admits to a powerful connection with his own mother—a figure who is otherwise totally absent from the novel. The implication is that Rojack himself might be gay—at least according to his own understanding of psychology.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> In *Norman Mailer and the Quest for Manhood*, Silverstein claims that Rojack's excessive emphasis on masculinity cloaks his latent homosexuality (v). Similarly, Andrew Gordon argues that "Rojack's repressed homosexual impulses are willfully converted into honorable and manly aggression" (137). Michael Snyder argues that other characters "read" Rojack as homosexual (268), and sees Rojack's fights as instances as homosexual panic.

<sup>48</sup> This omitted passage adds significance to an earlier, much-discussed episode involving Rojack and a German soldier whom he kills. Rojack describes the soldier as having "that overcurved mouth which only great fat sweet young faggots can have" and claims that the soldier's last words were "'*Mutter,*' one yelp from the first memory of the womb" (4). Rojack's admission of his own attachment to his mother turns this passage into an instance of psychological projection.

While the theme of homosocial competition and homophobia remains present in the novel form of *An American Dream*, the omissions from the *Esquire* version—in particular, the repeated references to fear and the blatant references to homosexual panic—greatly reduce this aspect of the novel, resulting in a less problematic portrayal of masculinity. The result of reading the original text of the novel is that fault lines appear in the masculine fantasy of Mailer’s fiction, and even in the masculine project of *Esquire* itself. Despite the fact that, as I have argued, *An American Dream* can reinforce patriarchy and, especially in the pages of *Esquire*, serves to renegotiate hegemonic masculinity in an era of increased consumption and white-collar work, the exposure of these fault lines allows for the possibility of unmasking masculinity as camp, as a homosocial construct, created by men and hoisted upon both men and women in a ruthless self-generating hierarchy. As Gutman explains, the notion that Rojack’s actions are no more than homophobic reactions undermines the supposedly “existential” or counter-cultural elements of his journey (110-111). The quest for masculinity in *An American Dream* (and, by implication, in general) is the pathological drive to enact masculine signifiers despite knowing that those signifiers are not natural, only learned performances, but that a failure to enact them results in the potential disenfranchisement of the male individual from the system of masculinity, and this is attended by homophobic panic.

This reading of *An American Dream* leaves masculinity, especially hegemonic masculinity, an incongruent mess. The novel seems to exalt hegemonic masculinity *and* parody it; see violence as masculine privilege *and* symptomatic of patriarchy’s illegitimacy; offer the “White Negro” as an exemplary masculinity *and* mock those who

would seek to emulate such a version of masculinity. I would argue that the novel's contradictory representation of masculinity is not a weakness, but a way of narrating the complexity and sometimes incoherence of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, the *Esquire* version of the novel gives alternate gender identities greater prominence, hinting at the possibility of liberation from this pathological gender regime. As it was written in *Esquire* magazine, *An American Dream* begins with a roll call, with a list of "men and women who have a life which proves to be their own; history records their name because they found no place" (Jan. 77, emphasis added). That Mailer (as Rojack) includes the names of women in this roll call of heroes opens up the possibility of an alternative to Mailer's masculine nightmare.

Perhaps the most transgressive name on Rojack's list is Christine Jorgensen: in 1952, Jorgensen, an ex-G. I., became the first person to gain fame for undertaking sex-reassignment surgery.<sup>49</sup> As James Gilbert explains in his study of masculinity in the 1950s, Jorgensen's widely-discussed case "vividly challenged the biological stability of gender and gender definitions by introducing the possibility of transsexuality" (76). Whereas I have argued that Rojack's main fault in his enactment of the "White Negro" is his inability—or unwillingness—to view gender as a cultural institution, akin to the other organizations in which he is caught, and to instead view it as a ground upon which cultural institutions are constructed, Jorgensen clearly provides an example of a figure who can destabilize this "ground." As Gilbert explains further, the popular discussion around Jorgensen's transition

---

<sup>49</sup> For more on Jorgensen, see *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography*, and *Becoming a Woman: A Biography of Christine Jorgensen* by Richard F. Docter.

suggested the prospect of a radical rupture between biology and sociology, between organic sexual characteristics and psychological identity in a way that reverberated through some of the decade's most controversial cultural productions. The recognition of ambiguity ... profoundly destabilized the assumed continuities of biology and personality upon which the gender crisis and its most facile resolution rested. (76)

Jorgensen, then, provides some similarities to another excised figure from the *Esquire* version of the novel, the jailhouse "punk" whom Rojack fears he will long for (Mar. 148). In both instances, the rigidity of gender is called into question, and it is explicitly shown that there is a disconnect between biological sex and cultural ideas of gender. Both figures, too, choose femininity over masculinity, thumbing their noses at hegemony and its corresponding homophobia; this is an especially provocative gesture in the case of Jorgensen who, as an ex-G.I., once embodied a hegemonic gender position.

Joanne Meyerowitz picks up on the way that contemporary accounts of Jorgensen focused on the performance of her gender as the most important aspect of her gender identity: "The stories on Jorgensen ... ultimately undermined the attempt to restabilize gender. It could provoke anxieties about the failure of boundaries dividing female and male, and it could also invite fantasies about the possibility of traveling across the suddenly permeable border that separated women from men" (Meyerowitz 18-19). Jorgensen, and the public discourse surrounding her, proved that gender could be destabilized, and that biological sex was in no way an ultimate "ground" for experience. When Meyerowitz notes that Jorgensen could provoke anxieties about the boundaries between male and female, she seems to be pointing to Jorgensen as a potential cause of

the type of homophobic panic continually on display in *An American Dream*. However, by listing Jorgensen as someone who managed to live a life that was her own, who found no place within the Establishment, Mailer seems to be endorsing her status as someone who actually destabilizes gender.

Inviting fantasies about gender instability, Jorgensen can be seen as a fantasy gendered-figure—not, obviously, an “exemplary masculinity,” but instead a figure who seeks to problematize hegemonic masculinity rather than supporting it. Her potentially exemplary status is supported not only by Mailer’s invocation of her name in the novel’s original introduction, but in the points of similarity between Jorgensen and Rojack. Like Rojack, Jorgensen served in the American army in World War II, and while she never entered politics or the academy, like Rojack she transitioned from soldier to television celebrity. Just as Rojack came to practice an exaggerated, hypermasculine role, so too did Jorgensen take up the role of fantastic female figures: as David Serlin explains, Jorgensen’s Las Vegas cabaret show “culminated with Jorgensen parading around on stage dressed in a Wonder Woman costume and knee-high boots while holding ignited sparklers” (159). Like Rojack, Jorgensen’s gender performance suggests camp, specifically as a “recognition of the artificiality of social roles” (Chauncey 290).

Also listed in Rojack’s roll-call of heroes is Marilyn Monroe, who almost ten years later would be the subject of another of Mailer’s books, *Marilyn*. Marilyn makes a surprising appearance in the novel’s epilogue, when Rojack, seemingly insane, phones up Cherry in the afterlife. The call is brief, and only Cherry speaks: “Why, hello, hon, I thought you’d never call. It’s kind of cool right now, and the girls are swell. Marilyn says to say hello. We get along, which is odd, you know, because girls don’t swing. But

toodle-oo, old baby-boy, and keep the dice for free, the moon is out and she's a mother to me" (269). The omission of Marilyn from the beginning of the novel makes her return even more abrupt; as it was published in *Esquire*, Marilyn helps to bookend the story. More importantly, Marilyn's identification in the original introduction as a role model worthy of emulation, combined with her association with the moon, highlights the way the moon is not just a focus of Rojack's pathology, but an important female symbol. One aspect of the novel which this chapter has not yet touched on is Rojack's relationship to the moon: in the early stages of the novel, he admits to communication with the moon (the first chapter is entitled "The Harbors of the Moon"). Furthermore, Rojack's murder of Deborah is preceded by Rojack rejecting the moon's command to kill himself (12-13). Rojack refers to the moon as "the Lady" (12), and after rejecting her command feels as though he "had disappointed a lady and now must eat the cold tapeworm of her displeasure" (13). After noting this feeling, he acknowledges that "Nothing noble seemed to remain of me" (13). In some ways, Rojack's consequent chauvinist actions can be seen as a result of this denial of the feminine (12-13). Rojack's relationship with the moon is emblematic of his problematic relationship with femininity, and an almost singular instance, in the novel, of femininity being discussed in favourable terms. When Cherry seems to indicate that she is not in heaven, but on the moon with Marilyn and "the girls," the moon—and the heavenly city which Rojack keeps seeing—becomes a positive symbol not only associated with femininity, but from which Rojack is explicitly excluded. The connection between Marilyn and the moon helps to emphasize the notion that the moon is not just a site of abject, exterior femininity, but is actually a desirable female enclave, a space disconnected from the Establishment and yet off limits to Rojack.



Further deletions weaken the notion of female empowerment, which is, admittedly, only present in nascent form in the *Esquire* version. Found in *Esquire*, in the nightclub scene where Rojack fires mind bullets at his enemies, is the figure of a sorceress:

Exhibit: The old widow with the queer was (in defense) mounting curses all about her. A hint of iridescence was in the light above her head. The thought came to attack her. For nothing. For no more than to see the technical grace of one's weapons, or was it that one's confidence had been damaged by the judge. So an arrow was shot into her largest curse (one huge luminous jelly fish shimmering in the air), her curse burst and sent needles back into my skin, ten thousand needles which pricked on my face like the touch of Deborah's hand. (Apr. 98)

Certainly, in this scene, patriarchy seems to be reinforced: the widow's feminine curses (shapeless, luminous jelly fish instead of solid, manly bullets) are no match for Rojack's masculine powers of the mind. However, this omission follows the pattern of Mailer's other deletions: female power, even if it is described as no real threat to masculine domination, is erased. Rojack may not come off any the worse for this encounter, but this is still an instant of him being harmed—no matter how insignificantly—by a female source. Unlike Deborah and Ruta, the widow's transgression remains unpunished: somehow, she stands outside of the pattern of trespass and punishment which runs throughout the novel. The widow may be no substantial threat, but she and "the queer" present an alternative gender configuration, one that does not so easily fall into Rojack's rigid gender hierarchy, and so, in the novel version, she is totally deleted.

#### 4. Conclusion: Revision and Homophobia

Commenting on the revisions made to the Dial version of the novel, Parker suggests that a number of them may have been undertaken because Mailer feared that they were too blatantly autobiographical, or might be read as such (411). Provocatively, he wonders whether “Mailer’s retrenchments for the Dial version prove that growing up in macho U.S.A. is a burden to the best male literary minds around as much as it is to every little boy who dreads being called a sissy” (413). This is to suggest that Mailer’s revisions were made out of fear of how his own masculinity would be judged because of his similarity to Rojack. If this is the case, then comparing the Dial and *Esquire* versions of the novel reveals an act of textual homophobia, and the original, unrevised version is all the more important because it provides readers with an image of the state of American masculinity that is deeply complex and contradictory.

Jorgensen, Marilyn, and the widow all represent, in some way, a threat to hegemonic masculinity, and so Mailer’s deletions of their presence in the novel drastically reduces the possibility of a more radical gender project coming out of the novel. Instead, *An American Dream*, as it was published in novel form, presents masculinity in a less problematic way (since homophobia is de-emphasized), and omits most of the possibilities of feminine agency present in the *Esquire* version. As the novel was published in *Esquire*, there exists a greater chance for a counter-patriarchal discourse, since the pursuit of masculinity can be read as camp, or as a pathological exercise in homophobia, undermining the legitimacy of the gender hierarchy, and also because liberatory feminine figures exist as signifiers of existing fault lines in a rigidly-constructed conception of gender.

The *Esquire* version of the novel therefore asks us to revisit those historical moments in which a narrative of “crisis” emerges, and to imagine them as moments in which the previous justification for patriarchy is no longer tenable: these are times during which hegemonic formulations of masculinity need to be renegotiated. Examining *An American Dream* as it was originally published, we can see how it is at these moments, before a new hegemonic formulation is established, that the contradictory and fragmented nature of masculinities are most obvious, and the possibilities for new, less toxic versions of masculinity appear.

Finally, even though the *Esquire* version provides a stronger criticism of patriarchy and provides the reader with instances of feminine power, it nevertheless reproduces many of the problems inherent in hegemonic masculinity. The novel’s most obvious remaining weakness is its treatment of its Africa-American characters. Most obviously, the novel still portrays black men, as represented in the figure of Shago Martin, as hyper-sexualized fetish objects for white masculinity. Certainly the novel does not repudiate the racist premise of “The White Negro,” a premise to which James Baldwin directly responded in the pages of *Esquire*. As we shall see in the next chapter, Baldwin, largely in response to Mailer, used *Esquire* to launch a critique of hegemonic masculinity, focusing specifically on how black masculinity is constructed through white hegemonic masculinity projects.

### Chapter 3

#### Cooling It with James Baldwin

The American ideal, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden—as an unpatriotic act—that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood. (Baldwin, “Here Be Dragons” 678)<sup>50</sup>

Originally titled “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood,” and published in *Playboy* in 1985, James Baldwin’s essay “Here Be Dragons” is perhaps his most sustained and direct criticism of the American gender order and of hegemonic masculinity. This particular attack on American masculinity, launched late in his career, was not new, nor was his strategy of criticizing masculinity in a publication devoted to valorizing it. Indeed, strands of Baldwin’s critique of masculinity as an ideological construct can be traced throughout his career, often as a direct response to the white constructions of black masculinity, such as Norman Mailer’s “White Negro.” Building on the considerable scholarship devoted to an analysis of Baldwin’s critique of masculinity,<sup>51</sup> I argue that his critique forms a crucial part of his 1960s contributions to *Esquire* magazine. Baldwin may have been in *Esquire* as a voice of the Civil Rights

---

<sup>50</sup> Here, Baldwin is distinguishing “masculinity,” a category created in opposition to femininity (and which, as he describes, establishes an uneven gender hierarchy) from “manhood,” which should be understood in opposition to “childhood.”

<sup>51</sup> Baldwin’s treatment of masculinity has been thoroughly analyzed by a good number of scholars. For some of the strongest analyses—those which identify the ideological dimension of his argument, as well as discussing the connection Baldwin draws between race and gender—see, e.g. Roderick Ferguson, Robert Reid-Pharr, and William Spurlin.

movement and as a commentator on the so-called “Negro problem,” but, as fitting the focus of the magazine, he continually framed his discussion of race as a discussion of masculinity.

In the quotation that forms the epigraph to this chapter, Baldwin’s reference to “the American ideal of masculinity” could be replaced with Connell’s term “hegemonic masculinity” to clarify how Baldwin is indicting just such a gender order as Connell outlines. In that passage, Baldwin identifies masculinity as a kind of master code for identity. In other words, if the characteristics that make up most hegemonic formulations of masculinity are the culturally favoured identities in a series of binaries—rich not poor, straight not gay, white not black, young not old, and so on—then why is Connell’s (and Baldwin’s) major focus on *masculinity*? Why not hegemonic whiteness, or hegemonic youth? Baldwin clarifies this emphasis. In a patriarchal society, masculinity is the dominant identity category, the characteristic that supersedes all others. It is because Baldwin directly addresses the American ideology of masculinity that his critique is so focused, and he thus provides such a significant analysis of the intersections of masculinity, race, and power. Baldwin therefore critiques the problematic hegemonic masculinity projects offered by Norman Mailer (“The White Negro”) and *Esquire* itself. However, the inevitable weakness of Baldwin’s analysis is that by privileging masculinity—even as a target against which to dissent—over all other identity categories, his criticism could naturalize patriarchal power as *the* power. This is not to say that Baldwin’s critique is not sophisticated and insightful—it is—but that by foregrounding masculinity as a master code he risks further marginalizing those who are oppressed otherwise. The most obvious example of the limitations of Baldwin’s critique is his

inability to address the position of women in the gender hierarchy against which he strives.

Baldwin's critique of masculinity is more focused and direct than the other writers in this study, and he illuminates how masculinity, as a dominant category, connects in illuminating ways to other forms of identity. Furthermore, even in his critique, Baldwin demonstrates how patriarchy's *assumption* of its own centrality, and not necessarily its actual centrality, results in masculinity being understood as *the* master code for identity. This is why, as seen in the second chapter of this study, and as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, male characters are represented consistently as feeling that any failing in (or threat against) any aspect of their identities are failings in (or threats against) their masculinity. Furthermore, it is through what Kimmel<sup>52</sup> calls the homosocial enactment of masculinity—the fact that masculinity is demonstrated for and evaluated by other men (“Homophobia” 186)—that men are codified into an uneven gender hierarchy. Baldwin's point, in the passage above, is that it is when each man's performance of masculinity is judged against a (largely symbolic) hegemonic form that some become “faggots,” and some become “studs,” and, in the most crucial part of Baldwin's argument, it is also only in this act of masculine evaluation that some become “black” and some become “white.” It is therefore, in Baldwin's argument, the larger gender order, policed by (regime-specific) hegemonic concepts of masculinity, which creates, naturalizes, and reinforces racial categories.

As I will demonstrate, Baldwin's critique of American masculinity is central to his fiction, and begins as early as *Giovanni's Room*, and intensifies throughout his fiction

---

<sup>52</sup> This claim, about the homosocial enactment of masculinity, is also central to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Epistemology of the Closet*.

of the 1960s. Significantly, Baldwin articulated parts of his critique of hegemonic masculinity in the pages of *Esquire* magazine, a panopticon-like field with its own hegemonic masculinity project, and wherein constructions of masculinity are negotiated and reinforced.<sup>53</sup> I argue that aspects of Baldwin's critique of hegemonic masculinity—especially the role it plays in enforcing and maintaining racism—are present throughout Baldwin's *Esquire* articles, in particular in two early essays from the 1960s, later republished in *Nobody Knows My Name*: "Fifth Avenue, Uptown" and "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy." The criticisms Baldwin makes in these essays provide a foundation for his more provocative attacks against hegemonic masculinity in his subsequent fictional works of the 1960s, in particular "Going to Meet the Man" and *Blues for Mister Charlie*. Making his argument in the pages of *Esquire*, Baldwin indicts those complicit with the contemporary construction of the gender order and encourages a radical change to conceptions of American masculinity, and he does so through the more direct method of nonfiction rather than through the medium of fiction, which could be dismissed as purely aesthetic. Furthermore, I closely analyze one issue of *Esquire* magazine from the late 1960s, to demonstrate the ways the magazine attempted to diminish his counter-hegemonic critique through racially charged textual strategies that reinforce the dominance of white, professional/managerial masculinities, and reinscribe the subordination of black masculinity.

---

<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, this external judgement—the judgement of other men met in face-to-face social relations—is also internalized by the masculine subject, who judges himself and others accordingly. Accordingly, David Buchbinder finds Michel Foucault's concept of the "panopticon" useful for explaining how this homosocial construction of masculinity functions. He argues that men are simultaneously subjects and objects of a patriarchal panopticon—they both judge others and are judged against current gender norms. Those who do not meet the currently accepted masculine criteria are subjected to "disciplinary action" (81), which in most instances will be some form of subordination or marginalization from dominant forms of masculinity, resulting in lessened access to the patriarchal dividend.

## 1. Baldwin's Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity

Baldwin's critique of hegemonic masculinity was situated within a series of important, overlapping historical contexts. Baldwin began working for *Esquire* in 1960, the first year of a decade that saw massive political and social change for African Americans. The decade witnessed the passing of the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Voting Rights Act (1965), the foundation of the Black Panther Party (1966), and the assassinations of Malcolm X (1965) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1968), to name only a few of the most noteworthy events. Baldwin became, if not a leader of the Civil Rights Movement, then one of its most famous spokesmen. As a socially conscious black author, Baldwin was placed in an African American literary tradition—following the dominance of the Harlem Renaissance and the social protest novel, and seeing the emergence of the nascent Black Arts Movement—and at the centre of the rise of Black Nationalism and Civil Rights, all of which proffered competing conceptions of black and white masculinity.

As several scholars have argued, configurations of masculinity were central to articulations of blackness during this period. In particular, several African American activists promoted a discourse of aggressive, heterosexual black masculinity to oppose an insufficient white masculinity. Baldwin's critique significantly overlaps with Black Nationalism and Black Arts Movement critiques in several places, though it just as significantly differs. As Darieck Scott argues, "The writers of the Black Power/Black Arts Movements identified sexuality as one of the primary means by which black subjugation was achieved and concomitantly as one of the primary arenas in which black



liberation was to be won” (172). Consequently, Black Nationalism and the Black Arts Movement, which was one of its analogues in literature, often framed its attacks on institutional whiteness in terms of masculinity. For instance, when Larry Neal discusses theatre in his 1968 essay “The Black Arts Movement,” he refers to Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as “very American: sick white lives in a homosexual hell hole” (2043). For comparison, when Neal describes LeRoi Jones’ [Amiri Baraka’s] 1964 play *The Dutchman*, in which the African American man Clay is murdered by the white woman Lula, he foregrounds the contestation of masculinity in matters of race, arguing that “the relationship between Clay (Black America) and Lula (white America) is rooted in the historical castration of black manhood” (2044). Accordingly, one of the implicit goals of the Black Arts Movement was to articulate new, revolutionary formulations of masculinity, resulting in numerous charges of misogyny being leveled against the movement.

Those black writers concerned with masculinity were responding, in no small part, to the demonization of black masculinity, especially as that figure is caricatured in the white imagination as the “black beast,” “an enduring image of the segregation era characterizing black males as sexually aggressive, only slightly removed from savagery, and particularly lustful toward white women,” one which was central to the sexual policing of African Americans by white men (Leiter 2-3).<sup>54</sup> Richard Schmitt situates this white, masculine fear of black masculinity’s sexuality to the social and cultural changes in the Post-Civil War South, arguing that it was a reaction to the Populists, a multiracial

---

<sup>54</sup> Leiter’s study focuses on the placement of “African American male sexuality at the center of black and white individual and communal identities” (6) in the works of James Weldon Johnson, George Schuyler, Erskine Caldwell, Walter White, Margaret Mitchell, Allen Tate, William Faulkner and Richard Wright.

group of small farmers. To re-establish the subordination of black men and white women, white men “mounted a concerted campaign to persuade Whites that Black men were a constant and serious threat to the honor and safety of White women, because Black men had huge genitals and an insatiable sexual appetite, particularly for White women” (47). Schmitt is here describing the renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity in the Post-Civil War South. This renegotiation was achieved, in part, through raising fears of the exaggerated sexuality of the “black beast,” and in particular through disseminating the supposedly threatening image of the black man’s “huge genitals.” Furthermore, in what is typical of the functioning of hegemonic masculinity, Schmitt argues that this renegotiation has, as its primary goal, the maintenance of men’s control over women (51-52). This supports Toby Ditz’s claim that “the gender order pivots on men’s access to women, its differential distribution, and challenges to it” (11), demonstrating that one of the primary ways gendered power is played out in a system of hegemonic masculinity is through policing which men have access to which women.

As will be discussed shortly, this synecdochal reduction of the “black beast,” and therefore black masculinity, to the image of the “huge black penis,” is a technique of domination that Baldwin specifically identifies and speaks out against. Other black male artists were not so critical of its implications. As Schmitt argues, “The myth of the giant Black penis is more intelligible in a setting where all men, White and Black, think of themselves as embodied in their sexual organ and, ultimately, estimate their own worth by the functioning of that organ” (51). Revised articulations of black masculinity, meant to counter white hegemony, often fell into the trap of arguing against white masculinity while simultaneously being stuck in the old discourse of hegemonic masculinity. As

Anne Pochmara puts it, “black assertions of masculinity inevitably pose a challenge to white constructions, yet they most frequently retain their sexist dimension” (10). Both black writers and revolutionaries were invested in rearticulating black masculinity in such a way that it would escape the emasculating effects of living in a white, heterosexist society; however, a “remasculinization” of black masculinity threatened to reinscribe heterosexist and patriarchal discourse. bell hooks speaks to this problem:

The discourse of black resistance has almost always equated freedom with manhood, the economic and material domination of black men with castration, emasculation. Accepting these sexual metaphors forged a bond between oppressed black men and their white male oppressors. They shared the patriarchal belief that revolutionary struggle was really about the erect phallus. (57-8)

What hooks identifies here as a major problem in the discourse of black resistance is the way it seeks to renegotiate hegemonic masculinity, so as to allow for greater access to the patriarchal dividend for black masculinities. Such an alliance would only benefit black men: women would remain subjected to a system of masculine domination.

hooks’ criticism is especially pertinent to writers associated with the Black Arts Movement, who saw the reclamation and articulation of masculinity as central to their revolutionary goals of Black Nationalism. The Black Arts Movement—in particular, Amiri Baraka—saw white men as emasculated because of disengagement from the physical world (in preference to the intellectual/artistic world). Additionally, they saw this same failing in their literary forbearers, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. As Phillip Brian Harper explains, “Black Aestheticians” drew a parallel between a perceived

lack of black consciousness and an inadequate masculinity, allowing for “Black Arts judgements of insufficient racial identification to be figured specifically in terms of a failed manhood for which homosexuality, as always, was the primary signifier” (50). This kind of devaluation of the Harlem Renaissance, based on its perceived failure of manhood,<sup>55</sup> made Baldwin himself a target, especially given the “open secret” of his homosexuality. Based on this argument, Baldwin’s homosexuality made him insufficiently black. In this vein, the most obvious attack on Baldwin’s masculinity came from Eldridge Cleaver, who would later go on to be a leader in the Black Panther Party.<sup>56</sup>

During the 1960s, Baldwin’s writing about race and masculinity attempted to escape the trap identified by hooks and Pochmara: while fixating on castration, emasculation, and manhood in much the same way as the writers hooks castigates, Baldwin’s sophisticated critique nevertheless attempted to resist sexist, patriarchal sympathies with white masculinity. Instead, Baldwin saw masculinity, and the feelings of castration and emasculation that come with it, as ideology, as the very tool by which white America subordinated and marginalized African Americans.

Baldwin’s understanding of masculinity—that is to say, masculinity as a crucial component of dominant, racist ideologies—can be seen in his stance toward the protest novel. In particular, it can be seen in his rejection of one-time mentor Richard Wright.<sup>57</sup> Baldwin’s rejection of Wright is, in part, the rejection of “The cult of phallic masculinity

---

<sup>55</sup> As Harper notes, many of its key male figures were “coily acknowledged” as homosexual, including Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, and Alain Locke (50).

<sup>56</sup> Cleaver’s heterosexist attack on Baldwin, in his *Soul on Ice*, has received considerable scholarly attention. While the *difference* between the two authors’ approaches to black masculinity are fairly obvious (Cleaver’s hypermasculinity, Baldwin’s nonnormative masculinity) several scholars have thoughtfully elaborated on the convergence of both authors’ thinking. See, in particular, Douglas Taylor, Kathryn Bond Stockton, Nathaniel Mills, and Robert Reid-Pharr.

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., Baldwin’s “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” “Many Thousands Gone,” and “Alas, Poor Richard.”

associated with the protest novel (embodied in Wright's *Native Son*) and praised as exemplary of black literature by Black cultural nationalists" (Spurlin, "Rethinking" 60). According to the logic of Baldwin's critique, this way of thinking was an example of conceiving black masculinity in white hegemonic terms, in effect equating black selfhood and agency principally with masculinity in general, and the penis in particular, threatened to merely reinscribe white racist notions of black masculinity.

Moving from the specific example of Wright, Baldwin's general problems with the protest novel demonstrates the basis of his critique of hegemonic masculinity. Baldwin's criticism of protest literature, as many have discussed, is generally that it unthinkingly recreates the categories of domination created by hegemony.<sup>58</sup> Just as the category of blackness is itself the creation of white, racist ideology, so too is masculinity a tool which enforces this ideology. Consequently, when Baldwin wrote fiction, it was in contrast to what he saw as the supposedly simplistic protest fiction of Wright and members of the Black Arts Movement. Baldwin's critique of racism is instead articulated in his fiction as a critique of hegemonic masculinity. This critique is perhaps most clearly expressed in his controversial 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room*. Set in Paris, the novel follows the love affair between David, a young white American, and Giovanni, a young

---

<sup>58</sup> According to Carolyn Wedin Sylvander, Baldwin sees that the difficulty for activist writers "is resisting simplification" (20-1). Protest fiction is overly simplistic to Baldwin, because, as Andrew Shin and Barbara Judson note, it "necessitated an overly narrow conception of the black writer, restricting him to a racial category that pre-empted the exploration of a more expansive and imaginative notion of human potential" (249). As William Spurlin argues, "'Baldwin questioned models of political solidarity and resistance based on one's membership in a particular community (thought of as homogenous) and looked at the ways a variety of oppressors intersected with one another'" ("Culture" 110). Expanding on this point, Jocelyn Whitehead Jackson argues that protest literature "confines the Black man within his own skin ... The 'novels of Negro oppression,' written by Blacks and Whites alike, fail furthermore because they ignore the fact that oppressor and oppressed are bound inextricably in American culture" (255). Marlon Ross concurs, claiming that "According to Baldwin, protest fiction plays up an illusion that we can understand injustice by fictionally *representing* the categories on which that injustice is based ... [Rather,] Baldwin wants to *explode* those categories" (36).

Italian man. Though the novel presents no black characters, it is nevertheless critically concerned with the intersection of race and masculinity. As Robert Reid-Pharr has noted (388), the discussion of race begins on the very first page, as David describes himself: “My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past” (1). Reading this with Lacan’s theory of the “Mirror Stage” in mind,<sup>59</sup> here David identifies in his *imago* an idealized version of himself: “ideal” to the extent that his reflection is a kind of exemplary masculinity, arrow-like and blonde, immediately recognized and immediately recognizable in relation to a history of colonialism and genocide. Against this ideal, colonial masculinity, David must compare his “real,” homosexual self. It is the conflict between these two versions of David that dominates his characterization.

David’s investment in his whiteness—as demonstrated in this early, formative reference to his ancestors—helps to explain, when read through Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, why he continually associates homosexuality with blackness. As Josep Armengol argues, “*Giovanni’s Room* suggests a parallel between the heterosexual and white (with its metaphorical associations with light, cleanness, purity, rationality, transparency, goodness, innocence, etc.), on the one hand, and the homosexual and black (with its symbolic meanings of darkness, dirt, sin, emotionality, obscurity, evil, guilt, and so on), on the other” (675). This is to say that David, the narrator, cannot describe the appearance of homosexual characters, or even their lodgings, without associating them

---

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of the “Mirror Stage,” see Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.”

with blackness. David is described in the opening passage as an example of hegemonic masculinity—or in Baldwin’s terms “the American ideal of masculinity”—and his narration makes clear its workings. Gay masculinity, like black masculinity, is subordinated or marginalized within the American gender order, the gender order that educated David and which he has internalized. In addition, both are abject, to the extent that hegemonic masculinity can only be defined through a series of oppositions—in this case, white, not black; straight, not gay. Hegemonic masculinity “denies” or marginalizes both kinds of masculinity, and the slippage, in David’s perception, between blackness and homosexuality only emphasizes the ways both marginalized identities are categories created by the ideology of hegemonic masculinity itself.

While *Giovanni’s Room* establishes Baldwin’s critique of hegemonic masculinity, his later fiction develops this critique, though it has as its focus a different aspect of the racist conflation of race and gender. Indeed, Baldwin’s fiction of the 1960s repeatedly turns to a white obsession with African American male sexuality—in particular, the fetishization of black penises—and to the literal act of the emasculation of black men by white men. While Baldwin touches on this theme in novels of the 1960s, especially *Another Country*,<sup>60</sup> the two works which most horrifically foreground this theme are the play *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964) and the short story “Going to Meet the Man,” published in a collection of the same name (1965). Both feature the murders of African American men, and both explicitly connect racial hatred with the fetishization of black masculinity.

---

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Shin and Barbara Judson see *Another Country* as a repudiation of Mailer’s concept of black masculinity, articulated in *The White Negro*, arguing that “the sexual lionizing of the black musician merely appropriates him for white consumption, and, Baldwin warns, if black musicians embrace this myth, they will be destroyed by it, as demonstrated by the case of Rufus Scott, the tragic character at the center of *Another Country*” (256-7). For further discussions of the confluence of masculinity and race in *Another Country*, see, i.e., Keith Clark (55) and Susan Feldman,

*Blues for Mister Charlie*, dedicated to Medgar Evers and loosely based on the murder of Emmett Till, takes place in the segregated location of Plaguetown, U.S.A. Plaguetown, divided between “Whitetown” and “Blacktown,” is the setting of the murder of Richard Henry, a young African American man, at the hands of the white store-owner Lyle Britten. The play begins with Richard already dead, and continues to depict the trial of Lyle, in the present, and a series of flashbacks recounting Richard’s actions, leading up to his murder. As the plot unfolds, Baldwin makes it clear that at the root of the racial tension in the town, and the conflict between Lyle and Richard, is white, male conceptions of black masculinity. This is most obvious in a discussion between the denizens of Whitetown:

ELLIS: Mrs. Britten, you’re married and all the women in this room are married and I know you’ve seen your husband without no clothes on—but have you seen a nigger without no clothes on? No, I guess you haven’t. Well, he ain’t like a white man, Mrs. Britten.

GEORGE: That’s right.

ELLIS: Mrs. Britten, if you was to be raped by an orang-outang out of the jungle or a *stallion*, couldn’t do you no worse than a nigger. You wouldn’t be no more good for nobody. I’ve seen it.

GEORGE: That’s right.

RALPH: That’s why we men have got to be so vigilant. (*Blues 50*)

In this passage, Ellis and George, as symptomatic white men, clearly express that the justification for racism is the fear of black men’s exaggerated sexuality. Ellis and George invoke for Mrs. Britten the figure of the “black beast.” Some of Richard’s last words to



Lyle reflect his acknowledgement, if not his understanding, of the psychosexual predicament in which he has been caught: “Why have you spent so much time trying to kill me? Why are you always trying to cut off my cock? You worried about it? Why?” (*Blues* 120). Additionally, Lyle’s acquittal is predicated on white fears of black men’s sexuality. While on the witness stand, Jo Britten, Lyle’s wife, concocts a story about Richard assaulting her sexually, and the State repeatedly refers to Richard’s ownership of photographs of naked white women.<sup>61</sup> *Blues for Mister Charlie* therefore demonstrates the degree to which racist ideology relies on the construct of the “black beast” for the policing and segregation of black masculinity, as well as the instability of a white masculinity that, in creating so many “Others” (black, homosexual, and so forth) has created so many cracks in its own edifice. If black masculinity, like white masculinity, is a product of patriarchy, of the development of patriarchal gender regimes, then the policing of black masculinity is in fact the policing of white masculinity.

In “Going to Meet the Man,” Baldwin returns to this theme, with an unforgettably brutal description of a lynching. It is in this story that Baldwin asserts that, by creating the “black beast” stereotype to police racial segregation, (racist) white men have created a fetish. Citing the dreams and fantasies of his white patients, Frantz Fanon claims that “One is no longer aware of the Negro, but only of a penis: The Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis” (170).<sup>62</sup> This synecdochal effacement of black masculinity by the fantasy of the penis allows for not only the dehumanization of black men, but also its symbolic appropriation, whether in Fanon’s France or Baldwin’s America. Lynne Segal argues that this racist stereotyping of black masculinity is not only common among

---

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g. pages 92-93, 104, 111-12,

<sup>62</sup> Also quoted in Bordo (25).

traditional racists, but also supposedly liberal, equality minded progressives. She provides the examples of Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*) and Mailer (178-79), both of whom Baldwin criticizes in “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy.” Segal cites the example of “The White Negro” to support her claim that Mailer is invested in this myth of black sexuality; a similarly apt example is *An American Dream*, especially the point at which Rojack is given Shago Martin’s phallic umbrella after savagely beating him (201). Similarly, Susan Bordo invokes Mailer as an example of the white fetishization of black masculinity. She begins by citing the above quotation from Fanon, and goes on to argue that not only do white men envy this fetishized black masculinity, but also black celebrities exploit it (25). If the myth of the black man as hypermasculine has resulted in the black penis as a mythological symbol of virility—it functions both as threat and object of desire. The black penis (in the white-supremacist, patriarchal imagination) becomes the locus of a number of white conceptions of black masculinity.

“Going to Meet the Man” begins in bed, where Jesse, a white Southern sheriff, is unable to get an erection. His impotence is only cured by remembering a lynching he witnessed as a youth. The description of this lynching is horrific:

Then the man with the knife walked up to the hanging body. He turned and smiled again. Now there was a silence all over the field. The hanging head looked up. It seemed fully conscious now, as though the fire had burned out terror and pain. The man with the knife took the nigger's privates in his hand, one hand, still smiling, as though he were weighing them. In the cradle of the one white hand, the nigger's privates seemed as remote as meat being weighed in the scales; but seemed heavier, too, much heavier, and Jesse felt

his scrotum tighten; and huge, huge, much bigger than his father's, flaccid, hairless, the largest thing he had ever seen till then, and the blackest. The white hand stretched them, cradled them, caressed them. Then the dying man's eyes looked straight into Jesse's eyes- it could not have been as long as a second, but it seemed longer than a year. Then Jesse screamed, and the crowd screamed as the knife flashed, first up, then down, cutting the dreadful thing away, and the blood came roaring down. Then the crowd rushed forward, tearing at the body with their hands, with knives, with rocks, with stones, howling and cursing. Jesse's head, of its own weight, fell downward toward his father's head. Someone stepped forward and drenched the body with kerosene. Where the man had been, a great sheet of flame appeared. Jesse's father lowered him to the ground.

“Well, I told you,” said his father, “you wasn't never going to forget this picnic.” His father's face was full of sweat, his eyes were very peaceful. At that moment Jesse loved his father more than he had ever loved him. He felt that his father had carried him through a mighty test, had revealed to him a great secret which would be the key to his life forever. (247-8)

The young Jesse, his father, and the lyncher all find sexual arousal in the victim's masculinity, and emasculation. The lyncher cradling and caressing the black man's genitals connotes a sensuousness seemingly out of place with the violent murder. Jesse's immediate reaction is to feel his “scrotum tighten,” and the description of Jesse's father after the lynching—face full of sweat, eyes peaceful—seems to indicate a post-orgasmic state. Reading this same passage, Sara Taylor argues that it demonstrates “white

patriarchy's false construction of a hypersexualized black masculinity, as well as its subsequent attempts to repress and destroy that construction" (46). It needs to be noted that in this sense Baldwin's critique is similar to Cleaver's; the crucial difference is that Cleaver wants black men to exploit the culturally constructed, hypermasculine role they have been assigned, while Baldwin wants to deconstruct it. The racist formulation of black masculinity depicted in "Going to Meet the Man" reveals white men's investment in an uneven gender hierarchy, at the same time that it demonstrates the instability of that very hierarchy.

The last sentence of the above passage is perhaps the most troubling, but also the most revealing. The "great secret" that the white men share seems to be the degree to which their own identities are predicated on the violent subordination of black masculinity. Taylor comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that the story reveals that "true white manhood, in a heteronormative, sexist, and racist paradigm, can be achieved only by destroying the masculinity of the black male, while the tenets of socially constructed black masculinity are dictated by this selfsame white patriarchy. Baldwin, then, suggests that the system of creating masculinities for both blacks and whites is a system of destruction of all" (57). Taylor is right that Baldwin identifies "the system of creating masculinities" as the root cause of domination and inequality for both black and white alike; however, I would argue that "destroying the masculinity of the black male" is not as central as Taylor claims. While Baldwin provides numerous examples where destruction is the obvious result, the homoeroticism of the lynching scene offers an alternative never taken—the possibility for a sensual, not a violent, relationship. In this case, then, heterosexism actually trumps racism as the mechanism by which racial

segregation and the subordination of racialized masculinities are created. As Lee Edelman explains, systems of domination are

systems that generate a “racial” discourse suffused with homophobia insofar as it plays out the incoherences of a heterosexual masculinity that cannot afford to acknowledge, as it cannot afford to deny, the centrality of its narcissistic investment in, and hence the intensity of its desire for, the culturally institutionalized authority of the phallus that never fully distinguishes itself from the anatomical penis. (48)

If masculinity is the primary signifier of power in a patriarchal order, then all differentiations of power come with a sexual dimension, and even racism is revealed to be another form, or at least motivated by another form, of heterosexism. Even the possibility of overcoming racism between males is policed by homophobia, and the types of domination found in a society are repeatedly seen to overlap and reinforce one another.

Baldwin, then, has constructed a multi-faceted critique of hegemonic masculinity, seeing the American ideal of heteronormative masculinity as the foundation for every other system of domination—especially racial. The specific way black masculinity is subordinated—through its hypermasculinization and the myth of the “black beast”—simultaneously denies and fetishizes black masculinity (specifically the black man’s penis) while denying black men the “patriarchal dividend.” Black men remain estranged from masculinity—and yet, they are still invested in it, since their gender presumably justifies their access to patriarchal authority. It is precisely this system which Baldwin critiques, and, significantly, when the opportunity arises, he does so in the pages of a magazine dedicated to a white hegemonic masculinity.

## 2. Baldwin's Queer Critique of Race in *Esquire* magazine

While Baldwin wrote several essays for *Esquire* during the 1960s, of special significance are “Fifth Avenue, Uptown” and “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy.” For the first of these essays, “Fifth Avenue, Uptown,” Baldwin had been engaged by *Esquire* to write an article on Harlem, as part of its July 1960 magazine focused exclusively on New York City. Baldwin had recently returned to America from Paris, and realized that he had “a role to play.” As Baldwin biographer James Campbell explains, “By his ‘role’ he mean[t] working for the movement, writing reports, getting the story past the editor’s desk” (125). Furthermore, Campbell argues that this was a role he was uniquely positioned to play—Wright was in France, and his “star was in decline,” while both Ralph Ellison and Langston Hughes were disinclined to take active roles in the movement (125). David Leeming, another Baldwin biographer, states that this particular *Esquire* article drew Baldwin’s attention to civil rights and its ongoing struggle (168). The issue in which it was published featured the work of other noted literary authors—in particular, Truman Capote and John Cheever. While most of the rest of the magazine paid homage to the Big Apple, Baldwin’s piece was a condemnation of Harlem’s housing projects and, more generally, a denunciation of the white American society that had allowed the ghetto to exist in the first place.

Baldwin’s critique of Harlem in many ways parallels his critique of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, Baldwin sees Harlem’s ghettos as ideological constructs meant to restrict African Americans to a subordinate position within the larger American society (and in particular the larger American gender order, as I argue below). As Baldwin states, “The projects in Harlem are hated. They are hated almost as much as policemen, and this

is saying a great deal. And they are hated for the same reason: both reveal, unbearably, the real attitude of the white world, no matter how many liberal speeches are made, no matter how many lofty editorials are written, no matter how many civil-rights commissions are set up” (“Fifth” 209).<sup>63</sup> I would argue that Baldwin sees the housing projects as a representation of what Slavoj Žižek calls “objective violence” (2). That is to say, in this example, that the housing projects, like policemen, are not only repressive state apparatuses, in Louis Althusser’s terms, but are also symbolic of the state violence that marginalizes African Americans. This kind of violence—the looming projects, the patrolling policemen—creates the “zero-level standard” of supposed non-violence. It is against this supposedly non-violent background of Harlem that the street-level violence, from assault to the aforementioned rioting, is made visible.

Baldwin considers the questions that will arise when just such a demonstration of subjective violence occurs: “One day, to everyone’s astonishment, someone drops a match in the powder keg and everything blows up. Before the dust has settled or the blood congealed, editorials, speeches, and civil-rights commissions are loud in the land, demanding to know what happened” (“Fifth” 211). It is following this quotation that Baldwin explicitly links the subordination of African Americans to masculinity. In answer to the hypothetical situation of riots taking place in Harlem, and the presumed question regarding “what happened,” Baldwin explains that “What happened is that

---

<sup>63</sup> Citations refer to page numbers in *The Price of the Ticket*, unless otherwise noted.

Negroes want to be treated like men” (“Fifth” 211).<sup>64</sup> Repeating this line in the next paragraph, Baldwin continues:

Negroes want to be treated like men: a perfectly straightforward statement, containing only seven words. People who have mastered Kant, Hegel, Shakespeare, Marx, Freud, and the Bible find this statement utterly impenetrable. The idea seems to threaten profound, barely conscious assumptions. A kind of panic paralyzes their features, as though they found themselves trapped on the edge of a steep place. (“Fifth” 211-2)

For Baldwin, then, African American men feel their subordination primarily as a form of emasculation. The containment of African Americans to the slums is felt, in the first instance, as a containment of their masculinity, and the violence that will eventually result therefore stems from the emasculation of the African American male.

Not only do African American men primarily feel their disempowerment as emasculation, but also that emasculation—their segregation from, and the inaccessibility of, the patriarchal dividend—is seen as the root of racial segregation. As Roderick Ferguson argues, Baldwin’s work “suggests that racial regulation emerges from heteronormative exclusion. As Baldwin’s work illustrates, white racial dominance ‘others’ African-Americans as ‘queer’ subjects, as people who exist somewhere outside of proper heterosexual interaction” (420). African Americans are only “queer” inasmuch as their assumed heterosexuality is understood by a white, patriarchal society as non-normative. As Ferguson further explains, the understanding “of African-American

---

<sup>64</sup> At the time of Baldwin’s writing (1960), two significant riots had occurred in Harlem, in 1935 and 1943. For further discussion and analysis, see, e.g., Janet Abu-Lughod’s *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles*.



sexuality as wild, unstable, and undomesticated locates African-American sexuality within the irrational and therefore outside the bounds of the citizenship machinery” (423). Accordingly, masculinity is understood by Baldwin as a system of domination.

Importantly, Baldwin is not arguing for a renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity, one which would at best incorporate African Americans into the hegemonic bloc, or at worst increasingly authorize black exemplars of masculinity in the symbolic realm. (This second stance is taken up by *Esquire*, as will be discussed below.) Such a renegotiation may improve, however slightly, the position of African American men, but it would leave in place the unequal power hierarchy. The system that subordinates African Americans is the same system that authorizes them. On the contrary, Baldwin is arguing for the destruction of the existing gender order in a manner similar to his argument against the existence of slums: “The people of Harlem know they are living there because white people do not think they are good enough to live anywhere else. No amount of ‘improvement’ can sweeten this fact. Whatever money is now being earmarked to improve this, or any other ghetto, might as well be burnt. A ghetto can be improved in one way only: out of existence” (“Fifth” 210). The ghettos are ideological constructs—they are meant to keep African Americans marginalized. Even if they are improved, their function remains the same. As Baldwin advances his critique of hegemonic masculinity, a similar argument is made: that “blackness” is a category invented to marginalize African Americans, and that the only way to counter this situation is to overturn the gender order which finds hegemonic masculinity at its pinnacle.

Though Baldwin’s critique aims to dismantle hegemonic masculinity, he could easily be charged with forwarding a patriarchal point of view, one that simply effaces

women from the picture. Such a critique is not without merit; however, I will demonstrate that Baldwin's argument has larger implications that include women, albeit implicitly, and that his critique is more sophisticated than has yet been established. Though Baldwin does not expressly make this claim, his critique of masculinity is allied nonetheless with a feminist critique of patriarchy, inasmuch as he wishes to dismantle a system that ultimately subordinates women, even if his focus is on that system's effect on subordinated and marginalized versions of masculinity. This critique of the system itself is not limited to Baldwin's magazine articles, but is present in his novels as well. As H el ene Christol argues, Baldwin's fiction argues that all systems of dominance and oppression will continue to operate as long as the American ideal of masculinity is maintained. Until hegemonic masculinity is re-examined and ultimately abandoned, relations among men and between men and women will be exercises in power and violence (86). It is important to add to Christol's assertion that Baldwin saw the American ideal of masculinity not only as the centre of systems of oppression based on gender, but also at the centre of racial discrimination. Still, the fact that Baldwin seemingly ignores women in his nonfiction writing is problematic, and could allow his critique to bolster the system of masculine domination that it hopes to diminish.

Baldwin's critique is furthered in "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," a May 1961 *Esquire* article about his troubled relationship with Norman Mailer. As *Esquire* historian Carol Polsgrove explains, the two writers, and their relationship, were an important part of *Esquire* in the 1960s. Indeed, Polsgrove claims that both Mailer and Baldwin were crucial in *Esquire's* construction of masculinity (117-18). It is not surprising, then, that the crux of the dispute between the two men, as articulated by

Baldwin in “Black Boy,” represents Mailer’s embrace of idealized white masculinity and his fetishization of black masculinity. The unease at the centre of the article, and at the centre of the two authors’ relationship, stems from Mailer’s “The White Negro,” an essay that, as demonstrated in the last chapter, forms the basis for *An American Dream*, and articulates the contemporary renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity for the era of white collar, conformist masculinity. As Leeming argues, “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” reveals Mailer as a “representative of the white man’s naïve and arrogant perversion of black culture—a culture centered in pain and deprivation—for bourgeois ‘hip’ purposes without understanding it” (184). Gerald Early furthers this criticism, seeing in Mailer’s ‘hip’ perspective “that juvenile penis envy that might as well be hate because it amounts to such an insulting kind of love” (137). Baldwin’s article consequently highlights exactly how black masculinity was marginalized and fetishized by white men in the same period.

