HOLLOW MEN: SUBORDINATE MASCULINITIES IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN DRAMA

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In the past half century, masculinity has been consistently seen as in crisis, undergoing a diminishment of its authority. At the same time, however, the overall power structure, one that consistently favors white men, has only changed in seemingly minor ways. There exists, then, a disparity between representations of masculinity in popular culture and the way in which authority is maintained. This study focuses on the connection between representations of masculinity in the larger culture and how these ideas influence the reception of five important canonical Broadway productions. Employing R.W. Connell's concept of subordinate masculinities, these plays and the struggle of subordinate white male types they stage are analyzed to understand the ways in which they reify a masculine hegemony. The study begins in the anxious economic postwar world with Arthur Miller's 1949 *Death of a Salesman* before moving into the culture of affluence as demonstrated with Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Analyzing the tumultuous decades of the '60s and '70s is David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, which although it centers around Vietnam, speaks volumes about an ever-growing isolation and narcissism pervading masculine representations. David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* and the Dustin Hoffman-led revival of *Salesman* take Reaganism to task before a final twentieth century revival of *Salesman* shifts to a growing introspection among American men. The final chapter looks to Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* a play that has decentered the male into obsolescence and what that says about the status of men in the 21st century. By examining popular culture, assessing how masculinity was portrayed in film, the

popular fiction, music, the presidents, those iconic individuals that left a mark on society, this study contextualizes how certain time periods have portrayed men and how theatrical representations reflect or quarrel with those images. The final assessment of masculinity questions whether masculinity is simply founded on the notion of crisis, and suggests that instability is at the core of the identity of white American males. Ultimately this study takes steps to analyze major male characters of American drama as gender-constructed individuals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I would like to thank my colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh past and present for providing me encouragement, competition, solace, and friendship throughout all of my graduate career and through the writing of this study. Bill Daw at Special Collections at the University of Pittsburgh consistently provided wonderful assistance with archival material. I would also like to thank my faculty members who saw me develop throughout my time at Pitt to reach the point I am at today. Dr. Kathleen George deserves my extra gratitude for her care, attention, and interest in supervising the dissertation. I always felt a great deal of support and encouragement that enabled me to be creative, explore my topic, and write the dissertation that was truly mine. Thank you, Kathy. Thank you also to the staff in the Theatre Arts department for their support and assistance throughout my time at Pitt.

Lastly, none of this would have been possible without the support, love, and encouragement from my wife. Thank you Courtney, for being my calm, my steady, and the foundation that makes the thing I do possible. There are also two little kids who are very proud of their daddy and who can't wait to spend a little more time with him. I dedicate the hard work I put into this to them.

I. INTRODUCTION: "HERE WE GO ROUND THE PRICKLY PEAR…"

> "men do not constitute a homogeneous, internally coherent bloc. Particular masculinities are themselves subordinated by the hegemonic practice."
> Demetrakis Demetriou

In Tracy Letts' award-winning play, *August: Osage County*, the character of Barbara, after sharing with her sisters one of her last conversations with their recently deceased father, attempts to summarize his feelings at the close of his life. She states,

> …there was something sad in his voice—or no, not sad, he always sounded sad—something more hopeless than that. As if it had already happened. As if whatever was disappearing had already disappeared. As if it was too late. As if it was already over. And no one saw it go. This country, this experiment, America, this hubris: what a lament, if no one saw it go. Here today, gone tomorrow. Dissipation is actually much worse than cataclysm (123-24).

Containing a weary sadness and resignation, the play never reveals just what that "it" is for Beverly Weston. Is it his life, his manhood, the state of his family, the country? The lack of a definitive answer, however, allows one to develop her/his own ideas behind Beverly's frustration and the play itself. An easy answer concerning Beverly's angst might simply be his wife, Violet, and the rather sour life they led together. However, there is something deeper than this occurring, and it is Barbara's speech above that lends the most credibility to that idea. The lines, to a certain extent, recall Tony Kushner's fixation and frustration with America, while also closing with

echoes of Neil Young's famous sentiment, "It's better to burn out than it is to rust." There is even a closer and more appropriate referent, the closing line of T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men"—"This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper"—a poem that is important, both thematically and structurally, to *August: Osage County*. Beverly twice quotes the poem in the Prologue ("Life is very long" and "Here we go round the prickly pear…") and Johnna quotes the ending of the poem while holding Violet in the final moment of the play ("This is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends…") What is significant is that Johnna does not deliver the final line of the poem, effectively ending the play with a whimper instead of a bang.

The connection between the play and the poem identifies a key theme behind much of *August: Osage County*, a theme that is central to this study: the diminishment of the American man. T.S. Eliot opens his poem with the following line, "We are the hollow men/ We are the stuffed men," and digs deeper in the next stanza describing the characteristics of this breed of men: "Shape without form, shade without colour,/ Paralysed force, gesture without motion." With this poem in mind, one cannot help but link an understanding of Beverly Weston—or any male figure in the play—to Eliot's bleak imagery. The question behind this connection between the work of Eliot and Letts is, why are these men hollow?[1] What is the "it" that is disappearing that is making these men hollow? Are the souls of man or the soul of America really fading? Or, instead, has anything really disappeared at all?

As one traces American drama back over the past half century, however, these same questions seem applicable to other dramas. In fact, there are numerous examples of "hollow men" and their struggle for meaning and expression in this country. Suddenly Letts' drama

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[1] The reasons behind Eliot's naming of these men has been effectively argued elsewhere, but will not be produced here. Instead, I will just be using the term hollow men as a way to describe the state of men in the latter half of the twentieth century to today.

appears to be just another link in an American dramatic tradition of portraying near-powerless, often immobilized masculine figures.[2] While there is no lack of theory and criticism analyzing the major male figures of American drama, very few examine them as emasculated, hollow men, "shape without form, shade without colour." I begin this study, then, remembering and honoring Eliot's invocation: "Remember us—if at all—not as lost/ Violent souls, but only/ As the hollow men/ the stuffed men."

It is my aim to examine how dramatic works stage representations of hollow men and how an audience understands that treatment. However, I do not want to simply acknowledge emasculation onstage, but instead examine the reasons for that treatment and what happens to masculine authority in the play after there is a diminishment of authority of that male character. In addition to the dramatic and performative analysis, this study will consider the cultural events and attitudes that are behind representations of masculine diminishment; there is certainly no lack of images in larger popular culture showing men without power and brought low. Essentially, if theatre—and popular culture—consistently reinforces images of men failing what does this say about who controls the power in society? This study looks to explore if and how a system of masculine hegemony, as articulated by R.W. Connell—a system understood both through gender politics and class issues—can ultimately be affirmed through the display of emasculation of subordinated others, a term reserved for those emasculated men. As Connell states in her *Gender and Power*, "[h]egemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities" (183).

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[2] It is easily noted that all of drama, not just in America, is replete with representations of men engaged in power struggles that often lead to their downfall, from Oedipus to Lear. My study is unique, however, in that I am examining the cultural milieu and circumstances behind that display of masculine emasculation and diminishment, which is intimately bound up with American politics and culture.

To complete this study, I have chosen five major plays that exemplify and interrogate issues of masculine representation over the past half century: Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and Letts' *August: Osage County*—a period extending from 1949 to the present day. A weakening of masculine authority occurs throughout all of these plays, although it takes on many different forms. Male characters can be seen emasculated by the dominant women in their life, by superior masculine figures, from corporations that treat them as unnecessary cogs, or brought low from feelings of powerlessness in a world where their impact is negligible to nonexistent. In other words, the standing of the male protagonist in each of these plays is reduced in social, cultural, economic, and familial ways; they suffer a shaming that strips power, authority, and standing. The men in these five plays self-destruct, facing either economic ruin or death. In fact, it becomes even more than a self-destruction—these men effectively commit or are working towards suicide.

I chose these five canonical plays because I wanted works that would reflect cultural viewpoints and whose commercial and popular Broadway success would offer some telling insight into how masculinity was staged and received. Each dramatic piece concerns issues central to masculinity in subject areas that often pit men against men in the struggle for dominance. In fact, all of the plays seem to be in dialogue with what has come to be known as the "crisis in masculinity." It has been assumed—and much written about—that men who previously held the power—predominantly white men—have seemingly fallen into a crisis, losing the authority, cohesiveness, and group identity that held them together as a hegemonic group for most of history. These plays offer commentary on masculine representation and speak volumes about how white masculinity was perceived by the country and, thus, allow

opportunities to interrogate the idea of crisis. It should be acknowledged that I am dealing more with representations of manhood and masculinity and not the actual standing of men in culture. While I do occasionally point to masculine uncertainty or fragmentation, I am speaking of the way that sentiment is affecting representations of men. In a study such as this that focuses on theatre and New York audience representation, conclusions cannot be drawn that speak to an understanding of manhood in the whole country. What the study can do, however, is analyze the relationship between theatrical representations of masculinity and larger cultural ones and what that could say about a concept such as hegemonic masculinity.

Previous scholars have also conducted theatre and cultural examinations investigating masculinity. Gender and theatre scholar David Savran, in his study connecting ideas of American masculinity and masochism, *Taking It Like a Man,* succinctly explains the conditions by which masculinity, as articulated by many theorists and psychologists, has been viewed as being in a crisis:

> a new masculinity became hegemonic in the 1970s because it represents an attempt by white men to respond to and regroup in the face of particular social and economic challenges: the reemergence of the feminist movement; the limited success of the civil rights movement in redressing gross historical inequities through affirmative action legislation; the rise of the lesbian and gay rights movements; the failure of America's most disastrous imperialistic adventure, the Vietnam War; and perhaps most importantly, the end of the post-World War II economic boom and the resultant and steady decline in the income of white working- and lower-middle class men (5).

A key element to be drawn from Savran's findings is that white masculinity is perceived to be under attack from a multitude of elements in society; it is not that women are gaining rights, for

instance, it is that men are losing them. I would argue that while the 1970s witnessed a definite anxiety in American males, this feeling of discontent had already been reflected in theatre, with such post-World War II plays as *All My Sons* or *Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, suggesting a certain uneasiness amongst American men ever since America became the dominant superpower of the world.[3] The current study employs gender and cultural studies in order to focus on that notion of crisis as reflected in drama from Miller's *Salesman* in 1949 to Letts's *August: Osage County* in 2007. The events that Savran lists clearly resulted in a loss of privilege, but what I hope to examine and question here is if this loss of privilege has affected masculine supremacy and in what ways the system of masculine hegemony has attempted to maintain its authority in the face of competing claims. In my analysis, I focus on how masculinity is constructed, staged, and reacted to in popular American drama during the same time period as critics have assumed a crisis amongst men.

One of my central investigations is how the idea of crisis or diminishment of masculine authority is integrally connected to the continued maintenance and reification of masculine hegemony. It could be argued that the concept of crisis has almost become a characteristic of American masculinity itself, a means of maintaining the power. Feminist scholar, Abigal Solomon-Godeau, acknowledging a destabilization in masculinity, argues that the notion of 'crisis' is invoked more to state a loss of unquestioned masculine authority, than to suggest that their authority is in question. In her essay, "Male Trouble," she states that

> the recent visibility of masculinity itself…attests, if nothing else, to a destabilization of the notion of masculinity such that it forfeits its previous transparency, its taken-for-

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[3] Theatre historian Bruce McConachie has analyzed this Cold War phenomenon of American male malaise in his examination of politics and manhood in *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War.*

> grantedness, its normalcy. It is doubtless this loss of transparency that underpins the now-frequent invocations of a 'crisis' in masculinity (70).

In other words, once masculine authority was unmasked as the dominant—unchallenged—order, things began to change, leading to a perceived "crisis." Sally Robinson, author of *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*, also expresses doubt as to the validity of an actual crisis when she states that the "question of whether dominant masculinity is really in crisis is, in my view, moot: even if we could determine what an actual, real, historically verifiable crisis would look like, the undeniable fact remains that…dominant masculinity consistently represents itself as in crisis" (11). In fact, it needs to be seen that way for the perpetuation of, what she terms, "masculine vulnerability." As long as the dominant authority is viewed as being fallible in popular representations, there will be more acceptance—however unwittingly—of its authority. The plays that I examine deal in part with many of the potential "crisis"-points from Savran's quote above—feminism, civil rights, lesbian and gay rights, the Vietnam War, the economic bust—but, though all stage a disappearance or emasculation of the central male character, none of the plays truly challenge larger ideas of masculinity or its hegemonic placement in our culture. The male character is either mourned for or scorned, but the system that would make the man that way, is hardly questioned.[4]

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[4] Intention of the playwright is very much beside the point here. Both Arthur Miller and David Mamet wrote damning critiques of their society that, in reception, did little to effect change. Given also the relative smallness of New York theatre audiences, revolutionary change is hardly expected from these works. Further, much of these audiences, mostly liberal in their makeup, would not need much convincing towards a critical take on society. In my discussion of these plays' relation to masculine hegemony, then, my intent moves between the characters and the plot line reflecting a reinforcement of that hegemony and the reception doing that work. These are almost always mutually exclusive and I will be noting the differences throughout. None of these plays by themselves could alone reinforce masculine hegemony, but in their plot or their reception they can point to how masculine hegemony is maintained.

Sociologist Allan Johnson refers to the specific thematic device used to represent a crisis that would lead to affirmation as the "Men as Victims"–trope. Johnson states how interest is built towards characters that capture and engage our attention and emotion, thus diverting our attention from larger ideas. In this way, then, masculine representation embraces victimization in such a way that the power structure that sustains privilege and dominance is made invisible; "It is all too easy to go from sympathy for men to forgetting that patriarchy and male privilege even exist." (Johnson 173). To use a dramatic work to illuminate this idea, sympathy for Willy Loman is foregrounded at the expense of examining a culture that lets only white men succeed; our focus is on Willy's losing, not on changing the game that makes him lose. To use another example, the older men in *Glengarry Glen Ross* might garner our sympathetic understanding for their situation, but we know that the younger men replacing those fired will simply be more men caught in the same destructive masculine cycle. Victimization, then, is an attempt to focus less attention on the power structure that sustains white male authority and more on those victims garnering our sympathy.

The key theoretical approach to this study is first and foremost the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the hierarchy of subordinated masculinities it constructs and sacrifices in the affirmation of its dominance. The term, hegemonic masculinity, first appeared in 1985, in the periodical *Theory & Society*, defined by Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee as a system of "how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance" (592). This definition not only states how only "particular groups of men" hold and legitimate the power in society, but how that dominance is manufactured through a relationship, suggesting interaction, between different groups. In stressing a focus on gender and class relationships, it is important to note that

it is not merely women and minorities that are being subordinated. As Judith Lorber states in *The Paradoxes of Gender*, "gender dominance and its ideological justification include men's subordination and denigration of other men as well as men's exploitation of women" (4). Thus, hegemonic masculinity assigns a hierarchical value, differentiating the dominant men from other men.

The idea of multiple masculinities is still a relatively underexplored area of study. Much of Connell's early work was overturning the tenets and claims of sex role theory. In *Gender and Power*, Connell states that the basic idea of sex role theory "is that being a man or a woman means enacting a general role definitive of one's sex…[and that there are] always two sex roles in a given context, the 'male' role and the 'female' role" (48). Connell calls this rigid dichotomization of gender into masculine and feminine into question, arguing instead for multiple masculinities and femininities. Connell's evidence is necessarily broader than just what a 'man' does or what a 'woman' does, examining instead the class, racial, and sexual differences that come to make up the whole idea of hegemonic masculinity.[5] What became evident was that "men do not constitute a homogeneous, internally coherent bloc. Particular masculinities are themselves subordinated by the hegemonic practice" (Demetriou, 340). The impetus, then, of

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[5] Connell has clearly been influenced by Raymond Williams, who asserts, in *Marxism and Literature*, that hegemony is not "a system or a structure [but] a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities with specific and changing pressures and limits." These specific changes highlight the idea that for hegemony to be maintained, it "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (*Marxism*, 112). It is not static nor is it a matrix whereby others are judged by a rigid set of standards. Instead, it is historically dynamic, meaning it is receptive to historical context and customs—always changing—making it malleable and indeterminate, and applicable to multiple arenas in different ways, thus resisting easy definition. Connell states how hegemony is "a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes" (*Gender & Power*, 184). To draw a bridge, then, between Connell and Williams is to figure Connell's subordinated masculinities as one of the primary means by which (masculine) hegemony, under Williams, is "renewed, recreated, defended, and modified."

studying men was to examine the multiple ways in which men are constructed, viewed, and even constrained by masculinity and how that can vary in different time periods. From an academic standpoint, Michael Kimmel argues that "[i]ntegrating gender into our courses is a way to fulfill the promise of women's studies—by understanding men as gendered as well" (*Manhood*, 6).

