Negative Masculinity: Theories of Freedom in American Literature after 1950

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Abstract

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This dissertation offers the term "negative masculinity" as an analytic for a variety of ways of thinking about freedom in postwar American literature. This term is built in part by theories of freedom in American political thinking that value individualism and autonomy, and this dissertation connects core aesthetics of American subjectivity to the role of masculinity in a variety of literary narratives. In doing so, this dissertation offers a way to critically analyze postwar American narratives' relationship between freedom and masculinity, and it argues for the ways in which forms of dissent can be legitimized against the totalizing force of hegemonic white masculinity. Its first chapter focuses on the ways in which individuality and community intersect with how freedom is imagined by way of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and John Okada's *No-No Boy*. In the second chapter, James Baldwin's *Another Country* and Colson Whitehead's *John Henry Days* are placed in contrast to consider the historical differences that produce Baldwin's pessimism and Whitehead's utopianism in consideration of the role of

negative masculinity for different histories of black masculinity. The third chapter considers how the evolving nature of American military conflict problematizes the war narrative, and it looks to contemporary American literature written by veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for the ways in which they attempt to place their narratives within and outside of the history of American war literature. Lastly, this dissertation's fourth chapter considers the modern, regressive form of masculinity in contemporary alt-right movements, and it uses Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* to understand the disconnect between reality and fantasy in the performance of mastery. Each of these chapters are read with this analytic of negative masculinity in mind, and the term proposed here offers a way to reconsider the relationship between freedom, masculinity, and subjectivity throughout the literary narratives of postwar American literature.

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For Justina,

Standing here beside me / I love the passing of time

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Introduction: Negative Freedom as Nationalized Masculinity

In contemporary mainstream narratives, there is a tendency to conceptualize masculinity in one of two ways. First, and most common in conservative discourses, is that it exists in a constant state of being under attack. From the beginning of women's liberation movements on through multiple waves of feminism, egalitarian politics have been cast as an infringement upon masculine/patriarchal authority and power, and as a crippling threat to the near total autonomy normative masculinity has held in the public sphere. In doing so, this form of masculine crisis allows for, as Sally Robinson terms it, an "identity politics of the dominant" which positions masculinity (especially white heterosexual masculinity) as under attack by using similar rhetorical strategies as historically marginalized groups (3). This perpetual state of crisis creates for masculinity an identity category without foreclosure and a flexible way of subsuming various challenges to its heterogeneity. In so doing, while there remain iconic figures of masculinity embedded into American literature and American culture in a broadly consistent way throughout the post-WWII period, normative masculinity demonstrates an ability to absorb subcultural and countercultural manifestations of masculinity within its network of masculine types[1].

Second, connected in part to this un-foreclosed identity, there is an impulse to treat masculinity as if it is a difficult object of study, and that it manages to operate outside of easily classifiable categories making it capable of withstanding challenges to it as it absorbs various masculine iterations in its all-consuming identity. This way of thinking about masculinity, as universalized to the point of invisibility, seems to invite a paradox in which this dominant, hegemonic social category is also mystified by its treatment *as* hegemony. In other words, its ubiquity and its unchallenged dominance make mapping its limits, or understanding its material

boundaries, a difficult task. Here another paradox is created—because of the totalizing force of masculinity in the public sphere, attempts at understanding identity formations other than normative masculinity are read as an erasure of normative masculinity, and that feminism writ large seeks to erase the role of masculinity in culture[2]. Here we find the critical missteps of authors like Christina Hoff Summers, who argues that boys—the nascently masculine figure which is also treated as the uncorrupted potential of the male gender—are the victims of feminism that seeks only to advance girls who have been marginalized in education and the workplace[3]. In this way of thinking, masculinity paradoxically becomes seen as an unknown, unmarked, under-theorized form that passes unserved by the verve of progressive politics.

When considering the pervasiveness of maleness and masculinity in the public imaginary, it seems difficult to imagine masculinity as something unsolvable, in that it is perpetually represented and therefore easily realizable. Robinson, to be discussed further in Chapter 2, would describe this as the invisibility of normative masculinity, an "unmarked" norm whose de-centeredness only serves to "*re*center" its power (12). Robyn Wiegman identifies many of these issues as a core aspect of contemporary defenses of whiteness, which, as she writes, "cast [whiteness] not only as a minority identity but as one injured by the denial of public representation" (116). In doing so, a tension is created between "particularity and universality," on which the power of whiteness finds its "historical elasticity" which allows for the reiteration of its universality (117-118). Wiegman's identification of this tension between the particular and the universal is useful here in articulating the similar problems created by masculinity as an object of analysis, specifically in the ways that much of our thinking on the topic "cannot render the historical specificity and material production of its description" (118). As well, by way of masculinity's unmarked power[4], this dissertation will argue that American notions of masculinity

are woven so deeply into the fibers of American subjectivity that they are synonymous with basic political ideals, abstracting any sense of historical specificity into generalized senses of the American subject. This is not a wholly new idea, and it is a useful and accurate critique that officialized accounts of American history are exclusionary, written for and by white men, obsessed with the actions of white men at the expense of any other identity group, and so on. As well, I want to continue this way of thinking to consider its impact on our political imagination, and specifically on the ways in which our concepts of freedom are bound by our nationalized ideals of masculinity.

First, I want to make a relatively simple claim that there exists a historical linkage between ways of articulating freedom and ideals of masculinity[5]. In doing so, this linkage allows for a way to read questions of masculinity in a wide range of American writing after WWII. As such, this dissertation argues that at the root of these literary engagements with masculinity—of its failure, of its transgression, of attempts to rescue it—is an attempt to articulate forms of freedom that are still bound *by* the normative ideals of masculinity. The result of this, I will argue, is often the confusing of liberation with simply a new form of liberal individualism. I hope to argue that a source for this confusion exists in the synthesis of normatively masculine traits and ways of thinking about freedom. These chapters investigate various manifestations of this concept of freedom. Whether it is freedom from institutionalized forms of discipline, from racist stereotype, from historical modes of heroism, or from evolving sexual economies, how this freedom is being imagined runs through the literary analysis to follow.

There are a few critical sources to this analytical framework. First is that masculinity, or "national manhood" by Dana Nelson's definition, exists as nationalized identity connected to the experience of American subjectivity. As well, as argued by Bonnie Mann, American political

policy is primarily interested in protecting the sovereignty of this masculinity, such that America-as-a-superpower becomes synonymous with the strength of American masculinity. Following this, I argue there exists an additional fundamental root to the sovereignty of American masculinity and argue that this nationalized form of masculinity is coterminous with the articulation of liberal ideas of freedom.

A starting point for this analysis is Dana Nelson's work on her concept of "national manhood." Nelson's work is crucial for understanding the intersection between the development of a new American subjectivity and the creation of a totalizing sense of "white manhood"—eliminating the local productions of ethnic collectivity for the umbrella term of whiteness. As Nelson argues, the false sense of fraternity created by this concept of white manhood allows for a simultaneous experience of privilege and oppression. As Nelson writes, this lionizes liberal subjectivity under the guise of the achievement of an impossible identity:

> …The process of identifying with national manhood blocks white men from being able efficiently to identify socioeconomic inequality as structural rather than individual failure, thereby conditioning them for market and professional competition; second and more importantly, that it entails a series of affective foreclosures that block those men's more heterogeneous democratic identifications and energies. (ix)

Here is the demonstration of another paradox. Because this socioeconomic power enjoyed by white manhood is so dominant, failures to achieve this power are read not as an institutional failure, despite the power of this institution depending on the subjugation of nearly all white men, but as an individual failure. Thus, the system recapitulates itself, as its power thickens in the continual emphasis on atomistic notions of identity, resisting any call for heterogeneous collectivity (to be explored as well in this dissertation's discussion of Kesey). Nelson claims that

for this system to work most efficiently, the various local productions of maleness/manhoods must be repurposed under a unified form:

> In this process national manhood substitutes itself for nascently radical, local democratic practices, energies, and imaginings, not replacing local manhoods so much as enlisting them for and orienting them toward a unified, homogenous national ideal…National manhood erects and abstracting, atomizing circuitry that charges white men for market competition in the name of national unity. (x)

For Nelson, this concept of national manhood is specifically bound in capitalist logics that enforce this circuitry for the furthering of capital-in-itself. It encourages a one-against-all mode of liberalism that justifies greater socioeconomic orders by way of a relationship to the achievement of an idealized form of masculine identity. My interest here is the way in which this circuitry establishes these "series of affective foreclosures" as ways of limiting the kind of political and cultural imagination necessary to directly interrogate ways of thinking of freedom or as forming alternative aesthetic forms of freedom. The capacity for a subject to develop a more perfect form of freedom underlies all of the literary texts considered in this dissertation, and the tension between the idealized American subject embedded in American political thought as a specific type of masculinity and a "heterogeneous democratic identification" that does not fall victim to the "atomizing circuitry" of national manhood is examined by a few exemplary texts that transcend Nelson's national manhood.

However, I want to take an even further step than Nelson offers and argue that not only is this concept of masculinity bound up in questions of nationhood and citizenship, but that it infiltrates the ability to imagine a concept of freedom disconnected from masculinity. As such, the strength of the nation, or the degree to which American national identity effectively conveys

its sovereignty, depends on the defense of its nationalized masculinity. This idea is expanded on in Bonnie Mann's *Sovereign Masculinity*, specifically in response to what she reads as the narrativizing of the trauma of 9/11 in explicitly femininized ways, and she critiques the persistent masculinizing rhetoric that girds discussions of sovereignty. Perhaps in response to Nelson's central thesis, Mann argues that the production of this national manhood relies upon constant justifications (here in the Beauvoirian sense) of itself, as well as the constant shaping of national discourse over this issue. However, as Mann notes, this concept of "national manhood" is fundamentally an imaginative one, which must "borrow its ontological weight from somewhere else" (11). She continues, "This process of borrowing goes on between levels, so that the ontological weight that accrues to the individual subject at the lived embodied level will be appropriated through a material process of production to lend reality to the manhood of the nation" (11). As mentioned previously, this process of borrowing, here thought of as subsuming, is an essential part to the reproduction of masculinity, as it finds its reproducibility through its ability to borrow. Mann argues that these accretions of national manhood "get their claws into the very identity structures of individual persons" (11). For Mann, like Nelson, this experience of national manhood is not in the pursuit of a collective sense of national identity, but instead a self-reflexive measurement against an impossible (and imaginary) ideal. While Mann's focus is largely on the ways in which this narrative of national manhood is used as a recruitment strategy for the military, even a de-particularized form of this fantasy of "measuring up" against an ideal is a consistent way of describing the successful (or, in a national sense, the sovereignty) performance of hegemonic masculinity.

If we are to accept that masculinity serves as a yardstick for national sovereignty, how this sovereignty is envisioned is necessary to consider. In other words, what type of liberty is this

masculinity being positioned as defending, and who does it best serve? Two distinct but usefully integrated theories of freedom have shaped this analysis: the initial establishments of American subjectivity in the early American political thought of Thomas Jefferson, and the later concept of "negative freedom" as formalized by Isaiah Berlin. In synthesizing these ways of thinking about freedom, I hope to form a connection between what become the shapes and forms of masculinity in post-WWII American literature and central philosophical questions stemming from understandings of liberal freedom.

First, in a too quick gloss, I want to incorporate Isaiah Berlin's concept of "negative freedom" from his seminal essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" as a way of reading concepts of liberty expressed in the works of American fiction this dissertation considers. Again, discussion of Berlin's work could sustain its own dissertation, and my choice for including his term here is for its efficiency in describing the relatively consistent ways of thinking about freedom in American history. This is not to say that Berlin's formulation of two forms of freedom is the only way of articulating concepts of liberty. Indeed, much of the critical work on Berlin challenges his dichotomizing of liberty, and instead argues, as in Gerald MacCallum's work, less of a clear line between different types of freedom[6]. Still, I am more interested here in a *cultural* understanding of concepts of freedom, and even if both sides (negative/positive) are discussing a relatively similar concept of freedom but interpreted differently, it seems a defensible claim that each side (as in, Hobbes' version of negative freedom versus Rousseau's version of positive freedom) would not see it that way.

Berlin, at his simplest, defines negative freedom in this way: "I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others" (169). This idea

of non-interference is the primary theme of negative freedom—freedom is demonstrated most often when one is not coerced into an action but can be an agent in their own concept of liberty. If one is to believe Hegel that the point of human history is finding a more perfect form of freedom, it stands to reason that negative freedom demonstrates its most perfect form when we are *most* free from the obstruction of others[7]. Imagine, then, the ideal subject operating under this definition of freedom. What form does the subject take who can live in such a way that others do not interfere, or who can live without the need for some obstruction? In other words, who is best fit to live free of others?

Of course, as Berlin notes, our personal freedoms are constantly sacrificed for the interest of other values—no concept of justice is free from a limiting of freedom, so the idea that an absolute pursuit of this freedom makes you freest is not a useful claim. Much of what Berlin glosses as "history" is the dispute over the terms and boundaries of the conditions we set on the limits of our freedoms. Yet, he is less persuasive when understanding inequalities by way of this system of freedom. Berlin writes, "Mere incapacity to attain a goal is not a lack of political freedom…If…I believe that I am being kept in want by a specific arrangement which I consider unjust or unfair, I speak of economic slavery or oppression" (169-70). In his example, being unable to purchase a loaf of bread is not a loss of political liberty, as there is in this case no legal ban on it, and this lack of freedom felt by an incapacity is better understood as a function of different systems. Yet, it is difficult now to imagine a point at which the two do not converge, or even more difficult to find, in any specific way, a point in which the realizing of an economic injustice is not also a political injustice. Again, the point here is to imagine the subject most *likely* to be able to experience the greatest amounts of freedom created by this system of thinking, and what the idealized subject of this sense of liberty places value in. Usefully, Berlin

asks two questions: “What is freedom to those who cannot make use of it? Without adequate conditions for the use of freedom, what is the value of freedom?” (171). Berlin concedes that systems which depend on the misery of others are “unjust and immoral” in their understanding of liberty. Yet, he claims, “…if I curtail or lose my freedom in order to lessen the shame of such inequality, and do not thereby materially increase the individual liberty of others, an absolute loss of liberty occurs” (172). Here Berlin sets some weighty goals on the pursuit of a moral form of freedom. By implying that a pursuit of a more just form of freedom by way of one’s morality must produce an obvious material benefit, it is possible to see how this line of thinking can produce a stasis for political imagination. Berlin is at least partially right in his claim that freedom that cannot be used is of little value, and that a system that relies on unequal realization of freedom at the expense of others is imperfect. Yet, when considering Nelson’s atomizing circuitry of national masculinity, this failure to realize a form of freedom can be read not as a failure of a system but as a form of individual failure. Thus, it is not the concept of freedom itself that is blamed, and, in American history, it is this freedom that is most stridently defended.

The production of freedom—of its actualization and of its ontological weight—rests then in the individual relationship to the concept. What must be answered then is how this theoretical notion of liberty, seemingly sweeping in its generalizing force, becomes individuated across American subjectivity. To do so, I want to apply Lee Quinby’s concept of American notions of liberty being rooted in an “aesthetics of liberty” that are directly linked to the self, which Quinby finds evidence for in early American political thought, specifically in the writings of Thomas Jefferson. For Quinby, this aesthetics is formed by a “self-stylization as a practice of freedom,” in which the individual subject’s self-stylization is the greatest tool against “disciplinary power relations” (3). Quinby invokes Foucault’s “Technologies of the Self” to argue that the care of and

for the self—rather than, say, the Motherland, commitment to a ruler, and so on—resists the "technologies of normalization" practiced by disciplinary institutions. While resistances to "national identity and eugenic obligation" certainly dissuade the authoritarian streak of positive freedom, the ethical weight given to this concept of liberty imagines liberal individualism as the only resistance to the "uniformity of values and homogeneity of selfhood as prescribed by the law and the human sciences" by way of this aestheticizing of freedom (5). While Quinby maintains that, in contrast to Rorty's critiques of Foucault, that this aesthetic of freedom occurs in private and public—within the self and within a relation to the other—the degree to which they "dislodge the private/public dichotomy" would seem to rest on *what* they produce rather than only how they imagine their dialectical formation (5). In this dissertation, it is this product that I seek to examine through American literature, and I will consider if this aesthetic of freedom creates the kind of resistance that Quinby implies.

Quinby finds her "discursive founder" to be Thomas Jefferson, namely through his writing in the Declaration of Independence and *Notes on the State of Virginia,* citing that his foundational objectives of the "freedom from domination" and from "the uniformity of opinion" form the basis of these aesthetics of liberty (4). While even the language—these freedoms *from*—imply the role of negative forms of freedom, Jefferson is an ideal figure for these claims of national manhood I am making. In invoking the writing of a foundational thinker in American political thought, it carries with it all the burdens of that era's way of thinking—namely, Jefferson's racism—and the sense that the Founding Fathers (a concept of course imbued with patriarchal assumptions of authority) had only a very specific form of citizenship in mind when thinking through the political and ethical issues surrounding the forming of a new nation. Yet, the core of that criticism, that American citizenship is crafted in the image of only a fraction of

its population, is what is at stake in my argument in this dissertation, and that these early, classically liberal political and ethical logics direct ways of thinking about freedom such that, even in the present, the idealized form of American subjectivity is still most accessible to the limited population the Founding Fathers were writing to, that is, within a hegemonic form of white male masculinity.

Quinby describes this Jeffersonian ideal as being a direct counter-ethics to the ethical systems in colonial America (4). Certainly, under colonial rule, "freedom from" carries a different ethical promise. As Quinby describes, this self-stylization is as much a resistance to the normalizing force of "prevailing ethical systems" of colonial America as it is the creation of something new, but that it continues today as "one of the most important means of resisting contemporary restrictions on freedom" (4). In doing so, as Quinby argues, American ethical and political life is locked into a conflict between negative freedom and everything else from the onset of imagining the political world of a new nation:

> Such changes in the mode of governance fueled concerns about the relationship between individuals and the state, simultaneously introducing two opposing possibilities: one of greater personal freedom and self-determination within American society and one of greater normalization and totalization of the population. (6)

Clearly, the interests of Jefferson (unalienable rights, pursuit of happiness) align early American thought with this increase in personal freedom and a resistance to totalization. By Quinby's formulation, understanding one's American subjectivity becomes a project of continual self-stylization, a process alike, perhaps, to Mann's types of justification for national manhood: "In America's aesthetics of liberty, the self that is being formed is assumed to be a work of art: not a work in which one becomes what one is 'intended' to be, but a set of practices through which

one questions the way one has been formed as a subject" (6). Yet, who gets to ask these questions of their own subjectivity? In other words, who gets to shape their aesthetics of liberty in their production of the self, and who is shaped *by* the dependencies of another's subjectivity? This relationship between being-shaped and being-shaped-by is a recurrent theme in the divide between Quinby's "greater personal freedom" and "normalization," and it is a subject of many literary texts to be discussed here (especially in Baldwin). To frame the thinking for this dissertation, I am synthesizing these ideas—Berlin's negative freedom, Mann and Nelson's national/sovereign manhood, Quinby's aesthetics of liberty—to what I am calling negative masculinity, a persistent cultural ideal that shapes the ways in which freedom is thought of, defended, and imagined.

My first chapter considers the conflicts of individualism and community in the expression of dissent. It takes a rather obvious choice of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and reads it alongside the less canonized but recently revitalized *No-No Boy* by John Okada. Kesey's novel, in its attempts at imagining a form of dissent from institutional authority, instead embodies the negative freedom perspective of non-interfering individualism rather than any collective form of dissent, directly implicating masculinity as free and effeminate forms of authority as oppositional to the expression of freedom. McMurphy becomes the ideal figure of negative masculinity, as the obstructions to the achievement of his free masculine identity are read as feminized forms of power. I contrast this deficiency of Kesey with Okada's novel, which follows the experience of Japanese American men after internment and after the war, where questions of masculinity, nationalism, and their roles within immigrant communities and the wider experience of American identity are under constant threat. Okada presents an inverse of Kesey's rebellious hero, as Okada's protagonist is excluded from his community as the result of

his rebellion, and he is stigmatized by a wider American population by way of his ethnic identity and his refused allegiance to a country that segregated him in internment camps. In comparing these texts, this chapter wants to consider how individualistic and atomistic views of American subjectivity work in concert and in conflict with one's connection to collective and communal forms. Embedded in these questions of atomistic and collective subjectivity are specific questions of gender roles forming after WWII, as well as the ways in which community either shapes individuality or flattens it. What is the effect of the fraternity created by these characters in competing atomistic and collective subjectivities? How does Okada's protagonist, seemingly out of line with all the ways possible to express his subjectivity, navigate these spaces differently than Kesey's? I argue that this navigation is dependent on a dialectical understanding of community and individuality, whose struggle is expressed in each novel.

My second chapter focuses on James Baldwin's *Another Country*, as well as Colson Whitehead's *John Henry Days*, to consider the ways in which this understanding of negative freedom is fundamentally marked as a form of white masculine citizenship, and to consider the ways in which black masculinities can be destroyed by this normalizing concept of freedom (in the case of Baldwin's text) or how they can offer a way out of the destructive cycles of neoliberal capitalism (in the case of Whitehead's novel). While race is a subject and subtext throughout all my chapters, here it gets a specific focus through Baldwin's text, which is in many ways a prescient meditation on intimacy and violence, specifically through the suicide (or, arguably, murder) of the character of Rufus. I argue that Baldwin takes a complex and often pessimistic view to this potential for progress by way of intimacy, which Whitehead's novel revisions through Darieck Scott's idea of extravagant abjection. In doing so, these texts present the ways in which black masculinity exists as a non-normative form of masculinity that can serve as a way

of critiquing the destructive normative force of white masculinity that would otherwise configure black masculinity to said destruction. As well, these articulations of the aesthetics of black masculinity, separated by nearly forty years, show a difference in the historical imaginings of what black masculinities can produce. For Baldwin, they lead to an artificial sense of intimacy that results in destruction, whereas Whitehead provides a rhetoric for disrupting this destructive formulation rooted in a reclamation and refiguring of American mythologies.

My third chapter attempts to understand the evolving social role of the most persistent masculine archetype—the soldier. I focus specifically on texts on recent American wars, primarily the Bush-era wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In an ambitious reading, I want to consider how shifting demographics in the military and evolved rules of engagement in counterinsurgencies cause a degree of change in the traditional image of heroic masculinity embodied by the soldier. Specifically, I will argue that there exists a persistent narrativizing of contemporary war and masculinity through the logics of previous eras of military engagement and is romanticized via the long shadow they cast over contemporary fiction about modern wars. The material of these wars themselves—the terms, the goals, the paradoxes—must be considered in the attempts to narrativize the ways in which these wars work within a historical arc that connects war to masculine ideals and national sovereignty. How do authors write about these experiences without this traditional image and archetype to fall back on? While these texts, themselves an extension of the aestheticizing of military conflict, do not reflect a fundamentally progressive stance, I am interested in the degree to which the role of heroic masculinity is evolving and how these roles are depicted, primarily in the work of Phil Klay, Kevin Powers, and Brian Turner. Each of these texts antagonizes the expectation of military service against its reality, which allows for a way in to discussing questions of the soldier's role in this collective

cultural mythmaking. I argue that rather than excavating a vision of national manhood from the trauma—gendered in its own way—experienced after September 11th, these texts show the inability for this modern version of war (counterinsurgency) to allow for the realization of this historical form of masculinity.

My final chapter is where this dissertation finds a contemporary voice, but it is also its largest step forward in analysis of contemporary masculinities. Considering recent cultural changes since the beginning of this project, this last dissertation chapter responds to the rise of the alt-right and the resurgence of regressive, toxic forms of white masculinity, figured as a form of woundedness. I will read this "movement" as a nakedly obvious sexual panic, in which its members interpret their displacement within modern sexual economies as a form of violence cast against them by progressive feminism. This perceived social violence is then redistributed as both physical violence and the glorification of violence, as evidenced by recent domestic terrorist attacks by self-proclaimed "incel" movements and the broad integration of male violence into alt-right subgroups. Unable to navigate this economy, they retreat to violent male vernaculars, which reinvest physical violence as the dominant mode for the expression of masculinity. To make these arguments, I will offer a different take on a somewhat obvious text, to consider how Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho* anticipates the kinds of legitimized and anonymous violence that is essential to the alt-right's demonstrations of masculinity, as well as how it translates this violence through consumer capitalism as a fantasy of mastery.

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[1] Consider two contemporary examples: the late 1990s/early 2000s figure of the metrosexual, and the role of bear culture within gay male communities from the late 1970s and onward. The metrosexual, itself perhaps a revision of the British dandy a la Beau Brummell, stresses normatively femininized features and characteristics within its identity formation. Yet, in its outward presentation, this can be refigured simply as the "well-dressed male," which is then seen as its own sort of progressive masculinity. While bear subcultures may usefully serve as a way of challenging hypermasculinity and standards of beauty within gay male culture, bears can just as easily *pass* for the gruff, lumberjack-esque exterior (in other words, a type of normative masculinity) if one is unaware of this private bear affiliation, thus being subsumed into a sense of normativity that this culture is meant to be in contrast to, an effect of a wider culture with limited imagination for non-normative masculinities.

[2] The critical text for this way of thinking would be Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*, which argues that sentimental culture largely managed by women in the 19th century is the origin of what Philip Gould has described as her sense of "cultural malaise" manifested in this period (i). This malaise is a result then of the increased role of the feminized "private sphere" at the expense of the "masculine public sphere" (ii). Gould argues then that "the demise of 'masculine values'—intellectual rigor, genius, and the value of experience" are for Douglas the simultaneous loss of "'Americanness' itself" (iii). As is discussed in this introduction by Bonnie Mann, here again there is a direct connection between the strength of the nation and the strength of the nation's defense of masculine ideals and masculinity broadly.

[3] In Summers, these ideas are effectively a conservative take on egalitarian educational policies under the guise of feminist critique. The roots of these issues are explored in more interesting analysis in Michael Kimmel's *Misframing Men: The Politics of Contemporary Masculinities*, which advances a more thoughtful claim, that our adherence to ideological forms of masculinity create educational fissures, and that only in the creation of a "frame" for masculinity that more directly relates to the contemporary realities of maleness will this "war" be recast as progressive collectivity.

[4] Also useful in this question of "unmarked" whiteness is David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, in which Roediger establishes what would be echoed in my discussion of Nelson here, that whiteness becomes a normalizing identity category that erases ethnic differences under this umbrella term, and in doing so allows whiteness to become a wedge between working-class whites and blacks throughout American history, making whiteness a concept that needs defended more than other forms of liberty (for Roediger, specifically economic ones).

[5] It is entirely possible to take an even wider historical arc here, and a persuasive claim could be made that in nearly all our formations of power—even in something like Foucault's versions of biopower or Althusser's ideological state apparatuses—gendered modes of thinking run so deep that power is always already a narrative of national/ideological masculinity.

[6] In fact, it seems as though nearly all critical work since Berlin's formulation has been critiquing the formulation itself. Piper Bringhurst and Gerald Gaus note that this dichotomization has created an impulse in political theory to defend one's system for understanding freedom against competing forms of freedom (40), and direct readers to Philip Pettit's critiques of Berlin and Charles Taylor's "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty." As well, Ryan Patrick Hanley disputes Berlin's moralization of positive and negative freedom, especially for the "association of positive liberty with authoritarianism," and argues that these two concepts from Berlin in fact work together (223-224). My interest here in Berlin is not as a scholar on freedom, or as a statement to whether his ideas on freedom are unimpeachable, but for the ways in which they develop a shorthand for thinking about American liberalism, and for the degree to which his conception of negative freedom is applicable to narratives of freedom in American literature.

[7] Warner and Berlant provide a contemporary critical parallel here, especially for the was in which public life requires a relationship to some form of ideal, formulated by Warner and Berlant as the "institutional matrix" that exists for heteronormative distributions of intimacy that enable a Foucauldian form of normalization (562). Thus, the public self is always formed in some degree of negation to the private self, no matter how out of sync this private self is with the matrices of cultural normalization.

Chapter 1: Dialectics of Community and Individuality and the Expression of Dissent in Postwar American Literature

To begin this analysis, I want to turn to Nina Baym's essential essay on American literary criticism, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors." Baym explains the absence of women writers in literary criticism and literary history as being dependent not only on systemic bias, but also focuses on the ways in which certain narratives in American literature have been elevated at the expense of others. In Baym's analysis, American literature is "judged less by its form than its content," and that the literature of America must stylistically map on to the democratizing project of America (125). In that sense, a parallel is created between American literature and American history, such that "literature produced in this nation would have to be ground-breaking, equal to the challenge of the new nation, and completely original" (125). As such, the successfulness of American literature became not just a statement to its technical merit, but the ways in which its form matched the content of the "new nation." As such, in works treated as emblematic of American literature, Americanness itself becomes a primary concern: "Inevitably…it came to seem that the quality of 'Americanness,' whatever it might be, constituted literary excellence for American authors" (126). For Baym, this places American literature in a thoroughly subjective field, as "the idea of Americanness is even more vulnerable to subjectivity than the idea of the best" (126). In doing so, the project of literature considered to be the ideal of American literature becomes the relating of a concept of Americanness, which is inevitably a process of exclusion based on who has the greatest degree of access to American ideals. Indeed, it is not only the exploration of these ideal Americans that become part of what constitutes canonized American literature, "America as a

nation must be the ultimate subject of the work" (127). As Baym claims, this literature then becomes a literature entirely of the type of men most able to "derive…generalizations and conclusions about 'the' American experience" (127). Despite the wide range of possible types of American identity, literature most able to generate these conclusions becomes regarded as the most symptomatically American. From this Baym formulates her idea of "the melodrama of beset manhood," in which "the male author produces his melodramatic testimony to our culture's essence" (130). I turn to Baym here for the ways in which this melodramatic project maps on to the literary texts to be considered. In revisiting such canonical works like Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, I look to it for the ways in which this melodrama shapes the narrative of the text, in which McMurphy's attempts at resisting the feminizing forces of feminine power in the ward become not only a classic example of Baym's melodramatic manhood narrative (in which the test of manhood becomes a test of Americanness), but also for the ways in which this resistance becomes gendered and therefore connectable to the ways of thinking about freedom that my theory of negative masculinity offers. As well, I include Okada's *No-No Boy* here for the ways in which it disrupts the authority of this melodrama by way of Ichiro's resistance to the narratives of masculinity that attempt to connect him to a concept of Americanness, which through his resistance to the ideological fantasy of assimilation allow a form of masculine resistance that is liberating for both men and women. As such, these texts become essential for understanding the ways in which masculinity is not only connected to literature of community and individuality, but they are symptomatic of the narrative of male melodrama in postwar American literature—following Baym, it is not simply that Kesey and Okada's texts are useful because they are literature written by men, but it is in their narrative exploration of Americanness connected to a concept of masculinity that they become essential texts to consider.

In developing an argument for the role of masculinity within the tension between individuality and community, it is necessary to define how each of these terms is being understood. As well, it is necessary to establish how this tension intersects with questions of masculinity and gender broadly in the consideration of literary texts, and how this question is expanded by literary analysis. The basis of this tension is an interpretation of the roles community and individualism play within American political life. Yet, the idea of a political life necessarily implies a participation within a community, either in a material, spatial sense (one's neighborhood, one's state) or a community shaped by the borders of identity (political party, ethnic ancestry). How then do we mediate the sanctity of individual freedoms with the reality of a coterminous existence with others? Does community necessarily imply an erasure of individuality, or can it be read instead as a way of enabling the legibility of identity? How too is masculine identity shaped by this balance between community and individuality, given its role in shaping ways of thinking about freedom? In the literary texts to be discussed here, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and John Okada's *No-No Boy*, answers to these questions will be articulated by the ways in which the protagonist in each manifests their own concepts of dissent in relation to the communities they participate in by way of their narrativizing of conflicts between normalizing ideas of American masculinity and the threat of feminization.

First, a tension between community and individualism does not imply that these modalities are incompatible, such that individuality cannot exist within a community, or that communities must force a singular, totalizing identity formation. This is too narrow a view of community that sees it as a normalizing force that flattens individuality rather than as something which allows for the legibility of any number of minoritized subjectivities. I want to argue for a dialectical understanding of community and individuality, wherein individuality exists by way of

the function of community, and each is structured by the negation of the other. However, this dialectic is not easily formed, and much of the conflict to be discussed in these literary texts directly attends to this difficulty. As Iris Marion Young writes in her essay "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," community is dependent on the awareness of individuality: "Unlike reactionary appeals to community which consistently assert the subordination of individual aims and values to the collective, most radical theorists assert that community itself consists in the respect for and fulfillment of individual aims and capacities" (8). Indeed, rather than flattening subjectivity as a way of promoting unity or by way of assuming a kind of universalism, the strength of a community would then be the degree to which it allows the expression of individualism, either intra-communally or as it presents itself to an exterior identity. However, as Young writes, this way of thinking can be directly contextualized within a logic of gender and its relation to the individualism/community dyad:

> The opposition individualism/community receives one of its expressions in bourgeois culture in the opposition between masculinity and femininity. The culture identifies masculinity with the values associated with individualism—self-sufficiency, competition, separation, the formal equality of rights. The culture identifies femininity, on the other hand, with the values associated with community-affective relations of care, aid, and cooperation. (306)

Young allows for a useful transition from Jefferson's aesthetics of the American self to the linking of ways of thinking of freedom and hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity. Cultural values given to individualism are the forms in which liberty has been actualized throughout American history, and the feminization of communal forms will be animated throughout the texts to be discussed here[1]. A formulation of the gendered tension between the

values of individuality and community, while aware of the interdependent nature of individuality and community, articulates community and identity as enclosed concepts, both as a fully-formed, atomistic version of the self and of a community whose exclusions mark its territory.

I want to argue for a different form of community, connecting the un-foreclosed habits of negative masculinity, that more usefully understands this community and individuality dialectic. In doing so, this unbound form of community I argue for is rooted in an analysis of theories of community as detailed in Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community* and Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperable Community*. I hope to steal from them major ideas related to theories of community to serve as a model for the ways in which these literary texts approach the relationship between community and individuality to be discussed here, to establish the "whatever it might be" of Baym's form of Americanness (Baym 126). In these literary texts, I hope to argue that they reveal the difficulty of this dialectical balance, as well as the consequences for unbalanced expressions of dissent. For Kesey's McMurphy, his unwillingness to see how individuality can be articulated through a community (however forced that community might be) leads not only to his destruction but also to the destruction of others he is attempting to liberate from a feminized world he sees intruding on his expression of masculinity. For Okada's Ichiro, his constant longing for a sense of community places him into an unreconcilable state of non-being, what Okada calls a "prison of forever," unable to resolve the melodrama that McMurphy resolves through violence (38). For McMurphy and for Ichiro, their expressions of dissent make them illegible within their communities by way of their inability to navigate this community and individuality dialectic. However, the difference of their social positioning informs the failure of this possibility[2]. McMurphy, seeking to express his dissent for institutionality and the effeminizing of the men in the asylum, defines his liberation only in terms

of a liberal individualism that seeks connections to no one in its free expressions of masculinity. For Kesey, there is no distinction between the resistance to power and the resistance to feminine power, and this lack of distinction drives the violence of the novel's ending. Ichiro, seemingly seeking a way to express his dissent as part of a greater community rather than as a minoritized subculture within his already minoritized community, fails to connect to any generation of communal identity that is open to him, but in doing so transcends the assimilationist logics offered to him by masculine ideology.