As Baldwin describes it, Mailer’s arrogant perversion of black culture is a symptom of his position as a man trapped in his role as a masculine author. Baldwin refers to Mailer “striding through the soft Paris nights like a gladiator” (291), states that Mailer’s novels, *The Naked and the Dead* and *Barbary Shore*, “are written in a lean, spare, muscular prose” (296), and that at a party, Mailer’s “shoulders hunched, seeming, really, to roll like a boxer’s, and his hands moving as though he were dealing with a sparring partner” (300). In these instances, and elsewhere, Baldwin repeatedly emphasizes Mailer’s exaggerated performance of hegemonic and exemplary masculinity in the form of the boxer. The point of Baldwin’s critique is not just to caricature Mailer’s masculine ego, but to articulate the ways Mailer’s practice of hegemonic masculinity is

intimately connected to the fetishization of African American masculinity—that hegemonic forms of masculinity are predicated on the subordination of all other forms of masculinity, and therefore reinforce not only inequalities based on gender, but every other type of inequality. In this way, Mailer’s ostensibly liberal, urbane, white-collar masculinity is revealed to be similar to the Southern, working-class masculinities of “Going to Meet the Man” and *Blues for Mister Charlie*. This is a rather pointed message to make in the pages of a magazine invested in the promotion and consumption of hegemonic masculinity for a white male readership.

Baldwin not only highlights Mailer’s roleplaying, but also his own. Arguing that both writers played the role of the “toughest kid on the block,” Baldwin goes on to state that “the roles that we construct are constructed because we feel that they will help us to survive and also, of course, because they fulfill something in our personalities; and one does not, therefore, cease playing a role simply because one has begun to understand it. All roles are dangerous. The world tends to trap and immobilize you in the role you play” (290-1). “The toughest kid on a block” is a role, but so are Mailer’s and Baldwin’s racialized gender identities, as presented by Baldwin: “I am a black boy from the Harlem streets, and Norman is a middle-class Jew” (289). While here Baldwin may seem guilty of essentializing these roles, he is rather, as Douglas Taylor sees this, distinguishing between naturalness and situatedness (79). This is to say that “black boy” from the lower-classes and a “Jew” from the middle-classes are not depicting subjects but subject-positions; “black” and “lower-class” can be added to “homosexual” in a series of coordinates that situate Baldwin within the larger gender order. Just because these different identities are historical, not essential, does not mean that they are not real;

rather, they are discursive, and thus open to reinterpretation and renegotiation. This is what Baldwin means when he says that one cannot “cease playing a role simply because one has begun to understand it,” since one is not situated in that position by choice but by a system of domination; thus, “All roles are dangerous.”

Baldwin goes on to demonstrate that he is, indeed, aware of his role, and it is because of his particular situatedness that he is able to critique hegemonic masculinity. In the essay’s most pointed passage, Baldwin states:

I think that I know something about American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been. It is still true, alas, that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one’s own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others. The relationship, therefore, of a black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing. (“Black Boy” 290)

As Douglas Taylor argues, in this passage Baldwin claims that his outsider status allows him to see the reality of American masculinity and heteronormativity, and from this vantage point he is better able to critique it (79). In Connell’s terms, Baldwin would not be properly “exterior” to American masculinity, but he perhaps occupies a position so marginalized as to be perceived as altogether *outside* of the system. From this marginalized vantage point, Baldwin is able to not only see the structures that shape Mailer’s perception of African Americans, but also the mechanisms by which African Americans are marginalized. As the passage continues, Baldwin clearly returns to the criticism articulated in *Blues for Mister Charlie* and “Going to Meet the Man”: African

Americans are denied masculinity by the very mechanism which makes them “hypermasculine” in the eyes of white America. Reduced to only a phallus, black men are more readily made into “tools” for hegemonic masculinity.

As Polsgrove explains, by writing for *Esquire* magazine, Baldwin was taking part in the renegotiation of American masculinity for the 1960s.<sup>65</sup> His voice, though strong and reasoned, nonetheless came from a subordinate position in the gender hierarchy, and so his influence was, understandably, not as considerable as, for instance, Mailer’s. However, in articles such as “Fifth Avenue, Uptown,” and “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” Baldwin repeatedly brought in a consideration of masculinity when discussing the effects of racism. In a publication that continually explains to its readers “How to Be a Man,” Baldwin’s answer was to indict the very notion of masculinity, and to make clear the connections between racism and masculine domination.

### **3. “James Baldwin tells us all how to cool it this summer”**

Throughout the 1960s, *Esquire* continued to assume a white, male readership, while also invoking fear of black radicalism. In each issue, African Americans are largely absent as implied readers, and are never hailed as the subject of interpellation. Take, for example, the January 1967 issue. Advertisements depicting the type of fashionable, leisure-based lifestyle thought desirable by advertisers excluded any representation of African Americans. Advertisements for the ’67 Plymouth Barracuda (depicting sexy, stylish couples) and Haig blended scotch whiskey (again depicting stylish people,

---

<sup>65</sup> While “Fifth Avenue” and “Black Boy” are perhaps the best examples of Baldwin’s critique, his other contributions to *Esquire* contained elements of his overall argument. See, e.g.: “The Northern Protestant,” “Color,” and “The New Lost Generation.”

identified as: “underwater worldlies,” “young fashionable,” “comers in the combos,” “elite equestrians in St. Moritz,” “the big game set,” “Nomads of the international set”) use only white models. An entire section of the issue, entitled “New Year’s Eve With Elegance,” consists of several photo spreads of luxurious, formal, black-tie gatherings, made up entirely of white people. No African Americans are photographed to accompany such articles as “A Sportsman’s Tip Sheet on the West Indies” or “How to Fly to Europe Without Buying a Ticket.” *Esquire* assumed a white audience, and its portrayal of a desirable, ideal life took no consideration of African American subjects.

That is not to say that African American masculinity is entirely absent from the magazine. On the contrary, the issue features an article on Black Rights leader Stokely Carmichael. As a radical Black Power leader, Carmichael represents a threat to the (white) way of life depicted in *Esquire*. He is almost immediately described by the article’s author, Bernard Weinraub, as being “six-feet-one and [having] the build of a basketball guard: a solid chest, slender waist, powerful legs” (132). Emphasizing Carmichael’s physicality makes him more of a threat, in much the same way that the “black beast” stereotype did. Instead of the “black beast,” the author’s rhetorical comparison to a black athlete brings to mind a traditional form of exemplary masculinity which would be familiar to *Esquire*’s readers. The only other black figures depicted in the magazine can be found in the “Dubious Achievement Awards” section (82-89), including Cassius Clay (named “Mealy-mouth of the Year”) and Adam Clayton Powell Jr (“Poor Mouth of the Year”) (85). Black masculinity is authorized only to the extent that it can be used to reinforce hegemonic masculinity; challenges to hegemony are always represented as potentially threatening or are ridiculed by the magazine.

When the potential threat of black masculinity cannot be subverted, *Esquire* was not above resorting to fear mongering. The November 1967 issue featured an exposé on “Black Power,” predominantly written by William Worthy. The articles that made up the section included Worthy’s “The American Negro is Dead,” described as a showcase of “Negroes who have been in touch one way or another with the N.L.F.<sup>66</sup> and other non-white revolutionaries” (125), and “The Black Power Establishment,” a diagram that sought to visualize the power structure of Black Power. The former article was accompanied by the following description: “Don’t look now, honky, but some of his best friends are Vietcong” (126). The short description manages to both identify the racial identity of the assumed reader (“honky”) and to other the Black Power Movement by associating it with foreign, Communist influence. Here, Black Power is presented as powerful and frightening, giving white masculinities something to rally against, thus shoring up its borders. Furthermore, the March 1968 issue featured a lengthy article by Gary Wills entitled “The Second Civil War”, its first page promising “This time it’s simpler: black and white” (71). The article was later revised by Wills into a book. These few examples gesture to a larger fear of Black Nationalism, Black Power, and Civil Rights promoted by the magazine throughout the decade.

---

<sup>66</sup> The National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (the Viet Cong).





Fig. 1. Cover of *Esquire*, July 1968, featuring an interview with James Baldwin;

Esquire.com, n.d.; Web; 6 Jan. 2014.

*Esquire*'s July 1968 issue hit the stands just two months after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., in the wake of the consequent riots and ongoing racial tension. The issue plays a strange game of slight-of-hand: Baldwin, a long-time contributor to *Esquire*, is seemingly brought in to explain how African Americans can “cool it” that summer, a message that would no doubt go over well with white society. In the table of contents, though, the description accompanying the Baldwin feature betrays, however sarcastically, a degree of white condescension, and perhaps even fear, when it asks “Comes [sic] summer, what will Whitey give up?”

Baldwin *had* been deliberately attacked by *Esquire* before. Carol Polsgrove explains how Bob Adelman was assigned a profile of Baldwin for the August 1964 issue

of *Esquire*, having been given the simple instruction to “Get him” (116).<sup>67</sup> The article opened with what Polsgrove describes as “an unflattering photograph of Baldwin, his eyes popping at a host of hands extended toward him,” while the profile’s author, Marvin Elkoff, “laid out a sequence of scenes featuring a needy, exhibitionist Baldwin” (116). Polsgrove suggests that *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes did indeed intend the profile to “get” Baldwin, since Hayes viewed Baldwin’s attacks on white liberals as hypocritical (he suggested that white liberals made up “the better part of Baldwin’s audience”), and thought that his “recent work” (1964) showed a “virulent strain.” Baldwin subsequently did not appear in the magazine for several years (116-17). When he did appear in *Esquire* again, it was for the interview under discussion.

Baldwin steadfastly refuses to play the role he has seemingly been assigned, instead pointing to a large variety of ideological problems that underpin the violence in the streets. Baldwin continually declines to have his position (and that of the black rioters) defined by the white interviewer, for instance, by avoiding the rhetorical trap of referring to African Americans involved in the riots as “looters.” The interviewer begins by proposing that police have been more “permissive” by refraining from shooting “looters,” and, when Baldwin objects, insists that the label is accurate, asking what Baldwin would call someone “who smashes in the window of a television store and takes what he wants.” Baldwin uses this opening to launch an attack on systemic racism: latching onto the word “looters,” Baldwin queries the interviewer, “how would you

---

<sup>67</sup> Adelman was the photographer for a similar article on LeRoi Jones. Jack Richardson’s “Blues for Mister Jones” features a picture of Jones looking odd, with his eyes rolled back in his head. The article features Richardson’s snide, paternal voice; in one instance, he says of Jones’s plays that “judged as relevant social observations they evidenced less imagination than delirium tremens; judged as art they argued a poor future for black literary standards ... I, as LeRoi had told me, was locked in a decaying white sensibility and from my decomposing prison it just seemed to me that LeRoi couldn’t write” (106).

define somebody who puts a cat where he is and takes all the money out of the ghetto where he makes it? Who is looting whom?" Furthermore, he insists that the interviewer is "accusing a captive population who has been robbed of everything of looting. I think it's obscene" (51). The act of labelling African Americans "looters" is an act of what Althusser calls interpellation, a hail which Baldwin refuses, and it is similar to the act of labelling African Americans as "Negroes" or "Sambo," attempting to hail them into a subordinate position. For Baldwin, it is not the action of "Negroes" but the creation of "Negroes" that is the criminal act.

Baldwin further attacks the systemic violence of subordination and marginalization when he explains "whiteness" and "blackness" as ideological categories:

BALDWIN: White by the way is not a color, it's an attitude. You're as white as you think you are. It's your choice.

Q. Then black is a state of mind too?

BALDWIN: No, black is a condition. (52)

Here, though he obviously uses a terminology of his own, Baldwin details a racial ideology propagated by the system of hegemonic masculinity later identified by Connell. In this interview, Baldwin does not directly and consistently reference masculinity (and gender) as a root cause of racial problems; however, his argument is clearly informed by the critique of hegemonic masculinity previously established and, I argue, central to all of Baldwin's discussions of race. Baldwin's answers suggest that "whiteness" is the choice of complicity, the attitude of investing in the gender order as it is stratified by hegemonic masculinity. "Blackness," on the other hand, is a "condition," to the extent that it is a

subject position enforced on African Americans by those invested in the gender order: the “condition” of blackness is the effect of an act of subordination.

In keeping with Baldwin’s long-standing critique of American masculinity, he continually frames his discussion in gendered terms, arguing that “The price in this country to survive at all still is to become a white man. More and more people are refusing to become a white man” (50). Baldwin’s gendered pronoun is not idly chosen: freedom remains solely in the purview of men. Furthermore, when Baldwin speaks of truly free African Americans, he shifts his gendered pronoun from “man” to “male,” stating that “The American white man does not really want to have an autonomous Negro male anywhere near him” (50). The “white *man*” occupies a constructed subject position within the current gender order; the “autonomous Negro *male*” represents a figure outside of a system of hegemonic masculinity. However, African American men do not exist outside of this system; this is one reason why color divisions are understood by African American men as a form of emasculation.

Baldwin’s discussion of Carmichael references both this form of emasculation and the perceived threat of black men to hegemonic masculinity: “Stokely is a leader for a great many people. Stokely is even more than that, Stokely is a symbol for a great many people. A great many emasculated black boys turn to Stokely because he's fighting against their emasculation” (52). Michele Wallace, a scholar of black masculinity, supports Baldwin’s assessment of Carmichael. Additionally, she discusses Carmichael’s perceived threat in terms of masculinity, stating “Here was a black man with an erect phallus, and he was pushing it up in America’s face” (36). Moreover, Wallace calls Carmichael “the nightmare America had been dreading—the black man seizing his

manhood, the black man as sexual, virile, tough and dangerous” (36). Here is a figure that claims the masculinity otherwise denied African Americans—here is a figure embodying Baldwin’s claim from 1960, that when violence occurs in Harlem, and white society asks what happened, “What happened is that Negroes want to be treated like men” (“Fifth” 211). Carmichael, a “black man seizing his manhood,” is therefore the leader implicitly foretold by Baldwin, and an appropriate leader for a subordinated group of men wishing to escape their emasculation. Carmichael’s version of black masculinity certainly has obvious parallels with the “black beast” archetype, and with the jazz musicians and “hipsters” of Mailer’s (and *Esquire*’s) naïve fantasies. However, Carmichael’s masculinity cannot be as easily appropriated based on both his education (supposedly incommensurate with a hyper-masculine black man) and his Black Nationalism, which proposes a systemic assault against white privilege. Still, Baldwin does admit to “disagreements” with Carmichael, and his reticence to clearly identify Carmichael as a leader is not surprising, given that Carmichael’s investment in masculinity puts him at odds with Baldwin’s critique of hegemonic masculinity.

Baldwin’s argument, in the published interview, boils down to an assault on the gender order itself. He cites the “nightmarish” black, masculine figure of Carmichael in his objection to integration:

I think Stokely's right when he says that integration is another word, you know, the latest kind of euphemism for white supremacy. No, I don't want to be integrated into this house or any other house, especially not this burning house. I don't want to be become... like you. You, the white people. I'd rather die than become what most white people in this country have become. (116)

What Baldwin offers as a true remedy to the “Negro problem” is not the integration of African Americans into white society—that is, in Connell’s terms, Baldwin is not arguing for a renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity so as to include African Americans in a hegemonic bloc—but the dismantling of the system that creates “Negro problems.” In fact, Baldwin argues that the “Negro” is actually the creation of a Fordist society, stating that “Labor unions along with the bosses created the Negro as a kind of threat to the white worker” (50). Therefore, for African Americans to improve their position, the system of hegemonic masculinity will need to be overthrown altogether, and those complicit masculinities invested in its continuation will have to sacrifice their access to the patriarchal dividend: “It means in short that if the American Negro, the American black man, is going to become a free person in this country, the people of this country have to give up something” (49). For Baldwin, freeing African Americans will involve the destruction of hegemonic masculinity itself, and consequently the end of subordinated, marginalized, and complicit masculinities, and the patriarchal dividend.

It is near the end of the interview that Baldwin forwards his most articulate critique of hegemonic masculinity. In response to the interviewer’s question “You would say, then, that we have a lot to answer for,” Baldwin argues that the overthrow of hegemonic masculinity (though not, obviously, in those terms) will not only require the work of white men, but also result in a freer society for all:

BALDWIN: I'm not trying to accuse you, you know. That's not the point. But you have an awful lot to face. I don't envy any white man in this century, because I wouldn't like to have to face what you have to face. If you don't face it, though, it's a matter of *your* life or death. Everyone's deluded if they

think it's a matter of Sambo's life or death. It isn't a matter of Sambo's life or death, and it can't be, for they have been slaughtering Sambos too long. It's a matter of whether or not *you* want to live. And you may think that my death or diminution, or my disappearance will save you, but it won't. It can't save you. All that can save you now is your confrontation with your own history... which is not your past, but your present. Nobody cares what happened in the past. One can't afford to care what happened in the past. But your history has led you to this moment, and you can only begin to change yourself by looking at what you are doing in the name of your history, in the name of your gods, in the name of your language. And what has happened is as though I, having always been outside it—more outside it than victimized by it, but mainly *outside* it—can see it better than you can see it. Because I cannot afford to let you fool me. If I let you fool me, then I die. But I've fooled *you* for a long time. That's why you keep saying, what does the Negro want? It's a summation of your own delusions, the lies you've told yourself. You know *exactly* what I want! (116)

Baldwin's claim that he is "outside" of "what has happened" parallels his statement, in "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," that he "know[s] something about the American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been" (290). Here, Baldwin argues that his blackness and his homosexuality have led him to be able to perceive the system of domination as a whole, from a doubly marginalized position. Furthermore, the white man's history, which Baldwin references, is the history of hegemonic forms of

masculinity—it is the history that “has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, *black and white*” (“Here Be Dragons” 678; emphasis added). It is this history that white men must face, come to understand, and then overcome, if a freer world—for white and black, men and women—is to be established. Such a criticism is hard for men to accept, since, as Connell argues, all men, the vast majority of whom are not hegemonic, profit from a patriarchal dividend; however, Baldwin’s argument is that men need to recognize that this patriarchal dividend is predicated on the system of marginalization and subordination that negatively impacts the vast majority of men and all women. Perhaps it is precisely the ideal readers of *Esquire* magazine—readers so interested and invested in “how to be a man”—who not only need to hear this message, but also are equipped, however insufficiently, to understand it, given that very interest.

The possibility that readers might read and understand Baldwin’s critique is met, however, with a variety of textual manoeuvres in the published magazine, which subvert or undermine Baldwin’s message. The first and most obvious instance of this subversion is the cover itself (fig. 1). The cover image, and the choice of language, seeks to subvert Baldwin’s argument, diffusing his anger and his critique of ideology by providing for its white readers more easily recognizable and assimilable images of black masculinity. The men on the cover imply a different connotation of “cooling it”—not “calming down” the riots following King’s assassination, but the type of “cool” associated with jazz music (“cool jazz”) and African-American slang.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the men on the cover are clearly adopting what Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson call the “cool pose,”

---

<sup>68</sup> See, i.e., the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*’s entry for “cool, *adj.*, *adv.*, and *int.*,” especially entry 8b.



which they define as “a strategy that many black males use in making sense of their everyday lives” (xi). These figures are significant for two reasons. First, they represent easily recognizable stock images of black masculinity; in particular, they represent the character of the “cool cat,” whom Majors and Billson describe as “an exceptional artist of expressiveness and flamboyant style” (79). The cool cats on the cover are reminiscent of Shago Martin in Mailer’s *An American Dream*, and, as discussed in chapter two, they are figures whose particular masculine performance can be fetishized and appropriated by hegemonic forms of masculinity, especially given that they lack the threatening nature of Carmichael’s Black Nationalist masculinity.

Second, the strategy of the “cool pose” is, it’s been argued, specifically adopted by African American men as a coping mechanism for the emasculating effects of being a black man in a white-dominated American society (1). The “cool pose” is, according to Majors and Billson, sometimes the only way that African American men can distinguish themselves and their masculinity in a culture that deprives them the material symbols to do so (30-31). As such, “The ironclad façade of cool pose is a signature of true masculinity, but it is one-dimensional. If it fails, masculinity fails” (28). The “cool pose” is therefore necessary only because of the opportunities denied African American men through a gender order in which they are subordinated. The ideal readers of *Esquire* are Ehrenreich’s “gray flannel rebels” (discussed in the previous chapter), a type of masculinity complicit not only in the gender order that subordinates African American men, but also in the appropriation of signifiers of African American masculinity, done to shore up or renegotiate white patriarchy. All of which is to say that Baldwin’s nuanced and radical criticism of race and masculinity in America is threatened to be occluded by a

version of black masculinity both one-dimensional and easily consumable by *Esquire's* white audience. It is as though by using such a pat phrase and such easily recognizable images of black masculinity, *Esquire* hopes to force Baldwin into a subject position more easily digestible for the magazine's consumers. A reader could be forgiven for believing that the magazine offered advice from Baldwin regarding style and music, rather than an uncomfortable discussion of race riots.

While the subversion of Baldwin's message begins on the cover, it certainly does not end there. "Cool it," a phrase first appearing on the cover, repeats throughout the magazine, and is used to undermine Baldwin. The phrase features prominently in the rather unwieldy subtitle of the Baldwin interview: "Q. How can we get the black people to cool it?/James Baldwin: It is not for us to cool it./Q. But aren't you the ones who are getting hurt the most? James Baldwin: No, we are only the ones who are dying fastest." The interviewer uses the phrase "cool it" (or some version thereof) in six questions; though Baldwin repeats the phrase, he makes clear his distaste for the term, stating "I am not the one to be cooled," and "I suggest that the mayor of every city and the President of this nation go on the air and address the white people for a change. Tell *them* to cool it." While in this usage "cooling it" refers to relaxing racial tensions (the onus being placed on African Americans to do so), this rather serious matter is further denigrated by an accompanying feature: "Advice for Summer Drinkers: Cool It!" Here, "cool it" becomes a suggestion for how to prepare drinks.<sup>69</sup> The accompanying pictures show wealthy white people imbibing various beverages in a tropical location; the captions identify Miss

---

<sup>69</sup> Oddly enough, this was not the first time that Baldwin had somehow been associated with beverages by the magazine. The November 1967 issue included, as part of its "Black Power" section, a feature on hot drinks called "What to Drink Before the Fire Next Time."

Cherly Del Vecchio (107), for instance, and James Kimberly (108), but the only African American represented goes unidentified, and is one of the wait staff, dressed in uniform and holding a drink. The idea of “cooling it”—that is, easing racial tension—is deflated, and Baldwin’s example of a radical version of black masculinity is replaced by literally subordinated examples.

Other features in the magazine work to further undermine Baldwin’s subject position, and thus his critique. Finding resonance with Baldwin’s claim, made in the same issue, that “black is a condition,” Lawrence Lasker’s article “A White Shade of Black” discusses dermatological treatments for the skin disorder vitiligo, treatments that can lighten the skin colour of African American sufferers of this ailment. The accompanying description has the same tone of white condescension as the previously cited description of the Baldwin interview: for the Lasker article, it states “An ointment has turned fifty-five Negroes white, and there may soon be a pill that can do the job more effectively—presuming, of course, that by then there is still some advantage in being white” (62). While the ointment is meant to treat vitiligo, the article makes clear that the real “skin condition” that needs curing is the condition of blackness. During dinner out with Lasker, Dr. Robert Stolar, one of the interviewed practitioners of the treatment, gestures to the African American waiter and says, “You see, he shouldn’t have to be black, if he doesn’t want to be. He doesn’t have to be” (63). The same tone of contempt found in the article’s description is taken up by the author of the article, who describes one dermatologist, Dr. Aaron Lerner, as “doing research [into skin lightening] which would make him *the most important man* in the history of race relations” (64, emphasis added); this is a rather poor joke, if it is indeed intended as a joke, given the article’s close placement to the Baldwin

interview (it starts less than ten pages after the first break in the interview) and, even more significantly, the recent assassination of King, two black men who could actually be identified as “important” in the history of Civil Rights.

Despite the tone of the article and the nature of the doctors’ treatments, both Stolar and Lerner make statements that betray an understanding of the social dimension of blackness. Lerner, for instance, states that “It would be quite a blow to people who think of Negroes as inferior to have a Negro able to switch colors with them” (65), indicating that the perception of racial inferiority is only that, a perception. Further, Stolar “claims that each of his fifty-five patients changed social status. Many were able to get better jobs” (65). Though it is impossible to forgive the article’s racism and the misguided interest of the dermatologists, the physicians’ statements nonetheless reveal an understanding that race is, in fact, only “skin deep.” This understanding is nevertheless drastically different than Baldwin’s, who sees black not as a skin colour, but as a label or position impelled on people of a certain skin colour by the ideology of hegemonic masculinity. African Americans do not need to get rid of their black skin; rather, white America needs to be rid of its perceptions of what black skin supposedly signifies.

In keeping with my methodology throughout this study, I am not arguing over editorial intention; that is to say, I am not arguing that the placement of these different representations of blackness and black masculinity are necessarily deliberate. Rather, I am arguing that the magazine was published with patterns that detract from Baldwin’s message by foregrounding other versions of masculinity and downplaying the importance of racial discrimination. This particular issue of *Esquire* thus applies a number of strategies typical of the magazine as a whole to undermine or subvert Baldwin’s message.

These strategies appear in the content authored by *Esquire*'s writers and editors, and include the representation of more easily assimilable versions of black masculinity, the degradation of black skin colour, and the repetition of the phrase "cool it," as previously outlined. Representations of black masculinity that appear in the advertisements—and which are therefore *not* produced by the magazine itself—are more complicated. For example, an advertisement for the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund features a stark black and white photograph of a young African American man raising a Molotov cocktail in a threatening manner. The advertisement, directed at *Esquire*'s white, middle-class male readership, asks "Does he make you mad? Scared? Guilty?" (127). The tone of the advertisement is much more in keeping with Baldwin's approach to Civil Rights: as well as challenging white perceptions of black masculinity, it baldly states that "White America traps the Negro in a cycle of prejudice and poverty that denies him humanity and destroys his dignity" (127). The magazine therefore does not omit challenges to white masculinity, though it does present them in a package that threatens to dull their critical edge.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In "The New Lost Generation," published in *Esquire*, Baldwin speaks about those individuals who, like David in *Giovanni's Room*, fled America for Europe, leaving behind not only the country, but the ideological apparatus that gives it meaning. He argues that "many expatriates vanish into the lives of their adopted country ... This applies especially, of course, to women, who, given the pressures of raising a family, rarely have time to be homesick, or guilty about 'escaping' the problems of American

life. Their first loyalties, thank heaven, are to the men they married and the children they must raise” (309). Here, then, Baldwin highlights an important limit—not to his critique, but to his own historical perception. Theoretically, Baldwin’s attack on the American gender order would, if successful, benefit women most of all—hegemonic masculinity is predicated, in all instances, on the domination of women by men. Certainly masculinities are subordinated or marginalized based on sexuality and skin colour, but in every instance, in a patriarchal society, these “lesser” masculinities still find themselves in a higher position than women, by virtue of their masculinity. The overthrow of the gender order would have as its primary benefactors the 50% of the population that is female. However, Baldwin seems unable to fully grasp this; despite his radical critique of masculinity, he continues to see women in traditional gender roles. This shortcoming highlights Baldwin’s own historical situatedness, but does not undermine the possibilities implicit in his critique. Even if he does not valorize phallic masculinity, he still falls into a trap akin to those highlighted by Pochmara and hooks; perhaps he avoids allying black men with white men against women, but he fails by omitting a consideration of the place of women from his analysis of hegemonic masculinity.

Central to my argument throughout this study is the idea that *Esquire* magazine is a site where the renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity plays out. With its ideal readership of white, middle-class professionals, *Esquire* is directed toward a culturally significant and economically influential group of consumers, a group powerfully invested in the changing definition of masculinity. The magazine is therefore an ideal place for Baldwin to make his critique of hegemonic masculinity, to reveal the ways those who are complicit in the maintenance and articulation of hegemonic masculinity are also

complicit in the maintenance of racial inequality. He is also an ideal author for *Esquire* to recruit, not only because his literary *gravitas* makes him suitably distinguished, but also because their hegemonic masculinity project is always a work in progress, and must work through various possible definitions of masculinity. The 1960s were a time when the alliances that constituted hegemony were in a state of flux, and Baldwin, at least at the beginning of the decade, presented the kind of figure through which certain alliances could be made. Though Baldwin's articles are rarely explicitly focused on masculinity, his critique is always present, and even highlighted by the context of the magazine in which his articles were published. Baldwin's contributions to the magazine therefore have the potential to provide a more radical impetus into the renegotiation of masculinity, and to challenge readers to critique their own valuations of the very concept. However, while a publication focused on masculinity is therefore a pivotal place in which to make such a contribution, it is also a place invested in patriarchy, in the valorization of masculinity and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity; it is therefore simultaneously a place open to, and resistant of, such a radical critique.

For Baldwin, the treatment of black masculinity as a commodity is a major contributing factor to its subordination and marginalization; in the 1970s, the continued commodification of masculinity would increasingly become the focus of American fiction published in *Esquire*. For Carver, the commodification of masculinity will be seen as a limitation even to complicit forms of white masculinity; for Capote, this commodification is a necessary first step to a type of mobility previously unavailable to queer masculinities.

## Chapter 4

### Low-Rent Tragedies of Beset Manhood: Consumer Realism in Raymond Carver's

#### *Esquire* Stories

And last week my wife dropped by

with a can of beef soup

and a carton of tears.

She drank some of my vodka, too, I think,

then left hurriedly in a strange car

with a man I'd never seen before. (Carver, "Cheers" ll. 13-18)

Raymond Carver's poem "Cheers" not only echoes the spare form that similarly marks his prose, but also his recurring themes: an attention to consumer goods, a fixation on alcohol and drinking, and cuckoldry. Carver's fiction, which began to reach a larger audience in the 1970s, came to prominence in the 1980s, part of a vanguard of new, realistic fiction emphasizing sparse prose and working-class lives. In particular, Carver's fiction depicts everyday situations in working-class life (Skenazy 77), focusing on what one reviewer called "people who read *Popular Mechanics* and *Field and Stream*, people who play bingo, hunt deer, fish, and drink. They work at shopping centers, sell books, have milk routes, or try, drunkenly, to manage a motel" (Towers 38). Carver's protagonists represent the working class of the 1970s, a decade during which a struggling economy resulted in an increasing gap between the rich and the poor (Borstelmann 53). In the new American economy of undervalued labor and increased consumerism, Carver's protagonists, usually male, are down on their luck, often out of work, and



struggling just to get by, suffering through what Robert Towers calls “Low-Rent Tragedies.”<sup>70</sup>

The emphasis on race and conformity, central to the discourse on masculinity in the 1960s, shifts in the 1970s to the relationship between men and the economy. Carver’s men are not, in any way, living the good life advertised in *Esquire* magazine, which was the first national, popular magazine to publish his work, and established his relationship with long-time collaborator Gordon Lish. Carver’s men can be read as illustrative of the disparity between, on one hand, the world of sophistication and commodities offered by the magazine, and on the other, the life of its male readers whose access to patriarchal power is limited by their distance from obtaining the goods on display in the magazine’s glossy pages. *Esquire* advertised a particular hegemonic masculinity project as a lifestyle, one that was at least ostensibly available to the members of the professional-managerial class, who make up the magazine’s target audience. Carver’s protagonists, however, represent the increasingly alienated lower-middle and working classes, who not only do not live the good life promised in *Esquire*, but also simply cannot afford to consume the cultural codes and meanings advertised. If consumption is posited as one of the few avenues available for self-fashioning masculinity and accessing patriarchal authority, then Carver posits that those men who cannot afford to consume the “right” things logically feel their economic constraint as a constrained masculinity.

---

<sup>70</sup> My title is a conflation of Towers’ phrase and Nina Baym’s influential discussion of American literary critics’ investment in “melodramas of beset manhood”: “Personally beset in a way that epitomizes the tensions of our culture, the male author produces his melodramatic testimony to our culture’s essence—so the theory goes” (130). While in Baym’s study men are threatened by feminism, in Carver’s fiction, masculinity is threatened by consumerism, as I discuss below.

For Paul Skenazy, “The trademark Carver tale is a kind of mundane ghost story in which these people are haunted by the presence of some lost, almost forgotten, not-really-expected possibility” (77). In this chapter, I would like to suggest that the “presence” haunting these characters is the commodity form and the ideal realm of advertising that is its primary vehicle. Carver writes a form of “capitalist realism” I call “consumer realism,” in which his characters are troubled by the unbridgeable distance between their own lives and the lives promised them by the world of consumerism, as exemplified in the magazine’s articles and advertisements, which were the original context of publication for Carver’s stories. Read in the context of their original publication, Carver’s *Esquire* stories narrate the increasingly detrimental effects of the reification of masculinity on blue-collar and working-class white masculinities, revealed as the inevitable outcome of a life structured by the commodity form and the aesthetics of advertising.

### 1. “The market represents”: Carver’s Consumer Realism

Carver’s literary career was marked by an author-editor relationship with *Esquire*’s fiction editor Gordon Lish, who had made his reputation as the publisher of the avant-garde literary magazine *Genesis West* before being brought on at *Esquire* in 1970. Carver’s style—influenced by Lish<sup>71</sup>—is viewed as paradigmatic of his aesthetic “school,” and has gone by many names: “Kmart Realism,” “dirty realism,” and

---

<sup>71</sup> Further discussion on this particular editor-writer relationship has taken many forms. Sklenicka pays a considerable amount of attention to in her biography *Raymond Carver: A Writer’s Life* (see, e.g. 185-187, 354-362). The Carver-Lish relationship, and its connections to university creative writing programs, is explored in Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (273-297). For some literary-critical discussions of the Lish-Carver relationship, see e.g., Michael Hemmingson, and Enrico Monti.

“minimalism.”<sup>72</sup> Bill Mullen’s list of minimalist characteristics describes many aspects of Carver’s style, such as “sparse prose . . . elision, ellipsis, and indeterminacy,” as well as a “fixation on consumer habits and the surface details of consumer lifestyle” (99). Philip Simmons argues that minimalism is viewed as “a more faithful representation of the speech and experience of ‘ordinary’ men and women” (49).<sup>73</sup> This description highlights the connection between Carver’s style and the genre of realism: by being more “faithful” to “representation,” Carver’s fiction reads as more realistic. Its realism is characterized by the perceived absence of a barrier between readers and *things*. This is to suggest that what is “faithful” about Carver’s representation is its close association with the commodity form. Moreover, Carver’s style can only be understood as “unmediated” in a society where the commodity has become naturalized, in which the eye has been so thoroughly trained that it no longer *sees* reification as a mediating experience.

In other words, Carver’s realism needs to be understood as a form of “capitalist realism.” In particular, I argue that Carver’s realism is a variety of “capitalist realism” that I call “consumer realism.” The term “capitalist realism” has its roots in visual art and advertising, and has recently been picked up by literary scholars, most notably Richard Godden, Alison Shonkwiler, and Leigh Claire La Berge. In the introduction to *Reading Capitalist Realism*, Shonkwiler and La Berge set out to provide a working definition and

---

<sup>72</sup> Bill Buford coined the term “Dirty realism” in *Granta* 8 (Summer 1983). The coinage of “Kmart realism” is more difficult to pin down; the earliest reference I have found is in Edwin J. Kenney’s *New York Times* review of Phyllis Naylor’s *Unexpected Pleasures*. For “Kmart realism” and “minimalism,” see John Barth’s “A Few Notes About Minimalism.”

<sup>73</sup> Ben Harker provides an excellent discussion of Carver and class struggle, and directs readers to pertinent sources on Carver as a blue-collar writer. See, e.g., both Bruce Weber and Gordon Burn in Marshall Gentry and William Stull’s *Conversations with Raymond Carver*, and also Towers, and Jonathan Yardley. For a discussion of class and gender in Carver, see Vanessa Hall.

theory of capitalist realism.<sup>74</sup> The authors see capitalist realism as necessarily articulating the “lived economic, social, and affective” experience of life in “an inequitable, winner-take-all system of casino capitalism has seemingly achieved popular consent” (6). Most importantly, Shonkwiler and La Berge explain how capitalist realism operates as both an ideological formation describing “the pervasive logic of capitalism” and a mode demonstrating the colonization of the real by the process of commodification (14-15). The process of reification is therefore central, as capitalist realism depicts “the real world” using typical realist practices, but from a totally reified perspective, wherein “human experience takes on the quality of things” (Godden, “Money” 188) and society has learned to “satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange” (Lukács 91).

Shonkwiler and La Berge see capitalist realism “sharing an articulation” with neoliberalism. Dating the rise of the neoliberal era in the early to mid-1970s—the time at which Carver begins publishing with *Esquire*—the authors define neoliberalism as “an economic and political paradigm in which freedom is conceived almost entirely in market terms” (4-5). Capitalist realism shares an articulation with neoliberalism to the extent that it is a mode that represents via “market terms.” In other words, the economic and cultural shift to neoliberalism is accompanied, in realist fiction, by a complementary shift in aesthetics. As Shonkwiler and La Berge elegantly put it, “in liberalism the market was represented; in neoliberalism, the market represents” (16). All representations are therefore shaped by the market, the central metaphor of neoliberal society.

---

<sup>74</sup> The editors clearly relate the term to Mark Fisher’s short study *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* While my interest in the term is connected to the genre of “realism,” Fisher’s work is mostly focused on periodization, labelling the period after postmodernism as capitalist realism; however, many of his insights remain useful. Shonkwiler, La Berge and Godden have done the most to refine and apply the term to literary and cultural texts.

If the market speaks, it speaks through advertisements. As Robert Goldman explains, advertising is “a primary channel through which the commodity form is extended and reproduced” (15).<sup>75</sup> A focus on advertising brings the discussion of capitalist realism back to its earliest uses. First, the coinage of “capitalist realism” comes from the “German Pop Art” group, especially Gerhard Richter, who was influenced by American pop art and Marcel Duchamp’s ready-made concept. Their aesthetics were largely connected to consumer culture. Their 1963 art show “Living with Pop – A Demonstration on Behalf of Capitalist Realism” took place in a furniture store; the store was part of the show.<sup>76</sup> In its original use, capitalist realist art therefore could be almost indistinguishable from advertising. In this way, such art demonstrates “the point at which realism simultaneously records and undergoes the economic processes of commodification” (Shonkwiler and La Berge 16). Furthermore, Michael Schudson developed the most influential discussion of capitalist realism in his book *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*. Seeing capitalist realism as a response to socialist realism (214-15), Schudson argues that the crucial difference is that socialist realist art idealizes the producer, capitalist realist art the consumer (220). The earliest articulations of capitalist realism therefore conceived the term in relation to the aesthetics of advertising.

Shonkwiler and La Berge’s definitions are helpful, and open up a wide range of possibilities for the term and the mode. For example, the authors argue that capitalist realism “demands an engagement with specific economic forms such as the commodity, money, and finance, as well as organized economic processes such as production and

---

<sup>75</sup> For Goldman’s discussion of the relationship between advertising and the commodity form, see pages 15-36.

<sup>76</sup> See Dietmar Elger 32-69, and Martin Hentschel.

consumption” (11). Capitalist realism’s characteristics are therefore well-defined, yet general enough that we might speak of multiple capitalist realisms: for instance, a capitalist realism that foregrounds the world of finance would differ from one fixated on production. Consequently, I would like to introduce the term “consumer realism” as a category of capitalist realism, one which specifically focuses on the role of the consumer, rather than, for example, the producer, the laborer, or the investor. Furthermore, consumer realism is shaped more by the commodity form than the financialization of capital. Consumer realism does not just comment on capitalism, *per se*, but on consumerism more specifically, where the individual is not just alienated from the product of his or her labor, but is in fact hollowed out, replaced only with consumer product-identification.

Because consumer realism as a mode is a combination of realist practices and commodity aesthetics, it is less related to the world of finance than it is to the realm of advertising. The critical edge to be found in consumer realism is that it frames a reality in which articulations of values alternative to capitalism are repressed or absent: reality itself can only be described in terms influenced by the commodity aesthetics of advertising.<sup>77</sup> Consumer realism can therefore be understood as an area of cultural production, not limited to advertising but dominated by its aesthetics. Additionally, it is a mode that can be understood as representing the world through an eye educated by advertising: consumer realism represents a fully reified world, a world of signs. As Jean Baudrillard argues in *The Mirror of Production*, the most important feature of advanced

---

<sup>77</sup> For a fuller discussion of commodity aesthetics, see Wolfgang Haug (103-120), as noted by Godden.

capitalism is that consumption is concerned only with the “systematic manipulation of signs.” Objects become signifiers of constantly changing, abstract qualities:

The monopolistic stage signifies less the monopoly of the means of production than *monopoly of the code* ... The form-sign describes an entirely different organization: the signified and the referent are now abolished to the sole profit of the play of signifiers, of a generalized formalization in which the code no longer refers back to its own logic. The signifier becomes its own referent and the use value of the sign disappears to the benefit of its communication and exchange value alone. The sign no longer designates anything at all. It approaches its true structural limit which is to refer back only to other signs. (127-28, emphasis in original)

Referring to this very passage from Baudrillard, Sut Jhally contends that advertising holds a commanding influence over the code, manipulating it and socializing people through it. For example, it is during this period of advanced capitalism that product-focused advertising was replaced by user-centered advertising (Jhally 127-28), thereby situating the subject, rather than the commodity, at the centre of the code. Consequently, Carver’s consumer realist stories emphasize the perception of the consumer thus situated, as well as the affective experience associated with the shift in social relations which accompanies this new social reality. In particular, Carver’s *Esquire* stories use consumer realism to reveal the social and affective instabilities specific to working-class, white masculinities in the 1970s.

## 2. “The man on the way up”: The “Good Life” and Gender Ideology

Flipping through *Esquire* magazine is a trip through the world of consumer realism. It offers a fully reified perspective in which the “good life” and masculinity itself are both presented as commodities. Examining the types of advertisements found in *Esquire* reveals the type of materialist lifestyle being advertised to its readers. For example, in the June 1971 issue of *Esquire*, wherein Carver’s “Neighbors” was published, readers will find the following: approximately thirty advertisements for alcohol; thirteen for automobiles; the same number for smoking; twelve for fashion; twelve also for travel; eleven for electronics; seven for colognes or aftershave; five for watches; and four for books. The cumulative effect of these ads, all presented in the same magazine, is perhaps more important than the individual ads, since, taken together, they advertise a particular idea of what the “good life” is, in particular for a man. The list above only reflects the blatant instances of magazine advertising; *Esquire* itself is a form of advertising, and the regular articles on books, film, and culture also function in much the same way as these “proper” ads.

Schudson argues that the most significant effect of advertising does not come from the individual ad, but from the cumulative effect of the constant inundation from advertising. While the primary goal of a given ad is to convince consumers to purchase a particular item—and that ad may well fail in its aim—the overall effect of advertising is the gradual acceptance that consumption itself is a remedy for inadequacy, and that this “belief in a larger sense” comes to dominate “the assumptions and attitudes of people surrounded by ads” (224). *Esquire* may convince a reader to go out and purchase one of the advertised brands of scotch, or it may more generally convince the reader that the



objects being advertised are material manifestations of the good life. In her study of the cultural impact of *Playboy* magazine, Elizabeth Fraterrigo describes the “good life” as a postwar concept that involved “comfort, security, and abundance” (2). More specifically, she argues that *Playboy*, inspired by *Esquire*, “had lifestyle features that allowed readers to envision an upscale, masculine identity based on tasteful consumption and sexual pleasure” (3). Importantly, the “good life” is one that men should aspire to: it is not spiritual or ethical, but a state defined solely on the consumption of the right kind of commodities.

For *Esquire*, the “good life” is specifically associated with masculinity through both its third-party advertisements for commodities and editorial content which itself acts as an informal type of advertising. The advertisements that promote the “good life” through consumption do so while presenting their audience with idealized images of gender. The magazine’s system of advertisements therefore demonstrates the imbrication of capitalist and gender ideology, not only within each particular advertisement but in society more generally. As Jhally has argued,

Advertising draws us into *our* reality. As hyper-ritualistic images, commercials offer an extremely concentrated form of communication about sex and gender. The essence of gender is represented in advertisements .... Furthermore, we cannot deny them because we define ourselves at our deepest level through the reality of advertising. (136, emphasis in original)

Gender is cultural, and advertising is the most effective and pervasive form of communicating cultural forms. If advertising’s primary function is to promote the

consumption of commodities, then gender itself is “essentialized” and commodified through advertising.

In her analysis of advertising in *Esquire*, Denise Kervin argues that advertisements promise men “comfort and joy, not from the self, but from products obtainable only through collusion in a system based on their continuing labor” (69). Men continue to collude in this system because advertisements guide male readers to associate “stereotypical masculine characteristics and having money, consumer goods, and leisure . . . . In addition, and also continuing today, compensation reinforcing traditional masculine behavior comes from its association with the admiration of women—a goad to achieve greater success” (62). Examples of what Kervin here describes can be found throughout the pages of *Esquire*. For example, a fashion spread in the August 1975 issue demonstrates the connection between masculine traits and the good life (fig.2). A male model dominates the frame in each image, his clothes connoting not only style and sophistication, but the financial success required for such a sartorial display. He obviously lives the good life, his clothing demonstrating his access to wealth and leisure. In each picture the accompanying female model is relegated to the edge of the image, leaning on the male model or touching him in some way, connoting his strength—she needs his support—but also relegating her to the role of accoutrement. Significantly, she is always looking at the male model, evidently finding his masculine display desirable. In contrast, the male model looks out at us, confident in his display of goods, almost challenging the assumed male reader’s presumably inferior masculinity. The model’s

superior clothing signifies his superior social position, and his reward is the admiration of women.<sup>78</sup>



Fig. 2 – Fashion photography from *Esquire* (August 1975)

A similar logic is displayed in the advertising found in *Esquire*. For example, an advertisement for suits states that “The man on the way up chooses a suit of Hart Schaffner & Marx Viracle ... when a man’s on the way up, his suit shows it. A Hart Schaffner & Marx Viracle Suit will keep you looking great—all the way to the top” (60-61). The men are in poses similar to the male model’s from the last example, eyes staring out at the reader, connoting confidence and a possible challenge to the reader. The repetition of “man on the way up” emphasizes a connection between clothing and success in business (and with virility, since the doubling of “up” suggests an erection).

---

<sup>78</sup> These fashion photographs therefore depict the subordination of women to men in many of the ways noted by Erving Goffman in his 1976 study *Gender Advertisements*. For more on gender ideology and advertising, see, e.g.: Lance Strate, “Beer Commercials: A Manual on Masculinity”; Michelle A. Masse and Karen Rosenblum, “Male and Female Created They Them”; Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*.



Fig. 3 – Advertisement for Stetson Shoes

One connotation of both the advertisement and the fashion spread is that masculinity itself is a commodity. This connotation is made explicit in a Stetson shoe advertisement (fig. 3), which claims “No ordinary man can wear these shoes, Because no man who steps into Stetson remains ordinary” (78). While the explicit statement of the ad is that the shoes augment their wearer’s masculinity (presumably going from ordinary to extraordinary), the suggestion is that masculinity resides in the item itself. While I have focused here on clothing, *Esquire* advertised other commodities in a similar fashion, such as cars, alcohol, and cigarettes—the kinds of items upon which Carver’s characters often fixate. The advertisements and editorial content of *Esquire* speak to a larger cultural myth that views consumer items as emblematic of both a desirable lifestyle and a successful performance of hegemonic masculinity.

### 3. Carver's First *Esquire* Story: "Neighbors" and the "Space" of Advertising

It is fitting that Carver's first publication with *Esquire* is the frequently anthologized "Neighbors."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps no story by Carver better illustrates the idea of "consumer realism." The story is simple enough: when Jim and Harriet Stone leave to visit relatives, they ask their neighbors, Bill and Arlene Miller, to look after their apartment. This mundane domestic agreement dramatically affects the neighbors, who become obsessed with the Stones' apartment. Situating Carver's story within the realm of consumer realism, I will illustrate that the Stones' apartment functions as an advertisement, and that the Millers' interactions with the apartment mimic the relationship between consumers and advertisements, much like the relationship readers have with the magazine itself.

"Neighbors" presents the Millers as a couple whose attitudes reflect the "belief in a larger sense" in consumerism. Carver's example of the Millers suggests, as Schudson argues, that those surrounded by ads have internalized the perspective of advertising itself (224). Playing the role of consumers, the Millers view the Stones' life with eyes shaped by reification. Their own life has taken on the quality of things: they understand lives to be made up of things, and they see the Stones' lives as made up of superior things.