This call for examining men in society was fueled not simply by the feminist cause of explaining how men subordinate women, but more how men subordinate other men. While masculinity might trump femininity in our culture—and white masculinity trump black masculinity—there are even finer lines that are drawn between white men in the negotiation for dominance and control. By way of example, R.W. Connell most clearly defines subordinated masculinities by demonstrating how homosexual men are marginalized and subordinated by the dominant heterosexual group. Demetrakis Demetriou, in an articulate and investigative response to Connell's thoughts, took the idea a step further arguing that hegemonic masculinity is less an active agency that marginalizes subordinated groups and is, instead, the manner in which the system disallows alternative or diverse representations.[6] In other words, any activity or practice that is not in line with the accepted example of masculine life and worldview is considered other and subordinate. Similar studies have identified delineations among masculine groups along lines of class and race. However, these lines are not always so clear-cut; "[t]hese other masculinities need not be as clearly defined – indeed, achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives [from] gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness" (Connell, *Gender and Power* 186). A central aim in

[6] Demetriou argues, for instance, that homosexuals are subordinated "because the configuration of practice they embody is inconsistent with the currently accepted strategy for the subordination of women" (344). From this it would seem that prejudice comes later and, first and foremost, it is differences from the dominant way of doing things that differentiates groups.

investigating subordinate masculinities is understanding the complex interplay between groups of men vying for dominance and just how these men are differentiated.

Culture and gender theorist, Michael Kimmel has further examined how masculinities and femininities are "arrayed along a hierarchy, and measured against one another, buttress[ing] the argument that domination creates and exaggerates difference" (*Gendered Society* 11). Essentially, the differences are in place to support a power system, a "gender politics within masculinity" (Connell *Masculinities* 37). Subordinated masculinities are deliberately not clearly defined; as long as groups are unable to recognize the power separating them, it is harder for them to mobilize against a dominant authority. In other words, and very important to this historical study, there is oftentimes not a defined dominant representation of masculinity. One reason being that an obscure understanding of what counts as a dominant idea of masculinity ensures competition amongst subordinate masculinities. Another reason, though, is because certain time periods simply do not reflect one single dominant masculine type. Instead, as this study will demonstrate, society often allows for several accepted—or at least competing—versions of masculinity. In the 1950s, for instance, many masculine types, from the organization man to the playboy, were in abundance, but it is not entirely clear which type could be called dominant. What we see reflected in drama and popular culture is a playing out of these masculine types, challenges to a dominant representation. Throughout this study, then, the analysis often examines what counts as more acceptable versions of masculinity as opposed to dominant representations, simply because a strict idea of what was dominant is simply not there.

A study of drama, history, and gender from 1949 to the present is broad enough to warrant a good deal of clarification. Knowing that any one study cannot do adequate justice to concepts of masculine representation, hegemony theory, and post-WWII theatre American

culture, I believe there are some ideas that need to be addressed before the study can commence. I do not mean for these to be read as an apologia, merely to make sure the intent of my work is clear and that it is not attempting to do more than examine masculine representation in American culture as reflected in American drama.

The concept of patriarchal authority is notably absent in this study. Patriarchy clearly addresses masculine power and even the subjection of other representations. I believe, however, that patriarchy does not go far enough; instead, it is more a symptom of hegemonic masculinity and not the means by which that power is enacted. As Susan Jeffords states, "[m]asculinity is the primary mechanism for the articulation, institutionalization, and maintenance of the gendered system on which patriarchy is based" (181).[7] Patriarchy, then, is too narrow of an investigation when dealing with the sustainment of hegemonic power. Often it is used exclusively in a familial context, meaning that it is examining the father's authority, or it is simply an ideology that is assumed and taken for granted. While a system of patriarchy seems to be understood in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, for example, it is not something that is examined in the play, whereas the sustainment of masculine hegemony is a major aspect of the dramatic conflict. Put another way, hegemonic masculinity is larger than the family and more active than ideology. Patriarchy, here, is understood as a tool of control under the aegis of a historically situated masculine hegemony.

It could be argued that drama always stages conflict and therefore always features winners and losers. While each age certainly has its own cast of winners and losers—from Oedipus to Malvolio to Metamora—their story, characterization, and reception is as revealing of

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[7] Drawing upon the ideas of Norwegian sociologist, Øysten Holter, Connell and Messerschmidt are careful to state how it is a "mistake to treat a hierarchy of masculinities constructed within gender relations as logically continuous with the patriarchal subordination of women" and instead insist on "factor[ing] in the institutionalization of gender inequalities, the role of cultural constructions, and the interplay of gender dynamics with race, class, and religion" (839).

the dramatic narrative as it is about the time period in which they were written and staged. Examining how Willy Loman is a possible tragic character for an audience is also the study of the culture that would interpret that character, a character only understood through the politics and culture of its day. What makes my study unique is its investigation of the power structures behind these masculine characters. While the men in these plays are more often than not victims and clearly not representative of the dominant authority, it is through the singular focus on their story and their status as subordinated masculinities that the masculine hegemony is ultimately left unexamined, intact, and even affirmed. In the following plays, there are certainly losers, but the winners are not characters, but a system that relies on those masculine victims for the perpetuation of its authority.

Most gender studies have veered from examining the white male protagonist. It is usually the others—the woman, the black man, etc.—who receive the most attention. Michael Kimmel has written extensively about the need for examining all genders as constructed. In his *The Gendered Society*, he declares, the "social institutions of our world—workplace, family, school, politics—are also gendered institutions, sites where the dominant definitions are reinforced…We become gendered selves in a gendered society" (15). If gender, as Judith Butler claims, is performative and always constructed, then my focus is on examining how the white male protagonist is also a product of gender. Because characters such as Brick, Willy Loman, and Shelly Levene are clearly gendered products of the culture in which they are represented, our understanding of gender relations and gender issues in these plays is left wanting in a major way if they are not analyzed through the lens of gender studies. If hegemony—the generative process whereby power is maintained—is gendered male, then what has taken gender studies so long to delineate categories of men?

I would say that the answer lies with the curious way in which white heterosexual males are so often seen as an invisible group. Sally Robinson explains how white men, "conflated with normativity in the American social lexicon," (2) have so often been the standard by which others are measured and too little examined as a constructed category in themselves: "To be in the dominant position, then, is to embody (a lack of) traits that does little to flesh out an identity. This leaves the dominant invisible, characterless, and much more difficult to be understood and critiqued" (3-4). In *Manhood in America*, Kimmel states how "[o]nly white people in our society have the luxury not to think about race every minute of their lives. And only men have the luxury to pretend that gender does not matter" (7). This supposes that a privilege or authoritative anonymity is awarded those groups that fit the dominant mold—straight, white male. However, a difficulty with this notion is the idea of the historically dynamic character of the "dominant mold" as there is simply no universal or normative idea of gender, only historically constructed ones. This means, then, that even the gender of the dominant order has to be understood as a socially and historically constructed category. While white, heterosexual masculinity has been the dominant norm for many years, how does it negotiate changing social, cultural, and political conditions that would threaten its hegemony? The battlefield—or, at least, cultural negotiations—of masculine subordination plays itself out in multiple arenas, one of these being drama.

A gender criticism of American theatre has been widely established (Austin 1990, Case 1988, Dolan 1988). However, most of these treatments have been a feminist treatment of American drama, analyzing the ways in which women have been subordinated by men or the manner in which women have fought for a more fair and balanced representation. Other studies involving gender have examined homosexual representation (Sinfield 1999) or work on

individual gay playwrights such as Tony Kushner or Terrence McNally. Very few studies exist, however, that deal solely with masculine representation in American drama.

One of the first thorough investigations of men in American drama was Paul Rosefeldt's *The Absent Father in Modern Drama*, which explores the trope of the absent father that is largely prevalent in drama of the twentieth century. While Rosefeldt has important things to say about how this theatrical device is employed, much of the argument is textual analysis/identification and steers clear of asking why this was occurring. Furthermore, much of Rosefeldt's specificity to modern drama begins to break apart as it becomes clear that this trope of the absent father has a long dramatic tradition from *The Persians* to *Hamlet*. Another study of the father is Thaddeus Wakefield's *The Family in Twentieth Century American Drama*. Though Wakefield's work rests a lot on textual analysis and identification of rigid roles for the family without bringing in historical or cultural understanding, he is careful to note the growing connection between family roles and economics, a trend he traces from O'Neill to August Wilson. Both of the above studies, however, treat men as a single group and veer from examining men as a socially constructed gender category and in which the struggle concerns power relations both over women and between men.

Since the early 1990s, however, studies have appeared that treat men and, more specifically, masculinity as a phenomenon to be investigated. David Savran (1992) broke a lot of scholarly ground with his investigation into masculinity in the work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Robert Vorlicky's *Act Like A Man* soon followed, which offered an analysis of multiple masculinities in American drama. His analysis is worthwhile in seeing the intricacies and challenges of masculine relationships and while most of his claims are enlightening, Vorlicky only treats "male-cast" dramas (plays with all male casts) and his analysis

examines only the dialogue in the plays. Carla McDonough's 1997 *Staging Masculinity*, is probably the closest to my own investigation, both in the material we are investigating and in the claims we are making, but we differ in two distinct ways. Her work, I believe, does not delve far enough into gender studies in explaining differences between masculinities and, second, is her suggestion that the crisis in masculinity is real and that the patriarchal power structures have actually been shaken by cultural events over the last half-century, a position that could arguably be denied by hegemonic masculinity.[8]

Given that this work relies on an understanding of history and culture, I have relied largely on historians and cultural critics to flesh out the story of America in the past half-century. Foremost among these is historian William Chafe's *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, which chronicles American politics and culture almost up to the present day. Besides historical texts, I also examine academic publications, editorials, and journalistic critiques that examine culture in any given moment. These cultural studies range from work by

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[8] There are other important works on gender studies and theatre. Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests* is useful for its examination of transvestism, which shifts analysis to a multi-gender examination, away from the strict binary of male/female. Then there are studies (Bassi 1998, Mangan 2003, van Nortwick 1998) that have examined masculinity and its constructedness and diversity in representations outside of the range of American drama in the twentieth century. While I believe that the historically dynamic and context-situated configuration of gender disallows me from adopting their findings wholesale, there is great value in analyzing their approach and applying their ideas of gender studies to theatre studies.
Film studies have also broken a lot of ground in examining men as gender-constructed characters and how they have been both portrayed and received in popular culture. This dissertation references and borrows from these studies in assessing how a larger public understands these representations. In several works, most of them feminist-leaning (Baker 2006, Bruzzi 2005, de Lauretis 1987, Jeffords 1989), masculinity was conceived and evaluated as a gendered construction before theatre theorists took on that challenge and so their claims are interesting to note and compare to gender studies in theatre. So, although, the medium differs markedly between these two genres, some of the conclusions of their analyses will be particularly poignant here, and will be especially helpful in understanding culture and pointing towards what was appreciated and valued in specific time periods.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to David Brooks, assessments of American culture and life that lay much of the groundwork in analyzing the ways Americans were assumed to have lived and thought. Lastly, I examine literature, film, and events that all point to an understanding of the moment. In the first chapter an example of a John Cheever story highlights American self-absorption, while the country's fixation on Rambo in the 1980s speaks volumes about reassessing masculinity in an age of glorified individualism. Masculine models emerge from film, from music, and quite frequently from presidential politics. I affirm that many of these writings and interpretation of cultural events that I draw upon are steeped in bias and singular interpretation. However, given that my intention is to piece together a story of American culture in relation to popular conceptions about masculinity, I look quite frequently to the cultural zeitgeist of a particular time period to get an idea of what was important and discussed and which ideas of white masculinity were most emphasized.

There are a few words, however, that beg to be defined before the study can begin. Masculinity contains many definitions and cultural assumptions that warrant clarification. First of all, masculinity is almost always understood in relation to the term femininity. While much of gender theory attempts to distance itself from this binary, this is how the terms are recognized and employed, therefore any study must start with the acknowledgement of their intertwined and opposing characteristics.[9] R. W. Connell understands that there are deep historical and subjective understandings of this word with the concept sometimes implying a standard by which men aspire to reach and at other times a type that men should, but could never hope to, emulate. In *Masculinities*, Connell lists four ways in which the masculine and feminine are understood and

[9] Susan Jeffords understands masculinity as a power structure and is "used to refer to the set of images, values, interests, and activities held important to a successful achievement of male adulthood in American cultures" (xii).

used (*Masculinities*, 68-71). The first usage is an *essentialist* one, which attempts to define a core idea of masculinity and then pattern men's lives around that idea. This obviously leads to oversimplifying generalizations. Second is a *positivist* strategy that hopes to define masculinity by simply understanding what men are by finding out what they do. The obvious problem with this approach is its acceptance of a male/female binary that ignores the plurality of masculinity and the way in which supposed "masculine" traits are not exclusive to men. The third approach is a *normative* one that attempts to assign traits based on "what men ought to be" (70). This thinking, Connell notes, is similar to essentialist thought and often offers exemplary models—such as John Wayne—by which other men are, or should be, measured. The last strategy is a *semiotic* one that defines masculinity as "not-femininity." But Connell explains that while this is a useful strategy in discourse, the semiotic approach often ignores other areas of life where a semiotic understanding becomes limited.

Drawing from Connell's conclusions, it is hard to assign a rigid definition for masculinity.[10] As Connell states, "'[m]asculinity', to the extent that the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture" (*Masculinities* 71). Masculinity, it would seem, is where we engage

[10] The dictionary definition of the word states that masculinity is "qualities or appearance *traditionally associated* with men," and this might be the best way to approach the idea. Culturally, masculinity is tied into manhood and male identity. While the concept is broader than that, this is how it is best understood.

with “ideas” of manhood and attempt to understand its larger effects between genders and in culture.[11]

From a cultural lay perspective, the terms masculinity and femininity are neither void signifiers nor are they concepts that warrant much defining. Instead, these words are seen as loaded concepts that carry a great deal of weight in defining how men and women are supposed to act. In other words, popular culture—drawn from the politics that controls legislation, entertainment that affirms gender stereotypes, to cultural attitudes defined by church, community, family—holds certain assumptions about men and women and where their place is in society. For much of the 1950s, for instance, it was culturally accepted that women were to remain at home and raise the children while the men worked outside of the home to provide for the family. The idea of masculinity carried ideas of being physically and emotionally strong, a leader, the head of the family, the breadwinner, immune to soft and sensitive emotions. Women, on the other hand, were weaker, needing the strong hand of men to guide them; they raised the children and managed the house, but they were far from being in charge.[12] When individuals or groups strayed from these accepted notions—Christine Jorgenson, Gloria Steinem, Harvey Milk, to name only a few—they were clearly seen as different and taking on other, less accepted, gender roles. While closer examination reveals that nothing is that simple, the starting point for this study will be the culturally entrenched idea that men are strong, and woman are weak.

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[11] Other avenues of exploration exist and need to be examined—such as where femininity deals with “ideas” of womanhood—but this study takes as its starting point, masculinity and ideas and conceptions of what it means to be a man.

[12] The series of children novels, *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, which was written in the 1930s, but became immensely popular in the ‘50s and again in the late ‘70s and ‘80s is an excellent example of how society accepts gender stereotypes. These stories, which contain a nostalgia for a simpler American life always show Pa as the head of the family and the strong provider, while Ma is at home taking care of the kids and minding the house.

The power of these gender stereotypes is still firmly in place to this day. Their strength lies in the fact that they provide the most basic understanding of masculinity and femininity. A simple comedic film such as 1983's *Mr. Mom* proves this point. By assigning a masculine signifier to the concept of mom tells an audience that a man will be taking on the feminine for comedic effect. The basic premise of the movie shows that men are not stay-at-home caregivers who are sensitive and attuned to children's needs, an idea that is reiterated over and over again in popular culture: *Some Like It Hot, Three Men and a Baby, Tootsie*, etc. Whether any of these films are actually critiquing gender roles is beside the point; the humor in these movies depends upon a largely accepted, cultural understanding of gender roles. Even the humor of *August: Osage County* relies to a great extent on how gender stereotypes are being upended or critiqued. Throughout the following analyses of culture and theatre, I will rely on this understanding of gender roles—men, the strong workingman; women, weak, stay-at-home nurturer—as well as on the ideas of gender theorists. After all, the popularity of these theater pieces is due to their acceptance by a larger mainstream audience and not by feminists examining how gender roles are critiqued.

There is also a need to clarify what will be my usage of the various terms masculinity, American man, and male. This study foregrounds an examination of straight, white men in American culture. While over the course of the country's history, many volatile changes have occurred and over the past fifty years many of those changes have drastically redrawn notions of gender, sexuality, and race, there is still a common understanding when one speaks of straight, white men. It is this image that we think of when one speaks of white businessman or the politicians running Washington. Admittedly, there is much more complexity and historical subjectivity when one uses a term such as the white American male. My usage throughout the

study, however, should be taken at a most basic level. Just as there is a basic understanding of gender roles in order to make sense of the humor of a film like *Tootsie*, so too is there a basic understanding when someone bemoans "white America." If there are times that there is a drastic difference from white America, meaning those running the country, and lowly white Americans, such as Willy Loman, the difference will either be noted or clear from the context.

The question of race raises important questions as well: where does a normative idea of whiteness come from? Is it possible to speak of a cultural white bloc? In other words, how do we define whiteness in America? Ultimately, the progression of multiple and diverse ethnicities into a single monoethnic white group is based on uneasy alliances and a politics of exclusion. It was a long struggle that did not include a fair and equal distribution and naturalization, but instead left many peoples feeling uncertain and, in the words of David Roediger, "inbetween."[13] Defining how America "became white" is essential in understanding how hegemonic masculinity came to retain and solidify its standing throughout the period that this study examines.