I want to begin this analysis by way of theories of community as stated in Nancy's *The Inoperable Community*. When we invoke the term community, a common thought might be the arrangement of small social groups bound by whatever identity, which might be as politically simple as fans of the same local sports team or as complex as intersections of racial, gender, and sexual identities. Still, it is perhaps most common to imagine these identities somehow distributed through space, such that to be part of a community means to also participate within its spatial boundaries—the commune, the convent, the sports arena, and so on. In Nancy's figuration, this idea of community is spread to a wider, unfixed spatial understanding that classifies community simply as the "being-*in*-common" rather than the necessarily specific and limited idea of "being common" (as in, known) to one another (xxxix). This *in* as part of "being common" implies a possibility to this sense of commons, and imagines community as always existing as a potential for being rather than something fixed in one thing—identity, language, and so on. For Nancy, though, this notion of being-*in*-common is under threat by the social power given to liberal individualism.

As a useful extension of elements in my introduction, Nancy identifies a political dimension to his concept of community: "In order to speak of the sight that we are dealing with,

I might venture the following thought: 'left' means, *at the very least*, that the political, as such, is receptive to what is at stake in community. (On the other hand, 'right' means, at least, that the political is merely in charge of order and administration)" (xxxvi). Here Nancy imagines these positive and negative forms of freedom as distributed through a partisan lens. In doing so, we can then apply this ordering of community with regards to the expression of dissent, and a leftist notion of dissent may then be in order to expand the receptiveness of what is at stake in this ordering of community, while the opposite (the "right" in Nancy's figuration) might be dissent in order to form a restriction on the ways in which a political community extends beyond simply the protections of certain individual freedoms. In the terms of negative freedom as identified by Berlin, to resist the power of the individual and to be receptive to the ideas of community is to resist the inherent non-interference that negative freedom treats as its essential doctrine, and (to synthesize a few ideas) resist the gendered forms of identity that would protect these freedoms *from.*

Nancy expands the ways in which the political applies to community by arguing that the political is the place in which community can enact the ways of being-in-common that he proposes. He writes, "…There would be no power relations, nor would there be such a specific unleashing of power…if the political were not the place of community—in other words, the place of a specific existence, the existence of being-in-common" (xxxvii). If political life is central to the concept of community, and central to the ways in which one can exist as being-in-common rather than an unrealizable notion of togetherness, it is worth wondering what is actually accomplished by way of this political life. To do so, Nancy argues that some fundamental part of selfhood (of realizing the being-self) is achieved by the participation within

this notion of community. As well, Nancy makes a claim central to this analysis and an expansion of the previous discussion of the Jeffersonian aesthetics of liberty. He writes:

> This [political life] is the one thing the Western tradition has always known. Aristotle says that we live in cities—this is the *poli*tical way of life—not for reasons of need, but for a higher reason, itself without reason, namely to "live well" …: here "well" means neither a comfort, nor a having; it is the ownmost difference of man, which means also, for Aristotle…the sharing of a *logos*. (xxx)

Nancy develops a notion of community that speaks directly to the questions being posed in this chapter by these literary sources, specifically of the value of community compared to the liberty offered by non-interference via negative freedom. The point to political life (as in being part of a *polis*) is not simply to improve the ease of our lives (though one might argue this is also an effect), but that this requires us to be always in some form of communication with another as we operate within a community. This is a clever expansion of community—of being in communication, of sharing language, of a divided *logos* to be shared with an exteriority. The direction of this inquiry for Nancy is to form "the community of interrupted myth, which is community that in a sense is without community" (71). For Nancy, we must remove ourselves from thinking of "community as essence"—that instead, in the alliance of our collectivities, we disconnect community from being dependent on a notion of commonality: "Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance" (xxxviii). The absorption into a common substance is a distortion of the potential of community to be a deeper, more useful connection: "The community that becomes *a single* thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader…)

necessarily loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or, it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being *of* togetherness" (xxxix). Nancy wants us to escape the illusion of this togetherness, as it results in a disruption from forming an actual sense of community, which seems to then always be dependent on the possibility of entering into something rather than the establishment of that thing's finitude. Echoing some of Deleuze's ideas on immanence, Nancy describes his guiding principles this way: "…Community does not consist in the transcendence (nor in the transcendental) of a being supposedly immanent to community. It consists on the contrary in the immanence of a 'transcendence'—that of finite existence as such" (xxxix). Rather than the goal of community to be the reaching of some higher plane of identity, which is in a sense a closure of the potential of and for identities, Nancy wants a form of community that exists without the violent closure that fixing a sense of being to a community might require. This version of "community without community" is, as Nancy writes, always in a state of becoming, as it "resists collectivity itself as much as it resists the individual" (71). As Vijay Devadas and Jane Mummery note, this version of community is fundamentally at odds with work like Benedict Anderson's sense of an imagined community, and instead sees community as working as a series of "horizontal affiliations" dependent upon "closure or closing down multiple forms of affiliations" ("Community").

While these concepts might be useful as a theoretical way of imagining a different, perhaps even rhizomatic form of community, it is important to note that these are effectively unrealizable forms of community. For Nancy it is "inoperative" in the sense that it is not representable, and it exists for Agamben only as a "coming" community, not one actualized in a material sense. We must instead think of this notion of community as a description of what it offers as potential, that the goal of this unrepresentable community is instead to expand the

network of connections that might work toward Nancy's notion of "being-together" rather than a (perhaps by default) romanticized notion of togetherness. This unrealizability is not simply a utopian vision, but it is instead part of its purpose in reimagining the communal. If we are to think of community by way of Agamben and Nancy as the process by which the possibility for being-together is expanded rather than existing as a closure centered on a fixed identity category, this expands our capacity for understanding the promises of community working in Kesey and Okada's novels. The ways in which these characters imagine community-as-closure become a way of understanding the insufficiencies of these communities at allowing for the expression of one's own sense of subjectivity. And, most crucially for this dissertation topic, masculinity as a form of communal identity structure antagonizes these stresses by way of the narrativizing of melodrama (successfully and unsuccessfully) that Baym finds as essential to understanding Americanness.

For Agamben, his notion of community hinges on his idea of "whatever" as being the unifying aspect of community, the sense of self that is coming into being, that is, whatever-being. It is important to note Agamben's usage of this word. This is not as it is known colloquially, but it is instead the exact opposite: "*Quodlibet ens* is not 'being, it does not matter which,' but rather 'being such that it always matters'" (1). Rather than whatever-being as a being of indifference, whatever-being for Agamben seems to describe a sense of collectivity in which the particularities of an identity are not irrelevant but are accepted as simply part of whatever-being. Agamben writes, "The Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being *such at it is*" (1). This singularity then would seem to subsume these common concepts not in the sense of a vague universal humanism (that there is

no difference between his examples), but it would instead accept whatever status of whatever-being as not a disqualifying or discordant part of the establishment of this singularity[3]. Agamben continues, "Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal" (1). This is perhaps another version of the community and individuality dialectic, here answered through its refiguring as a singularity—rather than be stuck by the endless particularity of the individual or constrained by the limits of the universal that allow for it to be mappable, this whatever singularity folds in both in its production of whatever-being.

To attempt to make this concept a bit more concrete, Agamben, surprisingly, relates this to a concept of love. Agamben writes that, "Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one…but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love) …The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is" (2). If this love was particularized (the color of someone's hair and so on), it would then become arbitrary, like Nancy's claim that being-in-together is being replaced by an insufficient sense of togetherness, and similar in the sense that this produces a community of exclusion rather than a "community without community." Yet, as Jessica Whyte writes, "while *whatever beings* have no unitary identity that would enable them to form a community premised on a logic of inclusion or exclusion, neither are they marked by what Agamben terms the 'incipit generality' of concepts like 'universal love'" (3). Rather than a concept of universal love that erases difference, Agamben, like Nancy, argues for a boundaryless notion of a "whatever singularity," in which identity is shaped by the whatever being expressed in communion with other whatever beings. Agamben writes, "Thus, whatever singularity (the Lovable) is never the intelligence of some thing, of this or that quality or essence, but only the intelligence of an intelligibility" (2). Like

Nancy, Agamben seeks to deconstruct this notion of love from being bound in specific predicates to being "with all of its predicates," such that love's finitude (its specific quality) is replaced by the capacity to render a thing then as lovable. Here the lover wants the loved one as more than a representation of specific identities, but as a totalizing potential. As such, these deconstructed modes of participation with community allow us to approach the problems of community to be discussed in these literary texts. Nancy and Agamben seem to both realize the not-yet of their forms of community. For Nancy, this is an inoperative form within a contemporary historical period (for Nancy, the early 1990s) that has largely dissolved the capacity for his kind of community. For Agamben, this form of community is future-pitched, not as a real and present thing or essence, but as a thing to develop instead of the violence of community based on exclusion. In my literary analysis here, I hope to achieve two things. First is to see this deconstructed form of community tested against forms of community that exist in these novels. Because of the reliance on exclusionary forms of community, Kesey reproduces ideas of the feminization of power and its threat to masculine autonomy. As well, these concepts of "whatever being" and "community without community" antagonize the ways in which masculinity can be articulated for Ichiro, creating, for Ichiro, masculinity without masculinity, the whatever being of masculinity.

To begin approaching these questions of community and masculinity, a useful text for this discussion of male melodrama is Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The intersections between Kesey's figurations of feminized communities and masculinized individualities make it an essential text for this dissertation. These ideas are a common thread in the critical work on the novel and part of its lasting interest, despite the novel's obvious flaws. In assessing the importance of the work, M. Gilbert Porter identifies Kesey's novel as having two

central contributions that make it as a classic text: "…1) it embodies in modern form a long-standing tension in American life and literature between the individual and society and between optimism and pessimism, and 2) it affirms heroism in the face of universal absurdity, alienation, and overwhelmingly destructive forces" (11). This first element is of similarly central focus in this chapter, especially for the ways in which Kesey's novel wavers between its acknowledgement of the social power of community and its overinvestment in the potential of heroic individualism. This heroism that Porter describes, as it is only capable of being embodied by the novel's male characters, is clearly meant here as a form of heroic re-masculinizing of the men in the ward[4]. And, considering the relative passivity of the other characters in the novel and Chief's complex ending to be described later, the heroism that Porter describes is meant to be reading McMurphy as a form of hero who transcends the feminizing power of Nurse Ratched, and the institutional powers as only a force of harm[5]. The logical question to ask of Porter's formulation is what in McMurphy's actions constitute a form of heroism. Porter continues:

> The growth of McMurphy from con man to hero to savior is a paradigm of the successful struggle of the individual against at once an oppressive society, his own human weaknesses, and cosmic indifference to his wishes and welfare. That McMurphy is finally willing to sacrifice his life to restore life to others is a testament to values more important than mere survival—freedom, dignity, pride, love, courage—and thus an imposition of human significance on the absurd. (14)

Porter's progression of McMurphy from con man to hero throughout the novel requires a few erasures of the greater weight of his actions. While Kesey highlights the oppressiveness of the ward, and it could be read as an attempt at understanding the wider senses of cultural oppression occurring at roughly the same time in history (especially considering Kesey's involvement in

early 1960s countercultural movements), we must also be specific in the way this sense of oppression is being understood. It is difficult to imagine the struggle being identified here is a struggle against the anonymized, larger disciplinary institution of the ward, and instead seems more plausibly understood as a struggle specifically against Nurse Ratched and her embodiment of female power. While Nurse Ratched might work for some as a symbolic representation of the institution, she is more directly implicated in the sexual economies of the ward, and the ward itself is very directly read as a feminized space early in the novel. As such, a resistance to institutional power gets reformed as a resistance to feminine power, coding the achievement of masculinity as the potential for liberation[6]. After McMurphy's first group session with the other members of the ward, he takes part in a long conversation with another patient, Harding, who describes the power dynamics taking place in the ward. After McMurphy asks why the head doctor is not the one in control, Harding replies, "In this hospital…the doctor doesn't hold the power of the hiring and firing. That power goes to the supervisor, and the supervisor is a woman, a dear old friend of Miss Ratched's…We are victims of a matriarchy here, my friend, and the doctor is just as helpless as we are" (Kesey 59). Harding sees this line of power operating solely within the grasp of women in the hospital, and he insinuates that Nurse Ratched can simply accuse the doctor of possibly skimming Demerol to maintain her power over the doctors and maintains near constant control over the hospital orderlies. Here we see how the typical gendered economy is both apparent and unpowered—McMurphy assumes the male doctor is the one in power, while Nurse Ratched has effectively co-opted that power. It is difficult to imagine that, if this situation was flipped, Harding would be decrying being the victim of a patriarchy. Indeed, it is in this inversion of the normative gendered power dynamic that Harding can cast himself as a victim. Power coalesces and accretes in Nurse Ratched, and it seems too simple to imagine that

Nurse Ratched is only a metaphor for a greater sense of institutionalized, disciplinary power aiming to restrict the expression of individuality. Because Nurse Ratched is the hub for all this power, she is the thing that is being resisted, and she is the force that interrupts the "freedom, dignity, pride, love, [and] courage" that is being denied from the patients in the ward. This is not an attempt to give Nurse Ratched an overly sympathetic reading[7] but is meant only to clarify that in Porter's formulation, the heroism displayed by McMurphy must mean a heroism in the face of the source of all the oppression he feels he is facing, which is of course Nurse Ratched.

From early in the novel, Nurse Ratched's threat to the freedom/dignity/pride of McMurphy et al is read specifically as a threat to masculinity. The agency meant to be granted by negative masculinity is threatened in a symbolically violent way. Right before Harding's claim that they are the victim of the matriarchy of the ward, McMurphy identifies that Nurse Ratched poses a threat to a fundamental element of masculinity, and that, like a chicken at a "peckin' party" she aims to peck:

> Right at your balls. No, that nurse ain't some kinda monster chicken, buddy, what she is is a ball-cutter. I've seen a thousand of 'em, old and young, men and women. Seen 'em all over the country…people who try to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to. (57)

This quote from McMurphy is especially evocative within this chapter's analytic frame. First, we see McMurphy moving from the particularized experience of Nurse Ratched's behavior and connecting it to a wider cultural force of normalization, here a type of nationalized identity for McMurphy that he claims is "seen…all over the country." In the face of subservience to disciplinary power, individualism becomes not only an outlet for dissent, but an attempt to reaffirm one's own aesthetics of freedom and resist anything like the communal power of

Nancy's leftist vision of community. As well, power is again understood within the matrix of sexuality, as McMurphy identifies Nurse Ratched not only as an institutionalized form of discipline, but as a castrating, effeminizing force of power, capable of "stop[ping] you cold" (57). It might appear that McMurphy seeks to transcend this gendered critique, as he switches the pronoun later to describe this type as "a guy who wants to win by making you weaker instead of making himself stronger" (57). But, after Harding sardonically questions McMurphy's "ball-cutter" status for Nurse Ratched, McMurphy replies, "She may be a mother, but she's big as a damn barn and tough as knife metal…Hooo*wee*, I've seen some bitches in my time, but she takes the cake" (57). Again, this quote from McMurphy is useful—Nurse Ratched's femininity is read by McMurphy as a weapon used against the men in the ward, which can be applied and denied as Nurse Ratched sees fit. Richard Maxwell attempts to understand this behavior not as a form of agency but as disorder: "What has caused her to become what she is? It seems that she is sexually frustrated. Since she has not been allowed to function as a woman sexually, she has obliterated all her female characteristics and has directed this frustration toward all males" (141). This is weak analysis. First, it implies that the spaces in which we experience Nurse Ratched are naturally the spaces in which she seeks to "function as a woman" and not as a person in charge. Her refusal to be sexualized by the men of the ward can only be a symptom of her own personal frustration, which Maxwell later identifies as "a common practice." Maxwell agrees with McMurphy's claim and argues that "This is exactly what Big Nurse is doing. If she can make a man less than a man she can control him, and any method she can use to do this will be employed" (140). Here we see a fundamental tension between masculinity and femininity, between freedom and control. If we are to continue from Young's earlier claim that community and individualism fall along the terrains of gender, it would seem then that this control exists by

way of the denial of masculinity and by the imposition of femininity. As such, McMurphy's expressions of dissent must be translated through antagonizing the female power of Nurse Ratched, the source of the matriarchal form of power[8] Harding feels a victim of.

Yet, Kesey's novel complicates this gendered understanding of the masculine and feminine forms of community and individualism by way of its complex figuring of Nurse Ratched's gender. While she demonstrates the ability to be mothering by way of manipulation, she is also constantly portrayed not simply as posing as male (despite being "tough as knife metal"), but as specifically de-sexed. In an oft quoted passage, Chief Bromden provides us with the first sketch of Nurse Ratched:

> Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, pink little nostrils—everything working together except the color on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somewhere in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it. (11)

Laszlo Géfin attempts to read this passage in specifically psychoanalytic terms, implying that Kesey intends for there to be a satirical effect to the contrast between "inhuman…machinery" as seen through phrases like her "flesh-colored enamel" and the "bionic effect" of her breasts (98). If she is the "ball-cutter" that McMurphy describes her as, the conflict here between, as Ruth Sullivan describes, "the promise of softness as abundant giving one can associate with the mother's breasts" quickly places this institutionalized discipline within the field of gender (qtd. in Géfin 98). If this is, as Géfin claims, meant to be a satirical gesture, its exaggeration only fulfills a satirical role along a rigid sense of gendered identity structures and the denial of female

power. For Nurse Ratched to be sufficiently authoritarian, she must in some way be de-gendered, and denied any bodily aspect that might be read by Bromden as "womanly." The rhetorical turn at the end of this passage is notable too—we switch to the second person, and Nurse Ratched's apparent bitterness over her figure is so remarkable that anyone should be able to see it. Yet, this assumptive bitterness directs the reader to imagine that Nurse Ratched sees her gender as a burden, or that she views it as a disqualification of her ability to be an authoritarian, rather than an asset in her power over a community wholly of men. It is here where Baym's melodrama is narrativized most concretely—Ratched's power over the ward is the thing which denies the pursuit of the promise of Americanness offered by negative masculinity.

The libidinal conflict over Nurse Ratched's femininity underlies much of the tension between the community of patients and the institutionalized forms of discipline, of which celibacy is a by-product. The by-product of this celibacy is a source of anxiety for the men in the ward and, because of this, Harding understands his sense of masculinity very literally. First, he implies that McMurphy is something of a false front, and that "for all your cowboy bluster and your sideshow swagger, you too, under that crusty surface, are probably just as soft and fuzzy and rabbit-souled as we are" (Kesey 62). Harding then continues this rabbit metaphor to consider his own sexual potency, the most literal demonstration of his masculinity. Kesey writes:

> Rabbits are noted for that certain trait, aren't they? Notorious, in fact, for their whambam…you are a healthy, functioning and adequate rabbit, whereas most us in here even lack the sexual ability to make the grade as adequate rabbits. Failures, we are—feeble, stunted, weak little creates in a weak little race. Rabbits, *sans* whambam; a pathetic notion…There's not a man here that isn't afraid he is losing or has already lost

> his whambam. We comical little creatures can't even achieve masculinity in the rabbit world… (62-63).

While McMurphy might be understanding his notion of masculinity as a demonstration of abstract concepts like freedom and power, for Harding they are expressible by way of sexuality. Masculinity, for Harding, is synonymous with virility, and presumably then the free expression and achievement of virility. For Harding, who later describes Nurse Ratched as having once been "a rather beautiful young woman" with "some rather extraordinary breasts," the de-sexing of Nurse Ratched becomes the way in which Harding understands his own impotence. Because Nurse Ratched has restricted her ability to be sexualized by the patients, Harding is unable to find a cathectic object in which to enable his rabbit-like sense of "whambam." As such, Harding poses this conflict as something of a challenge to McMurphy. In response to the perceived violence against him, Harding describes what to him is his only tool of dissent:

> …man has but *one* truly effective weapon against the juggernaut of modern matriarchy, but it certainly is not laughter. One weapon, and with every passing year in this hip, motivationally researched society, more and more people are discovering how render that weapon useless and conquer those who have hitherto been the conquerors…and do you think, for all your acclaimed psychopathic powers, that you could effectively use your weapon against our champion? Do you think you could use it against Miss Ratched, McMurphy? (66).

The weapon that Harding is referring to can be ready in a variety of phallic ways—as the free exercise of male virility in the face of the de-sexed ward, for the achievement of this phallic promise as a way of resisting female power, or simply the assumed power provided by this anatomic imperative. McMurphy interprets this the second way, by saying that he does not think

he can "get a bone up over that old buzzard" (66). In other words, Nurse Ratched's positioning of herself as asexual means that, for the free expression of McMurphy's individualism, and by extension the other members of the ward who position themselves as disciples of McMurphy, this expression must occur through the sexualization of Nurse Ratched, and, within Chief's logic, the creation of her as a human and not a machine, that a sense of individual freedom can occur. Here again is Baym's melodrama—under the threat of female power, masculinity must be saved, which can occur through reconfiguring Nurse Ratched into the gendered role patriarchal power wants to assign her to.

What, then, are McMurphy's attempts at heroism? I want to first consider two scenes that are demonstrations of McMurphy's expressions of dissent. Throughout the novel, McMurphy finds ways to be a general nuisance to the order and method of the ward, but these two scenes intersect as well with the psychosexual power dynamics of the ward. In one attempt, McMurphy attempts to be a hero *for* the members of the ward, while in the other he attempts to me a hero *to* a member in the ward, and this distinction is crucial in considering McMurphy's forms of dissent. It is no surprise, given Harding's challenge, that for McMurphy to antagonize Nurse Ratched, it is by way of sexualization, either of Nurse Ratched or by the addition of sex to life in the ward. Curiously, Chief begins his description of this scene wondering how McMurphy was able to become the person he is. He figures that this in some way enabled by the degree to which McMurphy experiences freedom: "No wife wanting new linoleum. No relatives pulling at him with watery old eyes. No one to *care* about, which is what makes him free enough to be a good con man" (84). Similarly, for McMurphy to be able to act against Nurse Ratched is an example of his freedom from her, as she is not someone for him to care about. For Chief, this freedom from others (again a version of negative masculinity) is what empowers McMurphy, but it makes

him only a good con man and is not extended here by Chief into making McMurphy simply a good man. Whether this is meant to temper what his sense of freedom enables or whether this is instead a demonstration of his ability to realize a true form of self is worth questioning, especially when read in contrast to how Chief proceeds to describe Nurse Ratched. In this scene, McMurphy is singing in the shower, fully aware of the disturbance this causes to the ward, which results in Nurse Ratched's fury as she seeks him out. Here, incapable of understanding her anger and frustration in feminized terms, Chief returns to descriptions of Nurse Ratched as a machine: "…She's already as big as a truck…her lips are parted, and her mile's going out before her like a radiator grill. I can smell the hot oil and magneto spark when she goes past" (67). For Chief, the fury demonstrated by Nurse Ratched is unimaginably human not because of its extremes but because of its disjunction with the presumed femininity of the embodied Nurse Ratched. After Ratched finds McMurphy singing in his shower stall, Kesey writes, "Then, just as she's rolling along at her biggest and meanest, McMurphy steps out of the latrine door right in front of her, holding that towel around his hips—stops her *dead!* She shrinks to about head-high to where that towel covers him, and he's grinning down on her" (67). This is a purposeful act of sexualization—McMurphy is making use of the power of Harding's described weapon and is doing so in a way that allows him to look down at her, the act itself perhaps miming the position of a sexual act. After Nurse Ratched informs McMurphy that he cannot be running around in only a towel and needs to stay dressed, he replies, "'No?' He looks down at the part of the towel she's eye to eye with, and it's wet and skin tight. 'Towels against ward policy too? Well, I guess there's nothin' to do exce—'" (67). In this, McMurphy's threat of exposing himself can be read as his attempt to inject a sexualization into his relationship to Nurse Ratched. While McMurphy may contain no legitimate desire to sexualize Nurse Ratched in any way, he is now aware of the

ways in which this act can undermine Nurse Ratched's sense of power, as the implicit object in this scene is the phallic weapon as described by Harding. By forcing this sexualization, itself a violent act that foreshadows the symbolic rape of Nurse Ratched later in the novel, McMurphy finds an expression of dissent which reinvests his own sense of masculinity within it—embodying a form of negative masculinity that serves only as a force of individualization and the destruction of the communal social codes of the ward. This is not a demonstration of "masculinity without masculinity," but is instead an example of McMurphy's attempts to reconfigure the sexual politics of the ward into those prescribed by a wider patriarchal power (and, again, an achievement of Baym's "Americanness").

Yet, McMurphy's dissent to the behavioral norms of the ward are not always so regressively individual and sexually violent. Perhaps the clearest case of this expression of communal agency is the fate of Billy Bibbit[9]. Bibbit is the most direct example in the novel of hero worship of McMurphy, and McMurphy takes the losing of Bibbit's virginity with a woman to be both a personal mission and a chance at a redemptive cure for him—Bibbit is the most rabbit-like among them, and his innocence and youth are represented as uncorrupted potential. For Bibbit, whose situation in the ward makes his potential for life outside the ward seem unlikely or at least distant, his virginity is also being maintained by the power Nurse Ratched has over the ward—the idea of a conjugal visitor would be unthinkable, and the men in the ward lament their celibacy as in Harding's earlier description. Then, it is no surprise that McMurphy's ultimate transgression is his smuggling of Candy Starr, a prostitute from Portland that McMurphy knows, into the ward as a ploy to help Billy Bibbit lose his virginity. After sneaking Candy and her friend Sandy into the ward, they share their wine with some of the other ward members, raid drug cabinets, and generally disobey in relatively benign ways the restrictive

practices of the ward as a final action before their planned escape[10]. Yet, it is in this act that the greatest affront to the disciplinary institution is realized, and McMurphy's transgressions crucially work *toward* a sense of community. First, of course, it is his interest, problematic or not, to help someone else. In doing so, rather than going it alone, McMurphy relies on the others in the ward to aid him in smuggling Candy into the ward. Consider Chief's reflection on the night's shenanigans:

> Drunk and running and laughing and carrying on with women square in the center of the Combine's most powerful stronghold! I thought back on the night, on what we'd been doing, and it was nearly impossible to believe. I had to keep reminding myself that it had *truly* happened, that we had made it happen…Maybe the Combine wasn't all-powerful. What could stop us from doing other things we wanted? (255)

Here Chief realizes the power that is enabled by the sense of community that this specific form of dissent takes. Simply, the switch occurs from singular to plural—instead of imagining how the Combine distributes its power against him, Chief considers the power that is enabled by the "us" and the "we," and realizes the potential for resistance that it allows. This scene works as a different form of resistance to institutionalized power, and rather than seeking out the freedom *from* a form of power (i.e. Nurse Ratched), McMurphy enacts a dissent that builds a collective resistance to the ward's attempts at normalization and dehumanization, to such a degree that Chief must imagine that it is actually occurring.

As well, this scene finds a different distribution of the community/individualism tension. Where before McMurphy's actions were largely his own, observed by the other members of the ward, then responded to by the disciplinary force, in this moment McMurphy uses his way of articulating dissent to help others and with the help of others. While McMurphy's individual

actions might be generously read as attempts to inspire the other members of the ward to act similarly, they are also largely demonstrations for his own individual sense of expression of dissent, and they are ultimately self-serving gestures and not attempts to help members of the ward. As such, before his last violent act, they are relatively easy to control within the networks of power that exist in the ward. What is most transgressive is his ability to finally enlist the help of others. Chief's question at the end of the passage reveals the power of this participatory form of resistance—instead of imagining what McMurphy might do next, Chief finds a new sense of power in himself. Perhaps it can be argued that this presents itself as an Agambian whatever singularity—here the group is made up of all the self-described flawed parts of the ward and of McMurphy's prostitute friends. But, the members of the ward are contributing to this group in their own individually expressive ways. Rather than forcing the members of the ward to become versions of McMurphy, McMurphy's actions in this scene give the other members of the ward the opportunity to express their agency. Members are contributing to their transgressions rather than being directed by McMurphy on what to do and how to act.

Despite the potential in this narrative turn, the book's violent ending complicates the reading of the book as anything other than an explicitly sexist demonstration that retreats to a form of negative masculinity. After Nurse Ratched catches Bibbit with Candy, she attempts to humiliate Bibbit by saying how disappointed his mother will be in him, and this shame ultimately leads to Bibbit committing suicide. This is perhaps Nurse Ratched's most violent moment in the text, and it is meant with an equally violent reply. Considering that sexuality has been a constant source of tension in the novel, McMurphy's violence also becomes sexualized. Chief's early setup of the restrained and de-sexed figure of Nurse Ratched reaches a violent conclusion—McMurphy, acting to redeem the death of Bibbit, attacks Nurse Ratched. But here it

seems difficult to read his "exposing" as meaning something greater than an attempt at humiliating Nurse Ratched to usurp her power, and it is at worst a form of rape. Consider Chief's description of McMurphy's attack on Nurse Ratched:

> Only at the last—after he'd smashed through that glass door, her face swinging around, with terror forever running any other look she might ever try to use again, screaming when he grabbed for her and ripped her uniform all the way down the front, screaming again when the two nippled circles started from her chest and swelled out and out, bigger than anybody had ever imagined, warm and pink in the light… (267)

There is no way to read this violence as a noble act, that by revealing Nurse Ratched as female McMurphy attempts to resist the dehumanizing sense of and abuse of power that could have led to the manipulation of Bibbit. Consider too how different Chief's description of Nurse Ratched now is. In the earlier scene, the "flesh-covered enamel" of Nurse Ratched coalesces into something that is only barely human or is the result of a manufacturing flaw. Chief is obsessed yet again with Nurse Ratched's breasts, as they fulfill the implicit wish of his earlier focus (that they are, in fact, "big" and "womanly"), and the "flesh-covered enamel" is now "warm and pink" and noticeably "in the light," as if spotlighted in their reveal. It is difficult to imagine this description by Chief as anything other than a direct sexualizing and gendering of Nurse Ratched, and that the focus on her exposed breasts and her face in terror makes her now a relatable human by way of her fear. The only sense we can make of Porter's "restoring life in others" in this scene is in the ways in which Nurse Ratched has been returned to sexual object, and the possibility for her to be an object of male desire rather than an expression of female power marks a return of the virility that underlies the fear of many patients. Géfin is again useful on this scene. In McMurphy's act, Géfin notes that "…only by becoming exposed and defenseless does Miss

Ratched 'prove' that she is not a machine…In addition, far more grievously than her womanhood, in her symbolic public rape it is her humanity that is violated and destroyed" (100). Nurse Ratched's humanity has been formed in opposition to the ways in which the men in the ward want to configure Nurse Ratched along the contours of sexualization. As well, Géfin continues that the gendered humanity which has been forced by McMurphy's rape is to deny "the humanity that attempted to preserve itself by refusing the role her breasts, in accordance with society's dominant male expectations, would automatically have condemned her to play" (100). This is part of the inherent conservatism of Kesey's supposedly anti-authoritarian novel. By this logic, to achieve a resistance to this form of feminized authority, the power relations inherent to "dominant male expectations" must be sustained. The difficulty of this ending is only exacerbated by the degree to which McMurphy's earlier forms of communalism in his attempts to help Bibbit seem to offer a better form of "masculinity without masculinity." Porter describes this as evidence of McMurphy's willingness to "sacrifice his life" to upset the vice-like grip and on power Nurse Ratched has over the ward so as to "restore life to others"—not only to the deceased Bibbit, but to the other men in the ward unable to resist Nurse Ratched's power over them (14). Yet, it is difficult to imagine this action has its intended consequence, as the action that leads to the sacrifice of his life is the least connected to a communal sense of power or a progressive notion of freedom.

In the closing scene of the novel, Chief escapes from the mental hospital after smothering the lobotomized McMurphy and breaking through a window. Yet, this has not been achieved through any sense of communal action or an investment in revolution on the ward. Chief says that he "thought for a second about going back and getting Scanlon and some of the others," but the threat of facing the consequences of his actions via the orderlies now responding to the noise

causes him to keep running (272). Chief finds himself alone, breaking out of the hospital completely through his own actions. While it could be argued that this is exactly what McMurphy meant to encourage, to give Chief the motivation to actualize his own desire, it is a form of rebellious freedom specifically on the terms set by McMurphy, and the serving of your own interests first and thinking of others "for a second" would fit within McMurphy's approach to dissent enabled by the retreat to negative masculinity as a form of power and freedom. After breaking out, Chief describes the experience of this exile: "I ran across the grounds in the direction I remembered seeing the dog go, toward the highway. I remember I was taking huge strides as I ran, seeming to step and float a long ways before my next foot struck the earth. I felt like I was flying. Free" (272). While this is a freedom from the asylum, it is worth considering the ways in which Chief articulates his sense of freedom. For Chief, this freedom seems to exist as the freedom of possibility, as he evaluates the many options available to him after breaking out. While Chief can express this form of negative masculinity by way of McMurphy's inspiration, it exists at the expense of others, both literally and figuratively. If the achievement of negative masculinity becomes synonymous with the concepts of Americanness that Baym sees as pervasive in American literature, Chief would seem to fulfill the melodramatic purpose of the novel. Chief, now free from the ward, imagines himself as running free, but he relies on the assistance and generosity of others from his first moments outside of the ward. It is then possible to read McMurphy's consistent rebelliousness as a symptom of this belief in the fully realized atomistic self. If individualism is formed through this process of negation against the communal, McMurphy's actions—sometimes pranks, sometimes unhinged violence—serve to define the scope of his individualism against the inaction of the other members of the ward. Chief's further reflection reveals a great deal about McMurphy's actions during this violent act:

> …only at the last, after the officials realized that the three black boys weren't going to do anything but stand wand watch and they would have to beat him off without their help, doctors and supervisors and nurses prying those heavy red fingers out of the white flesh of her throat…only then did he show any sign that he might be anything other than a sane, willful, dogged man. (267)

Throughout the novel, McMurphy seems certain of the ward being unnecessary for him, that somehow his existence in it is a mistake, and that he is different than the other members of the ward. And, in his ability to bring people together to help someone, as in the generous reading of his actions towards Bibbit, it would seem as though there is a potential for transcending the hold that negative masculinity has on McMurphy throughout. Instead, we see McMurphy retreat to the obsession with individualism that reveals him as something "other than a sane, willful, dogged man"—a character whose negative masculinity allows dissent only to be realized through individualism, and a model for living that leaves Chief "free" and someone that "nobody bothers coming after" (272).

In contrast to Kesey's novel, John Okada's *No-No Boy* further complicates the role of masculinity in this community and individuality dialectic by way of its protagonist, Ichiro Yamada[11]. For Ichiro, the source of this masculine crisis is his refusal to pledge allegiance to America following his internment, resulting in imprisonment and an inability to participate in the war, which is perhaps the most obvious example of Dana Nelson's national manhood by way of the masculinizing American military triumphs in the war. Okada's novel teaches us of the generational tensions between the Nisei, of which Ichiro is a part of, who are born in America as the children of first-generation immigrants known as Issei, all of which are part of the Nikkei community of emigrants Okada's novel focuses on. This generational gap faces a wide array of

identity challenges, as Nisei children feel split between cultures in ways their parents' generation never fully had to explore. For Nisei, then, there is a precarity to their sense of Americanness by way of how they are racialized by the wider American public, which translates itself as well as intra-Nisei hate toward no-no boys.