---

<sup>79</sup> It is also frequently cited by scholars. See, e.g., Ewing Campbell (14-17), Kirk Nessel (12-13), Harker, David Boxer and Cassandra Philips.

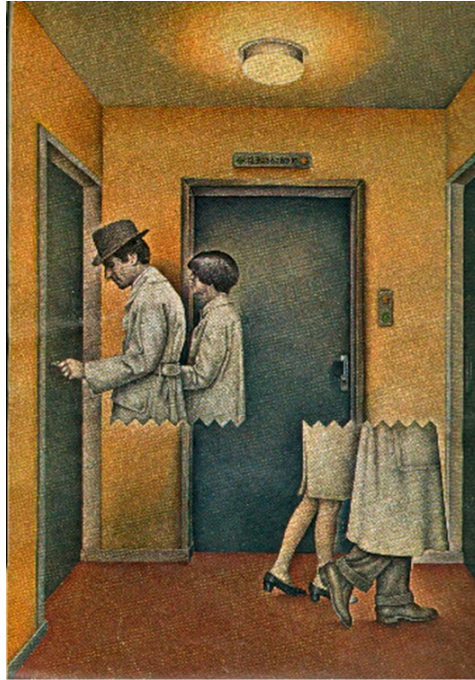


Fig. 4 – Illustration accompanying “Neighbors” in *Esquire*

This focus on reification is augmented by the additional material that *Esquire* included with the story. For instance, under the title, the magazine included a description of the story, alluding to *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*: “a cup of sugar, an egg, a stick of butter, and thou” (137).<sup>80</sup> Carver biographer Carol Sklenicka suggests that this hints at sexuality, in a way typical of the magazine (201), but it also foregrounds the story’s aesthetics of reification, in the sense that it illustrates the process identified by Goldman as “equivalence” (22). Instead of the romantic situation of Khayyam’s verse, readers are presented with a grocery list-like blurb. “Thou,” indicating a relationship between people (though whom it is between is unclear), is presented in the same fashion as a number of consumer items, first implying that the relationship takes on the character of a thing, and

---

<sup>80</sup> This page number refers to original *Esquire* publication. All other page numbers refer to the stories as published in the Library of America’s *Collected Stories*, unless otherwise noted.

also suggesting a type of equality between relationships—whether between people or people and objects—or at least an equal measure by which to judge them.

Additionally, *Esquire*, as was its custom, included an illustration with the story. This particular illustration, by Jean Lagarrigue, depicts a couple roughly split in half at the hips: their upper bodies head towards one apartment, while their legs head to another (fig. 4). As Sklenicka argues, the illustration foregrounds one interpretation of the story: “a modern couple, divided and walking away from themselves” (201).<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, it is worth noting that one effect of a reified consciousness is a divided subject. As Richard Westerman explains, developing the argument made by Georg Lukács, as a result of reification, the proletariat suffer “an absolutely sundered double existence—as both object (the daily reality of his existence) and subject (the abstract vendor of labor power, ostensibly the ‘cause’ of the objectification of labor power)” (120). The Millers roughly fit the definition of the proletariat: they are laborers, even if their labor is white-collar (Bill has “bookkeeping duties,” Arlene has “secretarial chores” [8]), and their last name is associated with a trade. (The “Stones,” however, have a much more solid, untouched name). Whatever its intent, the illustration can be seen as depicting the division of the subject, one of the effects of reification, a process which is central, I argue, to the story—in fact, this illustration could be seen as a commodification of the story itself.

The Millers are introduced as feeling that “they alone among their circle had been passed by somehow” (8). This feeling of being “passed by” is felt only in comparison to

---

<sup>81</sup> *Esquire* had the habit of including illustrations that made obvious what might otherwise have been subtle or vague aspects of the stories they published; for example, John Barth’s “Night-Sea Journey” is narrated by a spermatozoon; while this is not immediately evident when reading the story as it is published in his collection *Lost in the Funhouse*, it is made obvious in the *Esquire* version by an illustration depicting an army of Mars symbols (83).

others: in this particular case, they compare themselves to the Stones, whom they feel “lived a fuller and brighter life” because “The Stones were always going out for dinner, or entertaining at home, or traveling about the country somewhere” (8). In the Millers’ eyes, the Stones live a lifestyle closer to the “good life” depicted in advertisements. Their apartment is described like a catalogue, a collection of things:

He opened all the cupboards and examined the canned goods, the cereals, the packaged foods, the cocktail and wine glasses, the china, the pots and pans. He opened the refrigerator. He sniffed some celery, took two bites of cheddar cheese, and chewed on an apple as he walked into the bedroom. The bed seemed enormous, with a fluffy white bedspread draped to the floor. He pulled out a nightstand drawer, found a half-empty package of cigarets (*sic*) and stuffed them into his pocket ... He looked out the window, and then he moved slowly through each room considering everything that fell under his gaze, carefully, one object at a time. He saw ashtrays, items of furniture, kitchen utensils, the clock. He saw everything. (10-11)

Bill wanders through the apartment like a reader flipping through advertisements, gazing at “one object at a time,” in a casual, meandering sort of way.<sup>82</sup> Of course, it is not the listing of objects in and of itself which makes this a work of consumer realism; rather, it is the association between these objects and the supposed promise of satisfaction which they seem to make.

---

<sup>82</sup> The passage brings to mind Godden’s description of Nick Adams, who “sees like a good consumer, ‘successively’ (Tanner) in private, and without much thought. To think too much might be to waken numerous anxieties” (*Fictions* 47).



Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen offer a context for understanding the Stones' appeal to Bill: "the appeal of advertising, for example, must be understood in a cultural context in which ... survival is to a large extent a matter of appearance and surface impressions" (265). In Carver's consumer realism, the Stones' apartment functions as an advertisement. Consequently, within the apartment, Bill acts out the role of the consumer. As Campbell notes (15-16), Bill's behaviour in the Stones' apartment falls into two related categories: he inserts himself into their spaces and their belongings (e.g. the rooms of their apartment, their clothing), and he ingests their belongings (e.g. air, cigarettes, pills, alcohol, food). He even samples the Stones' Chivas Regal, a scotch prominently advertised in the very issue in which "Neighbors" was published. All of which is to say that Bill behaves like an *Esquire* reader, perusing the display of goods, the selling of a lifestyle. Bill is not hoping to find the Stones' "good life" among their "display of goods"; rather, conflating life and *lifestyle*, Bill hopes to understand the relationship between the Stones' goods and their seemingly superior social standing. However, Bill will not unlock the mystery by examining these ordinary goods—they are not exceptional items, nor is their quality or brand even worth noting. Moreover, the goods and their production do not matter at all: what does matter is one's position within the cycle of advertising and consuming.

That Bill is attracted to this advertised lifestyle is obvious from his frequent, lengthy trips to the apartment, and by the fact that the apartment is described in attractive terms when compared to the Millers' apartment: as well as seeming cooler (11), the air is described as "vaguely sweet" (9). Bill's trips to the apartment, and his behaviours there, literalize Goldman's description of the function of advertising, which invites us "to step

into the 'space' of the ad to try on the social self we might become if we were the product image" (3). When Bill, and later Arlene, walk through the door into the Stones' apartment, they are, in a sense, walking through the pages of *Esquire* magazine; not into the world it promises, but into the world of advertisements for items, for things which offer this promise.

The result of the apartment's seduction is increased sexual activity: in the six-page story (two full pages, in the magazine), Bill and Arlene have sex three times, and, as Campbell notes (15-16), Bill masturbates ("He lay for a while with his eyes closed, and then he moved his hand under his belt" [Carver, "Neighbors" 11]) and it is implied that Arlene does as well ("He noticed white lint clinging to the back of her sweater, and the color was high in her cheeks" [12]). Campbell equates Bill's "browsing" of the Stones' lives with "voyeurism," which leads to "excitement that has been absent from his life" (15).<sup>83</sup> Indeed, reading advertising amounts to a type of voyeurism since, as Haug notes, "commodities cast amorous glances at potential buyers" (107). It is not surprising, then, that Bill and Arlene find themselves aroused by the world of commodities the Stones' apartment represents: they are, in fact, responding to advertising in the very way for which advertisers hope.

However, the reinvigoration of the Millers' sex lives is not seen as an entirely positive thing. Arthur Bethea astutely notes that Carver's description of these sexual moments subtly detracts from the notion that these are generative experiences. For example, a sexual encounter begins with Bill "awkwardly" grabbing at Arlene and

---

<sup>83</sup> The story is typically associated with voyeurism. See, e.g., Nessel; Bethea (68-71); Abigail Bowers (98-101); Boxer and Philips. Boxer and Philips point to the window which Bill Miller looks through as a symbol of voyeurism (77).

responding to her question “What’s gotten into you?” with “Nothing.” Afterwards, the two order food and eat “without speaking” (Carver, “Neighbors” 10). As Bethea notes, both “nothing” and “awkwardly” have potentially negative connotations, and the sexual act itself is not followed by emotional closeness but disconnection (*Technique* 69). In a later example, Bill explains his long absence in the Stones’ apartment by stating that he “had to go to the toilet.” Following this statement, the narrator states that “they made love again” (“Neighbors” 10). Here, Bethea notes that the juxtaposition of references to defecating and copulating undercuts any potential emotional intimacy of the sexual encounter (*Technique* 70). Bethea’s observations aid in developing a reading of the story as an example of consumer realism: importantly, the Millers’ sex is affectless because it takes place in this same realm of reification and commodity aesthetics. This is not the lovemaking of producers—neither the Stones nor the Millers have children—but the sex of consumers, which produces nothing. Rather than children, or joy, both couples have *things*.

The story moves towards its conclusion with Arlene and Bill planning to enter the apartment together. As the Millers cross the hall toward the apartment, Arlene hopes aloud, “Maybe they won’t come back.” She seems to give voice to Bill’s desires as well: he responds, “It could happen ... Anything could happen” (13). Here, their desire to step into the lives of the Stones shows how completely they have been seduced by the belief that the lifestyle advertised in their apartment could be the cure for their own marriage, their own lives.

However, this cure is not to be had. Arlene locks the keys in the Stones’ apartment, effectively “banishing” the two from this consumer realm:

He tried the knob. It was locked. Then she tried the knob. It would not turn. Her lips were parted, and her breathing was hard, expectant. He opened his arms and she moved into them.

“Don’t worry,” he said into her ear. “For God’s sake, don’t worry.”

They stayed there. They held each other. They leaned into the door as if against a wind, and braced themselves. (13)

Bill and Arlene’s response seems totally incommensurate with the actual event: they are only locked out of the Stones’ apartment, denied only things to which they had no access only days previously. I would suggest that the deprivation perceived by the Millers is a reminder of inadequacy identified by Schudson as a function of advertising. Having been immersed in the realm of commodities, they find themselves confronted with the inadequacy of their own lives. As Schudson argues, when art “begins to take everyday life as the subject of its idealization . . . art becomes less an imitation of life and turns life into a disappointing approximation of art” (Schudson 231). The inadequacy that the Millers felt at the beginning of the story has now been amplified, and is now accompanied by the anxiety brought on by reification.

“Neighbors” could be read as a complement to the ads, as the Miller’s story depicts the consequences of failure (a form of negative reinforcement), while the ads depict the rewards of success (positive reinforcement). Such a reading would imply that the stories do not challenge consumerism at all. However, while the story reproduces commodity aesthetics, it also allows enough critical distance for a critique of such a reified perspective. For one, Carver’s characters are so empty that they reject easy identification. Additionally, while the Millers make much of the difference between their

lifestyle and that of the Stones, the narrative demonstrates that they are, in fact, almost identical. The Millers' feeling of relative lack is based on entirely superficial premises. Perhaps most significantly, the Stones are shown to be equally trapped in a realm of commodities. Bill remembers how when Harriet showed off her sunburst clock to Arlene she was "cradling the brass case in her arms and talking to it through the tissue paper as if it were an infant" ("Neighbors" 9).<sup>84</sup> The child has been replaced by a commodity; here, perhaps more than anywhere, Carver literalizes, almost grotesquely, the idea that relationships between people have taken on the characteristics of things.

#### **4. "What is it?" and "Collectors": Reified Masculinities, Diminished Selfhood**

While "Neighbors" ends with a snapshot of a couple's anxiety over their own perceived inadequacy in the face of reification, Carver's two subsequent 1970s *Esquire* stories, "What Is It?" and "Collectors" deal with male protagonists existing deep within this endemic cultural anxiety. The stories depict an increasingly commodified perspective, and an accompanying and increasing alienation of their male characters.

Carver's "What is it?" centres on a defining act of reification. The story describes Leo's wife, Toni, going out to sell their convertible, to avoid having it seized because of Leo's bankruptcy hearings. A symbolic connection is established between Toni—or Leo and Toni's relationship—and the convertible. This act of reification is just as grotesque as the example from "Neighbors" in which Harriet treats her clock like a newborn infant, but in "What is it?" this blatant act of reification is central.

---

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Bethea also draws attention to this scene, lamenting, "What a lesser substitute for a child; what a lesser life than the Millers imagine" (69).

The connection between Toni and the convertible is established in the very first sentence: “Fact is the car needs to be sold in a hurry, and Leo sends Toni out to do it” (157). As Sklenicka explains, the colloquial phrase “do it” suggests that Leo is sending Toni to sell her body along with the car (215). Indeed, it is strongly suggested that Toni sleeps with the car salesman, and the fact that she successfully sells the car strongly suggests that she “sells” herself as well.

Carver returns to this connection a few pages later, explaining that while Toni was preparing herself to sell the car, Leo “took the jack and spare from the trunk and emptied the glove compartment of pencils, matchbooks, Blue Chip stamps. Then he washed it and vacuumed inside. The red hood and fenders shine” (“What is it?” 159). While Toni makes herself over, Leo makes the car over; both are beautiful, ready to be sold. Furthermore, at the end of the story, as Kirk Nessel notes (22), Leo traces Toni’s stretch marks which are “like roads” (“What is it?” 164). This simile is almost immediately followed by Leo remembering “waking up the morning after they bought the car, seeing it, there in the drive, in the sun, gleaming” (164). This shiny, gleaming symbol of material success is contrasted with the state of Leo’s marriage. Even in Leo’s dreams, he can only conceive of the good life in commodity terms. The car is therefore both an ironic signifier of happiness and an example of the simple sexism of the objectification of women.

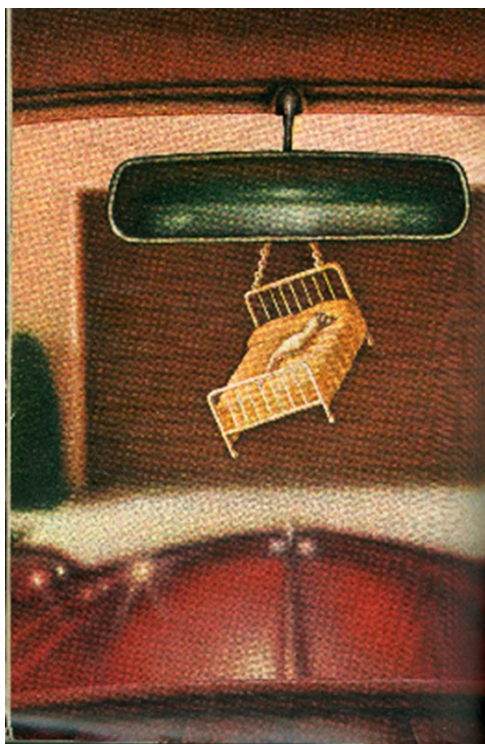


Fig. 5 – Illustration accompanying “What is it?” in *Esquire*

The accompanying illustration in *Esquire* highlights the sexual dimension of the story (Sklenicka 215). The illustration depicts the interior of a car with a bed-shaped ornament hanging from the rear-view mirror (fig.5). Here, though, the illustration highlights a more traditional association—cars and sexuality—than the more specific association being made by Leo between his car and his wife. The car is, however, still connected to sexuality, in that when Leo sells his car he also, presumably, “sells” his wife to the salesman.

Before Leo meets the salesman, he learns from Toni that “He said personally he’d rather be classified a robber or a rapist than a bankrupt” (“What is it?” 162). Her statement reflects the “business ontology” described by Mark Fisher, a term he uses to describe a neoliberal society in which “the very category of value in the ethical sense” has been eliminated (16-17). For the salesman (and Toni implicitly agrees), robbers and

rapists may be criminals, but *at least* they have money. Just as Leo seems incapable of disentangling Toni from her car, so too is Toni seemingly unable to find value in Leo outside of his bank account. As Nessel argues, when Toni screams “Bankrupt!” (“What is it?” 163), she rather bluntly indicates that “Leo’s value as a person is reduced to his equivalency in monetary worth. He is, in the literal sense, of no account whatsoever” (21). Both are trapped in the realm of consumer realism, unable to find value outside of money.

Leo can think of his relationship with Toni only in relation to the things they own (or do not). His memories of a better time in their lives are firmly focused on their possessions: “Food, that was one of the big items. They gorged on food. He figures thousands on luxury items alone ... They buy what they want. If they can’t pay, they charge. They sign up” (160). Leo and Toni’s “good old days” involve living the kind of life promoted in *Esquire*: they spend money on the type of luxury items advertised, and “sign up” for book and record clubs of the type marketed in the magazine. Their life as consummate consumers is highlighted by the fixation on food, which they “gorged” themselves on. Leo cannot help but compare this life of bounty to the type of life he now leads, bankrupt, no better than a rapist as far as the salesman is concerned.

When Leo finally meets the salesman, Nessel notes that Carver develops the contrast between the two through a description of their clothing (22). Leo, dishevelled, is unable to full dress himself: “Leo tries to pull the two pieces of his shirt together, tries to bunch it all into his trousers” (163). The salesman, conversely, “wears a white linen suit” (163). This focus on clothing, and on clothing’s importance as a signifier of masculinity, is highlighted by the story’s original position in *Esquire* magazine, which, as we have



seen, devotes a good portion of each issue to men's fashion. At the end of "What is it?", then, the reader is presented with a comparison between two men, and the masculinity of the salesman is clearly depicted as superior: he has the nicer clothes, the convertible, and he has presumably cuckolded Leo. In this way the story illustrates Michael Kimmel's theory of masculinity as a homosocial construct, wherein masculinity is proven through competition with other men, and in which women are "traded" as a "kind of currency" (186-187).<sup>85</sup> Women are therefore like cars, and it is evident that the salesman's survival in this homosocial contest among men is based on matters of appearance and impressions, on his display of goods.

The consequence of Leo's loss is devastating to him. He threatens Toni with violence (163) and realizes that "he is willing to be dead" (160). Leo finds his selfhood diminished: for example, during the night, when Toni is still absent, he receives a phone call with only a dial tone on the other end. "I'm right here!" Leo screams, but there is no answer, no recognition of his voice or identity. When Toni returns, he is unable to speak, instead cocking his fist at her and squeezing her wrists (163). Confronted with the salesman, Leo can only begin to say "I want to tell you" without ever completing the sentence (164). He is unable to make himself understood, and is recognized only as a bankrupt and a cuckold. Though in the final paragraph he slips into bed with Toni, she does not even acknowledge his presence (164). This loss of dignity is brought on, however, by his treatment of his wife as an object, and is exacerbated by his, and Toni's, inability to find value in anything but the commodity form. Even having faced such ruin, Leo is unable to correct his perception, and continues to understand his relationship to

---

<sup>85</sup> Kimmel's sociological theory of masculinity echoes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's literary theory of masculinity. See, e.g., *Between Men*.

people in the same terms as his relationship to things, dreaming in the end of the red convertible, gleaming in the sun.

According to Goldman, one consequence of reification is that “Social relations are no longer seen as the means to the production and consumption of goods. Instead, the acquisition of goods is presented as the means of forming social relationships. The goods acquire a life history, while humans lose theirs” (32). Certainly, for Leo and Toni, the acquisition of goods is a means of forming social relations: Leo’s relationship with Toni started when he bought children’s encyclopedias from her (157), and seemingly ends when she sells the convertible to a salesman, their relationship (and Toni) traded openly, as a commodity. Furthermore, the humans in the story seem to be in the process of losing their history to the car. Leo’s memories, which dot the narrative, give way to a final memory of the car instead, and prior mentions of the car paralleled Toni’s and his relationship. The couples’ relationship is essentially subtracted from their selfhood and repositioned into consumer items. Carver’s narrative depicts the car gaining in prominence as Leo’s and Toni’s selfhood diminishes. This process continues in “Collectors.”

If the Millers are enchanted, and then alienated, by commodity fetishism, and if Leo’s ruin is intimately connected to his perception of the world as a commodity, then the unnamed narrator of “Collectors” presents one more step on the path to alienation and anxiety in the realm of consumer realism. The story is perhaps best read in light of Godden’s claim that in capitalist realism, “selfhood is persuaded to reside in the isolated and full gratification of needs through commodities” (“Money” 183). The narrator’s lack

of selfhood is reflected in his dearth of commodities. The narrator's lack is emphasized by the magazine tagline: "End with nothing, not even your dust" (95).

The story of "Collectors" is, like most of Carver's fiction, quite straightforward: the unnamed narrator, whose first words are "I was out of work," is lying on a sofa waiting for word from "up north," presumably about a job (78). It is unclear if it is his apartment, or if he is squatting. A man named Aubrey Bell comes to his house and informs him that a Mrs. Slater has won a free vacuum demonstration. Despite the narrator's protestations that "Mrs. Slater doesn't live here" (78), Bell enters and demonstrates the vacuum's cleaning power. Eventually he picks up a letter, possibly the eagerly awaited news from "up north," claims that it is for a Mr. Slater, and leaves with it. There is very little action, and unlike "Neighbors" and "What is it?" there is seemingly no change in the characters or their relationship with one another.

However, what "Collectors" does describe is a character for whom the absence of things, of material possessions, corresponds directly to an absence of selfhood. Paradoxically, perhaps, this is the first Carver story in *Esquire* told from a first-person perspective, but this perspective, which should highlight the narrator's subjectivity, instead highlights its lack. From this first-person perspective, the reader "sees through the eyes" of a totally reified consciousness. Tellingly, the prose is even sparser than in other Carver stories. Like the apartment, almost totally empty of consumer items, the narration is lacking in adornment—it even lacks quotation marks, meaning that the distinctions between the narrator's perspective, his words, and the words of Aubrey Bell are lessened, reflecting his weakened subjectivity. When the narrator does speak, his comments are usually framed in the negative. Negative constructions can be found in the narrator's

dialogue on every page: e.g. “Mrs. Slater doesn’t live here”; “No car ... I don’t have a car” (80); “It’s not my mattress” (81); “This carpet’s not worth fooling with” (82); and so on. Perhaps most tellingly, he twice tells the salesman that he is “not in the market” (80). While he means that he cannot purchase the vacuum cleaner that Bell is demonstrating, the phrase situates him in relation to the market, which is “the central institution in this new monopoly of the code” (Jhally 12). The narrator’s dialogue therefore reflects both his distance from this institution and its centrality.

As mentioned, the narrator is also unnamed, and his identity is therefore indeterminate: Bell asks if he is Mr. Slater, but the narrator never responds. He repeats that “Mrs. Slater doesn’t live here” (79), but this could either mean that he is not Mr. Slater, or that he is, and Mrs. Slater has moved away. As Bethea argues, this indeterminacy “underscores the story’s central theme involving the absence or loss of identity” (*Technique* 9); the fact that his identity is left indeterminate is more telling than acceptance or denial, which at least would be affirmative, instead leaving him alienated from his own selfhood.

In contrast to the unnamed narrator, the salesman goes by a proper name, and his character is marked by his penchant for name-dropping authors. He names W.H. Auden (79), and mentions the good life of others: “Rilke lived in one castle after another, all of his adult life. Benefactors ... He seldom rode in motorcars; he preferred trains. Then look at Voltaire at Cirey with Madame Châtelet” (81). Bell’s commentary implicitly compares the narrator’s life of scarcity with Rilke’s and Voltaire’s life of abundance; similarly, the famous names of these authors contrast with the narrator’s namelessness. Held up as

exemplars of success and leisure, and therefore masculinity, the names of these authors highlight the narrator's comparatively constrained masculinity.

Since the narrator offers so little in the way of exposition or description, his characterization needs to be analyzed based on his things. While the Stones' full apartment in "Neighbors" signifies a "full" life, at least to the Millers, this narrator's empty house correspondingly signifies a life that is lacking. The scarcity of commodities in the narrator's house is returned to again and again: in his bedroom, "There was a bed, a window," only a few concrete objects worth mentioning. When he wants to watch Bell at work, the narrator says "I went to the kitchen and got *the* chair" (81, emphasis added). When Bell opens the door to the closet, there is "only a box of Mouse-Be-Gone" (82). This lack of commodities parallels the narrator's lack of selfhood, as though he recognizes no other way of identifying himself except through the commodity form. Bell ironically comments on this fact while discussing the virtues of his vacuum, stating "Every day, every night of our lives, we're leaving little bits of ourselves, flakes of this and that, behind. Where do they go, these bits and pieces of ourselves?" ("Collectors" 80). Here, Bell's comment refers to common detritus—dust, perhaps, or flakes of skin—but can fruitfully be read as a statement about the narrator, about how he has come to recognize selfhood only in commodities, and these items, these material things, are now gone from his life, taking his selfhood with them.

In light of the discussion of "What is it?," it is significant that the narrator admits that he does not have a car (80). Bethea correctly notes that this lack of a car "emphasizes his stasis" (*Technique* 10), but it is worth considering this detail in relation to the importance of the car in "What is it?" For Leo, the car was the only way he understood

his life: it symbolized not only his relationship with Toni, but his status in the world. Losing the car amounted to emasculation and a loss of identity. In “Collectors,” the narrator has no car—he either never could afford one, or, considering his employment status, and the fact that he is avoiding creditors (78), it could be assumed that he has sold his car or had it taken from him. Whatever the reason, the narrator’s lack of a car further symbolizes his loss of identity, but also his emasculation.

The notion that the narrator is emasculated is perhaps subtle if one does not read the story from a consumer-realist perspective. No mention is made of his sex life, and this omission would not be in itself notable if not for the lack of consumer items, and especially his car, which signify not only selfhood but masculinity. A scene wherein Bell cleans the narrator’s bed draws attention to the narrator’s emasculation. After entering the bedroom, Bell explains that “You have to turn it [the vacuum] up to full strength for a job like this one.” He then “extended the hose to the head of the bed and began to move the scoop down the mattress” (81). Here, Bell’s vacuum takes on a phallic quality: its “full strength” suggests a corresponding lack in the narrator. In “Collectors,” the narrator’s lack of agency is symptomatic of his symbolic emasculation. He does nothing to stop Bell’s demonstration, even when he wants him to leave: “I kept watching him,” the narrator states, “That’s all I did” (83). He cannot even get past Bell’s vacuum cleaner to pick up the recently-arrived letter, or speak a word of protest when Bell leaves with it.

Bell’s final act—leaving with the letter delivered during his demonstration—has menacing overtones. As Nessel argues, the narrator loses to Bell not only the possibility of a job, but also, with his name on the envelope, the last vestiges of his self (18-19). Bell has taken the narrator’s name, just as Bell’s vacuum has collected the detritus of his life

(Boxer and Phillips 86). Nameless and jobless, the narrator loses to Bell perhaps the only item capable of restoring both identity and employment. The shut door, the image which ends the story, therefore takes on additional significance, functioning as the final punctuation in the narrator's story of diminishing selfhood. In "What is it?," after mentioning Leo's financial status, Toni tells her husband "You're nothing" (157). This statement may not have been strictly true of Leo, but it certainly is true of the unnamed narrator.

"Collectors" goes further than either "Neighbors" or "What is it?" to represent the detrimental effects of reification. "Collectors" narrates a realm of pure consumer realism, a world where it can be taken for granted that a lack of material goods *logically* symbolizes a lack of selfhood. The narrator and his house have no characteristics of their own: they can only be characterized negatively, by the absence of commodities. This absence is highlighted by the feature immediately following "Collectors" in *Esquire*. Entitled "The Perfect Male Shopping Spree," the article opens with the following lines:

The problem: How to get everything you need for a fall/winter wardrobe on one grand shopping sortie, buying the best there is anywhere and actually having a good time while you're doing it.

The solution: London, of course. (Joseph 97)

The life of wealth and luxury required for such an extravagant "shopping spree" stands in stark contrast to the narrator's jobless status and empty apartment. The article is representative of the "good life" held up as eminently desirable for men. Masculinity, for Carver's characters and for the readers of *Esquire* magazine, becomes inseparable from the "display of goods" identified by Veblen that makes up an individual's social status in

society (265). Masculinity is both a commodity and an aspect of the display of certain commodities—commodities the narrator of “Collectors” is lacking. When read in the context of its original publication, then, one cannot help but notice that those commodities absent from “Collectors” have seemingly migrated, moving outward to densely populate the pages of *Esquire* magazine. It is a blunt illustration of the world from which the narrator is absent, declaring himself “not in the market.”

## 5. Conclusion

Carver’s short fiction invariably depicts lower-middle-class, blue-collar, or even unemployed workers, men who have seen their traditional relationship with labor and capitalism change under neoliberalism, and whose relationship with hegemonic masculinity has changed in response to the many challenges of feminism, civil rights, and gay activism. Unlike Mailer’s Rojack and the “White Negro,” Carver’s characters, trapped in the “realism” of consumer realism, cannot enact escapist fantasies in an attempt to renegotiate their relationship to patriarchal authority.

Because of their class position, the commodities that might enable such a transformation—the types of lifestyle offered by *Esquire*—remain largely out of the reach of Carver’s characters, for whom the right commodities are inaccessible; instead, their relationship with these commodities becomes one more like voyeurism. The promise that these ads seem to promote will forever remain tantalizing, but also tantalizingly unfulfilled. Carver’s stories critique the ideology of *Esquire* by challenging the connections between consumerism and gender that *Esquire* promotes in its advertisements. Furthermore, Carver’s stories challenge the ideological message of these



advertisements by illustrating the negative effects of reification on working-class men. Such a situation leads not to new relationships with patriarchy, but alienation and the loss of selfhood.

Carver's consumer realism may reveal a constrained masculinity for some, but this constraint can challenge, as much as be challenged, by dominant masculine forms. In "Neighbors," there is a brief passage that highlights the desire for an escape from masculinity. While Bill visits the Stones' apartment, he takes the opportunity to dress up in women's clothing (11). His cross-dressing is described in the same matter-of-fact matter as his consumption of goods: "He stepped into the panties and fastened the brassiere, then looked through the closet for an outfit. He put on a black and white checkered skirt and tried to zip it up. He put on a burgundy blouse that buttoned up the front. He considered shoes, but understood they would not fit" (11). In the realm of consumer realism, gender *can be* another consumer choice—it is an aspect of the individual's display of goods. Trying on another gender *could be* similar (if not identical) to consuming any other aspect of a different lifestyle, provided one has access. Still, this particular choice of consumption demonstrates a type of gender fluidity available because of the reification of gender; in this way, the increasingly constrained masculinity of Carver's male characters in his *Esquire* stories also hints at the potential for an increased freedom from gender constraints, if only his characters could identify this potential and access it.

Of course, the world might be similarly reified for Mailer and the types of characters he describes, but those reified commodities remain accessible, consumable. Carver's consumer realism may reveal a constrained masculinity for some, but this

constraint can challenge, as much as be challenged by, dominant masculine forms. As Judith Butler writes, “agency begins where sovereignty wanes” (16). This statement is true for the characters found in the work of Truman Capote. Like Carver, Capote is a writer intimately associated with *Esquire* magazine; however, Capote’s fiction of the 1970s provides a stark contrast to Carver’s, depicting not “Low-Rent Tragedies,” but the consumerist orgies of the jet-set elite. For Capote, reification leads to generative possibilities, and new forms of masculinity.

Though the 1970s saw a decline in the power of the working-classes, and thus posed a challenge to blue-collar masculinity, it was also the era of disco, David Bowie, and other queer subcultures influencing the mainstream. Alternative masculinities—those not beholden to a straight masculine ideal—were beginning to enjoy social influence, and new possibilities—new articulations of masculinity—were becoming increasingly possible, even if they too were to reside in the realm of consumer realism.

## Chapter 5

### True Men and Queer Spaces in Truman Capote's *Answered Prayers*

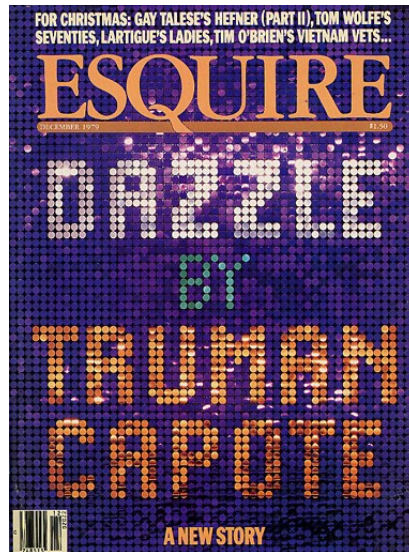


Fig. 6. Cover of *Esquire*, December 1979, promoting Capote's latest short story;

Esquire.com, n.d.; Web; 22 Jan. 2014.

The entire cover of the December 1979 issue of *Esquire* is given over to advertising the appearance within of Truman Capote's "nonfiction short story" entitled "Dazzle" (fig. 6). The design is eye-catching: purple, gaudy, and designed to resemble sequins, the cover may not reflect the subject matter of Capote's tale, but it at least reflects *Esquire's* own interest in promoting the story. The story itself could be read as quite scandalous: a supposedly true tale, it involves a young Capote visiting the local witch in the hopes that her magic will help him switch genders, exclaiming, "I don't want to be a boy. I want to be a girl" (62). The revelation that one of America's most famous authors and personalities desired to shed his gender and assume another could have caused quite a stir, but *Esquire* was seemingly more interested in controversies from Capote's recent past. In the issue's installment of "Backstage with *Esquire*," the regular feature on the magazine's contributors, Capote commented on the uproar caused in high

society by the publication of “La Côte Basque, 1965,” in the magazine’s November 1975 issue: “The reaction was unbelievable . . . I might just as well have killed the Lindbergh baby” (6). Certainly the author comments on the style of “Dazzle,” but the real thrust of the interview is to return Capote’s attention, once more, to the furor around his gossipy, unfinished novel, *Answered Prayers*, demonstrating the degree to which the scandal of Capote’s later writing acted as a kind of Trojan Horse, smuggling queer content into heteronormative discourse.<sup>86</sup>

According to Capote, *Answered Prayers* was to be a twentieth-century, American *Remembrance of Things Past*. It was also a book that Capote continually put off publishing: he signed the initial contract in 1966, to be delivered January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968, and as each deadline passed, the book’s contract was renegotiated, a process that was repeated at least four times. In 1975 and 1976, more than seven years after the initial deadline, Capote began publishing excerpts in *Esquire*.<sup>87</sup> From these excerpts, a basic plot can be divined: the story follows the narrator, P.B. Jones—an author, masseuse, and, eventual gigolo—as he climbs the ladder of high society as a “friend of the rich,” partaking in much gossip and imbricating him in the sexual lives of the famous and wealthy. During his travels with the jet-set he encounters Kate McCloud, and strikes up an association which (presumably) leads to his downfall. Jones retells all of this from his room at the YMCA, where, sometime later, he becomes a full-fledged gigolo. Capote made no secret that he was Jones, and that the high society gossip relayed by Jones was the genuine article. The publication of the second excerpt, “La Côte Basque, 1965,” caused the

---

<sup>86</sup> Capote referred to the work both as a roman à clef and as a novel. Both terms will be used in this essay.

<sup>87</sup> The details about Capote’s plans for *Answered Prayers*, and its troubled publication history, are taken from Joseph M. Fox’s “Editor’s Note” to the published version.

aforementioned stir,<sup>88</sup> and so *Answered Prayers* became, as the May 1976 cover of *Esquire* proclaimed, “The most talked-about book of the year,” not because of its artistic merits, but its salacious gossip.

Eventually, *Answered Prayers* became famous for another reason: no extant, full manuscript can be found, though rumors abound that a full draft does, indeed, exist. The recent (November 2012) publication of the chapter “Yachts and Things,” previously believed to be lost or non-existent, will no doubt give hope to those eager to someday read the completed novel. To the extent that the book has been discussed at all, the focus has been on the controversy surrounding its publication and its status as an unfinished text.

Perhaps because it is unfinished, the published text gives no explanation of Jones’ initials. According to Capote’s notes, P. B. stands for “Paul Bunyan” (Kashner). Significantly, Bunyan is specifically identified by R. W. Connell in her work *Masculinities*, when noting that exemplars of masculinity “have very often been men of the frontier” (185). Capote’s allusion may seem odd, connecting, as it does, a twentieth-century hustler to a legendary lumberjack. However, Jones *is* a frontiersman of sorts, though the borders he crosses are not located at the edges of civilization but at the margins of the gender order. In other words, Jones is a frontiersman of queer spaces. It is therefore worth considering how Jones, like an exemplar of masculinity, provides “solutions to gender problems” (Connell, “Hegemonic” 90). The particular gender problems to which Jones potentially provides solutions are quite different than those faced by standard exemplars of masculinity, who have as their main purpose the

---

<sup>88</sup> For an overview of the controversy, see, e.g., Kashner and Fox. For contemporaneous responses, see, e.g., Patricia Burstein and Liz Smith.

stabilization and reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. Rather, Jones demonstrates how queer masculinities<sup>89</sup> can avoid or perhaps even counter marginalization, by traversing queer spaces, social spaces in which different gender regimes allow for different gender relations, and open up the utopian possibility of a space outside of masculine domination. To make this argument, I first look at the shifting definition of masculinity in the 1970s: specifically, I consider the increased visibility of homosexual subcultures in the mainstream and examine how the heteronormative men's magazine *Esquire* responds to these shifting gender norms. *Esquire*, the site of *Answered Prayers*' original publication, provides a cultural field in which to analyze the renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity during the 1970s. The magazine's response to these changes results in a cultural text that could be read as promoting and critiquing heteronormativity at the same time. This ambiguity opens up the possibility of a "queer space" within the magazine—a space that Capote fills. After discussing Capote's relationship with *Esquire*, to provide the context for Capote's (queer) space-making practices, I elaborate on the concept of queer spaces, with reference to Judith Halberstam, David Warner, George Chauncey, and Samuel Delany, before turning to the pertinent example of Yukio Mishima's homoerotic placement in *Esquire*, as a way of demonstrating the potentially

---

<sup>89</sup> "Queer" is a difficult term in criticism, because it both signifies a theoretical position in which all identity is figured as non-essential and constructed, and an identity (as in "queer person") which is increasingly used in addition to, and sometimes instead of, "gay," "lesbian," or other more specific identifiers—in the latter sense, it may contradict the former sense. When referring to queer spaces or queer gender regimes, for instance, I use the term in the former sense, as detailed by Judith Halberstam, who states that the term *queer* "refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (6). Queer spaces are therefore spaces in which nonnormative gender regimes can be mobilized (as I discuss below). In instances when referring to an identity (e.g. "queer masculinities") or groups of individuals, it should be understood that I am invoking the latter sense of the word, though the former lingers in the margin, threatening to undo any simple essentialism.

subversive and disruptive qualities of queer spaces. Having established this argument, I detail the role of queer spaces and the reification of masculinity in *Answered Prayers*, to demonstrate how Capote critiques the relationship between economic and masculine domination, while simultaneously offering “dazzling”—and not-so-dazzling—utopian alternatives.

### 1. *Esquire’s* Queer 1970s

Even if Capote had met his initial deadline, perhaps *Answered Prayers* should never have been published in the 1960s. It seems very much a work of the following decade. The 1970s were, in some ways, a time when the hegemonic form of masculinity was less chauvinistic than in years previous, especially in some gender regimes. *Esquire* even dropped the subtitle “The Magazine for Men” from its cover in August of 1975, de-emphasizing masculinity as a focus of the magazine.<sup>90</sup> The urbane, middle-brow gender regime of the *Esquire* reader was less defined by the kind of homosexual panic felt by Norman Mailer’s “White Negro,” and existed, instead, in a wider culture of increasingly fluid gender lines and androgyny. Indeed, it could be said that while in the 1960s Mailer advocated the appropriation of a certain kind of urban, black masculinity (as he understood it), in the 1970s hegemonic forms of masculinity were adapting and reacting to a gay subculture. In this post-Stonewall era, “gay issues” were tackled in mainstream media, which found a new interest in “alternative” sexual lifestyles (Jones and Bego 52). Popular culture began to reflect, and perhaps propagate, a less rigid form of masculinity,

---

<sup>90</sup> Men were not banished from the cover for too long: a new subtitle, “Man at His Best,” debuted on the cover of the March 1980 issue. The new subtitle was meant to reflect the magazine’s “new” target readership: “men who were not necessarily macho anymore, but who had feelings. Men were being handled with dignity” (Heller 60).

as can be seen in the rise of disco. Surveying the decade for *Esquire*, Tom Wolfe writes that “the male-homosexual netherworld created disco. The discotheque is the 1970’s quotidian and commercial rationalization of what used to be known as a homosexual rout” (37). Wolfe further identifies Studio 54, the trend-setting nightclub, as seven-hundred and fifty men “dancing with one another to seamless music and exploding lights in a homoerotic frenzy” (36). Homophobic condescension aside, Wolfe articulates a movement of gay culture from the margins to the centre of culture.

It was not only disco, but also rock and roll that pushed the boundaries of normative masculinity. As Randy Jones and Mark Bego note, the glitter and glam rock of the 1970s predominantly featured figures of ambiguous sexuality and gender (e.g. Alice Cooper, David Bowie) who unsettled binary gender structures (53). While male pop stars were increasingly androgynous, if not outwardly transgendered, 1970s’ fashions—fashion being a central and long-standing aspect of *Esquire*—also reflected a new take on masculinity. As Anne-Lise Francois (157) explains, men’s clothes in the 1970s “undermine the image of manly independence from the vicissitudes of time, body, and context, which understated masculine garb has from the Enlightenment onward sought to project” (157). For Francois, in other words, men’s fashion traditionally remained surprisingly and statically “understated,” and this understatement is, in part, explained by the way masculinity has attempted to define itself as ahistorical and natural: men’s clothing less obviously changes with the times because it is the times which change, not men. However, in the 1970s, masculine garb becomes increasingly flashy (think John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*), including large sideburns and bell bottom pants, and so on. While not as obviously subversive of gender norms as the flamboyant image of



glam rockers, popular masculine dress nonetheless can also be read as undermining the supposed “natural” relationship between the male sex and older forms of hegemonic masculinity.

*Esquire* was (and remains) a magazine invested in the heteronormative, and this was true not only of its assumption of its readers’ heterosexuality, but in its valorization of such so-called conventional male roles. In the 1970s, for example, the magazine published Gay Talese’s two-part article on “The Erotic History of Hugh Hefner,” lionizing the playboy founder and his lifestyle. Perhaps even more representative of the magazine’s continued investment in hegemonic masculinities was its “Joy of Sports” special issue, the second installment of which ran in October of 1975. Connell argues that sport is the exemplary “test of masculinity,” and that in men’s formative school years success at sport is central to men’s performance of masculinity (*Masculinities* 30, 37). This issue’s focus on sports tellingly reveals the patterns of hegemonic masculinity, especially in the feature “Actual Size!,” a series of photos of athlete’s body parts which are supposedly, as the title claims, true to scale. The feature’s description in the table of contents invokes readers to “Try your hand (neck, thigh, arm, biceps) against these pictures!,” insisting that men test themselves against these masculine ideals. Even the successful businessman, for example, is forced to compare his masculinity against others during his reading time. Those who feel an aversion towards doing so, or who have no interest in sport, may want to turn to Alexander Theroux’s supposedly humorous article “The Sissy,” a lengthy screed against school-aged boys who are unathletic and therefore (it posits) effeminate. Hegemonic masculinity, in this instance, is stringently enforced.

While *Esquire* remained a heteronormative magazine, it did reflect wider changes in the gender order by featuring an increased amount of gay content. One significant demonstration of the magazine's willingness to openly discuss the place of gay masculinity came in 1969, when the magazine interjected itself into the public tiff between William F. Buckley, Jr., and Gore Vidal. The feud between the two public intellectuals began with Vidal calling Buckley a "crypto fascist" on national television during the 1968 Democratic Convention, and Buckley responding by threatening Vidal and labeling him a "queer." *Esquire* subsequently published Buckley's "On Experiencing Gore Vidal" and Vidal's response, "A Distasteful Encounter with William F. Buckley Jr." The two promptly sued each other.<sup>91</sup> While this hardly represents a progressive or a subversive shift in gender norms—and *Esquire*'s main motivation for publication was, undoubtedly, the increased sales figures that a scandal promised—it does demonstrate the new visibility of gay issues.

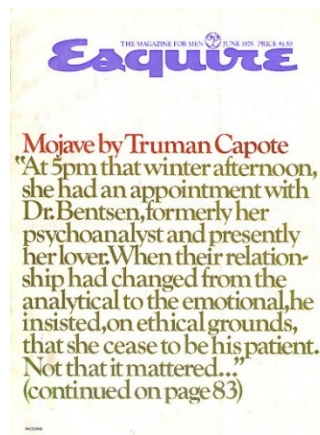


Fig. 7. Cover of *Esquire*, June 1975, featuring the first lines of "Mojave";

Esquire.com, n.d.; Web; 22 Jan. 2014.

---

<sup>91</sup> See Bram 123-128

*Esquire* foregrounded gay masculinity with the highly touted publication of three excerpts of *Answered Prayers*, plus the associated story “Mojave,” in 1975 and 1976. The excerpts caused a great deal of controversy—though not for their queer (e.g. nonnormative sexual) content. Many of the high-society women who were Capote’s closest friends—his “swans”—found the thinly-veiled gossip about their private lives distasteful, and broke off their relationships with him; some even believe that the fallout from the publication contributed to Capote’s alcoholism, and his inability to finish the manuscript (if it is, indeed, unfinished). The controversy was good for *Esquire*: the magazine could only profit from the increased attention. Capote had a history with *Esquire*, and so it was not a surprising choice for a place of publication: *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* was published in the November 1958 issue, while “Among the Paths of Eden” was subsequently featured in July 1960.

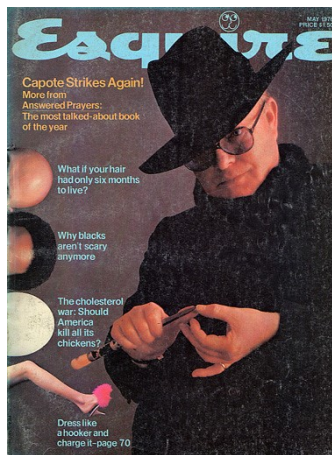


Fig. 8. Cover of *Esquire*, May 1976, featuring Capote as his character from *Murder by Death*; Esquire.com, n.d.; Web; 22 Jan. 2014

The magazine treated Capote's return—he had not published with them since an article in 1968, "Death Row U.S.A."<sup>92</sup>—with an uncommon deal of promotion. The text of "Mojave," the first published, rather uncharacteristically began on the magazine cover; readers had to begin there, and then turn to page 83 to find out what happened next (fig. 7). Such foregrounding of an author's words was uncommon; usually, the magazine's cover featured models or celebrities, not prose. The examples from 1976 are more in keeping with *Esquire's* established cover aesthetic: on the cover of the May issue, Capote himself appears, costumed as Lionel Twain, his character in Robert Moore's *Murder By Death*, a film that was to be released in June, and in which Capote made his feature film debut (fig. 8). On the cover of the December issue, a tired-looking Capote holds hands with a female model wrapped in Christmas ribbon. The accompanying blurb reads "Truman Capote's Gift to America: Kate McCloud!" (fig. 9). "Kate McCloud" is the title of the excerpt published in the magazine, and so the blurb seems to refer to both the short story contained within, and the character, whom they no doubt hoped would be just as iconic as Capote's most famous creation, Holly Golightly. Other than Norman Mailer, authors were not frequently featured on the cover of *Esquire*. The magazine's approach to Capote denotes his status as a personality more so than his status as an author: fiction had become even less central to *Esquire* as the 1970s wore on, and no other author would feature so prominently and so regularly on the magazine's covers again.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> While outside the scope of the current project, an analysis of this piece and its placement in *Esquire* could add to the growing body of material on prison as a site of (contested) masculinities—see Don Sabo, Terry Kupers, and Willie London's *Prison Masculinities*.

<sup>93</sup> There were still a few notable instances of authors showing up on the cover: William Styron and John Updike appear on the August 1987 cover, one of the magazine's summer reading issues; infamously, the July 1989 summer reading issue inexplicably features Jay McInerney costumed as a ninja.