The steps toward a whitening of America began with drastic nativist fears of the country losing its racial purity and identity. In *Working Toward Whiteness*, Roediger states "that the

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[13] Racial groups that found themselves "inbetween" cultural identification faced many struggles in simply identifying where they fit in American culture and in respect to other groups. As Roediger states,

> Racial terms like guinea, greaser, and hunky were, as we have seen, sometimes embraced, sometimes used against other immigrants, sometimes used to build connections to other immigrant groups, and sometimes campaigned against…Living inbetween racial categories and finding ways to whiteness were thus uneven, many-sided, harrowing processes (53).

In making many different groups "white," America made some steps towards seeing a realization of a melting pot, but through that Americanization, many ethnic groups lost much of their distinct and diverse identities. More problematic about this process, though, is the extent that a coming together of some groups was at the direct isolation and discriminatory exclusion of others. America's hope for racial unity has always been problematic, leaving deep scars within America's national identity and laying the groundwork for the battle of masculinity that would define the rest of the century.

nineteenth century ended with predictions that the United States was about to lose its racial moorings"" (7) as "the streams [of immigrants] from southern and eastern Europe that overtook the streams from northern and western Europe as the century turned…furnished the great majority of the more than 14 million newcomers in the first two decades of the twentieth century" (4). The urban centers of this country swelled with these new immigrants and neighborhoods split into distinct ethnic groupings. The dominant white population of the country strongly resisted the assimilation of these new peoples whom they saw as greatly inferior. Many of the political acts and cultural strife of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were largely in direct reaction to the influx of undesirable immigrants into the country.[14] This means that in the early twentieth century, to claim that Irish, Italians, Jews, Greeks, and other individuals mostly from southern and eastern Europe were white would have been laughable if not offensive, as the legislation and overt violence demonstrated against them would clearly demonstrate something else.[15]

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[14] In 1903, president Theodore Roosevelt argued that new immigrants to the United States were too fertile and that the declining birthrates of white Anglo-Saxons would lead to a "race suicide" and a loss of the country to these new groups. By 1924, the most restrictive piece of immigration legislation, the Johnson-Reed Act drastically curtailed the influx of new immigrants into the country, with the full blessing of the president. This act would ensure that "'New stock' would not be allowed to destroy the 'racial status quo'…Calvin Coolidge, the president who signed the bill, put himself firmly on record as endorsing this sense of racial peril" (Roediger 139). Its effectiveness witnessed a drastic reduction on incoming immigrant populations. Despite this, fear of these new immigrants propelled hatred, violence, and the continuing rise of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan declaring that the racial purity of the country was at stake. World War I, despite many of these groups coming together to fight in the war, did little to quell this sentiment and awakened more nationalist enmity as ethnic groups remained resolutely divided against each other and the country divided against them.

[15] Even a concept such as evolution reinforced dominant characteristics of white Anglo-Saxon America, as Julian Carter states, "evolutionist perspectives on civilization implied that social inequality—the dominance of native-born, financially secure, educated white men—was determined by heredity and so was beyond the bounds of meaningful dissent" (5). In addition to

A mollifying of this enmity and division was a combination of three major factors: the Depression, the Great Migration, and World War II. The subsequent effects from these three events would see many of the disparate ethnic groups pulled in under the banner of white America and the middle class. First of all, the Depression—in combination with the Johnson-Reed Act—allowed for a drop-off of immigrants coming to the States.[16] Besides simply limiting those coming in, the Depression did a great deal to unify those immigrants already here. The largest incentive for their unification, it is argued, was for filling the ranks of political parties. Roediger notes that, "[a]s the crucial 1936 presidential election[17] approached, labor-inspired efforts and trends in naturalization mattered greatly in adding 6 million new voters, 5 million of whom supported Roosevelt" (200). Roosevelt was successful in the 1932 and landslide 1936 elections, due in part to the Democratic Party bringing into its fold the new immigrants that filled the urban centers of the country.[18] Roosevelt's support of unions and labor issues did a great deal to strengthen the economic standing of many of the ethnic groups of the country.

The other, almost more significant, factor in unifying immigrants was the fear of a growing black population. As the Depression rocked the country, the south was hit particularly hard and millions of black Americans moved north to the urban centers looking for work. The

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evolution, the growing field of eugenics offered further "scientific proof" of the superiority of the Nordic races.

[16] As Roediger reveals, the "first four full years of the Depression saw the number of immigrant aliens in the United States decline by 22 percent. In 1934, those arriving in the United States outnumbered those departing by a mere 1,151 persons" (149).

[17] Interestingly, the first stirrings of these ethnic groups coming together politically in the face of American discrimination was in the 1928 presidential election when many groups united behind the Catholic Democrat Al Smith, a figure that plays a role in the self-conception of Willy Loman as the first chapter will demonstrate.

[18] There was a near repeat of history in 2012, as the Democratic Party had almost total control of non-white voters in President Barack Obama's reelection. Then, as in 1936, many political pundits predicted the death of the Republican Party.

Great Migration, as it came to be known would have a drastic effect on the northern cities.[19] Too, many New Deal policies seemed to benefit only "white" Americans.[20] The racial divide in America was also deepened by the strengthening of Jim Crow laws. The "separate-but-equal" conditions that blacks faced in this country not only enforced their status as sub-citizens, but brought together those who did not have to use "Colored Only" accommodations.[21] The non-"Colored," by virtue, then, became white no matter their ethnic background.[22]

The last factor bringing these various groups together under the white banner was World War II and its immediate aftermath.[23] In her influential, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?," anthropology professor Karen Brodkin Sacks, demonstrates how America was able to cast itself as a united nation[24] that worked towards assimilation and democracy as opposed to the racist and

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[19] I should stress that it was not simply the northern cities that were reacting against the presence of blacks in society. The Dixiecrat party in the 1948 presidential election—led by Strom Thurmond on a segregationist policy—carried 39 electoral votes and began the breakup of the Democratic stronghold in the South, which would be weakened first by Governor George Wallace and eventually by Richard Nixon's southern strategy in 1968.

[20] Roediger states how it is unclear "[w]hether the New Deal marked a departure toward an interracial politics of the working poor…or whether it expanded a white supremacist politics to include eastern and southern Europeans" (202). After all, white neighborhoods had partially recovered by the middle and later period of the 1930s, but New Deal legislation had "left African American communities mired in the Depression" (204). The Federal Housing Authority, for one, practiced active discrimination in securing houses for black families, but had become more inclusive towards immigrants. In other words, the various and often maligned new immigrants suddenly found themselves classified as white in receiving federal aid because they were more desirable than the growing black population.

[21] It is no coincidence that NINA ("No Irish need apply") signs were largely disappearing in northern cities around the same time that active discrimination against blacks was increasing.

[22] By no means am I attempting to paint a rosy picture of assimilation of ethnic groups into the dominant Anglo-Saxon America. Racial discrimination, epithets, and actual violence were certainly demonstrated and enacted upon these groups, but over the course of the first half of the century, the rising population of the black Americans became a more pressing fear.

[23] As the atrocity of Nazism spread throughout the world, racism became acquainted with Anti-Semitism—largely ignoring, of course, America's long-standing racist policies against blacks.

[24] As a caveat, she admits, "This is not to say that Anti-Semitism disappeared after World War II, only that it fell from fashion and was driven underground" (87).

destructive policies of the Nazis.[25] The effects of World War II did demonstrate a blurring of "ethnic divisions into Americanness as the children of new immigrants worked and fought beside great-grandchildren of the old against the racist scourge of Nazism" (Roediger 137). However, it would be the economic rebuilding of the country (and world) that truly brought many people together under the aegis of the new middle class.

Sacks demonstrates how the government took concerted action to bring the working class up in stature to participate and help boost the burgeoning postwar economy. She states how the

> GI Bill and FHA and VA mortgages were forms of affirmative action that allowed male Jews and other Euro-American men to become suburban homeowners and to get the training that allowed them—but not women vets or war workers—to become professionals, technicians, salesmen, and managers in a growing economy (97).

For America to succeed and take its global superpower status, the separate immigrant groups had to be better united under a common cause. This resulted in the founding of the white working class that would come to define the postwar world. As Sacks states, "the postwar period was a historic moment for real class mobility and for the affluence we have erroneously come to believe was the U.S. norm. It was a time when the old white and the newly white masses became middle class" (88).[26] In an upsurge of nationalist pride and necessity, America began to identity

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[25] The discrimination, of course, remained and was clearly visible. The armed forces remained segregated even as it fought a war against discrimination and oppression and the presence of internment camps for Japanese Americans flew in the face of democracy. As Roediger acknowledges, "Italian Americans, whose support for fascism had been consequential before the start of the war, largely escaped being put in camps by the government, even as Japanese Americans were massively interned" (137).

[26] Occurring concurrently with these newly redrawn class lines was the birth and buildup of the suburbs, which came to define the postwar boom. Beginning with New Deal policies and continuing through Truman and Eisenhower, the years after World War II saw the growth of the suburbs with its massive housing expansion helping to fuel the postwar economy. These new

itself as a melting pot only after World War II. As Sacks states, "Jewish mobility became a new Horatio Alger story" (87). Alger was a fictional self-made man, an American figure who pulled himself up by his bootstraps; he was a masculine type that America wanted to imagine for itself at this time. Reconfiguring immigrant families within this paradigm would be quite the demonstration of inclusion into what made up white America.[27] In the postwar era, there is, arguably, no better representative for this inclusion of ethnic groups than Willy Loman. Despite being created by a Jewish writer, drawn from his own Jewish uncle, and received as a Jewish man by many scholars since its premiere—Julius Novick, in 1984, even humorously referred to the play as the sequel of *Fiddler on the Roof*—Willy Loman was largely received by the public as an Everyman figure, drawn from America's past and telling a story of its present.

This study takes this defining moment in American history, the post-World War II era, a time of rapid change, industrialization, and the birth of the modern notions of America as its starting point. The principal analysis of the first staging of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is an effort to better illuminate understanding of the culture and economic uncertainty of this time period. Popular history remembers the jubilation at the conclusion of World War II and skips

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neighborhoods removed the old system of ethnic neighborhoods that characterized city dwelling; these areas were more mixed, heterogeneous but united. It can easily be argued that the growth of the suburbs was in some part a reaction to the influx of blacks into the city. As government subsidies allowed white city dwellers to leave and start a new life in the suburbs, life in the city for newly arrived blacks worsened. The growth of the suburbs and the solidification of union power in the postwar economy largely excluded blacks, again reinforcing an "us versus them" racial divide that ironically served to unite disparate ethnic white groups.

[27] This is far from saying that this white bloc was all-inclusive and accepting, merely that many ethnic groups could suddenly identify themselves as "conditionally white," a term coined by Sacks, as opposed to black, Hispanic, Asian, etc. As the country progressed into the second half of the twentieth century, inclusion into the white middle class—for many individuals—might have meant some shared identity, but it didn't necessarily mean access to power. New groups of white men were learning that while being white may have elevated them above some, the hierarchy that sustained masculine hegemony viewed them as simply another pawn in the struggle.

straight ahead to the economic boom that would ensue. In between, however, was some of the worst labor unrest this country has ever seen, a gridlocked congress that was blocking international efforts at rebuilding the country and world, and a grave fear that this country would slide directly back to the depression that characterized life before the war. *Death of a Salesman* and its titular character both reflect and set at ease the worries and concerns of the era. In this period, America was working hard to get onto its feet and establish itself as an international superpower; Willy Loman can be interpreted as a sacrifice at the altar of progress.

In the second case study, I examine the culture of the 1950s and the drastic changes witnessed in youth culture and popular representations of masculinity. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, it can be argued, reflects many masculine types of this era, invoking many studies and criticisms of the period—from William Whyte's *The Organization Man* to Beat culture to Hugh Hefner's creation of a playboy lifestyle. While Williams's play and Kazan's staging of bourgeois southern gentility focuses predominantly on its heroine, the masculine characters—principally, that of Brick—reflect and reinforce anxieties central to masculine self-conception during this time of affluence and suspicion.

The next study tackles the daunting era that spans Kennedy, LBJ, Vietnam, Nixon, Watergate, Ford, and Carter. In its analysis are ramifications of dashed hopes for change, failures of foreign policy, betrayal of political leadership, collapse of American global and economic supremacy, fears of white male disempowerment, and a fragmentation in the representations of manhood in America. While the study includes the important revival of *Salesman* that takes on many of these issues, the central analysis is of the Tony-award winning *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* by David Rabe. This Vietnam drama focuses on a protagonist who struggles with

identifying which masculine model to emulate, a figure who ultimately collapses in on himself under the frustration and confusion about a culture going through seismic changes.

In the next time period there are two revivals of *Salesman* and another play about salesmen by David Mamet that all speak volumes about both masculinity and the larger culture from which they emerge. As the country saw a conservative revolution and an unregulated economic revitalization, the popular culture of the day reflected angst towards government bureaucracy and a celebration of individualism. Popular representations of men, briefly adopted this macho posturing before sliding into representations of men soul-searching and seeking help in groups. This case study ends the twentieth century with images of masculinity—pensive and introspective like Brian Dennehy's characterization of Willy Loman—looking for new ways to combat feelings of being lost, anxious, and alone.

The final case study focuses on the twenty-first century. The main task of this concluding analysis is to demonstrate the cyclical nature of masculine habits, fears, and representations even in the face of the changing American political and cultural landscape, reflective in the familial struggle of *August: Osage County*. Ultimately, the study affirms that the problems that beset America and masculine identity are not singly the result of modern times, but reflective of a nation's identity built on anxiety and restlessness. As this chapter concludes, then, it expands its analysis towards the past to posit that American identity itself—founded squarely within a conception of hegemonic masculinity—might have always fit within ideas of crisis with fears of usurpation or replacement by an other.

Admittedly, these playwrights are all canonical, white playwrights. This is not accidental, but a deliberate decision to focus on representations of white masculinity by white men. This is not meant to diminish or suggest a lack of validity on the representation of white men by female

playwrights or those of color. In fact, a study that dealt with representations of white masculinity by playwrights who weren't white men would produce rich results. My conscious choice for insularity points to a need to take these often (some would say over-) analyzed works and examine them from a fresh gender perspective, a type of critical analysis that has not been as adequately applied to these canonical works.

In approaching a study of a theatre event as important and successful as Arthur Miller's *Salesman,* I have adhered closely to the advice of Thomas Postlewait on documenting and understanding theater events. "The primary task for all historians," he writes

> once they have finished their research and begun to write, is to describe and interpret the relations between events and their possible contexts. The abiding problem is to specify not only the defining traits of any context but also the causal features that contribute to the making of the event (198).

I have followed as closely as possible Postlewait's advice, understanding that the creation, reception, and success of a play such as *Death of a Salesman* as a theatrical event is intimately bound up with the culture from which it emerged. Throughout this study, it has been important that the historical era during which the play was written and performed be understood. Postlewait also lists the various places one should go when analyzing theatrical events: scripts and texts, intentions of individuals, traditions of drama and theater, nationalist and religious campaigns, theater as an organization, social organizations external to the theater, political discourses, cultural ideologies, reception of the work and event, and the historian's perspective.

In addition to Postlewait's advice about theatre events, I applied a number of framing questions to my reading and analysis of these plays in my attempt to look at how masculinity, crisis, and hegemony were demonstrated within each theatrical event. For instance, the questions

I posed for *Salesman* were: (1) How does Miller's 1949 production of *Death of a Salesman* reflect the growing uncertainty of peace and prosperity in postwar America? (2) Does *Salesman* and its representation of men—specifically, though not exclusively, Willy—demonstrate a diminishment while at the same time affirming masculine dominance? (3) What cultural events directly impinge upon an understanding of *Salesman* and what other events are downplayed or glossed over? (4) What were the dominant conceptions of masculinity at the time? (5) Finally, in what manner and form was masculinity conceived as facing a crisis? These questions are all pertinent to understanding the plight of the men in *Death of a Salesman.* These same questions, modified to fit the specific time period, were asked in relation to each staging this study examines.

Each chapter, then, is a specific case study of a discrete time period that impacts largely on ideas of masculinity, subordinate types, and how their struggle plays out in culture and is ultimately reflected in popular theatre. It will often feel that this study confines its findings to single decades and/or presidencies as if the history can be contained within these categories. However, discrete time periods do not exist solely in a single decade or within a single presidency. Time periods overlap, spill over into each other, influence and adopt characteristics of earlier eras, and possess characteristics that become more typical in the next time period. The porous boundaries between time periods need to be noted. The use of decades and presidents merely become markers, and the most prominent marker of progression throughout this study is the initial staging and various revivals of these five plays.

I feel an important caveat must be given before this study begins. What follows is a story of America and masculinity. I am not writing history and in no way am I claiming that this is the only way in which to view American culture over the past half-century. This is an interpretable

and, I would argue, very valid argument based on the evidence I have analyzed in popular culture and how it relates to some of the major theatrical output of the last 60 years. Interpretations are naturally subjective and many of these plays have been analyzed in a great number of ways. This does not, I would state, diminish my claims on representation of manhood and its connection to hegemonic masculinity, but instead demonstrates the importance of these plays to the construction of American identity and even myth.