Ichiro finds himself in this situation by way of being an eponymous no-no boy. In her introduction to *No-No Boy*, Ruth Ozeki provides the text of the loyalty questions asked to Nisei males by the War Department:

> No. 27 Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?
>
> No. 28 Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United State of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, any other foreign government, power, or organization? (Okada x)

For new Issei or Nisei, this kind of loyalty questionnaire is enmeshed with various historical difficulties. Apart from the obvious difficulty of still having potential familial ties with a nation now categorized as the enemy, Ozeki identifies a deeper ethical question arising from this pledge of loyalty: "And still others didn't understand why they should give their lives for a country that had branded them 'enemy aliens,' stripped them of all rights of citizenship, herded up their families, corralled them like cattle, and forced them to submit to the draft" (xi). The internment of Japanese Americans during the war looms over Okada's novel, though the focus is largely on Ichiro's individual search for a way in which to form any sense of subjectivity. As well, his absence from a unifying moment of masculinity casts him at odds with other Nisei veterans who enjoy the status of war heroes and confines him to a network of other no-no boys. Gary Storhoff

notes that, "…Okada seems to ask, can a Japanese American survive emotionally in a postwar America filled with racism and unreasoning hatred? How can a person like Ichiro overcome the double trauma of first the internment, then his imprisonment?" (2). While Ichiro's struggle to make sense of his sense of self is a consistent tension throughout the book, his inability to place himself—the lack of his ability to subjectivize his experiences—shapes much of his internal conflict.

There is a wide body of critical work that centers on how Ichiro understands his masculinity within and against a sense of postwar national identity, as well as recent critical interest in Okada's life and work. In incorporating Okada's novel into my analysis here, I hope to expand the critical response to consider the ways in which Okada's questions of identity and masculinity in a postwar context are useful in understanding wider American issues on these instabilities. In doing so, I do not seek to discount the role that Okada's novel has played in Japanese American literary scholarship or in the literature of internment, but I hope to instead expand the ways in which Ichiro's search for an understanding of his masculinity is also a question for Baym's "melodramas of beset manhood." In mapping the critical responses to Okada's novel, Jeffrey Yamashita identifies there being two major periods of critical thought on *No-No Boy* which loosely map eras of thinking about Asian American literature. In this, I am largely interested in what Yamashita identifies as the "second wave" of *No-No Boy* scholarship, which he marks as being from the "early 1990s through 2015" (284). These "second wave" scholars have largely been interested in the "epistemological concerns around concepts of anti-imperialism, antinationalism, and the material specificity of literature…and the intersectional racial and gendered identities of Ichiro's subject formation" (285). It is this "contested subject formation" that I hope to refract through this analytical frame on community, individualism, and

negative masculinity[12]. As Yamashita notes, *No-No Boy* fixes on a specific moment in history that illuminates how tenuous these intersecting systems are. *No-No Boy* rejects the model minority myth, and instead posits a main character attempting to form a sense of his own subjectivity in an era marked by "the harsh realities of Japanese American survival…in the postwar era" (286). This survival marks a core tension of critical work on the book, which often takes sides on whether Okada is an advocate for an assimilationist understanding of national identity, or if Okada is more nuanced in his understanding of how race intersects with this national identity.

A key difficulty in this search for subjectivity is in the already difficult situation Ichiro finds himself in as Nisei, as he has spent his entire life in America (and, of course, feels American), and he is distanced from his parents who still feel like immigrants. For Ichiro, he finds himself feeling out of place both within Japanese cultural traditions and the wider American experience that has excluded and interned him. Early in the novel, after Ichiro has returned from his imprisonment, his mother forces him to visit families she remains friends with to announce his return. Okada writes:

> …It was customary among the Japanese to pay ceremonious visits upon various occasions to families of close association. This was particularly true when a member of one of the families either departed on an extended absence or returned from an unusually long separation. Yes, he had been gone a long time, but it was such a different thing. It wasn't as if he had gone to war and returned safe and sound or had been matriculating at school in some other city… (20-21)

It is necessary here to unpack some of the novel's complications towards Ichiro's actions. Ichiro's mother, for most of the novel, obstinately believes that Ichiro's actions are a sign of him

being loyal to Japan. Yet, for Ichiro, while they may be rooted in the moral and ethical positions that Ozeki describes, he thinks of his return as something to be ashamed of. For Ichiro, this is not a return to be celebrated, as highlighting his no-no boy status only emphasizes the tenuous status of Ichiro's Americanness, and further aligns him with a group (other no-no boys) that he seeks to distance himself from. Ichiro gets to participate in neither cultural expression—neither the Japanese celebration of his return or the American celebration of military triumph. Instead, Ichiro is split across identities while subjectivized by neither, a double nothingness. Yogi notes that this divide is split even further by his mother: "She insists on a 'Japanese' identity by stubbornly believing that ships from victorious Japan will soon arrive to pick up those who remained loyal to the emperor. She dismisses as propaganda letters from her relatives in Japan begging for assistance…" (65). For Ichiro's mother, this stubborn loyalty to Japan marks her form of dissent to the normalizing forces of American superiority being trumpeted in postwar America. This, however, is discordant with Ichiro's justification for his no-no boy status, which seem to instead stem from his belief in the injustice of internment. As such, Okada forms a dramatic link between the various representations of "home" in his novel and the imprisonments that Ichiro has found himself a part of—while being home is meant to be a realization of freedom, Ichiro instead finds himself imprisoned by the weight of his own conscience and his mother's dysfunctional loyalty to Japan.

In the beginning of the novel, Okada quickly highlights the displacement felt by Ichiro as he returns to Seattle after his imprisonment. Immediately, Ichiro crosses paths with Eto Minato, a veteran Ichiro knew before the war. Initially this exchange is friendly, with Eto offering a cigarette and to have a drink with Ichiro, all simple signs of a desire for being-in-common a la Nancy. As Eto questions Ichiro about what he did during the war, he realizes that he is a no-no

boy. In the first scene of Ichiro having to come to terms with this identity category, Okada writes:

> Ichiro wanted to say yes. He wanted to return the look of despising hatred and say simply yes, but it was too much to say. The walls had closed in and were crushing all the unspoken words back down into his stomach. He shook his head once, not wanting to evade the eyes but finding it impossible to meet them. Out of his big weakness the little ones were branching…The hate-churned eyes with the stamp of unrelenting condemnation were his cross and he had driven the nails with his own hands. (5)

For Eto, whose military service is a clear marking of his loyalty to the US and allow him to achieve a stable sense of identity, Ichiro's actions make Ichiro a "rotten bastard" and he tells Ichiro that "I'll piss on you next time" (5-6). Again, while supposedly free now that he has been released from prison, the intra-Nisei policing of Americanness links Ichiro to his criminality, and he is not legible as a free man under the logic of postwar identity. As well, Eto makes reflexive use of racial epithets to distance himself even further from the Japanese American community:

> Lotsa Japs coming back to the Coast. Lotsa Japs in Seattle. You'll see 'em around. Japs are funny that way. Gotta have their rice and sake and other Japs. Stupid, I say. The smart ones went to Chicago and New York and lotsa places back east, but there's still plenty coming back out this way. (4)

In doing so, Eto distances himself from his community by way of employing this epithet, and he attempts to embody a nationalized identity disconnected from his racialization. Yet, as Yogi notes, "in this very action they indict themselves, because they are, in the eyes of the broader society, Japanese" (69). Considering that scholars like Gayle Sato have strongly criticized Okada for an apparently tacit support of assimilation, it is difficult to imagine how Eto is anything other

than evidence of the *failure* of these assimilationist aims. While Eto is doing everything "right" in order to position himself as loyal to America, it costs him a sense of community and a sense of subjectivity that does not depend on his "green, army-fatigue trousers and an Eisenhower jacket" (Okada 4). After Ichiro is spat on by Eto, he is jeered at by a group of black men hanging around a pool parlor. They shout "Jap!" at him, and "Go back to Tokyo, boy," followed by a mock chant of "Jap-boy, To-ki-yo; Jap-boy To-ki-yo" (7). However, this experience of racism is separated completely from Ichiro's status as a no-no boy, and this experience would be as equally possible for Ichiro as it would Eto. Following Yogi's early claim, the racism of the broader American society eliminates the particularities of Ichiro's experience, and the tension created by being a no-no boy is recast as an intra-communal one that becomes Ichiro's cross to bear. In that way, it could be argued that it is almost as if Ichiro's actions during the war are meaningless, as racism flattens this experience and the attempt at achieving a nationalized sense of Americanness. In a seminal essay on the novel, Jinqi Ling writes:

> Okada's novel appears to tell the story of the return of the prodigal, one who comes to recognize his 'error' and to embrace the promise of 'America.' But within this conventional form, Okada created a protagonist who fails to piece together his fragmented past and whose predicament epitomizes the consequences of the racism that had fueled the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and continued to condition their lives and identities in the postwar years. (360)

Even further, this fragmentation is enabled primarily by the communities Ichiro finds himself navigating in his life back in Seattle—he feels disconnected from his family, he is shunned by Japanese American veterans, and he spends a great deal of the novel reflecting on the psychic pain caused by his disjointed identity. As a result, if we are to read the space of home that Ichiro

finds himself in as its own kind of enforced prison, Ichiro's dissent can be understood as his attempts to flee from this idea, and his attempt at resisting the normalization of American war masculinity is an attempt to reproduce a new space of home for himself.

However, for Ichiro's younger brother, Taro, the threat to his American identity caused by Ichiro's actions is even more acute. After Taro reveals his desire to enlist, Ichiro reflects on his brother's situation:

> …The reason why Taro was not a son and not a brother was because he was young and American and alien to his parents, who had lived in America for thirty-five years without becoming less Japanese and could speak only a few broken words of English and write it not at all, and because Taro hated that thing in his elder brother which had prevented him from thinking for himself. (19)

Taro seeks to produce a space of home in much the same way Ichiro does, but he partakes in the assimilationist rhetoric that offers it as a bargain. Since Taro feels no connection to his family, he finds no issue in abdicating this familial role in the pursuit of a concrete form of identity. Yet, while characters like Eto and Ichiro attempt to position themselves fully within the assimilationist narrative of Japanese American survival in postwar America, Okada undercuts this posturing throughout the novel. When we are introduced to Freddie, a fellow no-no boy and Ichiro's friend by necessity, more is revealed about the tenuousness of the assimilationist mode of thinking. After telling Freddie that he ran into Eto, Freddie tells Ichiro, "We got troubles, but that crud's got more and ain't got sense enough to know it. Six months he was in the army. You know that? Six lousy months and he wrangled himself a medical discharge" (45). Freddie reveals two key arguments throughout the novel about this assimilationist tactic. First is that it operates as a lie—while Eto's service is legitimate, Freddie judges it as only a posturing and not a

committed investment to the identity Eto tries to portray. As well, the "troubles" that Freddie describes speaks to the distancing taking place in Eto's approach to his identity. It is through his service that he can distance himself, and his distancing (which it seems safe to argue consists of a large amount of denial and internalized cultural shame) only leaves unresolved the realization of his place in the larger American society.

Perhaps no character is better evidence of the insufficiency of assimilationist modes of navigating one's subjectivity than the character of Kenji. Kenji's character type of the wounded soldier is not an uncommon one in American literature, especially literature involving American wars, but here it takes on a complicated dimension in the dynamics of the wider Nikkei community. As Yogi writes, Kenji's injury is clearly also metaphor: "The nature of his injury, the ever encroaching pain that requires more and more of his leg to be amputated, symbolizes the costs, both physical and psychological, of Nikkei efforts to prove loyalty" (70). While this loyalty might work as a spectacle of patriotism, as it does for Eto still in his army garb, it does so by way of the "genocide of his own community…a surrender of valuable cultural distinctions to a dominant culture that would obliterate rather than incorporate them" (70). Kenji's complex relationship with these intracultural tensions is apparent again in a later reflection from Kenji over Ichiro's predicament:

> The way I see it, they [Nisei veterans] pick on you because they're vulnerable. They think just because they went and packed a rifle they're different but they aren't and they know it. They're still Japs.... The guys who make it tough on you probably do so out of a misbegotten idea that maybe you're to blame because the good that they thought they were doing by getting killed and shot up doesn't amount to a pot of beans. They just need

> a little time to get cut down to their own size. Then they'll be the same as you, a bunch of Japs. (146)

Kenji's pessimism over the experience of Nisei veterans speaks not only to his own futile experience but to the specific historical contexts that force the establishment of loyalty beyond all other considerations. Kenji seems to confirm the earlier point that race serves as a flattening force, and that no matter how much is sacrificed for the pursuit of a legible American identity (which for Kenji is nothing less than his life), loyalty will not overcome racism. As Yogi writes, the Nikkei community:

> …Had to do more and more to prove itself loyal when it never should have been suspect in the first place: Japanese-Americans were told that they were being interned because the government could not distinguish the loyal from the disloyal, while simultaneously being told that in order to prove their loyalty they should agree to internment without question. (71)

In the search for the access to national identity (and, for many Nisei veterans like Eto, specifically national manhood) that this loyalty promises, Okada's novel would seem to argue that the result is the immolation of ethnic communities, which will be continually locked in a process of proving one's own sense of Americanness (again, an act which is necessarily the pursuit of a sense of individual identity rather than the achievement of anything communal). The destructive nature of this genocide is especially apparent in Ichiro's later feelings toward his brother Taro. After realizing that Taro is different than the rest of the Yamada family, this difference evolves into a sense of hatred for his brother. When Taro and a gang of his friends attack Ichiro and Kenji, presumably because of their hatred of the no-no boy and a sympathizer, this familial hatred reaches a peak. Okada writes, "Taro, my brother who is not my brother, you

are no better than I. You are only more fortunate that the war years found you too young to carry a gun. You are fortunate like the thousands of others…for their answers might have been the same as mine" (75). While Ichiro casts his refusal to plead loyalty as a weakness, it appears instead that he is critiquing a weakness in his brother, who did not face the same challenges and can live in the certainty of his loyalty. Ichiro continues, "I am not to blame but you blame me and for that I hate you and I will hate you more when you go into the army and come out and walk the streets of America as if you owned them always and forever" (75). Ichiro's conflation of Taro with Eto and with other Nisei veterans may not be completely inaccurate, but it is worth considering the degree to which this tension breaks even a familial sense of connection because of Taro's organized violence, further distancing Ichiro from any sense of home. This is a disruption of community at the most basic level (the family), and the pursuit of legibility within the current American political scene is, following Kenji, a useless pursuit.

For Ichiro, to embody what Daniel Kim calls a sense of "American wholeness," he must resolve the "'wound' that has injured Ichiro's masculinity" (69). In a scene in which Ichiro and Kenji are comparing their relative wounds, Okada writes:

> I'll change with you, Kenji, he thought. Give me the stump which gives you the right to hold your head high…give me with it the fullness of yourself which is also yours because you were man enough to wish the thing which destroyed your leg and…made it so that you can put your one good foot in the dirt of America and known the wet coolness of it is yours beyond a single doubt. (58-59)

For Ichiro to resolve his woundedness, it must be by way of his demonstration of masculinity and his resistance to the feminizing cowardice he sees his no-no boy status as. In doing so, Viet Thanh Nguyen identifies Ichiro as being part of R.W. Connell's idea of subordinate

masculinities. Nguyen identifies the achievement of hegemonic masculinity as being "both desirable and execrable at the same time" and that Ichiro's struggle is largely a "struggle to attain a more dominant kind of masculinity than has been granted to [him]" (67). For Nguyen, the masculinity Ichiro experiences in postwar America "was then conceived…as a necessary method not only for extending the sphere of American power but also for buttressing domestic American virility" (67). Accordingly, the pursuit of Ichiro's wholeness is the pursuit of his achievement of this dominant form of masculinity. While Nguyen takes this as an opportunity to think through the ways in which Ichiro intersects with economic modes of masculinity and the achievement of the patriarch, I want to focus again on the theme of restorative violence that runs through this chapter as a way of understanding how Ichiro enables this masculinity[13]. To do so, two pivotal scenes complicate the ways in which Ichiro relates to questions of masculinity, and they consider if his inability to place himself in any community, let alone a male community he wants to be in, results in a retreat to negative masculinity.

Before Ichiro and Kenji are jumped by Taro's "gang of weak hoodlums," they seek out a place called Club Oriental to get a drink and talk about their respective troubles. Before long, the crowd at the bar grows, and they are joined by Bull, who Okada describes as a "swarthy Japanese, dressed in a pale-blue suit that failed to conceal his short legs and awkward body" (68). Bull immediately recognizes and converses with Kenji: "For cris-sake, if it ain't Peg-leg. It's sure been a helluva long time since I seen you" (68). Here this jovial familiarity is the kind of male intimacy that Ichiro feels closed off from by the feminization of his disloyalty. After Kenji identifies Ichiro as his friend, Bull's mood changes completely; "Bull turned around and looked at Ichiro with a meanness which was made darker by the heavy cheekbones and the rough stubble which defied a razor…'God-damnit,' he said aloud, 'brand-new suit. Damn near got it

cruddy'" (69). Okada continues, "Someone said something about 'No-no boys don't look so good without the striped uniform' and that got a loud boisterous laugh" (69). While Kenji tries to reassure Ichiro that they did not mean it, Ichiro, even after a great deal of whisky, does not believe it. Ichiro is humiliated in this moment, and he is left with "the fury inside him seething uncontrollably" as he finds himself both excluded from the masculine communities that Kenji and Bull can negotiate and feminized by his now well-known status as no-no boy. Ichiro is left feeling that he is "…nobody, nothing. Just plain nothing" by way of his feeling of embarrassment. Ling argues that Ichiro's "problematic recovery" of his masculinity then "reflects both the limited range of dissent permitted in the social and aesthetic discourses" that Okada the author finds available to him (363). Yet, Ling also claims that Ichiro "is never entirely dissolved into the social roles defined for him by the dominant discourse of the era" (363). As a result, Ichiro's resistance to the masculinizing narratives of assimilation are an attempt at resisting the ideological fantasies of assimilation, and they produce a form of dissent that is not only liberating for men but articulate a dissent to dominant discourses of American identity. However, for this to be true, Ichiro must transcend the ways in which masculinity and femininity are mapped on to respective discourses of freedom and subjugation.

In the final scene of the novel, Freddie, seemingly dead set on his own destruction to resolve his own shame over his no-no boy status, takes Ichiro out to play pool and drink. In this scene, Ichiro seems to have reached a sense of transcendence, and he feels sorry for the rage that is causing Freddie to act in such a way as to "blindly sought relief in total, hateful rejection of self and family and society" (213). After finding their way back to Club Oriental, Freddie manages to pick a fight with Bull, with Ichiro joining in to help his friend. Here a complex scene unfolds. Bull has previously presented himself as an antagonist to Ichiro, and a direct contributor

to the kind of shame that he feels throughout the novel. Yet, at this point, Ichiro regrets and resists the fight as much as he can. After pleading with Bull not to fight Freddie, Okada writes:

> Driven by fear, urged by a need to fight this thing which no amount of fighting would ever destroy, Ichiro raised his fist and drove it down…And Ichiro looked into the angry eyes and saw that to quit now would mean to submit to that unrelenting fury. He raised his first again, sick with what he was having to do. (218)

There seem to be two ways to interpret Ichiro's actions in this scene. The first is to disregard the sense that he feels "sick with what he was having to do," and that instead this very logical resolution is in fact his ability to demonstrate a form of hegemonic masculinity that he was unable to earlier in the novel. This would largely align with criticisms of the book that accuse Okada of being sympathetic to assimilationist rhetoric at the time. Yet, if Nisei like Bull represent, as Ling describes, the "unqualified acceptance of the social standards established by the dominant culture" Ichiro's violence takes on a more plausibly symbolic status than anything McMurphy manifests, and it can be read as a liberation from the normalizing forces of masculinity by of the lack of belief in its potential. What Ichiro is fighting is both literal and symbolic—if Bull represents the assimilationist bargain of the dominant culture, its "emptiness," as Ling describes, is evident in the resolution of the fight. When Bull has lost his grip on power, he is left only with "frightened, lonely eyes" and "empty sorry in [his] hulking body" (220-221). Ling identifies this as the evidence for the emptiness of the assimilationist bargain, and if Ichiro's actions are a transcendence, they would seem to be that of a simultaneous transcendence of subordinate and hegemonic masculinities and a refusal of the bargain. Yet, while Ichiro may feel as though he has arrived at some greater plane of understanding, one must also take the toll of where he finds himself at the end of Okada's novel. He is unable to save Freddie from his own

destruction, he finds himself fighting a major antagonist as a way of recuperating his sense of masculinity, and, in most ways, finds himself alone. While this subjectivity Ichiro arrives at might be, as Ling articulates, "the angry, self-contradictory voices of the victims of racism" its alignment with the characteristics of negative masculinity direct it toward a similar path to McMurphy—of symbolic violence and its loneliness (374).

To conclude, this chapter has attempted to synthesize a variety of ideas in its exploration of Kesey and Okada's novels. Following Baym's argument for the prevalence of melodramas of masculinity in the American canon, I have argued the degree to which Kesey is emblematic of this phenomenon in the structuring of his narrative. In doing so, Kesey reproduces the understanding of female power and feminization as a threat to masculinity, and despite the novel's potential moments for transcendence it retreats to the tenets of negative masculinity that values non-interference from any form of exterior power, unable to differentiate between a resistance to power and a resistance to feminization. In that way, Kesey's novel fails to imagine a transcendence of the individuality/community dialectic, and it aligns itself with ways of thinking about masculinity that fail to achieve the forms of potential that community can embody by way of Agamben and Nancy's ideas on community. Yet, Okada's novel offers us a way of imagining something different. The attempt here is to show the ways in which Okada's novel highlights the destructive bargain that the pursuit of Kesey's form of masculinist individuality offers, not just for Nisei no-no boys but as a general statement on the reproduction of the ideological fantasies attached to masculinity. In the unstable space of home offered to Ichiro—of America widely, or of his ethnic community in Seattle—Okada demonstrates the ways in which there is a possibility for transcending the restrictive norms of postwar masculinity, and, in doing so, creates a form of "masculinity without masculinity" in his refusal to participate within its normalizing logics. Yet,

for Ichiro, and perhaps for this argument, these exist only as a potential, as something inoperative, and as Okada's novel closes, when we find Ichiro "thinking [and] searching" for "that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and heart," he is searching for, as Caroline Chung Simpson writes, a "reconstituting [of] the crucial moment in national history" (Okada 221, Simpson 13). In believing in the *promise* of a new history, Ichiro is simultaneously reimagining his role in postwar masculinity, and "probing…in the darkness" for a new, liberated form of masculinity without masculinity (221).

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[1] Again, as mentioned in the introduction, this question of feminization and the ways in which femininity is a corrosive force against masculinity is outlined in Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*. Of course, this dichotomy created by Douglas is problematic and ignores the violence done to maintain the kind of boundaries she maps out, and I include its way of thinking here largely for the ways this logic occurs in Okada and Kesey.

[2] Although I attempt to make some mention to it in this chapter, the specific intersections of masculinity and Asian-American racial identity are underdeveloped and mostly unexplored here. This is in part because Ichiro's field of masculinity is fully within his Chinatown community, and never explicitly serves in contrast to other racialized forms of masculinity, such that there is an assumptive commonality for all participants within these racialized myths surrounding Asian-American masculinity in this novel. That said, I am influenced here by crucial work from David Eng in *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* and Tan Hoang Nguyen's *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*. Both books are essential on this topic, and they provide specific interventions for both Ichiro (existing here as an image of Asian male effeminacy for his unwillingness to participate in war) and Kenji (for his overperformance and hypermasculinization of a specific type of white heroic masculinity).

[3] There is a potential here for a connection between Agamben's notion of the whatever singularity and Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, which is an influential text in developing my own thinking on masculinity as an object of study that need not be bound to male bodies. While it did not find a place in any of these chapters, much of what Halberstam claims about the usefulness of studying masculinity when removed from being centered on the male experience of masculinity would fit with Agamben's notion of community existing "with all of its predicates" rather than a particularized form.

[4] Though it came soon after Kesey's novel, Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* is perhaps the most classic example of the analysis of the dehumanizing forces of contemporary medical practices. While this dehumanization might more accurately be *in*humanization in Kesey, Nurse Ratched is a clear example of the "medical gaze" that Foucault develops, as she frequently places her authority above more basic empathetic concerns. Yet, a Foucauldian analysis of Kesey would be difficult, if for no other reason than the narrative already wants the reader to view Nurse Ratched as the villain, and it would seem to already confirm Foucault's main claims.

[5] It should be noted here that evaluation of the destructiveness of the institution is largely outside the scope of this inquiry, but it is important in mapping the ethical questions of the novel. Nurse Ratched is without question meant to be read as villainous and is certainly capable of manipulation and evil that are beyond any ethical justification, but it is difficult from the novel's perspective to objectively evaluate which institutional practices are as "absurd" and "alienating" versus an attempt at rehabilitating neuro-atypical members in the ward. It seems, as well, that in classifying the ward members as victims of *social* forces created/manipulated by Nurse Ratched, it can just as easily erase the legitimacy of conditions for which they seek rehabilitation (especially true for the fate of Billy Bibbit).

[6] Another useful text that shaped my thinking on these issues is Robyn Wiegman's *American Anatomies*—my primary claim about Kesey, that his text argues for the excavation of the power of patriarchy in combating feminization, could be backed here by Wiegman's claims over the influence of empirical claims about the nature of gender relations. Wiegman would also be applicable here to Okada's text if I were to expand my analysis to consider more of the role of race and racism in the production of Ichiro as a legibly male subject.

[7] It is important to note here that is difficult to read Kesey's text as much other than a sexist novel, and that women in the book have reduced and stereotypical roles that disallow them from existing as too fully realized of characters. Yet, feminist critiques of Kesey's novel that seek to defend Nurse Ratched (as in Patricia Reis's or Philip Darbyshire's work on the novel) seem too ready to excuse the deeply manipulative violence that Nurse Ratched demonstrates her capacity for throughout the novel, so as to deny the possibility of the novel being both sexist and depicting a real sense of malicious violence.

[8] Since this dissertation is not specifically interested in the psychological practices taking place in the novel (and since many are certainly barbaric by today's standards), I am omitting much discussion of the technique imposed by the mental ward on its patients and focusing instead on how they translate these practices to their own aesthetics of freedom. Yet, it is interesting to consider how the group therapy sessions instituted by the ward are a kind of forced community that might operate within the whatever singularity or the community and all its predicates—it is a community that many patients with varying degrees of neuro-atypical behavior participate in, and if Nurse Ratched is read by some as feminizing the men of the ward by force, this forced community via group therapy might work within Young's formulation—here, being forced to share in a communal way feminizes the men, and it becomes the forum that inspires much of their hatred for Nurse Ratched.

[9] Again, as this is not a psychoanalytic reading of the text, I will look past any deep analysis of the varying Oedipal issues going on with Billy Bibbit throughout the novel, but it seems important to note at least that Bibbit's virginity seems to be connected in some way to his ability to be rehabilitated—while this also gives Nurse Ratched power over Billy, it allows him to be categorized still as a "poor little boy" and presumably more capable of being formed/reformed by Nurse Ratched's will (Kesey 265).

[10] It would seem as though the characters are aware of how transgressive these actions are within the logics of the ward, and their ability to justify them hinges on McMurphy's planned escape. Yet, it is only McMurphy here that plans to escape, and even this is relatively doubtful. When Harding attempts to explain why he is in the ward, he says that he must "re-appraise his theory" because "There's something else that drives people, strong people like you, my friend, down that road" (Kesey 258). While this road could be what McMurphy is literally imagining driving himself down in the morning, it is also an articulation of what brings McMurphy to the ward, and perhaps could be read as foreshadowing the impossibility of his escape.

[11] It is important here to note that I am attempting to make use of Okada's novel within what are largely Americanist questions about the role of masculinity, subjectivity, and national identity. In many ways, this is a limiting look at Okada's novel, which is an essential text in Japanese American literary criticism and essential to the history literature of internment. An excellent text on this topic is Caroline Chung Simpson's *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945–1960*, in which she maps the ways that Okada provides a "chronicle of the immediate postwar predicament of Japanese American resisters" which allows for the consideration of the paradox between America's "heroic ascension…to super-nation status" amidst the injustices of internment (13-14). Also essential is SC Wong's *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*, Sheng-mei Ma's *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*, and, while only about *No-No Boy* briefly, the collection *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* edited by T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama. These texts were all essential parts of my research on Okada, but they did not make it into this version of my analysis.

[12] Much of what Yamashita identifies as the first-wave of scholarship on Okada influenced my reading of the text, most notably its inclusion in *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, which Yamashita considers to be the seminal collection at that time. Also influential were Dorothy Ritsuko McDonald's "After Imprisonment" and Colleen Lye's "Reading for Asian American Literature."

[13] Nguyen's angle here is, of course, a very smart one, and despite the focus here on masculinity I am avoiding discussion of the complex relationships between Ichiro, Emi, and Kenji, as well as Ichiro's consistent desire throughout the novel to return to college, presumably as a way toward achieving what Nguyen classifies as the ability to access the American middle-class and its corresponding economic privilege.

Chapter 2: Whiteness as Menace: Racial Masculinity, Hybridity, and Black Utopia in Baldwin's *Another Country* and Whitehead's *John Henry Days*

As is evidenced by Ichiro's struggle to define his own form of masculine dissent against the nationalized image of white masculinity brought upon by WWII, negative masculinity and the achievement of its democratic promise is especially vexed for minoritized forms of masculinity. Black masculinity finds itself similarly antagonized by the inherent whiteness of this nationalized manhood, as black masculinity is historically positioned as simultaneously a threat to the fidelity of white masculinity, shaped within and against white masculinity, and yet still capable of expressing a non-normative form of masculinity as a way of critiquing white masculinity's hegemonic role in shaping masculine subjectivity. An illuminating text for these kinds of problems can be found in James Baldwin's *Another Country,* especially through the characters of Rufus and Vivaldo.

Before examining Rufus and Vivaldo, the specific history of Baldwin's *Another Country* is critical to understanding its aims, as it also positions Baldwin's perspectives of masculinity that contribute to the writing of his novel. While their aims differ, Norman Mailer's "The White Negro" serves as a primary inspiration for Baldwin's text. For Baldwin and Mailer, their texts thematize not only a historical way of understanding the specific problem of black and white masculinities, but they reveal the extent to which negative masculinity shapes these ways of thinking. The friendship and/or rivalry between Mailer and Baldwin is long-documented[1], but it was exacerbated by the publication of Mailer's "The White Negro" and the preceding *Advertisements for Myself*. Douglas Taylor, encapsulating much of Mailer's essay, writes that Mailer "tells us more about the repressed fantasies of white men than what it means to be black,"

a position Mailer justifies as a kind of "psychic redemption" capable for white masculinity via black masculinity after the seemingly "assured nuclear destruction" of World War II (97). Taylor works through, at great length, the problems with Mailer's consistent essentializations and pervasively racist figurations of black masculinity. Of specific import to Mailer, and a major subject of critique for Taylor, is Mailer's focus on the "libidinal drives of the body and liv[ing] in and for the moment" that connect Mailer's version of black masculinity to a form of masculinity outside of white masculinity's own "utilitarian goals of family and nation" (73). In Mailer we see the masculinist logics of McMurphy at his worst, that the feminizing power of "family and nation" (in the Ann Jeffords sense of feminization by way of domesticity) is a direct affront to the freedom meant to be enabled by negative masculinity. Mailer's obsession with this idea of instinctual and instant gratification is at odds with his view of the overly repressed white masculinity in post-WWII America, but simultaneously reinvests a history of racist figuration of black masculinity in so doing. bell hooks extends this line of thinking when she writes that black men have been historically figured as "…brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers, black men have had no real dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented…As a consequence they are victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century" (xii). Mailer's focus on his vision of black masculinity being essentially primitivist[2] in its unchecked expressions of authentic joy free from the normalizing of mainstream culture echoes hooks's representations of black male identity across historical periods. This representation is mediated first by the body of the black male subject, and it then reinvests the obsession with it that permeates the psychosexual panics of Mailer's white masculine hipster subject who seeks to remedy the disconnect between body and mind in this historical moment. As such, this fails in its hybridity, since as Taylor recognizes, it is "unilateral and unidirectional":

> White men may partake of the perceived psychic, sexual, and emotional gratifications of a cultural immersion in blackness, but when, as in this discussion between a black man and a white woman, a black man impinges upon whiteness, it is a source of anxiety. (77)

This is absent any kind of notion of exchange, and its unilaterality only draws attention to how, for Mailer, his attempts at creating a mimicry of black subjectivity work only as a mirror to insecurity. For Mailer's sense of whiteness to be something to be impinged upon would also demand the crafting of it as a specific subjectivity rather than the invisible and transmutable whiteness that Sally Robinson identifies as the answer to this perceived "crisis" of white masculinity, to foreclose a sense of identity rather than to leave it constantly deferred. This runs contrary to Mailer's desire for his unencumbered subject of white masculinity (here, the negatively masculine subject) to move across these racial positionalities at his leisure, as it also establishes this *as* subjectivity.

Baldwin draws attention to this problem from the onset of his essay, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy." It is crucial here to think of the directionality of Baldwin's looking—the gaze of white fantasy runs throughout Mailer's essay, but Baldwin reorganizes this process of looking. In doing so this also forces this white hipster subjectivity to be looked at—to articulate its limits, to define its conditions. Baldwin mirrors Mailer's processes but shows the differences in what they reflect. While Mailer looks from the position of the white male subject oppressed by the utilitarian needs for white masculinity, Baldwin uses the position he finds himself looking on from to claim his own mastery:

> I think that I know something about the American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it 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. (269-70)

Baldwin depicts a dual menacing here—first, of the performance of the kind of limited black masculinity that Mailer describes (which Mailer equates to psychopathy and "primitive" stereotyping[3]), and of the distance between white and black masculinities. It seems a safe claim to make that Baldwin wants to defend neither in his analysis of Mailer's flawed essay.

Yet, it is in this relationship between masculinities ("a very complex thing," in Baldwin's words), that Baldwin articulates the central question: "Why malign the sorely menaced sexuality of Negroes in order to justify the white man's own sexual panic?" (270, 278). In Mailer's argument, is not enough to use one's unfettered access to power in society to develop a clear sense of one's identity, it must be recuperated in this period of American history via a kind of racial tourism via self-marginalization[4]. Baldwin continues that, "…The really ghastly thing about trying to convey to a white man the reality of the Negro experience has nothing whatever to do with the fact of color, but has to do with the man's relationship to his own life" (272). Here is where the unequal accesses to power in the exchanges that Mailer imagines between white and black masculinities are laid bare[5]. To convey this "reality" relies upon an abandonment of Mailer's pervasive essentialization and fantasy of black masculinity to demonstrate how unstable this identity formation is, as well as an awareness of one's ability to move in and out of this marginalized subjectivity. More succinctly, this unequal relationship of power enables the white subject to craft a version of black subjectivity to the limits at which they see fit. Baldwin writes:

> The world had prepared no place for you, and if the world had its way, no place would ever exist. Now, this is true for everyone, but, in the case of a Negro, this truth is absolutely naked: if he deludes himself about it, he will die. This is not the way this truth

> presents itself to white men, who believe the world is theirs and who, albeit unconsciously, expect the world to help them in the achievement of their identity. (279)

Baldwin quickly establishes a connection between this identity formation and power—that each of these parts, both the ability to confirm one's identity within notions of culture and the expectation of culture to do such, is also evidence of an unequal distribution of power, and perhaps more crucially, the expectation of power. Citing Mailer's desire to "know how power works," Baldwin explains that he needs to know how power works, otherwise "I would be dead…I have simply never been able to afford myself any illusions concerning the manipulation of that power. My revenge, I decided very early, would be to achieve a power which outlasts kingdoms" (279). For Baldwin, this power that outlasts kingdoms is of course his art, which solves the problem of Mailer's illusions of blackness by being equal parts magnanimous and cocky[6]. Throughout his essay Baldwin goes to great lengths to show his respect for Mailer's work and to not diminish the kind of affect that produces Mailer's essay[7]. In a generous reading of the racial essentialism of Kerouac's writing, Baldwin proposes that it is evidence that "there is real pain in it, and real loss, however thin; and it *is* thin, like soup too long diluted; thin because it does not refer to reality, but to a dream" (278). The degree to which one can recognize that dream as a dream, and to dissociate from the way in which it obfuscates reality, is what marks the difference between Mailer's work and Baldwin's since Baldwin could not afford any illusion or dream. Yet, Baldwin, who by his own admission is often lost in the "prison of my [Baldwin's] egocentricity" places a great deal of faith in his work to achieve this relationship with power, which for Baldwin is perhaps only somewhat fulfilled: "I had tried…to convey something of what it felt like to be a Negro and no one had been able to listen: they wanted their romance" (272). Whether or not Baldwin was specifically successful in relying on literary arts to do that

work through time is a different question, but Baldwin is committed to arguing against Mailer's work being successful in a similar pursuit because of the commitment to a variety of fantasies. Speaking of Mailer's essay, Baldwin writes, "For exactly because he knew better, and in exactly the same way that no one can become more lewdly vicious than an imitation libertine, Norman felt compelled to carry their *mystique* further than they had, to be more 'hip,' or more 'beat', to dominate, in fact, their dreaming field" (277). This kind of liberation by dominating the degree to which someone is replicating a mystique fails not only on political grounds—since it recapitulates systems of white patriarchy that are at the root of the issue—but is unsolvable by its own definitions: "Since this *mystique* depended on a total rejection of life, and insisted on the fulfillment of an infantile dream of love, the *mystique* could only be extended into violence" (277). If there is violence to Mailer's essay, it can be found in the ways in which its attempts to liberate white masculinity from the constraints of normative masculinity further the abjection of black subjectivity.