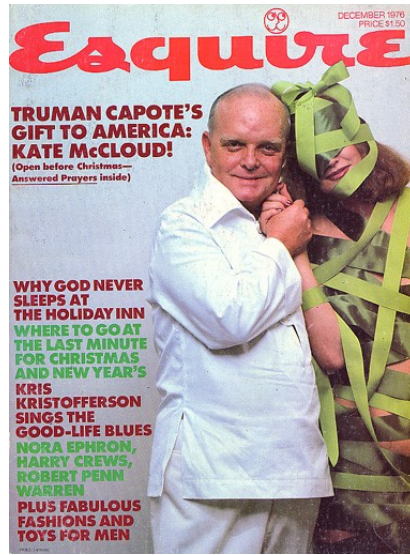


Fig. 9. Cover of *Esquire*, December 1976, featuring Capote with his character Kate McCloud; Esquire.com, n.d.; Web; 22 Jan. 2014

*Esquire*'s publisher, Arnold Gingrich, used his publisher's page to reiterate the noteworthiness of Capote's appearances. When "La Côte Basque, 1965" was first published, Gingrich announced his own expectations: "I can hear some voices saying that Truman Capote's evocation of the lunch scene at *La Côte Basque* is the finest thing we've printed since that now long-ago November when we ran *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. And I can hear others saying that it's the portrait of a decadent society, portending that everything's going to hell in a hack, this magazine included" (8). Gingrich also defended the artistic merits of *Answered Prayers* in the May 1976 publisher's page, which was entitled "Gossip as an Art Form." Clearly, Capote was good business: when additional chapters were published, the magazine included information for purchasing back issues, so that readers could get the whole story. An advertisement in the May 1976 issue calls on readers to "Complete your Capote collection with 'Mojave' and 'La Côte Basque, 1965' ... as first presented in the June and November editions of ESQUIRE. A double-

barreled tour de force ... While you're at it, why not enter or extend your own subscription (see below, right) and be sure to receive Capotes to come" (6).

*Esquire's* foregrounding of Capote is not surprising when one considers his celebrity, but it may seem somewhat peculiar that such a profoundly heterosexual and heteronormative publication would emphasize its connection to such a queer figure as Capote. Indeed, while *Esquire* did not go out of its way to label Capote's gender or sexuality, it still hinted at his queerness: for example, the first page of "Unspoiled Monsters" included a picture of Capote, and below the title ran the byline "It must be *strange fruit* to last through any season" (55, emphasis mine). The picture of Capote reinforces the connection between the narrator and the author, and *Esquire's* word choice further insinuates the queerness of both figures.<sup>94</sup> The queerness of Capote, and the work, are significant: though the published excerpts of *Answered Prayers* were mostly noted, then as now, for their gossipy nature and the uproar they caused in high society, the way the magazine created a queer space within a highly heteronormative one contributes to a queer critique of heteronormativity.

Judith Halberstam refers to queer spaces as "the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and ... the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics" (6).<sup>95</sup> Halberstam develops the term "counterpublic" from David Warner who argues that counterpublics, "can work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived ... It can therefore make possible new forms of gendered or sexual citizenship—

---

<sup>94</sup> Here, I am suggesting that "fruit" is being used as slang for "homosexual," and that the eccentric Capote is therefore being labelled a "strange fruit." The association between "strange fruit" and lynching (see Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit") does not seem to be at play here.

<sup>95</sup> For a fuller discussion of counterpublics, see Warner, especially 56-63, 117-24, and 198-208.

meaning active participation in collective world making through publics of sex and gender” (57). As Warner’s quotation indicates, counterpublics are especially pertinent to queer gender identities; Halberstam adds the importance of gendered spaces to the creation of counterpublics. Much of the scholarship surrounding the politics of gender identity has, indeed, focused on locality and gendered spaces. This has been especially true of gay and lesbian scholarship, whether those spaces are physical, social, or symbolic. For example, both George Chauncey and Samuel Delany, though focusing on different time periods, have discussed the importance of physical spaces to the construction, maintenance, and pleasure of gay life in New York (where much of *Answered Prayers* takes place). In *Gay New York*, Chauncey discusses gay social centers such as rooming houses, cafeterias, bath houses and the YMCA, and gay neighborhoods such as Greenwich Village and the Bowery, in the period from 1890-1940. In *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, Delany discusses, generally, the neighborhood around Times Square, and specifically the gay institutions found there: “clubs, bars of several persuasions, baths, tea-room sex, gay porn movie houses (both types), brunches, entertainment, cruising areas, truck stop sex, circuit parties, and many more” (193-94). Delany argues that these institutions—both physical and social spaces—are central to his concept of sexuality. As well as these physical spaces and social spaces, the symbolic space of “the closet” looms large in discussions of homosexuality’s “place” in society, while queer men and women are often defined as either being “in” or “out” of the closet, and the spatial metaphor of “coming out” is central. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick plainly submits that “The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (71).

Chauncey and Delany are discussing, at least in part, the role of queer spaces for establishing, mobilizing, and supporting different gender regimes—and this makes queer spaces, I would argue, potentially utopian. Delany’s gay institutions are not only places of pleasure, but different gender regimes found within the dominant gender order. Delany therefore describes how queer spaces can exist within a heterocentric society. The significance of this discussion of gendered (queer) spaces is twofold: first, it indicates how Capote’s *Answered Prayers* could itself act as a queer space within the heteronormative field of *Esquire*; next, it explains how Capote can depict queer masculinity existing within the larger gender order but without the fear of marginalization and domination, since his queer characters, ensconced in high society, exist in a kind of queer space, though the queerness of that space is limited. The term “queer space” is pertinent because it describes how different social spaces can create different gender regimes, regimes that can exist within the dominant gender order and alongside other gender regimes, and how the creation of such spaces can be potentially disruptive and transformative of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. This is why I argue that, although such space, within the diegesis of the text, is certainly not political, extra-diegetically the space is potentially utopian, in the sense of utopia as “a critique of a present order, and of the overarching dictate of how things are and will always be in an unyielding status quo” (Muñoz 133). If, as I argue last chapter, Carver’s characters are trapped because they see the world with “commodifying eyes,” then the importance of queer spaces is that their existence can potentially allow for a new way of “seeing” or negotiating one’s own relationship within the dominant gender order. Capote’s place-



making practices therefore mobilize different gender regimes, within which different, and perhaps even subversive or utopian, versions of masculinity can exist.

Occasionally, queer spaces could be found within the pages of *Esquire*. Perhaps the most obviously queer content in *Esquire* in the early part of the decade was Oliver Evans' "A Pleasant Evening with Yukio Mishima" in the May 1972 issue. True to its title, the article describes an evening that the author spent with American playwright Tennessee Williams and Japanese author (and actual "crypto fascist") Yukio Mishima, both of whom are implicitly identified by Evans as gay (among other things, he refers to both authors as having "an indifference to orthodox sexual morality" [130]). In a straightforward manner, Evans describes how Williams and Mishima met at a party for swingers at Williams' "West Side pad" in New York, around 1956-57; additionally, Mishima compares himself to Gore Vidal, and discusses Capote ("I don't like his mannerisms, the image he creates for himself. The effeminacy is disgusting") (174, 177). More striking, though, are the accompanying black and white photographs, taken by Kishin Shinoyama and depicting the physically sculpted Mishima posing either nude or semi-nude. In one picture (127), Mishima reclines on a Honda motorcycle, wearing only leather boots and gloves, black underwear, and goggles and a helmet for riding. Another (131) supposedly depicts death by drowning, and involves a naked, supine Mishima lying alluringly on a rock out in the water, in a pose (because of its context) reminiscent of the pin-up girls (the Petty Girls, the Varga Girls) of the magazine's early years.

I draw attention to the overt discussion of homosexuality in the article, and the obvious homoeroticism of the accompanying photographs, to address how the magazine staged queerness, and to further draw parallels with Capote's later publications in

*Esquire*. In “A Pleasant Evening with Yukio Mishima,” queerness reigns; however, even though heteronormativity is almost banished from the text, concepts of hegemonic masculinity (other than sexuality) still govern Mishima’s thinking (“The effeminacy is disgusting”). The article creates a kind of butch queer space within the heteronormative space of the magazine. Furthermore, the queerness of the article threatens to overstep its borders, because the eroticism of the Mishima pictures might trouble the male gaze: advertisements such as those for Healthknit Men and Boys underwear (14) or h.i.s. (72-73), which depict men in various stages of undress, find the implicit homoeroticism in any appreciation of the masculine form suddenly made explicit by the Mishima pictures and the article.

Here I use the term “male gaze” in much the same way as Laura Mulvey does in her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” though because of the different medium this requires some explanation. For Mulvey, there are “two aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking”: scopophilia and identification. The first is the “pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight”; the second is based on the “spectator’s fascination” with the image of the male protagonist “and recognition of his like” (435). Schematically, when the male spectator views the female actress, he looks at her through the first structure; when he views the male protagonist, he looks at him through the second. This is because, as Mulvey explains, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (436). The magazine relies on this kind of identification—the male reader sees other men consuming goods and living a supposedly desirable lifestyle, recognizes his like, and so desires those goods and that lifestyle.

Scopophilia is restricted to images of women. However, Mishima's erotic pose troubles this distinction, and does so largely by subverting the active/male, passive/female binary. As Richard Dyer has argued, male pin-ups are traditionally presented as active to avoid passive effeminacy (67). This is even true of the model in the aforementioned Healthknit Men and Boys underwear ad, who, though modeling underwear, is speaking on the phone, *actively* doing something, not passively being photographed. Recumbent on the flat rock, his well-muscled form splayed out luxuriantly, Mishima embodies passivity and the "to-be-looked-at-ness" which Mulvey finds characteristic of the female figure in film, and which "plays to and signifies male desire" (436).

The blatant homoeroticism of this image, I would argue, threatens to force men to renegotiate their gaze, since queer representations contain "the capacity to disturb stable definitions" (Evans and Gamman 47). As Lynne Segal further explains,

Because the affirmation of homosexuality is the affirmation of sexual desire, it inevitably symbolizes opposition to repressive sexual norms. Because the affirmation of homosexuality is outside the institution of the monogamous heterosexual family, it inevitably symbolizes the possibility of real alternatives to that institution, the possibilities of new types of community and morality which challenge patriarchal family ideology. (156)

The homoerotic images of Mishima are therefore potentially subversive. In a way, the image of Mishima is a queer space within the magazine, one which exposes queerness as a potentiality implicit in *all* of the magazine's images, but which typically was exploited only by queer readers (such as queer uses of "muscle magazines"). In other words, the "heterosexual" space of *Esquire* is such only because it does not announce the potential

for a queer enjoyment of its aestheticizing of men, but the Mishima photographs foreground such a reading. For example, in this particular case, the relationship between the reader and the images of men changes from one of comparison and competition (as with the athlete's bodies) to one of pleasure and eroticism (as with the images of Mishima). Other relationships between the reader and the text threaten to be similarly troubled, resulting in a queer "hermeneutics of suspicion," which as Lee Edelman argues, involves the suspicion of "the potential permeability of every sexual signifier" (7).

*Answered Prayers*—another queer space—threatens to do much the same.

## 2. *Answered Prayers* as Queer Text

Queer spaces are central to *Answered Prayers*: no matter how separate from the gender order, such spaces nonetheless have broader implications on current formulations of hegemonic masculinity. Though much ink has been spilled about the controversial reception of "La Côte Basque, 1965" and its effects on Capote's standing among the jet-set crowd, little has been written in the way of a criticism on *Answered Prayers* itself.<sup>96</sup>

Just as *Answered Prayers* is queer because of its open play with gender, so too is it "queer" (as in, nonnormative) because of its indeterminate position as a work of fiction.

The novel troubles the line between truth and illusion: for instance, the magazine version

---

<sup>96</sup> Even Capote scholars find little productive to say about it; Robert Eisenauer describes *Answered Prayers* as "a sort of temple or paean dedicated to the expensive hankerings, stupidities, and sexual hangups of an epoch now as culturally distant as the Belle Époque of Proust" (16). William Todd Schultz, in a book dedicated to explaining Capote's motivation for writing the novel, says only that "*Answered Prayers* was an exceedingly bitchy, nasty, corrosive work, with no precursors in Capote's oeuvre," (109) while Christopher Bram dismisses it as "a pornographic fantasy on literary and society life" (158). Only Edward O'Neill has extensively analyzed the text, and his queer critique is largely confined to an anecdote about Tallulah Bankhead recounted in the novel (which will be discussed below). Most reactions have therefore focused on the work's scandal, without analyzing the degree to which that scandal was set off by a work which is not only gossipy, but queer.

of “Unspoiled Monsters” does much to reinforce the connection between Capote and P. B. Jones, author and narrator. As previously mentioned, the first page of the story makes Capote’s picture central: when a magazine reader encounters the “I” of the narrator the presence of Capote’s image on the page facilitates an increased association between the two. Capote himself simultaneously encouraged and troubled this association, writing in the preface to *Music for Chameleons* that in *Answered Prayers* “the plot—or plots—was true, and all the characters were real: it wasn’t really difficult to keep it all in mind, for I hadn’t invented anything. And yet *Answered Prayers* is not intended as any ordinary roman à clef, a form where facts are disguised as fiction. My intentions are the reverse: to remove disguises, not manufacture them” (xvi). Here, Capote describes himself as a reporter, in much the same way that Jones does within “Unspoiled Monsters” (4), but immediately complicates things by claiming that *Answered Prayers* will “remove disguises.”<sup>97</sup> And so the relationship between author and narrator is actually reversed: Capote is, by his own logic, Jones’s disguise.

Not that a work blending fiction and fact was unheralded within the pages of the magazine; after all, *Esquire* is one of the homes of the New Journalism. However, the significant difference is that while New Journalism applied literary technique and sensibility to ostensibly factual reportage, Capote’s roman à clef continuously and self-consciously draws attention to its indeterminate relationship with the truth. While the close relationship between Capote and Jones helps to establish a certain “truth” to the story (as in the notion that Jones, as a stand-in for a real person, is transmitting real details of the lives of the jet set), it is simultaneously Jones’ role as an author which

---

<sup>97</sup> Page numbers for *Answered Prayers* refer to the collected edition, unless otherwise noted.

foregrounds the work's factual instability. For instance, Jones reveals himself to be the author of not one, but two works entitled *Answered Prayers*. The first is a collection of short stories, the theme of which "is of people achieving a desperate aim only to have it rebound on them—accentuating, and accelerating, their desperation" (18). This description fits Capote's *Answered Prayers* equally. It is the short story collection that makes a name for Jones, and establishes him in high society. The parallel works further the connection between Capote and Jones—both are authors of *Answered Prayers*—while problematizing the claims to truth made by the roman à clef, since the reader is being explicitly told that at least one *Answered Prayers* is definitely fictional.

Furthermore, Jones admits that his *Answered Prayers* was prepared and "groomed" by his literary mentor (and lover), Alice Lee Langman (18), calling the book's authorship into question.

Jones also alludes to a second book, an unfinished novel, which will also be called *Answered Prayers*. This one sounds even more like Capote's novel, as it is to include "Kate McCloud, and gang" (40). Capote's *Answered Prayers* literally includes Kate McCloud, both as a character and a chapter, and, focusing as it does on high society, certainly includes her "gang." When pressed, however, Jones admits that the real focus of his new novel will be "Truth as illusion" (40). The discussion of Jones' new novel is brought on by a reverie:

"Because something is true doesn't mean that it's convincing, either in life or in art. Think of Proust. Would *Remembrance* have the ring that it does if he had made it historically literal, if he hadn't transposed sexes, altered events and identities? If he had been absolutely factual, it would have been less

believable, but”—this was a thought I’d often had—“it might have been better. Less acceptable, but better.” I decided on another drink, after all. “That’s the question: is truth an illusion, or is illusion truth, or are they essentially the same? Myself, I don’t care what anybody says about me as long as it isn’t true.” (39-40)

Jones’ question, “or are they essentially the same,” cuts to the heart of what I am calling the queerness of his text, that is, its deliberate deconstruction of a hegemonic cultural binary, especially as it is connected to gender and sexual identity. This is not to say that Jones teases out all of the implications of his observation: his final statement (“I don’t care what anybody says about me as long as it isn’t true”) returns “truth” to its privileged position and situates Jones back in the binary. However, the novel can be seen to advance his theory beyond his own limited remarks.

Significantly, Jones attempts to explain his problem with the truth-illusion binary by giving a gendered example: “as truth is nonexistent, it can never be anything but illusion—but illusion, the by-product of revealing artifice, can reach the summits nearer the unobtainable peak of Perfect Truth. For example, female impersonators. The impersonator is in fact a man (truth), until he re-creates himself as a woman (illusion)—and of the two, the illusion is the truer” (41). Here, Jones inverts a normative gender binary in what is the first step of a Butlerian gender deconstruction (Butler 313). For example, Edward O’Neill provides a queer reading of this passage, one the work invites, insisting that what Jones is describing is not a simple reversal of a stable binary (truth/fiction), but its deconstruction (317). Jones’ continual reinscription of the original binary points to heterosexuality’s “compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only

produce the effect of its own originality,” revealing what Judith Butler refers to as “heterosexuality as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization” (313, 314).

Jones’ example of the female impersonator designates where this deconstructive impulse is most thoroughly directed in the novel, to the binaries governing gender and sexuality: male/female, gay/straight. This focus can be seen in how Capote tellingly returns to the notion of the “female impersonator” or the drag-queen, to whom he compares none other than Jackie Kennedy: “that is how she struck me—not as a bona fide woman, but as an artful female impersonator impersonating Mrs. Kennedy” (127). Here, Jones undermines one of the era’s primary examples of emphasized femininity.<sup>98</sup> This principle example of “what women should be” and “what men desire” is described here not as feminine, but effeminate. The difference, as Jeff Solomon has noted in his analysis of portraits of Capote, is significant, since “effeminate is derivative of, but not, a woman” (301). In other words, something is effeminate if it is feminine, but not located within the woman. This is why typically men can be termed effeminate, but women cannot.<sup>99</sup> This description of Jackie Kennedy therefore draws attention to gender as performative, in the ways theorized by Judith Butler and subsequent queer theorists.<sup>100</sup> Jackie Kennedy’s femininity is something that can be performed by drag-queens, as Jones describes (127), but is equally something performed by Kennedy herself, demonstrating

---

<sup>98</sup> See Connell, *Gender and Power* (187-8).

<sup>99</sup> Notably, the counterpart to “effeminate,” “emasculate,” is only used as a verb. Both refer to men. One would not refer to a woman’s behavior as “emasculate.”

<sup>100</sup> For example, scholars cited in this essay who are influenced by and build on Butler’s theory include: Sedgwick; Halberstam; Muñoz.



that gender itself may be no more than a citational performance of established cultural practices.<sup>101</sup>

*Answered Prayers* thus unsettles stable conceptions of gender, conceptions upon which hegemonic masculinity relies. The novel also destabilizes parallel conceptions of truth and fiction, also important to the dominant gender order, at least to the degree that masculine domination is predicated on passing off the fictional (symbolic) superiority of masculinity as a true, “natural” superiority. The novel therefore deconstructs both stable categories and creates a queer space in the process. The “factuality” of the novel’s so-called reporting is as indeterminate as the gender of its characters. This indeterminacy creates a field in which hegemonic conceptions are troubled: just as one cannot assume that the novel’s characters will be heterosexual unless otherwise noted, as would be the case in most mainstream fiction, so too one cannot safely categorize the work as either fact or fiction.

The most significant effect of this unsettled hegemonic masculinity in *Answered Prayers* is the almost total lack of masculine anxiety, homosexual panic, and fears of emasculation (and consequent violence) which marks the other works in this study. The novel’s narrator, P.B. Jones, is bisexual: though he announces some opposite-sex desire, especially for Kate McCloud, he is most often associated with same-sex desire, declaring, “Ho ho! Starting at an early age, seven or eight or thereabouts, I’d run the gamut with many an older boy and several priests and also a handsome Negro gardener. In fact, I was a kind of Hershey Bar whore—there wasn’t much I wouldn’t do for a nickel’s worth of

---

<sup>101</sup> This interpretation is further supported by O’Neill’s reading of an anecdote, included in *Answered Prayers*, involving the rather drunken congregation of Montgomery Clift, Dorothy Parker, and Tallulah Bankhead. See O’Neill 318-321.

chocolate” (5).<sup>102</sup> More to the point, once he is no longer a member of high society, he hires himself out as a gigolo for an almost exclusively male clientele. As a queer man, Jones’ freedom from fear and oppression is atypical of the other texts published in *Esquire*. When Connell discusses the process of subordination between groups of men, her primary example involves homosexual men. Stating that hegemonic masculinities and institutions oppress homosexual masculinities, she argues that the viciousness of homophobic attacks is the result of gayness’s association with femininity, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity (*Masculinities* 78). Furthermore, Michael Kimmel argues—in agreement with Sedgwick—that “Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood” (95). The centrality of homophobia to American masculinity is obvious in Mailer’s *An American Dream*, wherein the insinuation of homosexuality resulted in Rojack’s violent chauvinist outbursts; however, in *Answered Prayers* Jones is never ill at ease with himself or his masculinity. Perhaps this is simply because Jones has accepted his sexual identity, while Rojack has not; even were this the case, though, some anxiety would still be expected, as long as Jones exists within the larger gender order.

Instructively, Brian Mitchell-Peters identifies this lack of homosexual panic as characteristic of Capote’s earlier work, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (109). Furthermore, Mitchell-Peters argues that this absence of homosexual panic is possible only because of the text’s creation of a queer space, what he calls a “fantasy locale” which moves the text from “dismal realities” to “the world of queer acknowledgement and arguable

---

<sup>102</sup> Jones’ fetishization of black masculinity is reminiscent of Rojack’s (and Mailer’s) in *An American Dream*; here, though, the homoeroticism is blatant, not latent. As discussed in the third chapter of this study, Baldwin saw such white sexualisation of African American masculinity as the root of racism. See also footnote 21, this chapter.

homosexual awakenings” (108). Mitchell-Peters therefore suggests a way to read high society in *Answered Prayers* as a queer space—not a physical space, like Skully’s Landing in *Other Voices*, but a social space, one that is not limited by geography but, as shall be discussed below, delimited by race and economic status. Jones therefore challenges the marginalization of queer masculinities, but is only authorized to do so because of his position within a queer social space.

It may seem somewhat counter-intuitive to refer to high society as a queer (social) space, no matter how qualified that label is, especially since Halberstam clearly identifies queer spaces as places for the formation of “counterpublics.” However, while the jet-set are socially placed firmly within the existing economic order, they nonetheless, as depicted by Capote, trouble the dominant gender order. High society is one variation on queer space; a queerer space, Father Flanagan’s Nigger Queen Café, will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

What I am calling the queer space of high society is, according to *Answered Prayers*, fixated on sex, a subject which Capote had not previously focused on (Schultz 110). Not only is the narrator a gigolo, but also every character seems to be embroiled in non-normative sex, and many, if not most, of the characters display non-normative gender identities or features. A list of non-normative sex acts in *Answered Prayers* would include (but not be limited to) masturbation, pedophilia, incest, rape, bestiality, and urolangia, not to mention the repeated focus on infidelity which, while usually heterosexual, still counters patriarchy and the family unit as a normative social unit. Similarly, a list of non-normative gender features, identities, and behaviours would

include homosexuality, androgyny, transvestism, cross-dressing, and prostitution.<sup>103</sup>

These characteristics contribute to an understanding of high society as a “queer space” to the extent that they subvert heteronormativity, the naturalization and taken-for-grantedness of heterosexuality. Instead, when characters are encountered in a queer space, there can be no concept of normalized sexuality and gender. The chapters of *Answered Prayers* that appeared in *Esquire* are rife with these practices and identities, and this queer content, located within the pages of the heteronormative magazine, creates a kind of queer space.

The queerness of high society can be located throughout the text, but is best symbolized by the island of Spetsopoula, which appears in “Yachts and Things.” In November 2012, *Vanity Fair* published a fragment of this incomplete chapter of Capote’s unfinished novel. The newly discovered fragment provides a compressed picture of some of the concerns of the existent novel: like the rest of *Answered Prayers*, it focuses on high society, the jet-set, the fabulously wealthy. Taking place on and off the shores of Spetsopoula, the real-life private island of oil magnate Stavros Niarchos, “Yachts and Things” depicts a world of decadence. The narrator, Jones, describes Spetsopoula in telling terms: “the island, naturally dry and unfertile, imports its own water by tanker; it has been turned into a place as flowered and green as a Rousseau forest . . . It was a bit artificial, even sinister, but nevertheless a work of art, nature tamed and reconstructed by sensibilities of a unique sort” (2). The art and artificiality of the island are paradigmatic of the adornment and materialism of the jet-set crowd. Similarly, Capote’s text is littered

---

<sup>103</sup> See, e.g.: masturbation (16), pedophilia (5), incest (15), rape (128), bestiality (49), urolagnia (105), homosexuality (passim), androgyny (13), transvestism (13), cross-dressing (127), and prostitution (passim). This is only a list of examples, and is not definitive.

with designer items and the names of expensive restaurants and hotels. The reference to “Verdura cuff links, classic Paul Flato cigarette cases, the obligatory Cartier watch” in “Mojave” (267) is relatively restrained when compared to the absolute saturation of such markers of a decadent lifestyle in *Answered Prayers*, in which on one page alone a reader will find references to Pernod, Deux Magots, the Ritz, Boeuf-sur-le-Toit, Brasserie Lipp, and Gauloises bleu (26). These symbols of excess clearly delineate the social space of the text.

Just as significantly, the infertility of the island takes on symbolic importance when read within the rest of *Answered Prayers*, wherein infertility and non-reproductive sex are a recurring motif. This theme first shows up in “Mojave,” the first-published but ultimately excised chapter of the novel. The story—intended to have been an example of Jones’ own writing, according to Capote (Fox 30)—focused on a narrator incapable of having sex with her husband after the birth of their second child. “Mojave” depicts childbirth as a dangerous enterprise:

The child had been born two months prematurely, had nearly died, and because of massive internal hemorrhaging, so had she; they had both hovered above an abyss through months of intensive care. Since then, she had never shared a bed with her husband; she wanted to, but she couldn’t, for the naked presence of him, the thought of his body inside hers, summoned intolerable terrors. (272)

Procreative sex and reproduction become a looming threat, echoed in the narrative by the story of Jaime, the narrator’s homosexual hairdresser. During an appointment, Jaime describes how his lover, Carlos, wants to have children with Jamie’s sister, Angelita

(268-69). Jaime's sense of betrayal is compounded by Carlos's desire to have children: he announces, "I'm going to kill Carlos ... There's no use talking anymore. He understands nothing. My words mean nothing. The only way I can communicate with him is to kill him. Then he will understand" (268-69). However, while within the dominant gender order (i.e. patriarchy) infertility is often read as symbolic of moral or ethical bankruptcy, within a queer gender regime the turn to nonreproductive sex opens up a realm of nonnormative pleasure and a potential counter-hegemonic discourse.

Indeed, just as procreative sex is all but occluded from high society, so too is heterosexuality often associated with violence. Jones' first heterosexual love affair, between himself and Miss Langman (a stand-in for Katherine Anne Porter), is presented as a ruthless business arrangement, and is marked by moments of violence. For instance, Jones describes Langman speaking in "such a whimper-simper stupid-touching way you wanted to knock out her teeth but maybe kiss her, too" (17). Other heterosexual couplings result in even more explicit violence. For example, Lady Ina Coolbirth coolly reveals to Jones that Joe Kennedy raped her when she was eighteen (128), Axel Jaeger is thought to want to murder his wife, Kate McCloud (112), and a lengthy anecdote involves Ann Hopkins' murder of her husband (130-6). This excessive heterosexual violence is reminiscent of Mailer's *An American Dream*—there, too, violence was a marker of the instability of heteronormativity. However, limited as it was to Rojack's masculine perspective, especially in the revised version, that novel ultimately (and problematically) saw generative heterosexual sex as regenerative to Rojack's masculinity. Similarly, in *Answered Prayers*, the association between heterosexuality and violence can be seen as a

critique of patriarchy—these are instances of the dominant gender order manifesting itself in the queer space of high society, with terrible consequences.

Of course, the queer space of high society has stark and imposing borders, and it is here that the violence of patriarchy is most highly visible. While queerness of sexuality and gender is permitted to enter high society, it remains a closed, racist space. Only whiteness is permitted,<sup>104</sup> and racism is bandied about so often and so casually that it performs a kind of policing function in that the saturation of racist language implies a normalization of whiteness and a hostility to other races. A few examples of virulent racism include the racist description of Jones' dog (64), Harry McCloud's mother's outburst (76), and Harry Cohn's message to Sammy Davis Jr. (118). These most egregious examples are not often of events that occurred within the queer space of high society; rather, they are only spoken of, but their open rehearsal points to the homogenous racial makeup of the space.

This racial divide can be seen even more clearly in those spaces where racial minorities are visible: the streets. The chapter "Kate McCloud" begins with a description of Eighth Avenue, featuring a social makeup diametrically opposed to that of high society: "Prostitutes, blacks, Puerto Ricans, a few whites, and indeed all strata of street-people society—the luxurious Latin pimps (one wearing a white mink hat and a diamond bracelet), the heroin-nodders nodding in doorways, the male hustlers, among the boldest of them gypsy boys and Puerto Ricans and runaway hillbilly rednecks no more than

---

<sup>104</sup> One exception to this rule is Porfirio Rubirosa, the Dominican Ambassador. Rubirosa is also mentioned by Norman Mailer in the *Esquire* version of *An American Dream*, and in *Answered Prayers* is referred to as a "quadroon." In keeping with Baldwin's claim (examined in chapter three) that in America, to be a black male is "also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol" (290), mention of Rubirosa's racial identity is accompanied by a detailed discussion of his penis (*Answered* 21). However, Rubirosa's inclusion in the jet-set can be explained by his whiteness as well as his wealth.

fourteen and fifteen years old” (83-4). Jones, speaking in his own voice and not recounting high-society gossip, uses racialized descriptions, but the racist hostility is lessened. This “street-people society” is exactly what high society polices its borders against, and not surprisingly, then, they are described as a kind of detritus.

Significantly, Jones does speak up for the society of the street. When a preacher berates the denizens of Eighth Avenue, Jones finds himself coming to their defense: “‘I’m no better than they are. And you are no better than I am. We’re all the same person.’ And suddenly I realized the voice was mine, and I thought boyoboy, Jesus, kid, you’re losing your marbles, your brains are running out of your ears” (85). Jones’ justification for speaking up, declaring that “We’re all the same person,” might sound false, but when he goes on to reveal that these words slipped out, that this was an unconscious utterance, it discloses his identification with the poor and the marginalized, and speaks to the longing for a utopian space outside of the constraints of the dominant gender order, a longing embodied in Denham Fouts’ fantasy of Father Flanagan’s Nigger Queen Café (28). This longing highlights the insufficiency of high society as a queer space, its inability to fully extricate itself from the patriarchal gender order, and perhaps even its insufficiency as a space for the production of a queer counterpublic. The economic homogeneity of high society makes it especially problematic as a queer space, especially considering that one of Delany’s major interests is how queer spaces allow for challenges to class policing, in so far as they become a site of class mingling, rather than separation. Access to high society is simply too limited, and this points to the fact that while it provides a space which unsettles heteronormativity, it remains firmly ensconced within the dominant gender order, and is therefore limited in its capacity to challenge



patriarchal institutions. The desire to escape this gender order motivates the creation of queer spaces within the text. Since access to the queer space of high society is highly limited, queer characters need to come up with a strategy for penetrating its borders, and the principle way this is achieved is through the process of reification.

### **3. Fugitives from the Gender Order: Best-Kept Boys and Queer Utopias**

Denham Fouts, P.B. Jones, Aces Nelson—none of them are born wealthy, none are “natural” members of the jet-set, and yet each has reached the apex of high society. To do so, each has, to a certain degree, made himself into an object of sexual pleasure. This is true when Fouts is described as “Best-Kept Boy in the World,” and when Nelson is described as “a friend of the rich,” both of which describe Jones’ role in the jet-set before becoming a gigolo. The roles of the three men, when members of the jet-set, are best described by Jay Hazelwood, who, speaking of Nelson, declares that “He’s sweating for his supper ... Keeping the Geritols happy in their oceangoing salons. That’s how he makes his walking-around money. The rest of it comes from pumping broads of various ages and hungers—rich quim with husbands that don’t give a damn who does them as long as they don’t have to” (62). Tellingly, she further uses racist language to describe this sort of labour, claiming that “Being a friend of the rich, making a living out of it, one day of that is harder than a month’s worth of twenty niggers working on a chain gang” (62). Here, Hazelwood clearly indicates how one from the lower classes can enter high society while also starkly declaring the limits of such mobility. A man can enter high society if he turns himself into an object, and if his labours are not menial but pleasurable; however, this possibility is specifically limited to white men. (Importantly,

what these figures lack in actual capital, they tend to make up in cultural capital: Jones is a short story writer, Fouts and Nelson are exceedingly well-travelled and capable, as the above description implies, of hobnobbing with the elite.)

Recently, queer scholars Kevin Floyd and José Muñoz have turned to the work of Herbert Marcuse to describe alternatives to the patriarchal gender order. Both Floyd's focus on reification and Muñoz's discussion of queer utopianism are informed by Marcuse's cultural analysis, and both topics are central to the type of queer critique of hegemonic masculinity at work in *Answered Prayers*. Marcuse's work largely focuses on reconceptualising psychoanalysis, and so much of his scholarship resides outside of the framework for this study; however, in "The Affirmative Character of Culture," Marcuse does comment on reification. Importantly, Marcuse finds the possibility of liberation in the concept of reification, but only at the stage of the absolute reification of the body, by which he means the marketing of the body as a source of pleasure, stating that such a form of reification is only held in contempt by members of the larger gender order (though he does not use this term—Marcuse talks more generally of the "performance principle," the rationalization of culture) because it represents an alternative to the procreative, familial forms of sexuality upon which capitalist culture is based (116).<sup>105</sup> Marcuse's argument is that bourgeois society regulates sexuality, attempting to shape society's sexuality into the best formulation for advanced capitalism. Bourgeois society and capitalism are therefore intimately connected to patriarchy, and founded on what Marcuse calls "genital supremacy." Resisting this bourgeois imperative, the proletariat can resist the dominant gender and economic orders.

---

<sup>105</sup> Floyd draws attention to, and discusses, this same section of Marcuse's essay (123-24).

As Floyd explains, Marcuse developed this line of thought further as his career progressed. Floyd points to a passage in Marcuse's most well-known work, *Eros and Civilization*, where Marcuse declares:

No longer used as a full-time instrument of labor, the body would be resexualized .... The body in its entirety would become an object of cathexis, a thing to be enjoyed—an instrument of pleasure. This change in the value and scope of libidinal relations would lead to a disintegration of the institutions in which the private interpersonal relations have been organized, particularly the monogamic and patriarchal family. (201)

Marcuse's description of "The body in its entirety" as "an instrument of pleasure" describes, to a certain extent, the ways Jones, Fouts, and Nelson can be viewed as resistant figures, returning us to the discussion of the photographs of Yukio Mishima. Their "resexualized" bodies, like the pictures of Mishima, symbolize "the possibilities of new types of community and morality which challenge patriarchal family ideology" (Segal 156).

Marcuse's criticism is relevant to the extent that it draws a clear connection between economic domination and masculine domination, a connection borne out by Capote. Capote's high society is a social space outside of economic domination, and so is a space relatively free of masculine domination. Fouts, Nelson, and Jones can be seen "triumphing" over reification, or at least its most detrimental effects, precisely because they have suffered "the most extreme reification," by turning themselves into "beautiful things," objects of exchange.

The menagerie of marginalized individuals found in the description of Eighth Avenue (83-4) demonstrates how the mobility of these reified individuals is still limited to race and cultural (if not economic) class. Barred entrance to high society, members of “street-people society” remain taboo objects, and are thus marginalized to the violent streets and largely denied the “new happiness” foretold by Marcuse; instead, the streets and theatres are depicted as a kind of hell, where “leather-boys” urinate on transvestite prostitutes and septuagenarian “wrecked whores” offer oral sex for a dollar (84, 85). In comparison, Jones, Nelson, and Fouts live in a world of material excess and physical pleasure, though while access to this kind of happiness might be new for these individuals, it is hardly the “new happiness” Marcuse seems to prescribe.

Importantly, then, this rent-boy reification is not part of a revolutionary change. This is not reification as praxis, but as individual social mobility. Either Marcuse vastly underestimates the power vested in the overall economic and gender order or his theory of beautiful things is predicated on revolutionary, communal action; otherwise, the result is, as with Jones, individual and largely incapable of producing a counter-patriarchal discourse. *Answered Prayers* may therefore be read as a critique of the gender order, or perhaps more fittingly the libidinal economy. The equation that roughly parallels the economic system to patriarchy, and which orders gender accordingly, reveals a grossly unequal and illegitimate system. What is desired, Capote reveals, is a queer enclave, a utopian space, within the borders of which the specter of hegemonic masculinity and masculine domination cannot be found.

As described by the “Best-Kept Boy in the World” (20), Denham Fouts, Father Flanagan’s Nigger Queen Kosher Café is just such a queer enclave, a grotesque Promised Land which haunts *Answered Prayers* and its characters:

Tell me, boy, have you ever heard of Father Flanagan's Nigger Queen Kosher Café? Sound familiar? You betcher balls. Even if you never heard of it and maybe think it's some after-hours Harlem dump, even so, you know it by *some* name, and of course you know what it is and where it is ... There it is: right where they throw you off at the end of the line. Just beyond the garbage dump. Watch your step: don't step on the severed head. Now knock. Knock knock. Father Flanagan's voice: 'Who sent ya?' Christ, for Christ's sake, ya dumb mick. Inside... it's... very... relaxing. Because there's not a winner in the crowd. All derelicts, especially those potbellied babies with fat numbered accounts at Crédit Suisse. So you can really unpin your hair, Cinderella. And admit that what we have here is the drop-off. What a relief! Just to throw in the cards, order a Coke, and take a spin around the floor with an old friend like say that *peachy* twelve-year-old Hollywood kid who pulled a Boy Scout knife and robbed me of my very beautiful oval-shaped Cartier watch. The Nigger Queen Kosher Café! The cool green, restful as the grave, rock bottom! That's why I drug: mere dry meditation isn't enough to get me there, keep me there, keep me there, hidden and happy with Father Flanagan and his Outcast of yids, nigs, spiks, fags, dykes, Thousands, him and all the other dope fiends, and commies. Happy to be down there where you belong: Yassah, massuh! Except—the price is too high, I'm killing myself. (28)

In the novel's fragments, its narrator, P. B. Jones, never reaches the Café, though he wishes he could “dash downstairs and find a bus, the Magic Mushroom Express, a chartered torpedo that would rocket me to the end of the line, zoom me all the way to that halcyon discotheque” (79). Alas, like the reader of *Answered Prayers*, Jones can never reach this promised end-point, but desires to do so.

Desire is central to queer spaces. Queer spaces are, according to Jean-Ulrick Désert, “desires that become solidified: a seduction of the reading of space where queerness, at a few brief points and for some fleeting moments, dominates the (heterocentric) norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape” (21). Such queer spaces are, according to Delany, one of the few social spaces that foster interclass relationships, in direct opposition to the largely intraclass space of high society (which is, as explained, delineated by class). Interclass relationships at the Café can be seen in Fouts’ dance with the “Hollywood kid,” or in the proximity of the “potbellied babies with fat numbered accounts at Crédit Suisse” and the “commies.” Delany’s argument is that the “stabilizing discourse” which supports the infrastructure—what I would call hegemonic discourse—finds interclass contact dangerous and undesirable (104). Patriarchy is largely defined by its hierarchization of the social: take, for instance, the way Connell’s taxonomy of masculinity organizes the gender order into masculinities that are hegemonic, complicit, or subordinated, and how this internal differentiation is always predicated on the domination of women by men. The type of queer space symbolized by the Café brings this high level of order into a high level of disorder.

While the outcasts of the Café have reached “rock bottom,” the Café-goers have nevertheless embraced their marginalization. On the one hand, with neoliberal

masculinity, the only kind of gender capital that can be “cashed in” is *actual* capital. On the other hand, the outcasts of the Café are “all derelicts” who are “happy to be down there where [they] belong.” Their dereliction, their marginality, is embraced: “yids, nigs, spiks, fags, dykes ... dope fiends, and commies” have given up on their patriarchal dividend, and have found “relief” in finding an exit from the realm of hegemonic masculinity. The Café outcasts therefore take part in the “Great Refusal” outlined by Marcuse, the refusal of what he calls “the performance principle,” or, for our purposes, a refusal of the gender order as “the rejection of normal love that keeps a repressive social order in place” (Muñoz 134). Additionally, the Café-goers differ from the street-people of Eighth Avenue precisely to the extent that they occupy a queer space, a place from which they can produce a queer counterpublic.

Father Flanagan’s Nigger Queen Kosher Café is therefore a type of queer utopian enclave, a space that exists within, but separate from, the dominant gender order. While it is not overtly stated, it seems to be a place exclusive to marginalized *masculinities* in particular—Fouts’ word choice, “You betcher balls,” is directed to Jones, but might imply that the Café outcasts are traditionally male; additionally, the only identifiably female group identified with the Café, “dykes”—that is, lesbians—might well be understood as representatives of female masculinity. Those who have been marginalized within the gender order find an equally marginalized space—beyond the garbage dumps, past the severed heads—wherein they can be “hidden and happy.” Even former enemies, such as Fouts and the Hollywood kid who once mugged him, can form new relationships, in this instance joining together in dance. The kid from Hollywood robbed Fouts of his Cartier watch, the type of lavish adornment typical of the high society Jones spends most

of his time with. In the queer enclave of the Café, there is no need for such outward signs of wealth, nor is there competition over goods. The implication is that without market competition, there is no sexual competition: a less aggressive, less toxic, and altogether different form of masculinity can gain dominance.

What both the social space of high society and the utopian enclave of the Café make clear is the almost complete interrelation between the economic and gender order. The realm of economic domination is the realm of masculine domination. Any form of non-hegemonic (i.e. marginalized, subordinate) masculine subject situated within the gender order can either be dominated or become himself a reified object (as is the case with Capote's Jones) and thus allow for a kind of upward social mobility.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Capote's *Answered Prayers* demonstrates the degree to which the economic and gender order are entwined, illustrating how a late capitalist gender order can structure sexuality by prohibiting some forms of sexuality and gender while allowing others free reign. Qualified sexual (and gender) freedom is available to those who can afford it, while absolute domination is all that is available to those who cannot. Capote's queer masculinities—usually subordinated and victimized within the dominant gender order—can avoid any feeling of emasculation or homophobia precisely because they can afford to. Those in the highest economic strata of society are therefore relatively free of patriarchal domination: if one is not at the mercy of the system of economic dominance, then one is less at the mercy of patriarchy. High society is therefore a type of queer social



space, though access to this space is severely limited by not only economic status, but also racial identity.

Whereas the effects of reification are potentially emasculating for an alienated masculine subject, Capote's protagonist is free, as Marcuse argues, precisely because he embraces reification to the furthest extent, turning his body into a marketable source of pleasure. However, it would be wrong to insist that P. B. Jones demonstrates the truth of Marcuse's claims: as long as he exists within the dominant gender order, he is limited to the extent that hegemonic masculinity is willing to authorize his social and sexual mobility.

Father Flanagan's Nigger Queen Café therefore represents a utopian desire to exist outside of the dominant gender order. I focus on the term "desire" because of the Café's always-deferred status: it is a place that Jones can never reach and, to the extent that a completed version of the manuscript has not yet been found, it remains a place that the reader can never access. Father Flanagan's Nigger Queen Café is a vestigial limb or a missing supplement, a sign of what is lacking from the gender order but which cannot be obtained. This desire for a queer space makes explicit the limits in the gender order which are implemented by the prohibitive nature of hegemonic masculinity.

Consequently, *Answered Prayers* highlights how *Esquire* itself similarly represents or contains possibilities for alternative configurations of masculinity, alternative gender practices. As the placement and promotion of *Answered Prayers*, Capote, and Mishima within its pages demonstrates, *Esquire* can offer a space for certain kinds of queer masculinities. As noted in the preceding chapter, the reification of masculinity felt by Carver's male characters suggests the potential for an increased

freedom from gender constraints; while Carver's characters have not the means to achieve this freedom, Capote's characters, and possibly *Esquire's* ideal readers, do.

Though I argue that *Answered Prayers* demonstrates the close relationship between the gender order and the economic order, and therefore the tight link between masculinity and wealth, it also demonstrates the 1970s as an era when queer masculinity gained increased cultural visibility and influence. This increased cultural influence is not merely an act of authorization, as Connell uses that term, by which she means that hegemonic masculinity will allow figures representing subordinated masculinity (her example is the black athlete) to be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity (to the extent that they demonstrate masculine superiority) while at the same time this practice "has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority" to the subordinated group (*Masculinities* 81). Rather, this authorization also reflects an increased cultural power for queer men generally.

This post-Stonewall era would mark a high point for queer masculinity's access to the patriarchal dividend. The 1980s would see the ascension of Ronald Reagan and a new cultural conservatism which would attempt to "remasculinize" American masculinity. The result would be a renewed marginalization of queer masculinity and a mobilization of conservative exemplars of masculinity. As we shall see in chapters six and seven, this attempt to re-establish a unified representative (white, heterosexual) masculinity paradoxically calls attention to the impossibility of doing so, and highlights instead hegemonic masculinity's fragmentation.

## Chapter VI

### Sexual Fallout in Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*

“Am I crazy?” The reader of Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age* is immediately confronted by this question, constituted, as it is, by the first three words of the novel. It does not take long for O'Brien to establish that the answer, regarding the narrator, William Cowling, is obviously “yes.” But the real question that dominates O'Brien's 1985 novel is not *if* William is crazy, but what has caused his madness. While William's troubled mental state is ostensibly a result of living under the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, the source of William's insanity is actually directly connected to his problematic relationship to masculinity. *The Nuclear Age* returns us to the discourse of masculinity in “crisis” which provided the context for Norman Mailer's *An American Dream*, but also delineates and criticizes the way cultural institutions mobilize culturally conservative ideologically charged symbols in an attempt to maintain patriarchy. William questions his sanity because he finds himself alienated from patriarchy: though a white, heterosexual male, he finds himself continually failing to demonstrate the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, and therefore fails to benefit from his privileged position within an unequal gendered hierarchy. He therefore represents what Connell calls a “complicit” form of masculinity: that is, William either does not, or fails to, practice hegemonic masculinity, yet he nonetheless expects his “patriarchal dividend.” Though he practices a number of masculinity projects—including as a fighter, a husband, and a father—he continually fails to achieve hegemony. The novel presents this problem as a contributing factor to his insanity, since William has been culturally indoctrinated to believe that masculine domination has been naturalized, and that as a man he has certain

rights and privileges that guarantee his dominant place in society, especially over women. Instead, his patriarchal authority is constantly threatened, resulting in his own feelings of obsession and paranoia. William's failures are felt most keenly because he attempts to activate patriarchal authority in the very ways that the Reagan era endorsed and authorized; in particular, he does so by attempting to practice a version of "cowboy" masculinity, and by trying to establish a patriarchal gender regime by practicing "civil defense."

My focus on masculinity in the novel is motivated, in part, by O'Brien's relationship with *Esquire* magazine. O'Brien was a frequent contributor to the magazine, especially in the 1980s, when he published two excerpts from *The Nuclear Age* and five short stories which would eventually make up the majority of his most well-known work, *The Things They Carried*.<sup>106</sup> In the 1980s, *Esquire*'s hegemonic masculinity project reflected the cultural politics of Reaganism, and what Scott Duguid calls that era's "addiction to masculinity." This is not to say that *Esquire* always endorsed Reagan's

---

<sup>106</sup> Much has been written about gender in O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. In particular, Lorrie Smith focuses on the stories in *The Things They Carried* originally published in *Esquire*, arguing that, "Read sequentially, these stories make up an increasingly misogynist narrative of masculine homosocial behavior under fire" (20). Smith's justification for discussing the stories in the context of *Esquire* is that "It seems more than coincidental that the stories that most deeply probe and most emphatically reassert masculinity should appear in this glossy, upscale men's magazine famous, as [Susan] Faludi puts it, for its 'screeds against women'" (23). The most engaging answer to Smith's criticism comes from Pamela Smiley, who argues that it is through his female characters that O'Brien "de-genders the war, constructs an ideal (female) reader, and re-defines American masculinity" (602). Smiley's argument would be complicated by contextualizing O'Brien's stories in *Esquire*, where the ideal reader is not female, but male. An analysis of *The Things They Carried*, contextualized in *Esquire*, could greatly add to our understanding of not only the homosocial construction of masculinity, but also the masculine construction of femininity. However, for the purposes of this study, I have chosen to focus on O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*, because of its focus on the domestic sphere and consumption, both of which are more relevant to *Esquire*'s hegemonic masculinity project.