I urge this statement to be seen as a caveat as opposed to an apology as I adamantly stand behind the cultural evidence and claims that support my argument. I simply do not want to be so definitive as to rule out contrasting or alternative interpretations of this broad historical data. The five plays that I analyze have remained largely popular and enduring. My task is to examine the historical evidence that helps explain the culture from which these stories emerge. The case studies that follow hope to contribute to a growing trend of examining masculinity and gender-constructed masculine characters, the ways in which representations of masculinity are tied to the power structure, and how these masculine types are reflected in theatre.

II. DEATH OF A SALESMAN & THE AMERICAN MALE IN POSTWAR AMERICA

"Failure is not the dark side of the American Dream; it is the foundation of it. The American Dream gives each of us the chance to be a born loser."
Scott Sandage, *Born Losers*

"The *man* simply isn't with them any more."
Elia Kazan

Published in *The New Yorker* in 1947, John Cheever's short story, "The Enormous Radio," is a glimpse into the lives of an Everyman and Everywoman living in urban postwar America. As in most of Cheever's stories, though, the lives he chronicles are emblematic of a larger grouping of society—a stand-in for the growing middle class, those moving up the ladder in the postwar boom. I stress moving up and not necessarily succeeding, though. "The Enormous Radio" is careful in documenting the status and position of Cheever's characters: "Jim and Irene Westcott were the kind of people who seem to strike that satisfactory average of income, endeavor, and respectability that is reached by the statistical reports in college alumni bulletins" (33). Cheever reveals that, although the Westcotts might be living a middle class life, underneath their veneer of respectability is a great insecurity, eroding their happiness. As Irene becomes voyeuristically obsessed with the lives of those in her apartment building through her magical radio, we see that everyone's lives are beset with problems and far from ideal. The story ends with Jim and Irene fighting about their discontent with their own 'normal' lives, utterly

indifferent to the now fixed radio drolly reporting disasters in Tokyo and Buffalo. This, at times, funny and hauntingly macabre critique of normal life points to a deep and unsettling discontent in America, a potential crisis point in the fabric of society.

In 1949, cultural historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. tapped into this same discontent in his work, *The Vital Center*. Commenting on life and the political landscape in the middle of the twentieth century, Schlesinger writes, "We live on from day to day, persisting mechanically in the routine of a morality and a social pattern which has been switched off but which continues to run from its earlier momentum. Our lives are empty of belief. They are lives of quiet desperation"[1] (244). This bleak outlook on American life—bereft of hope and filled with a dread uncertainty —tends to belie the more popular image of postwar America, gliding confidently into the economic boom of the 1950s. Instead, Schlesinger identifies something dead at the center of our culture. Even though America was growing, seismic cultural eruptions were leaving a lasting impact on the country, affecting everyone. These changes did more than prompt a baby boom; they represented a sea change in customs and traditions. While it is true that many people prospered and lived more materially satisfying lives during this time, it is also the case that many lives were altered, upended, or ruined as these changes took place. Historian William Chafe describes the economic situation as much more dire than is commonly thought, stating that "in 1947, 34 percent of all families earned less than $3,000…[and] between one-fifth and one-fourth of the nation could not survive on the income they earned" (137). The immediate postwar years, then, were a period of alarm for many Americans. This chapter, with the aid of Arthur Miller's

[1] Schlesinger quotes here Henry David Thoreau's famous dictum: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

Death of a Salesman, examines the underside of the postwar American boom and how a figure such as Willy Loman served to allay the fears of those transitioning into a more prosperous time.

Appearing onstage the same year as Schlesinger's study, *Death of a Salesman* ran for 742 performances and swept Broadway, taking with it all the major awards and gaining almost universal praise. This popular drama reveals a truth about this era in American history, showing its anxieties, wishes, and hopes as well as its successes and failures. Unlike what he did with his first Broadway hit, *All My Sons*, Miller is not directly writing about the current cultural events in his day.[2] Indeed, very little of the play seems to outwardly situate this story of generational conflict in postwar America. Miller states that the action of his play takes place in the "New York and Boston of today." However, given the chronological investigation of the play done by theatre scholar June Schlueter, Miller leaves plenty of evidence for his play to be historicized. Willy was probably born in 1886, living through the panic of 1893, traveling with his father across the country, and facing the Great Depression in his adult years. For the audiences of *Salesman*, Willy would have evoked this older generation—including, possibly, their parents—that survived the Depression, and were now being cast off in this rapidly changing economy. Indeed, one of the most persistent fears in the postwar period was that the country would slide back into a depression. Thus, Willy recalled an important and fearful character for those watching.

As a man in the twilight of his life in this time period, Willy is having an identity conflict between the generation before him—that of his father, as well as Ben—and the one represented by his children. However, inherent in this generational tension, I would argue, is not only the

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[2] Both Biff and Stanley mention the war, but Miller avoids any direct discussion of the time period, its culture and politics.

conflict of the postwar era, but a representation of American masculine identity at a crossroads. Ben's invocation to Willy to go west and make a fortune—an obvious reference to Manifest Destiny—is contrasted both with Howard's masculine business model and Bernard's future as a lawyer in front of the Supreme Court, symbolizing newer routes to the American Dream. The Loman men represent something different from these other models—an uneasy middle ground—unable to succeed as adventurers or businessmen. Studying the politics of this time period demonstrates that the Lomans' struggle stands in for the anxiety of masculine competency. It is my belief that, for the audiences of *Salesman*, Willy allayed masculine anxieties by serving as an almost sacrificial figure for masculinity—the failure—whose diminishment of authority insures the perpetuation of the dominant masculinity, a new identity bound up with postwar idealism and strength.

Most gender studies of this play have stressed that Willy fails to live up to an accepted view of American masculine identity. What I intend to demonstrate, however, is that masculinity in *Salesman* emerges as a troubled concept with no one identifiable definition or normative example. It is less that Willy fails to live up to one ideal and, instead, that a consistent conception of masculinity is not defined. This uncertainty breeds a sense of confusion in Willy, largely demonstrated by his increasing paranoia, delusions, and disorientation. It is often stated that Willy fails because, like Jay Gatsby, he believes too much in that definition of self-made manhood, the American Dream. As C.W.E. Bigsby compares the two characters,

> Corrupted by dreams which simultaneously denied them access to the potential redemption of human connectiveness, [Willy and Gatsby] had reached out for some substitute for the meaning which continued to elude them. They sought it mostly in an

> endlessly deferred future, a green light which beckoned them on towards a mythical world of romance and affluence (Memoriam 127-28).

It is my argument that it is not so much that Willy fails for not succeeding in the American Dream, as he simply does not know how to understand what that dream is.[3]

We see, in *Salesman*, a family being crushed from within and without, groping for meaning that eludes them. Willy is a man who has come to the end and has nothing to show for it, a ruined career, alienated from his family, haunted by his own memories. Biff, the oldest son, fell from his promising start at adult life to wandering the West,[4] subsisting from job-to-job, making less than "thirty-five dollars a week" (16), unable to find contentment. Happy, the second child, seems to have everything he ever wanted (women, apartment, job), but is deeply unhappy, no doubt suffering from the insecurity of always living in Biff's shadow with a father who cares little for him. Their mother, Linda, described as "[m]ost often jovial" (12), suffers from the frustrations of her husband and the ingratitude of her children. While she is the only one holding the family together, her input and her feelings seem to matter less both to her family and to many audiences.[5]

Miller reveals that while the Loman men lead lives of quiet desperation, everyone around them—all of the male cultural archetypes—seems to be succeeding. Miller's main technique in

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[3] The idea of the self-made man could be seen as a masculine type, but exists more as a social position towards which one aspires. The parameters and expectations of what a self-made man is are not defined at the time; it merely exists as something one should be.

[4] The image of a man wandering in the desert is an important one for America; it crops up in this study a few more times. Whether it is meant to evoke freedom to wander the vast lands of the U.S. or to paint man as lost and alone depends on the context, but both have been used.

[5] I say this as a point of sadness, but as an important part of the reception of *Salesman*. There has been a great deal of criticism written about Linda and her place in the family and while she is very rightly given the last sympathetic pull for audiences, it is Willy and his sons who comprise the bulk of the reception of this play.

demonstrating this is by showing contrasting foils to Willy and Biff. The first foil is seen with the Lomans' neighbors. Throughout the entire play, Willy attacks Charley for not being as much of a man as he, saying, "A man who can't handle his tools is not a man" (44). However, Charley is actually making money, and even supporting Willy's family by providing them the money to pay bills. His son Bernard, who, in childhood, acted as a foil to the more popular Biff, is now a lawyer, about to present a case in front of the Supreme Court. Another contrast is seen with Willy's boss, Howard and his father "old man Wagner." We don't actually get to see the elder Wagner and have only Willy's affectionate nostalgia for him, painting him as an idealized, benevolent father-type. Howard, though, is a stand-in for those in charge—the masculine representation of the Man who reveals an utterly callous attitude in dismissing Willy after years of service. Howard possesses cutthroat, business tactics that demonstrate his success, starkly highlighting Willy's failure.

The most important foils to Willy in the play are his own father and brother. Like Howard's father, Willy's father is not actually in the play, and is barely even a memory for Willy. In the absence of that father, though, is an idealization of his surrogate, Ben. For Willy, his brother is the measure of man—an ideal he can never reach. There is, however, an important contrast to Ben—also not seen in the play—Dave Singleman, the old, popular, and well-liked drummer. His charm and popularity have had as much impact on Willy as Ben, standing in for the salesman role model.[6] Most critics have located Willy's identity struggle as being torn between these masculine ideals. Carla McDonough largely affirms this sentiment in her invaluable study of masculinity in drama when she describes the plight of Willy as being

[6] It is telling that three of the most important father figures to Willy do not appear in the play, vanished like Willy is about to be.

> …caught between two models of manhood—the independent explorer in the wilderness as represented by his father and Ben, and the community man tied into both the capitalist enterprise and the family wherein he must be husband, father, and provider (30). [7]

However, as we dig further into what ideal masculine type is represented in Miller's work, differing, often clashing, characteristics are brought forth. There is actually no one single dominant type towards which Willy can aspire. It is my assumption that Willy is not so much caught between two masculine ideals, but among a myriad of masculine qualities.

But where do these qualities and types come from and who gets to choose them? Feminist and film theorist Teresa de Lauretis explains that gender "is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, as well as institutional discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices; by that I mean not only academic criticism, but more broadly social and cultural practices" (ix). Put another way, ideal conceptions of gender—whether masculine or feminine—are drawn from cultural sources ranging from film, theatre, and literature to politics, business, or sports. Those people or values that are honored and sustained during a particular time period become the ideal conception in defining essentialist masculinity. So while the sensitive and humorous nature of current film stars such as Denzel Washington or Johnny Depp lead them to be exemplars of masculinity, in the 1940s, stars such as Humphrey Bogart or Gregory Peck were fostering an entirely different tight-lipped steely masculinity.

This idea seems to be in line with Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses, whereby the values and authority of the dominant group are perpetuated, indeed

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[7] See also, Savran's *Cowboys, Communists, and Queers*, 33-35 and Bigsby's *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*, 100-123. Neither of these authors explicitly states that there are only two options for Willy, but much of their criticism of the play deals with binaries in the way that McDonough does.

supported, by private "institutions" that make up the religious, educational, economic, and artistic sectors of our society. As Althusser states, "the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology" (132). In other words, while a repressive government will enforce its authority by violence, areas of culture such as education, sports, arts, or church actually support the interests of the ruling class through more ideological means. This is clearly seen with John Wayne or Jimmy Stewart, actors of the postwar era who became role models for scores of men in ways that upheld a preferred cultural masculinity at the exclusion of other types. So while there is no direct intervention into these cultural systems, the beliefs, desires, and values of the dominant class find their way into many areas of culture such as artistic expression, cultural critiques, and economic analyses. It is from these apparatuses that we draw characteristics or examples of accepted masculine type(s) that are prevalent in certain time periods. *Salesman* references multiple characteristics of male types in often conflicting ways, leading to Willy's identity crisis.

Although it is possible to conflate the two, the most dominant influences of masculinity for Willy are clearly Ben and his father. These, at first, quite similar masculine exemplars for Willy are different enough, though, to warrant separate investigations, as Willy draws distinct ideas from both of them. This is reinforced in the original production when flute music is heard to symbolize Willy's father—a reference to the flutes his father made while they traveled on the road—while a separate leitmotif is given for Ben's entrances. His father's *essentialist* characteristic is that of the pioneer, exploring the Midwest before moving on to Alaska. We learn this from Willy's interactions with Ben and Willy's description of him, but also from the aura that Miller creates around the memory of the father. The opening stage descriptions paint the

picture: "*A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon*" (11). For Willy, his father is like the horizon of the Midwest and Plains that they drove through during his childhood, forever beckoning. The open air of Willy's youth is so opposite from present life that his imaginings of driving around with his father are always linked with the rugged masculinity of the pioneer/explorer. Miller reveals how important this emphasis on rugged is when Willy uses the exact word to Ben when describing how he raises his children, "rugged, well liked, all-around" (49). The flute, carefree and light, serves a more darkly ironic purpose at the end of the play. While the opening music might symbolize the open air, when the flute returns after Linda's closing line, "We're free," Miller states that the "*apartment buildings rise into sharp focus*" (139), not only highlighting Willy's failure to capture that dominant ideal symbolized by his father, but suggesting that Willy might achieve some peace through death, operating on a Strindbergian dream level. At the end, he is finally free from the ideals that he could never reach.

The deepest scars imprinted on Willy came from his father's abandonment at such an early age. He states desperately to Ben, "Dad left when I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel—kind of temporary about myself" (51). Without knowing what his father thought of him or without being able to receive the attention he so desperately needed from that masculine figure, Willy has always felt half-formed, even impermanent. While following in his father's footsteps by being a salesman and driving around the countryside with the window down, he was never able to figure out how his father was able to make a living for himself, succeeding where Willy cannot. Willy fails to instill rugged and successful qualities into his children because they were not instilled in him. Instead, Willy makes his children just like him—men confused by which masculine model to embody.

Though serving a similar function as Willy's father, Ben has different masculine characteristics. His most important thematic purpose is to serve as surrogate father to Willy. Miller himself described Ben in his notebooks as "a heavy-set man. Pompous, the father."[8] I believe, though, that there are distinct differences between the two. Where Willy's father represented the pioneer/frontiersman mythos of the American man, Ben represents the next step, the conqueror/settler—Willy's father was finding new frontiers, Ben was aggressively settling them, and reaping a profit as well. His exploits are extravagant—walking into a jungle at 17 and emerging rich, living in Africa, having seven children. His is a heightened version of masculinity, serving to underline Willy's own failings. Kazan recognized this, detailing his conception of Ben as "the embodiment of Success, Authority, Daring, Manliness, Enterprise, Fearlessness, Self-sufficiency" (Rowe 44). One of Ben's most important characteristics is his confidence, a steely resolve that seems to encapsulate a brawny masculinity, as Willy says, "The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! (41). The masculine type that Ben evokes is one that represents brute strength, confidence, and will to succeed.

Ben is also a retainer of the past for Willy, containing his most important information about his family, elevating his importance to something near sacred for Willy. In his first remembrance of Ben, Willy pleads for him to stay and "Please tell about Dad. I want my boys to hear. I want them to know what kind of stock they spring from. All I remember is a man with a big beard" (48). Willy reveals here his own feeling of inadequacy at being unable to impart and instill in his children the type of masculinity he so desperately wants to embody. As much as

[8] Quoted in Murphy, 9. Miller's notebooks are located at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

Willy draws strength and inspiration from his patrilineal past,[9] he knows very little about it and can only hold onto a masculine trait—a bearded man. His desperation and confusion in life stems from feeling detached from both his father and Ben. This highlights the necessity for Ben's approval at the end of the play before committing suicide.

The hypermasculinity of Ben is linked to several of the cultural references—representations of archetypal male figures—made throughout the play. The earliest allusion comes in Willy's first reverie into the past, returning from a sales trip bearing a gift for the boys in the back of his car: a punching bag with Gene Tunney's signature on it. Tunney was the world heavyweight-boxing champion from 1926-1928, who defeated Jack Dempsey twice, retiring before he was ever beaten. For the Loman men and probably much of the audience, Tunney represents an unstoppable male force. Another sports figure is referenced later in the play—in speaking about Biff's athletic prowess—Red Grange, an ultra-athlete who defined the masculinist nature of sports, standing as a role model for the children and men of the era. So, in addition to the pioneer/conqueror mythos of American masculinity, Willy also adds athletic excellence to his conception of the dominant type.

However, there is another interesting cultural referent that reveals a different side of acceptable masculine types than previously analyzed. In his scene with Howard, Willy tells of the praises heaped on him by Wagner Sr. for his excellent sales in 1928—sales Howard denies Willy ever having made.[10] It is during this exchange that Willy references politician Al Smith.

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[9] It would seem that Willy is more familiar with his matrilineal past—given Ben's knowledge of Mother having lived with Willy (46)—but Miller refuses to give us any detail about her and Willy does not ever mention her.