David Savran discusses this conflict in Mailer's essay in problematic but critically useful ways. Savran seeks out Mailer's essay as an example of how to historicize the concept of masculinity that is often figured as unstable and porous, capable of absorbing a wide variety of proximal (if minoritized) masculinities, like Wiegman's claims about the difficulties that whiteness poses as an object of study. Savran even quotes Freud on this difficulty in fixing a definition on masculinity: "'…The concepts "masculine" and "feminine" …are among the most confused that appear in science'" (7). Via Mailer's white hipster, Savran locates the rise of identity politics converging with the end of the post-WWII economic boom as the source for the perceived threat to the white male of this period (this is, as Savran notes, hyperbolic, as the economic decline of the middle-class white male coincides with the expansion of wealth by

upper-class white men). Savran uses masochism to organize these "crises of masculinity," so that to regain the perceived loss of social power requires the ability to suffer through violence: "[Masochism] seems tacitly to acknowledge that masculinity is a function not of social or cultural mastery but of the act of being subjected, abused, or even tortured" (38). This view of masculinity as masochism is a common enough way to view the connections between masculinity and violence, the latter of which so often associated fully with black masculinity, as bell hooks notes in her work: "According to racist ideology, white-supremacist subjugation of the black male was deemed necessary to contain the dehumanized beast" (48). Savran views Mailer's hipster as "…a hybridized subject, a product of cultural miscegenation, a cross-dresser, neither completely white nor black, masculine nor feminine, heterosexual nor homosexual, working-class nor bourgeois" (52). While the resulting "oscillation between these different positionalities" may destabilize the repressive, normative white masculinity of this era, it is difficult, if not misguided, to read this as a hybridized subject. As Douglas Taylor notes, since this sampling is not multilateral, this insufficiently white and insufficiently black subject is only a descriptor of the white hipster subjectivity, and as Mailer's essentialization of blackness evidences, black bodies are denied any chance to take part in this one-way version of hybridity. If this is a statement against power, it comes at the expense of further subjugation. Disrupting hegemonic masculinity cannot only be done via disrupting normative white masculinity through the expansion of racial essentialism.

As well, there are problems with the narrative of masculinity that Savran develops. First, Savran seems invested in the idea that these variations of the victimized white male become hegemonic masculinity through their visibility and are not a constituent part of increasingly variable masculinities. This develops a lateral view of history that sees these periods as

repetitions of crisis and resolution, not as cycles of deferment to extend masculine power indefinitely[8]. Savran's view of masculine masochism legitimates this lateral view of history: "…Masochism functions precisely as a kind of decoy and that the cultural texts constructing masochistic masculinities characteristically conclude with an almost magical restitution of phallic power" (37). Savran's view of masochism, while effective in thematizing victimhood, relies on limiting masculine and feminine traits along the lines of domination and submission, building from Freud's theories of masochism. Savran writes that this masochism is, "…A condition in which the ego is ingeniously split between a sadistic (or masculinized) half and a masochistic (or feminized) half so that the subject, torturing himself, can prove himself a man" (33). Mapping masculinity onto sadism and femininity onto masochism seems instead to force femininity into a position as always already subordinate, and while Savran attempts to excuse this by saying that white masculinities are contradictory and eroticize submission, it does seem to foreclose views of femininity as being capable of power or agency against the overtly positive traits commonly ascribed to masculinity, which seems especially fraught considering the capacities for female power identified earlier in Nurse Ratchet.

Yet, while Savran locates a "hybridized subjectivity" in the character of the white hipster, it is black masculinity that is consistently being hybridized by way of its relation to power. The classic text for this concept of hybridity is Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha describes the hybridized subject of colonialism as capable of a disruption of power between the colonized and the colonizer—without the existence of an essentialized version of the culture of the colonized, colonial power becomes unable to find its footing. This power gets flipped back on itself as a version of mimicry, a blend of culture like and also tangibly different from the culture of the colonizer. Bhabha writes, "What [colonial imitations] all share is a discursive

process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry…becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" (279). For Bhabha, this partiality exists as partially a subject of colonial power and partially a subject of the colonized subject's original culture, akin to Du Bois's double consciousness. Bhabha's "ambivalence of mimicry" is useful for the ways in which it dis-identifies reading mimicry as operating as only parodic. This mimicry becomes the primary force of identity formation for the colonized subject, and it can be simultaneously parody or an attempt at authentic identity formation (e.g. black dandyism as a subversive identity). Bhabha locates this process as a "repeat" and not a "re-presentation"—unlike a representation of identity, which must flow through ideology, Bhabha's mimicry is merely an attempt to repeat the processes that formulate a hybridized subjectivity, an attempt at an "authentic" replication, an intentional irony. Yet, it is in these slippages between the parodic and authentic that Bhabha locates the productive power of this formation: "The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (284). In this collection of ambivalent partial identities, Bhabha finds a site for resistance, as ambivalence denies both an essentialized vision of a pre-colonial subject and any notion of a "proper" colonial subject. Fanon serves as an echo here, as his vision for national culture requires an abandonment of belief in a pre-colonial culture as being something realizable in a post-colonial context. If it is this pre-colonial/essentialized subjectivity that must exist for this power to manifest itself, an infidelity to its truth (or at least an ambivalence toward it) seem to offer a way to subvert this subjection.

It is from this point that I want to offer an expansion of the hybridized subject in relation to the racialized masculine subject. I want to begin with Michael Uebel's assertion that black masculinity operates as a simultaneous inhabitance of normative white masculinity and local

productions of unique black masculinities. Uebel writes that racial masculinity is "the origin as well as the product of local transactions between the social and the psychic, of negotiations among popular forms of representation and political ideologies, and of technologies of performance" (2). Uebel reinvests his idea of the question of racial maleness being a matter of negotiation across localized racial performativity, and never fully a function of an "authentic" racial masculinity. In the way that Bhabha's partial presences only render a mostly complete subject, Uebel's insistence on thinking of these productions as localized allows for a similar disengagement with a totalizing notion of black masculinity, capable of responding to spatial and political variances. Uebel extends this through Herman Beavers' work to argue that "definitions of black masculine identity crucially hinge on investments in white male identity. Such interdependence shows that the formation of masculine identity is never strictly, so to speak, a black-and-white issue" (3). Presumably, Uebel's idea of "investment" here is not to argue that black masculinity must work specifically within the terms that white masculinity sets for it, but instead that the overlapping of these forms makes finding the limits and boundaries of each difficult. To read white and black masculinity as interdependent at least places them in the field of one another, even if black masculinity works specifically against white masculine normativity. Uebel implies here the "partial presence" of Bhabha's hybridity—never fully one or the other, but never fully not.

It is tempting, then, to read Uebel's assertion as parallel to Bhabha's colonial hybridized subject—that, by the processes of slavery and systemic racism throughout American history, the experience of black masculinity in America is a kind of Bhabha-esque hybridized subjectivity that offers colonial whiteness as the Self and blackness as the Other. However, Beavers points us to the insufficiency of this formulation. First, Beavers argues that this must be figured first in the

ways in which it is and is not power: "…Black masculinity (as an interstice) is often emblematic of an intersection of deficiency and effaceable power, which takes on numerous formulations (e.g., power over women, other men, nature)" (256). The danger, then, is rendering black masculinity as, through the destructive impact of racism, "a total fragmentation of self, the embodiment of total powerlessness" (257). In Beavers' view, this is a totalizing view that renders black masculinity as "synecdochical; that is, black males are often configured as 'the race'" (257). As such, and as will be critiqued by the work of James Baldwin, antiracist discourse can often intersect with the deployment of patriarchy, in addition to its attempts to mediate the negativity ascribed to blackness by this hybridization. The latter is depicted perhaps most powerfully in Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, in his essay "My Dungeon Shook." Baldwin, writing to his nephew, states, "You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being" (7). Baldwin identifies the source of this as being "because you were black and *for no other reason*" (7). From a historical perspective, Baldwin's italicized focus on skin color as the only product of racial difference allows him to resist narratives of racial inferiority while also avoiding any disavowal of blackness in so doing. Baldwin's call here is not for a production of color-blindness or an erasure of difference, but from disengaging with representational hierarchies that would cast blackness as an imperfect version of whiteness[9]. Later, Baldwin remakes this work to be done as one demanding self-reflexivity: "There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that *you* must accept *them*" (8). For Baldwin, this progress through acceptance is both a defense of the difference of blackness (i.e. anti-assimilationist) and a belief that as "the black man…moves out of his place" a furthering of local exchanges of

culture will be as much a force of antiracism as any social movement (9). This is consistent with the anti-sentimentalism that runs throughout Baldwin's work, and it places the subjective experience of affective moments of connection as the catalyst of social progress, allowing the "lost, younger brothers" to participate in "making America what America must become" (10). If we read this in conjunction with Uebel's assertion of the interrelations of white and black masculine identity formation, Baldwin's vision imagines these as being possible through an equal exchange, as magnanimous and hopeful as that may be. But, that effort does not come without peril. Baldwin argues that the view that "black men are inferior to white men" serves as the pole star for white identity, and that the difficulty of working against this belief, which Baldwin identifies as nothing less than "attacking one's sense of one's own reality," serves as the material for enacting racial progress (9). In these brief lines, much of Baldwin's oeuvre is defined—to rethink the sites of cultural exchange for white and black Americans as places for social change, to work through the negative aesthetics of blackness, and to seek intersections across marginalized spaces of race and gender. Baldwin's novel *Another Country* works directly through these ideas via the characters of Rufus, Leona, and Vivaldo. Specifically, Rufus's masculine positioning antagonizes readings of racial masculinity and how it intersects with antiracist progressive social movements.

A more useful explanation for explaining the role of white identity than Savran is found in Sally Robinson's *Marked Men*. Particularly persuasive in Robinson's formulation is an ambivalence to this representation of crisis as being real or authentic, as what matters to Robinson is the consistent representation of being in crisis as a defining aspect of the narrative of masculinity and "fully embodied through its wounding" (9). Savran's own focus on masochism only furthers this representation. The equation of the wounded male as a representation of white

masculinity has far-reaching effects: it personalizes the perceived violence of identity politics against white masculinity by appealing to the "persuasive force of corporeal pain," it creates a paradox of recentering while decentering white masculinity by "compet[ing] with various others for cultural authority bestowed upon the authentically disempowered," a fact seen through Mailer's equation of the dullness of white masculinity with the abjected black subject, and creates a linkage between the remasculinziation of the wounded male with the healing of America in the aftermath of a variety of wars, crucially establishing the image of white male power and its legibility as metonym for America in postwar culture (20, 12). This context is especially true for Mailer, as so much of the desperation for which he views the present situation for masculinity comes in the shadow of the unmatched destruction of WWII.

Robinson allows us to reframe this then by a further analysis of the rhetoric of crisis. Rather than view this victimization as something classifiable into periods, Robinson writes: "The language of crisis imposes a certain narrative logic on an event …we might assume that logic to be governed by a teleological drive toward resolution and closure, the rhetoric of crisis actually defers that closure" (11). This develops a performative relationship with crisis such that the invocation of it situates it within discourse on crisis whether it is depicting "actual social trauma" or not, so long as the repeated "power of language…metaphors and image" can represent this depiction (10). Robinson continues: "The rhetorical power of 'crisis' depends on a sense of prolonged tension; the announcements of crisis are inseparable from the crisis itself, as the rhetoric of crisis performs the cultural work of centering attention on dominant masculinity" (11). To depict this state as crisis then allows the antagonized to be the focus of discourse rather than any critical consideration of that which is doing the antagonizing—progressive feminism, for example, is read instead as producing a "crisis of masculinity" rather than a consideration for

how this might expand our understandings of both femininity and masculinity, as well as patriarchy's continual need of the subjugation of most men. This is a more flexible reading of the influence of the "white male as victim," as rather than it being the ascension of a particular style of masculinity it figures itself as a continual process of remasculinization (a "dwelling" for Robinson) that allows for revising the boundaries of white masculinity without closing off any of its parts. Mailer seeks out a similar directive with his expansive search for a new identity formation via his essentialized black subject—by crafting a new masculinity from borrowed elements of black culture alongside hegemonic masculinity, the edges are expanded while remaining exclusive. This is what constitutes Robinson's "identity politics of the dominant"—rather than having to foreclose certain types of experience in the name of being "marked," this woundedness allows for a double experience of the personal and political. Robinson responds specifically to the problems of viewing crisis as a linear model of history:

> …A *cyclical*, as opposed to linear, understanding of crisis is perfectly suited to a history that appears to move through waves of crisis and resolution…the idea of crisis in no way requires a singular outcome or…any outcome at all…crises produce both retrenchments and recodings, and while new models of masculinity might share some features with old, assuming that history is comprised of a struggle between "traditional" and "alternative" constructions of masculinity misses the dynamism in shifts of gender meanings. (10)

This focus on dynamism and shifts is useful not only as a general model to understand the development of masculinity over a longer historical scale, but it is also useful for parsing how these shifts can occur through local exchanges as well as greater social forces, in line with Uebel's earlier assertion. No longer do we need to think of challenges to hegemonic masculinity as a resolution of a binary, but instead treat them as a widening, repellant circle, absorbing the

resolution to its challenges yet never needing to stop in its expansion, a logical extension of the types of freedom negative masculinity seeks out. This is the point at which Baldwin's *Another Country* becomes most useful in understanding these dynamisms and hybridities between black and white masculinity, and Baldwin's novel allows for a demonstration of the ways in which black masculinity antagonizes the entrenched whiteness of negative masculinity.

Perhaps responding to Mailer's focus on black sexuality, the opportunities offered to Rufus to express his identity intersect with both fantasies of black sexuality and the destructive potential of fantasy. However, Rufus also offers a potential reading of Darieck Scott's notion of "extravagant abjection"—that, through Rufus's complex management of the various manifestations of power that he experiences, he recuperates his abjection to form a degree of agency that can work against the forces that seek to destroy them. The degree to which this can be considered "recuperative" is certainly at question given that all paths lead to Rufus's suicide (and it would be problematic to argue that this is the ultimate form of abjection, or the only way to act freely), but the degree to which Rufus haunts the remainder of Baldwin's novel is at least some testament to the power Rufus creates, if only in vain and only in death. Since the memory of Rufus so often intersects with Rufus's sexuality, it is useful to consider Scott's paradox of sexuality:

> …As I consider black sexuality I feel…that I must consider how it is or can be a vehicle for, or the realization of, black freedom and power—however vexed, attenuated, and provisional those concepts must be—even though, and *especially* though, deployments of notions of black sexuality are frequently the very means by which that freedom and that power are curtailed. (7-8)

Rufus allows us to see both sides of this paradox, namely that Rufus's sexuality can be used by him as a potentially powerful resistance to the same kinds of fantasies of black sexuality that also destroy him. As well, Baldwin keys into the thin line that separates recuperating this abjection in a powerful way and the ways in which this logic can also reproduce violence that perpetuates a further, non-extravagant abjection. Early in Baldwin's novel, finding himself barely keeping himself alive, an unnamed man in a bar attempts to pick up Rufus by buying him drinks and food. As we learn not long after, Rufus's sexuality is in flux—his past with Eric, which he remembers throughout this scene, makes this advance not impossible, but Rufus's refusal is telling of where he finds himself in this moment, stretched too thin across a continuum of sexualities. Baldwin writes, "And Rufus stared into the gleaming cup, praying, Lord, don't let it happen. Don't let me go home with this man. I've got so little left, Lord, don't let me lose it all" (43). Considering the desperate condition of Rufus at this state, the implicit question in these lines is what the "it" that Rufus has to lose still is[10]. I want to read against a simple reading of this "it" as purely an invocation of Rufus's homophobia and that it presents to him a full corruption of his ability to be legible as the kind of male subjectivity he desires for himself. Instead, Rufus follows this with, "If you touch me, [Rufus] thought, still with these strange tears threating to boil over at any moment, I'll beat the living shit out of you. I don't want no more hands on me, no more, no more, no more" (43). Baldwin's repeated "no more" also lacks a specific subject to attach the hands to, which if extended to the multitude of forces Rufus finds acting against him remove this reaction from the local exchange Rufus finds himself not desiring. This must be read not only as a kind of abjection as outlined first by Kristeva and again by Scott, but directly as a question of power as Baldwin described in his critique of Mailer's essay. Rufus knows how power works, but again all paths lead to his destruction. These hands,

pulling Rufus to pieces, demonstrate the various kinds of white racism Rufus experiences throughout the time he is alive in Baldwin's novel.

Yet, it is crucial to consider the way in which Rufus resolves this scene. Seemingly on the edge of a violent reaction to the unnamed man's advances, this situation is defused by Rufus's pleas of non-association with the situation he finds himself in. Rufus responds to these advances by telling the unnamed man, "I'm not the boy you want, mister" (44). There is much to unpack in this line—as Kevin Ohi notes, this can be read as part of a continual practice of Baldwin to "movingly metaphorize" the ways in which sexuality obfuscates race, and part of a long line of critical readings of Baldwin that connect self-acceptance/self-knowledge with transcendence (261). As Ohi notes, this is a misguided way of understanding the kind of self-knowledge being evoked by Rufus's line. In addition to the social positioning the honorifics tempt us to read, and their place within Rufus's view of the sexual exchange, there is also an element of the kind of abjected power that girds Scott's argument. Consider the contrast between the thought of "I'll beat the living shit out of you" and the submissive/childlike spoken reference to this man as "mister." Rufus conflates these two himself, when he says to the man, "I don't want to die, mister. I don't want to kill you" (44). In Rufus's pleading, there is a simultaneity of power and submission—while Rufus's knows he can end this man's life, he is keenly aware that it would be his own destruction as well, an extension of the paradox of Scott's formation of black sexuality being both liberating and restrictive. Roderick Ferguson picks up on these wavelengths in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer Color of Critique*, when he writes: "The material and discursive production of African American nonheteronormativity provided the interface between the gendered and eroticized properties of African American racial formation and the material practices of state and civil society" (21). What moves this scene away from its violent

potentiality and links it to Ferguson's connection between racial formation and material practice can be seen in Rufus's final plea: "I don't have a thing to give you. I don't have nothing to give nobody. Don't make me go through with this. Please" (44). Consciously or not, the eroticization of Rufus's racial formation by the unnamed bar patron refigures itself as abjected power with a material benefit for Rufus—he escapes death, he escapes murder, and uses this position to sustain himself (if only on the most basic biological terms). It would be difficult, if not outwardly false, to argue that Rufus is really making it out ahead in this situation—he finds himself still on the brink of his own destruction, oscillating between a variety of self-presentations that are pulling him apart on the path to his eventual suicide. Yet, if Baldwin himself can find real pain and loss in Mailer's much less articulate racial/sexual confusions, there seems to exist a shred of tangible power in Rufus's manipulation of the unnamed man. The man, realizing he's been duped by Rufus's interest and has simply provided a free meal to a black man no longer useful to him, asks "What are you, anyway—just a cock teaser?" (44). To which Rufus, devastatingly, responds, "'I was hungry,' Rufus repeated; 'I was hungry'" (44). Like many of Rufus's lines, this can be extended both to the physical and psychic pain he finds himself inflicted with, and the erosion of the boundaries between the two might be the path to Scott's abjection. Scott writes:

> This power (which is also a way of speaking of freedom) is found at the point of the apparent erasure of ego-protections, at the point at which the constellation of tropes we call *identity*, *body*, *race*, *nation* seem to reveal themselves as utterly penetrated and compromised, without defensible boundary. (9)

Scott's argument places the sight of Rufus's pain on the belief that there are still defensible boundaries for him to maintain as offered by the society he finds himself a part of. For Rufus, to "lose it all" is to lose the ability to maintain the boundaries that he seeks to keep for himself, to

understand his position in a way that has yet to be penetrated by the forces that seek to control and create the terms of his self-presentation. Following Ferguson, whether there is a way to link this is as a useful material practice that enables a form of power for Rufus is a less certain claim, exacerbated by his demise.

Along the way, the ability for Rufus to enact a form of power turn only to destructive outcomes for those around him. Later, after a fight with Leona, Rufus identifies the weight of these ego-protections as described by Scott that Rufus must maintain. Rufus, explaining his plight to Vivaldo, says, "Sometimes I listen to those boats on the river…and I think wouldn't it be nice to get on a boat again and go someplace away from all these nowhere people, where a man could be treated like a man" (68). Considering the preceding scene in the bar, it is tempting to read this statement again as a homophobic response from Rufus—that to be "like a man" is to do so by way of heterosexual subjectivity confirmed by homophobia. Again, a particularized understanding of Rufus is more evocative here. Rufus, to nearly every character he experiences through the novel (at least to Vivaldo, Eric, the unnamed bar patron, and Leona), is understood first and foremost through sexuality. In this scene, after Vivaldo has forcibly removed Leona from Rufus after witnessing the aftermath of his abuse, Rufus locates his violence against Leona as a generalized violence against whiteness, and against how these white characters identify him solely with sexuality. When Vivaldo states that Leona loves him, Rufus replies:

> "She loves the colored folks so much," said Rufus, "sometimes I just can't stand it. You know all that chick knows about me? The only thing she knows?" He put his hand on his sex, brutally, as though he would tear it out, and seemed pleased to see Vivaldo wince…"That's all." (68)

Here Rufus enacts a variety of forms of abjection. He locates Leona's desire for him, and her appetite for all varieties of sex (described in vivid detail in later passages) with him within the phallic myths of black sexuality Baldwin's essay on Mailer describes. This reduces Rufus (in his view) to only a phallus, and his gesture ("as though he would tear it out") mimes a history of material castration of black males while also enacting a racialized castration akin again to Scott's abjection, made real by Baldwin's description of the act being self-brutalizing. Rufus's act of embodying his hatred of white people in Leona codes his violence towards her as a response to the sexualized violence Rufus perceives as enacted by all white people against him, an attempt at remasculinization through a form of retributive violence. Yet, for Rufus this retribution is only virtualized, as evidenced by his own fantasies of destruction: "Sometimes I lie here and I listen—just listen…Sometimes I lie here and listen, listen for a bomb, man, to fall on this city and make all that noise stop" (Baldwin 67). Rufus wants this violence against white hegemony to be personalized: "I listen to hear them moan, I want them to bleed and choke, I want to hear them *crying*, man, for someone to come help them" (67-8). While it is tempting to read Rufus's desire as a remasculinization that transplants whiteness with the helplessness he feels, Rufus is not the agent of this violence, only a bystander to abstract violence against whiteness (perpetrated by bombs of an unknown sender), which would then allow him to set the terms of his magnanimity. Instead, absent this intervention, Rufus is left to stew, with "his eyes glittering with tears and with hate" (68). hooks argues that this inertia Rufus feels is symptomatic of a long history of collisions between white patriarchy and black masculinity: "Most black males are being encouraged through their uncritical acceptance of patriarchy to live in the past… More often than not they are stuck in the place of rage. And it is the breeding ground for the acts of violence large and small that ultimately do black men in" (60). For hooks, this equation of black masculinity

and the violence of white patriarchy offers some reasoning, though not a justification, for the violence enacted by Rufus on others and, finally, on himself. By extension, this is readable as a legitimated form of woundedness and masochism laid out by Savran and Robinson—rather than the perceived violence manifesting itself as self-inflicted wound, Rufus, described as broken down and falling apart for most of his time alive in the book, is wounded by society. His masochistic gesture (and his later suicide) works then as a simultaneous emasculation and remasculinization, and the only escape from phallic myth for Rufus is a destruction of his embodiment as minoritized subject.

This is, admittedly, bleak. Scott argues there is a way to create (and not only destroy) from this position, and that abjection as a form of power is not to argue that the destruction of the minoritized subject is its only chance at escaping its subjugation, but instead to find in Rufus a potential in his violence for revising hegemonic masculinity. To explain the variety of forces at work here, hooks again provides a useful distinction on black masculinity:

> Although the gendered politics of slavery denied black men the freedom to act as 'men' within the definition set by white norms, this notion of manhood did become a standard to measure black male progress…that saw 'freedom' as that change in status that would enable them to fulfill the role of the chivalric benevolent patriarch. (3)

This seems especially true by any reasonable understanding of the destruction of Rufus, and links directly to Rufus's previous desire to find a boat and a place where he could be treated like a man. Here, Rufus is desiring to be a subject of negative masculinity, yet his version of freedom from is a freedom from a white society intent on killing him. Yet, the difference in verbiage is important—Rufus still wants to be treated by others like a man by a definition of his own choosing, not simply to "act" as a specific type. While Rufus is no doubt incapable of

articulating his "freedom to act as 'm[a]n'" within the variety of social constraints placed upon him in the novel, Rufus is also finding himself incapable of fitting into a "benevolent patriarch" role that becomes the yardstick of black male progress per hooks, as evidenced by the domestic violence in his relationship with Leona. If the panacea for the kinds of crises that Rufus incurs is to enact a more perfected version of patriarchy, the violence it produces becomes as much a historical enactment of racial violence as it does a suicide.

Within Baldwin's novel, there is no achievable transcendence that makes these conflicts possible to be resolved non-destructively. As Amy Reddinger argues, this is a crucial departure for *Another Country* in the context of Baldwin's works. Reddinger concludes that the fact that, "Utopia could be possible is important not as a claim for sheer utopian possibility, but as a claim for the possibility within possibility…Baldwin rejects visions of utopian belonging and community in the novel, which is a departure in some ways from his previous writings' reliance on prophetic or visionary worlds deferred" (119). Rather than imagine the conflicts of his novel because of an unattained version of the present (and, perhaps, of an unattainable form of negative masculinity), Baldwin's novel focuses instead on the world as it presents itself to his characters in the spaces they find themselves occupying, resisting any utopian community across racial identities. Reddinger argues that this constitutes part of Baldwin's resistance to articulating spatial arrangements of the city as "actualizing *blank* space," and instead demonstrates the "impossibility of erasing the layered material histories invested in space" (129). The city then functions as a space in which "borders are crossed and sexual, racial, and class boundaries are blurred," and where the antagonisms of these borders create an interdependency that shapes the formation of each subjectivity (129). This interdependency maps on as well to Baldwin's wider political project in which he views white identity as dependent on a domination and abjection of

black bodies, as identified in his discussion of Mailer's essay. However, it is possible to read Rufus as also antagonizing these objectives that Reddinger identifies. Baldwin's rejection of "utopian belonging and community" can also be read as maintaining Rufus as constructed within liberal modes of identity formation necessary to the maintenance of negative masculinity. While Rufus undoubtedly straddles borders and boundaries within *Another Country*, the act, or possibility, of doing so is no guarantee of a break from logics that maintain asymmetrical configurations of power. This is the enigmatic part of any attempt to understand Rufus—to read his destruction as a symbol for historical black death under hooks's "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" must also place Rufus as subject to critique for the ways in which he views his liberation only via avenues for domination offered to him *by* patriarchy—namely, his violent relationship with Leona. An optimistic view would be to see this as a social critique that sees attempts at dissolving the "disorienting effect of sheer alterity" as utopian only, and not capable of being manifested by any contemporary social conditions (119). This then becomes a question of agency and the limits of freedom, and the degree to which Rufus has agency to find solutions to his inability to articulate masculinity outside the destructive forces of white patriarchy.

Rufus's struggle can then be read as exemplary for the ways in which negative masculinity shapes the possibility for imagining an outside to the power of hegemonic white masculinity, and for the ways in which negative masculinity and liberalism are fundamentally linked in the imagining of freedom. bell hooks identifies this in the ways in which "real men go it alone"—Rufus is committed to a version of masculinity that excludes others from participating in its legibility (50). For Rufus, to enact a legitimate form of masculinity is also to enact it unencumbered from others. Rufus's desire, again, is to move away from the "nowhere people" of

America and go it alone in a place that allows this liberal form of masculinity to be fully realized, by way of the eradication of others[11]. Yet, in line with this struggle, he contradicts this desire as soon as he forms it. After accusing Vivaldo of only being interested in Rufus's sex life, Vivaldo declares himself Rufus's friend, and chastises Rufus: "But you don't want any friends, do you?" (70). Baldwin continues, "'Yes, I do,' said Rufus, quietly…He paused; then, slowly, with difficulty, 'Don't mind me. I know you're the only friend I've got left in the world" (70). It is worth considering what is difficult about this admission—if, through an expression of intimacy, Rufus is unable to use his destructiveness as a shield against being vulnerable, or if only having one person truly care about him is its own kind of difficulty. Yet, this is also an expression of a desire for belonging, not only of destruction. hooks would see this position of Rufus as being fully disengaged with any kind of radicalism: "Wisely, individual radical black males understood and understand that imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy is an interrelated system of domination that will never fully empower black men" (xiii). While Vivaldo's care for Rufus might be genuine, it is difficult to imagine this as any form of liberation through the creation of intimacies, which Baldwin has at times offered as a resolution to white racism. As such, it is through Baldwin's choice of having Rufus commit suicide despite his attempts to enact a version of "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" that speaks to its utter incapacities at aestheticizing a form of black masculinity that can do the social and political work that Rufus needs to enact any sort of progressive subjectivity—without a resistance to the systems of male power that negative masculinity makes use of, there is no way to imagine a resistance to normative masculinity.

bell hooks again provides a useful way of thinking through these difficulties. She writes, "…This is a culture that does not love black males, that they are not loved by white men, white

women, black women, or girls and boys. And that especially most black men do not love themselves" (xi). This line of thinking integrates usefully with much of the content of *Another Country*. It is worth parsing how hooks means to use this concept of love. For this argument, it is useful to extend it as a dual intimacy, not simply as idolatry, as objectification/abjectification, or as masculine competition. This form of love, of the creation of intimacy, is never experienced by Rufus. Vivaldo's relationship with Rufus then falls somewhere on this spectrum between idolatry and competing masculinities. While Vivaldo may seek to express his love for Rufus, his interest in his sex life limits him to becoming the "walking phallic symbol" that Baldwin describes ("The Black Boy Looks…" 217). After Rufus's death, Vivaldo's relationship with Ida, Rufus's younger sister, is in that way a form of racial conquest, where Vivaldo seeks to transcend Rufus as phallic symbol. These reductions of Rufus are again a form of the "menaced sexuality" of black men that Vivaldo uses to justify his own form of "sexual panic" (230). hooks continues, "Black males in the culture of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy are feared but they are not loved. Of course part of the brainwashing that takes place in a culture of domination is the confusion of the two" (xi-xii). There is a potential to read this way of thinking alongside negative masculinity—this fear, and the absence of the kind of love via hooks to be manifested by a legitimate form of intimacy, is a contributor to this "go it alone" mode of liberal masculinity that hooks is critiquing. Baldwin shows us its unequal difficulty for black masculinity—that, even in our attempts to express a fundamental care for others (as a generous reading of Vivaldo may allow), our attempts at intimacy can be clouded by the racial fantasies that invoke the fear hooks describes. This is not a liberation through experience (Vivaldo cannot escape his racism simply by dating a black woman or having a black friend), and instead

Baldwin's text demands a more thorough engagement with the terms in which this intimacy is produced.

To challenge this atomism, a parallel historical path for the questions of masculinity and freedom Rufus faces can be found in American folklore stories of John Henry. In making this connection, I want to immediately distance this reading from any myth and symbol school formations and their entrenched American exceptionalism and narrow narratives of American history, and instead seek out this folkloric history only to offer Colson Whitehead's *John Henry Days* as a possible critique and different method to the kind of destruction embodied by Baldwin's Rufus. Rather than offering this American myth as a kind of recurring "American theme," Whitehead's novel is specifically focused on the way in which this logic can be, at least, disrupted. This disruption is at the core, and the beginning, of Whitehead's novel. The beginning of the novel is the end of its chronology—Whitehead's protagonist, J. Sutter, a press junketeer, finds himself covering the unveiling of the John Henry stamp, an event which ends in a violent shooting, a familiar scene in American mythos. This event is covered by a variety of voices, and the novel places this reporting in the hands of Joan Acorn, a novice journalist. In these moments where the reality of a violent situation is being created, Whitehead writes, "In these first few minutes a thousand different stories collide; this making of truth is violence too, out of which facts are formed" (24). If this is the case, then, as William Ramsey notes, the subject of Whitehead's novel is how these facts are spun into history and myth, and how we position in relation to these as we construct historical truth (780).

To consider the degree to which Whitehead revises the John Henry myth, it is useful to consider some of the literary forebearers of John Henry and the degree to which they misunderstand the myth's meaning. The John Henry myth finds a place throughout a variety of

American literary forms, including Roark Bradford's *John Henry*. Bradford himself has a questionable literary legacy, and his inclusion here is to serve only as historical referent for the kind of ways writers have used the John Henry myth, and the racist approaches to this folklore. Steven Tracy, in introducing Bradford's text, provides his own perspective on the John Henry myth in American literary history. Tracy writes:

> Psychoanalyzed, historicized, politicized, idolized—the descriptions, intentions, and results have been various, but the story's remarkable staying power in both vernacular and mainstream culture bespeaks a vital spark in the simple story of the power of human beings to strive, to persevere, to overcome, and, yes, to die, but to come back again and again and become immortalized in collective memory, with a multivocal expressiveness that catches the relation of the individual to the community. (35)

This is, like Bradford's text itself, a fundamentally flawed view of the Henry story. The death of John Henry is as crucial an aspect to its mythology as its racial history, a death Tracy minimizes to "and, yes, to die"—while death is a uniform endpoint, it is the conditions of John Henry's death that are the weight of its historical importance. Tracy continues, "John Henry may have been a steel drivin' man, but he could just as easily be a cotton pickin' woman or a coal-minin' teen, all speaking and singing with individual voices one big beautiful song of strength, pride, hope, and perseverance" (35). Here Tracy highlights a major question surrounding the placement of the Henry story in this mythos—is Henry's story a national story that speaks to universal notions of perseverance and struggle that is inhabitable by a wide swath of populations? Or, does this attempt to consume a specifically racialized exploitation of labor into a national identity evacuate it from the conditions that give it power? This displacement of the specific historical

conditions of the John Henry folklore seem then an unfaithful gloss of its historical importance within histories of minoritized labor in America.