For further analyses of gender in *The Things They Carried*, especially "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," originally published in *Esquire*, see, e.g.: E H Piedmont-Marton; Chris Vanderwees; Terry Martin and Margaret Stiner.

“Cold Warrior” masculinity<sup>107</sup>; rather, the magazine strategically endorsed or rejected these conservative notions of gender in an attempt to negotiate a hegemonic masculinity project for its white-collar, ideal readership. Significantly, though, *Esquire* demonstrates how cultural symbols were activated in the American gender order in the 1980s. Read in conversation with the magazine, *The Nuclear Age* dramatizes how two such conservative symbols were mobilized to reinforce patriarchy: the exemplary masculinity of the cowboy and the gendered space of the bomb shelter. These symbols recur throughout the novel, but dominate certain sections. The three sections of the novel (Fission, Fusion, Critical Mass) broadly delineate different eras of William’s life. Each section is divided into several chapters, many of which are entitled “Quantum Jumps.” These chapters depict William in the present of the novel, when, in 1995, he begins digging a hole in his backyard, presumably to construct a bomb shelter, a project that will accelerate the deterioration of his nuclear family. The other, variously titled chapters form an autobiography of William’s life, from childhood to parenthood. While the bomb shelter is present throughout the novel, the dominant image of the autobiographical chapters is the cowboy, while the shelter is foregrounded in the “Quantum Jumps” chapters. More importantly, the novel not only depicts the use of these symbols, but also criticizes them, demonstrating how the larger cultural discourses of the Cold War participate in an endless sheltering of heteronormative gender roles, roles perceived as always on the edge of destruction.

This is not to say that *The Nuclear Age* depicts the failure of patriarchy; rather, what the novel depicts is a historic moment during which the strategy used to renegotiate hegemonic masculinity is anachronistic and insufficient for the new social and economic

---

<sup>107</sup> See Suzanne Clark’s *Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West*, discussed below.

reality, and specifically for a white-collar gender regime. This failure to renegotiate gender relations in the 1980s does not result in an immediate threat to those in a position of actual hegemonic power: their position is far too entrenched. It does, however, result in a failure whereby non-hegemonic men—whether they represent subordinate, marginalized, or complicit masculinities<sup>108</sup>—find the basis of their relationship to patriarchal power disrupted at a discursive, cultural level. This disruption complicates the access to what Connell calls a patriarchal dividend. It is therefore not patriarchy itself—that is, the institutions which materialize patriarchy—that is immediately weakened, but the cultural discourse that naturalizes patriarchy. However, if the cultural discourse is weakened, then the social structure loses some of its ability to reproduce itself, and so is weakened in that regard. The result, in the case of O’Brien’s novel, is an idea of complicit masculinity which is unable to practice a single, unified configuration of gender, and instead is completely fragmented. In the case of O’Brien’s narrator, William, the result of this fragmented masculinity is paranoia, delusions, and obsession, which leads to a total undermining of his patriarchal authority. Since William is set up as a representative man of his age, and since, in Connell’s formulation, “complicit” masculinities make up the largest number of masculinities, the novel depicts William’s fragmented masculinity as symptomatic of the era.

While the cracks that appear in the façade of hegemonic masculinity do not completely undermine its structure, they do represent opportunities—or the beginnings of opportunities—for gender subversion and the materialization of a counter-patriarchal discourse. While these possibilities are not fully explored in the novel—and cannot be, since it is told by a masculine voice speaking from within the failing discourse of

---

<sup>108</sup> See, for a further explanation of these terms, Connell, *Masculinities* (76-86).

hegemonic masculinity—they are presented in a nascent form in the female characters in the novel, most promisingly in the figure of William’s daughter, Melinda. The last part of this chapter therefore focuses on the female characters in *The Nuclear Age*, characters who subvert Connell’s notion of “emphasized femininity” (*Gender & Power* 183). In doing so, they provide alternatives to the ideology of hegemonic masculinity responsible for William’s madness.

### **1. Cold War Discourse and Gender Trouble in *The Nuclear Age***

*The Nuclear Age* needs to be contextualized in the cultural (especially gendered) politics of Reaganism. This process requires a double focus, since the era mobilized a gendered, Cold War discourse, focalized in the 1950s and early 1960s, to undertake what Susan Jeffords has called the “remasculinization” of America. This hegemonic masculinity project was practiced so as to respond to America’s experience in Vietnam, and also as a response to the relatively queer-friendly decade of the 1970s. During this time, Reagan-era America returned to ideas of “Cold Warriors” and “civil defense” to reinforce strict gender roles and heterosexual patriarchy.

The Cold War discourse invoked by Reaganism might be thoroughly masculinist and heteronormative, but it is nonetheless paranoid and fraught with contradiction. Throughout the novel, William conflates gendered threats with nuclear threats in a manner paradigmatic of the discourse surrounding civil defense. Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound* remains the most comprehensive discussion of the ways Cold War culture attempted to retrench strict gender roles through an overvaluation of the nuclear family, as well as explicit antagonism towards alternative sexualities and sex outside of the family. For example, May discusses the fact that homosexuals were targeted during

the “Red Scare,” their attackers using the faulty logic that so-called “sexual degeneracy” was equivalent to moral weakness, and thus the “sexual degenerate” vulnerable to Communist influences (95). Alternative forms of sexuality were not only outside of the mainstream, but seen as potential dangers, if for no other reason than they could be blackmailed by the Soviets.<sup>109</sup> Their potential threat to heterosexual masculinity was re-encoded as a threat to national security.

Female sexuality was also depicted as threatening if not contained in monogamous, heterosexual, domestic relationships. As May points out, during the Cold War, sexually available single women were given the explosive label “bombshell” (106), reminding us that the hydrogen bomb dropped on the Bikini Islands had a picture of Rita Hayworth attached to it. Furthermore, the creator of the “bikini” swimsuit, which would become a standard uniform for “bombshells,” named his design after the infamous islands to suggest the swimwear’s “explosive potential” (107). Jacqueline Foertsch further elaborates on this issue, explaining that the so-called “bombshell” represents both the explosive power of the bomb and the “possibly fatal threat to men’s cultural centrality which she simultaneously ‘radiated’” (472). What May and Foertsch here demonstrate is that Cold War discourse conflated female sexuality with nuclear warfare. Female sexuality is therefore both an object of desire and of fear: if it can be harnessed (especially in the domestic sphere), then it can be a powerful tool for the defense of hegemonic masculinity (the Bikini Island tests were, after all, an act of offence figured as a defence of national security), but if female sexuality cannot be controlled, then it threatened to annihilate the American way of life.

---

<sup>109</sup> The targeting of homosexuals during the “Red Scare” is often referred to as the “Lavender Scare.” See David K. Johnson’s *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*.



The potential explosiveness of female sexuality, combined with the “Red Scare” distrust of queer sexuality, demonstrates how alternative forms of sexuality—alternative, specifically, to monogamous, married, heterosexual relationships—were therefore figured as threats to patriarchy, prompting a renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity. Patriarchal authority, embodied in the U. S. government, sought to use fears of nuclear war to label any potential counter-hegemonic gender configurations as dangers to the nation, thus shoring up patriarchy and ensuring its continued connection with military supremacy and national defence. Cold War discourse, then, saw the gendered landscape of America as primed to explode—good, clean heterosexual families, the backbone of patriarchy and the American way of life, were besieged by volatile single women and insidious queers.<sup>110</sup> Or so the supporters of civil defense would have us believe.

In *The Nuclear Age*, William lives out this drama of civil defense, and its associated gender panic. While William obsessively identifies the source of his fears as nuclear annihilation, it is clear that the threat William is unconsciously responding to is one to his masculinity in particular, and to patriarchy in general. In this way, William’s life is paradigmatic of the gendered Cold War discourse, which, in mobilizing a campaign of civil defense against nuclear threats, sought to retrench the nuclear family and reinforce the dominant position of white, heterosexual, complicit men in society—a gendered discourse which O’Brien holds up to ridicule through the use of parody.

O’Brien spends a good deal of time establishing a connection between William and the nuclear age itself, making him a paradigmatic example of complicit masculinity. William is a baby boomer, born in 1946, making him roughly the same age as the bomb.

---

<sup>110</sup> As May further explains, “To avoid dire consequences, men as well as women had to contain their sexuality in marriage, where masculine men would be in control with sexually submissive, competent homemakers at their side” (95)

His last name, “Cowling,” may sound like a play on “coward” or “cowering,” but as Mark Heberle notes, “cowling” was originally a term for the hood covering an airplane’s engine, and was extended in the nuclear age to refer to the outer canopy of a rocket engine (174). Not only is William connected to the bomb—the symbol of the age—but he also takes great pains to explain his own typicality, stating that he “carved out a comfortable slot for [himself] at the dead centre of the Bell-Shaped Curve.” His averageness is reinforced by his dress (“blue jeans and sneakers”), his batting average (“.270—not great, but respectable”) and his grades (“mostly B’s”) (O’Brien, *Nuclear Age* 34). Toby Herzog argues that even the chapters themselves further link William’s life to the age itself: the titles (for example, “Chain Reactions,” “First Strikes,” and “Escalations”) refer both to mankind’s progress toward a supposedly unavoidable nuclear apocalypse and the periods of William’s lifetime (130). William’s averageness, when considered alongside the novel’s era-defining title, adds a certain allegorical weight to his identity and actions. To put the allegory bluntly, the threats to which William responds are threats the whole age feels.

William begins the story of his life by recounting a formative event from his childhood, one which is illustrative of the subconscious connection he establishes between nuclear threats and sexual ones. Fearing nuclear annihilation, little William constructs a bomb shelter in his basement out of a Ping Pong table.<sup>111</sup> Confusing graphite for lead, William lines the top of his shelter with pencils in an attempt to stave off nuclear radiation. William overhears his father mocking his shelter, which is embarrassing enough, but his anger really rises when his mother joins in (21). Following this episode,

---

<sup>111</sup> In a fascinating dissection of Cold War nuclear discourse, Daniel Grausam discusses this episode as a paradigmatic example of how late 1950s and 1960s nuclear rhetoric frequently transformed nuclear war “into a rule-governed exchange (almost, in the end, a conversation) rather than the catastrophe that Cowling dreads” (509)

William skips school to read up on civil defense at the library, where a sexual drama unfolds. When a librarian, described as “all hips and breasts and brains” (23), approaches William, his reaction is specifically targeted: “As she bent down, one of her breasts accidentally pushed in against my neck” (22). Here, though, William’s sexual attraction is quickly confused with his desire for safety. William believes that, unlike his mother, the librarian takes civil defense seriously. His time with the librarian leads to embarrassment, though, when he breaks down crying, and his parents are called to pick him up. When William is taken away, he states that “I wanted to crawl into her lap and curl up for a long sleep, just the two of us, cuddling, that gentle hand on my knee. All I did, though, was sigh and take a last fond look at her chest, then I headed for the door” (24). Here, William’s sexual desire for the librarian is displaced by a desire for shelter—in the case, the shelter offered by a mother to her child, her breasts a symbol of maternal nurture. Commenting on this passage, Daniel Cordle rightly notes that William views women as both erotic and maternal (*States* 131). More specifically, the passage indicates an Oedipal confusion, in which he longs for a nurturing family/mother, but he also yearns for the power the father represents (hence his anger over hearing his parents laugh at his shelter). William’s confused sexual attraction and his embarrassment in front of the librarian leads him back into his homemade bomb shelter, which his father eventually convinces him to deconstruct so that they can play a few games of Ping Pong. As Susan Farrell notes, this part of the story ends by clearly associating William’s mental state with global nuclear politics (21),<sup>112</sup> with William claiming that “for the decade my dreams were clean and flashless. The world was stable. The balance of power held” (O’Brien, *Nuclear Age* 32).

---

<sup>112</sup> Farrell makes this comment when discussing the version of the chapter which was first published in *Esquire* as “Civil Defense.” The point, however, is equally applicable to the novel version.

William's mental state and world geopolitics are here shown to be intertwined, his (sexual) confusion a confusion of the era.

However, William's obsession with the bomb shelter is not solely the product of duck-and-cover lessons at school: Arthur Saltzman correctly notes that the nuclear threat William fears is predated by his sexual problems (19). The cause of his anxiety may be a much earlier injury to his penis, which he sustained through "an embarrassing bicycle accident" which, in his own words, left him with "a mangled pecker. A huge gash, and it hurt like crazy" (O'Brien, *Nuclear Age* 18-19). The damage to William's penis is permanent, since Dr. Crenshaw decides to stitch the injury without anesthetic, leaving stitches "like railroad ties." William asserts, "I've still got the scar on my pecker to prove it. Great big tread marks, as if I'd been sewn up by a blind man" (19). William's phallus, the symbolic centre of masculine authority, is irreparably marked at a young age, metaphorically denoting the problematic relationship he will have with masculinity throughout his adult life.

Perhaps William's originary trauma is the wounding of his "manhood"; perhaps it is his father's annual performance as Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn, with its requisite death and symbolic scalping (more on this below). In any event, William's nuclear anxiety is forever linked with sexual anxiety, in much the same way that his culture confuses the two, as Cordle notes ("In Dreams" 109). William reacts to threats against his masculinity as though they were nuclear threats against his safety, and he responds accordingly. First, he turns a Ping Pong table into a bomb shelter, since his parents do not provide the kind of comfort and safety he imagines the librarian offering, and also after his doctor symbolically castrates him by inadequately treating his "pecker." Later, William digs a massive hole in his backyard, ostensibly for shelter, after his

masculinity is threatened by his wife's infidelity. What William's behaviour displays, at the larger cultural level, is the degree to which the practice of civil defense is understood as inherently patriarchal and heteronormative. In other words, as a heterosexual white man, William has privileged access to this discourse, and when his masculine status is in question, he relies on this larger cultural discourse to reinforce, or at least protect what remains of, his patriarchal position.

Through the figure of William Cowling, *The Nuclear Age* demonstrates the effects of these conflated threats on complicit forms of masculinity, specifically one who is not, for most of his life, connected with actual hegemonic power, but who, as a straight, white male, nonetheless expects that the benefits of patriarchy should be available to him. When William's masculine authority is challenged, he falls back on these Cold War discourses to defend his position, but finds them inadequate to the task. William's story, then, demonstrates not only how hegemonic masculinity was renegotiated during the Reagan era, but also the failings of that renegotiation, and the effect that failing had on masculinity.

## 2. Cold Warriors and Cowboys: "Somewhere the Duke is Smiling"



Fig. 10. Cover of *Esquire*, April 1980, with John Wayne as an angelic cowboy;  
Esquire.com, n.d.; Web; 12 Jul. 2014.

If the bombshell was the figure of both the power and threat of American women's sexuality, then both the Cold War and the 1980s cultural return to the cowboy signal the attempt to posit a masculinity that can rein in—or corral, if you will—the power of that sexual energy. Kathleen Starck calls this dominant formulation of gender practice during the Cold War “realist masculinity” or (following Suzanne Clark) the “Cold Warrior.” Quoting Clark, Starck further argues that “Cold Warrior” masculinity relied on “the gendered mythology of an American West as the site of the hero, the warrior” (Clark 2, qtd. Starck 17). This follows Clark's claim that the Cold War mobilized discourses of the old West in order “to claim that there was and always had been only one real American identity” (2). During the early Cold War, then, figures such as John Wayne, most often associated with the role of the cowboy, became important exemplars of “Cold Warrior” masculinity.

In American culture in general, the cowboy is an especially poignant figure, a symbol of masculine hegemony. Kimmel summarizes the cowboy's key traits as including bravery, emotionlessness, and impeccable ethics, but more importantly he notes that the cowboy is characterized by his mission “to reassert natural law against those forces that would destroy it,” including, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, communism (*History* 94-5). This cowboy figure plays a prominent role in American popular culture, especially in Hollywood and in the White House: one need not have too long of a memory to remember the cowboy persona of George W. Bush, but both Ronald Reagan (discussed below) and John F. Kennedy (discussed next chapter) used cowboy and western imagery during their presidencies.

It is no wonder, then, that the cowboy is a recurring exemplar of masculinity held up to ridicule in *The Nuclear Age*. It is important to note that the cowboy, like all exemplars of masculinity, is a fantasy figure: while an “actual” person may be an exemplar—for example, Cary Grant—the actor is significant as an exemplar of masculinity only insofar as he is associated with a series of fictional, masculine roles. As such, these fantasy figures do not need to resemble actual men, hegemonic or otherwise. Indeed, their exemplary status need not resemble even their own lives: as Grant once stated, “Everyone wants to be Cary Grant. Even I want to be Cary Grant!” (qtd. in Preston). However, as exemplars of masculinity, they aid in the functioning of hegemonic masculinity by embodying a set of traits that seemingly exemplify the “naturalness” of men’s superiority to women in a naturalized gender hierarchy.

*Esquire* magazine’s ideal readership is comprised of white-collar professionals, and so Grant portrays a type of hegemonic masculinity that they might wish to emulate. The magazine therefore has a complicated relationship with more conservative, violent forms of masculinity, such as John Wayne. On the one hand, the magazine was quick to rely on traditional, conservative notions of masculinity; on the other, it might just as easily mock such a masculinity project. Bethan Benwell, analyzing more recent British “lad” magazines, finds a similar ambivalence between what he calls “a traditional masculinity within which attributes such as physicality, violence, autonomy and silence are celebrated” and “a more ironic, humorous, anti-heroic and self-depreciating masculinity” (151). Benwell’s conclusion is that the ideal reader “subtly oscillates” between these two roles. In much the same way, *Esquire* can sometimes embrace cowboy, “Cold Warrior” masculinity, or reject it, depending on the context and on what, at the time, would most benefit the magazine’s hegemonic masculinity project.

Consider the April 1980 issue (fig. 10): depicted on the cover is John Wayne, standing among the clouds and complete with cowboy hat and angel wings. The caption reads, “Somewhere the Duke is Smiling – A Guide to the New Hard-Line Culture.” The accompanying article by Peter W. Kaplan, described in the table of contents as “A tough guy guide to the new Hard Line” (3), offers a series of comparisons between the old “soft-line” and the new “hard-line” culture. This “hard/soft” dualism was a direct throwback to McCarthy-era political rhetoric: as K. A. Cuordileone has shown, Cold War culture “put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft, timid, feminine, and as such a real or potential threat to the security of the nation” (viii, also qtd. in Starck 16). According to the authors, the new “hard-line” was much like the old “hard –line”—thus the Duke’s posthumous smile. The article provides a wide range of examples: for instance, soft-line sex is identified as “foreplay,” while hard-line sex is identified as “making babies” (46); soft-line villains are multinationals, while hard-line villains are “Soviets, traitors, and flu carriers” (47); and the soft-line hero is identified as Alan Alda, specifically in his TV role as wise-cracking surgeon Hawkeye Pierce, while the hard-line is associated with Larry Hagman (45), in his TV role as J. R. Ewing, cowboy-hat-wearing oil baron. Each of these examples of hard-line masculinity is culturally conservative: sex is for procreation, not pleasure; villainy is not systemic, but individual; and heroes are, well, cowboys, not surgeons. If Wayne’s presumed blessing was not enough to underline which type of culture was dominant in the 1980s, then the obviously phallic terms used to differentiate the two—hard and soft—make the supposedly superior category clear.

*Esquire* uses Wayne on the cover because he stands as a paradigmatic example of the figure of the cowboy, and thus, with one single image, calls into being an entire



American mythology. As Richard Slotkin explains, Wayne was the paradigmatic cowboy of the era (*Gunfighter* 512-13). Furthermore, Wayne's masculine persona was so strong, and so ubiquitous, that a number of stress disorders suffered by Vietnam veterans came to be identified as "John Wayne Syndrome." These syndromes always involved "the soldier's internalization of an ideal of superhuman military bravery, skill, and invulnerability to guilt and grief, which is identified at some point with 'John Wayne,'" an ideal to which the soldier could never possibly live up (519-20).<sup>113</sup> "John Wayne Syndrome" perfectly demonstrates how an exemplar of masculinity functions in the real world: he provides men with an ideal version of masculinity for them to emulate, one based, in this instance, on the "cowboy" characteristics of bravery, emotionlessness, and ethical action. Additionally, readers of *Esquire* can consume Wayne's image without going to the extreme of having to practice it, as the aforementioned Vietnam veterans did. After taking in the image of Wayne, the reader who flips the cover is immediately confronted with a two-page advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes, featuring a typical "Marlboro Man"-type cowboy saddled atop a horse. The Marlboro Man's rhetorical message can be phrased as "real men smoke Marlboros." Wayne acts for the magazine as a whole as the cowboy does in this particular advertisement.

*Esquire's* use of Wayne's image to advertise a "new" form of masculinity is ambivalent: his placement on the cover demonstrates that they know the image of Wayne sells magazines (particularly magazines advertised to men), but the "hard-line" masculinity he represents simply does not represent *Esquire's* hegemonic masculinity

---

<sup>113</sup> In an interview discussing the cowboy myth as it related to his time in Vietnam and his later work *The Things They Carried* (much of which was also published in *Esquire*), O'Brien discusses how the cowboy figure in general—and John Wayne in particular—was held up as an exemplar of masculinity by some during the Vietnam war. See his interview with Twister Marquiss (especially 12).

project. What is demonstrated here is how exemplars of masculinity can be mobilized. Like the discussion of the “White Negro” and Sixties’ counterculture in the second chapter of this study, Wayne represents a kind of masculinity that should not be practiced by *Esquire*’s ideal readership, but a kind of masculinity that they can nonetheless consume.

The importance and specific functions of this conservative figure to the “panicked” maintenance of patriarchal power (to echo Judith Butler) are best shown by an article published one month after the original publication in *Esquire* of “Civil Defense,” which would later become, in a revised version, the second chapter of *The Nuclear Age*. The article, “American Beat: A Wolf in Wolf’s Clothing,” offers a counter-example to this conservative notion of masculinity embodied by the cowboy, only to then reinforce the need for what is presented as a more foundational and natural masculinity. In the September 1980 piece on millionaire playboy Nick Nickolas, writer Bob Greene describes a threat to masculinity which he labels the “New American Man”:

The nation’s social fabric has been embellished in recent years by the arrival of something called the New American Man. In his extreme and exotic form, the New American Man drinks white wine and cries a lot and is so achingly sensitive that he often finds himself quivering. He is constantly searching for the feminine side of his own personality. He is a staunch supporter of feminist theology; in many cases, his wife has left him, but he is secretly proud that she was able to show such strength. (12)

Greene importantly labels this type of masculinity “new,” setting up a comparison between it and the conservative type of masculinity exemplified by John Wayne’s cowboy persona. This “new” masculinity is importantly allied to feminism, an actual

political and cultural threat to patriarchy. This alliance is characterized as emasculation: the New American Man sips chardonnay while weeping, “quivering,” all while trying to be more like a woman. Such a masculinity is specifically seen as marginalized by or at least subordinated to the type of hegemonic masculinity which Wayne is seen as exemplifying. Whereas previously the magazine mocked Wayne’s cowboy masculinity, here, such a conservative and nostalgic version of masculinity was mobilized both to sell magazines and other consumer items and, in the process, to buttress the patriarchal structures of the Reagan era by reifying “real” masculinity as an object that men—men presumably threatened by feminism—can purchase and therefore “own” as part of themselves.



Fig. 11. Cover of *Esquire*, August 1980, warning against Reagan’s “cowboy” presidency; Esquire.com, n.d.; Web; 12 Jul. 2014.

Scott Duguid has argued that this nostalgic masculinity buttressed America's political and economic situation (30), and accuses Reagan-era culture of being "addicted" to masculinity. There is no better example of the fact that this version of cowboy masculinity was tied to political and ideological power than Ronald Reagan himself (Le Coney and Trodd 168). Enacting the figure of the cowboy, Reagan sought to assure Americans that political problems could be overcome through tough and assured masculine action—or, perhaps more appropriately, "true grit."<sup>114</sup> Wayne passed away the year before Reagan won the election; following in the footsteps of Wayne, Reagan became America's foremost exemplar of masculinity for the 1980s (Jeffords 11). Reagan accomplished this performance by creating masculine images of himself: for example, Reagan was sometimes represented as "chopping wood, breaking horses, toughing out an assassination attempt, bullying congress, and staging showdowns with the Soviet Union" (Jeffords 12). The Reagan administration therefore sought to define political leadership through masculine example.

Of course, neither Wayne nor Reagan were "real" cowboys; they only played them, either in the movies or in the White House. This performance is not unusual—exemplary masculinities are, by their nature, fantasy figures—but the fact that actors were now the paradigmatic exemplars points to the fact that such masculinity is an artifice, a performance. It also makes it plain, to some, that the cowboy is no longer a "real" figure (if it ever was). Rather, by the 1980s, the cowboy can not only be mobilized as an exemplary masculinity for some,<sup>115</sup> but also be viewed as a kind of fourth order

---

<sup>114</sup> *True Grit* (1969), based on the Charles Portis novel of the same name, featured one of Wayne's most iconic cowboy roles, as the marshal Reuben J. "Rooster" Cogburn.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Cohen's "Cowboys Die Hard: Real Men and Business Men in the Regan-Era Blockbuster." The article, focusing on John McTiernan's *Die Hard* (1988), argues that John McClane (Bruce Willis) is a cowboy figure for the 1980s, establishing himself as an exemplary masculinity (though Cohen does not use that term) in comparison to the businessmen figures found elsewhere in the film. As if

simulacrum, an image which, according to Jean Baudrillard, “bears no relation to any reality whatever” (11).

It is therefore helpful to examine the ways O’Brien continually evokes the figure of the cowboy only to subject that figure to parody or ridicule, and, most often, to emasculation, in a way similar to *Esquire*’s invocation of Reagan’s cowboy masculinity (fig. 11).<sup>116</sup> Unlike Mailer’s “White Negro,” who was a historically specific answer to the “problems” facing patriarchy, the cowboy is an anachronistic figure, out of place in the 1980s. Indeed, *The Nuclear Age* is full of cowboys, but each of their performances is not only inadequate, but points to the necessary inadequacy of the cowboy as an exemplary masculinity.

The first cowboy introduced in the novel is William’s father, who, every year, re-enacts Custer’s Last Stand, playing the title role. Every summer of his childhood, then, William witnesses the “death” and scalping of his father—his scalping acting as a symbolic castration. William makes this connection between scalping and castration clear in a later chapter, when in university he attends a “Custer’s Last Stand” Carnival. Ned Rafferty, a “big-shit linebacker” dressed as Crazy Horse, dips William’s hair in a bowl of ketchup (85). Moments later, when William is dancing with Sarah Strouch, Rafferty cuts in, getting between our protagonist and the novel’s “bombshell” character. William’s reaction is telling: “Scalped, I thought. First my father, now me” (91). William makes

---

describing an exemplary masculinity, Cohen writes, “Men like McClane, *Die Hard* suggests, know Westerns because they embody the authentic man’s heritage, ideology, and language of being” (74-75).<sup>116</sup> O’Brien’s *The Nuclear Age* was not the only 1980s text which complicated the cowboy’s relationship to gender. See, for example, Le Coney and Trodd for a discussion of Delmas Howe’s series of paintings entitled *Rodeo Pantheon* (1977–91), and the founding of the International Gay Rodeo Association (IGRA) in 1985. The authors argue that such individuals and groups “opened a counter-hegemonic space that challenged social marginalization in the public sphere” which allowed them to resist “the imposition of a rigidly heterosexual cowboy mythology and met Reagan’s straight-shooting cowboy dreams on a queer frontier” (165).

clear here what he otherwise seems to realize only unconsciously: that he understood his father's repeated scalping as a form of emasculation.

Aside from connecting the cowboy to issues of gender—and, more specifically, masculine anxieties about gender—William's father's annual performance of Custer also establishes a connection between the cowboy and American history, expansionism, cultural genocide, and patriarchal governmental power. Like Wayne and Reagan, he is also, in this instance, an actor playing a role, and his performance of this exemplary masculinity has a profound effect on young William:

I worshipped that man.

I wanted to warn him, rescue him, but I also wanted slaughter. How do you explain it? Terror mixed with fascination. I craved bloodshed, yet I craved the miracle of a happy ending ... It was the implacable scripting of history; my father didn't stand a chance. Yet he remained calm. Firing, reloading, firing—he actually smiled. He never ran, he never wept. He was always the last to die and he always died with dignity. Every summer he got scalped. Every summer Crazy Horse galloped away with my father's yellow wig. The spotlights dimmed, a bugler played Taps, then we'd head out to the A&W for late-night root beers. (10-11)

Here, William describes just how successful his father's performance is: like a "true" cowboy, he displays manly discipline in the face of overwhelming odds, and dies with dignity. Not surprisingly, young William wants his father to survive, but he also craves his death. This familial (and communal) drama might be Oedipal, but more to the point it reveals the formative violence in the cowboy conception of masculinity, and, perhaps, the failure of older models of masculinity which still hold sway over a generation of men.

It is worth asking just *why* William's father has been granted this privileged position in the town's annual historical pageant. He is not the mayor, nor would it seem does his job make him a significant figure; however, he might be recognizable, since the librarian, for example, is able to phone William's home without even asking who he is (23-24). I bring this question up not to speculate on the diegetic reason for William's father's role, but to underline its symbolic importance: if William is an "average" and therefore representative man in the nuclear age, then the fact that William's father plays the role of Custer, and that William must witness this performance annually, demonstrates that the novel points to a historical problem with masculinity, culminating in the 1980s. The men in the 1980s are not directly connected to a cowboy lineage, but only to a simulacrum thereof; however, that empty image still rules over them. That William is representative of this cycle is clear not only from his father's role as Custer, but from the fact that even as a child his father "hails" him as "partner" (32) and "cowboy" (192), performing an act of what Althusser calls interpellation, whereby ideology "'recruits' subjects among the individuals ... or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects" (130). William even used to dress the part: a photo of him as a child, introduced late in the novel, represents young William as "a handsome child: blond hair and a cowboy shirt and a big smile" (250). In the description of William's childhood can be found his initial, highly problematic connection to the figure of the cowboy.

Rafferty, who is first introduced dressed as Crazy Horse, is himself a cowboy, as William later learns. Later, when both are members of the Weathermen-like guerilla group called the Committee, and in a moment of brotherly bonding, Rafferty tells William that he is a "Ranch kid—I ever tell you that? Grew up on a ranch. Dumb cowboy. Home on the range. All I ever wanted, some cows and dope and git along little

dogie” (237). Rafferty expects William’s disbelief: his past identity as a cowboy, and all the ideological underpinnings that brings with it, do not easily match with Rafferty’s role as a counter-cultural, anti-patriarchal guerilla, nor, more importantly, with his role as the hen-pecked partner to Sarah Strouch. Rafferty, then, is portrayed as having taken up several masculine roles—brave, football player, and, later, guerilla—the most significant of which, for this discussion, being the cowboy; yet, these all fail to naturalize gender hierarchy, leaving him instead the lesser partner in his relationship with Sarah. Rafferty’s cowboy masculinity fails to rein-in—or subordinate—Sarah’s femininity.

The most obvious parody of the cowboy figure comes in the form of William’s schoolmate and eventual Committee member Ollie Winkler. Ollie has the typical trappings of the cowboy: wearing “a white cowboy hat and fancy high-heeled boots” (75), Ollie is the most aggressive, action-oriented member of the resistance. He is introduced to the reader when he approaches William during William’s peaceful anti-bomb demonstration. Immediately, Ollie demands action: ““This bomb shit,’ he said, ‘a catchy tune. Who do we assassinate?’” (75). But his cowboy dress and demeanour are comically undercut by the contrast with his stature; described as “A Friar Tuck facsimile,” William decides that Ollie might not be quite a midget, “but there was obvious evidence of a misplaced chromosome” (75). When Ollie puts on the hat and boots, he synecdochically invokes the exemplary masculinity of the cowboy; however, he cannot overcome the masculine deficit engendered by his physical form, though he endeavours to do so with his (inevitably comical) masculine performance.

Ollie’s performance of the cowboy may be comedic because of his stature, but it would be wrong to assume that Ollie’s bad copy implies an authentic original. Rather, as Thomas Strychacz has argued in a discussion of the matador in the fiction of Ernest



Hemingway, “the confusion of a fantasy that keeps getting recorded as real works to unsettle the priority of original over copy” (69). Strychacz’s perspective is indebted to Judith Butler, who writes that gender is a “*kind of imitation for which there is no original*”; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself” (Butler, “Imitation” 21). The problem, according to Strychacz, “is that the process of manhood-fashioning . . . alienates what appears to be ‘true’ manhood by showing that it too derives from copies, from repeated performances, from discursive iteration” (50). Even supposedly “real” cowboys are citing or performing previous performances, and these are performances not of a single originary cowboy figure but of other performances—John Wayne’s, for instance—resulting in a form of alienated, pathological masculinity.

In the case of the cowboy in *The Nuclear Age*, it is not merely enough to say that gender is represented as performative, but that in the gendered discourse of the Cold War, nearly all of the male characters are impelled to perform this specific “Cold Warrior” iteration of hegemonic masculinity. This gendered Cold War discourse is what Butler calls a “regulatory norm.” She writes that “regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled” (*Bodies* 2). Each of the male characters practices a version of “cowboy” masculinity, but Rafferty’s is inadequate, Ollie’s is comical, and William’s father’s necessarily entails emasculation and death. Trying to practice “cowboy” masculinity leads to failure, not dominance. The novel therefore reveals the workings of hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously parodying them. The figure of the cowboy—so central to the Reagan era in which the

novel was written—has a very real effect on the men in the novel, and on masculine identity in America, but the poor attempts to enact the cowboy make not only the characters, but the cowboy itself, seem comical. Parodying the cowboy exposes heterosexual masculinity “as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization” (Butler, “Imitation” 23).

Though William does not practice cowboy masculinity like the others, he is nonetheless associated with the role. For instance, as previously noted, William’s father regularly refers to him as “cowboy” (13, 26) or “partner” (32). As Susan Farrell notes, these forms of address were added by O’Brien after he revised the *Esquire* “Civil Defense” excerpt into the second chapter of the novel, stressing the town’s frontier history (21) and strengthening the pattern of associations between characters and the cowboy figure. While William does not practice cowboy masculinity, he nonetheless attempts a similar role as a revolutionary guerilla. While John Wayne never played a revolutionary, he nonetheless played a number of soldiers, a role similar to a guerilla, though the soldier is a role that William specifically tried to avoid. After running from the draft, and therefore refusing the role of the soldier, William and his associates in the Committee take up with Ebenezer Keezer and Nethro, two specialists who put them through a kind of guerilla boot camp. Here, William learns that what it takes to be an armed radical is the same as what it takes to be a soldier. On the weapons range, William discovers that his friends—Sarah, Rafferty, Tina and Ollie—“knew the whys and wherefores of deadly force” (O’Brien, *Nuclear Age* 185). Conversely, William loses control of his bowels when he fires his automatic rifle. His mishap is clearly identified as a masculine failing: Ebenezer Keezer, directly eyeing William, later refers to the group as “regulation panty-poopers” (186). The supposed radicals have, perhaps unwittingly,

become an institution so similar to the military that, rather than challenge society, they merely reproduce its patriarchal logic. Given the “cowboy” presidency of Reagan, and his involvement with guerillas during the Iran-Contra scandal, the novel subtly criticizes radical groups, presenting them as another iteration of Cold Warrior masculinity.<sup>117</sup>

At the “final exam,” a quasi-military drill featuring live ammunition, William completely shuts down, attempting to bury himself in the sand rather than move forward. He hallucinates his father, who says “I love you, cowboy” (192), underlining William’s failure in the primary skills that denote the cowboy: an ability to remain cool and in-control in adverse situations (think of his father’s calmness during the Little Bighorn re-enactment), and mastery over his weapons, which demonstrates his privileged access to violence. William does not fit either the military or the resistance, because he does not fit patriarchy and the practice of masculinity that it demands.

William’s eventual turn away from “Cold Warrior” masculinity marks a shift in the novel, from William as a guerilla to a more domestic version of masculinity. Following his failure during the “final exam,” William’s role becomes increasingly domestic: he becomes a sort of housewife for the movement, explaining that his job at meetings involved “serving coffee, washing the breakfast dishes” (214). As he rationalizes it, “it wasn’t heroism or cowardice. Just non-involvement: potato chips and coleslaw and iced tea” (219). His marginalization from the violent members of the group leads him into fantasy, where he expresses nostalgia for the nuclear family: “I tried not to listen. I scoured the frying pan and hummed *Happy Birthday*, pretending I was back home again, my father outside raking leaves, my mother in the bedroom wrapping gifts”

---

<sup>117</sup> Throughout O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, the author subverts the typical heroic war story by equating fighting and dying in Vietnam with cowardice rather than bravery. Both *The Nuclear Age* and *The Things They Carried* engage in a criticism of the “masculinization” of America in the 1980s.

(215). In William's fantasy, he fits into both the role of the mother and the child—he is actually washing dishes, a stereotypically feminine role in the domestic sphere, while in his mind he awaits presents from his parents. Here, William fantasizes about both femininity and immaturity, two roles against which masculinity typically measures itself. William therefore fails to fit into the masculine roles offered by a violent, “Cold Warrior” culture.

### **3. Retrenching the Domestic Sphere in “Grandma’s Pantry”**

But William, after failing to gain power within a series of patriarchal roles (be they within the sexualized realm of adolescence, or the violent realms of the military and the resistance), will not allow his domestication to turn into emasculation, and seeks yet another patriarchal institution in which he can finally discover his masculine identity. Soon after this shift is made, William begins seeking out Bobbi and a domestic life similar to the one he remembers having in his childhood—a life like the one he had in Fort Derry, fishing with his father, but omitting the night terrors. This nostalgia for the nuclear family will lead William into his next masculine role: the family patriarch. In an attempt to secure this role, William begins to dig a hole in his backyard, presumably to build a bomb shelter; in doing so, he invokes the gendered Cold War discourse of “Civil Defense.” The bomb shelter is—according to this Cold War discourse—a physical space that can create, and maintain, a patriarchal gender regime. As opposed to the queer spaces discussed in the last chapter, which seek to avoid a patriarchal gender hierarchy, William hopes to provide an exaggerated, heteronormative space.

The bomb shelter is, like the figure of the cowboy, a symbol from the past which was returned to prominence by the political culture of the Reagan era. Just as the 1980s

saw a return to prominence of the conservative cowboy figure, so too did they see a return to the Cold War discourses of the 1950s and 1960s. As Margot Henrickson explains, many works responded to Reagan's resuscitation of Cold War rhetoric and renewed nuclear policies, such as his Strategic Defense Initiative (the so-called "Star Wars" program) (XIX). Foertsch concurs, adding that the Reagan-Thatcher era was characterized by Cold War fears suggestive of the early 1960s (474). As Allan Winkler notes, these Cold War tensions led to a resurgence in civil defense during the Reagan years (112), eventually resulting in the 1983 budget for civil defense doubling the previous year (133).

*The Nuclear Age* comments on the cultural discourse of Reaganism by foregrounding the over-determined, gendered place of the shelter. As Henrickson explains, the shelter was central to each proposed civil defence policy (92). The bomb shelter was a central image both of the Cold War and of domestic safety and retrenchment. It is this image which drives William, who attempts to recast his dissolving family into a model, nuclear family, by re-establishing the domestic realm in the form of a shelter. However, just as the novel reveals that the figure of the cowboy was too obviously an insufficient masculine figure by the 1980s, so too is the bomb shelter exposed as too anachronistic and outdated to serve as a model by which to reinforce and restructure hegemonic masculinity.

In a 1951 article referenced by May, Charles Clarke argues that one of the major challenges of a post-nuclear America would be sexual. Writing for the *Journal of Social Hygiene* in a piece entitled "VD Control in Atom-Bombed Areas," Clarke argues that in the panic following a nuclear attack,

Families would become separated and lost from each other in the confusion. Supports of normal family and community life would be broken down ... Under such conditions, it is to be expected that moral standards would relax and promiscuity would increase. With this increase, the venereal disease rates and the number of illegitimate births would mount ... the chances are that the venereal disease rates would increase by 1,000% or more. (Clarke 4-5, also qtd. in May 90)

Here, Clarke shifts the focus away from such common post-nuclear concerns as radiation, looting, and the scarcity of food and resources, and toward the threat of venereal disease and illegitimate babies. Clarke's suggestions include policies ensuring that sexuality be strictly policed in this nightmarish, post-apocalyptic America, arguing for the "vigorous repression of prostitution and measures to discourage promiscuity," as well as championing "social and religious services." "Every effort should be made," Clarke warns, "to re-unite family groups, to safeguard morals, to support or restore morale" (7). Commenting on Clarke's essay, May notes that just as nuclear energy was to be contained, so too was "the social and sexual fallout of the atomic age itself" (91). What is most at risk in a nuclear war, the article suggests, is the continued survival of the traditional family unit.

So, how does one guard against the threat of dangerous sexuality—that is, the type that is had outside of the confines of the heterosexual, socially sanctioned family unit? The answer comes in the form of the bomb shelter. The bomb shelter, then, was a highly gendered place. As May notes, the shelter was referred to in some literature as "Grandma's pantry" (101), while in civil defense publications, "safety was represented in the form of the family" (102). Constructing the bomb shelter was a masculine activity,

connected to the contemporaneous cultural fixation on Do-It-Yourself work.<sup>118</sup> While men would take on the role of protectors and providers (Lichtman 40), women had an important role to play as well. Jean Wood Fuller, the Assistant Administrator of the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), called on women to use their domestic skillset to help out with the Cold War (May 101). In the domestic realm of the bomb shelter, they would be homemakers, while in the post-nuclear world they would be relied on to perform the all-important role of mother. As Georgia Senator Richard Russell put it, “If we have to start over again with another Adam and Eve, then I want them to be Americans and not Russians, and I want them on this continent and not in Europe” (qtd. in Lichtman 40). Indeed, the fallout shelter acts to consolidate the powers of patriarchy: women’s sexuality is forced back into the domestic sphere, and directed entirely toward their husbands, while homosexuals and other so-called “degenerate” sexualities, understood in the Cold War as threats to national security, are directly excluded from safety. Alternative masculinities are thus marginalized while the dominance of men over women is confirmed. The building of a fallout shelter is the figural retrenchment of patriarchy, while the space itself is literally a bomb-proof domestic sphere.

It is therefore fitting that the chapter in which William discusses his nostalgic, domestic childhood is entitled “Civil Defense,” the appellation given to America’s bomb shelter strategy. When “Civil Defense,” which would go on to become the second chapter of *The Nuclear Age*, was originally published in the April 1980 issue of *Esquire*, the main feature of the magazine was three articles on the then-presumed Republican Presidential nominee, Ronald Reagan. The original publication of the story, then, had an even more

---

<sup>118</sup> For an excellent analysis of the Do-It-Yourself fad and its relationship to masculinity and the gendering of the domestic sphere, see Steven Gelber.

explicit connection to the President than its later publication as a novel. One of these features, Joel Kotkin and Paul Grabowicz's "Dutch Reagan, All-American," begins by describing Reagan's version of his childhood home of Dixon, Illinois:

A sunny day in a nineteenth-century town entering the twentieth century. Victorian houses, small factories, boys in straw hats, girls in party dresses, summer afternoons at the creek. Wise town doctors, hard town villains, small-town government. Hard work, school plays, chores to be done, civics as ethics, football as worshipful activity. Galena Avenue, the war memorial, the house where Lincoln slept one night. A good place to raise your children, and a place that one of those children could look back on and say, "I realize now that we were poor, but I didn't know it at the time." Did that world exist? ... It's important to ask, because it's that little town, more than any other place, to which Ronald Reagan would like us to return. (25)

Compare this description of Reagan's purported idyllic small-town past to O'Brien's description of William's childhood home, as it was originally published in "Civil Defense" in the same issue:

Fort Derry, Montana, was your typical small town, with the usual gas stations and parks and public schools, and I grew up in a family that pursued all the ordinary small-town values. My father sold real estate, my mother kept house. During the summers we would sometimes hike up into the mountains above town, the Sweetheart Mountains, and my dad would show me how to cast for trout, and my mom would fry the catch over an open fire, and things were just fine. I was a regular kid. I played war games, tried to hit baseballs, started a rock collection, rode my bike to the A&W, fed the dog, messed around.



Normal, normal. I even ran a lemonade stand out along the sixth fairway at the golf course, ten cents a glass, plenty of ice: a regular entrepreneur. (82)

Both are depictions of a stereotypical “small town.” Like Reagan, William is convinced that he must return to this supposedly unspoiled past. In the second example, William—telling his story in retrospect, as an adult and a father—depicts a time when he was “regular,” and when the domestic sphere was an inflexibly gendered place. Dad works; mom stays home. Dad catches the food; mom cooks it. William describes himself as an All-American boy, playing baseball (America’s official pastime) and war (America’s unofficial pastime), and involving himself as both a producer and consumer of goods—a kind of nascent capitalist. Capitalism, gender roles, and even masculine aggression are all tied, here, to the “good life,” and to the safety—or shelter—of normalcy. However, William’s repetitious insistence of his normalcy (“Normal, normal”) suggests, following Butler, that something is not normal about this “normal” life—that normalcy must be iteratively re-expressed because it is not actually a solid origin. One might ask of William’s origin the same question that the *Esquire* writers put to Reagan’s “small town” upbringing: “Did that world exist?” In the present of the novel, William hopes to transport his family back to this nostalgic image of the past, just as Reagan tries to remake the country in the image of Dixon, Illinois, circa 1920. William’s individual story serves as an allegory for the culture of Reaganism as a whole.

A series of parallels motivate the comparison between William’s childhood past and his present as a father and cuckolded husband. William’s adult family mirrors the makeup of his childhood family: husband, wife, and child. His home is even near the Sweetheart Mountains, which he used to visit with his family when he was young. Moreover, the novel makes the connection even clearer: in the “Civil Defense” chapter,

William's first memories are of when he was a kid of "about Melinda's age" (9). As Heberle points out, when William was Melinda's age, his father disassembled one bomb shelter (William's ping pong table); at the end of the novel, William—Melinda's father—will disassemble another (151).

This parallel between William's childhood and his present underscores the ways William's obsessive digging of a bomb shelter has, at its source, a desire to force his family back into a conservative notion of the past, one which may never have existed to begin with, considering that William introduces his childhood by explaining that he was a "frightened child" who in his dreams "watched the world end" (9). Having supposedly failed as a man in a world of cowboys, William's desire for patriarchal control turns toward the home front, ostensibly motivated by his ongoing fears of nuclear annihilation, but actually provoked by Bobbi's infidelity, as symbolized by her missing diaphragm (286). Bobbi's infidelity comes to represent, for William, "an erosion of the traditional family structure" (197), and even makes him question whether his daughter, Melinda, is actually his own (196). At his home near the Sweetheart Mountains, William begins obsessively digging; when Melinda asks what the hole is for, William's response is that "It's a shelter" (5). William's response is complicated by the fact that the hole never becomes a shelter—that, in the end, it is nothing but a hole—but the act of digging is clearly the culmination of William's lifelong obsession with shelter.

For William, the bomb shelter metonymically links safety and domesticity. This is perhaps clearly shown in a *Good Housekeeping* editorial, noted by Winkler. The November 1958 article, entitled "A Frightening Message for a Thanksgiving Issue," describes the precautions that would need to be taken to survive a nuclear attack, and is

essentially an advertisement for family bomb shelters.<sup>119</sup> The editors conclude that “All this may happen. You have the choice of believing that it can’t. But if you recognize the possibility of war between major powers, you must go further and acknowledge that atomic bombs will be dropped. On us” (“Frightening” 61). This is a message that William seems to have taken to heart: his continued insistence that the “bombs are real” echoes *Good Housekeeping*’s contention that atomic bombs *will* be dropped. More to the point, that the call for bomb shelters was published in this particular magazine demonstrates how the shelter was a part of the domestic sphere: building and maintaining a shelter should be a pivotal concern to “good housekeepers.”