[10] Ironically, this is the year Tunney retired from boxing and the same year that Willy remembers in relation to his old Chevy, the same car where the windows would come down and the car that Biff simonizes so well in that important memory. By putting together the timeline of the story,

While Howard cuts his speech off, Willy is presumably referencing Smith's failed bid for presidency in 1928 when he lost to Herbert Hoover. Linked to Tammany Hall politics, Smith was a Catholic Democrat and governor of New York and was known as a reformer who famously opposed the powerful newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst.[11] While Smith stood up to individuals like Hearst and went all the way to a presidential race, there is an aspect of failure attached to him. If Gene Tunney is an extension of Ben's masculinity, we can see Willy, even as he is lying about his success as a salesman, largely identifying with Al Smith—a defeated presidential candidate in the same year.

However, *Salesman* resists easy identifications with characters and masculine types. Just as it might seem that one character is, or was, a positive force in Willy's life, Miller complicates it. For instance, Ben is not left to just be the rich uncle; Miller also adds an element of danger to him, witnessed in his unexpected violence to Biff, followed by his injunction to "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy" (49). This not only guarantees an audience's distrust of him, but demonstrates his outsider status to the family. His menacing presence is a deliberate counter to the affability that Willy sees as so important. This practice of complicating the importance of these figures to Willy demonstrates the competing versions of masculinity in the play and the confusion that is so palpable within Willy's self-conception.

The largest counter to the aggressive and hypermasculine traits of the Loman men is clearly Dave Singleman. Willy recounts that he was the type of seller who could go "at the age

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this is also the year that Biff finds Willy with the woman in Boston and fails to go to college—seemingly the most pivotal point in Willy's remembrances. The year 1928, then, becomes a monumental moment in the past both for conceptions of masculinity and for Willy's own sense of failure.

[11] Smith was also at the forefront of the construction and running of the Empire State Building, the edifice that—built during the Depression—stood as a symbol of dominance and strength.

of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people" (81). For Willy, the myth of Singleman is one that combines different masculine types: that of being personable and well liked. Singleman supports his family through the sale of goods, a trait that is shared by Willy's father, elevating Singleman's position to another surrogate father position. The world that Singleman existed in is a counter to the conquering and dangerous world of Ben; Singleman was definitely a pioneer-type, like Willy's father, but used affability instead of aggressive violence to explore new territory. Willy explains to Howard how, in Willy's youth—the days of Singleman—business was built on personality with friendship playing a large part. As he says, "There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it" (81). The masculine world of Ben lacks these very qualities, being instead a world of harsh, conquering rugged men. While Willy's naiveté had led him to believe that the world of Singleman was kinder, he is now finding out, at the end, that it could be just as harsh as the one in which his brother lived.

Willy's dream of embodying the ideal of the affable salesman pioneer is quickly debunked by his sheer inability to successfully sell or even be liked. Ironically, it is not just in the present, with Willy sloping across the stage carrying full sample cases that we see him as a failure. Miller makes it clear that Willy was also a failure in the past. In his first reverie—which one can place in 1928, the supposed height of his success—Willy's two sons welcome him home as a champion. He then proceeds to tell Linda of his success on the road, "five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston" (35). This number unfortunately dwindles down to two hundred gross for the whole trip, as Willy becomes honest about his sales. Tellingly, his excuses for why he failed reveal a problem with being liked, pointing towards an inability to meet his own criteria for masculine success. "You know, the trouble is, Linda," he confesses,

"people don't seem to take to me" (36). He claims that they laugh at him, stating "they just pass me by. I'm not noticed" (36). In his next delivery he claims that it is his garrulousness; "A man oughta come in with a few words" (37). He finally confesses a story that exposes an irascible temperament: "I'm fat. I'm very—foolish to look at…a salesman I know, as I was going in to see the buyer I heard him say something about—walrus. And I—I cracked him right across the face" (37). Willy's violence here reveals an utterly unlikable quality, highlighting discrepancies between his beliefs and his actions. Moreover, the entire scene paints a picture of a conflicted individual, a man who lies to his wife to make up for his shortcomings; it is clear Willy recognizes his own failings, but just can't seem to correct them.

Willy's pioneer conception of himself, as if he were following in the footsteps of his father and Singleman, is debunked by Linda when she rebukes her sons at their disregard at their father's plight. She tells them, "He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there no one knows him any more, no one welcomes him" (57). Willy's present reality is that the frontier has already been settled and he is merely lost. If he was ever the pioneer for that territory—which is doubtful—he has long been forgotten. From the episode with the Woman in Boston, we can glean that Willy attempted to secure an advantage over other sellers by starting intimate relationships with the secretaries. Considering he wasn't well liked by other men, he had to use other means in order to be important to his buyers. Ultimately, this tactic cost him a great deal. In his production notebook, Elia Kazan captures perfectly this conflicted portrait of Willy when he writes, Willy "is torn between an absolute need to believe he is '*vital* in New England' and an absolute knowledge that he is not" (Rowe 45; emphasis in original).

Although he mostly serves a sinister purpose in this play, Willy's boss Howard is actually another very important masculine figure who complicates the notion of there being just one or

two acceptable types. In a play that relies on such a small, tight cast, the inclusion of Howard in such a lengthy, pivotal scene indicates his significance as a male figure. Directly after Willy is fired, Charley lectures Willy about how unimportant it is to be liked in the business world, referencing J.P. Morgan, whose impressiveness was his money and the way he handled it, not his geniality. Howard, then, in his deft and brusque manner with Willy exemplifies this cold, calculating business type who refuses to respect and honor a man who has devoted his whole life to the company. Moreover, Howard represents success, the Man, a character type so different from the failing Willy Loman. However, Miller refuses to merely vilify Howard and instead demonstrates his human side as a devoted family man. As the scene starts, we see Howard playing back for Willy the recorded voices of his family on his brand-new wire recorder. He brags about his son's learning, his daughter's devotion, and his wife's demure, charming shyness contrasted to her husband's outgoing and commanding personality. This moment reveals a reinforcement of Howard as the man of the house, highlighting Willy's own inadequacy at home. One assumes from listening to the wire recorder that everything is ordered and in place at Howard's house with gender and familial roles respected and honored. Unlike Willy, Howard is both a successful businessman and a providing family man.

Miller further confuses the family man type with the example of Charley. After Willy learns of Bernard's success at arguing in front of the Supreme Court, Willy incredously questions how Charley could have helped make this happen: "And you never told him what to do, did you? You never took any interest in him." To which, Charley replies, "My salvation is that I never took any interest in anything" (95-96). Willy condemns Charley for never being masculine enough, but it is Charley and his son that are successful, not the Loman men. Charley seems to embody an alternative, even oppositional, masculine stance from that which Willy

embraces and Howard exemplifies. While Charley knows nothing of sports, is not mentioned with a wife, and does not know how to use tools, which, to Willy, is "disgusting" (44), the end of the play reveals that Charley's apathy towards masculine expectations allows him to avoid the very pitfalls that ensnared Willy. These different portraits of successful family man types merely serve to demonstrate Willy's confused sense of himself as a father and husband.

Willy draws a great deal of identity from his sons, especially Biff. The stage directions reveal that on the mantle above Willy's bed is a silver athletic trophy. It is not stated where this comes from, but we are left to assume that the trophy is Biff's from his days playing football. Further, the references to his boys as Adonis and Hercules, in addition to the cultural references made to Red Grange and Gene Tunney, leave us to imagine that Willy inspired them with tales of athletic prowess as indicators of masculine exemplarity. The more that Biff achieved these hypermasculine goals, the more Willy could identify himself as possessing some degree of masculine excellence. When those traits in Biff started to disappear, so too did Willy's self-confidence.

However, it is not just success on the playing field that the boys were encouraged to succeed in; the bedroom was also a proving ground for their masculinity. In their first scene together, Biff and Happy speak of the "five hundred women [who] would like to know what was said in this room" (20), revealing that virility, not to mention hyperbole, is something intimately tied up with their identities. Brenda Murphy uncovers in her work on *Salesman*, that the original scripted version of *Salesman* has additional dialogue from Willy's first remembrance. In this cut scene from both the performance and the published edition, Biff and Happy recount a camping trip with some fellow boys, in which Biff had a romantic exchange with an older woman in her tent. Willy laughs delightedly and expresses keen interest and pride in Biff's heroics, with the

stage directions describing him as "*Teeming with sensuous happiness*."[12] This demonstrates how Willy drew a great deal of identity from sexuality and virility, obviously realized in the play by the Woman in Boston. It seems clear that Willy instilled this in his sons as well.

This is no better demonstrated than with Happy, whose sexual conquests are a pathetic call for attention. While Biff demonstrates that sexual conquests are behind him, Happy relentlessly pursues women, even sabotaging his own career, social standing, and family by his promiscuity. He uses sex as a weapon in the business sector, exposing an inability to compete with those men on an even playing field. Sleeping with the fiancés of men being promoted above him, however, is getting him nowhere. All he seems to receive is the scorn of his mother who refers to him as a "philandering bum" (57), accusing him of placing his "lousy rotten whores" (124) above the concerns of his own father. While Willy wants to think that virility is a way to embody a dominant masculine type, neither he nor Happy play the game right.

While many critics of the play[13] have focused on just Ben and/or Dave Singleman as the example of Willy's role models and normative types, the play reveals that the masculine models from which Willy draws inspiration are too large for just one or two types. The male figures and characteristics that inspire Willy are almost diametrically opposed and he often confuses them. Willy's confusion is aptly demonstrated when he conflates Charley's type with Ben's. As Charley and Willy play cards, endlessly bickering, Willy begins to speak to Charley as if he were Ben—"For a second you reminded me of my brother Ben" (45)—who soon appears. Willy finds

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[12] This is from Brenda Murphy's *Miller: Death of a Salesman* 47. She drew it from Miller's original script (37-39), which is located at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Murphy postulates that these lines, along with a number of others, that would reveal a more negative opinion of women on Biff's part, were cut as they would have lessened an audience's sympathy for Biff.

[13] David Savran, June Schlueter (2000), and Carla McDonough all tend to view Willy's struggle in a binary form with Ben and Singleman serving as representatives of two competing worlds

himself confused about masculine roles, desperately trying to please his elder sibling while also attempting to demonstrate his superiority to Charley. His disorientation culminates in an explosion at Charley before fully entering into the past with Ben.

While Willy might be confusedly pursuing multiple types throughout the play, there is no reason to conclude that he was destined for failure. Despite growing up without a principal male figure in his life, Willy found other means of support: a career, a wife, a family, and a home. He can build his own stoop, fix the roof, and his son was a star quarterback with scholarships to universities. All of this is consistent with images of success and of having achieved the American Dream. The goals and dreams that Willy pursued were (and still are) important to many American men. His failure as a man is not simply because of an adulterous affair; it goes much deeper than that. The reason Willy resonates so much with his audiences is because of his uncertainty as a man. The play becomes less a failing of one man, and, instead, of everyman. In his essay on the play, A. Howard Fuller taps into this universality when he declares, "Nearly everyone who sees it can discover some quality displayed by Willy and his sons that exists in himself and in friends and relatives." What strikes me about this quote is that as much as this play is often viewed as an allegorical tale, its universality seems to be solely contingent upon male empathy and identification. The importance of this play, I would argue, is not so much in examining Willy as *every*man but as an every*man*—notions of masculinity being the central focus in understanding the success of *Death of a Salesman*.[14] Essentially, who are the people Willy Loman speaks to and for? What are the cultural events that impacted the creation and reception of this theatrical event?

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[14] This is not to suppose that women cannot relate to Willy and his family's struggles. I am mostly identifying the fact that women and their situation (in a pre-*Feminine Mystique* world) were not considered and the problems seen in *Salesman* were considered male problems only.

There was certainly a great deal of hopefulness at the conclusion of World War II. Having gone through the devastating economic crisis of the Great Depression as well as an arduous war, both struggles now appeared to be over. America's international influence had never been stronger, with the Truman administration passing two acts of legislation, the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine—the former intending to lay the foundation for the economic recovery of Europe, with the latter emphasizing the policy of containment that would characterize Cold War politics —effectively defining the political landscape to come for the latter half of the twentieth century. Domestically, the future of America pointed towards recovery. The war had led to a mass employment increase and, due to massive rationing, some of the country had income to spare when the war ended. As William Chafe describes it, "Most Americans could hardly wait to spend their accumulated savings on automobiles, washing machines, electrical appliances, and housing. With advertisers promoting fantasies of consumer indulgence, and war workers ready to release their pent-up urge to spend, the postwar economy possessed its own built-in momentum" (106). This portentous level of spending led to a height of growth, consumerism, and prosperity—not to mention birthrates—the country had never before seen. The immediate aftermath of World War II not only changed the face of the international community, but the United States emerged as an entirely new place, with both unbounded aspirations and dread uncertainties.

Much of the rampant consumerism that permeated this time period is critiqued in Willy's false belief in material gain. From the refrigerator to the cars to the wire recorder, these material gains were supposed to represent strength, security, and stability. Miller works to undermine this cultural thought, exposing the false security bred through rampant commercialism. In Willy's case it is the fact that nothing lasts. This is alluded to in the play when Willy points to both the

impermanence and ephemeral nature of material goods—"Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it" (15). At the start of Act Two, he states, in relation to his constantly breaking refrigerator, "Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard" (73). His house, for many years, has served its function, providing shelter while Willy and Linda raised their children, but it has now grown old and useless, choked out of its own environment by towering apartment buildings. The temperamental refrigerator, too, demonstrates an inability of material goods to live up to their potential. Further, these material goods that Willy ties to self-identity and happiness are not fully owned until they are almost ruined, perhaps symbolic of Willy himself. Another consumer in this play, Howard, provides a different perspective on the use of material goods. He states, while playing with his new wire-recorder, "I'm gonna take my camera, and my bandsaw, and all my hobbies, and out they go. This is the most fascinating relaxation I ever found" (78). The important difference between these two men is the worth and importance of just what they buy. Willy buys necessities, a house, refrigerator, car; Howard trifling toys.[15] Their relation to their goods exists across a class divide.

Miller's critique aside, the immediate postwar years did instill assurance through material gain, providing a hope that the political and cultural gains made during the war would have lasting change for the country. During World War II, America experienced its only redistribution of wealth whereby, to a small extent, the wealth of the upper tier was distributed to those below. Due to necessity—and a scarcity of able-bodied white men—women found gainful employment. Blacks, though still grossly unequal in their treatment, experienced the first promise of change

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[15] I say trifling toys, but it is important to note that Howard's wire-recorder was purchased for means of dictation, linking it to the white-collar world of business and prosperity from which Willy is not allowed to participate and from which he is being eliminated.

and improvement during the war. Labor leaders, as well, saw unions bursting at the seams with numbers and their momentum carried the hope of gaining victories not only with higher wages, but in the world of management as well. Further, fears of the economy being unable to accommodate the return of so many soldiers were not realized. Thanks to the GI Bill, returning soldiers and their new families changed the face of this country, sparking an increase in higher education, the rise of suburbia, larger families, and spending levels that put multiple cars in the houses that these new members of the burgeoning middle-class owned themselves.

However, as Michael Kimmel notes, and Schlesinger alluded to, there were not just hopeful feelings in the postwar climate, but also anxiety; a sentiment captured in *Salesman* itself. In *Manhood in America*, Kimmel touches upon the optimistic attitude: "Men had been able to prove on the battlefield what they had found difficult to prove at the workplace and in their homes—that they were providers and protectors…When the war took on the tone of a moral crusade…the virtuous tenor of military manhood was enhanced" (147). However, Kimmel also reveals how several popular films and advice columns focus on how "reentry proved more difficult than many men had anticipated" (*Manhood* 147). Moving from war hero to domestic provider in a changing economic world bred much anxiety. So while the economy was able to handle the return of so many soldiers, the veterans themselves faced a lot of challenges adjusting to life back home, seen so explicitly in the Academy-award winning 1947 film, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, where three soldiers return to their home town as heroes only to find themselves dissociated from everyone they knew before they left for war. Referencing *Salesman* directly, Kimmel states that men faced a masculine identity crisis: "Men had to achieve identities that weren't too conforming to the march of the gray flannel suits lest they lose their souls; but they couldn't be too nonconforming lest they leave family and workplace responsibilities behind"

(155). Unfortunately, this left a very unclear idea about acceptable masculine goals for many men in society. Miller's play, then, is perched right at that point of societal anxieties that were only going to increase in time.

It seemed, then, that the same hope that the conclusion of the war brought also ushered in the anxiety felt by the country as well. History has not remembered as well the worry that came just before the success. American historian John Patrick Diggins demonstrates just that sentiment,

> …the immediate postwar years reflected the country's stress and frustration. There were shortages of housing and consumer goods, cold-war tensions, overcrowded schools and classrooms, and disillusionment on the part of some soldiers who had returned to a country that seemed far removed from the dreams that comforted them during their lonely years overseas" (100).