Bradford seeks in his text to give a voice to the oral literature of African-American folklore, yet in his desires to speak these stories he attempts to, as well, speak for a culture, and more critically to speak *as* one, adopting oral vernacular so pervasively as to be difficult to read as anything other than outwardly racist. Marc Connelly, a friend of Bradford's and a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, writes of Bradford's work that Bradford, "…Looks at the Negro with a steady eye and considers him with an alert and honest brain. His Negro talk has the rhythm and actuality of life and his fun making is such that his team mate could share with him" (10). Connelly makes two mistakes here—first, he imagines Bradford's text in communication with black culture in a way that is solely unidirectional (the "steady" eye being an overt colonial gaze), and it presumes the only way to read Bradford's use of vernacular would be for it to be fun. There are many problems with this sentiment (reading a population so broadly as to grant one a place within it, of equating the experience of black men and women), but the popularity of its attempts to give a voice to black folklore (Bradford sold many books) is especially strained by its effect as confirmation bias, to assume an "actuality of life" divorced from experience allows for the expansive influence of black stereotype to promulgate even within Pulitzer Prize winning minds, an empiricism of the worst kind.

Roderick Ferguson, in his book *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, identifies this over-reliance on empiricism as "think[ing] with, instead of against, hegemony" and encourages us instead to disidentify with this mode of thinking, writing that we need to instead be "determining the silences and ideologies that reside within critical terrains, silences and ideologies that equate representations with reality" (5). The most generous possible reading

of Bradford's work might be to see it as white representations of rural black vernacular, but the equation made with reality, an "actuality of life" as Connelly puts it, elevates a limited vision of a crucial narrative in black folklore. Here then is where Tracy's words feel so fraught—his emphasis on reading the John Henry story as one of "strength" and "perseverance" disregards the essential destructive formulation of it, and it distances the plight of John Henry from its necessary relations with the commodification of the black body in histories of American labor. Ferguson continues: "Commodity disrupts the moral parameters of subjectivity and agency…commodification produces man as a 'mentally and physically dehumanized being,' deforming agency and distorting subjectivity" (7). This idea of deformed agency and subjectivity directs us to the John Henry myth—while Tracy identifies John Henry's struggle as being a source of strength, it would be impossible to read it as a site of total agency or one connected to any form of freedom[12], especially considering the obsolescence the steam machine poses for John Henry's future. Effectively, John Henry has no protection for the kind of labor he produces, and he has only the spectacle of his supreme physical attributes left to sell. Ferguson writes: "We can see that violent mediation very clearly as the worker who…must sell his own labor to survive. Castrated from the means of production, the worker has only that labor that resides in his body to sell…the work is branded as the property of capital" (8). This complicates any reading of subjectivity we might aim for in Baldwin or Whitehead. Rufus finds himself configured in a similar way, reduced only to the bodily fantasies of white characters and their attempts to recuperate their own sexuality. John Henry then fits into this version of the castrated subject, who in the face of replacement has only destruction as an option. The race against the steam drill serves as a spectacle of his labor and his destruction.

This is a consistent theme in Whitehead's imagining of John Henry, in which the days leading up to the race are an acceptance of the fate of his death. Whitehead's strategies for using the figure of John Henry differ from either Bradford's patronizing view or Tracy's myopic one. William Ramsey formulates these as a series of questions: "Is American history a continual, ritual killing of its black citizens?...Was John Henry a sacrificial racial martyr?...By parallel, is J. Sutter an updated version of the ritual racial martyr?" (780). It would be difficult to imagine an era where there was a discontinuity with this line of thinking, as the ritual killing of black citizens transitions into every era, and at the very least across the texts discussed here. However, if we map violence to masculinity as Savran does, and specifically the capacity to absorb violence, it is plausible to see Henry's destruction as a ritualized form of masculinity. To achieve this, Whitehead positions John Henry as a different kind of every man—in opposition to the universalizing narrative of a folklore hero, Whitehead highlights the instability of this figure:

> "There were a lot of reasons why they wouldn't have kept records. And if they did keep track of their black workers, well, John and Henry were the most common names for freed slaves, so if there was a record of him, it wouldn't mean that he was *the* John Henry." "John Henry is Bob Smith." "John Doe." (189)

This universalizes John Henry in the ways that Tracy imagines his place in culture—that any human struggle is equitable to the indefinite John Henry. But Whitehead's modification—John Henry to John Doe—anonymizes John Henry rather than a simple universalization[13].

This difference manifests itself as well as a stylistic choice in Whitehead's novel. Instead of universalizing John Henry, or put another way, attempting to have John Henry speak for many, Whitehead allows his novel to contain many voices that intersect with the story of John Henry[14]. Whitehead develops the idea of John Henry in his text as a diverse, de-particularized

notion of John Henry. Instead of reinvesting this myth within a racist logic that Bradford invokes, this usage of myth subverts its typical use as a story of individual resistance. Instead, as Éva Tettenborn writes, "Whitehead treats John Henry as a representative of working-class black men whose unacknowledged heroism consists of simply enduring their dangerous lives" (272). This perspective is built by a kaleidoscopic view of this enduring heroism. Tettenborn writes that Whitehead's novel bounces around perspectives to include:

> …Portraits of John Henry during a day of grueling work; descriptions of Pamela's father, the obsessed collector of John Henry memorabilia; a snapshot of an alcoholic blues singer working on a record of the ballad; and a glimpse at a disillusioned Paul Robeson performing as John Henry in an ill-fated eponymous musical. (271)

In doing so, Whitehead's novel compels the reader to draw the conclusions Tettenborn offers, and to see the "thousands and millions of John Henrys driving steel in folk's minds" by way of these multiple characterizations (Whitehead 262). Two aspects of this depiction subvert the traditional John Henry mythology. First, Whitehead's fictionalizations of John Henry's life beyond the competition humanize him in a way that makes John Henry acutely aware of his own forthcoming mortality rather than existing as an unassailable "abstract hero" (Tettenborn 272). Second, the variety of voices that come to represent John Henry in Whitehead's novel demonstrates the instability of any accuracy to this history. William Ramsey identifies this as Whitehead's push to destabilize Henry within historical myth: "Eschewing binary oppositions, he does not antithetically counter the white grand narrative with an Afrocentric history claiming its own truth. He dramatizes instead the slipperiness of all historical representation" (780). In this way, and like Darieck Scott's encouraged infidelity with historical remembrance, this process of separating Henry from any of the supposedly stable historical representations allows for the

repurposing of this story for Whitehead's multiple plots. John Inscoe picks up on this line of thinking when he argues that, "If the legend represents a parable of man versus machine, of tradition over modernization, then Sutter sees himself caught in a parallel dilemma in a postmodernist era" (92). While this is a bit of a vague periodization, Whitehead's protagonist J. Sutter echoes this question of his place within his updated historical frame. While J. is left to his thoughts in the tunnel that killed Henry, Whitehead writes:

> This place confounds devices, the steam drill and all that follows. This place defeats the frequencies that are the currency of his life. Email and pagers, cell phones, step in here and fall away from the information age, into the mountain…How long does it take to forget a hole in your self. He wins the contest but then what? (322)

Irrespective of its absolute fidelity to history and the clearly differing stakes that exist for each, there exists an affective link across these histories of exploitation that speaks to a desire to read these local histories as part of historical myth. Whitehead's protagonist asks himself: "Step in here and you leave it all behind, the bills, the hustle, the Record…What if this you're your work? To best the mountain…How deep you dig your grave" (321-2). While this is also an image of death, it is also a place where memory fails—the outside world disappears across any era. Rather than "speaking and singing with individual voices one big beautiful song of strength," Whitehead directs us to how Henry's song is, like so much labor exploitation after slavery, an unheard and unknown song, reliant only on its myth to carry it through history.

Through these multiple perspectives, Whitehead wraps J. Sutter's story and the story of the John Henry stamp's release around them. In doing so, J. Sutter himself is linked to this history, as well as to Pamela Street, who is visiting the John Henry Days festival to spread her father's ashes in Talcott, who curated a John Henry museum that never had a visitor. Pamela's

father is consumed by this curation, and the sense that it consumes his life is linked by Whitehead as a John Henry-like futile battle. After her father's death, Pamela visits the festival for John Henry to make peace with the loss of her father, by way of understanding his obsession with John Henry. In a scene at the end of the novel, Pamela is reflecting on her father's death as she spreads his ashes with J. Sutter. In doing so, she narrates John Henry's death through the death of her father. Pamela explains to J. that "The Ballad of John Henry" has a complex past as both work song and a song of resistance. Whitehead writes, "They wouldn't go out like John Henry. But maybe they were condemning him instead of lamenting him. His fight was foolish because the costs were too high" (378). Pamela interprets John Henry as a nearly Christlike figure, whose sacrifice allows others to "endure without having to give your life to you struggle" (378). Here, Pamela can as easily be speaking about her late father's own obsession with his John Henry museum as she is speaking of John Henry. As such, Pamela questions whether her father's death, and his release from his John Henry obsession, in some way enables the tribute to John Henry to occur. Here the link is not literal, it is not that her father had some causal relationship between his death and the stamp celebration for John Henry, but that for Pamela it serves as a release from the obsession that controlled her father's life. In that way, her father pays for "The price of progress. The way John Henry had to give himself up to bring something new into the world" (378). Again, a linkage between progress and death is created for Whitehead's John Henry-esque figures. Yet, it is this relationship between giving something up and bringing something new into the world that is worth considering alongside Darieck Scott's idea of extravagant abjection. While Kristeva's work on abjection typically direct us to the terror incurred by confronting the abject[15], Scott's work attempts to recuperate abjection from black

history as a potential for a new body politic that can be both embraced and destroyed. Scott writes:

> [The] use of the term abjection describes how the achievement of an identity depends on certain objects-to-be becoming reviled and cast off in order to consolidate the subject, which thereby becomes not only itself or a self according to its idealized definitions but "clean" and defended—while retaining an attraction and repulsion relationship to what is abjected…abjection is a way of describing an experience, an inherited historical legacy, and a social condition defined and underlined by defeat. (16)

Fundamental to Scott is understanding how this site of abjection can be recuperated and celebrated, especially as a usage of this abject history to reshape its historical referent. Scott's defense of an infidelity with historicity allows for a reimagining of a place of abjection, as Scott finds in this abjection a potential for reconstituting notions of black power that do not require a disavowal of history but encourage a distortion of it, as we collectively are the arbiters of the memory of history. This question of fidelity and infidelity is at the core of Whitehead's novel, seen especially in Pamela's father. Her father's collation of all things John Henry is in some way an attempt to narrate a "correct" history of John Henry that stays faithful to its historical record rather than distortions of the myth, like in Bradford's text. Yet, as Whitehead's depiction of a variety of John Henrys shows, the impact of this myth is not through its historical particularity but of its near universality in expressing the violence of everyday black life in America. Again, as Tettenborn writes, "…Whitehead's portrayal of the 'real' John Henry as commentary on African American working-class history, and his actions as portrayed by Whitehead signify not only on the famous ballad but, more important, on the history of the nameless black workers whom the folk hero represents and the human and labor rights violations they endured" (272).

This is a usefully imprecise usage of "real"—for Whitehead, his fictionalization of the actual John Henry allows for the aforementioned destabilization of the John Henry myth. In doing so, Pamela's father is that which becomes the extravagant abject. It is only at the point when the attempt to narrate a truth to the John Henry myth is cast off that this anonymous, de-particularized John Henry can become an object-to-be as opposed to an *objet petit a*.

As well, Whitehead's sympathetic reimagining of the John Henry folklore and his resistance to connecting it to a universal story of struggle helps imagine a kind of aesthetic that Ferguson values in the African American novel. Writing on the role of the African American novel as part of the conflict over subjectivity, Ferguson writes that "As discourses of mimicry, [African American novels] estrange themselves from the normalizing knowledges upon which canonical literature is founded…Apprehending African American literature as a critical cultural site means that we must read it not simply as consistent with the universalist ideals of nationalism" (26). Rather than an Ellisonian notion that black aesthetics develop a more perfect form of liberal capitalism, Ferguson argues that through its *mimicry* of canonical literature the African American novel places itself in position to critique normalizing narratives that set limits on participation as citizen-subjects. Ferguson writes that, "…Liberal ideology has often presented literature as a mechanism by which marginalized groups can bid for the normative positions of state and civil society" (25). This is the point at which at which Whitehead's novel offers a counter to this liberal ideology in the ways that Whitehead's version of John Henry problematizes the folkloric tradition from which it pulls. As part of The List, a collection of junketeers who get invited to cover events such as the new stamp, J. Sutter is, intentionally or not, going for a record for the longest time spent junketeering. This has several deleterious psychic effects, but The List and the record serve as J. Sutter's version of John Henry's race, a

possible task that will destroy him in the process. J. Sutter's work in the novel is also a critique of the normalizing goals of capital to arrange a subject as incapable of expressing agency, bound to inevitable destruction a la John Henry, as this attempt at a record begins to define J. Sutter's identity to his other press junketeers. Through his rejection of The List, and the dispassionate views toward an outwardly cushy job, J. Sutter forms a direct resistance to the ways in which capital seeks to shape him as another version of John Henry. Consider an early description Whitehead provides of us J. Sutter. While waiting at an airport for a flight to leave, he spots a discarded receipt that he can credit towards his expenses for the trip. Whitehead writes:

> [J.] reckons the boy is waiting for one of the travelers to step on it, to relish that dinosaur foot carnage, and when this image occurs to J.—the receipt mangled by designer sneaker tread or so smudged that it would be useless to him—he immediately evacuates the plastic bucket seat, strides confidently out into the walkway with nary a guilty twitch…he bends down and grips the lonesome shaving between his thumb and index finger as gingerly as an entomologist scooping for a rare moth. (10)

Scrounging an airport for discarded receipts may seem like abnormal behavior for anyone, but it is especially notable that J. Sutter could, presumably, just buy things and spend money and credit them back to his expenses for the assignment. The fact that he seeks out a clearly fabricated receipt would imply how doubly manipulative this game is—not only does he not want to participate in the conspicuous airport consumption (a more ambitious reading might see this as disengaging with capital, but it is possibly only disruptive to it), he wants his employers to pay for the purchases of others. Ramsey argues that this is works as, "A parody of John Henry's heroic manual labor skills, J.'s actions substitute false *receipts* of experience for original pleasures he never had" (782). In this substitution, J. is using a disciplinary power against itself,

or to put in Ferguson's terms, J. uses the tools and logics of capital to disrupt the ways it estranges labor and the self[16]. Ferguson writes, "Capital now violently mediates man's relationships to himself, to others, and to nature… '[Alienated labor] estranges man's own body from him, as it does external nature and his spiritual essence, his human being'" (7). J. Sutter serves as a version of this alienated subject—from his job, from others—but rather than being destroyed by these disciplinary objects like John Henry (which becomes nearly fetishized within Tracy's reading of the myth), he seeks to turn them against themselves to attempt to recover agency from them. This intersects with J. Sutter's purpose in the novel—to cover the unveiling of a stamp of John Henry. Ramsey defends J. Sutter's small forms of resistance: "A sham paper slip now constitutes an ironic reality…what is a John Henry stamp but a copy of the man? Literally only a receipt for money paid to the postal service, it is a paper-thin simulacrum" (782). Whether this object as simulacrum makes a material difference is irrelevant, as does whether it constitutes anything ironic, as these materials coalesce into a linkage between J. Sutter and John Henry's relationships to their labor.

It is useful then then to highlight the methods of J. Sutter's disengagement with The List and with his junketeering as a whole—simply put, he goes off the grid after learning more about John Henry. This is not merely a matter of quitting a job, but it is more deeply a refusal to continue to engage with its logic, leading to a piling up of old voicemails and uncertain questions from his handlers on his status as junketeer. In a pivotal scene, Whitehead intersperses these voicemails with material from the John Henry tale, forcing the reader to balance these passages with one another. Whitehead writes:

> The foreman and the drill salesman ran to get the results of the race. By the time the referee fired his shot signaling the end of the competition, John Henry had drilled a total

> of fourteen feet. The poor steam drill, however, had only drilled nine feet. John Henry had triumphed over the nefarious machine! (234)

This passage directs us to its contradictions. First, the steam drill is somewhat humanized as a "poor steam drill," as if it deserves sympathy, but is also poor in its competitiveness against John Henry. While John Henry beats the "nefarious machine," his price of course is death—as pyrrhic a victory as can be conceived, and impossible to read as triumph. Immediately following this, J. Sutter hears from his own kind of nefarious machine, in a voicemail from his editor:

> We're finally going to run that luxury doorknob piece it looks like. Turns out we have some space in the section because one of our writers went AWOL…I'm going to send you that kill fee today, but I don't think I said it was for the whole thing. If you look at the contract, it's a twenty-five percent kill fee for things now ever since we got that new editor in chief. (234)

J. Sutter's writing, replaced by a vapid piece of luxury doorknobs, is offered a kill fee to pull the plug on his article, a different kind of sacrifice from the ones John Henry endures. Yet, there is a clear parallelism here—both are being replaced by something subtly or transparently soulless, and the cost for both is a death of a different sort. For J. Sutter to triumph over his machine, he must not be destroyed by it. He has gone effectively AWOL—the pile of voicemails is perhaps another version of his receipt collection, a refusal to engage with a system that renders him agentless and incapable of expressing any sense of a will. While it may be possible to read these actions as amoral and selfish, Ferguson would direct us to how essential that amorality is:

> If morality is that which legitimates certain social practices, then liberal ideology delegated aesthetic culture to justify normative social relations and the liberal nation-state. Moreover, aesthetic culture could demonstrate moral fitness for citizenship,

> demonstrating that the citizen-subject is idealized through race and conceived in normativity. (25)

Whitehead's usage of J. Sutter is to resist this framework—to continue with The List and to be conquered by his pursuit of the junketeering streak would "justify normativity" in the sense that it configures J. within a long history of the romanticizing of struggle in American life. To resist this struggle is to resist the alienation offered by capital to J. Sutter. This leads to Whitehead's revelation near the end of the novel as to the greater purpose of the John Henry song. Rather than be appropriated as a song of strength, Whitehead notes a different purpose:

> Before it came into ballad form, the men used to sing it as a work song, to keep the rhythm of their strokes…they sang it like a song of resistance. They wouldn't go out like John Henry. But maybe they were condemning him instead of lamenting him…Are they saying they're not as arrogant as John Henry, or are they twice as arrogant for thinking themselves safe from his fate. (378)

This seems to be the mission of J. Sutter throughout the text, to not die like John Henry—to use the tools that discipline him into the logics of capital against themselves as ways of keeping oneself a visible citizen-subject while resisting the pull of normativity. This is of course an ambiguity—while he manages to escape The List and abandons his streak of junketeering, the question of whether he is safe, or by extension if anyone is, is a question left unanswered, but serves as a productive resistance to the forces of normativity that configure him in specific ways and saves John Henry's proper place in history—as the cost of resistance when played on others' terms.

However, at the risk of sounding sentimental and romantic, it is necessary to consider what it is that ultimately distances J. Sutter from his pursuit of the streak and his involvement in

The List. While there is no doubt his education on John Henry allows J. Sutter to think more critically about his own life and the sacrifices he is making in his own futile conquest with The List, these feelings do not solely arise from a place of self-reflection about one's own labors and how they reflect the John Henry folklore. There is no doubt that the cynicism and alienation J. Sutter feels throughout the novel about his line of work is emboldened by the John Henry myth, but this history does not produce the ability of J. Sutter to imagine an outside to his trajectory in life, or, in other words, to imagine a possibility other than being a part of The List. This is J. Sutter's crucial difference from Rufus. Whereas intimacy and connection were denied to Rufus by way of racial fetishizing/castration, it is intimacy that draws J. Sutter away from his John Henry-like futile chase. In his time with Pamela throughout the festival, a clear attraction is developing. By the end of the novel, after spreading her father's ashes with her, J. Sutter sees a possibility outside of how he has been previously subjectivized. Whitehead writes, "J. Sutter will not get to say good-bye if he leaves early. He and Pamela are on the same airline. It is a simple matter to get on an earlier flight. He knows about airports. The man behind the ticket counter can work his machine and seat them together" (389). This desire for intimacy is echoed just later by Pamela, who just after this reflection invites him to ride to the airport with her. Consider the different response to the mechanics of airports than what exist at the beginning of Whitehead's novel, where we see J. Sutter collecting discarded receipts to claim as expenses. Here J. Sutter uses this knowledge not for his own self-interest but to seek a connection to another person. This desire for connection is ultimately what sours him from The List and his own pursuit of the streak—despite being pseudo-friends with other junketeers, this is an ultimately lonely pursuit. In giving up, he breaks himself out of being "the man going for the record," but to instead exert some degree of control over his own sense of self. In Bradford's retelling of the John Henry

myth, the futility of the event, the eventual replacement of his labor, and the inevitability of John Henry's death are erased by a confidence in his nearly supernatural ability, the generalized strongman representing the strength of human will against invasive technology. In Whitehead's novel, we see J. Sutter aware of this direction in his life, and his resistance by way of connection allows not for an erasure of this myth, but for a way to imagine an outside to this trajectory.

In considering what leads Rufus to commit suicide, it is easy to argue for it as a form of murder. Stefanie Dunning details this view when she writes that, "Figuring Rufus's death as 'murder,' enacted upon him by the text/author or by the effects of racism, is perhaps the most common way of thinking through Rufus's demise" (53). Dunning sees this way of thinking as a way of maintaining the novel's utopianism by way of its violence toward Rufus, arguing that "Rufus's death suggests that there is no black utopia, no place where he can escape the iniquities of racism" (53). Yet, as Dunning notes, Baldwin's novel is invested in the idea of *another* country, a seemingly necessary separate world where Baldwin's utopianism is not "fractured by difference but [is] productively bound together by it" (54). At the root of both versions—Rufus and J. Sutter—is a question of intimacy. For Rufus, his consumption by others via their racialized sexual fantasies is the ultimate source of his downfall. This view is even voiced by Richard, a noticeably conservative character in Baldwin's novel, who identifies that their fascination with Rufus "was partly just because he was colored. Which is a hell of a reason to love anybody" (107). Of course, this is not an authentic love, but it is useful that Baldwin orients the fascination with Rufus around this idea of love. For J. Sutter, what breaks him out of his destructive, alienated labor is the awareness of a possibility for connection with Pamela. Baldwin depicts a variety of characters invested deeply in an atomistic pursuit of their own desires, seeking only for a relationship to the world that enables their form of negative freedom. For J.

Sutter, it is a resistance to the way negative masculinity transposes blackness into the John Henry myth, and the ability to see one's self in the field of others, that allows for him to disengage with forces that would have left him where we ultimately find Rufus, destroyed literally and figuratively by the text. If there is an outside to this, and an achievement of even a limited black utopic revisioning of the power of white masculinity within the logics of negative masculinity, it is imaginable only through the intimacy sought by Rufus and realized by J. Sutter.

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[1] For more authoritative looks at Baldwin's takes on masculinity, Keith Clark's *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson* is excellent, especially for his take on how Rufus embodies the "antimonies that defined his own life" and his argument for placing Baldwin alongside black masculinist writers like Richard Wright and James Weldon Johnson. Similarly useful is Rolland Murray's recent *Our Living Manhood: Literature, Black Power, and Masculine Ideology*, which frames discussions of Baldwin's masculinity around Eldridge Cleaver's homophobic claims that Baldwin's homosexuality was a result of an "internal femininity" that made him incapable of standing up to the power of white racism, which, in Cleaver's view, required a "decidedly masculinist subject" for "participation in Black Power politics" (30).

[2] A useful text for understanding this primitivist claim would be Andrew Ross's *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*, which devotes a great deal of excellent analysis to this essay, especially for his claims about the "transactional history of white responses to black culture" and "of black counter-responses" (67).

[3] Douglas Field is the best source for discussions of "recalcitrant myths of black sexual appetite" which reoccur in Baldwin's writing (465). Field sees this as an attempt to respond to Cleaver's celebration of "the walking phallus of the Supermasculine Menial" and connects this tension, which occurs here in *Another Country*, back to Fanon's claims about the white gaze reducing the black body to the "walking phallus" (465). Kobena Mercer's discussion in *Welcome to the Jungle* of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs is especially useful in discussing this racial fetishizing.

[4] This idea appears as well in Kerouac's *On the Road*, which also gets the ire of Baldwin in his essay, in John Clellon Holmes' *Go*, and widely throughout the subculture, as described more by Sharin Elkholy in *The Philosophy of the Beats*.

[5] For a useful meditation on the relationships between queerness and the white hipster, Stephen Knadler's *Fugitive Race: Minority Writers Resisting Whiteness* contains a long meditation on the relationship between the two. Knadler echoes my basic claim here that the white hipster is still "going along with the flow of whiteness" and not particularly endangering unmarked white identity (xxiv). While I do not read this "refusal of identity" to necessarily imply a sense of queerness, Knadler seems spot-on that the white hipster might formulate it as such, and that "a fantasy of open-ended, nonnormative performativity" is as in-line with the white hipster as it is with my overarching claims about negative masculinity.

[6] While largely outside of this analysis, there is an interesting power struggle going on between Mailer and Baldwin over authenticity over the same experience. Yet, as Steve Shoemaker notes, one could argue that this is not that progressive of a move by Baldwin, and instead, "The point is that both writers are forced to play their roles…determined to a large degree by their respective races" (358). For Shoemaker, Baldwin's experience is more "real," but he achieves this sense of realness by "virtue of his blackness," which uses blackness in the same way Mailer attempts to use his whiteness (358). Thankfully, Shoemaker does not conclude an equivalence, only that the question of authenticity is "vexed" (358).

[7] Baldwin was perhaps being too generous here. As Randall Kenan notes, Mailer would go on to say of *Another Country* that "[Mailer] suggested that Saul Bellow had done more to illuminate the African American psyche than had Baldwin" (45).

[8] Manuel Luis Martinez describes this thinking as a "crude dialectical process" and refers to the work of Foucault, Althusser, Gramsci, and Raymond Williams as evidence for undoing the "binary oppositional movements" (4). Still, as Martinez argues, this is a common way of reading postwar dissent, if inadequate.

[9] Here I am also reminded of the scene on a train in Frantz Fanon's "The Fact of Blackness" in which he distances his mastery of blackness to the way in which the "cripple" must develop a mastery of their own crippled body. Fanon writes that, "All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together," and later states that, when comparing blackness to an amputation (of insufficient whiteness) by way of the film *Home of the Brave*, Fanon states that "with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation" (112). This is a vexing scene—while the refusal to accept blackness as a crippled form of whiteness is consistent within a greater Fanonian teleology, this seems also to betray Fanon's claims of universal humanism, perhaps then denying the cripple the status of "a man among other men" from Fanon's refusal to identify with them. Baldwin's version would seem to solve this by disengaging with this dichotomy completely, rather than choosing which part ones sees a connection to.

[10] Lawrence Hogue argues that this is the moment in which Rufus realizes death is his only option and that "white people are trying to kill him" (7). Yet, Baldwin himself is more nuanced here, and Hogue cites a Baldwin interview with Studs Terkel: "But, he is not prepared to 'really dig down into [himself] and [to] re-create [him] self… [He is not able or is not sufficiently strong enough] to decide who [he is] and force the world to deal with' him" (qtd. in Hogue 6). In the world he finds himself in, the contradictions of Rufus's identity deny him the ability to achieve any sense of male subjectivity (perhaps akin to Ichiro).

[11] This is not specifically an indictment of Rufus's choices, nor is it meant to blame Rufus for acting within a notion of liberal masculinity that has been sold to him as an ultimate form of freedom, but simply meant to highlight the ways in which Rufus repeats this ideology even as he is being destroyed—literally and figuratively—by it. Althusser might argue that this is the point of an ideological state apparatus, as Rufus is reproducing this ideology as he experiences it.

[12] Any form of freedom is robbed of its potential here—in a Hegelian sense, this denies both an objective and subjective ethical life, and even arbitrary expressions of free will, the most limited form of freedom, are denied.

[13] An excellent early critical work on *John Henry Days* is John Inscoe's "Race and Rememberance in West Virginia: John Henry for a Post-Modern Age," in which Inscoe maps out what he identifies as Whitehead's postmodern techniques of destabilizing history by way of the multiple voices of the John Henry myth. For Inscoe, this implicates the text as a "profound commentary on memory, on history, on heritage and on identity" (93).

[14] Whitehead's usage of multiple histories in a non-linear way, along with the role of pop culture in the creation of a John Henry stamp, might be the reason in which it is often read as an emblematic postmodern text, as it figures prominently in Preston Scott Cooper's *Playing with Expectations: Postmodern Narrative Choices and the African American Novel*. Michael Walonen calls this a "secret history of the post-Reconstruction America" whose "rhizomatic cultural meanderings" place it similarly in the postmodern field (67). Still, I am more interested here in Whitehead's infidelity with history and what this can do for the abjected history of John Henry as identified by Darieck Scott than I am arguing for the text as postmodern.

[15] Simply, I want to argue that Pamela's father's death is a form of this abjection—his pursuit at immortalizing John Henry through his museum is in a sense an attempt to immortalize his own struggle, which reaches its end because of his death. This becomes identifiable as well by Pamela's feeling that her father's death was necessary for this John Henry festival to happen, as if his attempts to establish a finite, conclusive history of John Henry makes a celebration of its diverse intersections into contemporary life unrealizable (Whitehead 378).

[16] A further meditation on the role of economics, postmodernity, and the hauntological features of capitalism can be found in Peter Collins's "The Ghosts of Economics Past: John Henry Days and the Production of History." While Collins has useful links between J. Sutter's views on commodification and the commodification of history, consumerism rarely is connected to demonstrations of masculinity, or is so marginal to not really be seen as a focus of the novel.

Chapter 3: Homo/Heterosocial, Homo/Heterotopic: Masculinities and the War on Terror

To begin analysis of literature of the War on Terror, I want to start with a skeletal sketch of the relevant historical features that impact its analysis. While this chapter is not meant to be a piece of historico-political criticism and is instead interested in the literature produced in response to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, ways of thinking demonstrated in the works to be discussed has been directly shaped by past American conflicts. However, I want to guard against a too easy way of narrativizing the history of these American wars as though they are causally linked, as though each successive war is in some way meant to atone for or be responsive to a previous generation's conflict, as it implies a directionality to this history that is difficult to defend. Instead, I seek merely to highlight the ways in which this logic is cemented into ways of thinking about recent military action, both in its criticisms and in its defense.

To produce this analysis, understanding the ways in which discourse on the War on Terror is placed in the field of gender norms is the first step, as it genders the space and sites of contemporary military conflict. From its onset, the American response to the September 11th attacks became gendered in specifically masculinized and feminized ways. Bonnie Mann, in her book *Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror*, makes this argument by way of analyzing various cultural responses to these attacks. She writes:

> We come to understand that this [US cultural] imaginary reads the attack on the twin towers as a closely sequenced double act of penetration/rape…and castration…when we attend to the subsequent fantasies of revenge: cartoon drawings of missiles poised to anally penetrate Saddam Hussein, the slogan "USA: Up Saddam's Ass." (5)

Mann's implication, that the penetrative force of planes flying into the twin towers effectively feminizes the wider American subject as the receiver of this trauma, seems less drastic when considering the severity of gendered language in response to the attack. Mann argues that there is a way to read the War on Terror as a project in reclaiming and reasserting the sovereignty of national masculinity, by way of a reinvestment of traditional masculinized roles within this revenge narrative, and she extends this logic to explain actions like the specifically and explicitly sexualized Abu Gharib prisoner abuse[1]. This reclamation is taken up as well by Ann Ferguson, who argues that this historical moment represented a shift to kind of "Cowboy masculinity" that seeks to avenge wrongs done to the nation and "positions our Cowboy leaders to assume the 'white man's burden' of saving the world from their evils" (4). Ferguson argues that the assumption of this burden invests this problem into the mythic past figure of the "Good Guy Cowboy Avenger" whose response to fear and trauma is to further strengthen this archetypal patriarch against the "inferior" feminized state (4). Mann argues that there is a historically consistent way for arguing the existence of this feminized state. While it might be possible to counter that the 1980s and 1990s represented a relatively peaceful time for American foreign policy, Mann argues that this era still carried with it the weight of the failures of the Vietnam War, rather than the U.S. being in a simple position of defensive retaliation for the attacks against it[2]. In response to then-President Bush's claim that these attacks "cannot dent the steel of American resolve," Mann writes:

> Yet the steel of American resolve was already dented. The Vietnam War had long taken its place in our social imaginary as a story of the unmanning of American and as an embarrassment to American visions of global sovereignty. This new/old national

> manhood was tasked not only with waging global War on Terror, but with finally redeeming the United States from the feminizing loss of the Vietnam war. (5)

While it is dangerous to place too much ontological authority into conceptions of the national imaginary, as such claims can often serve as a vehicle for ideology, it seems fair here to assume that the specter of Vietnam War shaped narratives of the War on Terror[3], and parallels between the quagmire theory of Vietnam (à la David Halberstam) and Iraq appear in print as early as 2003[4]. Again, what Mann offers in this analysis is to consider the ways in which a masculinizing rhetoric permeated discussion of the response to the War on Terror, and in doing so articulates how national responses to the attacks of 9/11 integrate with ideas of masculinity.

Perhaps the most stable figure of iconic masculinity throughout American history is the figure of the soldier. It is the ideology of the nation distilled into embodied form, and its conquest is as much a statement to the power of national ideology as it is a statement of the power of the state. In fact, if post-WWII America is to be read as a period of American prosperity and optimism, it can also be read as dependent upon this galvanized male spirit because of WWII's military conquest and its way of linking American male exceptionalism to this prosperity narrative. Gone is the shame and desolation brought on by the Great Depression, and it is replaced by an era of American optimism because of the results of the war effort[5]. Consider, as a simple example, the place in national iconography for the post-WWII generation, either in its self-definition as "the greatest generation" or through its emphasis on an unassailable masculine fraternity in such filmic representations as *Band of Brothers* (2001) or *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Not only is this fraternity given a clear moral absolutism, but the intimacies formed in this bonding serve as either an unrealized model or aspirational source for future generations of soldiers, as the strength of this fraternity gets envisioned as the strength of the national war

effort. Yet, as I will argue here, the literature of the post-9/11 wars is marked by changes to the ability for this fraternity to be realized, and it highlights the ways in which the attempts at gendering the rhetoric of war (as seen in Mann's discussion of American rhetoric immediately post-9/11) is unfulfilled by the war effort, making the attempts at remasculinization after the humiliation of 9/11 unattainable. Thus, these literary texts break down the ways in which war functions as a masculinizing narrative prior to the War on Terror.