However, despite *Good Housekeeping* and the label of “Grandma’s pantry,” the domestic space of the bomb shelter was specifically not a feminized place. Much of the cultural discourse of the Cold War 1950s had taken great strides to turn the homestead into a masculine realm. One way this happened was through the Do-It-Yourself movement. As Steven Gelber explains of the 1950s movement, “household maintenance and repair permitted the suburban father to stay at home without feeling emasculated or being subsumed into an undifferentiated entity with his wife” (94). In the 1950s, then, men made the domestic sphere masculine through home construction and various home projects. William demonstrates, in satirical fashion, how Do-It-Yourself still keeps the domestic space sufficiently masculine, when he barricades his wife and child into a bedroom and builds a service hatch through which he can communicate and pass them food and other necessities. He says of the service hatch, “I’m proud of it. It’s a brilliant piece of engineering: a rectangular hole in the door, nine by twelve inches, wide enough

---

<sup>119</sup> Appended to the article is the following message: “The Office of Civil Defense Mobilization will send, direct to you, free, a set of simple plans for a home shelter that you can make yourself” (“Frightening” 61).

to permit the essential exchanges, narrow enough to deflect foolish thoughts of flight” (194-195). William’s DIY project makes his household safe for patriarchy, inasmuch as he uses his masculine set of skills to imprison his wife and daughter and force them to maintain the charade of a happy nuclear family. The bomb shelter does this on a larger, cultural scale: Lichtman calls it “an ideologically charged national do-it-yourself project that permeated America’s post-war consciousness more than its physical landscape” (39). William’s actions, then, were emblematic of a larger cultural attempt to shelter heteronormativity and patriarchy.

The kind of gendered emotional response Gelber describes when discussing the Do-it-Yourself movement is detailed in Irving James’ “Psychological Aspects of Vulnerability to Atomic Bomb Attacks.” For example, James explains that building a shelter would allow men to think that “I am really able to do something about it” (54, also qtd. in Boyer 332). Likewise, in O’Brien’s novel, William expresses much the same sentiment as he begins to dig: “Turn the first spadeful. Then bend down and squeeze the soil and let it sift through the fingers. Already there’s a new sense of security ... the hour has come for seizing control” (3). William’s Do-it-Yourself masculinity project demonstrates its status as a complicit masculinity, leading him to believe that he has the sort of agency promised to members of his gender, but which is actually reserved for hegemonic masculinity.

Despite William’s new sense of security, the shelter should not be viewed as the opposite of the bomb; rather, the bomb shelter is a symbol of the regulatory practices of Cold War culture, authorized by the threat of nuclear warfare. Civil defense is therefore just another aspect of nuclear warfare. Jean Baudrillard makes the connection: “The risk of nuclear atomisation only serves as a pretext ... to the installation of a universal system

of security, linkup, and control whose deterrent effect does not aim for atomic clash at all ... but really the much larger probability of any real event, anything which could disturb the general system and upset the balance. The balance of terror is the terror of balance” (60).<sup>120</sup> Baudrillard’s claim is that the nuclear threat is a mere pretext for the increasing powers of the military-industrial complex, the very seat of masculine hegemony.<sup>121</sup>

Derrida, writing (fittingly enough) in 1984, makes a similar point:

For the “reality” of the nuclear age and the fable of nuclear war are perhaps distinct, but they are not two separate things. It is the war (in other words the fable) that triggers this fabulous war effort.... “Reality,” let’s say the encompassing institution of the nuclear age, is constructed by the fable, on the basis of an event that has never happened (except in fantasy, and that is not nothing at all). (23)<sup>122</sup>

Here, the connection between hegemony and gender is clear: civil defense is, according to Baudrillard and Derrida, a “pretext” for structuring society—and that includes gender relations—according to the logic of technology and militarism. The masculinist images of Cold War discourse in general, and the fallout shelter in particular, clearly link “safety” and authority with masculinity. Furthermore, the fallout shelter not only literally entrenches the family, but creates a domestic sphere that is also a militarized zone—the family home as bunker. The man must be in charge not only because he is the *pater*

---

<sup>120</sup> This passage is also referenced by Messmer (399-400), in a study of the interpretation of nuclear culture.

<sup>121</sup> Baudrillard also identifies nuclear deterrence as a cultural discourse dominated by hyperreality: “this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us—a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence” (12-13).

<sup>122</sup> Both Foertsch and Cordle (“Cultures”) reference Derrida’s when discussing *The Nuclear Age*. Derrida’s essay is central to the 1984 *Diacritics* issue on “Nuclear Criticism,” and is often cited by literature scholars discussing nuclear or postnuclear fiction (see, e.g.: Mária Minich Brewer’s “Surviving Fictions: Gender and Difference in Postmodern and Postnuclear Narrative,” as well as most of Cordle’s scholarship on nuclear fiction).

*familias*, but also because he is the commanding officer. Mapping their more general theories onto this specific situation, then, one could say that both Derrida and Baudrillard would agree that there is no clear distinction between nuclear warfare and nuclear defense. Civil defense is but a part of nuclear discourse, which itself is a regulatory practice, one which—among other things—seeks to reinforce patriarchy. The fear of nuclear war is the impetus behind adhering to strict gender roles in the name of national security.

O'Brien's novel, then, sees nuclear threat and nuclear defense as part of the same madness—the hole William builds is both safety for, and threat to, his family—and this united nuclear discourse serves to regulate and normalize clearly defined gender roles. It is a clear action of hegemonic masculinity: those in power use nuclear discourse not only to ensure patriarchy, but actually to entrench even stricter gender norms. The bomb shelter not only links safety and domesticity, but also stands in for the regulatory norms of the Cold War. Because he is white, male, and heterosexual, William believes that he is able to bring the regulatory powers of patriarchy to bear on his family by constructing the bomb shelter; however, by metonymically linking patriarchy with Cold War notions of civil defense, O'Brien points to the illegitimacy of both, and he does so by making William take this connection to an absurd extreme.

Just as the cowboy is a figure inadequate to the task of revivifying patriarchy in the 1980s, so too is the bomb shelter, as a highly gendered space, too outdated to perform its role of retrenching the domestic sphere. The result is that the bomb shelter becomes too visibly a symbol of the subjective violence of patriarchy. In the process of digging the hole, William alienates his wife and daughter, who threaten to leave him. To avert this crisis, William barricades them in the house, forcing them to share one domestic space

while he prepares another. Rather than becoming a potential home for William's family, though, the hole becomes a potential tomb; instead of building a shelter in the giant hole, William rigs it with dynamite and, in the final chapter, drugs his family and lowers them into it. Here, we witness the symbol of the bomb shelter transform, so that it comes to symbolize visually the usually subjective violence of hegemonic masculinity. The gaping hole, the drugs, the dynamite—William's "shelter" becomes an image of the illegitimacy of patriarchy, the inverted shelter threatening to scatter his family across the countryside.

Luckily, Melinda recovers from her sedation before he can detonate the explosives, and William seemingly suffers a change of heart, committing himself to a new outlook on life. One form of retrenchment is replaced by another, and, if anything, William has simply moved from a material shelter to a mental one:

I will trust the seasons. I will keep Bobbi in my arms for as long as she will stay. I will obey my vows. I will stop smoking. I will have hobbies. I will firm up my golf game and invest wisely and adhere to the conventions of decency and good grace. I will find forgetfulness. Happily, without hesitation, I will take my place in the procession from church to grave, believing what cannot be believed, that all things are renewable, that the human spirit is undefeated and infinite, always. I will be a patient husband. I will endure. I will live my life in the conviction that when it finally happens—when we hear that midnight whine, when Kansas burns, when what is done is undone, when fail-safe fails, when deterrence no longer deters, when the jig is up at last—yes, even then I will hold to a steadfast orthodoxy, confident to the end that  $E$  will somehow not quite equal  $mc^2$ , that it's a cunning metaphor, that the terminal equation will somehow not quite balance. (312)

William's plan, as he describes it, is to destroy the bomb shelter, and instead to live a life of quiet conformity—to embrace the life that Mailer railed against, as described in the second chapter of this study. This is barely progress for William, but a move sideways. As Cordle has convincingly argued, the novel comments on a cultural discourse that equates security with conformity, and suggests that the Cold War culture of consumerism and containment was itself a kind of psychological sheltering (*States* 130, 134).<sup>123</sup> In effect, William's decision marks an embrace of a more socially acceptable form of shelter—a life of consumerism. This is exactly the life *Esquire* has to offer its readers, should they, too, require a similar type of “safety valve” while living under the threat of nuclear annihilation.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Cordle is the novel's most frequent and most compelling critic. His reading of the novel correctly emphasizes how William counters nuclear anxieties with domestic and consumerist fantasies. See *States of Suspense*, chapter 6, “In Dreams, In Imagination,” and “Beyond the Apocalypse of Closure.”

<sup>124</sup> Much of the scholarly disagreement on *The Nuclear Age* largely focuses on how to read this ending. In Peter Schwenger's psychological reading, William's actions at the end are a type of therapy, and destroying the hole is an act of erasing William's psychological connection to the nuclear age itself (114). Lee Schwenger, writing from an ecofeminist perspective, finds the recognition of the need for an epistemological (and post-phallogocentric) shift (183). Jacqueline Foertsch rather astutely uses the image of the hole to connect the novel to the “overarching homoerotics of the nuclear age” (478). Foertsch's analysis leads to a rather problematic reading of the ending: “the novel's homoeroticism is ultimately equated with bomb-generated madness and paranoia ...this equation forces us in search of curse and redemption not only for nuclear-generated madness, but for any suggestion of queerness as well” (478-479). For Foertsch, William's detonation of the hole can be read as a destruction of queerness. Foertsch backs up this reading by claiming that, following the detonation, William “releases his family, who begin to forgive and reaccept him” (478). This, however, does not occur in the text, and is merely an impossible future which William imagines for himself. Responding most directly to Foertsch, but also anyone who would too easily find in the ending a neat resolution, Cordle explains that William's final words can only be understood as “self-deception ... As readers, therefore, we are alienated from William's new vision and we cannot achieve the sense of closure that he finds” (“In Dreams” 115). Rather, Cordle argues, quite correctly, that “The novel, therefore, explicitly refuses to resolve the tension between the two alternatives—madness (shelter digging) and denial (conformity) – acted out by William in the course of his narrative” (116). Countering Schwenger, he argues that “This is not a radical ‘ecofeminist vision’ but a suburban fantasy, acquiescent to the primacy of the political status quo, and as much of a hole in which to shelter as the one he has dug in the garden. It is an admission that nothing can be done in the face of power” (114).



#### 4. “Ovaries Like Hand Grenades”: Emphasized Femininities in *The Nuclear Age*

Given that the novel was first excerpted in *Esquire* magazine, it might not be surprising that, at first glance, there would not seem to be much room in *The Nuclear Age* for female characters. Melinda is only a child, Sarah is killed off by a mysterious disease, Tina Roebuck seems to exist solely to have her weight mocked, and Bobbi, most obviously, never actually speaks—the reader’s only access to Bobbi’s character is through Melinda, as a proxy, and through her poetry. To a certain degree, this only makes sense—in my reading, *The Nuclear Age* deals largely with the conflict between a man and his place within hegemonic masculinity, and so women are necessarily marginalized. However, the novel clearly demonstrates not only the fact that these women work within patriarchy, but also that they are subject to the regulatory norms of the Cold War era as well, even as they attempt to escape them. This is most obvious in the problematic relationship between the female characters and domesticity, and in the way that Bobbi and Sarah complicate the concept of emphasized femininity. While neither Bobbi nor Sarah are given enough agency and freedom to be the authors of a truly counter-patriarchal discourse, they do provide examples and hope for Melinda to be just such a character.

Both Bobbi and Sarah could be viewed as complicating what Connell calls “emphasized femininity.” Emphasized femininity is the female equivalent of hegemonic masculinity; however, based on the very nature of hegemonic masculinity, no woman can actually have access to hegemony—women are always subordinated within the gender hierarchy. Rather, emphasized femininity is based on compliance with this unequal and illegitimate gender structure. Emphasized femininity is therefore constructed around women’s subordination to men and “oriented to accommodating the interests and desires

of men” (Connell, *Gender and Power* 187); emphasized femininity therefore maintains hegemonic masculinity through acquiescence and collaboration. Superficially, Bobbi and Sarah might fit this description, especially when considering the fact that Bobbi’s job as a stewardess<sup>125</sup> and Sarah’s role as a cheerleader threaten to place them in the role of male fantasy figures; however, Bobbi’s desire to escape, and the clear presentation of, domestic violence, troubles such an idealized relationship, as does Sarah’s evolution into a radical.<sup>126</sup>

One characteristic of emphasized femininity is the “acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labor market discrimination against women” (188). Even as William attempts to force his family members into thoroughly domestic roles, the female characters of the novel feel the cultural pressure of which William’s actions are symbolic. This is most prevalent in the character of Tina Roebuck, who is obsessed with losing weight. Despite what is revealed to be her surprising competency as a radical guerilla,

---

<sup>125</sup> In *The Jet Set: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon*, Victoria Vantoch argues that stewardesses both reflected Cold War gender roles and challenged them. As an example of emphasized femininity, a stewardess was thought of as “A high-flying expert at applying lipstick, warming baby bottles, and mixing a martini,” (2), and seen as “a role model for American girls, and an ambassador of femininity and the American way abroad” (1). Vantoch goes on to challenge these assumptions by claiming that “the profession fostered a budding feminist consciousness among these women long before the American women’s movement brought inequality into the mainstream national consciousness” (3). Bobbi’s career is hardly accidental, then, since concepts of gender roles and gender power were central to her profession.

<sup>126</sup> Like stewardesses, cheerleaders are important gendered figures in the American cultural imagination. In “Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport,” Laura Grindstaff and Emily West specifically identify cheerleaders as examples of emphasized femininity. Discussing the activity during the twentieth century, the authors argue that,

Female involvement changed the nature of cheerleading, shifting emphasis ... to notions of physical attractiveness and sex appeal, which led to a white, middle class bias in the selection of female cheerleaders in the aftermath of desegregation and the trivialization and devaluation of cheerleading overall. Icons of “ideal” femininity notwithstanding, cheerleading is often considered a trivial activity and female cheerleaders have been negatively stereotyped as dumb and/or sexually promiscuous, particularly as traditional gender ideologies underwent significant change in the wake of second wave feminism. (504)

Grindstaff and West go on to argue that, as males became more involved in cheerleading in the last decades of the twentieth century, cheerleading became a gender regime “where the boundaries of gender difference are crossed as well as preserved” (515).

Tina longs to fit a more conventional concept of femininity, papering the walls of her room with “photographs of fashion models—trim, well-tailored girls out of *Vogue* and *Seventeen*, shapely specimens out of *Cosmopolitan*” (115). Mostly, Tina’s obsession is played for laughs—William looks back with nostalgia on “Tina with her Mars bars and anorexic dreams” (115)—but it is telling that one of the members of a radical, anti-nuclear paramilitary unit is still subjected to the cultural dictate to conform to emphasized femininity, just as its male members repeat the fascination with violence, within a model of complicit, if not hegemonic, masculinity. Sarah finds herself drawn even more powerfully to a strictly domestic lifestyle, admitting to William that “Part of me wants to run away. Like to Rio, or anywhere. Have babies and clip coupons. Be your wife, maybe—something normal—anything” (172). Later in the novel, even more desperate for William’s attention, she insists that “My doctor says I’ve got this gorgeous womb—ovaries like hand grenades—I’m built for motherhood—I can cook and rob banks and manage money. I can sew. I know how to make pickles. Just name it” (276). Even radicals like Tina and Sarah, it seems, cannot escape a patriarchal discourse which advertises a life of domesticity as an ideal choice for women.

However, Sarah’s simile, “ovaries like hand grenades,” and the description that follows, conflates her potential role as a housewife with her symbolic role as a bombshell. Sarah’s supposedly explosive reproductive organs highlight the danger that she potentially poses to patriarchy. First, the sheer size of Sarah’s ovaries—organs which produce, among other hormones, testosterone—is threatening, given that her ovaries might stand-in for testicles, making her more “manly” than William, or most men for that matter. Second, the particular simile she uses makes her reproductive organs potentially destructive. Sarah seems to be stuck in a liminal space between emphasized femininity

and counter-hegemonic radical. Never finding a real place for herself, Sarah eventually dies from a form of meningitis. As a sexual outlaw, she has no place in the rigid gender order of the Cold War, and is thus silenced.

If Sarah offered no more resistance than her guerilla actions, then she would not have much to offer as a potential counter-hegemonic figure. Her death, in the text, would seem to be an example of a failure to imagine a place for her in a patriarchal society, or perhaps a fitting punishment for her failure to conform. Sarah does, however, describe a fantasy, a possible alternative to the patriarchal aggression and violence of the nuclear age. One evening in Key West, Sarah describes her dream to William, a dream of being, fittingly, a cheerleader for the Dallas Cowboys. It is Super Bowl Sunday, and the teams do not show up:

[B]ut here's the stunner. Nobody cares. Nobody notices. Because yours truly is out there blowing their dirty little minds with cartwheels. Cartwheels you wouldn't believe. Nobody's even thinking football—cartwheels, that's all they want. Crowd goes bananas. Super Bowl fever, they're all screaming for more cartwheels ... They love me. They really do, just love-love-love. Who cares about football? War's over. Just love. It's all completely reversed. At half time the two teams trot out for a cute little twenty-minute scrimmage and then—bang—back to the action—me and my cartwheels. (243)

Sarah's dream describes an America where Cold Warrior masculinity is no longer central, where the militarism and violence of cowboy masculinities is replaced by "love-love-love." Such an analysis is not unproblematic: Sarah's vision of the future is largely narcissistic ("They love me") and still features a highly sexualized female figure as a focal point for spectacle. However, the revolutionary aspect of Sarah's dream comes from

the complete reversal she envisions: the war is over, and the football game—a ritualized form of male aggression which is war’s correlative—is marginalized. In its place is love, which finds its correlative in Sarah’s “billion beautiful cartwheels” (243). It is worth noting, too, that one of the benched football teams is the Dallas Cowboys, and so here Sarah imagines a world where the exemplary masculinity which has cast such a shadow over the text, and over American masculinity itself, is symbolically overcome. With the motions of her body, those “beautiful cartwheels,” Sarah hopes to write the cowboy out of history.

While Sarah hopes to challenge patriarchy with her cheerleading, Bobbi’s contribution comes through her poetry. Based on analysis of the works of Norman Mailer, Peter Schwenger has argued that William writes in the “language of men”: “conversational, even colloquial; slangy; occasionally foul-mouthed; and above all anti-literary” (107). Furthermore, Schwenger argues that William’s writing must respond to the feeling that literature is somehow effeminate: “A style must then be evolved that will fend off the threat of emasculation, that will turn pen into penis. In Cowling’s case, his ‘normal,’ ‘American,’ ‘manly’ style is defensive on many fronts” (107). *The Nuclear Age* is focused on, among other things, its protagonist’s problematic relationship with masculinity. As Schwenger notes, William’s style is defensive—his “manly” writing can be seen as yet another example of William mobilizing discourse in an attempt to access patriarchal privilege. Stated another way, William uses his writing on one hand as a way to elide the effeminacy of some of his actions, and on the other he uses it to essentially omit femininity from the text.

But if the novel is written in the “language of men,” in Schwenger’s terms, then what we might call the “language of women” manages to work its way into the narrative

only by sneaking into the cracks that form in the masculine façade. The most obvious examples are Bobbi's poems; take, for instance, her short poem entitled "Relativity," apparently composed while William digs his hole and Bobbi contemplates leaving him:

*Relations are strained  
in the nuclear family.  
It is upon us, the hour  
of evacuation,  
the splitting of blood  
infinitives.  
The clock says fission  
fusion  
critical mass. (122, italics in original)*

William calls a similar poem "Horseshit of the worst kind" (65), denying that there is any worth to Bobbi's only form of communication, and demonstrating the aforementioned dislike of the literary. Even Foertsch, a critic of the novel, seems to share William's opinion, calling them "childish and fragmentary," before dismissively explaining that Bobbi "Donna Reed-ly pin[s] them to pajama tops and cereal boxes as if they were any Saturday's 'honey-do' list" (476). Better than any male character, Bobbi perceives the comparisons between the ordering of the domestic sphere and the regulatory norms of nuclear rhetoric. As Cordle argues, at the end of the novel the change in William's perspective is characterized by a change from his old point of view, which denied metaphor—"No metaphors, the bombs are real" (*Nuclear Age* 4)—to one which embraces "the metaphoric power of the science behind the bomb" ("Beyond" 72). Bobbi's poems represent a third option, unacknowledged by William at the end of the

novel: her poems contain “powerful metaphors for domestic crisis, but they also indicate how the language of power and control, and the way of thinking that accompanies it, permeates society from the macrocosm of international politics to the microcosm of the family unit” (Cordle, “Beyond” 72-73).<sup>127</sup> As a poet-critic, Bobbi is able to correctly identify the root of her husband’s problems: he simply is not able, or willing, to comprehend.

Though Bobbi’s occupation as a stewardess threatens to make her another male fantasy figure, her position also indicates mobility and freedom. In fact, it is Bobbi’s very mobility that causes William problems. After Bobbi meets William on a flight from New York to Miami, she pens him a poem entitled “Martian Travel.” Later, William goes to great lengths to track Bobbi down. The pursuit leads William on a merry chase: staking out the gate area of Bobbi’s airline; flight from Denver to Salt Lake; New York City; Bonn, German; an American Air Force base in Wiesbaden; University of Minnesota; and finally back to New York where she works for the UN. Along the way William learns of Bobbi’s various lovers: a navigator named Andy Johnson, a Professor named Scholheimer, an unnamed Air Force adjutant, another Professor named Johnson. He learns that men love her and women hate her, that she leaves a trail of broken hearts behind her, and that he is not the only recipient of “Martian Travel.” When the adjutant claims that Bobbi “had this way with words,” Sarah derisively responds, “Like a Xerox machine” (279), while earlier another stewardess claims that Bobbi would “pass them out like peanuts” (227). So Bobbi, like Sarah, exists in a kind of liminal space in the novel. In many ways, she seems to embody the male fantasy of the sexy stewardess, and she treats

---

<sup>127</sup> For a discussion of the significance of the difference between Bobbi’s and William’s rhetorical approach to the subject of nuclear warfare, see Grausam.

her own poems like consumer items. At the same time, her poems touch on deeper truths than any other form of discourse in the novel, and her mobility can be seen as a resistant tactic to domestication and emphasized femininity.

The long pursuit required to track Bobbi down, and the stories William hears about her romantic history, certainly foreshadow her eventual infidelity to William; however, more importantly, what the chase symbolizes is Bobbi's resistance to domestication. That she continually does settle down with someone, if only for a little while, only emphasizes how central the domestic life is to hegemonic masculinity's conception of women, and the cultural pressure to conform. Bobbi's voice is absent from the text, and her presence often mediated, because she is a figure who cannot adequately be pinned down and fully represented in William's "language of men." She exists in a liminal space, one which denies full representation. William cannot fully represent or understand her because she has access to a discourse outside of patriarchy—or she at least skirts its perimeter. Trapping Bobbi in a domestic sphere and therefore removing the mobility which defines her character is the only way William can begin to understand and represent her, but those moments are transitory and fleeting. Bobbi can be represented, in as much as she conforms to some definitions of emphasized femininity and domesticity, but she cannot be represented to the extent that she continues to elide these definitions. Therefore, it is not surprising that William eventually decides to destroy her.

It is Bobbi's child, Melinda, who represents perhaps the best prospect for a post-phallogocentric or counter-hegemonic future, though it needs to be emphasized that this is only a *possibility* opened up by the text, and in no way a certainty. It is Melinda who is able to reverse her father's downward spiral toward murder-suicide, and who breaks the spell that the hole has on him. She is also the character who continually answers his



opening question, telling him he is crazy. Her character draws further significance from a comparison between her childhood and her father's. When William retells the story of his childhood bomb shelter, he begins by explaining that it occurred when he was a kid, "about Melinda's age" (9). While little William is obsessed with building bomb shelters, Melinda is critical to dismantling them. While in both cases it is the father who destroys the shelter, it is crucially important that not only was Melinda not involved in the construction of the hole, but that the impetus to destroy it comes from her, not from William. Heberle makes clear this significance, arguing that while William's ping pong shelter was disassembled by a loving father, his final shelter is dismantled through the love of his daughter (151). Heberle focuses on William's action, but Melinda's role needs to be emphasized: in effect, Melinda refuses to be a victim of history, like her father, and it is the child who saves the father, not the other way around. If the lineage of fathers and sons forms a sort of patriarchal history, then here Melinda severs this chain. If William's gender problems are prefigured by his relationship with his father, then perhaps Melinda, by both saving her father and rejecting his authority, opens the path for a better future. Bobbi and Sarah provide examples of the possibilities for women, but are too situated in history to truly break free and create a space outside of patriarchy. The possibility is there, however slight it may be, that Melinda, and her generation, could change all of that.

## **5. Conclusion**

Lying in bed as a young man, William dreams of "a concrete igloo" and "a tree house made of steel" (38). These unlikely images of shelter illustrate William's anxiety, his need for safety—the safety provided by images whose security is so exaggerated as to

be farcical. When William's anxieties are recognized as gender anxieties, these absurd images come to emphasize not only his anxiety about his access to patriarchal authority—William's culturally enforced desire to retrench and maintain patriarchy—but also the insufficiency of the images currently being marshalled to do so. *The Nuclear Age* critiques such Reagan era images as the cowboy and the bomb shelter, images pulled from a conservative notion of America's past and mobilized to reinforce patriarchy. Sometimes, these images work: remember, for example, how John Wayne was used to sell *Esquire* readers on the idea that the “New Hard-Line” of masculinity would involve ruthless business practices and would engage in sex only for the purposes of reproduction, or when the Cold War rhetoric of civil defense convinced homeowners to entrench the domestic sphere in their own backyard. William, feeling his masculinity threatened, attempts to mobilize these images to access his patriarchal dividend, but finds that they lack the cultural power to do so for him.

*The Nuclear Age* sees the 1980s as a decade when hegemonic masculinity fails to successfully renegotiate its boundaries. The cowboy is held up to ridicule; the bomb shelter becomes a tomb. Even the domestic sphere itself is challenged as an adequate way to reinforce an unequal gender hierarchy. In attempting to benefit from all of these different images and discourses, William's complicit masculinity becomes fragmented, and madness follows. However, his final decision, contra-Mailer, is to embrace conformity and, in particular, consumerism. This embrace of consumerism points toward a gender practice that can suture together these fragmented pieces of masculinity: what John Benyon calls “bricolage masculinity.” Bricolage masculinity is a type of “hybridized masculinity that is experienced and displayed differently at different times in different situations ... a more fluid, *bricolage masculinity*, the result of ‘channel-hopping’

across versions of ‘the masculine’” (Benyon 6, emphasis in original), and “in which fashion and ‘image management’ are clearly primary elements” (159). This bricolage masculinity is sufficient, if only to the extent that it allows men to go from one version of masculinity to another, with great alacrity, to cobble together a masculinity which responds to the momentary problems of patriarchy. When William cannot be a cowboy, he will be a father and husband, and when that fails, he will be a consumer. When that fails, another form of masculinity will take its place.

As Benyon’s references to “channel-hopping,” fashion, and “image management” suggest, bricolage masculinity is a practice of masculinity intensely related to consumption. Rosalind Gill, taking up Benyon’s term, argues that masculinity and consumption became increasingly interrelated as the twentieth century advanced, and that representations of masculinity were increasingly fragmented (206). Furthermore, by the 1980s, a wider range hegemonic masculinity practices was available for men (206-07). Gill discusses bricolage masculinity as a type of consumer masculinity which responds to this situation. While her discussion is situated in an analysis of “lad” magazines in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s, it nonetheless suggests that men’s interest magazines are an ideal field in which bricolage masculinity can be practiced. As Stefan Ciepły argues, *Esquire* promotes the idea of understanding identity as “lifestyle” (“Uncommon” 162). Readers of the magazine can consume dissent, as in the 1960s’ case of Mailer and *An American Dream*, or they can consume images of cowboy masculinity. Conversely, they can reject these images in favour of other masculine practices, practicing a type of strategic mobilization of certain kinds of masculinity. In this way, magazines such as *Esquire* allow men—especially those men practicing a form of complicit masculinity—to access the patriarchal dividend and feel comfortable in their masculinity without forcing

them to choose a particular hegemonic masculinity practice which may not fit the consumerist gender regimes in which they primarily operate.

For William, raised in a supposedly idyllic, conservative notion of the past, one to which he longs to return, such a bricolage masculinity might not be tenable, and until he accepts it as a possibility, his fragmented sense of masculinity leaves him obsessive and possibly insane. Perhaps it will be men of a later generation who can embrace such a multifaceted masculinity, finding strength in bricolage; this may be the case, but no such men exist in *The Nuclear Age*. As we shall see in DeLillo's *Libra*, masculinity continues to fragment, and the accompanying paranoia and feelings of emasculation characterized by William's complicity masculinity will be felt even more so by those engaged in hegemonic masculinity projects. Furthermore, this paranoia and emasculation is seen through their eyes as generalized to masculinity at large. Instead of a counter-hegemonic male figure—if such a thing exists—the novel motions towards the existence of a realm outside of patriarchal discourse. If masculinity is fragmented, then Bobbi's poetry and Sarah's cheerleading gesture toward those cracks, however small, and hint that these cracks open up a space outside of patriarchy, however insignificant it might be.

## Chapter 7

### Don DeLillo in the American Kitchen

As I was working on *Libra*, it occurred to me that a lot of tendencies in my first eight novels seemed to be collecting around the dark center of the assassination. So it's possible I wouldn't have become the kind of writer I am if it weren't for the assassination. Certainly when it happened I had no feeling that it was part of the small universe of my work, because my work, as I say, was completely undeveloped at that point. (DeLillo, qtd. in DeCurtis 56)

As argued in the previous chapter, O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*, published in 1985, depicts a time when masculinity fragments, when the idea of a unified, representative masculinity becomes untenable. Don DeLillo's *Libra*, published three years later and excerpted, like *The Nuclear Age*, in *Esquire*, picks up on many of the same issues, whereas O'Brien's novel focuses on the fragmenting effects of "Cold Warrior" masculinity on complicit forms of masculinity, *Libra*, with its vast narrative scope and shifting narrative focus, turns its attention to "Cold Warriors" and other men practicing hegemonic forms of masculinity. *Libra*, moreover, moves beyond identifying the symptoms of a fragmented masculinity, instead positing the Kennedy assassination as a watershed moment during which a fantasy of a coherent, unified, and hegemonic American masculinity was destroyed.

In an interview with Anthony DeCurtis, quoted in this chapter's epigraph, DeLillo refers to the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy as the "dark center" around which his earlier novels had been collecting. He elaborates in another interview, observing that Lee Harvey Oswald is explicitly mentioned in *Players* and *Running Dogs*,

and that *Americana*, his first novel, ends with his protagonist driving through Dealey Plaza, the site of the assassination (Mitgang). Even DeLillo's later novel, *Underworld*, features a screening of the Zapruder film (487-489). This "dark center," then, should be read as a significant, central historical moment for the author, an event that DeLillo is compelled to represent again and again.

Of course, Kennedy's assassination is not just a watershed moment for DeLillo, but for the whole of America: the assassination of JFK is "the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century" (*Libra* 181). Several critics echo this sentiment: Jeremy Green describes the assassination as "the catastrophic occasion which appeared to shatter a consensual narrative of nation" ("Disaster" 586); Peter Boxall declares it "a moment in [American] history at which narrative *fails* to cohere" (133); finally, Mark Osteen sees it as "America's *Mysterium Magnum*; like any religious mystery, it is both radiantly overdetermined and heavily shrouded" (153). For each of these critics, the assassination is a crisis for America: it disrupts narrative (for Green and Boxall) and initiates a new era of mystery (for Osteen). Other critics cast an even wider net, finding in the assassination implications for the world and culture at large. Thomas Carmichael sees the assassination as "the first postmodern historical event. In popular terms, it is best known both as the original site of a contemporary nostalgia and as the moment at which all that follows in the postmodern period was violently interjected into contemporary experience" (207). For Fredric Jameson, it was "the coming of age of the whole media culture," and should be understood as "a unique collective (and media, communicational) experience, which trained people to read such events in a new way" (355). Both

Carmichael and Jameson see the assassination as a sea change, one which drastically changes the culture not just of America, but of the Western world.

While the significance of the event—both as an historic event in American politics and culture, and as an aesthetic event highlighting the difficulty of representation and the distance between history and narrative—seems to be well established in the literature, Jameson, for instance, argues that its significance cannot be explained by Kennedy's political status alone (355). Though Jameson is correct, to the extent that it is not Kennedy's position as president *alone* that makes this event so meaningful, I would like to spend more time interrogating the role of the man central to this event. Kennedy's masculine persona was already firmly ensconced in American culture at the time of his death, and has since only grown in significance. The repercussions of Kennedy's assassination were therefore keenly felt in the American gender order.

Looking at a wide range of media, Randi Gunzenhäuser finds a distinctly gendered dimension in reactions to Kennedy's assassination, arguing that “presentations of the president's death are in part characterized by the effort of recovering a strengthening frame for the heterosexual white male body and identity via the myth of male sacrifice and the stabilizing of gender relations” (79). On the contrary, Craig Warren, responding directly to Gunzenhäuser, insists that Kennedy's broken body can act “as a symbol of liberation from normative white masculinity” (573). While both scholars come to different conclusions about the use to which Kennedy's death is put in the gender order, they both nonetheless suggest that the assassination should be understood as a moment in which American gender ideology is reconfigured. That is to say that, especially in the American cultural consciousness, Kennedy's assassination is a

privileged site in which hegemonic masculinity is reshaped, contested, and potentially fragmented.

At the centre of this profound postmodern moment is a preeminent exemplary masculinity. Even before his death, Kennedy functioned within hegemonic masculinity in a fashion similar to previously discussed exemplars of masculinity (e.g. John Wayne, Mailer's "White Negro"). He was an important figure for *Esquire*: for example, it was there that Norman Mailer published his famous essay on Kennedy, "Superman Comes to the Supermart."<sup>128</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., whose "The Crisis of American Masculinity" was published in the magazine and discussed in chapter two, was an advisor to Kennedy, and went on to write *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, which won both the Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography and the National Book Award in History and Biography. Additionally, Tom Wicker published in *Esquire* two important articles on Kennedy following his assassination: "Kennedy Without the Tears" and "Kennedy Without End, Alas." Add to these specific instances multiple covers, articles, and references, and it is clear that *Esquire* was, and has since been, invested in Kennedy's presidency, finding him an important exemplar for their own hegemonic masculinity project.

However, Kennedy is doubly significant to the nation as a whole because of his political stature. As Dana Nelson argues, as president, Kennedy represented "the concrete correlative for national manhood" (218). Moreover, Kennedy, with the help of many who wrote about him, cast himself as a representative man, a "man whose developmental trajectory stands not for the achievement of the individual ego but for the integration of

---

<sup>128</sup> The title was changed, in subsequent printings, to "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" to avoid trademark issues.



the state” (Wesley 140-141). Kennedy therefore embodied several important discourses about American masculinity, and his representation could therefore be used as an exemplar of masculinity in specific gender regimes (such as *Esquire*’s ideal male readership), or to make claims about the larger gender order. These uses were not limited by his death, but multiplied by it, and so Gunzenhäuser and Warren can make opposing claims about the significance of Kennedy’s assassination for American masculinity, and both can be correct, depending on what discourse is being mobilized. One man—exemplary, representative, or otherwise—cannot hope to adequately represent all men, or even all men’s ambitions or desires.

Building on this scholarly disagreement, I argue that in *Libra*, DeLillo scripts the Kennedy assassination as the centre of a crisis for twentieth-century American masculinity. The novel depicts a group of “Cold Warriors”—men practicing a paradigmatic form of Cold War hegemonic masculinity—who feel their masculinity threatened by domestication and a supposedly “queer threat.” In the face of this threat, Kennedy is offered as the (always deferred) masculine solution. However, Kennedy is a solution that does not quite work, in part because, as a particularly ubiquitous form of exemplary masculinity, he not only figures as a solution to the “problem” of patriarchy, but also represents what James Messerschmidt calls a “masculinity challenge” (298). Finally, the postmodern, ironic author is offered as an exemplary masculinity that *does* work, at least from DeLillo’s point of view. This point of view is supported by *Esquire*, which finds in DeLillo’s definition of masculine authorship an exemplar of masculinity suitable to its ideal male readership.

With *Libra*, DeLillo provides an entire masculine metanarrative, one which diagnoses the problems of twentieth-century American manhood and prescribes a type of remedy in the figure of the author himself, recalling the three “techniques of liberation” (satire, art, and politics) offered by Schlesinger in his essay on “The Crisis of American Masculinity” (65). The pattern repeats itself: twentieth-century consumerism and materialism is believed to threaten masculinity, and so masculinity is renegotiated through the tools of consumerism and materialism themselves. Materialism, the domestic sphere, exemplary masculinities, the place of the American author—these seem like disparate topics, but there is one place that they are regularly united: *Esquire* magazine.

### **1. “Men in Small Rooms”: American Masculinity, American Kitchens**

*Libra* returns us to the popular discourse of “masculinity in crisis” discussed in chapter two and the “Cold Warrior” masculinity of the preceding chapter. Despite years of ideological labour, the type in which *Esquire* magazine had long been engaged, certain forms of masculinity remain adverse to, and threatened by, domesticity and materialism. Certainly by the 1980s, there remained a sense of what Timothy Melley calls “agency panic”<sup>129</sup> for those who continued to equate consumerism (in all of its forms) with femininity, and conformity with castration.<sup>130</sup> These men feel as though they are meant to produce things, to fix things, to work with their hands: anything else represents a lack of masculine agency. This masculine anxiety is perhaps best described in DeLillo’s earlier

---

<sup>129</sup> See *Empire of Conspiracy* (12).

<sup>130</sup> As discussed last chapter, the domestic sphere has the potential to be highly patriarchal; it depends on the type of masculinity being practiced by men in the domestic sphere, and whether or not they are able to dominate within that sphere.

1980's work, *White Noise*, in which the narrator, Jack Gladney, explains his discomfort around his father-in-law:

There were times when he seemed to attack me with terms like ratchet drill and whipsaw. He saw my shakiness in such matters as a sign of some deeper incompetence or stupidity. These were the things that built the world. Not to know or care about them was a betrayal of fundamental principles, a betrayal of gender, of species. What could be more useless than a man who couldn't fix a dripping faucet—fundamentally useless, dead to history, to the messages in his genes? I wasn't sure I disagreed. (245)<sup>131</sup>

Here Gladney, an influential professor of “Hitler studies,” describes his relationship with his father-in-law in terms that espouse his own gender insecurities. Vernon Dickey (whose last name emphasizes his masculinity—and perhaps his attitude as well) *attacks* Gladney with his knowledge of tools, themselves symbols of his physicality. Gladney does not have these supposedly useful physical skills; instead, he is a white-collar worker, and his labour is of the intellectual sort. Because of this, Gladney feels that his masculinity is inferior to Vernon's. The result of this anxiety is, as is often the case in DeLillo's fiction, violent action: Vernon, the more stereotypically masculine character, gives Gladney a gun (253), an obvious phallic object, which Gladney later uses to shoot Mink (312). Violent action is often felt by DeLillo's male protagonists as the remedy for

---

<sup>131</sup> Here, Gladney understands his own masculinity in response to the kind of Do-it-Yourself masculinity discussed last chapter (225, 229-30). To him, his father-in-law demonstrates just such a type of masculinity, one which turns the domestic sphere into a patriarchal realm.

a loss of agency,<sup>132</sup> and the symbol of this lost agency is usually the encroachment on the male subject of materialist, domestic space.

DeLillo's concern with materialism's (and often specifically domesticity's) effects on characters—especially as they might result in a kind of diminished selfhood—is not new to *Libra*. Indeed, this is a recurring concern for DeLillo, one that is also a major focus of works he previously published with *Esquire*. For example, “In the Men's Room of the Sixteenth Century,” published in the December 1971 issue, focuses on a cross-dressing detective known as “Lady Madonna,” and is thematically concerned with the sacred and the profane; however, the profane is identified as much by nonnormative sexuality as it is by consumerism (e.g. “the homoerotic wax museum,” “the paraplegic sex exhibit,” and the “pubic-wig boutique” [176]). The one act that draws violent response from the story's protagonist is a business suggestion, made by one Grambling Douglaston Clapper: “We've recently become interested in possession by demons and plan to start a nationwide chain of clinics, to be run on a franchise basis, devoted to exorcism and general postoperative therapy. We need somebody to run things from the spiritual standpoint. We're basically business-oriented, you see” (177). The commercialization of spiritualism seems to be the ultimate example of the dehumanizing effects of materialism. The story implies that what is lacking in this nightmare landscape is a proper form of masculinity, one that would police strict gender roles and keep materialism in check.

---

<sup>132</sup> Timothy Melley notes that violence is used as a common response by DeLillo's male characters who feel that their agency is threatened. His principle example is Oswald's attempt on General Walker, stating that “This familiar form of masculine agency recovery is one of DeLillo's obsessions” (148).

“Human Moments in World War III,” published in the July 1983 issue of *Esquire*, ignores questions of the sacred, but provides perhaps the ultimate example of “men in small rooms”<sup>133</sup>: the narrative focuses on two astronauts who become alienated from themselves and from humanity, feeling increasingly impotent while orbiting the earth in a space capsule. Their capsule is both weaponry and a domestic space, in which the astronauts listen to “old radio shows” (123) and feel “a sensation of prosperous well-being, the consumer’s solid comfort” (121). However, the story that most keenly focuses on the negative effects of a consumerist-materialist lifestyle on individual agency under late capitalism is “Players,” which was featured in the April 1977 edition of *Esquire*, and which was published as a novel later that year. (The version in *Esquire* involves several excerpts from part one of the novel, and concludes with “The Motel,” the final scene from the complete novel.) Lyle, the story’s male protagonist, is defined by the objects around him. One of Lyle’s recurring characteristics is his television-watching habits: he flips through the channels incessantly, finding comfort not through the narrative or the images that the TV offers, but from the ritual of technology itself (103).<sup>134</sup> Another of his rituals highlights the degree to which Lyle depends on material things: “Lyle checked his pockets for change, keys, wallet, cigarettes, pen, memo pad. He did this six or seven times a day, absently, his hand skimming over trousers and jacket while he was walking, after lunch, leaving cabs. It was a routine that reassured him of the presence of objects and their locations” (104). Lyle’s life is so caught up in the material world that he

---

<sup>133</sup> The importance of the trope of “men and small rooms”—a phrase used in the novel—has been commented on by several critics of the novel. Most pertinent to a discussion of gender in the novel are Wesley and Bellaggia, whose discussions will be analyzed below.

<sup>134</sup> Page numbers refer to the *Esquire* version.

seemingly cannot extricate himself from the objects that surround him. His selfhood seemingly collapses into materialism.

A masculinity project that is uncomfortable with consumerism is therefore out of place in an advanced, consumerist society, and so cannot be properly hegemonic. At the centre of *Libra* is Win Everett, a semiretired CIA operative who practises a type of masculinity adversarial to consumerism. Everett's plot to shoot at Kennedy (and miss) stems from doubting, and wanting to prove, his own masculine agency. It is no surprise that the highly patriarchal gender regime of the CIA,<sup>135</sup> from which Everett is semiretired, fittingly punished Win for his past transgressions by finding him a position within the faculty of Texas Woman's University (19). Everett primarily hopes to re-establish his masculinity through the authoring of secrets,<sup>136</sup> contrasted with the domestic lifestyle he is forced to live in their absence.

The section of *Libra* that introduces Win was published, in excerpted form, in the September 1988 issue of *Esquire* magazine, under the title "The Lone Gunman Theory." Tellingly, Everett's first appearance is prefaced by his domestic environment:

American kitchens. This one has a breakfast nook, where a man named Walter Everett Jr. was sitting, thinking—Win, as he was called—lost to the morning noises collecting around him, a stir of the all-familiar, the heartbeat mosaic of every happy home, toast springing up, radio voices with their intimate and busy timbre, an optimistic buzz living in the ear. The *Record-*

---

<sup>135</sup> Much of the research on gender and the Central Intelligence Agency focuses on the Kennedy era. Dean's *Imperial Brotherhood* discusses the creation of an "Elite Masculinity" in Kennedy's foreign policy establishment, while Cuordileone writes that Kennedy was attracted to the CIA's style, seeing them as "the institution which best reflected the New Frontier's self-image: fast-acting, adventuresome, impatient with conventions, gutsy, and subversive" (215-16).

<sup>136</sup> For a discussion of the importance of secrets in the novel, see Melley.

*Chronicle* was at his elbow, still fresh in its newsboy fold. Images wavered in the sunlit trim of appliances, something always moving, a brightness flying, so much to know in the world. He stirred the coffee, thought, stirred, sat in the wide light, spoon dangling now, a gentle and tentative man, it would be fair to say, based solely on appearance. (15-16)

“American kitchens” take precedence over Everett in the paragraph’s structure, subtly emphasizing the influence of Everett’s surroundings over the plot he is soon to author. Everett’s home life hedges him in and defines him: his introduction to the reader is crowded with domestic sounds and images from which he separates himself, “lost” in thought. But the reader might not see Everett as separate, as distinct, since this introduction is overwrought with breakfast smells and sounds, and kitchen appliances, as though Everett lives in a home décor catalogue.

The problem of distinguishing Everett from his material context might be reflected by the problem of distinguishing the story from its material context in *Esquire*. As published in the magazine, the excerpt itself is hedged in and surrounded by domestic images. As Ruth Helyer has argued, DeLillo’s fiction “suggests that masculinity ... is an insecure construction based on dominant societal norms and presented via mediated images” (Helyer 125). It is therefore worthwhile to analyze DeLillo’s fiction as it was contextualized within a field of such mediated images. Full page advertisements focused on food and dining, such as Remy Martin champagne (221) and *Food & Wine* magazine (223), interrupt the text of “The Lone Gunman Theory,” as well as advertisements which implicitly identify the reader’s masculinity as being in need of supplementation by way of consumption: for example, a JCPenney advertisement for men’s wear states that “You’ve

got to get up pretty early to beat a Stafford Man” (229), while an ad for Foltene Shampoo (fig. 12) states that “One Out Of 20 Needn’t Worry About Thinning Hair. This Is For The Other 19” (227). At the end of the novel excerpt, another full-page advertisement shows a couple kissing; the top of the ad features a quotation that reads “We’ve told each other ‘I love you’ a thousand times. But it took a diamond like this to leave her speechless” (Service 231). These advertisements rhetorically suggest that the reader (and *Esquire’s* imagined reader is most certainly male) is insufficiently masculine to succeed in the contest between men (a contest often fought over women). The Foltene advertisement, for example, is directed toward the supposed 95% of men who need help with their thinning hair, not the 5% who do not; moreover, it implies that thinning hair needs help, since thinning hair is a sign of aging that undermines the practice of hegemonic masculinity. These advertisements hail the reader: if successfully interpellated, the reader must identify his own masculinity as deficient, either based on his appearance (clothing, hair) or in his relationship with women, and consequently turn to the consumer solutions offered within the magazine. The Service Merchandise ad vows that diamonds can provide a form of mastery over women which standard communication cannot; furthermore, standard communication implies mutual dependence, whereas capitalist interpellation—based on mechanisms of ownership—implies mastery and control. These consumer items promise to supplement masculinity, but only by defining the reader’s masculinity as always already deficient.





Fig. 12. Foltene Advertisement; *Esquire*, Sept. 1988, 227.

These processes of hailing and interpellation, and the rhetoric of masculinity as either surplus or lacking, are intrinsic parts of how hegemonic masculinity is negotiated in the marketplace. *Esquire*'s consumerist masculinity is directed at an ideal readership that is conversant in these processes, and understands them as lifestyle choices. However, men like Everett do not see masculinity as something negotiated in the marketplace, and therefore find materialism emasculating. Everett later describes his domestic routine as a kind of Sisyphean ritual: "He checked the front door. The days came and went. Bedtime again. Always bedtime now. He went around turning off lights, checked the back door, checked to see that the oven was off. This meant all was well" (*Libra* 148). His character is firmly situated in the domestic sphere: his daily life is measured out in bedtime routines, and he finds his masculinity depleted by the signs of materialism and

domesticity all around him. In this way, at least, he is like Lyle in “Players,” feeling his selfhood diminishing into materialism and domestic ritual.