This anxiety caused massive restructuring of society just after the war ended. Although women retained employment, the returning male soldiers took back the jobs that paid more and promised advancement. Rosie the Riveter joined the world of clerical work—swapping machinery in factories for typewriters in high rises. Blacks and other socially disenfranchised people found themselves still marginalized without gainful employment or equal rights, experiencing more of a backlash against their minimal gains during the war. Having flocked to the north for employment, they now found themselves in ghettos of cities that were forgotten by the white middle-class, which was in the midst of America's largest internal migration, to the suburbs. Companies, as well as the government, cracked down on labor unions, drastically diminishing the strength they had attained over the previous few years. Even America's international promise soured quickly as relations with the Soviet Union took a drastically negative turn and a nuclear

threat seemed to loom large, threatening another war. The last years of the Truman administration went from the hope of postwar growth to a world rife with the threat of war as well as anxieties that threatened to tear a hole in the social fabric. Schlesinger's "quiet desperation" is an intense perturbation, caught between the fear of communism on the left and totalitarianism on the right, between the promise of wealth and the reality of utter injustice. For most of the 1950s—essentially defining the tone of this era—problems simmered just below the surface, fully erupting only at the start of the next decade.

Many authors writing on this era highlight the uncertainty felt just after V-J Day—victory, but at what cost? Although the war was over, what occurred at Hiroshima and Nagasaki engendered a fear of the devastation of nuclear warfare. It wasn't just the bomb, though, that loomed large in the cultural imagination. At the time of *Salesman*'s opening, Truman was putting together his own New Deal-type legislation, modestly labeled 'Fair Deal,' which hoped to bolster those areas of the economy that had begun to falter, including problems for the workingman. However, with the conservative Eightieth Congress running the legislative branch, more pro-business legislation was passed than anything resembling help for the workers in the country. Also at this time, lawyers, including a young Richard Nixon, were readying evidence in a trial against Alger Hiss on perjury for denying espionage charges in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee—an event that symbolized the opening salvo of McCarthyism and the Red Scare. Fears of Moscow and the internal spread of communism were only worsened when it was revealed that the U.S.S.R. had successfully tested their first atomic bomb and that Chiang Kai-shek's China had fallen to communism, already questioning the efficacy of the Truman Doctrine. Combating both domestic and foreign fears, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council were born, leading to an increased sense of paranoia that was

seemingly confirmed “by the arrest, trial, and conviction of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg” (Chafe 100).

While many problems occupied the attention of the country in this time period, none were, arguably, so vociferous as the intense and divided conflict over labor. Diggins explains how, during the war “workers benefited from full employment, high wages, and overtime pay” (101) and William Chafe explains how “[n]o group had greater reason for optimism at the end of the war than organized labor” (86). The ranks of unions were filled because of war employment, and labor leaders looked forward to advancing those wartime gains. The movement envisioned by labor leaders was ambitious; “If successful in their venture, labor leaders would become joint partners in corporate life, not simply defenders of such traditional union interests as higher wages and better working conditions” (Chafe 86). However, this prosperity did not come to fruition, with “the soaring inflation that followed the war erod[ing] many of labor’s gains…In 1946 America witnessed one of the most severe periods of unrest in American labor history” (Diggins 101). Workers, those who had fueled—or fought for —the country during the war, were now facing unrest as the country adjusted to a postwar, inflationary economy. On its way to prosperity, the country had to make changes and it was the workingman that went through the most upheaval.

Due to fears of communism, unions suddenly became suspicious areas; Chafe citing CIO membership plummeting from 5.2 million to 3.7 million in a matter of a couple years. On the immediate postwar years scholar George Lipsitz, in his work *Rainbow At Midnight*, states how “[f]ears of another depression, accumulated resentments over wartime sacrifices, and anger over postwar reverses in wages and working conditions ignited strikes and demonstrations from coast to coast” (99-100). Strikes very soon became so commonplace as to be a feature of the postwar

era, “Within a year after V-J Day more than 5 million men and women had walked off the job in quest of better wages, improved working conditions, and job security, creating the greatest work stoppage in American history” (Chafe 88). Instead of finding an ally in the Democrat Harry Truman, workers and labor leaders became frustrated with a president who seemed so different from their former presidential ally, Roosevelt. As part of America’s plan to combat Soviet expansion and promote free trade for America’s own growth, William Clayton of the State Department had declared immediately after the war that the country needed “to export three times as much as we exported just before the war if we want to keep our industry running somewhere near capacity.”[16] Because of the strikes, workers across the country began to frustrate not only hopes for the country’s recovery, but also the promises made by the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe and combat the growing fear of communism. Truman became desperate for workers to get back on the line. Chafe notes how after a railroad strike, “Truman told his cabinet he was going to ask for the harshest labor law in history. The government should have the power to seize vital industries, Truman told Congress, to draft strikers, and to incarcerate rebellious union leaders” (90). The stage was being set for an all-out war against the very mechanisms that would rebuild the country.

Buoyed by Truman’s seeming distrust with workers, or simply enacting their own agenda, the Republican controlled Congress sent up the Labor-Management Relations Act, known as the Taft-Hartley Act, after its sponsors, Senator Alphonso Taft and Representative Fred Allan Hartley. This act undid many of the labor relations enacted by FDR in the previous decade, a type of undercutting of the American worker that is mirrored in the dismissive handling of Willy. Diggins lists how the act “outlawed the closed shop and secondary boycotts,

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[16] Quoted in Chafe 68.

held unions liable for breach of and damages due to jurisdictional strikes…legalized injunctions against strikes …compelled workers about to strike to obey a sixty-day cooling off period, and required union leaders to take a non-communist oath" (101). This, however, seemed to go too far for Truman who, in a possible bid to win back workers' votes in anticipation of the 1948 presidential race, vetoed the bill. The Eightieth Congress, however, did not have to rely on the president's approval, as they controlled both the House and the Senate, and so passed the bill anyways, which, coupled with growing anti-communist fervor, effectively destroyed the postwar momentum of organized labor.

Because of or simply tangential with this legislature against unions was the country's movement from an industrial economy to a service economy, with more jobs in clerical and other related positions than in the factories. With the rise of the service industry, the GI Bill providing college education to millions of Americans, as well as the "flight" from the cities by white, more affluent citizens into the suburbs, the world under which the American workingman had existed was changing dramatically. Many writers, including Schlesinger, were cataloging a malaise, even backlash, stemming from these drastic societal changes. Foremost among these voices was sociologist C. Wright Mills. The American man, Mills states,

> …is more often pitiful than tragic, as he is seen collectively, fighting impersonal inflation, living out in slow misery his yearning for the quick American climb. He is pushed by forces beyond his control, pulled into movements he does not understand; he gets into situations in which his is the most helpless position. The white collar man is the hero as victim, the small creature who is acted upon but who does not act, who works along unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking loud, never talking back, never taking a stand (xii).

Mills, quite succinctly, captures not only the angst of the American man in the time period he was writing, in 1953, but sums up the general feeling throughout this whole study: the American man as in crisis, as a victim.

At the same time that situations were drastically changing in the workplace, there was also a paradigmatic shift occurring in the home. Related to cold war politics, this change shifted the social standing of the man in his home. Elaine Tyler May provides probably the best overview of what became known as domestic containment. In her work, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, May demonstrates how "public policy and political ideology [were] brought to bear on the study of private life, locating the family within the larger political culture, not outside it" (10). As both external and internal communist subversion was feared by the country, not only did the borders of respectable, capitalist nations need to be secured, but so too did the family—making the family a microcosm of the society that needed protection from outside sources. Essentially mirroring the cold war politics of the day, the domestic version of containment ensured that "the 'sphere of influence' was the home. Within its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed, where they could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which postwar men and women aspired" (14). With this emphasis on the security and comfort of the home came a new emphasis and role for women in society, the homemaker.

Much of this drive to establish women's interests within the home was a cultural need to justify women's move out of the workplace. While women had established themselves as a viable work force during the war, with twelve million returning soldiers and a fear of a sluggish economy, those women needed somewhere to go. Offering up the idea of domestic containment, coupled with a fear of a communist threat in society, ensured a culturally acceptable place for

women. However, this move also bred uncertainty among men. Elaine Tyler May notes that while most studies of the period have concentrated on the plight of women, many critical voices of the day, such as David Riesman and William Whyte "considered homemakers to be emancipated and men to be oppressed" (20). Shifting of the masculine roles in the household put more expectations on the man at the same time that the world of business was also changing his role. What this shift manifested was a seeming loss of independence in both the workplace and at home.[17] Man's role in this changing period was shifting constantly in an effort to find the right place for him.

While many feminist critiques of Linda Loman have been written and vary in their conclusions, it does seem apparent that very little subversion of patriarchal authority is at play in Willy's home. Linda dutifully maintains the house, managing the domestic areas while Willy works. She listens to him and obeys him, abiding his fitful temper while demonstrating an exhaustive supply of sympathy for Willy's situation. There is however, enough anxiety about the role of the Other—wives and children—to warrant a fear of patriarchal supplanting for Willy. At the end of the first act, when the men in the house become increasingly excited over the prospect of a possible sporting good stores venture, Linda keeps expressing her excitement only to be met with rage from Willy for interrupting. When this outburst is answered with intense anger from Biff, Willy replies, "What're you, takin' over this house?" (65). Willy's fear here is not just that his son is standing up to him, but in doing so is defending Linda's right to speak. As Willy's position is diminished in the workplace and in society, his feeling of power and authority at home is also felt to be in question and under attack.

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[17] Fear of male impotence was still quite real almost a decade later in William Inge's play, *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, a tale of male emasculation at the workplace—the father is fired from his salesman job—that translates to a fear of powerlessness at home.

As Willy evidences, this postwar masculinity crisis was especially impacting not only those older Americans who had weathered the Great Depression and the home front during the war, but those returning millions of American soldiers. These massive changes were drastically unsettling and even bordered on emasculation. Given America's international posture and the stances the government was taking on organized labor, Chafe is correct when he states that "[m]achismo, patriotism, belief in God, opposition to social agitation, hatred of the Reds…were the definitions of true Americanism" (103).[18] I would argue, more specifically, that these characteristics were, and to some degree still are, the definition for the ideal American masculine type. It seems, though, that there is an apparent contradiction in masculine identity, between the mindset engendered with the victory of World War II and the changing domestic roles in the home and workplace on the other side, the friction of these two drastically complicating man's self-conception. American male identity seemed to be remarkably similar to the perception of the bomb, instilling both confidence and fear, marking the era as remarkably contradictory.

Willy Loman's value to his work and his family becomes not only inefficient but also unnecessary; he was a man who neither served in the war nor had sons who did; a man who was caught between the pioneer mythos of his father and the conquering mythos of his brother; a man who never knew what he wanted, and who, as Charley says, simply "had the wrong dreams" (138). At the end all Willy manages to do is, through his present discontent, reflect back on all of the choices and events of his life that led him to this point. Miller's work plays on the idea that individuals write their own history. All events of one's life are seemingly narrativized around certain, similar ideas. Essentially, we become written into our own history with all of our events

[18] These characteristics seem to recall Kazan's conception and understanding of Ben listed above.

crystallizing around certain themes, remembrances, even traumas. Willy Loman has become the sum of his failings, from his affair with the Woman in Boston to his refusal to follow Uncle Ben to Alaska. He reads the theme of failure and betrayal in every action and event in his life. While he hardly ever acknowledges any of his own failings, the irony is there that Willy has figuratively dug his own grave. It is principally with the idea of masculine identity that Willy experiences the most disorientation leading to his present circumstances. With no solid role model or cultural ideal from which to pattern his life, which Willy desperately needs, he is left to guess at who and what to be. We find him even seeking the approval of his mystical brother on the eve of his own suicide, the ultimate empty gesture of giving. It can be seen that Willy's tragedy is that he never knew himself; my addition is that he never knew himself as a man, and just what that manhood should mean.

While acknowledging that the idea of tragic flaw plays into Willy's downfall, Miller, in his essay "Tragedy and the Common Man," implies that other forces are at play against Willy. He states, that the "tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity…the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his 'rightful' position in his society." This rightful position of the workingman in 1949, for Miller it would seem, should be higher. Through his sympathetic portrayal, Miller shows a man who has given much of his life to his work and is now being rejected and cast off. What we see through the action of the play is a diminishment of Willy as a masculine authority. As Kazan states in his notes, "by the end of the play, there is no one there for him to reach out to and he is living entirely within himself. The people watching this spectacle are horrified. The *man* simply isn't with them any more" (Rowe 48-9). In this way, I would argue, Willy represents the mood, the feeling in 1949 of transition:

the transition from industry to service, the transition from upwardly mobile man to domestic man, the transition from a leader of men, such as a Ben or even a Dave Singleman, to just another face in the crowd, a follower. The ultimate fear being that one will simply become irrelevant and disappear.

However, why did the representation of man's failure—especially one so representative of lower-class male individuals—have such a distinct impact on the theatre audiences of the day? The swelling ranks of the middle class throughout the country—those filling the houses in burgeoning suburbs being built by Levitt & Sons—were not the people making *Salesman* the hot ticket in town. And, certainly, individuals who could most closely relate to Willy could not afford Broadway tickets. Broadway is and was a New York phenomenon, attended more by the elite than the masses. The active theatergoers, the elite, wealthy class that still used opening night as the means to demonstrate their social standing, largely determined the worth and success of a show. As Bruce McConachie states in his work on cold war theatre,

> Because the first few performances were crucial to long-term success in the hit-or-flop system of Broadway production, the ["active theatregoers"] exercised a kind of veto over all shows. In effect they, together with tastemakers and consumer guides in the press, selected what the professional-managerial group and the rest of the theatergoing public might see (4).

The important term brought up here is the idea of the professional-managerial class (PMC)—a group who owned none of the means of production, but were in charge of those beneath them that did much of the work at the lower levels. McConachie reveals how much of the theatre audience was solidly part of the PMC, and not the working class of America, and would have been highly influenced by the tastemakers and critics in determining what was popular. In his

survey of Broadway audiences, Thomas Gale Moore notes that "the Broadway audience is a reasonably homogeneous group of upper-middle-class Americans" (88). Moore goes on to note that visitors to New York only accounted for about 30% of the audience and that over 60% were from the city limits and that in surveys taken, it was noted that there was a "status of going to the theater and especially the prestige of attending first nights. In this group, naturally, were those who visited Broadway because it was the thing to do culturally or socially" (76). Much like today, then, it is a certain group, or class, in our society that make theatergoing an event and it is that group who largely determine the success of any given show.

The interesting idea here is that Miller wrote a play about a poor working class failure that succeeded resoundingly well for a predominantly middle and upper class audience. Loman could easily have stood in for those disgruntled workers on strike and been a figure of scorn for those wealthy audience members. Instead, he was a sympathetic figure. Elia Kazan found this to be one of the most interesting aspects of the play, stating in his biography, Miller

> …does an extraordinary thing there; he shows us a man who represents everything [Miller] believes to be misguided about the system we live in, then goes on to make us feel affection and concern, pity and even love for this man. Then he goes deeper and we are aware of a tragic weight. Is it for the Salesman? Is it for ourselves? (356)

Kazan touches upon the fact that Miller's play is a harsh condemnation of the system that causes Willy to fail. One wonders if the audience recognized this harsh criticism or if they merely saw the demise of a flawed man? Robert Garland, in his review of the first night performance, seems to think that very little of the cultural critique was observed, believing, instead, that the male part of the audience simply sympathized with poor Willy Loman. He states, "If Everyman will forgive me, in Arthur Miller's Salesman there's much of Everyman. Bothered, bewildered, but

mostly bedeviled, as Willy Loman is, he's not a great deal different from the majority of his contemporaries. He, even as you and I, builds himself a shaky shelter of illusion" (358). The system that supported Willy's demise is somehow left unexamined, but still connections are made to Willy by virtue of his status as a man in a contemporary context.

Whether or not Miller meant this play to be as allegorical as it was received, he certainly felt strongly about how it should be interpreted. On the first-year anniversary of *Salesman*, he wrote, in *The New York Times*, that the play "is the tragedy of a man who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices" (150). Here Miller possibly suggests that the frontiersman type has been modernized to the businessman type, but also shows how isolated Willy must feel. He is led to believe that he alone is suffering these injustices. This condition—clearly impacting a great deal of the culture, evident in works from *Salesman* to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*[19]—is summed up succinctly by Horkheimer and Adorno writing only two years before *Salesman*'s premiere: "any person signifies only those attributes by which he can replace everybody else: he is interchangeable, a copy. As an individual he is completely expendable and utterly insignificant" (145-46). Willy's delusion is his isolation and his feeling that he has nowhere to turn to for help or support, when, in reality, he is far from alone. Indeed, the inability of Willy and Biff to come to terms and recognize that both of them are lost perpetuates their irreconcilable conflicts and contributes to Willy's suicide. The audiences at *Salesman* could empathize with that feeling of isolation, feeling it very potently in the cutthroat world of business.

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[19] Published as a novel in 1955 by Sloan Wilson and made into a popular movie, from 20th Century Fox starring Gregory Peck, the following year. This work becomes more important in the next chapter.

Biff, however, is the one Loman man to learn something about himself and this false feeling of isolation. In his climactic outpouring to Willy, Biff undoes this idea of isolation and taps into a greater cultural anxiety: "Pop! I'm a dime a dozen and so are you! …You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them!" (132). The tragic side of this realization for Biff is the fact that Biff's life is half over and he's got nothing to show for it. From a cultural perspective, Willy and his sons are not unique, simply one of the millions undone by the system, the dime a dozen failures who are perched on the edge of the ash can. In his essay, "*Death of a Salesman*: In Memoriam," C.W.E. Bigsby relates text found in a journal of Arthur Miller that was cut from the original production in the climactic confrontation between Willy and Biff:

> Willy—see?—I love you Willy. I've met ten or twelve Willys and you're only one of them.—I don't care what you do. I don't care if you live or die. You think I'm mad at you because of the Woman, don't you. I am, but I'm madder because you bitched up my life, *because* I can't tear you out of my heart, because *I keep trying* to make good, *do something* for you, to *succeed for you* (118).