While this identity formation can shift through the dynamics of a certain era, there are certainly historically contiguous figurations of masculine ideals—namely, the muscular body[6]. This emphasis on muscularity is apparent throughout American war propaganda. As well, as Christina Jarvis notes, the serviceman body of this period is directly sexualized as a way of articulating its fitness both for service and against competing images[7] of masculinity. For Jarvis, this able-bodiedness becomes not only a realization of an idealized form of the American subject (that is, ready to accept the embodied form of ideology), but a statement to the virility of the nation by way of the successful performance of its men at this type of embodiment. Jarvis cites the copy of a Florida Grapefruit Juice advertisement of the time that articulates this treatment of the male body at war:

> You bellowed it forth to the world, Mr. Tojo a year or so ago. *"Americans have grown soft."* Tell that to your Zero pilots today. Tell 'em if you dare! Or find a survivor from Guadalcanal and ask him what it feels like to meet a U.S. marine…for he's up against men with iron wills and nerves of steel—and bodies hard as nails. (qtd. in Jarvis 48)

This steeled male body, part machine and part chiseled figure, finds itself represented differently than Nazi representations of nude male figures that borrow from the classical Greeks. Jarvis argues that these figurations, which "reveal through their croppings of bodies, the most visually

important and most symbolic parts of the male body were the arms and chest," are rooted within comic book superheroes and "contemporary ideals of bodybuilding" (52). They are also overtly sexualized, and it requires no deep imagination to unpack the euphemisms pervasive in this description of bodies. As Lynda Boose writes in "Techno-Muscularity and the 'Boy Eternal': From the Quagmire to the Gulf":

> The masculine image has undergone such literal inflation, the representation of maleness and the narrative of which it is imagined—which together constitute a set of culture-specific dreams, desires, and fears—has become progressively less adult as a projection and more and more the cartoon image of a little boy's fantasy of manhood. (74)

If these hypermasculine images (for Jarvis, WWII-era American propaganda; for Boose, film characters like John Rambo in *First Blood*) serve then as a model for the successful performance of an idealized, militarized masculinity, the possibility for them to be achieved becomes a question to be asked. As well, this reveals a shortcoming in analytic frames for masculinity that place weight in the "proving grounds" of masculinity as being the ability to withstand the kinds of physical exertion and training necessary to fit into this notion of "national fitness" and set the terms for participation within homosocial space. Instead, the spectacle of masculinity, as played out in these examples of hypermasculinity, becomes a yard stick by which one's legibility as national subject is measured rather than a particular performance of said national fitness. In making this argument, I agree with Mann's assertions that gender and national identity are linked not only by the way in which it perpetuates a kind of nationalized fraternity built upon sexism and homophobia, but "as a site of evidence for what gender *does*" (8).

Gender is then directly bound to this historical moment of the War on Terror. However, I want to offer a competing narrative to the gendering of the War on Terror that considers the

changes taking place in counterinsurgency that distance this war literature from previous generations. There is of course a clear and present truth to Mann's specific ways of describing the gendered language and logics that permeate discussion of the War on Terror and are evidenced in a variety of cultural examples. Yet, for all the bloodthirsty revenge stoked by American politicians, there is a disconnect between this domestic rhetoric and the operational goals of counterinsurgency, both in theory and in practice. While there is no shortage of examples of similar disconnects between national narratives of a conflict and the reality of it (one might argue this itself is an animating feature of Vietnam War protest), if we are to agree with Mann's assertion that the War on Terror becomes a way of reasserting a new sovereignty for American masculinity, a disconnect between representations of the War on Terror and the operational realities of the war attend directly to questions of the possibility of this remasculinization. To find answers to this conflict, I look toward three exemplary texts written by authors who served during these wars: Kevin Powers, in his book *The Yellow Birds*, Phil Klay in his short story collection *Redeployment*, and poems from Brian Turner in his collections *Phantom Noise* and *Here, Bullet*.

As well, I want to argue that there is a convergence between aspects of Mann's War on Terror's remasculinization and the greater project here of understanding the connection between freedom and masculinity. Again, the achievement of these masculine norms is articulated not only as an achievement of a gender ideal, but as a search to realize a more perfect form of freedom enabled by negative masculinity. To proceed with this analysis, I am attempting to synthesize three relatively divergent modes of thinking about intimacy, space, and culture. The primary text for this line of thinking is Eve Sedgwick's crucial work on homosociality, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. While Sedgwick's focus in her

discussion of homosociality is primarily the English novel, the general concept of homosociality has been applied broadly to understand the intersections between heterosexuality, homosociality, and homophobia[8], and is useful here for mapping out the intricate networks of male bonding occurring in the aforementioned literature. As the scenes to be discussed in the following literary sources take place within homosocial networks created by war, Sedgwick's concept is a useful way for considering the social dynamics at play in these entirely male communities. I want to then expand Sedgwick's idea of homosociality by developing an inverse of the Foucauldian idea of heterotopia into what I am calling a homotopia, to explain how homosociality directs possibility in these spaces[9]. As well, I look to the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, published by the U.S. Army/Marine Corps, as an essential and radical document in imagining the function of war in the era of counterinsurgency, as well as evidence for the concrete intersections between intimacy, space, and culture.

To begin this analysis requires an inversion of Foucault's understanding of heterotopia. Foucault formulates heterotopias as a way of contrasting the idea of a utopia. Utopias, while impossible spaces, still function in relation to reality, as "inverted analogy with the real space of Society" (Foucault 24). They depict a possibility, a creative imagining of the future, even if they exist as unrealizable under the constraints of these real spaces. Heterotopias work similarly, in that they offer this level of possibility yet exist also as a materiality. Foucault provides an analogy of a mirror to explain this idea. A mirror is utopic in the sense that is a projection of an impossible space, a place where you both are and are not (the space that the mirror reflects). Yet, the mirror is also a real, material item, creating a "joint experience" of reality and impossibility. Foucault describes this conjoining of space such that "it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space

that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (24). For Foucault, the simultaneity of these spaces speaks to the navigation of the "mythic and real." Foucault claims that we navigate these spaces throughout our lives, as we move in and out of locations that function with non-hegemonic codes of conduct, expectations, social interactions, and so forth. Without becoming too deeply semiotic in this analysis, what delineates a holy or sacred place from any other sort of place is its demarcation as such. A simple rural church can be thought of as no less deserving of its sacredness than the most aged and ornate cathedral (and it is only our naming of this space and its iconographic marking that defines it in this way). Yet, our ability to move across these spaces, to inhabit separate realities within specific delineations, develops what Foucault calls a "heterotopology" that, when understood for its possibility, allows for the destabilization of any variety of normative behaviors, which Foucault links to various systems of oppression/repression, authoritarianism, and other normalizing regimes.

In doing so, Foucault identifies two primary types of heterotopias—heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. While Foucault believes these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing, he usefully lists "military service for young men" as one such heterotopia of crisis (24). It is important to be careful with this term—while crisis is certainly a part of the narrative of post-war masculinity I am interested in here, the Foucauldian form of crisis is more correctly defined as a relationship "between society and the human environment in which they live" (24). The goal of the heterotopia then is to be a place in which this crisis can be resolved that is otherwise discontinuous with societal norms (for example, an assisted living facility for the elderly suffering from senility or dementia). This is not a "crisis of masculinity" in the sense of deferring the establishing of a fixed identity as much as it is being directly discontinuous with a

certain social space. Other than what exists elsewhere in the Foucault oeuvre with regards to military service, he leaves this certainty, of military service as a heterotopia, undeveloped. While he continues that boarding schools and military service "have certainly played such a role…as the first manifestations of sexual virility were in fact supposed to take place 'elsewhere' than at home," the exact ways in which this service is a service to the development of sexual virility is taken no further (24).

I want to take this to two distinct but useful places in the imagining of military service and heterotopic spaces. First, like the way the mirror projects a real and unreal space, the military base and the battlefield operate as spaces in which wider social norms do not apply. While the military base may exist within national borders, its internal logics, social hierarchies, and the object of all its training (the capacity to commit state-approved violence) would seem foreign to the wider nation. Yet, while these conditions within the military base might be evidence of a kind of otherness, the violence they authorize and develop are specifically forces of hegemony rather than being anything non-hegemonic. Similarly, the battlefield becomes materialized as this pseudo-heterotopic space because of its discontinuity with our typical usages of whatever space. Towns that might otherwise contain cafés or libraries become repurposed for military strongholds, front lines, and so on. Yet, of course, it remains this original space, and can be reclaimed for its original orientation after the passing of this usage. These heterotopic spaces are not fixed in their position, as Foucault notes: "…Each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another" (25). However, the battlefield rarely, if ever, operates as a society's "determined function," as the landscapes and cityscapes that become these sites of conflict do not get to choose this distinction and must suffer these consequences. Again,

this is heterotopic in concept but not in practice—while typical norms may not apply, these disruptions aid hegemony more so than they disrupt it. I want to term this other heterotopic space then as homotopic, that while the militarized uses of space may still cast this space as a site of difference and otherness, it is specifically not opening it up into a variety of meanings. Instead of a "desanctification of space" which Foucault argues the heterotopia can allow, the homotopic militarized space only results in one outcome, by way of the furthering of various forms of hegemonic power rather than a disruption of the "network of relations" that previously demarcated a certain type of space[10] (23).

Second, I want to extend Foucault's claim that military service works as a place for the "first manifestations of sexual virility" by way of Eve Sedgwick's concept of homosociality, specifically the ways in which she articulates homosocial desire, to link homosociality and homotopia. Again, as the social networks to be described here are solely male, it seems essential to consider how the norms for this social engagement differ not only by their homotopic space (as in, their improvisational existence because of war) but also by the ways in which these all male societies police their own norms of masculinity, seen especially in the work of Kevin Powers. Instead of challenging norms, as is offered by heterotopic possibility, these homosocial spaces reproduce the masculine norms of war in line with the historical expectations of militarized modes of masculinity. In her introduction, Sedgwick begins by defining homosocial as specifically bound by the things in which it marks as exclusions of homosociality. She writes:

> "Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." In fact, it is applied to such activities as "male bonding," which may,

> as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. (2)

For Sedgwick, there exists a fundamental linkage between heterosexuality, homosociality, and homophobia. She claims that for male bonding to be able to navigate this space of intimacies, it must fundamentally be in opposition to a sexualized form of desire. While the degree of this sexualization is an "active question" in her text, she roots this concept of homosociality in desire so as to link it with libidinal drives, as she says this operates "not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotionally charged, that shapes an important relationship" (2). Sedgwick claims that male homosocial desire is glued together by an interruption between a desire for male bonding and direct sexualization of this male intimacy. She writes:

> …However convenient it might be to group together all the bonds that link males to males, and by which males enhance the status of males—usefully symmetrical as it would be, that grouping meets with a prohibitive structural obstacle. From the vantage point of our own society, at any rate, it has apparently been impossible to imagine a form of patriarchy that was not homophobic. (3)

Here Sedgwick's definition of patriarchy is perhaps best defined as men helping the interests of other men at the exclusion of women. Yet for this form of patriarchy to exist, the separation between men-helping-men and "men-loving-men"[11] must be kept clear and absolute (3). Sedgwick claims that this is clearly a *male* problem, and she argues that this disjunction between sexual and non-sexual relations is not as absolute for women. Here Sedgwick makes a complex claim borrowing from Adrienne Rich's theories of the "lesbian continuum," whose continuum includes both the sexual and non-sexual relations, the homosexual and the homosocial: "…It

seems at this moment to make an obvious kind of sense to say that women in our society who love women, women who teach…or otherwise promote the interests of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities" (3). Sedgwick's claim is not that there exists no capacity for homophobia within women's bonds, but that this bonding is not structured by homophobia in the way that male homosociality is dependent on it for its reproduction of gender norms. While this may not be true absolutely[12], and some women's bonds might be similarly shaped by the exclusion of minoritized femininities, Sedgwick argues that they are not essential to homosocial bonding for women the way that the structuring of male identity and the navigability of homosocial desire depend upon homophobia. In fact, the remarkability of such a concept, that they can exist in a form of Rich's "lesbian continuum" is only a controversial interpretation because of the affective force of its difference to the relationships between men:

> The apparent simplicity—the unity—of the continuum between "women loving women" and "women promoting women," extending over the erotic, social, familial, economic, and political realms, would not be so striking if it were not in strong contrast to the arrangement among males. (3)

From this we can take her fundamental claim that male bonding is necessitated on its specifically non-sexual nature, and that an opposition to it is fundamental in the expression of male bonding. Since the literary texts to be discussed here consider how to mediate these bonds across differing conditions of space, homosociality allows for a way to map these relations. If we are to accept that the production of male bonds is a consistent feature of war (as evidenced by countless literary and filmic representations of war), this bonding would then seem to be a constituent part of the excavation of masculinity that Mann argues for as part of the War on Terror and dependent upon the creation of fraternity in line with previous eras of war. Thus, Sedgwick's

homosociality allows for a directive way of reading the various types of male bonding to be described in these literary texts. The question for this war literature then is if these male bonds and the wider homosocial structure is realizable within homotopic spaces.

If we assume that homotopic space, here the altered material spaces of military conflicts serving hegemony rather than acting non-hegemonically, is a necessary part for the production of homosocial bonding (structured by homophobia/heterosexism and working toward Sedgwick's descriptions of male power), what occurs to these forms of male intimacy when this homotopic space is denied, unable to achieve its unidirectional force toward hegemonic power, both in theory and in practice? While it is entirely possible that the net average experience of these identity building projects for participants in these conflicts might simply map on to Sedgwick's disjointed male homosocial continuum, and that tangible male bonding still took place and is structured by a pervasive homophobia that allows this masculinity to be expressed (a claim certainly defensible by way of persistent homophobic language spoken by characters in *The Yellow Birds* and *Redeployment*). This is only a supposition. What I am interested in here is how literature about these wars represents these problems differently than a simple unified narrative of military fraternity, and how they serve as evidence for an unrealized experience of militarized space and identity that expresses itself in literature as paranoia, isolation, and overt traumatic stress.

The first claim to unpack here is the way in which these wars develop an inconsistent orientation to homotopic space. I want to make this by way of a brief analysis of the military's own explanation of its operational goals, specifically in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* published by the U.S. Army. By incorporating this text, there is no attempt here to broaden this analysis to being that of political policy, and this analysis is instead interested in the U.S. Army's

own definitions of its goals as well as its broad takes on the socio-cultural conflicts that define the operational goals in counterinsurgency. To invoke Mann's usage of the national imaginary, it seems safe to claim here that when imagining the operational goals of a certain military conflict, these goals are likely to be shaped by tactics of the past. However, as Sarah Sewall argues in her introduction to the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, this era of military conflict saw with it new ways of understanding operational goals. What results is a kind of superimposition of space in which the lived experience of combat collides with the homotopic space previously described. Said another way, this confusion of spaces results in an uncertainty of how to correctly navigate said space through the codes of conduct meant to apply to that space.

In her introduction to the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Sewall historicizes why this text serves as a radical piece of military doctrine. Sewall describes that American doctrine on counterinsurgency focuses on a "population-centered approach" as opposed to a military offensive directed toward insurgents. She writes that U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine deviates from offensive policies that, "…Concentrates on physically destroying the unseen opponent embedded in the general population. Some U.S. tactics in Vietnam such as free-fire zones and carpet bombing…are modern examples of this school" (xxiv). Perhaps learning from the mistakes of Vietnam, the population-centered approach, which focuses on securing civilians instead of eradicating the insurgents, became U.S. doctrine. Sewall identifies three consequences that disrupt ways of thinking about military conflict, which she terms the "centrality of the civilian, greater military assumption of risk, and the importance of nonmilitary efforts and actors" (xxv). The impact of this doctrine can be felt in the variety of ways in which the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* defines its imperatives and its paradoxes. These imperatives include: managing information and expectations (identified as resisting the "man on the moon

syndrome" of assuming the complete competency and successfulness of U.S. agencies), using appropriate levels of force (claiming that "An operation that kills five insurgents is counterproductive if collateral damage leads to the recruitment of fifty more insurgents"), learning and adapting (arguing that effective counterinsurgency works as a "learning organization" and that competence needs to be "widespread" rather than consolidated in higher ranking officers), empowering the lowest levels (rather than a strict hierarchy of power, subordinates are expected to make decisions on their own), and support of the host nation (rather than doing everything themselves, this doctrine advises U.S. military units to work with and develop local forces) (45-47). As Sewall notes, these are fundamentally radical approaches to military doctrine, but the extent to which they should be trusted as materially realized is suspect. Sewall notes two critiques of these imperatives. First, that it proffers an emasculated form of military power discontinuous with previous generations of conflicts, and second that it "smells like a suspect marketing campaign for an inherently inhumane concept of war," in direct critique of various "Just War" theories circulating around theories of counterinsurgency (xxxiii). This first critique, of counterinsurgency as emasculating military conflict, is clearly a central topic here, and has been since the Vietnam Era, as outlined in Susan Jeffords's work (see Note 2). But this second critique is again historicized through past military conflict. Sewall writes, "…History provides plenty of reason to doubt contemporary claims about a kinder and gentler counterinsurgency. During Vietnam, the U.S. spoke of winning hearts and minds even as it carpet bombed rural areas and rained napalm on village streets" (xxxiii-xxxiv). This skepticism is perhaps further enforced by the questionably sincere declaration of the paradoxes of counterinsurgency provided in the manual. These appear as headers to longer reflections that become something close to mantras for this conflict: "Sometimes, the more you protect your

force, the less secure you may be"; "Sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is"; "The more successful the counterinsurgency is, the less for can be used and the more risk must be accepted"; "Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction"; "Some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot" (48-49). These paradoxes described by the manual not only inspire skepticism informed by how disconnected they may seem from the military's place in the national imaginary (again borrowing from Mann), but they are written with such a lyrical quality so as to be seen to be placating a specific kind of critique about the concept of a Just War. Whether or not these claims by the manual are to be trusted, the concepts are evidenced throughout the works produced by veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I want to use these imperatives and paradoxes as a way toward reading this literary material, for the ways in which they fulfill or challenge expectations of militarized forms of masculinity and masculinization. The goal of this chapter's analysis is first to claim that this war literature occupies a primarily homosocial, homotopic spatial orientation. While gender demographics of the military are shifting, the literary texts in question here consist of a nearly total absence of this demographic shift and develop homosocial networks of intimacy amongst male soldiers. Yet, as these texts will show, the achievement of the homosocial/homotopic form is not simple and is complicated by their historically specific moment of counterinsurgency. However, it is in this complication of space that the capacity to achieve a nationalized version of manhood/masculinity becomes problematized. What happens then when this simple, homotopic understanding of space becomes complicated by the operational goals as defined previously, and what effect does this have on the reclamation of national manhood that Mann reads the War on Terror as? And further, what does literature have to say about the navigation of these conflicts? In the literary texts analyzed here, these critiques of counterinsurgency as identified by Sewall

are animated within them. They depict an emasculation in the sense that they fracture the historically-bound, performative masculine experience of what going to war means[13], while at the same time depict the disconnect between the moral purpose and tangible outcome of these conflicts. As well, these texts are directly interested in how space influences and fractures the possibility of participating within this history of masculinity, and, in their exploration of the unfulfilled attempts to re-masculinize the nation after September 11th, they depict the hollowness of this historically stable masculine archetype when applied to this new era of conflict and the changes to the gendering of the space of war in post-9/11 war literature.

An exemplary text for this question of homosocial bonding in the War on Terror is Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds*. Powers' novel follows the paths of Pvt. John Bartle and Pvt. Daniel Murphy (referred to as Murph), as they navigate their way through their experiences in the war in Iraq. From the novel's onset, Murph's characterization as naïve and young sets him up for his obvious destruction. Bartle feels primarily responsible for protecting Murph and his innocence from the realities and consequences of the war—Murph is instructed by their sergeant to "get in Bartle's back pocket and…stay there" (33). This innocence is treated as nothing less than Murph's entire identity—he enlists at eighteen, and his green perspectives on the world are in large part the basis for how people bond with him, but they are also the thing that creates his dependency on others[14]. Before Bartle and Murph ship out, Bartle gets the chance to meet Murph's mother, who is distraught by the idea of her son going to war. They share a brief exchange about protecting Murph: "'Nothing's gonna happen to him, right? Promise that you'll bring him home to me.' 'I promise,' I said. 'I promise I'll bring him home to you'" (47). Soon after this conference with Murph's mother, Bartle is approached by Sgt. Sterling, who is in charge of the squad containing Murph and Bartle. Sterling says to Bartle: "'You shouldn't have

done that, Private… He stopped and put his hands on his hips. 'C'mon. Promises? Really? You're making fucking promises now?'" (47). Bartle defends himself by saying that it was not a big deal, and that he was merely trying to comfort Murph's mother. Sterling responds by attacking Bartle, punching him "twice in the face, once below the eye and once directly in the mouth" (47). After he is finished punching his subordinate, Powers describes the presence looming over Bartle: "He stood over me with his feet on either side of my body, just looking at me. He shook the sting out of his hand in the cold air. 'Report me if you want. I don't even fucking care anymore'" (48). Here Powers presents a complex network of homosocial relationships. Bartle's promise to Murph's mother can be read as a way of taking him on as a burden, to take responsibility for his life as a way of forming a connection to someone. As well, this is a practical revision of Sedgwick's concept of men-looking-out-for-other-men, where looking out means nothing less than saving one's life. However, for Sgt. Sterling, any attempt at forming this type of bond is not only seen as an idiotic way of imagining social bonds, it is incompatible by way of a more primitive form of masculine violence. Sterling disrupts the way in which Bartle wants to see bonding—instead of looking out for each other as a form of collective protection being the way this homosociality expresses itself, Sterling can be seen as a force of unmitigated masculine violence, an isolated, nihilistic form of atomism that expresses masculinity only as a way of destroying others[15].

In that sense, *The Yellow Birds* explores these archetypes of war literature while it consciously subverts them. As such, Powers' novel repeats many of the features traditionally found in war literature. In "The Functions of War Literature," Catharine Brosman writes that war literature provides a dimension to the experiential that cannot be obtained by "marginally literary texts" such as histories, records, or philosophy. She writes:

> Fiction, drama, and poetry concerning war tend toward recording not simply the causes and conduct of armed conflict or individual battles but the manner in which they are lived, felt, used, or transformed by participants. The subjective element is what readers seek in the imaginative mode…authenticity and satisfaction come from a powerful appeal to readers' imaginations through identification with characters and their emotions… (85-86)

In that sense, this lived experience of a conflict becomes the primary mode in which the experiential is felt as distinct from the ideological or doctrinal. For Powers' novel, this subjective mode is developed throughout, by way of its exploration of male social bonds alongside its examination of the conflict between pastoral[16] and militarized concepts of space. Rather than simply focus on the ways in which this experience of war is hellish, and the landscape is a scarred and ruined battleground, Powers focuses much of his descriptive power on the conflict between the pastoral beauty of the landscape and its homotopic purpose. Consider the following passage from early in the novel, as Bartle finds himself with idle time to pass:

> A cool wind blew down from the distant hillsides we'd been patrolling all year. It passed over the minarets that rose above the citadel, flowed down through alleys with their flapping green awnings, out over the bare fields that ringed the city, and finally broke up against the scattered dwellings from which our rifles bristled. Our platoon moved around our rooftop position, gray streaks against the predawn light. It was still late summer then, a Sunday, I think. We waited. (4-5)

These are almost overwhelmingly naturalistic descriptions of place and setting. In contrast to the definitiveness of their natural beauty, the platoon figures as only a slight smear on this landscape, existing only as "gray streaks" across the scenic backdrop, seemingly out of place in this natural

wonder. This beauty is only capable of being expressed in these moments of waiting and in silent moments with his squad, and as the war interrupts his observations the reader is jarred back in to the reality of the gray streaks ruining this pastoral scene.

These scenes and spaces are crucial to how Bartle orients himself throughout the novel. It is not enough for these spaces to simply exist on their own—Bartle seeks in them a great sense of narrative purpose, as if to give meaning to his existence in these disjointed spaces. After being instructed on their latest objective and realizing that it was something the squad had done each fall for the last three years, Bartle reflects on the repetition of this event that works in contrast to past narratives of the experience of the soldier. Powers writes:

> I thought of my grandfather's war. How they had destinations and purpose. How the next day we'd march out under a sun hanging low over the plains in the east. We'd go back into a city that had fought this battle yearly; a slow, bloody parade in fall to mark the change of season. We'd drive them out. We always had. We'd kill them. They'd shoot us and blow off our limbs and run into the hills and wadis, back into the alleys and dusty villages…While we patrolled the streets, we'd throw candy to their children with whom we'd fight in the fall a few more years from now. (91)

Here, for Bartle, war works as a cycle as opposed to something linear, an endless war that continues still at the time of this writing. The purposefulness of his grandfather's war (presumably WWII given the timelines) could then possibly be read as this understanding of space as destination—in the liberation of cities and town from the Nazis, there was a clear directive move across Europe that develops a symmetry with a fulfillment of the kind of sovereign, nationalized masculinity that Mann and Jarvis describe—a crisis, a resolution, a triumph, and a redemption of the embedded masculinity/heterosexism within national identity.

Bartle finds no such clarity, and instead his experience in war feels futile, fully aware that the children who might greet him will be a future participant in this never-ending loop, an experience of space without finitude. This is the uniform of heroic masculinity evacuated from its heroism, a meaningless, paranoid violence more at home in Sgt. Sterling than in Bartle or Murph.

Eventually, Bartle gets to return home, and the reader is presented with the iconic image of the soldier returning home to his family waiting for him at the airport. Given the way Powers undercuts the typical expectations of a war narrative, this scene is similarly inefficient at enacting this performative moment. Upon arriving at the airport, Bartle is greeted by his mother, who is overcome by the return of her son:

> I don't how long we stood there like that, with me hunching down to be embraced, but I forgot the sounds of the motor and the people walking past, I forgot the travelers who called out their thanks to me. I was aware of my mother and of her alone. I felt as if I'd somehow been returned to the singular safety of the womb, untouched and untouchable to the world outside her arms around my slouching neck. I was aware of all of this, though I am not sure how. Yet when she said, 'Oh, John, you're home,' I did not believe her. (109)

This image of a soldier returning home has been fixed into the national imaginary and has been heightened in these contemporary wars[17]. Images of these returns abound in feel-good news segments, as the surprise part of throwing out the first pitch at baseball games, and create a cruel competition surrounding the reveal of the "return to home." The spectacle of these returns is possible only by the great weight the return serves in the narrative of going to war. It is the point of war, as well as a consistent point of discussion amongst the soldiers in Bartle's platoon, and as

well a part of the implicit and explicit promise made with civilians even when presented with a "just war." Yet, when faced finally with the reality of returning home, and perhaps an experience of a space with finitude, Bartle is unable to "believe" his mother that he has returned home. This lack of belief needs unpacking—it seems too farfetched to think that Bartle does not feel at home with his family because his home and family is instead a combination of his platoon and Iraq, especially given the instability each represents in his life and that he is not expressing a desire to instead return to war. Instead, within the homotopic logic of militarized space argued for here, in which the war space and the home space must serve a primary hegemonic function, Bartle finds himself disjointed by each of their insufficiencies. The war has not served as any sort of expression of heroic masculinity, and the return home has done nothing to salve the wounds of Murph's loss. Earlier in the novel, Bartle reflects on this confusing image of what home now means:

> But home, too, was hard to get an image of, harder still to think beyond the last curved enclosure of the desert, where it seemed I had left the better portion of myself as one among innumerable grains of sand, how in the end the weather-beaten stone is not one stone but only that which has been weathered, a result, an example of slow erosion on a thing by wind or waves that break against it, so that the else of anyone involved ends up deposited like silt spilling out into an estuary, or gathered at the bottom of a river in a city that is all you can remember. (99-100)

If the home space exists as "hard to get an image of," it is not because this militarized space has replaced it (this instability of home of course echoes Ichiro's very different struggles in *No-No Boy*). Instead, it is that it disrupts the capacity to imagine each's finitude. Powers focuses on Bartle's sense of identity as being eroded and washed away by the insufficiencies of each space

in providing the "destinations and purpose" that his participation was seeking. With Murph dead, Bartle is worn away by his experience in the war, and ends up alone, hiding from the consequences that surround Murph's death. Here there is no intimacy, no justice to war, and no resurrection of national manhood, only Bartle left broken at the loss of Murph.

This sense of loss and isolation is a recurrent theme in fiction about the War on Terror. Perhaps the most critically acclaimed of the works mentioned here, Phil Klay's *Redeployment*, winner of the 2014 National Book Award for fiction, is a collection of short stories that details a variety of perspectives on the War on Terror, all of which offer some meditation on the absurdity of the war or the isolation that it produces. For Klay, the tension in his work builds from this isolation—it is an isolation from others built both at home and at war. In the title story from the collection, we are immediately placed within the absurdity of war violence. Klay writes, "We shot dogs. Not by accident. We did it on purpose, and we called it Operation Scooby. I'm a dog person, so I thought about that a lot" (1). Here the theory of Chekhov's gun applies, as we know the narrator will find himself engaging in this violence in some way. But it is in this constant thinking that Klay's narrator finds himself struggling. The narrator describes how in the down time after his deployment, the difficulty lies in the directive to "decompress" (1). Instead, the narrator is left to relive his experiences by way of contrast to "home"—when he thinks about how they shot dogs, he contrasts this with thinking of his own dog, Vicar: "So there it was. Vicar and Operation Scooby, all the way home" (3). Klay's narrator desires a way to narrate this experience and to make sense of them in some kind of "straight order" that would allow for a narrative arc to close on what he has experienced through his service (2). Yet, this closure is denied, and he finds himself instead unable to turn off his brain's associative links between the space of war and the space of home. It is possible too to read this in conjunction with Bartle's

descriptions of previous wars having "destinations and purpose"—without a sense of purpose to the experiences of these traumas, Klay's narrator is unable to find purpose to what he has witnessed, and rather than being able to form any sort of affective closure, he is instead "thinking a lot, and I mean a lot, about those fucking dogs" (3).

This insufficient closure, and this inability to attach a clear sense of meaning to his experience, contributes to his life back home feeling foreign. When his squad returns home, and we are again given this traditional scene of families embracing soldiers back from combat, the narrator is met by his partner, Cheryl. Yet, in this classic moment of intimacy, Klay's narrator feels like he is simply performing the act of the intimacy rather than its meaning[18]. Klay writes, "I moved in and kissed her. I figured that was what I was supposed to do. But it'd been too long and we were both too nervous and it felt just like lip on lip pushed together, I don't know" (8). Rather than any sort of overtly romantic homecoming, the narrator only feels as though he is following orders, repeating an event that has been repeated countless times before him. When the narrator and Cheryl can finally share a moment of intimacy together, the narrator remarks that, instead, "She looked a bit scared of me, then. I guess all the wives were probably a little bit scared" (9).

As a result of this inability to separate and navigate the military space and the home space, the kind of thinking that kept the narrator alive during war continues in his live as a civilian. Klay, perhaps paralleling the color-coded Homeland Security Advisory System's index for alertness, describes the kind of heightened alertness that he is experiencing still as a civilian. Where "white" represents a total placidness, and "red" represents the inverse, of being completely lost in the tension and panic inspired by this heightened alertness, Klay's narrator claims he exists in a constant state of "orange": "Here's what orange is. You don't see or hear

like you used to. Your brain chemistry changes. You take in every piece of the environment, everything. I could spot a dime in the street twenty yards away. I had antennae out that stretched down the block. It's hard to even remember exactly what that felt like" (13). This intake and processing of threat levels is something the narrator cannot turn off, as he claims, for "seven months" (13). On the home front, though, this behavior is illogical. As will be shown as well in the poems of Brian Turner, the contrast between domestic spaces and the militarized space that the narrator seems to still occupy temporally again only heightens the frustration over the alert levels. The narrator, finding himself trying on clothes at an American Eagle Outfitters (an intentional choice for its pun, certainly), cannot help but relive the trauma of his experiences surrounded by "people who've lived their whole lives at white" (12). For Klay's narrator, the intensity of his "orange" alertness level expressed through the "white" level world he now finds himself in results in a desire to redeploy. Klay writes, "And glad as I was to be in the States, and even though I hated the past seven months and the only thing that kept me going was the Marines I served with and the thought of coming home, I started feeling like I wanted to go back. Because fuck all this" (11). However, this is not a heroic gesture of self-sacrifice, or a desire to re-emasculate a vision of national manhood or anything similarly bound to grander narratives. This is instead an expression of isolation, of an inability to reconnect with civilian life in any meaningful way, and an inability to adequately express intimacy when stuck in his aforementioned orange alert level. The "fuck all this" must then be unpacked—it is not simply that the world of people living at a white alert level are meaningless idiots that cannot experience the narrator's pain, or that the militarized space somehow enables a truer version of himself, but instead expresses a desire to inhabit a space where this orange alert level makes sense and has value, rather than it only a reflection of an inability.

This inability to form an intimate sense of connection is starkest in the story's final scene. As described, the initial focus on the shooting of the dogs leads to the inevitable ending where Vicar, the narrator's dog, must be put down. Again, this is a classic sentimental scene, which in a different story might be a tearjerker. For Klay's narrator though, his orange alert level allows him to process this scene only through the language of his militarization. Klay writes, "I focused on Vicar, then on the sights. Vicar disappeared into a gray blur. I switched off the safety. There had to be three shots. It's not just pull the trigger and you're done. Got to do it right. Hammer pair to the body. A final well-aimed shot to the head" (15). Vicar, his old, dying dog, perhaps the simplest form of sentimental attachment, becomes only a gray blur, and the language that follows describes in precise detail the ways in which to approach shooting and killing a target, as if the narrator is simply repeating the instructions he was taught, again finding solace in reoccupying the space of war. But it is in the systematic voice of this language that the reader learns that this narrator is too far gone to feel the intimacy of this scene. In the end, Vicar is "a blur of gray and black" and the narrator says that he "couldn't remember what I was going to do with the body" (16). This violence has no heroic narrative, nor does it have any sentimental attachment. It is instead only carried out with precision and with purpose, and the contrast between the ways in which the narrator is directionless is in the seemingly simple parts of domestic life and his laser focus in what should be a difficult moment only speaks to what has been lost. As the narrator "stay[s] there looking at the sights for a while," alone in a field with his now dead dog, the loneliness of this orange level is stark (16).

As well, there is no solace brought by the ways in which these Klay's narrators are trained for violence, as if this serves for them some realization of their purpose that gives a legible structure to their identity. In "After Action Report," Klay tells a story of a narrator and a

member of his platoon, Timhead, who are ambushed after their MRAP vehicle hits a roadside IED. As they are attempting to recover from the explosion, they are shot at by a young boy: "We figured that the kid had grabbed his dad's AK when he saw us standing there and thought he'd be a hero and take a potshot at the Americans" (32). The soldiers then realize that Timhead has shot the kid, making him "the first guy in MP platoon to…kill somebody" (33). In the confusion after the incident, however, it is assumed that the narrator is the one who shot the kid, and Timhead, proclaiming "I don't want to talk about it" asks the narrator to continue taking credit for it (34).