Despite the continued normalization of the progress of consumer culture into everyday life, we have seen throughout this study that certain men—certain masculinities—continue to feel threatened by consumerism and domesticity. A significant part of the continuous renegotiation of hegemonic masculinity relates to finding new ways to assuage this anxiety. In this way, Everett’s anxieties are fairly common, and his response to these anxieties is another iteration of agency panic. As Timothy Melley has argued, *Libra*’s male characters, fearing the emasculation of domesticity, come to equate self-sufficiency and self-determination with the keeping of secrets (152). Indeed, while Everett is introduced in the kitchen, seemingly “a gentle and tentative man,” he is in fact “thinking about secrets. Why do we need them and what do they mean?” (*Libra* 16). For Everett, “there’s something vitalizing in a secret” (26), implying that secrets carry with them a kind of potency absent from his domestic life of coffee and breakfast nooks, which are depicted as feminine spaces. In Everett’s case, the association between the feminine and the domestic is firmly established in the figure of his wife, Mary Francis, who “worried about the worn-out rug, thought about breakfast, thought about lunch, tried not to be too foolishly proud of the renovated kitchen, large, handsome, efficient, with its frostless freezer and color-matched appliances, on the quiet street of oak and pecan trees, forty miles north of Dallas” (31). Everett thinks about secrets, authors conspiracies, and plots his revenge against the agency that he feels abandoned him; Mary Francis thinks about her *things*. Mary Francis’ pride in her renovated kitchen clearly genders the domestic sphere feminine, within which Win,

surrounded by the kitchen but lost in thought, is clearly uneasy. It would be easy to see this chauvinist conception of gender as a symptom of the novel's gender politics—that is, to compare Everett's "important" thoughts to his wife's superficial concerns—but DeLillo, I would argue, is too sophisticated a commentator on gender, and especially masculinity, for one to make such a facile assumption. Rather, it is worth considering that Everett's obsession with secrets, with control and agency, and his discomfort in the domestic sphere, reveal a masculine anxiety which is held up to scrutiny in the novel, and which is manifested in the trope of small rooms. Furthermore, Everett's anxious masculinity points to the superiority of *Esquire's* hegemonic masculinity project, since it specifically exerts dominance through the marketplace.

Several critics have commented on the centrality of small rooms to the novel. Marilyn Wesley, for instance, refers to the small room as the "predominant setting, connoting confinement, debasement, isolation, powerlessness, and unreality, contradicts (even as it recalls) the deviant power, illicit passion, and esoteric knowledge of the epic-inspired 'undergrounds' of traditional literature and revolutionary politics" (157). Similarly, Lino Bellagga, in an article focused on the small rooms in the novel, argues that this recurring motif is DeLillo's metaphor "for the claustrophobic condition of postmodern subjects in postmodern society" (172). Bellagga points to a statement made by DeLillo regarding the significance of small rooms:

I see contemporary violence as a kind of sardonic response to the promise of consumer fulfilment in America. Again we come back to these men in small rooms who can't get out and who have to organize their desperation and their

loneliness, who have to give it a destiny and who often end up doing this through violent means. (DeCurtis, 57-58)

Most of the small rooms in *Libra* are domestic spaces—bedrooms, kitchens, and so forth. These small rooms are sometimes notable for their surfeit of consumer items (such as Everett’s kitchen) or for a dearth of them (as in Oswald’s many living spaces); in either case, the small rooms are the material manifestation of the male characters’ threatened masculinity.

Jack Ruby, Oswald’s eventual assassin, haunts small rooms. Despite his being a strip club owner and an eventual assassin, much of Ruby’s narrative is confined to, and concentrated on, his home. Much is made of Ruby’s domestic situation: he lives with a roommate, George Senator, because “Living alone was a pressure situation” (346). Ruby remembers the time when “he took a room in a cheap walk-up hotel and isolated himself for eight weeks with the shades drawn, eating only enough to stay alive. He was a nothing person” (345). Ruby’s fear of isolation takes on the familiar form of the small room. His home is bigger, messier, more expansive; like many of the novel’s characters, he spends much of his time at home in the kitchen. Ruby is perhaps even more ambiguous about his sexuality than Oswald, asking one of his strippers, “Do I look swishy to you, Janet? What about my voice? People tell me there's a lisp. Is this the way a queer sounds to a neutral person? Do you think I'm latent or what? Could I go either way? Don't pee on my legs, Janet. I want the total truth” (352). Following the pattern set in the novel, the small domestic spaces that Ruby inhabits are emblematic of his anxiety about his own masculine heteronormativity—an anxiety that he explicitly addresses in the

above quotation—and this masculine anxiety is a contributing factor to his later violent outburst, in which he murders Oswald.

Everett and Ruby may feel hedged in and emasculated by their domestic surroundings, but fittingly it is Lee Harvey Oswald, the novel's principle character and would-be assassin, who is most obviously shaped in the kitchen. He teaches himself to play and subsequently practices chess at the kitchen table (6, 36), does homework there (38), sleeps on a cot in the kitchen when in Fort Worth (133), and writes one of his subversive histories there (141). Following the established pattern, Oswald's domestic surroundings seem to be the material manifestation of his problematic relationship to his masculinity. Philip Nel outlines several of Lee's "masculine failings" which seem to underpin his violent actions, including not only his attempt on Kennedy's life, but also his assaults on Marina (232, 240-242) and his attempt on the life of Edwin Walker (269-292), the latter excerpted in *Esquire* as "Oswald in the Lonestar State." Nel argues that "DeLillo does not portray Oswald as a gay man but one who is persecuted for being read as gay, for not conforming strictly to "norms" of heterosexual masculinity" (434n11). Again and again, throughout the narrative, Oswald's heterosexuality is called into question, and his masculinity is thus threatened with subordination. This repetition establishes a pattern, and this pattern highlights the connection between a supposed dearth of masculinity and the kind of violent search for agency in which Oswald engages. As Wesley notes, *Libra* can be read as "an examination of violence as agency in contemporary society" (158); more importantly, though, this connection between violence and agency is only present in the male characters, who seek agency through violence because they feel that their own masculinity is threatened or deficient.

DeLillo's novel features a cast of male characters who are troubled with their masculinity, feeling a lack of agency and control as something that results from a highly consumerist world. As Wesley argues, the heroes of DeLillo's novels "experience lack of communal meaning and social order as a problem of power and try to re-establish the terms of masculine selfhood that is supposed to support it" (142). In opposition to these alienated and fragmented masculinities is the idea of a truly hegemonic form of masculinity who can re-establish patriarchy and masculine control. This is Kennedy himself, who, as President, acts as an exemplar of masculinity and a representative man. And, indeed, he does act as a unifying form of masculinity inasmuch as the male characters in the novel seemingly unify in a loose conspiracy against him.

## 2. "Suck in That Gut, America!": JFK's Exemplary Masculinities



Fig. 13. *Esquire*, November 1962, Kennedy as Muscle Man, 82.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963, Tom Wicker, the then relatively unknown White House correspondent for *The New York Times*, was riding in the presidential motorcade when Kennedy was shot. Wicker's subsequent reporting of the event launched him into the national spotlight:

The searing images of that day — the rifleman's shots cracking across Dealey Plaza, the wounded president lurching forward in the open limousine, the blur of speed to Parkland Memorial Hospital and the nation's anguish as the doctors gave way to the priests and a new era — were dictated by Mr. Wicker from a phone booth in stark, detailed prose drawn from notes scribbled on a White House itinerary sheet. It filled two front-page columns and the entire second page, and vaulted the writer to journalistic prominence overnight.

(McFadden)

Subsequently, Wicker published two articles on Kennedy in the pages of *Esquire* magazine. The first, published only months after the assassination—and in the same issue as one installment of Mailer's *An American Dream*—was entitled “Kennedy Without the Tears.” The second, published years later, was entitled “Kennedy Without End, Alas,” and offers some insights into understanding the retrospective importance of Kennedy.

In this later piece, Wicker explains what Kennedy had come to represent in the years immediately following his death: apparently, young people asked questions about Kennedy “in tones that suggest he is to them a mythic figure—not because of Vietnam but in spite of it, not that they believe in Camelot as a fact or an achievement, but because they have an idea that there was a time, associated with him, of action and hope, youth and confidence, long before today's drift and deadlock and rancor” (“End” 67-68).

Kennedy, then, came to represent a kind of “golden age” for America, one associated with the young President’s characteristics, characteristics which, during his time in office, were associated with his masculinity. Wicker goes on to suggest that “Merely that he was cut down as he was on a sunlit day, in the bloody mess of his mortality, might have been enough to establish him forever as the symbol of all our incompleting selves, spoiled dreams, blasted hopes” (“End” 69). Because these words were published in *Esquire*, and because of the masculine image that Kennedy fostered and enjoyed during his lifetime (and afterwards), I would suggest that one way the image of Kennedy functions is as an exemplar of a hegemonic form of masculinity, one suited to face the supposed problems of the time, specifically problems to be faced by “men.”

What were these problems? It is worth recalling Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s essay “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” published in *Esquire* in 1958. In it, Schlesinger argues that modern heroes are “castrated” (64), because “the conditions of modern life make the quest for identity more difficult than it has ever been before” (64). By the beginning of 1960, Schlesinger argued, in another *Esquire* article, that the “torpor” of the Fifties was caused by “exhaustion” (“New Mood” 58), resulting in “sterility in our conduct of foreign affairs” and “the politics of fatigue” (“New Mood” 59). The President most associated with the 1950s was Dwight D. Eisenhower, the paternalistic elder statesman. The “exhaustion,” “sterility,” and “fatigue” of the Eisenhower years would need to be remedied with youthful vigor: as Schlesinger claimed, “the Sixties will confront an economy of abundance. There are still pools of poverty which have to be mopped up, but the central problem will be increasingly that of fighting for individual



dignity, identity and fulfillment in an affluent mass society” (“New Mood” 60). What was needed was not just a leader, but a vigorous leader—an exemplar of masculinity.

Even before his Presidential Inauguration, Kennedy had been inaugurated as an exemplary masculinity, as is demonstrated in the pages of *Esquire*. When asked who should be President in the January 1960 issue of the magazine, Norman Mailer replied “If I have a choice at all it is probably Kennedy. I doubt if he possesses any more political courage than the other candidates, but I suspect he is a little more talented *as a man*” (Friedenberg 63, emphasis added). Hardly a resounding endorsement of Kennedy as a politician, but Mailer’s qualification of his choice is telling, especially when you consider Jackson Katz’s argument that an American president’s success as president is directly linked to his masculine performance (2). Mailer’s comment reflects this popular perception: he chooses Kennedy above all others because he assumes that his masculinity will equate to success in the Oval Office.

Mailer would go on to discuss Kennedy at length, especially in the pages of *Esquire*. It was in that magazine that he published his famous essay “Superman Comes to the Supermart,” wherein Mailer dubs Kennedy “The Hipster as Presidential Candidate” and discusses him in terms that underline his position as an exemplar of masculinity:

No one had much doubt that Kennedy would be nominated, but if elected he would be not only the youngest President ever to be chosen by voters, he would be the most conventionally attractive young man ever to sit in the White House ... Of necessity the myth would emerge once more, because America’s politics would now be also America’s favorite movie, America’s first soap opera, America’s best-seller ... "Well, there’s your first hipster,"

says a writer one knows at the convention, "Sergius O'Shaugnessy born rich," and the temptation is to nod, for it could be true, a war hero, and the heroism is bona fide, even exceptional, a man who has lived with death, who, crippled in the back, took on an operation which would kill him or restore him to power, who chose to marry a lady whose face might be too imaginative for the taste of a democracy which likes its first ladies to be executives of home-management, a man who courts political suicide by choosing to go all out for a nomination four, eight, or twelve years before his political elders think he is ready, a man who announces a week prior to the convention that the young are better fitted to direct history than the old. (123-124)

Significantly, Mailer lavishes praise on Kennedy for his masculine exploits (his war record, his beautiful wife, his political boldness) rather than focusing on any of his political positions. More to the point, Mailer sees in Kennedy the embodiment of an exemplary masculinity he himself fashioned years earlier—the Hipster, or “the White Negro.” Kennedy is not only politically powerful, but fitting that role which Mailer identifies as the future of white, hegemonic masculinity. For Mailer, the Hipster is the identity necessary for breaking the stultifying bonds of social conformity, which he associates with the figure of the “square,” a figure associated with 1950s conformity. As the 1960s began, the Hipster was set to ascend to the presidency, making Kennedy doubly significant as an exemplar of masculinity.

As the comparison to Mailer’s “White Negro” character suggests, Kennedy was an exemplar of a “new”—or at least newly dominant—formulation of hegemonic masculinity, one which resonated with *Esquire*. K. A. Curdileone, discussing Kennedy’s

masculinity and Mailer's essay, sees in the president a competing figure to the dreaded "Organization Man" of 1950s conformity. Kennedy's masculinity was characterized by "virility as well as . . . much-touted style" (195). Kennedy's presidency reconciled "intellect, education, cultural refinement, and liberalism itself with masculine virility" (169-70), and was therefore "bound up with the cultural trends that male dissenters like Mailer and [*Playboy* founder Hugh] Hefner shaped" (199). The reference to Hefner is significant: Cuordileone argues that Kennedy's masculinity could be thought of as exemplary of the "Liberal as *Playboy*," a gender project characterized by "power, style, youth, glamour, adventure, and virility" (195), and one that was exalted in *Playboy* magazine.

However, I would argue that it would be more accurate to see in Kennedy an exemplar of masculinity more in keeping with *Esquire*'s hegemonic masculinity project. Stefan Cieply, referencing Barbara Ehrenreich's influential *The Hearts of Men*, explains the difference between *Esquire* masculinity and *Playboy*'s gender project: "Hedonism, Ehrenreich argues, represented a cathartic liberation from the stifling responsibilities of work, family and respectability. To this end, *Playboy* promised a way to elude the 'bondage of breadwinning'" ("Uncommon" 159). However, while Kennedy fits many of the characteristics of the *Playboy*, he hardly represents a flight from family and responsibility. As Cieply argues, *Esquire* provides a counter-example to the type of *Playboy* masculinity under discussion. *Esquire*'s ideal readers are consumers, like the *Playboy*, but in consuming they do not abandon commitment and family (159).

The importance of this distinction is to note that the men who feel threatened by Kennedy—Everett, Banister, and Oswald—are the same who perceive the domestic

sphere as emasculating. They therefore represent a type of masculinity that cannot adequately maintain patriarchy in a consumerist society—their claims to hegemony are challenged (and thus their sense of emasculation). Kennedy, on the other hand, represents a kind of masculinity that embraces consumerism *and* responsibility, domesticity *and* virile toughness. Kennedy represented the hegemonic masculinity for *Esquire* that, as Cieply argues, was “invested in fashioning an identity of sophisticated toughness that neutralised the problematic anti-consumerist rhetoric of much mid-century social criticism, all the while advocating the critics’ calls for a dynamic, virile and authentic masculine individualism” (“Uncommon” 165). In Kennedy, *Esquire*’s readers find an exemplar of sophistication, toughness, and masculine individualism that was at home in the mediated world of consumption.

This is not to say that Kennedy’s masculinity was directly opposed to “Cold Warrior” masculinity; on the contrary, Kennedy’s masculine persona was similarly based on the belief that power was central to politics (Starck 17) and relied on the figure of the cowboy. Importantly, though, Kennedy, through the media, fashioned a type of “Cold Warrior” masculinity that sutures the (gendered) features of the cowboy to an urbane, intellectual form of masculinity, one at home with consumption and a life of luxury.

While his life seemed to exemplify sophistication, Kennedy flavoured his rhetoric with appeals to the American frontier, in a style Reagan would later elaborate. In his acceptance speech at the 1960 Democratic National Convention, Kennedy famously stated that “we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier—the frontier of the 1960’s—a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils—a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats.” Robert Dean finds in Kennedy’s cabinet the “composite picture of the ideal ‘New

Frontiersman” (170). Kennedy’s staff and cabinet were not only competent men, but “exemplars of masculine virtue” (170). Kennedy augmented his masculinity not only through the company of these “New Frontiersmen,” but also by projecting “an image of youth, ‘vigor,’ moral courage, and ‘toughness’” (Dean 169).<sup>137</sup> Kennedy’s masculine persona was constructed and disseminated in the same manner as a Hollywood star’s, even if the venue was not the red carpet but the White House.

It is therefore worth comparing Kennedy to another exemplar of masculinity, one who plays an important role in DeLillo’s novel: John Wayne. Comparing Kennedy to Wayne demonstrates how DeLillo comments on the mobilization of exemplary masculinities, and how Kennedy is both similar and significantly different than a “standard” exemplary masculinity. Indeed, throughout the novel, Oswald’s masculine fantasies are augmented by other exemplary masculinities. Oswald makes reference to several exemplary masculinities, each of which represents a life he hopes to emulate, but that he can never achieve. Two of them are familiar faces in this study. For instance, when in Russia, Oswald explains that he wants to model his career off of Ernest Hemingway (*Libra* 161). More significantly, in Atsugi, Oswald (Ozzie) meets with John Wayne<sup>138</sup>:

He wants to get close to John Wayne, say something authentic. He watches John Wayne talk and laugh. It's remarkable and startling to see the screen laugh repeated in life. It makes him feel good. The man is doubly real. He

---

<sup>137</sup> For a rhetorical analysis of how the American President uses masculinity as a political strategy, see Coe et al. For example, the authors discuss how two particular themes “suggestive of masculinity” are mobilized in political discourse: “The first theme we call *strength masculinity* because it taps into the traditional notion that, regardless of circumstances, leaders should be strong and resolute ... The second theme we call *dominance masculinity* because it emphasizes aggression and/or violence (Coe et al. 34-35).

<sup>138</sup> For a discussion of John Wayne’s role as an exemplary masculinity, see chapter 6, “Sexual Fallout.”

does not cheat or disappoint. When John Wayne laughs, Ozzie smiles, he lights up, he practically disappears in his own glow. Someone takes a photograph of John Wayne and the officers, and Ozzie wonders if he will show up in the background, in the passageway, grinning. (*Libra* 94-95)

Oswald's idolization of Wayne, and Wayne's role as a fantasy figure, is highlighted by the narrative voice, focalized in Oswald, that cannot ever refer to John Wayne as just "Wayne," the person's last name, and instead can only refer to "John Wayne," the full name of the celebrity persona that cannot be shortened. Oswald's attraction to Wayne is that the latter is real—"doubly real"—and so Oswald wants to say to Wayne something "authentic." For Oswald, Wayne's "realness" contrasts the supposedly virtual, inauthentic world of the American kitchens in which so many of DeLillo's characters find themselves. This is, of course, paradoxical, since what Oswald is reacting to in Wayne is not the "real" person but his celebrity. Wayne himself is a consumer item, an image.

What Wayne provides for Oswald is a model for a masculine fantasy of violent agency. As Philip Nel notes, Lee learned to equate violence and masculinity from a host of "hypermasculine" figures, including Wayne, and Lee performs the role the assassin in much the same way that Wayne played the role of the cowboy (428). Films and novels provide exemplary masculinities from which Oswald can extract a model of behaviour: after taking up the role of a spy, he even begins reading a James Bond novel (*Libra* 182). Similarly, shortly before the assassination he watches two films: *Suddenly*, in which Frank Sinatra plays a combat veteran intending to assassinate the president, and *We Were Strangers*, in which John Garfield plays a revolutionary. Nel astutely notes that by closely positioning the scene of Oswald watching the two films to the assassination, DeLillo

encourages the reader to equate the violence of heroic Hollywood masculinity with Lee's shooting of the president (428). Oswald is surrounded by fantasy figures who promise agency through violence, and therefore finds himself driven to achieve the same agency through both violence and the quest to become, like Wayne, an icon.

Wayne is "doubly real" to Oswald, but the doubling of his realness comes from the fact that Wayne matches the image of John Wayne. This is a capacity that Wayne shares with Kennedy, of whom it is said that "He looked like himself, like photographs, a helmsman squinting in the sea-glare, white teeth shining" (*Libra* 395). As Carmichael argues of Wayne (though it could be equally true of Kennedy), "the complete coincidence of John Wayne with his own specular image which makes Wayne so appealing for Oswald is precisely that which is denied Oswald everywhere" (209-210). Oswald hopes, in some small way, to also become "doubly real," inasmuch as he hopes to exist in a photograph with Wayne; in this way, he would exist as both man and image, just as John Wayne does, though to a much lesser extent. This double existence is, perhaps, exactly what Oswald achieves in his final moments:

There was something in Oswald's face, a glance at the camera before he was shot, that put him here in the audience, among the rest of us, sleepless in our homes—a glance, a way of telling us that he knows who we are and how we feel, that he has brought our perceptions and interpretations into his sense of the crime. Something in the look, some sly intelligence, exceedingly brief but far-reaching, a connection all but bleached away by glare, tells us that he is outside the moment, watching with the rest of us. (452)

Here, Oswald has, perhaps, achieved his goal, by becoming one with his image, in the instant before the shot that kills him. Oswald has, in a sense, done what “Cold Warrior” masculinity demanded: he has tried to augment his masculinity through recourse to violence, and modeled his behaviour after the exemplary masculinities that surround him in the cultural field. The fact that this leads to infamy, not agency, only underscores the fact that hegemonic masculinity is defined by exclusion, not inclusion, and that exemplary masculinities are fantasies who, as symbols, authorize hegemonic masculinity, but whose actual behaviour cannot guarantee hegemonic status. Oswald’s death gives the lie to the implicit promise of exemplary masculinities, that supposedly masculine traits actually equate to hegemonic power.

It is clear, then, that the novel reflects just how exemplary masculinities work, and that Kennedy is like Wayne in that they both seem to enjoy this status. More to the point, *Libra* develops an aspect of exemplary masculinities which Connell’s analysis has not touched on: that is, as much as exemplary masculinities reinforce hegemonic masculinity, they can also alienate men by baldly demonstrating a degree of exalted masculinity to which they do not favourably compare. To return to the Foltene Shampoo advertisement from *Esquire*: the one in 20 men who does not have thinning hair represents a figure to emulate, but his rare, desirably masculine characteristics are also a reminder of how most men do not have what he has. The advertisement works by demonstrating what most men lack to create the desire to fill this lack. Similarly, John Wayne may provide a model for masculine behaviour, but, as discussed last chapter, attempting to emulate Wayne might result in “John Wayne syndrome.” Kennedy’s exemplary status therefore provides a model for American men—especially the consumerist, white-collar men to whom



*Esquire* is targeted—but it can also alienate men by demonstrating their insufficient masculine characteristics.

Kennedy's exemplary masculinity, and the role it plays in the gender order, is exacerbated by his role as president, as Marina's dreaming demonstrates:

She wondered how many women had visions and dreams of the President.

What must it be like to know you are the object of a thousand longings? It's as though he floats over the landscape at night, entering dreams and fantasies, entering the act of love between husbands and wives. He floats through television screens into bedrooms at night. He floats from the radio into Marina's bed. There were times when she waited for him, actually listened late at night for a few words of a speech or a news conference recorded earlier in the day, waited for the voice of the President, the radio on a table near the bed. (*Libra* 326)

Marina's fantasy highlights Kennedy's own fantasy status, allowing him total access to America, or at least to the American imagination. For Marina, the President is the object of a thousand longings; these longings give him power, especially over women.

This passage, which highlights JFK's role as a fantasy figure and his dominance over women, also explains that while he obviously reinforces patriarchy, his status actually alienates the majority of men. Here, Kennedy enters the domestic realm and comes "between husbands and wives." Kennedy potentially cuckolds men, and therefore by his exemplary status can actually threaten men with emasculation, as demonstrated in the novel by Guy Banister's discussion of the President:

“It’s not just Kennedy himself,” Banister was saying on the other side of the door. “It’s what people see in him. It’s the glowing picture we keep getting. He actually glows in most of his photographs. We’re supposed to believe he’s the hero of the age. Did you ever see a man in such a hurry to be great? He thinks he can make us a different kind of society. He’s trying to engineer a shift. We’re not smart enough for him. We’re not mature, energetic, Harvard, world traveler, rich, handsome, lucky, witty. Perfect white teeth. It fucking grates on me just to look at him.” (DeLillo, *Libra* 68)

Banister’s description of his hatred for Kennedy is telling. He begins by discussing Kennedy’s persona, the fantasy figure of the president which fulfills the role of an exemplary masculinity. Banister is aware, at least in the beginning, that he is not describing the president himself, but his image, or perhaps more precisely Banister is describing how Kennedy’s persona is consumed as an image. Unlike Oswald, then, Banister recognizes this exemplar of masculinity as an unattainable fantasy, and responds to this unattainability with anger. That passage continues: “Do you know what charisma means to me? It means he holds the secrets. The dangerous secrets used to be held outside the government. Plots, conspiracies, secrets of revolution, secrets of the end of the social order. Now it’s the government that has a lock on the secrets that matter . . . Strip the man of his powerful secrets. Take his secrets and he’s nothing” (68-69). Here, Banister not only reiterates Everett’s own thoughts on the importance of secrets, but he tellingly associates Kennedy’s exemplary masculinity with his ownership of secrets. If there is any doubt that Banister’s involvement in the plot against Kennedy is motivated by his feeling of wounded (or insufficient) masculinity rather than, for example, simple pride or even

revenge, these doubts should be erased by his discussion with his co-conspirators, when he asks “How much of my manhood is watery puke? That’s what I want to know” (*Libra* 64).

Furthermore, Banister connects Kennedy’s (fantastic) masculine image with the president’s (real) plans for the country. He ends his description by enumerating the characteristics of Kennedy’s masculine persona, virtually echoing—or in this case, prefiguring—the details of Dean’s previously noted sketch of the “New Frontiersman”: “youth, ‘vigor,’ moral courage, and ‘toughness’” (169). In doing so, he echoes Wesley’s description of the “representative man.” Describing the aspects of the epic she sees at play in *Libra*, Wesley argues that, “the contemporary epic records the continued longing for the whole and representative man, the man whose developmental trajectory stands not for the achievement of the individual ego but for the integration of the state” (140-141). Wesley goes on to discuss Oswald as DeLillo’s attempt at crafting a “representative man,” but the quotation points toward the equally important example of Kennedy. Kennedy may not have been a monarch, but aside from being America’s Head of State, he also belonged to a political dynasty, and his presidency was popularly referred to as “Camelot.” In *Libra*, DeLillo emphasizes this connection to the monarchy, noting that Kennedy kept a scrap of paper on him, with the words “*They whirl asunder and dismember me,*” from Shakespeare’s *The Life and Death of King John*, scribbled on it (396).<sup>139</sup> Much of Kennedy’s symbolic importance stemmed from the fact that he seemed to represent an American aristocracy, an ideal version of American masculinity for the 1960s.

---

<sup>139</sup> DeLillo’s source may be Schlesinger’s *A Thousand Days* (725).

Connecting Kennedy's political and cultural designs for "a different kind of society" with a description of his image, Banister seems to conflate the body of the president with the state of the nation, in a matter reminiscent of medieval associations between king and country. Furthermore, he seems concerned that the nation simply cannot live up to Kennedy's image, that "we" (perhaps the "we" of "We the people") are not smart enough, rich enough, handsome enough.<sup>140</sup> What Banister is detailing here is the tension that arises when a so-called "representative man," an epic hero, and an exemplary masculinity are merged in one persona, and, more to the point, when this happens in a democratic society.

How can JFK be *representative* and *exemplary*? Kennedy is the people's actual "representative" in the democratic sense, yet Donald Pease argues that when the characters of democratic representatives are idealized, they stop being reflective of who the people really are and instead become what the American people would like themselves to be (34). It is worth remembering that Kennedy is not only a "representative" of the people, but "representative" to the extent that he is understood as embodying certain characteristics, or even ideals, of a generation (or of whatever group he is believed to be representative). Both "representative man" and exemplars of masculinity are fantasy figures. The representative man is a fantasy, since, as Nelson states, "No single citizen can stand for the 'whole' unless 'we' are all radically and repressively the same, unless some (even many) of 'us' drop out (or into the margins) of the picture" (223). Through his election to the office of the President, Kennedy becomes

---

<sup>140</sup> For a discussion of the figure of the statesman, and how he reverses the democratic structures of representation, see Donald Pease's *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context*, especially 32-35.

“representative,” an embodiment of the will of the people. Mailer presents a similar take on Kennedy in his famous essay on Kennedy: “a hero embodies his time and is not so very much better than his time, but he is larger than life and so is capable of giving direction to the time, able to encourage a nation to discover the deepest colors of its character” (123). Recalling Wesley’s statement that, in the tradition of the epic, the representative man’s “developmental trajectory” represents “the integration of the state” (141), it can be seen that the body of Kennedy is a powerful locus for the forces of masculine domination. Through his masculine embodiment, masculinity becomes the hinge between democratic representation *and* hegemonic domination.

However, Kennedy is not an unproblematic exemplar of masculinity. As Banister’s ruminations on Kennedy make clear, Kennedy’s masculine status may reinforce patriarchy, but this image is not just an “unattainable fantasy” but a *simulacrum* of masculinity, after DeLillo’s usual *modus operandi*. As Jesse Kavadlo notes, critics have often associated Jean Baudrillard’s simulacrum with DeLillo’s novels, especially *White Noise* and its “Most Photographed Barn” (386). According to Baudrillard, in “the era of simulacra and simulation” we can no longer “separate the false from the true, the real from its artificial resurrection, as everything is already dead and resurrected in advance” (*Simulacra* 6).<sup>141</sup> Kennedy, like Wayne, is *like* his image; the image of Kennedy takes precedence over the man—thoroughly disseminated, as his image is,

---

<sup>141</sup> According to Baudrillard, there are four “successive phases of the image”:

- It is the reflection of a profound reality;
- It masks and denatures a profound reality;
- It masks the *absence* of a profound reality;
- It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum (*Simulacra* 6)

through cultural institutions—until finally he becomes an exemplar of a hyperreal, postmodern masculinity, baring no relation to real men whatsoever.

Kennedy's masculinity, then, can only offer a kind of negative integration for other masculinities, and his exemplary and representative status is understood as more of a threat than a salve to the characters of the novel—a reminder, first, of their own imperfect manhood, but also of the imperfectability or insufficiency of all masculinity. Alternatively, a less evident form of unifying masculinity is found in the role of the author, a figure, exemplified by DeLillo himself, who can make sense and take control of the world around him.

### **3. Getting a Grip on the Runaway World: The Author as Exemplary Masculinity**

If there is still room for the self-made man in America, the autonomous or even rootless individual man who can exist outside of the system and still maintain his agency, then according to Don DeLillo, that figure is the novelist:

The writer is the person who stands outside society, independent of affiliation and independent of influence. The writer is the man or woman who automatically takes a stance against his or her government. There are so many temptations for American writers to become part of the system and part of the structure that now, more than ever, we have to resist. American writers ought to stand and live in the margins, and be more dangerous. Writers in repressive societies are considered dangerous. That's why so many of them are in jail.

(Arensberg 45-46)

Here, DeLillo speaks of authorship in a way that sets the writer up against the previously discussed figure of the Organization man, succinctly reproducing this crisis narrative. For

DeLillo, the writer “stands outside of society,” somehow able to extricate himself from the systems within which DeLillo’s own characters find themselves fully imbricated. From this privileged position, the writer fights the system, or, in this case, the Organization. DeLillo even describes the writer’s particular form of agency according to the logic of the masculine anxiety we have been discussing: he sees the writer’s actions as “dangerous,” implying the writer’s capacity to do violence, if only a symbolic form of violence, to the systems he opposes. It is the figure of the author, then, who is held up as an exemplary masculinity: he cannot mend the fractured masculinity of the so-called “American century,” but he can begin to make sense of it, creating for it—in this instance—a unifying narrative about that very fracturing.

Bringing an analysis of DeLillo’s concept of authorship into the discussion is motivated by the importance of the role of the author in the novel itself. At least two characters attempt to find their agency through authorship: Everett and Oswald. Everett, of course, is the author of the conspiracy, the plot against Kennedy. Everett constructs the plot out of “Pocket litter” (50), sitting at a desk in his basement. This process is described as though he were a novelist constructing a narrative: “Mackey would find a model for the character Everett was in the process of creating. They wanted a name, a face, a bodily frame they might use to extend their fiction into the world” (50).<sup>142</sup> The plot is a “fiction,” and Oswald is the main character. This fiction that Everett is creating, a pro-Castro attempt on Kennedy’s life, will prove his control of the world, his masculine agency. Everett not only wants his old enemy Castro to be blamed for the attempt, thus

---

<sup>142</sup> See also the description on 146-148.

potentially resulting in a war against Cuba and possibly Castro's death, but he also hopes to implicate the CIA in the plot, avenging himself against his former employers:

He would not consider the plan a success if the uncovering of its successive layers did not reveal the CIA's schemes, his own schemes in some cases, to assassinate Fidel Castro. This was the little surprise he was keeping for the end. It was his personal contribution to an informed public. Let them see what goes on in the committee rooms and corner offices. The pocket litter, the gunman's effects, the sidetrackings and back alleys must allow investigators to learn that Kennedy wanted Castro dead, that plots were devised, approved at high levels, put into motion, and that Fidel or his senior aides decided to retaliate. This was the major subtext and moral lesson of Win Everett's plan.

*(Libra 52-53)*

Everett describes his hopes for his plan in terms associated with fictional narratives, noting the plan's "subtext" and "moral lesson," but the major motivator seems to be self-aggrandizement (the fact that his own schemes would be revealed, and the sheer breadth of his plot) and revenge against the agency which relegated him to Texas Woman's University and "emasculated" him into semi-retirement.

However, while Everett is an author figure, he proves to be a failed author. In short, his narrative gets away from him: he is unable to maintain authority over the text. He reveals his worries in a passage which further connects his plot with the writing of fiction, claiming that "Plots carry their own logic. There is a tendency of plots to move toward death. He believed that the idea of death is woven into the nature of every plot. A narrative plot no less than a conspiracy of armed men ... He worried about the deathward



logic of his plot” (*Libra* 223). Indeed, Everett loses control, having authored not a failed assassination attempt, but an unintentional and successful assassination. As Timothy Parrish argues, “Everett finds that the world responds [to his fiction] with counterfictions. He becomes the author of plots never intended” (Parrish 8). As the plot gets away from him, Everett’s presence in *Libra* lessens: we learn that he cooperates with the Agency’s internal investigations (446), and in 1965 is found dead in a motel room where he is staying under an assumed name (381-382).

Oswald, like Everett, seeks to gain prominence in his life through authorship. He is a frequent diarist, constantly working on his “Historic Diary.” This is a document which “He wrote ... in two sittings, breaking for coffee at 4:00 A. M. He wanted to explain himself to posterity. People would read these words someday and understand the fears and aspirations of a man who only wanted to see for myself what socialism was like” (*Libra* 212). As with Everett, here there is an element of self-aggrandizement, a desire to write himself into history. However, Oswald is dyslexic, a handicap which he cannot seem to overcome: “He made wild tries at phonetic spelling. But the language tricked him with its inconsistencies. He watched sentences deteriorate, powerless to make them right. The nature of things was to be elusive. Things slipped through his perceptions. He could not get a grip on the runaway world” (213). This last sentence, especially, highlights what is at stake for Oswald with his writing: writing is an act of making sense of the world. Indeed, before Oswald turns to violence, he sees writing as a method by which he may enter history; in fact, Parrish argues that “What makes Oswald coherent as a character is his desire to transform his self into language” (12).

The result of Oswald's dyslexia is fragmented and occasionally impenetrable prose: "She is flabbergassed, but agrees to help. Asks me about myself and my reasons for doing this. I explain I am a communist, ect. She is politly sym. but uneasy now. She tries to be a friend to me. She feels sorry for me I am someth. ne." (150-151). Oswald's poor writing makes him a target for ridicule, especially when measured against his goals as a writer. Indeed, Oswald wants to model himself after Ernest Hemingway, explaining to Kirilenko that "I want to write short stories on contemporary American life" (*Libra* 161).<sup>143</sup> Hemingway is, of course, perhaps the American writer most associated with masculinity.<sup>144</sup> Significantly, Hemingway played an important role during the formative years of *Esquire*: the magazine's editor, Arnold Gingrich, specifically sought out Hemingway for contributions, in order, in the editor's words, to "deodorize the lavender whiff coming from the mere presence of fashion pages" (Gingrich 81).<sup>145</sup> Oswald therefore models himself after *Esquire*'s original exemplar of masculinity; however, Oswald lacks the capability to describe and diagnose "contemporary American life"—a capability DeLillo himself demonstrates in writing *Libra*—and by comparing his own failed writing to Hemingway's Oswald only highlights his own masculine failings.

In addition to Everett and Oswald is Nicholas Branch, whose most prominent characteristic is his failure to write the Secret History of the assassination. Branch's project is therefore similar to DeLillo's; however, Branch's failure underscores DeLillo's apparent success. As Parrish explains, there is a significant difference between Branch

---

<sup>143</sup> DeLillo seems to find this fact quite significant; for example, in one interview he quotes Oswald as writing that "He wanted to write 'short stories on contemporary American life' " (DeCurtis 60); he references the same quotation in Arensberg (44).

<sup>144</sup> See, e.g.: David Earle's *All Man! : Hemingway, 1950s Men's Magazines, and the Masculine Persona*.

<sup>145</sup> For the story of Hemingway's role in the early days of *Esquire*, see Merrill (32-35). These events are also covered by Gingrich in *Nothing But People* (84-90).

and DeLillo: “DeLillo’s fiction gains a purchase on the assassination precisely because it surrenders claims to historical veracity” (10). Both men are writers, but it is the novelist, not the historian, who can get a grip on the runaway world.

Oswald’s goal of being like Hemingway reinforces the notion that it is only the author who can “get a grip” (*Libra* 213) or “gain a purchase” (Parrish 10) on the world around him. Branch implicates another modernist writer in his description of the Warren Report as “the megaton novel James Joyce would have written if he’d moved to Iowa City and lived to be a hundred” (*Libra* 182). As Parrish notes, “DeLillo’s allusion to Joyce reveals the extent to which he remains attached to the traditional modernist ideal of the writer who can master the universe he writes” (5).<sup>146</sup> Like Hemingway and Joyce, DeLillo can construct out of fragments a representation of the world around him: he cannot create a totality, the kind of fictive totality represented by Kennedy’s masculinity, but he can make sense of the pieces.

Here, it is worth remembering Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s classic discussion of Western society’s traditional association of the penis with the pen. After citing Gerard Manley Hopkins’ statement that “The male quality is the creative gift,” Gilbert and Gubar explain that “Male sexuality, in other words, is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The poet’s pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis” within the patriarchal tradition (4). According to this frank equation, by demonstrating a failure of authorship, Oswald, Everett, and Branch are in fact demonstrating their own impotence. Consequently, though Everett notes that “It is essential to master the data” (*Libra* 447), the data masters him, and as a result, he

---

<sup>146</sup> This particular quotation is widely discussed by critics. See, e.g.: Tabbi (175), Carmichael (208), and Kavadlo (396).

becomes fixated on his passive state, three times identifying his office as “the room of growing old” (14, 59, 450). Similarly, as Everett considers the plot getting away from him, he fantasizes about cooperating with the Agency (364-65). He slips at the top of a stairway, and his wife, Mary Frances, immediately “take[s] him by the elbow and lead[s] him inside,” after which he confides in her: “I couldn’t even begin to carry on if you somehow weren’t well. I count on you for everything that matters” (366). The “Cold Warrior,” questioning his competency as an author, finds himself, more than ever, subordinated to his wife who, as discussed, is thoroughly associated with domesticity.

Gilbert and Gubar further explain that patriarchy and authorship have a history of being confused, one for the other. As they explain, Western literary tradition has long held the notion that the writer is the “father” of his text; referencing Edward Said, they note that “the metaphor is built into the very word, *author*, with which writer, deity, and *pater familias* are identified” (4). DeLillo himself describes American literature as a patriarchal institution, a history of great men:

Think of the postwar generation of writers. I’m talking specifically about male writers. Styron, Mailer, Vidal, Baldwin, and so on. Then think of the subsequent generation. Pynchon. McElroy. McGuane. Stone. Myself. A couple of others. If you were to give each group a choice of writing a novel about John F. Kennedy or Lee Harvey Oswald, what would be the result? It seems to me that the first group would choose Kennedy, and the second group, my group, would almost invariably choose Oswald. (Arensberg 46)

This quotation is significant, not, in this case, because of how DeLillo characterizes these two groups of writers, but because he perceives of American literature as being a paternal

line of generations, implying fathers and sons and a completely homosocial national literature. Indeed, DeLillo's statement matches Gilbert and Gubar's argument even more closely, insofar as it sides the second generation with the figure who murders the figure representing the first generation: i.e., this is precisely the Oedipal relation that Gilbert and Gubar, relying on Harold Bloom, analyze and critique for its denial to women of authorship. DeLillo therefore demonstrates Bloom's "anxiety of influence" as read through Gilbert and Gubar's feminist lens, repudiating female authorship completely.<sup>147</sup>

*Esquire* itself is guilty of reinforcing the notion of authorship as essentially masculine. In July 1988, fiction editor Rust Hills introduces the "summer-reading" issue of the magazine by tying its current fiction to that published in the 1930's: "In those early days, our own Founding Fathers published the most-celebrated American writers of the time—Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, Steinbeck—all the ones you recognize by their last names alone, as you do here with DeLillo and Mailer and Oates" (51). The inclusion of Joyce Carol Oates in this lineage of American writers keeps it from being a completely masculine collection of names, but she is listed last, while on the cover her name comes after not only Mailer and DeLillo, but the lesser known Bruce Jay Friedman and Jay McInerney. Hills' description of *Esquire's* literary history parallels DeLillo's description of a homosocial, paternalistic American literature.

Of the two excerpts of *Libra* published in *Esquire* magazine, one part, entitled "Oswald in the Lone Star State"—comprising much of the chapter "In Dallas" from the

---

<sup>147</sup> Updating Nina Baym's argument that male American authors have opposed their supposedly serious writing to encroaching femininity, Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Anxiety of Obsolescence* similarly discusses DeLillo's work as a response to the perceived threat posed by television, which is associated (through a certain sexist logic) to women and minority writers.

finished novel—was featured in the aforementioned “summer-reading” issue. Incidentally, the cover features a close-up of Norman Mailer; his contribution to the issue is the first piece of his fiction that *Esquire* has published since its serialization of *An American Dream*. The magazine dedicates itself to the “Lives of the Authors,” emphasizing the individuality and authority of each. The first page of “Oswald in the Lone Star State” is printed opposite a full-page portrait of DeLillo, aestheticizing DeLillo in much the same way that models in the advertisements found throughout the magazine are aestheticized. The author’s name is also the predominant feature of the first page, significantly dwarfing the title of the piece. A highlighted box of dialogue advertises DeLillo, not his novel: “Back from the Future: DeLillo’s made a habit of anticipating next year’s disaster, of getting into the future to send back dispatches of bone-chilling humor from an America made exotic by technology. ‘I’ve been prescient in poker games. A novelist just *sees* things before other people’” (52). These highlighted side-boxes recur throughout the excerpt, two of them containing extreme close-ups of DeLillo, all of them containing his commentary. These boxes are darker and placed near the centre of the page; the effect is that the text of “Oswald in the Lone Star State” is subordinated to DeLillo’s authorial intrusions.

Kavadlo, in a study of the role of authorship in the work of DeLillo (and specifically in *Underworld*), offers a way of conceptualizing how *Esquire* emphasizes an “elevated” idea of the author in *Libra*, arguing that real function of the Author’s Note is “to remind the reader that the book was authored . . . DeLillo’s stance on silence, even when broken, seems to re-establish Romanticism and modernism’s elevation of the author, albeit reflexively and perhaps ironically” (385). While DeLillo’s aesthetics

distance the author from the work, his photos and interviews in *Esquire*, which emphasize his reclusiveness and his separateness, actually elevate the author.

Similarly, Cieply discusses how the author was an important figure for *Esquire* in the 1960s (and, I would argue, into the 1980s), especially in relation to the Establishment. Cieply argues that *Esquire* advertises “lifestyle” as the arena in which masculinity can be fashioned. Quoting Mike Featherstone, Cieply argues that,

under the regime of lifestyle, the self is an aesthetic project that reflects a ‘stylisation of life’. Inherent in this sense of lifestyle as a ‘life project’, is a self-consciousness and an awareness of the ‘in-process’ nature of the self as a work-in-progress. Thus, the author and ... [*Esquire*’s ideal readership] share a common language of creation, destruction and rejuvenation. The creative agonies the writer suffers, in short, become the folklore of masculine individualism. (“Uncommon” 164-65)

This is to say that, “under the regime of lifestyle,” the author is an important exemplar of masculinity—a white-collar worker who, through suffering and heroic accomplishment, can make sense of the world around him and a name for himself.

Of course, DeLillo is the author of *Libra* and the excerpt itself, but he is not the author of *Esquire*—the placement of his image and his extra-textual words on the page, and the design of the excerpt, were no doubt left up to the magazine, not the novelist. What is important, though, is how the image of the author is being circulated, in a method similar to the magazine’s advertising. And what is for sale is the image of a certain kind of masculine agency which DeLillo seems to personify. A subsequent dialogue box implies just how DeLillo can be sold as an antidote to the emasculating effects of

domesticity: it states that DeLillo “disdained the ‘around-the-house-and-in-the-yard’ fiction of domesticity popular then [in 1982]. ‘It’s ironic I wrote *White Noise* as a domestic novel’—the only one that features a toxic cloud, Hitler studies, and a pill to erase the fear of death” (54). Domesticity itself might be bad for masculinity, but DeLillo’s satire of domesticity somehow provides a safety valve, an assurance of masculine hegemony.



## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

94,600,000 Google search results in 0.22 seconds

448,234 results on Amazon

2,810,000 on NYTimes.com

Opinions

Advice

Expertise

Books

Movies

TV specials

Magazines

All trying to answer the question

Or claiming they have the answer

How to Be a Man

How to Be a Man (Frey 1-14)

In 2013, Narrative 4, which describes itself as “a global organization” with the goal of promoting “empathy through the exchange of stories” (*Narrative 4*), partnered with *Esquire* magazine to produce a website containing over one hundred contributions, each with the title “How to Be a Man.” A selection of eighty, including stories by Salmon Rushdie, Khaled Hosseini, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, was later published as *The Book of Men*.

James Frey's poem, the first stanza of which makes up my conclusion's epigraph, was excluded from the published version, but his observations point to the enduring significance of, interest in, and the multiple answers to the question of "How to Be a Man." Furthermore, as the middle of the stanza indicates, "How to Be a Man" is a question deeply imbricated with the marketplace; there is a whole section of industry dedicated to providing answers to this seemingly unanswerable question. Moreover, the very nature of Narrative 4's endeavour—to ask the question of "How to Be a Man" to authors, men and women from all over the globe, and to have them respond in a number of genres, whether poetry, essay, or fiction—points to the multiplicity of masculinities that crowd the gender order or seek dominance in different gender regimes.

"How to Be a Man" is a question that endures, because the answer not only promises to explain a man's relationship to his gender, and so make intelligible his relative position in a network of social relations, but also seeks to explain his relationship to power in a persistently patriarchal gender order. Being a man—practicing hegemonic masculinity—is therefore always about men's relationship to dominance.

The recent, October 2014 issue of *Esquire* seems to tackle the issue of men's relationship to violence—and therefore, in the final instance, to violence—quite directly. The issue focuses almost entirely on the idea of mentoring or "building" men correctly. The centrepiece of the issue is interviews with dozens of men who identify the influential figures in their lives. The feature is entitled "Who Made You The Man You Are Today?" This idea of masculine mentorship is taken up in Mike Sager's "Are There Still Boy Scouts?," a feature which discusses the current state of the well-known boys' organization. Much of the article is taken up by an interview with Robert Gates, the new

national president of the organization. Gates is the former Secretary of Defense of the United States; in Althusser's terms, he is the former head of America's Repressive State Apparatus (110-13). Gates' position as the president of the Boy Scouts highlights that organization's role as an Ideological State Apparatus; moreover, the paramilitary nature of the Boy Scouts reinforces Connell's claim that violence (either explicit or implicit) is central to the construction of certain masculinities.

Sager describes the Boy Scouts as existing in a moment of crisis: "the organization is struggling to find its place in a postmodern, politically correct, multicultural society. The scouts were founded in 1910, at a time when the country was becoming increasingly urbanized, when the familiarity of small-town life was giving way to the anonymity (and godlessness and heterogeneity) of the industrialized city" (147). While Sager's description of the Boy Scouts' origin might be glib, it demonstrates the way the organization was conceived of as a hegemonic masculinity project, one which intended to retrench a highly conservative, white, and heterosexual construction of masculinity against heterogeneous and perhaps irreligious, "othered" constructions of masculinity.

Discussing today's Scouts as a heterogeneous group, Sager focuses on the story of Romulda Vasquez Pena III, a Hispanic Scout leader whose troop is made up of youth from South-Central Los Angeles (148). Indeed, Sager's story seems to indicate that the Scouts act most effectively as an Ideological State Apparatus that interpellates young, racialized men into a hegemonic, masculine subject position. Here are the workings of hegemonic masculinity writ large: through an act of renegotiation, hegemonic masculinity makes way for "othered" (in this case Hispanic) men, as long as they

conform to other traditional masculine characters, ones which continue to symbolically reinforce masculine dominance.