Biff doesn't just rest with the two of them being a "dime a dozen," he states how he has seen the man whom he calls father a dozen times in his life. Willy is a common American type, one more soul searching for that dream and forever failing to get it. The tragedy for Biff, and all those men that follow the dream passed down by their fathers in America, is that his model for manhood—the archetypal American male—is broken.

Happy, on the other hand, perpetuates the delusions of his father, destined to repeat the same mistakes. His condition recalls C. Wright Mills's comments above on the state of the white collar businessman at this time, working "unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking

loud, never talking back, never taking a stand" (xii). Happy not only seems like a stand-in for Mills' sentiment, but Happy even expresses to Biff a yearning to "rip my clothes off in the middle of the store and outbox that goddam merchandise manager" (24), yearnings he will, of course, never act upon. Earlier in the play, Happy states how he should be happy, that "it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women." (23). However, his material possessions and the actions he has taken to ward off a feeling of emptiness are simply not enough: "I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for…And still, goddammit, I'm lonely" (23).[20] Happy is representative of so much of the younger working class in the country. In his essay "Work and Its Discontents, published in 1956, Daniel Bell sums up this plight near verbatim, even echoing Biff's dream of moving West or starting a business, stating:

> Success at one's job becomes less important than success in one's style of life…The desire for immediate gratifications—a car, spending money, a girl—burn strong…His advancement depends upon educational training; but this he has foregone. He becomes restless. But dissatisfactions on the job lead not to militancy, despite occasional sporadic outbursts, but to escapist fantasies—of having a mechanic's shop, a turkey farm, a gas station, of 'owning a small business of one's own.' An idle dream! (32-33).

Miller has written something that touches upon an emptiness that could not be filled with material possessions, a crisis at the core of identity.

Miller is clearly touching a nerve with disillusioned working class members and the socially marginalized older generation, but the real worth of his work is the way that *Salesman* resonates with those moving up the social ladder and succeeding in the postwar period. It is

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[20] Happy's feeling of emptiness is a continuance—or realization—of Willy stating to Ben how he feels "temporary" about himself since he never knew his father.

through the intense empathy of those watching the decline of this man who fails to live up to—or even recognize—the dominant masculine type, that hegemonic masculinity is affirmed. Watching someone fail where you succeed serves to shore up one's own feeling of social standing, staving off fears of incompetency. Ultimately, *Salesman* highlights the constant presence of the loser, the failure in American society—a figure necessary for the perpetuation of masculine dominance.

This was not, however, a new idea in 1949. In fact, the archetype of failure—that which Willy embodies—has a much longer history, emerging from the nineteenth century as a recognizable figure always reifying the successful and dominant types. At the beginning of his important study *Born Losers*, Scott Sandage states, "Failure had become [by the beginning of the twentieth century] the most damning incarnation of the connection between achievement and personal identity." The statement 'I feel like a failure', he states, "comes so naturally that we forget it is a figure of speech: the language of business applied to the soul" (4-5). Sandage's study asks a simple question about the way we view individuals and understand the language we use to characterize them, "how did financial circumstances evolve into everyday categories of personal identity?" (10). His analysis is of America in the nineteenth century, but his conclusions resonate through the twentieth, past the Depression and New Deal politics into the time of Willy Loman. He explains, "To call a man 'a complete failure' tallied both the economics of capitalism and the economics of selfhood; that is, the external and internal transactions that reckon how we see ourselves and how others see us. Soon a man would be nothing more nor less than his occupation" (12). With the identity of the American man built upon this ethos, it is inevitable that Willy's masculine status would diminish the more he became disconnected from his work, his family, and his identity.

Sandage extends his study to include *Death of a Salesman*, offering up pertinent analyses of how Willy fits into this ethos of failure. Referring to Joseph Hirsch's immortal artistic rendering—of the sloped businessman in theatrical lighting carrying his two sample cases—that adorned the original playbills for *Salesman*, Sandage says,

> The covers of *Playbill* and paperback editions of *Death of a Salesman* culminated a century of artists' renderings of failure. Evoking the correspondence-school advertisements of the 1910s, Willy Loman was a man stuck on a treadmill, his shape so recognizable that the artist no longer needed to draw the machine. We see Willy from behind, a familiar silhouette, bent from years of lugging those heavy valises. He has no face because he has every face…the anonymity of one who fails makes him truly the American everyman. He personifies what really has happened to us or to people we know and love in spite of their flaws (263).

Sandage points to America's need for some individuals to fail while others succeed, the undeniable duality of success and failure. The epigraph from Sandage to this chapter sums up Willy and his place in our society succinctly: "Failure is not the dark side of the American Dream; it is the foundation of it. The American Dream gives each of us the chance to be a born loser" (278). The reason Willy resonates with so many is because everyone knows how many Willy Lomans have been burned through on a route to a J.P. Morgan, an Andrew Carnegie, or even an upper middle class audience member who sat weeping for Willy in his seat on that first night on February 10, 1949.

The Morosco Theatre on West 45th Street was full on the premiere of *Death of a Salesman*. While the play was favorably received, from its previews in Philadelphia to its grand opening on Broadway, the road to success, however, was not always certain. The play was met

with a great deal of resistance from potential producer Cheryl Crawford, Kazan's friend and colleague from the Group Theatre. Many believed that something so somber as ***Death** of a Salesman* would not find a receptive audience, but the writer and director knew that this was the way the play needed to be understood. Brenda Murphy relates the following story about Miller and Kazan's interactions with future producer Kermit Bloomgarden, who

> …suggested that the title be changed to *Free and Clear,* a phrase from Linda's speech in the Requiem. Both Miller and Kazan were adamant about the title, and *Variety* reported finally on 29 December that the "'Death of a Salesman' title for the new Arthur Miller play is being retained at the author's insistence. Noting that the producers disliked the title, 'figuring it has a somber connotation that may tend to repel prospective playgoers, besides being a story tipoff,' the article concluded that 'Miller has been adamant and under Dramatist Guild rules has final say' (12).[21]

In his autobiography, *Timebends*, Miller was almost sardonic about the importance of the title, stating, "always austere and elevated was death in titles. Now it would be claimed by a joker, a bleeding mass of contradictions, a clown, and there was something funny about that" (184).

There was another obstacle that had to be overcome involving the design of the show. Jo Mielziner, writing in *Designing for the Theatre*, stated that "the most important visual symbol in the play—the real background of the story—was the Salesman's house" (25), and so a majority of the stage was given to encompass the size and presence of the house itself. This, unfortunately left a very shallow playing area downstage. Again, Bloomgarden was consulted and eleven seats of the first row were removed, allowing the stage to be extended, a loss Mielziner notes of

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[21] Murphy, in this quote, draws from Kazan's *Elia Kazan: A Life*, 360 (cited in the bibliography) and *Variety* 29 December 1948, archived at the Arthur Miller Scrapbooks, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

$323.40 per week in sales (43), a loss that turned out to be pretty inconsequential given the success of the show.

The connection between Willy and his house was very important, something that both Miller and Mielziner emphasized. The stage description of the moment when the lights opened on the set links the Salesman's house to the Salesman's person, the fragile-seeming man being overpowered by the world around him: "*We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind* [the house], *surrounding it on all sides…As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home*" (11). This imagery is further reinforced—as well as seemingly referencing the exact image of the Playbill drawn by Hirsch—as the Salesman makes his entrance: "*From the right, Willy Loman, the Salesman, enters, carrying two large sample cases…Even as he crosses the stage to the doorway of the house, his exhaustion is apparent*" (12). Kazan and company wanted, from the first image, for the audience to feel the broken-down and oppressed nature of this man in his society and tie his identity up to the set of the performance itself.[22] Mielziner makes it known that it was important for all the stage elements to come together in creating a mystique of the man. He relates giving directions to one of his lighting technicians: "Now, Fred, I don't want to see your spotlight on Willy Loman's first entrance, but I do want to see the faint glow on Willy's face, so keep it way down on the dimmer, and when you get used to it, move it so the center of the beam is on the actor's face" (58). The idea here is that the outline of Willy—the broken salesman with his sample cases—is illuminated before the face of the actor is revealed, a dimming technique that parallels the slow reveal of the house and eventual apartment buildings at the top of the show.

[22] This was a decision that Mike Nichols would repeat in the 2012 revival of *Salesman*, also during a time of economic uncertainty for the country and the American man.

It wasn't just the set and the title, though, which sparked discussion and debate. One of the most distinctive—and most written about—aspects of the 1949 staging of *Salesman* was the body of Lee J. Cobb. A very important—and almost contentious—change from Miller's original script to Kazan's production was that Willy went from being diminutive to being a "walrus" of a man, like Cobb, whom Miller referred to as a "mountainous hulk" (*Timebends* 186). Even during the audition process, Miller was looking for a small man, but Kazan only wanted Cobb, who was only 38 at the time.[23] Certainly, this decision proved to be something that impacted the reception of the performance.[24] William Hawkins, writing of the first performance, states, "To be big and broken is so contradictory. The actor subtly moves from the first realizations of defeat, into a state of stubborn jauntiness alternating with childlike fear in a magnificent portrait of obsolescence" (203-04). For Hawkins, the corporeal size of Cobb and his tragic, pathetic failure was what had the most impact. John Mason Brown had a similar interpretation in his review, referring to the protagonist as "a little man sentenced to discover his smallness rather than a big man undone by his greatness" (207). Clive Barnes's review described Cobb's performance as "mammoth and magnificent" (358), but Richard Watts felt that it belied some of the tragic force, stating that

> …there is one perhaps paradoxical thing about Mr. Cobb's performance. Because he plays with such emotional strength, he is somehow less deeply moving than he might

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[23] It is interesting to note that Miller had also envisioned Linda as being a large woman, bigger than Willy, but Kazan's casting of Mildred Dunnock made her much smaller—a change he would repeat when he directed *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, also with Dunnock.

[24] Murphy states, "Seldom has the function of the actor's body as a signifier of the character's status been quite so clearly stated, but it has been a perennial factor in productions of *Salesman*" (83). This will continue to be important in subsequent chapters as different revivals in different time periods have treated differently the body of Willy Loman; most notably with Dustin Hoffman in 1984.

> otherwise have been, since the strength of his acting is transferred to the character he acts, and Willy Loman assumes a personal force that keeps him from being quite the pathetic failure the author made him (359).

For Watts, Cobb is simply too powerful to represent the little man that Miller had written. While it would be interesting to imagine how different interpretations would have been if Miller's original intentions of a small Willy were realized, Cobb's size certainly added a whole other interpretive element. Near the end of his review, John Mason Brown likens Cobb's size and strength to American identity itself: "Mr. Cobb's Willy Loman…is a great shaggy bison of a man seen at that moment of defeat when he is deserted by the herd and can no longer run with it" (210).

This tying together of Willy and ideas of America led to a negative response from reviewer Ivor Brown, an English critic reviewing the London premiere of *Salesman*. For Brown, the exaltation of Willy Loman into a tragic hero was a much different experience.[25] What Brown analyzed, however, was not just the reaction to Willy Loman, but a critique of the American audiences who would weep for him. He writes,

> What has puzzled me about these Broadway tears for Willy Loman is the fact that the average shedder of those tears over a stage figure couldn't be bothered for one minute with Willy Loman if the poor little man came round in real life to beg a small

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[25] I do admit, however, that Brown was reviewing Paul Muni's performance as Willy Loman and not Lee Cobb's. Admittedly, this changes some aspects of reception, as Muni was more diminutive than Cobb, obviously Jewish, and changed the role for his own style. The fact remains though, that the allure of Willy was lost for him and much of his English audience. However, it wasn't just British audiences that recognized this. An editorial written in 1949 by an American named E.B. Cronston references Ivor Brown's remarks and states that this is exactly how he responded to Loman when he saw the show in New York; referring to Cobb's Loman as a "man who never really had true values."

> loan…those who in their offices would brush him aside as just one more shabby and ineffective nuisance among a million may be sitting in their expensive seats to pay him the tribute of a sigh, even of a tear, since he is the symbol of all those failures on which alone success can be built (248).

Brown's review seems to critique American society more than the play itself, and it is an extremely important point, inextricably tied to the play's success. What Brown taps into is the amount of American identity that is actually bound up with the idea of failure. Admittedly, he is accurate in noting that much of this audience would brush past a Willy Loman on the street, or in the office, as Howard does, but what is less apparent is that, as Sandage argues, persons like Willy have provided the foundation for the American dream since this country was founded. In a symposium on *Salesman,* critic Richard Watts relates, "I saw again and again that it would be the husband who would…see something of himself in it. He would get far more out of it usually than his wife did" (Gelb 28). This male connection testifies to how important conceptions of masculinity and American male identity were in the success of the play.

The popular empathetic identification with Willy affirms a connection with the dominant class of men attending the show, but at the same time it elicits their pity. For Miller, there is an almost tongue-in-cheek device employed here by which he draws his audience in, only to call attention to their own flaws and sympathies. He states, in an interview, "to fail is no longer to belong to society…therefore, the path is opened for those who wish to call Willy merely a foolish man even as they themselves are living in obedience to the same law that killed him" (Robert Martin 149). While Kazan felt it was his theatrical duty to dramatize "Willy's experience in a way that would induce the audience's empathy and understanding" (Murphy 32), Miller disagreed. After watching performances before the premiere, Miller stated that he "simply felt

that there was too *much* identification with Willy, too much weeping, and that the play's ironies were being dimmed out by all this empathy" (*Timebends* 194). For Miller, these men were not catching a cultural critique of the system,[26] merely being moved by Willy Loman's tragic failure.[27] As Brooks Atkinson, writing for the *New York Times*, noted, "the tragedy of 'Death of a Salesman' is almost unbearable in the last act because Mr. Miller has drawn the portrait of a good man who represents the homely, decent, kindly virtues of a middle-class society." Miller's opinion, it would seem, is positioned closer to the English critic, Ivor Brown. Willy did embody much of the fears of postwar America and its transitional period, but he also highlighted the standing—however shaky that might have been—of those men who feared a diminishment of their own authority and place in society.

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[26] Miller relates a story in *Timebends* of his political intent behind this play: "On the play's opening night a woman who shall not be named was outraged, calling it 'a time bomb under American capitalism'; I hoped it was, or at least under the bullshit of capitalism, this pseudo life that thought to touch the clouds by standing on top of a refrigerator, waving a paid-up mortgage at the moon, victorious at last" (184).

[27] There has always existed some discrepancy whether Miller's drama should be considered a tragedy in the traditional understanding, despite Miller's own assertions in "Tragedy and the Common Man." Many critics simply do not think the play can be elevated to the same height as the major tragedies of the past. William Aarnes, in "Tragic Form and the Possibility of Meaning," says that Willy is more "pathetic" than tragic and that the drama is more of an "an adaptation of tragic form" (98) than a traditional tragedy. Another reinforcing argument is that there is no actual enlightenment by Willy; he dies believing in a false dream without ever truly understanding what Biff has said to him. On the other side of the argument, Esther Merle Jackson spends her essay, "*Death of a Salesman:* Tragic Myth in Modern Theatre," arguing that the play is the modern day equivalent of one of those great tragedies; the scale might be reduced, but not the sentiment and not the fall. She states that she sees the play as a "*tragedy of consciousness*, the imitation of a moral crisis in the life of a common man" (64; emphasis in original). While she does raise the concern that Willy can be accused of not being a great man and especially not one of importance, she declares that the plight of Willy carries the same pathos as in traditional tragedy: "Loman's crime in the universe may be likened to that of Agamemnon or Lear; it is the appearance of indifference, the absence of sympathy, and the lack of a sense of moral law…the most serious—and most common—indictment against humanity in our time" (68).

The idea of the Everyman status of Willy Loman is an intriguing argument. As the Introduction noted, this has been due to some critics seeing Willy as a Jewish character. In his work, *Acting Jewish*, scholar Henry Bial states that "there are many things about Willy Loman that lead a Jewish audience to identify strongly with him, including his situation, speech patterns, and mannerisms"(49). Indeed, critic George Ross declared the 1951 Yiddish premiere of *Toyt fun a Salesman* more truthful than the 1949 production: "What one feels most strikingly is that this Yiddish play is really the original, and the Broadway production was merely Arthur Miller's translation into English." Miller has changed his opinion on the matter over the years, arguing early on that Willy's heritage is not the important issue and then over time admitting that the Lomans were based in Jewish culture. Samuel G. Freedman argued recently in the *New York Times* that, given Miller's use of Jewish characters both before and after *Salesman*, the "decision to leave Willy's identity indistinct represented a thought-through choice, not a chronic ambivalence about Jewish content." Bial, however, would state, through what he describes as "double coding"—the Jewish artist's predicament of speaking to two different audiences—that the play could be seen by "a Jewish audience and a general or gentile audience" (16). He describes how it was even an important element of *Salesman*'s reception. "Only Jews (or those who know the codes)," he states,

> will interpret these elements of performance as Jewish. While general audiences may recognize these performance practices as unusual, urban, or ethnic, they will not necessarily recognize them as indicators of Jewish cultural difference. Thus, these performances implicitly indicate Jewish cultural difference while explicitly projecting a universalist, religiously and ethnically nonspecific vision of American society (152).