In the strange and violent topologies of combat, it could be argued that this experience of trauma could serve as a vehicle for bonding between Timhead and the narrator, enabled by the expectations of homosocial bonding in war. Yet, despite sharing a room together, this experience does nothing to place them in a greater communion with each other. Klay writes, "In our can, Timhead and I never talked much. We'd get back and I'd play *GTA* and he'd play *Pokémon* until we were too tired to stay up. Not much to talk about" (37). A reasonable person might argue that in fact they *did* have quite a great deal to talk about, but to do so would to be bonded in some way by this shared experience, which was rooted already in a lie. Of course, this is not the shared experience, since Timhead is the killer, and this violence seems to instead keep them apart:

> Sometimes I'd look at him, focused on the Nintendo, and I'd want to scream, "What's going on with you?" He didn't seem different, but he had to be. He'd killed somebody. He had to be feeling something. It weirded me out, and I hadn't even shot the kid. The best I could get were little signs. One time in the chow hall…Sergeant Major walked up. She called me "killer," and after she passed, Timhead said, "Yeah, killer. The big fucking hero." (38)

There is of course a great deal of implication here in Timhead's claim, but this gets to a greater theme Klay explores in this story, that it is the how this violence is narrated that links it to its meaning. For the narrator in "Redeployment," there is no narrative, only the repetition of training devoid of any affective power. For Timhead, his violence is similarly absent a narrative—he is not acknowledged as a hero, and the weight of his violence persists only as violence. When the narrator finally prods Timhead enough to have him talk about what happened, Timhead says the following: "He was trying to kill you. Us. He was trying to kill everybody…Here's what I see. Everything dust. And the flashes from the AK, going wild in circles…And then I see the kid's face. Then the mom" (41). There is no heroic arc to this retelling of violence. There is no sense that these actions meant anything more than a base sense of survival and a trained response to an event. Klay continues, "Timhead shrugged. I didn't know what to say. After a minute, he went back to his game" (41). Without a sweeping narrative arc, Timhead and the narrator are not bound by anything greater than an act of meaningless violence and trauma, that contributes to the narrator's sense of dread that this war is "50 percent boredom and 49 percent normal terror, which is a general feeling that you might die at any second and that everybody in this country wants to kill you" (43). Without a way of situating this experience—perhaps because of the insufficiency of this militarized space to conform to a historical imaging of war—the result is only a consistent paranoia akin to the orange alert level described above. For Klay, this conflict between the actual creation of narrative (that is, through his book) and the ways in which these narratives are disconnected from reality unite his story. Later, when a member of their platoon is grazed by sniper fire, this platoon member parades his wound as a badge of honor, proclaiming: "Purple fucking Heart, bitches!" (51). Timhead, the narrator, and perhaps the whole platoon realize that Harvey, the member who was shot, is only lucky to not be dead, and that the benefits

he sees himself reaping from this moment will be disconnected from the reality of the event: "This is gonna be a badass scar…Girls'll ask and I'll be like, 'Whatever, I just got shot one time in Iraq, it's cool'" (51). In the only moment between them that might be read as the creation of a bond, Timhead and the narrator argue about Harvey's proclamations. While Timhead thinks he is "full of shit" for this narrative, the narrator allows for this freedom to create the narrative, because, as Timhead then claims: "Whatever, it doesn't matter" (52). The narrator agrees—this violence serves no narrative, creates no sense of community, and only divides and haunts the characters in Klay's short stories.

In Brian Turner's poetry collections *Here, Bullet* and *Phantom Noise*, questions of participation within this space, both as a soldier and as a foreigner, are central to his poems. As well, Turner's poems express through poetry the kinds of anxieties and paranoias outlined in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. As much as any writer working on the war, Turner attempts to participate, as Samina Najmi describes, as "non-partisan," and evoking a "political subtlety" rather than heavy-handed political commentary (56). It may be possible then to claim that this "aesthetic distance" Najmi describes in Turner's work is an attempt to find an authentic voice for approaching these topics in a poetic form. A remarkable feature in Turner's work is his repeated usage of ghosts and ghost imagery to serve as stand-ins for American soldiers and past Iraqi citizens. While some of these ghosts have names, it is unclear whether they are living or dead, a manifestation of past trauma or an un-narrativized memory of an event. This achieves two primary effects. First, it allows Turner to focus on the effect of decisions that led to violence rather than what motivated them. Politically, this is a clever move, as it distances Turner from having to make overt political claims in either direction, and it allows his writing to reflect on aftermaths. Najmi argues that this political distancing is directly relevant to Turner's

positionality, namely the "uniformed, white American masculinity" (57). Najmi reflects on an exchange with Turner himself, and when asked how this positional imbalance influences interactions with Iraqi people, Najmi writes that Turner "added wryly that it's hard to have a casual exchange with people if you're always carrying a gun" (56). In this statement, Turner reveals the "mutuality and interdependence of identity constructions" that exist throughout his work, and in doing so Turner distances himself from the atomistic version of heroic masculinity[19] his poems work to undermine (56).

In "What Every Soldier Should Know," Turner details the Arabic phrases essential to one's livelihood in this setting, and he does so in a practically rhetorical style devoid of metaphor. These observations become flat, purposeful declarations, pulled from Turner's copy of the "Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) handbook *Iraqi Basic Language Survival Guide*" (70). Here there is a clear pun on survival established by Turner, as a language survival guide and his own mode of survival serve different ends. For Turner, survival is understanding the meaning behind the language rather than simply repeating a phrase. Turner writes, "*O-guf! Tera armeek* is rarely useful. / It means *Stop! Or I'll shoot*" (9). Here Turner's understanding of survival is complicated by the declaration of the phase being "rarely useful." This rare usefulness might simply be a statement that force is rarely a useful tactic[20], or that in the places one might be compelled to make such a claim it will go ignored. It is possible to claim that this is not the aforementioned "Good Guy Cowboy Avenger," and that Turner instead reflects an inability to control a situation, something that by extension "every soldier" should know and expect to experience.

Similar to this instability of authority is the instability presented by language. In a later stanza, Turner describes the ways in which phrases in Arabic can confuse the ability to evaluate

threats and leave "every soldier" in a constant state of unknowing, resulting in a double potential of combatant and noncombatant. He writes, "*Inshallah* means *Allah be willing.* / Listen well when it is spoken" (10). At first, this religious invocation can be read as a way to stress the importance of what is being said, as "listen well" can be read as akin to "pay close attention to." Yet, Turner does not allow for such one-sidedness even in this bit of divine language, as he writes later: "Men wearing vests rigged with explosives / walk up, raise their arms and say *Inshallah*" (11). Here the noncombatant language has recast itself as combatant, again akin to this doubling of possibility that underwrites the operational guides to threat evaluation. It is necessary first to establish the voice in these closing stanzas. It is too hasty of a reading to affix to these claims any sense of judgment, or even worse to imagine the lines between enemy and friend blurred beyond recognition. There is no sense here that the difference between these relationships is erased in such a way that the "Small children who will play with you" are indistinguishable from the "men who earn eighty dollars / to attack you, five thousand to kill" (10). Consider the U.S. Army's own classification of the project that appears in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*:

> …Insurgents usually look no different from the general populace and do their best to blend with noncombatants…Insurgent organizations are often rooted in ethnic or tribal groups. They often take part in criminal activities or like themselves to political parties…These conditions and practices make it difficult to determine what and who constitutes the threat. (100)

Yet, what is essential in this doubling of potentials is not that they produce a nihilism to a sense of good will that might otherwise drive the presumed narrator to be in communion with "old men with their talk, women who offer chai" (10). It is instead a reflection of a desire for these unfixed

identities that inspire only paranoia to be fixed in some way, to be either one or the other and apply some narrative to this experience. Without this narrative, ideology takes root. Instead of being "small children" or "old men" or "women," they become folded into a singular identity of enemy. Hegemony answers these questions by erasing the differences between combatant and noncombatant, so as to flatten the experience of these spaces into a single, homotopic space. In Turner's remarkable poem from *Phantom Noise*, "At Lowe's Home Improvement Center," these double identities and ghosts of past conflicts follow him through an otherwise banal experience. Turner writes:

> Sheets of plywood drop with the airy breath
> of mortars the moment they crack open
> in shrapnel. Mower blades are just mower blades
> and the Troy-Bilt Self-Propelled Mower doesn't resemble
> a Blackhawk or an Apache. (15)

Turner's reaffirmation that "mower blades are just mower blades" can be read as yet another double. In one sense, we see the narrator reassuring himself of the finiteness of the experience of an object so as to stave off the kind of ideations that haunt even a place as unassuming as a Lowe's Home Improvement Center. In another sense, we can see the narrator here directly resisting the desire to cast every object as an analogy, as if every item in the world now exists to remind him of war, perhaps a resistance too of the necessary self-centeredness of this trauma. While the narrator may be unable to completely stop the ways in which these objects inspire the recollection of traumatic memory, there is an awareness of the futility of the extension of this metaphor. These traumatic ideations do not change the essential thingness of the objects he is encountering, and the fissure that exists between the "synaptic geometry" required to form these

connections and the way the object exists to the civilian world is seen as impassable. The mower blade *is* a mower blade, regardless of its abnormal ontology inscribed through trauma. Still, there is another layer to consider in this poem. While the narrator makes clear that not every object exists as analogy, the greater arc of the poem is aware of its own relationship to the ways in which the greater War on Terror projects were narrativized. If nation-building[21] is seen as a larger operational goal in these conflicts, Turner's poem is self-consciously a pun on the kind of economic/capitalist exchanges embedded in that project. At first, Turner buys into a rather simple image of this kind of exchange:

> Dead soldiers are laid out at the registers,
> on the black conveyor belts,
> and people in line still reach
> for their wallets. (16)

Turner leans on a simple image of the kind of capitalist exchange at the heart of military conflict but does so in an indefinite way through "Dead soldiers," as easily American as Iraqi, a similar strategy to Klay's descriptions of the inability to navigate the differing space of home without militarized rhetoric. The repeated horror of these deaths does nothing to dissuade the continued consumption of this kind of destruction. Instead of an uncertain image, Turner gets definitive on this connection between consumption and death:

> Aisle number 7 is a corridor of lights.
> each dead Iraqi walks amazed
> by Tiffany posts and Bavarian pole lights.
> Motion-activated incandescents switch on
> as they pass by, reverent sentinels of light…

…welcoming them to Lowe's Home Improvement Center… (16)

Unlike the soldiers on conveyor belts, this image of dead Iraqis browsing the lighting section has a deeper complexity. Is this corridor of lights a representation of some afterlife? Or is this just an "imagistic rhyme" as described by Turner in interviews ("Turner interview" 12)? Rather than these rhyming images being an example of "living in a world of war without recognizing the war we were in" as Turner describes these images, that they unironically are a goal of the conflict, that through the expression of choice (here expressed entirely via capitalism, which seems a relatively common contemporary necessity) we place ourselves in communion with a wider culture making equally unimportant choices. Near the middle of this reflection, the narrator asks:

…Should I stand
at the magazine rack, reading
Landscaping with Stone or *The Compete*
Home Improvement Repair Book?
What difference does it make if I choose
tumbled travertine tile, Botticino marble,
or Black Absolute granite. (16)

It is too simple of a reading to think these seemingly unimportant choices speak to the narrator's alienation from the world they exist in within the Lowe's, or the absurdity of their pointless differences is meant to give a graver weight to the aforementioned traumatic ideations. I want to argue for the obvious—instead of these details being unimportant, absurd, or being indistinguishable, that instead these operate as fundamentally important exactly because they are so far removed from the kinds of trauma experienced by the narrator.

What Turner offers is a disjunction between the pull of identity toward a reproduction of Mann's "uniformed, white American masculinity" and an unknown other. This other is the source of exploration for these literary texts, as they seek to undermine, refine, and expand the interplay between war and masculinity. Embedded in this conflict is the unrealizability of a form of national manhood that is bound to the past. As policy has shifted, so has the topology of masculine identity formation as evidenced in these works. It is difficult, if not impossible, for these texts to answer the broad range of identities being searched for across the broad participation in the War on Terror. Still, if these texts serve as any model, it is identity's absence that is being shaped by this conflict. These spaces depicted—the battlefield, the home front, the training camp—lack a clear sense of directed narrative purpose that allows for the participation within a historical image of militarized masculinity shaped by the generation that fought in WWII. It is possible, then, to read these accounts of war as internally transgressive in their depiction of broken protagonists. Here, this concept of the "woundedness of masculinity" is not an attempt at spinning identity politics into the favor of the hegemonic, but instead to offer a critique for the hollowness of this essential function of masculine identity. In "Guarding the Bomber," Turner makes these points by way of an American solider tending to the devastating wounds of an unsuccessful suicide bomber. Turner writes, "…whether I want to admit it or not / the explosives continue around him, his arms / elbow-deep in the blue flame and heat / reaching in to save me" (37). In an interview about the poem, Turner claims of this image that he "doesn't know what that means exactly," but one possible reading can serve to conclude this analysis (Jarecki "Interview"). Simply, the failed suicide bomber, still moving ghost limbs after having them blown off in the explosion, has this reach interrupted by the unthinkable violence

experienced in this conflict. If the characters discussed here are equally reaching to some unknown thing—identity, intimacy, sense of belonging—this war saves no one.

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[1] This point is perhaps further served by Mann's focus on a quote from Dhia al-Shweiri, one of the detained prisoners tortured and humiliated in the Abu Gharib prison. In an interview with the Associated Press, Al-Shweiri describes the terror of his treatment not in terms of the physical torture, but that "they wanted us to feel as though we were women, the way women feel, and this is the worst insult, to feel like a woman" (ix).

[2] This way of thinking by Mann is informed by Susan Jeffords' *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*, in which Jeffords argues that the American failures in Vietnam produced a feminization of the nation that then needed redemption (Mann 5). Jeffords text influences much of my discussion here on the search for masculinization in the War on Terror (and its corresponding insufficiencies), and is a crucial text in analysis of the Vietnam era.

[3] In the forward to the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, John Nagl writes that, "The story of how the Army found itself less than ready to fight an insurgency goes back to the Army's unwillingness to internalize and build upon the lessons of Vietnam" (xii). From a policy perspective, claiming a linearity between these wars makes clearer sense.

[4] See here Sam Tenenhaus's "The World: From Vietnam to Iraq; The Rise and Fall and Rise of the Domino Theory" in *The New York Times* and Bradley Graham's "Is Iraq Another Vietnam Quagmire? No and Yes" from *The Washington Post*, both appearing in print in 2003.

[5] Though perhaps somewhere between academic and popular literature, David Kennedy's *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* is a compelling look at this question of American pessimism prior to WWII, which established a useful contrast to the optimism inspired by American prosperity post-WWII.

[6] The discussion of the muscular male body in relation to images of national prosperity is short here, but I am informed here by Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, of which the role of masculinity in Nazi Germany is a primary focus. The role of the male body in Nazism is a peculiar one, especially for the role that naturism played even within a conservative fascist state, especially in works like Hans Surén's *Mensch und Sonne*, composed largely of nude male bodies. I am also influenced here by the discussion of muscle in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, though in a much different context.

[7] Since the subject of this analysis is not about images of male bodies in the 1930s and 1940s, I want to mention only briefly that the American war propaganda was meant in some way to combat the obsession of the Nazis with physical fitness and the beauty of the male body. This idea is explored more in Dagmar Herzog's excellent book *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*.

[8] Sedgwick offers a fascinating note on the term "homophobia" that helps to expand my usage of the term, as its -phobia root would seem to establish the cause of homophobia only as fear, whereas a wider reading of the term might attend to the ways in which it reflects, for example, a desire for power. This is one possible way to understand Bonnie Mann's descriptions of the Abu Gharib prisoner abuse, as its exploitation of homophobic fears serve as a way to express power over prisoners by the threat this sexualization offers.

[9] I am inspired here, at least stylistically, by Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* and her notion of homonationalism, which for Puar is a linkage between narratives of queer tolerance and the inclusion of queer identities into things like American militarism, or at least in the defining of a progressive state. Yet, where Puar is interested in how tolerance becomes a "barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated," I am interested in how homosociality/homophobia become the ways in which masculinity can shape itself in homotopic space (336).

[10] While I am proposing a more expansive questioning of militarized spaces and Foucault's concept of heterotopia, there are ways of reading these spaces in limited ways that allow them to still function within Foucault's principles of heterotopias. Specifically, Foucault identifies "heterotopias of time" that enclose a period of time or multiple scales of time within a specific space (the museum, the cemetery). It would possible to read the site of a battle within this framework. As anyone who has experienced Civil War re-enactments can attest to, these sites can work as encapsulated slices in time, and what might seem like an unknown Pennsylvanian field can be stuck still as a historic space as a pseudo-grave to this memory. This idea however—of fixing a place within its own distinct slice of time in perpetuity—is too limited and random to be useful in understanding expansive uses of space throughout an entire conflict.

[11] Sedgwick makes this point by way of a perhaps intentionally comedic example, arguing that Ronald Reagan and Jesse Helms helping each other out on family policy issues cannot be read as the same kind of love expressed by a

gay male couple: “Is their bond in any way congruent with the bond of a loving gay male couple? Reagan and Helms would say no—disgustedly. Most gay couples would say no—disgustedly” (3).

[12] While it would be outside of the scope of this research, it would be interesting to place a stress on the validity of this continuum when considering how trans* identities have reshaped and challenged feminist discourses, or to simply consider the ways in which a Halberstanian notion of female masculinity might be a contingent part of navigating male homosocial spaces. It would be worth considering if Sedgwick’s understanding of the symmetry this continuum still applies, or if its notions of femininity are necessarily exclusionary in order to make this understanding of this “particular historical moment” work.

[13] This claim is meant to be as non-ideological as possible, but it feels necessary to be precise in my goal considering the murkiness of this territory. I am not claiming that this emasculation is a good or a bad thing, only simply that these wars offer a possibility of a further emasculation (within this historical notion of sovereign masculinity described by Mann) when the direct opposite was an implicit goal of the wars and perhaps of all war generally, and I am curious how this tension is explored by war literature.

[14] It is possible here to argue that this dependency is the first example of a disrupted masculinity, and that Murph’s inability to look out for himself directly feminizes him in the eyes of his fellow squad members. This is perhaps also defensible through a later scene in which Murph’s girlfriend writes him to say she is breaking up with him, in which Sgt. Sterling is unable to understand Murph’s reticence, who only says that he “can’t say I blame her” (81). Bartle thinks of this as an expression of his “naïveté and boyishness” (79). Sterling, however, thinks of this response as though “that line of words had been hung up in a place Sterling couldn’t reach, so he just stood there, disregarding” (81). For Sterling, the stereotyped image of uniformed masculinity, this response from Murph is not legible as masculine.

[15] In a later scene, Bartle, while AWOL in Germany, finds Sgt. Sterling at a brothel, where Sterling gets violently drunk and attacks women working at the brothel. Sterling describes his actions by saying, “This is complete freedom, hero…God, I love this” (67). Of course, this is obviously meant to be read as a delusion, but Sterling’s form of freedom is in line with this theory of negative freedom, in which Sterling has evacuated himself from responsibilities to anything other than his own self-interest.

[16] This connection between the pastoral and war literature is a pervasive concept, as described in Andrew Miller’s “Taking Fire from the Bucolic: The Pastoral Tradition in Seven American War Poems,” which also focuses on Brian Turner’s work, and argues that war exists as the embodiment of the anti-pastoral, which war poetry then excavates.

[17] A book that did not make the cut for this chapter, Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* deals extensively with the manipulation of this moment of return for certain ideological purposes.

[18] It is arguable here that this inability to perform an intimate act is simply a result of the time gap between taking part in this act, to which Klay’s narrator describes as he “hadn’t felt anything like her in seven months” (8). This is a compelling claim, but rather than focus only on the clumsiness of the act, the narrator specific claim about effectively following orders makes this seem like an inauthentic act.

[19] While there is a saying about judging books and their covers, it seems worth mentioning that Turner’s cover art for *Here, Bullet*, which features a lone soldier in full combat gear. Yet, this soldier is not framed heroically, and is shot alone, against a blank desert background (presumably Iraq) from a wide distance, further depicting this isolation. Because of the lack of the heroic frame here, it could be argued that this is an implicit claim about the emptiness of this image of heroic masculinity.

[20] There is no shortage of places where these literary sources directly apply to an assertion by the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, but for a specific example consider the header to imperative 1-150: “Sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is” (48).

[21] The degree to which “nation-building” served as motivation throughout these wars (as opposed to shortsighted searches for retributive justice) is easily debatable, but I mention it in part because of its prevalence in reflections and analyses of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Especially useful in this perspective is work done by James Dobbins in *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*, and even Francis Fukuyama’s work in *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*. While these nation-building projects seemed flawed from the onset and rife with historical blind spots, they are nonetheless prevalent in reflective discourse on American involvement.

Chapter 4: Vernacular Fantasies of Violence and Mastery: Economies of the Alt-Right and *American Psycho*

As will be discussed in this chapter, the rise of the alt-right as a political ideology in contemporary America requires a questioning of the basic assumptions that structure our rhetoric on a variety of social and political concepts. And, for the sake of the analysis here, it is essential to consider the ways in which the alt-right shifts historical understandings of the role of masculinity in understanding political life, especially considering the pervasiveness of its masculinist rhetoric. In some sense, the alt-right's explicit anti-feminist rhetoric would seem to be another version of negative masculinity's attempts to resist feminization and normalization, especially considering the alt-right's demonization of "normies" and its oppositional relationship with feminine power and the increasing role of women in contemporary society. Yet, negative masculinity is dependent upon a liberal vision of society, and as will be discussed here, is insufficient in understanding alt-right masculinity. In arguing for a literary connection to the alt-right, I hope to show that the ambiguities of the alt-right's political project are dramatized as the ambiguities of subjectivity in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. In doing so, I hope to provide both a critical framework for understanding the alt-right's recent history, and, by a critical engagement with Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho,* a reference point for the alt-right's version of masculinity, as well as a way of revealing the flaws in its consistent fantasies of mastery.

This chapter seeks to consider this new development in American discourses on masculinity and looks to the ways in which the alt-right has used antifeminist rhetoric and explicitly anti-egalitarian ideology to develop a new vision of conservatism where fantasies of

unchecked male power run rampant. In doing so, I am linking together what is collectively termed "the manosphere" with the alt-right, following Angela Nagle's claim that "the level of cross-pollination" between these groups means that their ideas of masculinity have become connected in such way as to make their separations impossible to map (98). In doing so, I will also be wrestling with perhaps the most notorious post-WWII American novel on male violence, Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*[1]. While Patrick Bateman as a form on proto-alt-right hero requires its own amount of historicizing, keeping an accurate hold on the types of violent, toxic masculinities exhibited by Bateman in Ellis's novel is similarly difficult. After reading the exhaustively descriptive, pervasive, and debasing violence orchestrated by Bateman, it is difficult to avoid asking whether we are taking part in real, material acts of violence perpetrated by Bateman (within the world of the novel) or if we are instead lost in his own fantasies of violence inspired by a pervasive homophobia and misogyny, as well as if this distinction makes any wider difference for how this violence is understood. As a result, the difficulty in judging the real and imaginary for Bateman is thematically related to the problems of navigating the political thinking of the alt-right.

The primary difficulty in treating the alt-right as a field of study for this dissertation's mode of analysis is that the alt-right attempts to cast itself outside of the dichotomies of American political thinking. Negative masculinity, at the very least, depends upon the belief in foundational liberal concepts—namely, that the defense and expansion of liberty is at the core of all understandings of freedom. As George Hawley writes in *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, the alt-right finds itself outside of the core concepts of American conservatism: "…it is not just a racist version of mainstream, *National Review*-style conservatism. The Alt-Right rejects the major premises of the conservative movement: the so-called three-legged stool of moral

traditionalism, economic liberty, and strong national defense" (4). Instead, as Hawley notes, what coalesces in the alt-right is not only something different than previous eras of white nationalist conservatism, but a different way of political thinking outside of the left/right divide of American politics. Hawley cites Hunter Wallace, who writes that contemporary political factions all "want to preserve the fundamental liberal world order" whether they are applying "liberty" or "equality" to the problem (qtd. in Hawley 5). Instead, as Wallace claims, for the alt-right, "nothing is less self-evident than the notion that all men are created equal" (5). As such, the alt-right marks as a goal the rejection of foundationally liberal concepts in American political thinking in its reimagining of white nationalist authoritarianism, and to Hawley the alt-right finds its truly radical streak by way of the "degree to which it rejects…basic American values" (5). Rather than the strict constitutionalist approaches that connects many right-wing ideologies, the alt-right sees no issue in abandoning these principles to achieve their own ends, which Hawley makes clear: "If the Constitution dictates a policy that is inimical to white interests, then the Constitution is the problem" (18). While rejecting mainstream values is not a new concept for extremist ideologies, Hawley claims that the alt-right must be viewed as something different, as it operates outside of the traditional political dichotomies apparent even in "other manifestations of the racial right" (3). If we accept Hawley's claim that the alt-right represents a movement outside of contemporary political dichotomies, a reimagining of this dissertation's organizing concept is necessary to critically approach the alt-right.

In previous examples, like in Kesey's McMurphy, negative masculinity serves as an analytical mode by way of the value placed in liberal individualism. Even in examples where this concept of liberal individualism is transgressed (J. Sutter's re-visioning of history, Ichiro's resistance to masculinizing narratives of American individualism), its core beliefs—the value of

liberty, or at least the aestheticizing of it—are still being defended, or they are used as the primary antagonist of the narrative. For the alt-right, their abandonment in the belief in liberty as a self-evident truth of all people in a society forces us to rethink their relationship to negative masculinity and to revise the term accordingly. The primary text that influences this revision is David Neiwert's *The Eliminationists*, which predates the alt-right but anticipates much of their anti-liberal ideology. Neiwert's primary contribution is his concept of eliminationism, which, after describing examples of simple public political discourse that escalate to violent threats, he defines eliminationism as such:

> What motivates this kind of talk is called *eliminationism*: a politics and a culture that shuns dialogue and the democratic exchange of ideas in favor of the pursuit of the outright elimination of the opposing side, either through suppression, exile, and rejection, or extermination…It always depicts the opposing side as beyond the pale, the embodiment of evil itself, unfit for participation in their vision of society… (11)

For Neiwert, eliminationist rhetoric is distinct from other types of political radicalism because it is "focused on an enemy within" a populace and is interested in "the extermination of those blocs by violent or civil means" (12). Rather than converting people to the cause or attempting to keep people out, as is often the case in white nationalist's imaginings of a white ethnostate, eliminationism "depicts its opposition as beyond the pale, the embodiment of evil itself, [and] unfit for participation in their vision of society" (12). Neiwert references Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's work on Nazi Germany as the first example of this eliminationist terminology, and he connects it as well to American rhetoric surrounding Japanese American internment. Yet, eliminationism is more dynamic than simply a form or racist ideology—Neiwert claims it works just as well along political lines, and that eliminationist rhetoric can be applied to anyone seen

enabling the opposition (15). Like Hawley's descriptions of the alt-right's abandonment of the "liberal world order," Neiwert argues that, "In an American culture that advertises itself as predicated on equal opportunity, eliminationism runs precisely counter to those ideals. Eliminationists, at heart, hate the very idea of an inclusive America" (12). As will be discussed further in describing the "manosphere," this level of unfitness for society is bound not only by identity categories, but it also works intra-racially by way of the abdication of the liberal maxim of "all men being created equal." Therefore, if we are to make the claim that the alt-right exists as a version of these eliminationists, it is useful to consider the goals of the movement. Hawley finds identifying an overarching goal of the alt-right as something difficult to map, as the alt-right contains within it a variety of factions with different aims. Hawley first identifies that there is a strong neo-Nazi presence within the alt-right, the most obvious form of eliminationists, which "desire the creation of something akin to the Third Reich" (14). Yet, this neo-Nazi subgroup is often denounced by members of the alt-right, and it is seen as "deliberately harming the movement" by others (14). Others, like Richard Spencer, instead desire a classic trope of white nationalist movements, which is the creation of "one or more white ethnostates in North America" (15). While Spencer claims that these are not inherently violent movements, and that his vision of a white ethnostate can be achieved without the necessity of violence, that vision still reflects a violent break both from the basic tenants of liberalism and from anything we might feasibly call the norms of contemporary society, be it by the boundaries of the nation-state or the contours of identarian politics. While these political aims might be another version of the individual versus society, what is pursued is not a greater sense of freedom but the domination of others by way of the belief in a demonstratable superiority. As such, the negative of negative masculinity, the connection between the ways in which freedom from society is imagined as

constituent component of masculinity, is here insufficient in imagining the role of masculinity within alt-right movements and needs redefined more precisely as eliminationist masculinity. This eliminationist masculinity seeks not just the freedom from the perceived normalizing and feminizing forces of modern life, but the institution of an authoritarianism at the expense of others, by way of the domination of others.

While the anonymized and decentralized online presence of much of alt-right discourse makes getting a sense of its totality difficult, one area its authoritarian rhetoric unites is in reaction to contemporary gender politics. As Angela Nagle has argued in her book *Kill All Normies*, "anti-feminist masculinist politics" has risen alongside the expansion of the alt-right. These masculinist discourses become collectively known as the "manosphere"[2] with direct overlap to the rhetoric of the alt-right: "The 'red pill' metaphor that has been central to alt-right rhetoric has also been central to these anti-feminist masculinist political subcultures that constantly cross-pollinate" (86). For the manosphere, the red pill metaphor is an extension of a central theme of *The Matrix*, which is that it possible to be enlightened on the "truth" of our systems of social functioning by way of having this truth revealed to you, in all its harmful reality. "Being red pilled," Nagle claims, is then a primary metaphor for enlightening other men on what they perceive as the reality of contemporary feminist politics—that it produces "false rape accusations, female-on-male violence, cultural misandry" and further increasingly misogynistic claims about the goals of feminism (88). As Mike Wendling argues, "As you move to the more extreme end of the spectrum, the ideas of the manosphere start to dovetail quite neatly with those of the alt-right…[including] several terms that are now dictionary entries in the alt-right lexicon, chief among them the 'red pill' concept" (63). By extension, while the alt-right

may contain divergent forms of political thinking, the manosphere contains enough overlap to implicate it as a primary influencer in the ways of thinking about gender for the alt-right.

From the perspective of the manosphere, this masculinist discourse is essential because of a contemporary cultural imbalance that normalizes feminist discourse as this feminist thinking is subsumed by mainstream political discourse. Wendling, in his book *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the White House*, writes that, "…women's issues of all sorts are better covered in the mainstream media than ever before. Even in the last few years, awareness of feminism has not just been raised but has more or less exploded…All of this has contributed to a countervailing rise in backlash chatter on the manosphere" (62-63). If one accepts that feminism writ large and "women's issues" loosely defined finally find themselves in more central places in American public consciousness, it is arguable that these are also creating new sexual economies, as concepts like consent, reproductive health, and increased autonomy over dating become norms. Nagle writes that these evolving economies produce "attendant insecurities of a society in which women have sexual choice and freedom" (96). It is these insecurities within the masculinist alt-right discourse that I want to interrogate here. It is because of these pervasive insecurities that much of the alt-right discourse on gender consists of the utter dehumanization of women, and the exclusion of them from positions of influence in alt-right communities.

As a result, there have been divergent ways in which the alt-right has been responsive to the new sexual economies which animate so much of their fear. Responses range from groups like Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), which Nagle defines as "a straight male separatist group whose members have chosen…to avoid romantic relationships with women in protest against a culture destroyed by feminism," to the violent "incel" subculture of men who classify themselves as "involuntarily celibate," and who became notorious following the violent rampage

of Elliot Rodger, whose violence was lionized within the community (94). For those who do attempt to still develop relationships with women, Wendling and Nagle both identify the terms of this engagement as working through the misogynistic logics of the "pick-up artist" (PUA) community. In the PUA version of "red pilling," the goal is to approach sexual relationships through cynical forms of social exchange, in which the language and logics of conquest dominate the process. Hawley argues that this is a form of "sex realism" offered by the alt-right that relies on a version of biological essentialism that reinstitutes a stricter and more totalizing form of patriarchy and classifies men and women to specific social roles (17). Put simply, the stated logic within the rhetoric of PUA communities is that men exist to conquer women, and women exist to serve the interests of men.

Wendling and Nagle both argue that the most notorious figure in the alt-right's form of PUA rhetoric is Daryush Valizadeh, known within the communities as Roosh V. I include Roosh V here only to connect the alt-right, violence, and the role of Patrick Bateman within *American Psycho*, and to point to the underlying authoritarianism that pervades the alt-right PUA view on women. As Wendling describes, Roosh V's form of PUA writing places him firmly within the disparate ways of thinking within the alt-right: "His site Return of Kings…operated under a code he called 'neomasculinity,' which seems to be a mixture of banalities…old-fashioned ideas dredged up to serve as outrage triggers…and straight-up white-genocide-themed alt-right shout-outs" (68). Yet, Roosh V's form of "neomasculinity" is rife with inconsistencies—while it consists largely of the chronicling of sexual conquest, Roosh V's site also "rails against women's sexual freedom and pushes a traditionalist, anti-birth-control line" (69). While this conquest is valorized as the successful demonstration of the alt-right form of liberated masculinity disconnected from feminist discourses on gender, it also classifies a key issue "ruining Western

women" as their "promiscuity" (69). Again, this is a form of freedom only applicable to some (i.e. red pilled men of the manosphere), and one that erases the progress of women's liberation movements whose gains in the sexual revolution of the 1960s they seek to enjoy. Nagle classifies this as a "frustrating contradiction and hypocrisy" of the PUA community, who "want the benefits of tradition without its necessary restraints and duties" (96). So, while Roosh V publishes articles like "Socialism, feminism, cultural Marxism, and social justice warrior-ism aim to destroy the family unit, decrease the fertility rate, and impoverish the state through large welfare entitlements," these apparent antagonizing -isms are the very things that enable the forms of sexual freedom they valorize, and see no contradiction in writing articles like "Women belong at home, not at the office" when expanded social networks for women again enables the kind of sexual economies they seek (Wendling 135). Nagle identifies it this way: "…Roosh V complains about the low morals of 'sluts', but writes an entire series called Bang about random promiscuous sex with women, strangers he seems to actively dislike" (96). In the same ways that is difficult for Hawley to map a clearly organized ideology to the disparate views of the alt-right, it is difficult here to be sure the degree to which this hypocrisy exists as either unexamined, unrealized misogyny, or hyper-rhetoric meant to create the kind of "outrage triggers" that Wendling identifies. Yet, irrespective of its relationship to reality or fantasy (and, presumably, there is no greater opportunity for fantasy than in the archival work of something like Roosh V's Bang), the manosphere/PUA way of thinking about these new sexual economies results in the creation of an internalized hierarchy, of which mastery over this economy becomes the way of realizing one's true sense of "neomasculinity." Wendling writes:

> Strangely enough, the promise of male liberation and individual self-determination is never quite borne out in the manosphere. In the world of PUAs and meninists, gender

> roles aren't just prescribed for women, who are either submissive wives, fuck toys, or avoidable feminists, but also for men, who are either "alpha"—red-blooded, bedpost-notching hero-warriors—or "beta," i.e. weak, sexually frustrated losers. (70)

Rather than liberating men from social hierarchies that they might otherwise interpret as the *reason* they find themselves isolated from modern sexual economies, the PUA community simply reimagines this hierarchy as something they now have agency over. By redefining the terms of these economies through a deeply thorough PUA vernacular, success becomes something achievably real rather than something they are fundamentally out of sync with in a modern world rife with "avoidable feminists." The common denominator in this approach to sexuality is an overarching theme of mastery—here, concepts like "neomasculinity" are less about the ways in which they enable the subject to form a sense of freedom from a society that seeks to normalize and control him, but exist instead as opportunities to demonstrate a sense of mastery over others, and to achieve a tangible result from the ability to navigate these varied performances. For the manosphere, sexual conquest is simply conquest, a way to concretely articulate and distribute a form of power through metrics and strategies that cast debasement and misogyny as "realism." To transcend "beta" status and to participate within the community as an "alpha" male, one must master this sexual economy by way of the application of these contradictory forces in PUA rhetoric. The "alpha" male is the figure in which this fantasy of mastery finds its most concrete form, but the ambiguity that arises from the establishment of this male hierarchy is whether the "alpha" male exists as a form of individualism so essential to the analysis of masculinity here, or if it is simply a "realist" account of the dynamics of social power afforded to men in contemporary American sexual economies—again, this ambiguity, of either

being an outside or being an effect of culture, appears throughout Patrick Bateman's attempts at mediating his own sense of subjectivity.