Sager's story suggests that the alternative to the Scouts, at least for the Hispanic youth of Los Angeles, is life in violent criminal gangs. One implication is that male physicality can either be regulated and made to work for patriarchy, or unregulated and destructive. This point is reinforced by the inclusion in the same issue of *Esquire* of Tom Junod's "Everything We Know About Mass Shooters is Wrong." While the article never explicitly announces that mass shootings are a gendered problem—that is, that mass shooters are almost exclusively young and male—the placement in *Esquire*, and especially this issue of *Esquire*, nonetheless indicates that mass shootings are a problem connected to masculinity. The "mass shooter" is a failed masculine figure, the poignant alternative to the Boy Scout. The "mass shooter" is the failure of hegemonic masculinity projects, but also—the placement in *Esquire* implies—a product of them. As Antonio Gramsci argues, hegemony is primarily established through leadership (the Boy Scouts model), but also through direct (i.e. violent) subordination (75). Mass shootings are the nightmare version of masculine hegemony; *Esquire* argues that men must be properly educated into positions of dominance.

Concerns about the role of domination and violence in the construction of masculinity appear, also, in *Narrative 4*'s collection. It is perhaps telling that these concerns are most directly addressed by female authors. For example, Liz Moore's contribution—named, like all the rest, "How to Be a Man"—describes in graphic detail the sadistic sexual humiliation and gang rape of an unnamed girl. The short story, which is told from the perspective of Jimmy, and seemingly takes place at a high school house

party, is reminiscent of recent stories circulated in the media; in particular, some of the details are similar to the Stuebenville High School rape case. While the male characters of Moore's story are named, the victim remains unnamed. Not only does this have the effect of reflecting the male narrator's perspective, by denying the victim individuality, and therefore personhood, but this also has the effect of potentially universalizing the female victim. In other words, the female character could be any woman—the humiliation and violence to which she is subjected has nothing to do with her, but only with her gender. The party becomes a predominantly homosocial space in which a violent, patriarchal masculinity is compulsively performed for the approval of other men.

The story ends with Jimmy reflecting on pictures of the girl's sexual assault, which have been posted online:

He thought of prisoners—the frightening hooded prisoners in photographs that Mr. Colgan, his favorite teacher, had projected onto the whiteboard in his political science class last fall. The prisoners were from one place and they had been taken to another. One was naked and wearing a dog collar. One had his hands extended out like Jesus on the cross. What is it that the soldiers were trying to teach them?, Mr. Colgan had asked his students, but nobody could say. (Moore)

While Jimmy is unable to make sense of his own associations, he seems on the verge of understanding his actions as an act of violent, colonialist othering. Here, a direct parallel is drawn between the treatment of women in their own patriarchal society, and the inhuman torture of illegally detained “enemy combatants.” The symbolic violence always at work in the subordination of women is here cruelly made physical and explicit.

But there is, perhaps, some small hint of hope at the end of Moore's story. However brief this hope might be, Moore implies that the right teaching, the right education, can change men's perspectives. Masculine domination can be countered, but it can only be countered through an ideological analysis that reveals the workings of hegemonic masculinity, and through masculinity projects which seek to educate and interpellate men as subjects of a more egalitarian gender order. Prose and fiction, like Moore's work itself, and like the work of Baldwin, Capote, and the others discussed in this study, will play a critical role in just such a project.

In the current neoliberal moment, in which the marketplace has come to dominate all aspects of life, many literary critics have turned their focus to financial capital, seeing other social differences—race, sexuality, gender—as essentially an aspect of “identity politics” which distract from the real issue of economic inequality. However, patriarchy and capitalism, as our preeminent systems of social dominance, are intimately intertwined. Over twenty years ago, Raewyn Connell stated that “The reassertion of a dominance-based masculinity” is embodied in

the 1980s cult of the “entrepreneur” in business. Here, gender imagery, institutional change, and political strategy intersect. The deregulation policies of the new-right governments in the 1980s dismantled Keynesian strategies for social integration via expert macro-economic regulation. The credibility of the new policies rested on the image of a generation of entrepreneurs whose wealth-creating energies were waiting to be unleashed. That this stratum was masculine is culturally unquestionable. Among other

things, their management jargon is full of lurid gender terminology: thrusting entrepreneurs, opening up virgin territory, aggressive lending, etc. (“Big Picture” 614)

One lesson to take away from Connell’s analysis is that neoliberal capitalism was, and remains, largely driven by a group of men engaged in a hegemonic masculinity practice, “legitimated by an ideology centering on an economic theory whose most distinctive feature is its blanket exclusion from discourse of women’s unpaid work” (615).

Hegemonic masculinity seeks to legitimate economic practice, and vice versa.

Masculinity is serious business. For the authors discussed in this study, like the authors included in *The Book of Men*, masculinity is similarly multiple, tied to the market, and concerned with power. However, practicing hegemonic masculinity, or being subordinated to it, is always understood as an act of dominance—an act through which men are terrorized almost as much as they benefit. *Esquire* magazine proposes that men practice a hegemonic masculinity project that maximizes the benefits of masculinity—but perhaps more importantly, tries to reduce the feeling of terror—by offering men agency in the marketplace.

Their solutions to the historic “problems” of patriarchy work to an extent, but the writings analyzed in this study always betray a discomfort, a discomfort not only with masculinity and the relationship to power that it entails, but also to the marketplace and consumption. Indeed, the texts under study often express—either explicitly or implicitly—a desire for alternative gender configurations, for an *outside* to a patriarchal gender order. This is true of queer men like Baldwin and Capote, whose works seek to escape masculine domination, either through an elaborate, explicit critique of hegemonic

masculinity, or through the creation, in fiction, of queer spaces which engender alternative, less toxic gender relations. It is true, too, of O'Brien's work, which holds up masculinity as a form of insanity. And it is true of Mailer, Carver, and DeLillo, men who seemingly champion masculinity but nonetheless provide queer or feminine role models to emulate, or implicate consumerism and advanced capitalism in a process that alienates men from themselves.

Perhaps for a strategy intent on countering neoliberal domination and market subjectivity to be successful, it will have to partake of the utopian thinking about gender that this study's authors have begun. Perhaps it will take the planning of new masculinity projects to create non-sexist, non-exploitative men, prepared to go about the important work of creating a more equal economic and gender order. A more equal gender order will require men to support—not lead—women and transgendered people in a critique of masculine domination. It is only through such a counter-hegemonic bloc that real change can begin to happen. To address so many of the twenty-first century's problems, we must first tackle the enduring question of "How to Be a Man."



## Works Cited

- Abu-Lughod, Janet. *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.
- “Actual Size!” *Esquire* Oct. 1975: 140-147. Print.
- “Affluence & Influence.” *Esquire Media Kit*. Esquire, 2014. Web. 25 Jun. 2014.
- Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *Mapping Ideology*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 2012. 100-140. Print.
- Arensberg, Ann. “Seven Seconds.” DePietro 40-47. Rpt. from *Vogue*, Aug. 1988: 336-339, 390. Print.
- Armengol, Josep. “In the Dark Room: Homosexuality and/as Blackness in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*.” *Signs* 37.3 (2012): 671-693. Print.
- . *Richard Ford and the Fiction of Masculinities*. New York: Peter Lang P, 2010. Print.
- “As for General Content.” *Esquire* Autumn 1933: 4. Print.
- “Backstage with *Esquire*: Capote’s Artful Nonfiction.” *Esquire* Dec. 1979: 6. Print.
- Baldwin, James. “Alas, Poor Richard.” *The Price of the Ticket*: 269-88. Print.
- . *Another Country*. New York : Dial P, 1962. Print.
- . “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy.” *The Price of the Ticket*: 289-303. Print.
- . *Blues for Mister Charlie*. New York: Dial P, 1964. Print.
- . “Color.” *The Price of the Ticket*: 319-23. Print.
- . “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” *The Price of the Ticket*: 27-34. Print.
- . “Fifth Avenue, Uptown.” *Esquire*, July 1960. 72-76. Rpt. in *The Price of the Ticket*: 205-213. Print.
- . “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood.” *Playboy*, Jan. 1985. Rpt. as “Here Be Dragons” in *The Price of the Ticket*: 677-90. Print.

- . *Giovanni's Room*. 1956. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.
- . "Going to Meet the Man." *Going to Meet the Man*. New York: Dial P, 1965. 229-249. Print.
- . Interview. *Esquire*. 23 Jul. 2013. Web. 17 Jan 2014. Rpt. of *Esquire* Jul. 1968: 49-53, 116. Print.
- . "Many Thousands Gone." *The Price of the Ticket*: 65-78. Print.
- . "The New Lost Generation." *The Price of the Ticket*: 305-313. Print.
- . "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel." *The Price of the Ticket*: 237-244. Print.
- . "The White Man's Guilt." *Ebony*, August 1965: 47-48. Print.
- Barker, Chris. "Cultural Capital." *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*. London: SAGE P Ltd, 2004. Print.
- Baron, Herman. *Author Index to Esquire, 1933-1973*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow P, 1976. Print.
- Barth, John. "Night-Sea Journey." *Esquire* June 1966: 82-83, 147-48. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Mirror of Production*. Trans. Mark Poster. St. Louis: Telos P, 1975. Print.
- . *Simulations*. MIT Press, 1983. Print.
- . *Simulacra and Simulation*. 1981. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. Print.
- Baym, Nina. "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors." *American Quarterly* 33.2 (1981): 123-139. Print

- Belleggia, Lino. "Staging and Performing in Small Rooms: Don DeLillo's *Libra*." *Critical Engagements: A Journal of Criticism and Theory* 2. 1 (2008 Summer): 167-194. Print.
- Benwell, Bethan. "Ambiguous Masculinities: Heroism and Anti-Heroism in the Men's Lifestyle Magazine." Benwell 151-168. Print.
- Benwell, Bethan, ed. *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*. Oxford: Blackwell P, 2003. Print.
- Benyon, John. *Masculinities and Culture*. Buckingham: Open UP, 2002. Print.
- Bethea, Arthur F. *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Bordo, Susan. "Does Size Matter?" Tuana *et al.* 19-37. Print.
- Borstelmann, Thomas. *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. 1979. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1984. Print.
- . *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001. Print.
- Bowers, Abigail L. "Seeing Ourselves from the Outside: Voyeuristic Empathy in Raymond Carver's *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*" *New Paths to Raymond Carver: Critical Essays on His Life, Fiction, and Poetry*. Ed. Sandra Lee Kleppe and Robert Miltner. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2008. 92-103. Print.
- Boxall, Peter. *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. Print .

- Boxer, David and Cassandra Phillips. "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver." *The Iowa Review* 10.3 (1979): 75-90. Print.
- Boyer, Paul. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. Print.
- Bram, Christopher. *Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America*. New York: Twelve, 2012. Print.
- Breazeale, Kenon. "In Spite of Women: *Esquire* Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer." *Signs* 20.1 (1994): 1-22. Print.
- Brewer, Mária Minich. "Surviving Fictions: Gender and Difference in Postmodern and Postnuclear Narrative." *Discourse* 9 (1987): 37-52. Print.
- Bridges, Tristan. "Gender Capital and Male Bodybuilders." *Body & Society* 15.1 (2009): 83-107. Print.
- Buchbinder, David. *Studying Men and Masculinities*. New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.
- Buckley, William F. "On Experiencing Gore Vidal." *Esquire* Aug. 1969: 108-113, 122-128, 131-132. Print.
- Buflithis, Philip H. *Norman Mailer*. New York: Ungar, 1978. Print.
- Burn, Gordon. "Poetry, Poverty and Realism Down in Carver Country." *The Times* 17 April 1985: 12. Rpt. in Gentry and Stull 117-119. Print.
- Burstein, Patricia. "Tiny Yes, But a Terror?" *People Online*. People, 10 May 1976. Web. 17 July 2013.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

- . *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- . *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- . "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." *inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*.  
Ed. Diana Fuss. New York and London: Routledge, 1991. 13-31. Print.
- Campbell, Ewing. *Raymond Carver: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne P,  
1992. Print.
- Campbell, James. *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin*. London: Faber and  
Faber, 1997. Print.
- Capote, Truman. *Answered Prayers*. New York: Vintage Books, 1987. Print.
- . "Dazzle." Rpt. in *Music for Chameleons*. New York: Random House, 1980. 51-64.  
Print.
- . "Kate McCloud." *Esquire* Dec. 1976: 81-96. Rpt. in *Answered* 81-113. Print.
- . "La Côte Basque." *Answered* 115-150. Rpt. of "La Côte Basque, 1965." *Esquire* Nov.  
1975: 110-118, 158. Print.
- . "Mojave." *Esquire* Jun. 1975: 83-91. Rpt. in *The Complete Stories of Truman Capote*.  
New York: Random House, 2004. 267-286. Print.
- . "Preface." *Music for Chameleons*. New York: Random House, 1980. xi-xix. Print.
- . "Unspoiled Monsters." *Esquire* May 1976: 55-68, 122-135. Rpt. in *Answered* 1-79.  
Print.
- . *Yachts and Things*. N.d. TS and MS. Vanity Fair Online. Web.
- Career Club advertisement, *Esquire* April 1977: 133. Print.

- Carmichael, Thomas. "Lee Harvey Oswald and the Postmodern Subject: History and Intertextuality in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, *The Names*, and *Mao II*." *Contemporary Literature* 34.2 (1993): 204-218. Print.
- Carver, Raymond. "Cheers." *Esquire* July 1976: 12. Rpt. in *All of Us: The Collected Poems*. 1988. New York: Vintage, 2000. 14. Print.
- . *Collected Stories*. New York: Library of America, 2009. Print.
- . "Collectors." *Esquire* Aug. 1975: 95-96. Rpt. in *Collected Stories* 78-84. Print.
- . "Neighbors." *Esquire* June 1971: 137-139. Rpt. in *Collected Stories* 8-13. Print.
- . "What is it?" *Esquire* May 1972: 135-137. Rpt. in *Collected Stories* 157-164. Print.
- Chapman, Mary, and Glenn Hendler. "Introduction." *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*. Ed. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. 1-16. Print.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994. Print.
- Christol, Hélène. "Whose power? Baldwin and the 'American legend of masculinity.'" Köllhofer, Jakob, ed. *James Baldwin: His Place in American Literary History and His Reception in Europe*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991. 79-88. Print.
- Cieply, Stefan. "The Lineaments of Personality: *Esquire* and the Problem of Male Consumer." Diss. U of Maryland, 2007. Print.
- . "The Uncommon Man: *Esquire* and the Problem of the North American Male Consumer, 1957-1963." *Gender and History* 22.1 (2010): 151-168. Print.
- Clark, Keith. *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2002. Print.

- Clark, Suzanne. *Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West*.  
Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2000. Print.
- Clarke, Charles Walter. "VD Control in Atom-Bombed Areas." *Journal of Social Hygiene*  
37.1 (January 1951): 3-7. Print.
- Coe, Kevin, et al. "Masculinity as Political Strategy: George W. Bush, the 'War on  
Terrorism,' and an Echoing Press." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 29:1: 31-  
55. Print.
- Cohen, Paul. "Cowboys Die Hard: Real Men and Businessmen in the Reagan-Era  
Blockbuster." *Film & History* 41.1 (2011): 71-81. Print.
- Connell, Raewyn [R. W.]. "The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History."  
*Theory and Society* 22.5 (1993): 597-623. Print.
- . *Gender*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Malden, MA: Polity P, 2009. Print.
- . *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity, 1987.  
Print.
- . "The History of Masculinity." *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Eds. Rachel Adams  
and David Savran. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. 245-61. Print.
- . "An Iron Man: The Body and Some Contradictions of Hegemonic Masculinity."  
Messner and Sabo 83-95. Print.
- . *Masculinities*: 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. U of California P, 2005. Print.
- . "On Hegemonic Masculinity and Violence: Response to Jefferson and Hall."  
*Theoretical Criminology* 6.1 (2002): 89-99. Print.

- . "Organized Powers: Masculinities, Managers and Violence." *Men and Development: Politicizing Masculinities*. Ed. Andrea Cornwall, Jerker Edstrom, and Alan Greig. London & New York: Zed Books, 2011. 85-97. Print.
- . "The Study of Masculinities." *Qualitative Research Journal* 14.1 (2014): 5-15. Print.
- Connell, Raewyn [R.W.] and James Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19.6 (2005): 829-859. Print.
- Cordle, Daniel. "Beyond the Apocalypse of Closure: Nuclear Anxiety in Postmodern Literature of the United States." *Cold War Literature: Writing the Global Conflict*. Ed. Andrew Hammond. New York: Routledge, 2006. 63-77. Print.
- . "Cultures of Terror: Nuclear Criticism During and Since the Cold War." *Literature Compass* 3.6 (2006): 1186-1199. Print.
- . "In Dreams, In Imagination: Suspense, Anxiety and the Cold War in Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*." *Critical Survey* 19.2 (2007): 101-120. Print.
- . *States of Suspense: The Nuclear Age, Postmodernism and United States Fiction and Prose*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008. Print.
- Cuordileone, K. A. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Dean, Robert D. *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2001. Print.
- DeCurtis, Anthony. "'An Outsider in This Society': An Interview with Don DeLillo." DePietro 52-74. Rpt. from *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89.2: 281-304. Print.
- Delany, Samuel R. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: New York UP, 2001. Print.



- DeLillo, Don. "Human Moments in World War III." *Esquire* July 1983: 118-26. Rpt. in  
*The Angel Esmeralda*, 2011. Print.
- . "In the Men's Room of the Sixteenth Century." *Esquire* Dec. 1971: 174-77, 243, 246.  
Print.
- . *Libra*. 1988. New York: Penguin Books, 2011. Print.
- . "The Lone Gunman Theory." *Esquire* Sept. 1988: 218-30. Print.
- . "Oswald in the Lone Star State." *Esquire* July 1988: 52-60. Print.
- . "Players." *Esquire* April 1977: 103-104, 122, 126, 128, 130, 132. Print.
- . *Players*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. Print.
- . *Underworld*. 1997. New York: Scribner, 1998. Print.
- . *White Noise*. 1985. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.
- Demetriou, Demetrakis Z. "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique."  
*Theory and Society* 30.3 (2001): 337-361. Print.
- DePietro, Thomas, ed. *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Jackson: UP Mississippi, 2005.  
Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven  
Missives)." *Diacritics* 14.2 (1984): 20-31. Print.
- Désert, Jean-Ulrick. "Queer Space." *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites  
of Resistance*. Ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda  
Retter. Seattle: Bay Press, 1999. 17-26. Print.
- Ditz, Toby. "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power:  
Some Remedies from Early American Gender History." *Gender & History* 16.1  
(2004): 1-35. Print.

- Docter, Richard. *Becoming a Woman: A Biography of Christine Jorgensen*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Donaldson, Mike. "What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?" *Theory and Society* 22.5 (1993): 643-657. Print.
- Donaldson, Stephen. "A Million Jockers, Punks, and Queens." *Prison Masculinities*. Eds. Don Sabo, Terry A. Kupers and Willie London. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001. 118-126. Print.
- "Dubious Achievement Awards." *Esquire* Jan. 1967: 82-89. Print.
- Duguid, Scott. "The Addiction of Masculinity: Norman Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance* and the Cultural Politics of Reaganism." *Journal of Modern Literature* 30.1 (2006): 23-30. Print.
- Duvall, John M., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.
- Earle, David M. *All Man!: Hemingway, 1950s Men's Magazines, and the Masculine Persona*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 2009. Print.
- . *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulps, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. Print.
- Early, Gerald. *Tuxedo Junction: Essay as American Culture*. New York: Ecco P, 1989. Print.
- Edelman, Lee. "The Part for the (W)hole: Baldwin, Homophobia, and the Fantasmatics of 'Race.'" *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 42-75. Print.

- Edwardes, Allen, and R.E.L Masters. *The Cradle of Erotica: A Study of Afro-Asian Sexual Expression and an Analysis of Erotic Freedom in Social Relationships*. London: Odyssey P, 1970. Print.
- Edwards, Ben. "The Never-Before-Told Story of the World's First Computer Art (It's a Sexy Dame)." *The Atlantic*. 24 Jan. 2013. Web. 24 Jun. 2014.
- "effeminate." *OED Online*. Oxford English Dictionary, 2012. Web. 29 June 2013.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*. Garden City: Anchor P, 1983. Print.
- Ehrenreich, John and Barbara Ehrenreich. "The Professional-Managerial Class." *Between Labor and Capital*. Ed. Pat Walker. Boston: South End, 1979. 5-45. Print.
- . "The Real Story Behind the Crash and Burn of America's Managerial Class." *Alternet*. Alternet, 19 Feb. 2013. Web.
- Eisenhauer, Robert G. *After Romanticism*. New York : Peter Lang, 2008. Print.
- Elger, Dietmar. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*. Trans. Elizabeth M. Solaro. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009. Print.
- Ellmann, Mary. *Thinking About Women*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
- Esquire*. *How to Be a Man: A Handbook of Advice, Inspiration, and Occasional Drinking*. New York: Hearst Books, 2014. Print.
- Esquire Subscription advertisement, Esquire May 1976: 6*. Print.
- Executive Research Institute Advertisement, *Esquire* Mar 1964: 153. Print.
- Ewen, Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen. *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1982. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1968. Print.

- Farrell, Susan. *Critical Companion to Tim O'Brien: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2011. Print.
- Featherstone, Mike. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: SAGE P, 1991. Print.
- Feldman, Susan. "Another Look at *Another Country*: Reconciling Baldwin's Racial and Sexual Politics." Miller 88-104. Print.
- Ferguson, Roderick. "The Nightmares of the Heteronormative." *Cultural Values* 4.4 (2000): 419-444. Print.
- Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978. Print.
- Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books, 2009. Print.
- Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2006. Print.
- Floyd, Kevin. *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009. Print.
- Foertsch, Jacqueline. "Not Bombshells But Basketcases: Gendered Illness in Nuclear Texts." *Studies in the Novel* 31.4 (1999): 471-488. Print.
- Foltene Advertisement, *Esquire* Sept 1988: 227. Print.
- Food & Wine* Advertisement, *Esquire* Sept 1988: 223. Print.
- Fox, Joseph M. "Editor's Note." *Answered* xiii-xxii. Print.

- Francois, Anne-Lise. ““These Boots Were Made for Walkin’”: Fashion as ‘Compulsive Artifice.’” *The Seventies: The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture*. Ed. Shelton Waldrep. New York: Routledge, 2000. 155-175. Print.
- Fraterrigo, Elizabeth. *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- Frey, James. “How to be a Man.” *How to Be a Man*. Narrative 4, n.d. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.
- Friedenberg, Walter. “Who Should Be President in 1960? What Should the Issues Be?” *Esquire* Jan 1960: 61-65. Print.
- “A Frightening Message for a Thanksgiving Issue.” Editorial. *Good Housekeeping* Nov. 1958: 61. Print.
- Gelber, Steven M. “Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity.” *American Quarterly* 49.1 (1997): 66-112. Print.
- Gentry, Marshall B., and William L. Stull, eds. *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1990. Print.
- Gilbert, James. *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s*. Chicago: UP, 2005. Print.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print.
- Gill, Rosalind. *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity P, 2007. Print.
- Gingrich, Arnold. “Differences of Opinion.” *Esquire* Nov. 1975: 8. Print.
- . “Gossip as an Art Form.” *Esquire* May 1976: 9, 12. Print.

- . *Nothing But People: the Early Days at Esquire, a Personal History, 1928-1958*. New York: Crown P, 1971. Print.
- Glenday, Michael K. *Norman Mailer*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1995. Print.
- Godden, Richard. *Fictions of Capital: The American Novel from James to Mailer*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Print
- . "Money and Things: Capitalist Realism, Anxiety, and Social Critique in Works by Hemingway, Wharton, and Fitzgerald." *A Companion to the American Novel 1900-1950*. Eds. John T. Matthews. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 181-201. Print.
- Goffman, Erving. *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. Print.
- Goldman, Robert. *Reading Ads Socially*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Gordon, Andrew. *An American Dreamer: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Fiction of Norman Mailer*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1980. Print.
- Gramsci, Antonio. "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. John Storey. London: Pearson, 2009. 75-80. Print.
- Grausam, Daniel. "Games People Play: Metafiction, Defense Strategy, and the Cultures of Simulation." *ELH* 78 (2011): 507-532. Print.
- Green, Jeremy. "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 45. 3 (1999 Fall): 571-599. Print.
- . "Libra." Duvall 94-107. Print.
- Greene, Bob. "American Beat: A Wolf in Wolf's Clothing." *Esquire* 94.3 (Sept 1980): 12-13. Print.

- Grindstaff, Laura, and Emily West. "Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport." *Social Problems* 53.4 (2006): 500-518. Print.
- Gunzenhäuser, Randi. "'All plots lead toward death': Memory, History, and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy." *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 43.1 (1998): 75-91. Print.
- Gutman, Stanley K. *Mankind in Barbary: The Individual and Society in the Novels of Norman Mailer*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1975. Print.
- Haig Scotch advertisement, *Esquire* Jan. 1967: 53. Print.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. Print.
- . *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York UP, 2005. Print.
- . "Thugs and Kings: Post-Imperial Masculinities in Recent Movies on Men and Masculinities." *Un/Sichtbarkeiten Der Differenz : Beiträge Zur Genderdebatte In Den Künsten*. Eds. Annette Jael Lehmann. Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 2001: 145-164. Print.
- Hall, Vanessa. "Influences of Feminism and Class on Raymond Carver's Short Stories." *Raymond Carver Review* 2 (2009): 54-80. Print.
- Hampton, Blake, and Howard Zieff. "Suck in that Gut, America!" *Esquire* Nov. 1962: 82-86. Print.
- Harker, Ben. "'To be there, inside, and not be there': Raymond Carver and class." *Textual Practice* 21.4 (2007): 715-736. Print.
- Harper, Phillip Brian. *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

- Hart Schaffner & Marx advertisement, *Esquire* Apr. 1972: 60-61. Print.
- Haug, Wolfgang Fritz. *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology & Culture*. New York: International General, 1987. Print.
- Heberle, Mark A. *A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2001. Print.
- Heller, Steven. "Esquire and Its Art Directors: A Survivor's Tale." *Graphic Design History*. Ed. Steven Heller and Georgette Ballance. New York: Allworth P, 2001. 51-63. Print.
- Helyer, Ruth. "DeLillo and Masculinity." *Duvall* 125-136. Print.
- Hemmingson, Michael. "Saying More without Trying to Say More: On Gordon Lish Reshaping the Body of Raymond Carver and Saving Barry Hannah." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 52.4 (2011): 479-498. Print.
- Henrickson, Margot A. *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*. Berkley: U of California P, 1997. Print.
- Hentschel, Martin. "Konrad Lueg and Gerhard Richter, Living with Pop - A Demonstration on Behalf of Capitalist Realism." *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture*. Ed. Christoph Grunenberg and Max Hollein. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002. 179-187. Print.
- Herbert, T. Walter. *Sexual Violence and American Manhood*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.
- Herzog, Toby. *Tim O'Brien*. New York: Twayne P, 1997. Print.
- Hills, Rust. "Literary Heat." *Esquire* July 1988: 51. Print.



- Hobbs, Alex. "Masculinity Studies and Literature." *Literature Compass* 10.4 (2013): 383–395. Print.
- Hoberek, Andrew. *The Twilight of the Middle Class*. Princeton: UP, 2005. Print.
- hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End P, 1990. Print.
- Horlacher, Stefan. "Towards Comparative Masculinity Studies: On the Independence of National Identity and the Construction of Masculinity." *Post-World War II Masculinities in British and American Literature and Culture*. Eds. Stefan Horlacher and Kevin Floyd. Burlington: Ashgate P, 2013. 1-14. Print.
- Iger, Eve Marie. "How to Fly to Europe Without Buying a Ticket." *Esquire* Jan. 1967: 70-75. Print.
- Jackson, Jocelyn Whitehead. "The Problem of Identity in Selected Early Essays of James Baldwin." *Critical Essays on James Baldwin*. Eds. Fred L. Standley and Nancy V. Burt. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1988. 250-267. Print.
- Jackson, Peter, Nick Stevenson and Kate Brooks, eds. *Making Sense of Men's Magazines*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell P, 2001. Print.
- James, Irving. "Psychological Aspects of Vulnerability to Atomic Bomb Attacks: Memorandum for Rand Corporation Crisis and Disasters Study." 15 Jan 1949. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. 1991. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.
- JCPenny Advertisement, *Esquire* Sept. 1988: 229. Print.

- Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1994. Print.
- . *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. Print.
- Jenkins, Richard. *Pierre Bourdieu*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Johnson, David K. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004. Print.
- Jones, Randy, and Mark Bego. *Macho Man: The Disco Era and Gay America's 'Coming Out.'* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2009. Print.
- Jorgensen, Christine. *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography*. 1967. San Francisco: Cleis P, 2000. Print.
- Joseph, Richard. "The Perfect Male Shopping Spree." *Esquire* Aug. 1975: 97-103, 134. Print.
- . "A Sportsman's Tip Sheet on the West Indies." *Esquire* Jan. 1967: 120-3. Print.
- Junod, Tom. "Everything We Know About Mass Shooters is Wrong." *Esquire* Oct. 2014: 82-97, 160. Print.
- Kaplan, Peter W. "The End of the Soft Line." *Esquire* 93.4 Apr. 1980: 41-47. Print.
- Kashner, Sam. "Capote's Swan Dive." *Vanity Fair*. Vanity Fair, Dec. 2012. Web. 10 Jun. 2013.
- Kavadlo, Jesse. "Recycling Authority: Don DeLillo's Waste Management." *Critique* 42.4 (2001): 384-401. Print.
- Kennedy, John F. "Address of Senator John F. Kennedy Accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the Presidency of the United States." Democratic National

- Convention. Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles, CA. 15 July 1960. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25966>.
- Kervin, Denise. "Advertising Masculinity: The Representation of Males in *Esquire* Advertisements." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 14 (1990): 51-70. Print.
- Kimmel, Michael. *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities*. New York: State U of New York P, 2005. Print.
- . "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." *Feminism and Masculinities*. Ed. Peter Francis Murphy. Oxford: UP, 2004: 182-99. Print.
- Kotkin, Joel, and Paul Grabowicz. "Dutch Reagan, All-American." *Esquire* 94.2 (August 1980): 25-33. Print.
- Krais, Beate. "Gender, Sociological Theory and Bourdieu's Sociology of Practice." *Theory, Culture & Society* 23.6 (2006): 119-134. Print.
- La Berge, Leigh Claire. "Capitalist Realism and Serial Form: The Fifth Season of *The Wire*." *Criticism* 52.3-4 (2010): 547-567. Print.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Trans. Alan Sheridan. *Contemporary Critical Theory*. Ed. Dan Latimer. Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1989. 502-209 Print.
- Le Coney, Christopher and Zoe Trodd. "Reagan's Rainbow Rodeos: Queer Challenges to the Cowboy Dreams of Eighties America." *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue canadienne d'etudesamericaines* 39.2 (2009): 163-183. Print.
- Leeds, Barry. *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer*. New York: UP, 1969. Print.
- Leeming, David. *James Baldwin*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. Print.

- Leigh, Nigel. *Radical Fictions and the Novels of Norman Mailer*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1990. Print.
- Leiter, Andrew B. *In the Shadow of the Black Beast: African American Masculinity in the Harlem and Southern Renaissance*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2010.
- Lichtman, Sarah A. "Do-It-Yourself Security: Safety, Gender, and the Home Fallout Shelter in Cold War America." *Journal of Design History* 19.1: 39-55. Print.
- Lipnitzki, Bernard. "Advice for Summer Drinkers: Cool It!" *Esquire* Jul. 1968: 106-109. Print.
- Look Magazine. *The Decline of the American Male*. New York: Random House, 1958. Print.
- Lukács, Georg. "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat." *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingston. Cambridge: MIT P, 1971. 83-222. Print.
- Mailer, Norman. *An American Dream*. New York: Vintage, 1999. Serialized in *Esquire*, Jan – Aug 1964. Print.
- . *Marilyn*. Alskog, Inc., 1973. Print.
- . "The Prisoner of Sex." *Harper's Magazine*, Mar 1972: 41-92. Print.
- . "Superman Comes to the Supermart." *Esquire* Nov. 1960: 119-127. Print.
- . "The White Negro." *Advertisements for Myself*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959: 337-358. Print.
- "Male Profile." *Esquire Media Kit*. Esquire, 2014. Web. 25 Jun. 2014.
- Majors, Richard and Janet Mancini Billson. *Cool Pose: The Dilemma of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Touchstone, 1992. Print.

- Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkley: U of California P, 1985. Print.
- Marcuse, Herbert. "The Affirmative Character of Culture." *Negations*. Trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon P, 1968. 88-133. Print.
- . *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. 1956. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987. Print.
- Marlboro Cigarettes. Advertisement. *Esquire* April 1980 93.4: 1. Print.
- Marquiss, Twister. "Westward Ho! (Chi Minh): Tim O'Brien and the Wounding of the American Cowboy Mythos." *Southwestern American Literature* 29.2 (2004): 9-15. Print.
- Martin, Terry, and Margaret Stiner. "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong': Tim O'Brien's (Feminist?) Heart of Darkness." *Short Story* 9.2 (2001): 94-104. Print.
- Masse, Michelle A. and Karen Rosenblum. "Male and Female Created They Them: The Depiction of Gender in the Advertising of Traditional Women's and Men's Magazines." *Women's Studies International Forum* 11.2 (1988): 127-144. Print.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. Print.
- McBride, Dwight A., ed. *James Baldwin Now*. New York: New York UP, 1999. Print.
- McCann, Colum, *Esquire*, and Narrative 4, eds. *The Book of Men: Eighty Writers on How to Be a Man*. New York: Picador, 2013. Print.
- McFadden, Robert D. "Tom Wicker, Times Journalist, Dies at 85." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 25 Nov. 2011. Web. 5 Feb. 2013.
- McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009. Print.

- Melley, Timothy. "Bodies Incorporated: Scenes of Agency Panic in *Gravity's Rainbow*." *Contemporary Literature* 35.4 (1994): 709-38. Print.
- . *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2000. Print.
- Meloy, Mike. "Tales of 'The Great Bitch': Murder and the Release of Virile Desire in *An American Dream*." *Mailer Review* 3.1 (2009): 337-356. Print.
- Merrill, Hugh. *Esqy: The Early Years at Esquire*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995.
- Messerschmidt, James. "Becoming 'Real Men': Adolescent Masculinity Challenges and Sexual Violence." *Men and Masculinities* 2.3 (2000): 286-307. Print.
- Messmer, Michael W. "'Thinking it Through Completely': The Interpretation of Nuclear Culture." *The Centennial Review* 32.4 (1988): 397-413. Print.
- Messner, Michael, and Donald Sabo, eds. *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Champaign: Human Kinetics Books, 1990. Print.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne. "Transforming Sex: Christine Jorgensen in the Post-War U.S." *OAH Magazine of History* (March 2006): 16-20. Print.
- Mid-Century Book Society Advertisement. *Esquire* October 1964: 17. Print.
- Miller, D. Quentin, ed. *Re-Viewing James Baldwin: Things Not Seen*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2000. Print.
- Miller, Gabriel. "A Small Trumpet of Defiance: Politics and the Buried Life in Norman Mailer's Early Fiction." *Norman Mailer*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House P, 2003: 67-81. Print.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday, 1970. Print.

- Mills, C. Wright and Russell Jacoby. *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*. 1951. Oxford: UP, 2002.
- Mills, Nathaniel. "Cleaver/Baldwin Revisited: Naturalism and the Gendering of Black Revolution." *Studies in American Naturalism* 7.1 (2012): 50-79. Print.
- Mitchell-Peters, Brian. "Camping the Gothic." *Journal of Homosexuality* 39.1 (2000): 107-138. Print.
- Mitgang, Herbert. "Reanimating Oswald, Ruby et al. in a Novel On the Assassination." *The New York Times on the Web*. New York Times, 19 July 1988. Web. 1 Feb. 2013.
- Moore, Liz. "How to be a Man." *How to Be a Man*. Narrative 4, n.d. Web. 24 Oct. 2014.
- Monti, Enrico. "Il Miglior Fabbro? Lish's Editing of Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*." *Raymond Carver Review* 1 (2008): 235-237. Print.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York UP, 2009. Print.
- Narrative 4*. Tides Center, 2014. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People advertisement, *Esquire* Jul. 1968: 127. Print.
- Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004. 2039-50. Print.
- Nel, Philip. "Amazons in the Underworld: Gender, the Body, and Power in the Novels of Don DeLillo." *Critique* 42.4 (2001): 416-437. Print.

Nesbet, Kirk. *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1995.

Print.

“New Year’s Eve With Elegance.” *Esquire* Jan. 1967: 96-107. Print.

Newman, David and Robert Benton. “The New Sentimentality.” *Esquire* July 1964: 25.

Print.

O’Brien, Tim. “Civil Defense.” *Esquire* 94.2 (August 1980): 82-88. Print.

---. *The Nuclear Age*. New York: Penguin Books, 1985. Print.

---. *The Things They Carried*. 1990. New York: Mariner Books, 2009. Print.

O’Neill, Edward. “How to Become a Camp Icon in Five Easy Lessons: Fetishism --- and

Tallulah Bankhead's Phallus.” *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular*

*Culture*. Ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, Jane Shattuc. Durham, NC : Duke

University Press, c2002. 316-338. Print.

Osgerby, Bill. “A Pedigree of the Consuming Male: Masculinity, Consumption and the

American ‘Leisure Class.’” *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines*. Ed.

Benwell, Bethan. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003: 57-85. Print.

---. *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America*. New

York: Berg, 2001. Print.

---. “Two-Fisted Tales of Brutality and Belligerence: Masculinity and Meaning in the

American ‘True Adventure’ Pulp of the 1950s and 1960s.” *Masculinity and the*

*Other: Historical Perspectives*. Ed. Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer. London:

Cambridge Scholars P, 2009: 163-189. Print.

Osteen, Mark. *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo’s Dialogue with Culture*.

Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000. Print.



- Parker, Hershel. "Norman Mailer's Revision of the *Esquire* Version of *An American Dream*: The Authority of 'Built-in' Intentionality." *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 84.4 (1981): 405-430. Print.
- Parrish, Timothy L. "The Lesson of History: Don DeLillo's Texas Schoolbook, *Libra*." *CLIO* 30.1 (2000): 1-23. Print.
- Pease, Donald. *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987. Print.
- Pendergast, Tom. *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2000. Print.
- Penner, James. *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks: The Rhetoric of Masculinity in American Literary Culture*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2011.
- Perfect Voice Institute Advertisement, *Esquire* Jan 1964: 156. Print.
- Piedmont-Marton, E. H. "Doing Gender and Going Native in 'Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong.'" *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* 114 (2010): 163-70. Print.
- Plymouth Barricuda advertisement, *Esquire* Jan. 1967: 28-29. Print.
- Pochmara, Anna. *The Making of the New Negro : Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2011. Print.
- Poirier, Richard. *Norman Mailer*. New York: Viking P, 1972. Print.
- Polsgrove, Carol. *It Wasn't Pretty, Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun?: Surviving the '60s with Esquire's Harold Hayes*. 1995. Oakland: RDR Books, 2001. Print.
- Preston, John. "Even I Want to Be Cary Grant." Rev. of *Cary Grant: A Biography*, by Marc Eliot. *The Telegraph* 6 Mar. 2005. Web.

- Reid-Pharr, Robert F. "Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality, Abjection and the Production of a Late Twentieth-Century Black Masculinity." *Studies in the Novel* 28.3 (1996): 372-394. Print.
- RelaxAcizor Advertisement, *Esquire* Feb 1964: 44. Print.
- Remy Martin Advertisement, *Esquire* Sept 1988: 221. Print.
- Ricciardelli, Rosemary, Kimberley A. Clow, and Philip White. "Investigating Hegemonic Masculinity: Portrayals of Masculinity in Men's Lifestyle Magazines." *Sex Roles* 63.1-2 (2010): 64-78. Print.
- Richardson, Jack. "Blues for Mr. Jones." *Esquire* Jun. 1966: 106-8, 138. Print.
- Riesman, David, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney. *The Lonely Crowd*. 1950. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001. Print.
- Ross, Marlon. "White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality." *McBride* 13-55. Print.
- Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women." *Deviations*. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2011. 33-65. Print.
- Sager, Mike. "Are There Still Boy Scouts?" *Esquire* Oct. 2014: 144-149. Print.
- Saltzman, Arthur M. *The Novel in the Balance*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1993. Print.
- Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. "The Crisis of American Masculinity." *Esquire* November 1958: 63-65. Print.
- . "The New Mood in Politics." *Esquire* Jan 1960: 58-60. Print.
- . *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*. 1965. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002. Print.

- Schmitt, Richard. "Large Propagators: Racism and the Domination of Women." *Tuana et al.* 38-54. Print.
- Schudson, Michael. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*. New York: Basic Books P, 1984. Print.
- Schultz, William Todd. *Tiny Terror: Why Truman Capote (Almost) Wrote Answered Prayers*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.
- Schwenger, Peter. *Letter Bomb*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1992. Print.
- Schweninger, Lee. "Ecofeminism, Nuclearism, and O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*." *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature*. Eds. Nancy Anisfield. Bowling Green: State U Popular P, 1991: 177-185. Print.
- Scott, Darieck. *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*. New York: New York UP, 2010. Print.
- Scott, Joan. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review* 91.5 (1986): 1053-107. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. Print.
- . *Epistemology of the Closet*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berkley: U of California P, 2008. Print.
- Segal, Lynne. *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1990. Print.
- Serlin, David Harley. "Christine Jorgensen and the Cold War Closet." *Radical History Review* 62 (1995): 136-165. Print.
- Service Merchandise Advertisement, *Esquire* Sept 1988: 227. Print.

- Shaw, Justin. "Destabilizing Sexistentialism and Hegemonic Masculinity in Norman Mailer's *An American Dream*." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 44.1 (2014): 44-64. Print.
- Shaw, Marc E., and Elwood Watson. "Obama's Masculinities: A Landscape of Essential Contradictions." *Performing American Masculinities : The 21st-century Man in Popular Culture*. Ed. Elwood Watson and Marc E. Shaw. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2011. 134-152. Print.
- Shin, Andrew and Barbara Judson. "Beneath the Black Aesthetic: James Bladwin's Primer of Black American Masculinity." *African American Review* 32.2 (1998): 247-261. Print.
- Shonkwiler, Alison, and Leigh Claire La Berge. "Introduction: A Theory of Capitalist Realism." *Reading Capitalist Realism*. Ed. Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2014. 1-25. Print.
- Simmons, Philip E. "Minimalist Fiction as 'Low' Postmodernism: Mass Culture and the Search for History." *Genre* 24.1 (45-62): 45-62. Print.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1998. Print.
- . *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1973. Print.
- Skenazy, Paul. "Life in Limbo: Ray Carver's Fiction." *Enclitic* 11. 1 (1988): 77-83. Print.
- Sklenicka, Carol. *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*. New York: Scribner, 2009. Print.
- Smith, Erin. *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2000. Print.

- Smith, Liz. "Truman Capote in Hot Water." *New York* 9 Feb. 1976: 44-5, 49-50, 52, 55-6. Print.
- Smith, Lorrie N. "The Things Men Do: The Gendered Subtext in Tim O'Brien's *Esquire* Stories." *Critique* 36.1 (1994): 16-40. Print.
- Smith, Willie. "Have No Fear and Keep It Clear, The Jive is Comin' For Look Who's Here." *Esquire* July 1964: 68-71, 128-139. Print.
- Snyder, Michael. "Crises of Masculinity: Homosocial Desire and Homosexual Panic in the Critical Cold War Narratives of Mailer and Coover." *Critique* 48.3 (2007): 250-277. Print.
- Solomon, Jeff. "Young, Effeminate, and Strange: Early Photographic Portraiture of Truman Capote." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 6.3 (2005): 293-326. Print.
- Spurlin, William J. "Culture, Rhetoric, and Queer Identity: James Baldwin and the Identity Politics of Race and Sexuality." *McBride* 103-121. Print.
- . "Rethinking the Politics of Race, Gender, and Sexuality: The Critical Reception of Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* in the Cold War Imaginary and in US Black Nationalism." *Middle-Atlantic Writers Association Review* 19.1 (2004): 58-70. Print.
- Starck, Kathleen. "The Early Cold Warrior on Screen: An All-Purpose Signifier?" *Post-World War II Masculinities in British and American Literature and Culture*. Eds. Stefan Horlacher and Kevin Floyd. Burlington: Ashgate p, 2013. 15-34. Print.
- Stetson advertisement, *Esquire* Apr. 1972: 78. Print.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer."* Durham & London: Duke UP, 2006. Print.

- Strate, Lance. "Beer Commercials: A Manual on Masculinity." *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Ed. Steve Craig. London: Sage Publications, 1992. 78-92. Print.
- Strychacz, Thomas. *Dangerous Masculinities: Conrad, Hemingway, and Laurence*. Gainesville: UP Florida, 2008. Print.
- Sylvander, Carolyn Wedin. *James Baldwin*. New York: Frederick Ungar P, 1980. Print.
- Tabbi, Joseph. *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1995. Print.
- Talese, Gay. "The Erotic History of Hugh Hefner: Part I." *Esquire* Nov. 1979: 57-72. Print.
- . "The Erotic History of Hugh Hefner: Part II." *Esquire* Dec. 1979: 57-62, 66-72. Print.
- Tanner, Tony. *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1971. Print. Print.
- Taylor, Douglas. "Three Lean Cats in a Hall of Mirrors: James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, and Eldridge Cleaver on Race and Masculinity." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 52.1 (2010): 70-101. Print.
- Taylor, Sara. "Denigration, Dependence, and Deviation: Black and White Masculinities in James Baldwin's *Going to Meet the Man*." *Obsidian* 9.2 (2008): 48-61. Print.
- Theroux, Alexander. "The Sissy." *Esquire* Oct. 1975: 199-201, 218-220. Print.
- Towers, Robert. "Low-Rent Tragedies." *New York Review of Books* 14 May 1981: 38. Print.
- Traister, Bryce. "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies." *American Quarterly* 52.2 (2000): 274-304. Print.

- Tuana, Nancy, *et al.*, eds. *Revealing Male Bodies*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2002. Print.
- Vanderwees, Chris. "Resisting Remasculinization: Tim O'Brien's 'Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong.'" *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 17.2 (2009): 191-210. Print.
- Vantoch, Victoria. *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2013. Print.
- Vidal, Gore. "A Distasteful Encounter with William F. Buckley Jr." *Esquire* Sept. 1969: 140-143, 145, 150. Print.
- Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Dial Press, 1979. Print.
- Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York : Zone Books, 2002. Print.
- Warren, Craig. "Presidential Wounds: The JFK Assassination and the White Male Body." *Men and Masculinities* 10.5 (2008): 557-582. Print.
- "Wealthiest Adults." *Esquire Media Kit*. Esquire, 2014. Web. 25 Jun. 2014.
- Weber, Bruce. "Raymond Carver: A Chronicler of Blue-Collar Despair." *New York Times Magazine*, 24 June 1984: 36-38, 42-46, 48-50. Rpt. in Gentry and Stull 84-97. Print.
- Weinraub, Bernard. "The Brilliancy of Black." *Esquire* Jan. 1967: 130-135. Print.
- Wesley, Marilyn C. *Violent Adventure: Contemporary Fiction by American Men*. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2003. Print.
- Westerman, Richard. "The Reification of Consciousness: Husserl's Phenomenology in Lukács's Identical Subject-Object." *New German Critique* 37.3 (2010): 97-130. Print.

- “What to Drink Before the Fire Next Time.” *Esquire* Nov. 1967: 118-119. Print.
- Whitehead, Stephen. *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions*.  
Cambridge: Polity P, 2002. Print.
- Whyte, William H. *The Organization Man*. 1956. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P,  
2002. Print.
- Wicker, Tom. “Kennedy Without End, Amen.” *Esquire* June 1977: 65-69. Print.
- . “Kennedy Without Tears.” *Esquire* June 1964: 108-111, 138-141. Print.
- Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*.  
London: Boyers, 1978. Print.
- Wills, Gary. “The Second Civil War.” *Esquire* Mar. 1968: 71-81, 136-151. Print.
- Wilson, Andrew. *Norman Mailer: An American Aesthetic*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008. Print.
- Wilson, Sloan. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. 1955. New York: Da Capo P, 2002.  
Print.
- Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Bomb*. New York:  
Oxford UP, 1993. Print.
- Winship, Janice. *Inside Women’s Magazines*. New York: Pandora P, 1987. Print.
- Wolfe, Tom. “Tom Wolfe’s Seventies.” *Esquire* Dec. 1979: 36-48. Print.
- Worthy, William. “The American Negro is Dead.” *Esquire* Nov. 1967: 126, 167-8. Print.
- . “The Black Power Establishment” *Esquire* Nov. 1967: 131-33. Print.
- . “The Red Chinese American Negro.” *Esquire* Oct 1964: 132, 173-179. Print.
- Yardley, Jonathan. “Ordinary People from an Extraordinary Writer.” *Washington Post*  
*Book World* 4 Sept. 1983: 3. Print.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador, 2008. Print.