As well, and as will be discussed as embodied by Bateman, it is important to link these sexual economies to the neoliberal economies that the alt-right serves as a reaction to. For Wendy Brown, neoliberalism is the animating force behind this reaction by way of its connections between freedom and oppression in an alt-right visioning of authoritarianism. To make this argument, Brown relies on Herbert Marcuse's idea of "repressive desublimation." She writes, "[Repressive desublimation] looks like freedom while shoring up the status quo and submitting to it. Its expressions…may be bold or vulgar enough even to appear as maverick or dissident… this daring or disinhibition… symptomize[s] or iterate[s] rather than counter[s] the order's violences or prejudices" (31-32). In this idea, Marcuse claims that the normalizing functions of mass culture that produce a "flattening out" are a fundamentally conservative force rather than a progressive, liberating one. Rather than eliminating class distinction, they simply allow for the continuation of the status quo. Marcuse writes:

> …The decisive difference is in the flattening out of the contrast (or conflict) between the given and the possible, between the satisfied and the unsatisfied needs. Here, the so-called equalization of class distinctions reveals its ideological function. If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television program and visit the same resort places…then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population. (10)

In doing so, Marcuse argues that normalization by way of this desublimation allows for an evacuation of deeper aesthetic meaning such that the meaning is itself inessential[3]. For Marcuse,

this repressively desublimated society "turns everything it touches into a potential source of progress *and* exploitation, of drudgery *and* satisfaction, of freedom *and* of oppression" (81). Brown finds a link in this simultaneity of opposites in contemporary expressions of political dissent by the alt-right, and she argues that "outlaw expressions of patriotism and nationalism" are similarly desublimated by way of their own internal contradictions, that in their "frenzied affirmation of individual freedom" that has led to violent action, this twinning of freedom and oppression is apparent (32). In other words, while the professed claims of the alt-right might be a pursuit of individual freedom unbound by traditional forms of liberal thought and against oppression, it is a freedom that instead *enacts* oppression in its creation of its form of freedom. As such, Brown claims this forms a kind of "authoritarian freedom" advocated by the alt-right. It is my argument here that *American Psycho* and the alt-right both exist as concrete forms of Marcuse's repressive desublimation, and they exist then as similar versions of a desublimated masculinity.

The goal of this overview of the alt-right's response to contemporary sexual economies and their narratives of masculinity and power is to arrive at the following conclusions. First, while the alt-right constitutes a wide-ranging movement, it coalesces under a basic rejection of liberalism, and openly advocates for supremacy instead of universal liberty, which requires a redefinition of negative masculinity to eliminationist masculinity. This eliminationist rhetoric becomes a rhetoric of domination, which extends not only to the alt-right's dreams of white ethnostates, but to their basic configuration of gender norms, in which men have unlimited dominion over women. This view of gender is therefore shaped by the PUA/manosphere discourse on contemporary sexual economies which rearticulate sex as a process of conquest and domination, and ingrains within the alt-right an obsession with a concept of mastery. In doing so,

a form of authoritarian freedom is created by way of a persistent repressive desublimation to articulate the alt-right's contradictory imaginings of an ideal social world. In each of these conclusions, there are echoes in the ways in which Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* has been critically approached since its publication. In forming this connection, there are a variety of associative links between the contemporary alt-right movement in America and the material of Ellis's novel. In doing so, I am attempting to balance competing ways of interpreting Bateman, and, in doing so, expanding this analysis in two directions. First is that Patrick Bateman might be best understood as the ideal example of a desublimated subject, a simultaneous experience of oppositions that become difficult to differentiate. Interpreted literally, Bateman offers a vision of the kind of rhetoric of mastery desired by the alt-right/manosphere as they attempt to reshape the sexual economies of contemporary American life as a form or re-masculinization. However, by pressing on the un/hyper-reality of the violence throughout *American Psycho*, Bateman's apparent mastery of his world is, like Bateman himself, simply not there, and Ellis's novel depicts the *absence* of control rather than the achievement of it. In doing so, Bateman reveals the contradictions of this attempt at mastery—his narrative becomes increasingly unreal as Bateman seeks a further mastery over the vernacular fantasies that define his sense of being.

Even before the publication of the novel, *American Psycho* was embroiled in controversy. Indeed, part of the difficulty in using Ellis's novel as an object lesson for the alt-right stems from the wide-ranging criticism of the novel and the reclassifications of its genre throughout the debate over its merit. As David Eldridge describes in his essay "The Generic American Psycho," before the book's release "grisly passages, self-evidently out of context" were leaked to various magazines (20). This led to an understandable outrage, which, in the absence of the greater context of the novel, focused on Ellis himself. As such, the initial outrage over the novel's

violence became a judgment of the author, and it shifts to Ellis the totality of the misogyny displayed by Bateman—if Bateman is beyond the pale, and his violence and worldview are unimaginable, these must exist then as fantasies of a sadistic author disconnected from social reality with nothing to say of the world of real people. Here, mapped out by David Eldridge, we find most of the early rhetoric on the novel, such as Roger Rosenblatt's claim that *American Psycho* was not a "real book," John Leo's description of it as "artless junk," and *Publisher Weekly's* claim that it was not "acceptable in mainstream publishing" (qtd. in Eldridge 20). These early reviews, including the National Organization for Women's famous claim that it is a "how-to-manual" on "torture and dismemberment of women" effectively classified Ellis's novel as pornographic, misogynistic, and not a text worthy of literary merit (qtd. in Murphet 68). This critique is not without its own merit, as *American Psycho* in fact *relies* upon its alienation and its moral ambiguity to achieve the horrific effect of reading Bateman's narrative. Eldridge writes, "Indeed, the novel consists of a profoundly alienating first-person narrative, in which Ellis adopts and remains in the persona of Bateman, resulting in a seemingly endless litany of grooming products, restaurant menus and designer labels - a text which only really comes 'alive' when Patrick kills someone" (22). I would dispute Eldridge's claim—if the text comes alive in its violence, it is only by way of one's own interest in the violence, as the violent scenes in the novel are written in a similarly clinical and affectless tone as the "litany of grooming products." If the difficulty in imagining Bateman as a literary character is rooted in the difficult to imagine Bateman as a subject, or, in other words, to imagine a voice in the text other than Ellis's own, it is made more difficult by the degree to which Bateman is alienated from his own sense of self, and, at times, evidence of a desublimated subject.

After the outrage that followed its initial publication, the first example of *American Psycho* being taken seriously as literature is in Elizabeth Young's "The Beast in the Jungle, the Figure in the Carpet," which is an excoriating critique of what Young describes as a pervasive misreading of the literary intentions of the novel. Young's essay is the first to take Bateman's actions as more than literal enactments of violence, as she argues that, "Only by decisively admitting Patrick's unreliability…can the critical imagination be freed" (101). Yet, in the pursuit of this admission of unreliability, and the examination of places in the text where Bateman either denies himself as a fully formed subject or has these moments tested, Young ends up practically erasing Bateman from the text. Young writes:

> Patrick is Void. He is the Abyss. He is a textual impossibility, written out, elided until there is no "Patrick" other than the sign or signifier that sets in motion the process that must destroy him…Patrick becomes in effect, feminized, excluded from "existing" in language; he is the void, the mystery, the threat of dreadful desires, the uncontrolled libido, the unconscious, the dark side of the moon. As "nothing" Patrick is dangerous. As a person, as a consumer, he cannot exist; he is an impossibility. (119)

A key textual passage for Young to produce this conclusion is by way of an early Bateman lecture about foreign and domestic policy. When the topic at a dinner party switches to political issues, Bateman is asked what are the "pressing problems at hand" (Ellis 15). What follows is a list of increasingly contradictory platitudes, which, as Young claims, are presented in a "chilling" dead-pan tone: "This disassociation between life as it is lived on the city streets, between this and the media avalanche that snows us…providing a seamless, self-contained, *meaningless* background commentary, this disassociation *is* the reality—for Patrick and for everyone else" (98). In that way, Bateman has no voice, and is instead speaking in the language of television

news, and his inability to grasp the contradictions he is creating here can easily be read as a description of his increased alienation from the subjects he is listing, and Bateman's dive into meaning is quickly brushed off over the promise of sorbet to end the dinner party.

As well, Bateman himself is a difficult object of analysis by way of his own continual sense of non-existence in the novel, and the uncertainty of his own subjectivity. The question of Bateman's subjectivity is, again, a central focus in Young's analysis. As Young writes:

> Before they arrive at Evelyn's house…there are already two cases of mistaken identity—guys with slicked-back hair, suspenders and horn-rimmed glasses who look exactly like other people they know. Ellis has no intention of deserting his obsession with deindividualization. It is extended so that it functions as the primary plot device. (96)

This deindividualization is the primary way in which Bateman's violence could perceivably operate as reality and not as fantasy (a serial killer with effectively no identity), but the degree to which Bateman is deindividualized would seem then to direct the reader to the impossibility of his being. If Bateman is denied this sense of being and is thus incapable of rendering his own moral judgment in the text, this work is offloaded to the reader. Eldridge highlights this tension when he writes, "A key difficulty with the novel is that it aggressively requires the reader to provide the critical condemnation of Bateman's attitude and actions - for, in the first-person narrative, no such condemnation can be found within Bateman's own perspective" (24). The root of this difficulty again lies in the flatness of the novel's approach to its own horror—there is no direction given to the reader for how to judge this material, and it is presented in its naked brutality. As such, Young claims, "Ellis himself does not achieve judgement and closure in the text but an endless circularity and *deferral of meaning*" (100). This deferral of meaning is echoed throughout the novel in the deferral of subjecthood. These mistaken identities are everywhere,

and characters are consistently calling each other by the wrong name. When Bateman takes Patricia on a date to Barcadia, he is greeted by a different name by the doorman: "'How are you, Mr. McCullough?' I nod, opening the door for Patricia, and before following her in say, 'Fine, uh, Jim,' and I shake his hand" (78). Here this faked familiarity can be read as part of the continual status exchange—that being *known* is more important than being known. These identity confusions are everywhere in the novel, and they occur with enough regularity for them to seem not only unremarkable but a necessary part of the general social norms of the world Bateman lives in. Soon after this effectively anonymous exchange with the doorman, Bateman is eating with a group of similarly anonymous people, including Paul Owen, a critical character in the discussion of Bateman's control on reality:

> Owen has mistaken me for Marcus Halberstam (even though Marcus is dating Cecilia Wagner) but for some reason it really doesn't matter and it seems a logical faux pas since Marcus works at P & P also, in fact does the same exact thing I do, and he also has a penchant for Valentino suits and clear prescription glasses and we share the same barber at the same place, the Pierre Hotel, so it seems understandable, it doesn't irk me. (89)

If one is to read the novel working as a satire of the yuppie culture of the 1980s, it is easy then to see this as a satirical take on both the monoculture of Wall Street yuppies and the vapidity of those involved—not only are the people essentially interchangeable, but no real effort is being made to keep track of anyone's identity. Despite the seeming congeniality and homosociality between then men in this scene, it is as if they are simply talking to themselves or talking *at* each other in an endless process of circularity that Young describes. Bateman, as the narrator, might seem to have more control over this scene, as he is naming the characters we see and is not irked by the mistake, and he identifies that Paul Owen has misidentified Marcus Halberstam's

girlfriend (although the factuality of this detail is likely unverifiable), but even Bateman is susceptible to this lack of recognition. When Paul and others leave, "they stop by the table Dibble and Hamilton are sitting at, or at least I *think* it's Dibble and Hamilton" (90). This is the level of familiarity of his network—people seem to be who they are, but they might easily be someone else. In a sense, Bateman can be anonymous even among people who presumably should know him. Someone named Paul Denton, also in the scene, seems to recognize Bateman as not being Marcus Halberstam, and Bateman says that "he seems panicked, convinced of something by my presence, as if he recognized me from somewhere" (90). It seems safe to claim that this anonymity is a vehicle for the kinds of violence that Bateman describes himself as participating in—if no one can remember who he is, there is less of a threat of ever being caught for his crimes.

If this violence is something *else,* something unrepresentable and unimaginable within social norms such that it could so easily be ascribed to the sadism of the author, Bateman's role as a fully-realized subject must be questioned[4]. In this questioning of Bateman's role as a fully realized subject, we are simultaneously questioning whether the violence, which led to so much protest of the novel, exists as something tangibly real within the interior world of the novel. Mark Storey claims that no understanding of Bateman's realism can be disconnected from what the world of the novel has taught him about the world. He writes, "Bateman conceives of the world in a purely clichéd, masculine way. The things he buys, the friends he keeps, the sex he has, and the violence he perpetrates are all told through a male vernacular particular to the 1980s that he inhabits" (60). Storey's description of Bateman operating within a male vernacular is a useful connection to the kinds of male vernaculars seen in alt-right/manosphere discourse. If we agree with Storey that Ellis "undermines the stability of those language systems and shows the

impossibility of their attempts to adapt to postmodernity," there is a thematic link to the alt-right's impossibility to adapt their discourses on gender to contemporary ways of thinking about gender (59). Similarly, if Bateman's subjectivity is in question, or, in other words, if we are uncertain of his sense of unification amidst the disparate voices that he attempts to yoke together into a personality (the language of advertising, pornography, and so on), the alt-right/manosphere's own disjunctive views on gender (of their authoritarian liberation) are similarly lost, and can then only rely upon the pornographized male vernacular in at attempt at coherency.

Evidence of the multiple voices Bateman adopts abound in Ellis's novel, but the most immediately jarring is the early description of Bateman's morning routine. These long soliloquies of Bateman's routine can take up pages, as it does in the early chapter "Morning." To consider only a sample, after two pages of what Bateman chooses to do every morning, he slips out of and into first-person:

> You should use an aftershave lotion with little or no alcohol. Never use cologne on your face, since the high alcohol content dries your face and makes you look older. One should use an alcohol-free antibacterial toner with a water-moistened cotton ball to normalize the skin. Applying moisturizer is the final step… (27).

Bateman's discourse on this routine continues for an additional two pages, and the monotony of this dialogue can only be understood as a kind of intentional boredom. Yet, the boredom created by Bateman's intense focus on his self-care can be read in a variety of ways. On some level, it possible to claim that this soliloquy speaks to the novel's overall satirical intentions of consumer capitalism by way of a hyper-consumption of expensive and exotic skincare products. Eldridge arrives at similar conclusions in his analysis, writing that Bateman's "fictive culture in which

'surface' is everything, and 'must have' designer suits and restaurant reservations are valued more than the life of a man, woman or child, Bateman the serial killer seems to act with impunity, presenting his increasingly excessive violence as an allegory for the consumerist excesses of the 1980s" (23). As well, Bateman's seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of this fictive culture, especially when contrasted with the absence of descriptions of what his job actually entails, speaks to what is given primary focus in Bateman's worldview. Yet, the didactic and affectless tone of these sections speak to the level of desublimation Bateman experiences—Bateman's internal monologue is barely past the level of instructional writing and is inflected with a total absence of personality. Even further, it cannot keep hold of who the subject of its extended monologue is, as if the concept of Patrick Bateman is insufficient and carrying out the narrative task.

As further evidence for the uncertain way we are meant to read the interjections of other voices in the novel, David Brauner looks to the chapter on the band Genesis[5]. If we are to assume that this review of Genesis's output is still from the narrative of Bateman, how to read this extended, boring passage of writing on the band is a challenge. This chapter directly follows a scene in which Bateman berates a homeless man and mutilates a stray dog. To follow up with discussion of a much loathed 1980s pop rock band would seem then to disorient the reader, or at least evacuate the reader from the moral payoff one might expect after Bateman's previous actions. This is a moment in the novel where Brauner claims that, "…the conjunction of interests and knowledge between Ellis and Bateman, combined with the absence of any voice in the narrative other than Bateman's, makes it difficult to locate irony with any certainty, and yet *American Psycho* demands to be read ironically" (48). Within this extended passage, Brauner notes that if we are to read this as Bateman's voice, there is more at play here than another

example of Bateman assuming a voice, because of the constant mistakes Bateman makes in his review of Genesis's work. As Brauner writes, Bateman complains that a track is "reminiscent" of a track that would come after it in the band's chronology, he begins to mix up the names of the band members, and he has noticeable blind spots in his musical knowledge, effectively erasing a period of the band's history (50). Again, how to read this passage is challenging, and would seem to invite a binary reading—either it is indicative of an author interjecting their own critique of a band and its fanbase (and an example of irony), or it is Bateman demonstrating his own insufficient subjectivity again, and even for a band he describes himself as a fan of and that is the "best, most exciting band to come out of England in the 1980s" (which is itself an inaccuracy, as the band formed in the late 1960s) he is unable to participate in a deeper meaning, missing even the most basic details in the repetition of someone else's voice (Ellis 136). I want to offer a third reading, and frame this around the idea of mastery—in these moments where Bateman is attempting to demonstrate his mastery over something, here over the basic facts about a band he is attempting to be a fan of, he is incapable of keeping track of all the details, and he attempts to cover up actual mastery with the *performance* of mastery, here by way of the voice of overwrought music critic (similar, in some sense, to Roosh V's voice of mastery in his columns of sexual conquest, which has been mercifully left out of this analysis). If this scene is considered for what it offers to this concept of mastery, it solves the problem of the irony of its textual conjunction by way of allowing it to be simultaneously serious and ironic, or, said another way, desublimated. Brauner cannot arrive at this conclusion, and instead attempts to validate all sides: "Is Ellis satirising the values of Bateman's world or is his investment in that world too great for him to establish any ironic distance between it and him? Is he complicit in Bateman's crimes or is he condemning them? The answer is both" (48). This too seems caught in

the trap that Young compels us to avoid, which denies the novel its right as an aesthetic object to separate art from the real.

For Ellis's novel to exist as a social satire, one must believe that the text is itself an exaggeration of the social climate of the Reaganite Wall Street era of the 1980s, and not instead a statement on what can be manifested by this culture. This is James Annesley's primary claim in his book *Blank Fictions*. In doing so, Annesley sets up a foundational claim about the nature of aesthetics in his evaluation of the criticism of Ellis's novel. He writes that the "moral censure" applied to Ellis and to his novel is instead something that should be placed on Bateman and the world that he finds himself in, and that too much attention has been placed on "the significance of representations of murder" rather than the meaning behind the actual murders themselves (Annesley 12). Yet, there are a few assumptions that need unpacked in these claims. First, when Annesley claims that these "brutal images" are not uncommon in American fiction or American society-at-large, Annesley seems to be claiming that the moral censure applied to Ellis becomes a tacit acceptance by critics of society as it is—that, it is not the fault of the society that could produce a literary character like Bateman, it is solely the fault of the sadistic mind of Ellis. This then requires one to take a position on the nature of the violence in *American Psycho*. If the violence "serves a complex symbolic and communicative function," as Annesley claims, then the work is taking an "obviously moral position" (12-13). Annesley attempts to understand this obviously moral position and clear significance of the violence via the thing in which Bateman demonstrates his unyielding fascination with and mastery over, his endless consumer capitalism. Annesley writes, "In the terms laid down by Ellis, Patrick Bateman's murders are crimes for which an increasingly commercial and materialistic society must take ultimate responsibility"

(13). To achieve this understanding, Annesley directs us to Bateman's murdering of Torri and Tiffany. Ellis writes:

> As usual, in an attempt to understand these girls I'm filing their deaths. With Torri and Tiffany I use a Minox LX ultra-miniature camera that takes 9.5mm film, has a 15mm f/3.5 lens, an exposure meter and a built-in neutral density filter and sits on a tripod. I've put a CD of the Traveling Wilburys into a portable CD player that sits on the headboard above the bed, to mute any screams. (304)

Annesley claims that this is a clear example of the Bateman being "unaware of the difference between commodities and human life," and that his attempts at understanding his victims are less successful than his ability to understand the specific functions of his commodity, i.e. his camera. Thus, as Bateman continues to collect more victims throughout the text and he does so in ever-increasing detail, human life becomes effectively reclassified as commodity, and the flat, affectless descriptions of his violence fully merge with his descriptions of clothing and other objects: "The litany of atrocities constitutes, like his discussion of his camera's specifications, some kind of reflection on the power of his ownership…everything has been commodified" (14). Again we see a fundamental ambiguity and tension in Bateman's identity, as his expression of mastery over commodification can be read here as Bateman becoming the ideal subject in a consumerist society, while at the same time his violence can be read as an expression of his attempt at freedom, and his inability to "understand these girls" is a measurement of his critical distance from properly functioning in this society. Yet, both would seem to place within Bateman faith in his reliability as a narrator, and, as Storey usefully notes, establishing the reality of this violence "places trust in the subjective nature of what we are told…To believe the events are true, or even to react to them in ways that suggest that they are the product of our narrator's

imagination, creates a Patrick Bateman who is unmistakably there" (59). This would seem to run afoul of Bateman's own famous descriptions of himself, that there exists only an "idea of Patrick Bateman" and that he "simply [is] not there" (Ellis 376-377). To make sense of this contradiction, Storey concludes that Bateman must be read as something other than a subject with agency:

> "Patrick Bateman" is not a single coherent identity that comes from within, but a pliable, artificial identity that is formed entirely by the culture that surrounds him. In almost all aspects of the novel, Ellis constantly undermines Bateman's subjectivity by having his account of the world be an uneasy collage of the different spheres of masculine language that create him. (59)

Indeed, this masculine language infects Bateman's voice in various guises. The more disconnected from Bateman's voice it gets, as in the multiple pages dedicated to Huey Lewis, the more defensible it might seem that Bateman is no longer there. As Storey claims, "Ellis increasingly blurs the line between reality and unreality as the novel progresses" (59). Certainly, this seems like a defensible position, especially considering the absurd scale of the violence and the casualness at which Bateman treats the possibility of its consequences in later violent scenes in the novel. Yet, increasingly blurring the line between fantasy and reality would not seem to necessitate the *removal* of the line, nor would it negate the early sections of the novel which we might feel Bateman as a more agentive force in his world, and this highlights the persistent ambiguity between the real Bateman as "alpha" male and the unreal, desublimated Bateman as "beta" product of Wall Street monoculture.

In an early scene in the novel, Bateman encounters a "very pretty homeless girl," and despite feeling as though she is too attractive to be homeless, Bateman sees this as being "all the

more heart-breaking" (Ellis 85). In this disconnect between her apparent attractiveness and Bateman's interpretation of her situation, Bateman's "nastiness vanishes…I lean in, still staring, eyes radiating sympathy into her blank, grave face, an dropping a dollar into the Styrofoam cup I say, 'Good luck.'" (86). Yet, this woman is not homeless, and this attempt at sympathy is met with derision for dropping a dollar in the woman's full cup of coffee. With his assumption proven to be wrong, and his sense of mastery is "shaken," and while in a taxi Bateman is left to "…hallucinate the buildings into mountains, into volcanoes, the streets become jungles, the sky freezes into a backdrop, and before stepping out of the cab I have to cross my eyes in order to clear my vision" (86). Here it feels difficult to imagine that Bateman is not imbued with a sense of agency—while his interpretation of the situation is certainly formed "by the culture that surrounds him," it seems a strained reading to imagine this as a something other than Bateman's realism. Yet, as Storey is correct to note in his overall analysis of Bateman, this entire scene works by way of cliché—Bateman's act of generosity is less an act of genuine sympathy (especially when contrasted by the way he treats other homeless people in the novel), but instead a reenactment of both a romanticized and sentimentalized vision of a differing social class, and within the wider savior complex a male ethos, again conforming to the expectations of what Bateman thinks society expects from him.

Of course, the primary test for where we experience a real version of Patrick Bateman or an imaginary form is through the novel's violent scenes. There are two elements of these violent scenes that force the reader into taking an ethical position on the novel—first, the flatness in which they are depicted, and second the seemingly endless frequency at which they appear. Like the language of his skincare routine and of his music reviews, Eldridge argues these previous narrative ambiguities seek to antagonize our response to the novel's violence, and to ask

"whether Bateman's violence re-creates what he sees and reads, just as he repeats everything else he reads, or whether it is another identity he is trying on in his mind" (28). In doing so, Eldridge seems to be making another binary claim—either this violence is recreated and material, and Bateman is living out his obsessions with serial killers and violent films by directly enacting them, or they exist as simply the wanderings of a deranged mind, undifferentiated from his description of commodities. Yet, this binary feels insufficient for attending to the ethical positions that the novel forces the reader into, as shown by the consistent ethical positioning of the critics mentioned here. I want to follow analysis from C. Namwali Serpell in the essay "Repetition and the Ethics of Suspended Reading in *American Psycho*" and advance a third way of understanding this disjunction between ethical positionings. Serpell argues that what is produced in much of the analysis mapped out here is an absolutist divide between two positions that "do not actually function on the same level": "Somehow, in the rebuttal of the ethical argument against Patrick Bateman, critics have moved from pleading his insanity to pleading his nonexistence. We are left with two strange argumentative poles: Patrick is evil versus Patrick doesn't exist" (50). This is a similar formulation as the earlier "alpha"/"beta" hierarchy, in which Bateman's real evil becomes a form of mastery by way of his resistance to the normalizing forces of his social world, or his non-existence configures him as a "beta" member of the one-dimensional desublimated world that Marcuse identifies—these ambiguities are then usefully linked. While Storey's claims of Bateman being a "nonexistent subject" are useful in understanding the depth of Bateman's desublimation and the degree to which the novel asks the reader to engage in moral questioning over the actions of the narrator, they would also seem to imply that Bateman is not an agentive force within the novel, and the only opposition to his evil is to treat it as immeasurably real, and thus an expression of a freedom from social norms that

would configure him otherwise (for example, as the desubmlimated Patrick Bateman/Marcus Halberstam). Alternatively, if we think of Patrick as simply the embodiment of evil, we evacuate from the text so much of its literary ambition, as mapped out by Elizabeth Young. Instead, I want to make a different claim, which is first that what needs to be considered in Bateman is that his fantasies still mark him as an agentive force in the novel. As Serpell claims, this agency is "crucial" because it describes "his capacity to affect others both within and outside the novel" (52). We must again think of here in terms of the potential of this action, as Serpell claims that by discounting Bateman's evil actions the novel "cannot infect the reader" (52). A better question, following Serpell's analysis, than whether this violence is real or if Bateman is real would then be to question what this violence does in the text, and what does it mean for it to be representable only as fantasy.

Usefully, Serpell concludes that the real question about Bateman's violence is not whether it is real or fantasy, or at what point it is one or the other in the novel, but that through its repetition of violence it creates within the reader an *uncertainty* over its realness (56). This presents another paradox of Ellis's novel. As Serpell claims, the repetition of events in the novel, especially the repeated scenes of violence, seem to "make him more real" (59). Yet, as Serpell writes, "The sheer number of murders Patrick claims to have committed renders them less probable" (59). I would argue that despite Bateman's desire to get away with his murders, the uncertainty of their reality is seen as his greatest threat. This is thematized best in the "Chase, Manhattan" chapter. In this scene, Patrick imagines himself (or is actually) being pursued by increasing amounts of police after murdering a saxophonist, and the scene quickly switches to something out a film chase scene. As well, Bateman shifts his narrative into and out of third-person, furthering the sense that he is, possibly, only imagining seeing himself being chased so

dramatically (and here arguably within male vernaculars of movie heroism). After escaping the possible police to the safety of his office, Bateman feels compelled to confess his crimes to his lawyer. Ellis writes, “I decide to make public what has been, until now, my private dementia, but Harold isn’t in, business, London, I leave a message, admitting everything, leaving nothing out, thirty, forty, a hundred murders” (352). As Serpell notes, not only is this confession inanimate by way of the answering machine (as opposed to telling it to a person, thus further commodifying even the admission of guilt), it is not taken seriously by its recipient. Later, after meeting Harold Carnes at a party, Harold not only misidentifies Bateman as someone named Davis, he figures the recording was all a joke (59). Thinking he is speaking to Davis, Harold tells Bateman, “‘I am not one to bad-mouth anyone, your joke *was* amusing. But come on, man, you had one fatal flaw: Bateman’s such a bloody ass-kisser, such a brown-nosing goody-goody, that I couldn’t fully appreciate it’” (387). Disappointed that his confession has been cast aside as a joke, Bateman demands that Carnes recognizes him for the violent psychopath that he sees himself as. It is here where we reach the moment at which most of the beliefs in Bateman-as-fantasy find their argument. After confessing that he killed Paul Owen, Harold tells Bateman that this impossible, “Because…I had…dinner…with Paul Owen…twice…in London…*just ten days ago*” (388). Yet, while this is meant to be a revelation, and a clear denial of Bateman’s self-created identity as masterful serial killer, within the logic of the novel we are only left with ambiguities. As Eldridge claims, if Harold can misidentify Bateman as Davis, and Owen misidentify Bateman as Halberstam, there is no specific reason to believe anyone’s recollection in any scene can be trusted. By this point in the novel, Bateman is seeking certainty, yet there is no one in his world that confirm this for him. The world he finds himself in is so similarly self-absorbed that it is not possible for them to notice the supposed violent actions of another person

(Eldridge 23). Storey finds the net result of all these murders similarly uncertain: "As he seems never to do any cleaning, we can only presume that his maid, whom he mentions more than once, does it for him. Would she stay silent about finding a decapitated head wearing sunglasses on the kitchen work surface?" (61).

Yet, following Serpell, it is exactly in these moments of questioning that the novel is making its primary ethical claim. In that sense, the uncertainty of the violence, that it *could* be real or *could* be possible speaks not only to the depravity of the world the novel is depicting, but to the numbness toward the violence that exists within it. Here Serpell gives us an essential claim for this way of thinking: "When violence is made surface, we confront the possibility that, within us, violence will be made *to* surface. The suspension of violence through repetition affords us each with an opportunity for self-reflection, in both senses of the word" (66). What then can we take away from this conclusion? By Serpell's logic, Ellis's novel is effective at demanding for the reader a kind of moral questioning that is typically the purpose *of* the novel. The ambiguity left by Ellis not only demands a moral position to be taken on the text, but that the extremeness of its violence allows for the actions of Bateman to be a possibility. Thus, Bateman is only an uncertain subject to the degree to which the reader views the certainty of their moral engagement with their sense of Bateman's world.

How then do we square the ethical conflicts of Ellis's text with the varied masculinist discourses of the alt-right? In considering *American Psycho* as the ur-text of the alt-right[6], there are a few necessary choices that must be made that influence how the text is being read, akin to Serpell's claim about Ellis's novel revealing more about the critic than anything else (66). First, in a broad and relatively shallow way, the character that Bateman develops for himself intersects with the aspects of masculinity valorized by the alt-right. Bateman makes no real attempt to

imagine anyone as equal, and while he still finds some things to be good and defensible, his widespread hatred of others—especially of women and minorities—inspires his willingness to destroy them. This violence can then be read as the simplest form of male power, and it distributes itself over those who either threaten his status or whose subjugation is necessary for his self-image. Like the alt-right's dependency on social hierarchy within their own form of repressive desublimation, Bateman distributes his violence (if it exists) to men as well, most notably to Paul Owen. This willingness to murder someone in similar social status to him requires us to think of this violence not only as racist and misogynistic (which it no doubt is), but as imbued with the eliminationist rhetoric that marks the alt-right. This clear social hierarchy by the alt-right—of "alphas" and "betas" and so on—sees in Bateman a form of heroic violence. Bateman is the ultimate paradox of self-absorption—while he cares about seemingly only himself, it is his sense of self that is the most unstable element of Ellis's novel. As such, it is possible to read Ellis's novel in conjunction with the ways in which the alt-right seeks to shape a version of masculinity in the post-feminist discourses of contemporary identity politics. If Bateman becomes a figure for what is necessary to be done to become "alpha" in a world of "beta" men, the authoritarianism and violence of the alt-right becomes even more chilling.

Yet, what is revealed by Bateman constantly being misidentified, and by his status as mastermind serial killer being denied to him, is that Bateman's perceived sense of mastery over his world is not only fleeting but inauthentic. While he attempts to display his erudition about contemporary music, the details are wrong. As Storey notes, "he cannot decide on a restaurant without consulting his trusty Zagat guide, and he cannot offer an opinion on something without first having read a review of it" (61). In that sense, this mastery is only a performance of mastery, the kind of artificial front that Bateman openly admits to being. This rhetoric of

performance is echoed in PUA communities' similar rhetoric of mastery, in which the exchange of Batemanian male vernacular (in similar stories of sexual conquest like Bateman and his fellow Wall Street friends exchange) is enough to constitute the possibility of mastery. For both to function, Bateman as mastermind, or alt-right as authoritarian "neomasculinity," the certainty of this positioning is essential. In that way, despite the target of the critique of the alt-right being the identity categories that have displaced them from mainstream society, their persistent categorizing, measuring, and establishments of hierarchies seems to imply that these constructs are not only necessary but an essential part of a "red pilled" version of reality. The fact that there is a lack of awareness of the irony of this position poses important questions for the ability to critique masculinity formed in this way. Yet, to extend Serpell, it is the constant *un*certainty of Ellis's novel that simultaneously enables its sense of horror and redeems it from being irredeemably evil. Like Bateman, the alt-right's version of masculinity relies upon the certainty of mastery, of the undeniable force of male power as a self-evidently supreme form of masculinity, allowing for a re-articulation of a social world that has left them, but, like Bateman, one that is simply not there. The question that continues for discussions of the alt-right version of masculinity is whether being "alpha" becomes the realization of a certain subjectivity, similar to Bateman's search for his own through his violence, or whether being "alpha" is to part in a mastery of society's expectations. These ambiguities remain present in our contemporary discourse on the alt-right just as they remain present in the various critical attempts to understand Bateman's subjectivity—unfortunately, as the sign at Harry's at the end of *American Psycho* directs us, this is not an exit.

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[1] While I am largely focusing on a specific reading of the gendered violence in *American Psycho*, a variety of other works have informed my reading of Ellis's novel and are part of the critical tradition for it. Especially useful are Laura Tanner's *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* for the ways in which he understands the presence and non-presence of the violent scenes in *American Psycho* which I mostly do not cite

here. As well, Kathryn Hume's *Aggressive Fictions: Reading the Contemporary Novel* is a clever take on why unpleasant fictions seem to draw the most attention, and Marco Abel's *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique After Representation* usefully places discussions of the violence in *American Psycho* in the field of affect theory.

[2] As Nagle notes in her analysis, early work in men's studies, such as those by Michael Kimmel and R.W. Connell, both of which were influential in my thinking for this dissertation, formulate their approaches to masculinity alongside feminist discourses, especially for Kimmel in *The Politics of Manhood* and Connell in *Masculinities*, and the attempts by the "manosphere" to define themselves as a men's movement erases this critical connection between pro-feminist men's studies scholars and the wider field of feminist studies.

[3] There is an interesting historical parallel between Marcuse's desublimation and the rhetoric of PUA communities—Marcuse is interested throughout his book in the ways in which the liberation of sexuality in effect anesthetizes the unhappiness that he sees as fundamental to political revolution, which is at least thematically similar to something like we see in *Brave New World*. For the manosphere, the liberation of sexuality for women works in the exact opposite way, as it erodes their traditional values of the role of women in society, despite their contradictory desire for total (male) sexual freedom.

[4] It would be interesting as well to place this within Sally Robinson's formulation of white masculinity always being in crisis and always being deferred, especially if we are to accept that Bateman exists as a potential subject, or an accretion of cultural fantasies, rather than as a fully-formed, realized subject.

[5] Brauner also notes that, near the end of Bateman's overview of the work of Genesis, he claims that their music contains "a groove funkier and blacker than anything Prince or Michael Jackson---or any other black artist of recent years, for that matter—has come up with" (136). While many would see this as a hard claim to defend, it is especially indicative of Bateman's white supremacy, as it follows a chapter in which he referred to a black homeless man by a racial slur. Bateman's racism is an obvious connection to the alt-right's pervasive white nationalism, as well as a constituent part of his sense of masculinity, but it mostly outside of my focus here on violence.

[6] It is worth nothing that within alt-right communities, especially the incel community, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* is often seen as a kind of masculine ethos, and a redemption of "ordinary frustrated men" (Beaumont-Thomas). This seems to be based off a flawed reading of *Fight Club* that sees its violence as a re-masculinizing of culture against the forces of domestic feminism and looks past its leftist politics and consistently queer imaginings of male intimacy—if it is a "metaphor" to which this form of masculinity can be read into, it is done so only by a distortion.

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