For Jewish immigrants just beginning to be assimilated into the larger white culture, "passing" was an important act, but their ethnicity still left them "in-between," in the words of Daniel Roediger. For audiences of *Death of a Salesman* in 1949, even a subliminal recognition of Willy Loman as Jewish would have important consequences. He could certainly be seen as a white male, but something about him would have remained not truly white; his life and circumstances differed in just such a way to make total recognition with him slippery. This possible ambivalence around Willy's fate for 1949 audiences allowed for sympathy at his plight, but relief that they would not suffer the same fate.

What this ultimately emphasizes is Connell's idea of subordinated masculinities and an overall uneasiness about American masculinity at the start of the Cold War. David Savran characterizes "Cold War masculinity to be both a gruesome exercise in nuclear 'chicken' and a charade, both a deadly earnest con game and a dirty joke" (*Communists* 19).[28] The masculine types men were drawing on in this time period were rich and often contradictory. Even some of the most celebrated male film stars of the era, Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, and Jimmy Stewart offered drastically diverging views of American masculinity. This was the world in which Willy Loman found himself, alternating between pioneer, businessman, and family man

[28] In his important study, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams,* Savran juxtaposes and analyzes the various ways in which, during the 1940s and 1950s, these two authors both met and challenged societal expectations of masculine characters. I am in line with much of what Savran is doing as he is against viewing dramatic works as necessarily universal and argues instead for understanding the way that "theatrical production is deeply and intricately ideological" (6), which therefore necessitates a more historiographical approach that analyzes the culture from which these works and their male characters derived. For Savran, Miller's ultra-masculine types and Williams' closeted characters met at similar points of anxious anxiety about men in the cold war climate of the postwar period.

leading to confusion about which type to emulate and follow. There were simply too many subordinated types in a country reeling from devastation, trying to define itself.

It is this very type of confusion that works so well in sustaining hegemonic masculinity, though. It is important to remember that, "[w]ithin that overall framework [of hegemonic masculinity] there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men" (*Masculinities* 78). These differences provide the order in a male-driven society, not only men dominating women—easily seen as a given in *Death of a Salesman*—but men dominating other types of men, remembering Kimmel's argument of, "masculinities…arrayed along a hierarchy, and measured against one another" (*Gendered* 11). While Savran moves between cowboys, communists, and queers and my study has used athlete, pioneer, conqueror, family man, this diffusion of types plays into the notion of confusion about both subtle and drastic gender distinctions between men. Instead of the play being a critique of the system, *Salesman* is closer to fitting in with Althusser's ideological state apparatuses, serving almost as a voice for the dominant masculine class, justifying the system that keeps some in power and some not.

Ultimately, *Salesman* reveals masculinity at an uncertain crossroads, a turning point in postwar America. Connell, drawing upon the work of Jürgen Habermas, notes the potential for crisis tendencies at certain points in history, which is where I would situate *Salesman*: "internal contradictions or tendencies that undermine current patterns, and force change in the structure itself" (*Gender* 90-91). Masculinity was changing and the clear-cut divisions would become more striking in the years following *Salesman*, as this study will illuminate. What this chapter has examined has been the manner by which dominant notions of masculinity, and subordinate ones as well, were defined in the immediate postwar era. We see in *Salesman* that Willy and his

sons all exist on the periphery, gendered outcasts who neither know their masculine role nor their place in society, subordinated by an undefined dominant form of masculinity, a club to which they don't belong.

One of the major tragic themes to draw from this play is that Willy believed in what he felt was right, so much so that he even refused to see a possible salvation in Charley's offer of a job. Charley knew that Willy wouldn't take his offer. He explains to Biff, in the Requiem, that a salesman is "a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat, and you're finished" (138). There could be no salvation for Willy; his time was simply up. Miller once explained, "if Willy Loman had not had a very profound sense that his life as lived had left him hollow, he would have died contentedly polishing his car on some Sunday afternoon at a ripe old age. The fact is he has values" (Gelb 28). Miller demonstrates in his play that modern man, while confused about his place in society, was struggling to identify the values by which he was supposed to live, but, ultimately, was left feeling like a hollow man. As we move into the next study, those values have begun to shift and the next male protagonist's struggle reflects the changing characteristics and types of masculinity.

III. *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF* & A PROFUSION OF TYPES

"Nothing is harder in the whole human condition
than to achieve a full sense of identity—
than to know who you are, where you are going, and
what you mean to live and die for."
Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

"In the nineteenth century the problem was that *God is dead*;
in the twentieth century the problem is that *man is dead*.
Erich Fromm

It was obvious to audiences of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* that Willy and Biff Loman were not representative of an acceptable masculine type. Their exclusion from mainstream culture, as well from possessing any type of cultural capital, was obvious. The characters in Tennessee Williams's 1955 *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, with their means, money, and power, posed a much different challenge for the audience members in the Morosco Theatre.[1] Despite the noted grotesquerie[2] of Williams's southern characters, audience members were able to relate to these members of the Pollitt family who possessed many striking similarities to well-known societal

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[1] Since my study is first and foremost an analysis of what audiences were seeing and reacting to with the productions of these plays, I take the Broadway version of *Cat* as published by Dramatists Play Service as the definitive text/production. While the multiple versions and contradictions between Kazan and Williams's original will be mentioned, I will attempt to adhere as closely as possible to what audiences would have seen in the original run.

[2] The idea of southern gothic, or grotesque—as drawn from the work of William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers—is a subset of literary analysis that is drawn from the larger category of the Gothic and is particularly prevalent within the work of Tennessee Williams.

archetypes. This carefully constructed drama both distances theatergoers by its portrayal of crass southern gentility while also critiquing a society very recognizable to New York audiences. The struggle in *Cat* lies with an inability to pin it down to one single idea. The play resists easy understanding and has long puzzled audiences and critics with its glaring inconsistencies—from deciding on whose story it tells, to the issue of homosexuality, to which version of the play should be seen as the authoritative one.[3] However, the ambiguity the play fosters is essential in understanding just what *Cat* is doing. Ultimately, the struggle that is seen is not one single issue, but a near mirror reflection of uncertainties in the United States of 1955, from issues such as materialism, family, to sex and gender roles in a rapidly changing society. Many of these anxieties strike close to just what it meant to be a man, and while very few questions are answered, the play raises ideas that both support and resist a notion of a masculinity crisis that had once again come to the forefront of American thought.[4]

A great number of scholars[5] have treated the subject matter of this play extensively and the present analysis, while acknowledging a debt to their contribution, looks to expand understanding of this play through a discussion of hegemonic masculinity and the gendered types operating in the 1950s by arguing that the play presents a diversity of important issues and character types important to masculine conception during the 1950s. Consequently, I view the play as a contest of identities between a profusion of types. As R.W. Connell states,

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[3] See, for instance, George W. Crandell's essay on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in Philip C. Kolin's edited volume on Tennessee Williams.

[4] This is evidenced by key texts of the era that were concerned with emasculation of men and the growing authority of women. These texts are noted and analyzed below.

[5] A small list that I relied on extensively includes Thomas P. Adler, Bruce McConachie, David Savran's *Cowboys, Communists, and Queers*, and Brenda Murphy's *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan*.

> To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity (*Masculinities* 37).

Almost every character in the play can be tied to an issue (or more than one) vitally important to people at the time of staging, and it seems as if the conflict of the drama is a playing out of these different ideological issues and relations among masculinities and femininities. This analysis will first examine the context out of which *Cat* and its characters emerge before focusing on the dominant and subordinate masculine types seen in the play that gesture towards an uncertainty around the issue of masculinity. It will finally examine how these types and context inform an understanding of the play and, more specifically, the character of Brick.

<u>*Cat*'s Historical Context</u>

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof comes only six years after Miller's *Salesman*. While the country, in this time, had moved from economic uncertainty to outright economic boom, many of the same fears and attitudes persisted. Williams's *Cat* reflects the country's understanding of, or difficulties with, family, sexuality, and gender roles and conceptions in the early Cold War culture. The main difference between Willy Loman and Brick Pollit, however, is not their masculine conception, but where their struggle is located in the context of the country. Willy, evocative of an older generation, representing a passing era, was a victim of new conceptions of masculinity. Unable to succeed or participate in this new time period, he was sacrificed for the sustainment of masculine hegemony. In *Cat*, masculine conception is even more varied, shifting inexorably towards more uncertain places to the point where the male characters in the play,

while all possessing aspects of masculinity, fail to achieve or embody any one dominant representation.

Duality and ambiguity have always been important concepts when dealing with the 1950s. The problems and issues of the day simmered just below the surface and were certainly not as overt as they would be in the next decade, but there is something irreconcilable about the way life was lived at this time for most Americans. It was a decade that seemed confident while also masking problems that threatened to undermine it. It was no doubt a prosperous time, instilling ideology and habits that are still a large part of the United States today.[6] This optimism, however, was tempered with a great deal of fear and uncertainty. Because of this, the ideology espoused during this time was fraught with contradictions.

While the climate of the 1950s, both nationally and internationally, was still quite dire and fearful, what often gets remembered are the "good old days" seen not only in many popular television shows and movies of the day, but later in such popular pieces as *American Graffiti* or *Happy Days*. It was not, however, always as hopeful and rosy as nostalgic sitcoms would have us believe. In 1957, Norman Mailer wrote an essay entitled "The White Negro," wherein he laid out a critique of American culture that was far from optimistic. He connects a cultural malaise to both the horrors of the Holocaust and the fear of atomic war, prompting a sentiment that "death being causeless, life was causeless as well" (338). He goes on to explain,

> For if tens of millions were killed in concentration camps out of the inexorable agonies and contractions of super-states founded upon the always insoluble contradictions of injustice, one was then obliged also to see that no matter how crippled and perverted an

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[6] As John Patrick Diggins states, in *The Proud Decades*, "Whatever the retrospective of writers and intellectuals, those who lived through the fifties looked upon them as a period of unbounded possibility" (178).

> image of man was, the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation…and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature? (338)

There was not only fear of sudden death from the bomb—prompting the construction of bomb shelters throughout the country as well as countless nuclear air raid drills occurring in school—but also guilt and realization of being a member of a humanity that could attempt to systematically eliminate an entire group of people. Diggins sums it up best, perhaps, when he declares that the "fifties was the first generation in modern history to know that the world could end tomorrow" (199). Thus, there were extreme feelings of alienation and insignificance in addition to cold war fear.[7]

It is true, though, that not every American consistently viewed their world as being on the verge of destruction at all times. The economy had done remarkably well for itself.[8] Material comforts were blossoming everywhere, especially in the newly settled suburbs. Historian William Chafe states that by the end of the decade, "75 percent of American families owned their own car, 87 percent their own TV set, and 75 percent their own washing machine" (106). Also at this time, in the midst of social critics espousing alienation, America was undergoing its largest Christian revival. New religious leaders, such as Billy Graham and Oral Roberts became overnight celebrities, sparking a fever of religious fervor with new churches cropping up in cities

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[7] In *The Sane Society*, Erich Fromm cites the population boom, advances in science and knowledge, as well as changing attitudes towards religion that underlied feelings of estrangement. William Leuchtenberg referred to this time as an "age of anxiety," citing the height of popularity for psychoanalysis as evidence of an insecure national identity. Lastly, John Kenneth Galbraith directly blamed America's frenzied economic growth as a major cause for midcentury malaise.

[8] While economist Harold Vatter reports two recessional dips brought about by cuts to military expenditures after the Korean War, things were looking up by mid-decade.

all over the country.[9] These dualities of fear and prosperity, nihilism and faith are representative of much of 1950s culture.

Many of the assumed ideas and habits of the 1950s—the nine-to-five breadwinner, suburbia, and the values attached to the dutiful housewife—were not actually traditions but new and culturally specific adjustments, responses to changing times. Nowhere is this more explicit than with the new American family. In her work, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, cultural historian Elaine Tyler May explains how our modern ideas of the American family were largely a byproduct of cold war culture, centered on the idea of domestic containment. She expresses how the challenge of the cold war "prompted Americans to create a family-centered culture…[that] took shape amid the legacy of the depression, World War II, and the anxieties surrounding atomic weapons" (11). Refuting later generations' tendency to historicize this idea of the American family, May states how the family of the 1950s was not, "as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of 'traditional' family life with roots deep in the past. Rather, it was the first wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its' members personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life" (11). In order to instruct an entire country of men and women on how to behave and act, resources from popular media as well as science were needed to justify and explain proper societal roles. Ehrenreich illuminates one large area of contention, by explaining that

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[9] It is noted by Leuchtenburg that one of Eisenhower's main directives early in his presidency was to fuel a revival of religion, even using Billy Graham to initiate that movement (71-72). It is notable that both "In God We Trust"—added to U.S. currency—and "under God"—added to the Pledge of Allegiance—was through legislation enacted during the 1950s. This decade also witnessed the rise of televangelism seen with the popularity of Oral Roberts who, in 1954, began premiering his television show *The Abundant Life*.

> …the construction of a scientific justification for the male breadwinner role was a somewhat more challenging enterprise than explaining why little girls necessarily grew up to be wives and mothers…It was more difficult to trace how the possession of a penis should lead its owner into a middle-management career and Little League weekends[10] (15).

Although this clearly provided difficulties, in order to sustain successful and controlled spheres of influence—as domestic containment called for—each member of the family would have to abide by its societal role.

Within the walls of the home, then, the family would be safe from the dangers of the outside world. Everyone had a prescriptive role and, if done right, each member would be satisfied. As Stephanie Coontz says in her work deconstructing ideas of 1950s family life, "[f]or the first time, men as well as women were encouraged to root their identity and self-image in familial and parental roles" (27), seen quite clearly in the popularity of a show such as *Father Knows Best*. However, the American family was not so easily contented as our false notions of nostalgia would suggest.[11] May notes that the purpose of domestic containment backfired in many ways since "domesticity ultimately fostered the very tendencies it was intended to diffuse: materialism, consumerism, and bureaucratic conformity. This inherent tension defined the symbiotic connection between the culture of the cold war and the domestic revival" (11). Within those walls of the home, the family may have felt protected from the evil and the threats of the

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[10] However difficult this might have been, it was clearly successful as these expectations of gender roles and expectations in life are still solidly with us.

[11] William Chafe affirms this, declaring that the "nature of family life, particularly in suburbia, was far more complicated and tension-filled than the stereotypes of the fifties would have us believe" (122).

outside world,[12] but also represented a kind of reflection of it—a microcosm of the same worries and fears being played out on a national front, for instance, tension with sexuality, what was expected from gender roles, the new phenomenon of the teenager,[13] as well as the issues listed by May above. May points out that fear of the outside world often led couples to stay together despite the pressures they felt, citing "[c]ompromise, accommodation, and lowered expectations [as] solutions to the ideal of domestic containment" (184). It would seem, then, that domestic containment helped to reinforce that duality between the contented and the discontents.[14] As Coontz describes, "the turn toward families was in many cases more a defensive move than a purely affirmative act" (33). Families weren't always coming together out of love but as an attempt to promote safety; roles and lifestyles were created on the road to protection.

The main reason that the happy façade of the American family did not automatically work as well as hoped was because individuals in those families were confused by the conflicting roles society expected of them. The new family roles introduced at this time challenged how society had previously understood mom and dad. According to editor Russell Lynes, the country had "shuffled the functions of men and women in a most contrary way, not that it has become difficult to tell which is which, but it has become increasingly difficult to tell who does what and why. Men have taken over women's work and women have taken over

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[12] It is no coincidence that the resurgence of interest in the home paralleled the flight to the suburbs, a move away from the dangers of the city and into the isolation and protection of white, middle-class suburbia (Chafe, *Paradoxes* 186). While not every woman or every family felt the home to be an unfair place, the birth of the feminist movement—Betty Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*—began as a critique of the woman's place in the home.

[13] Coinciding with the growing affluence of much of white America that enabled the teenager to have leisure time and income to spare was Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* in 1950 that labeled the teenage years as an important stage of development, instrumental in shaping identity.

[14] This way of life was famously recorded by novelist Richard Yates in his bestseller, *Revolutionary Road*, an indictment of conformism seen through the lives of a young couple in the mid-1950s in American suburbia.

men's" (5). This led to a great deal of uncertainty on both sides, but mostly towards an unsettling of man's feelings about his place in the family and society. Michael Kimmel poignantly observes that the climactic father/son confrontation scene in one of the decade's most important films, *Rebel Without a Cause*, occurs when the father is wearing an apron and cooking (163); domesticity represented a feminization of men. When men were doing women's work, there was emasculation. From the other side, when women were doing men's work, masculine society saw usurpation.[15]

However, undergoing her own seismic upheaval, the conception of the mother in the 1950s was pulling her in very contradictory directions. Even as family life became the acceptable role for women, emphasized in everything from Dr. Spock to *Ladies' Home Companion*, the workplace was gaining more and more women all the time. Stephanie Coontz describes how even a return of the veterans from World War II did little to slow the pace of women's presence at work, "[e]ven at the end of the [female workforce] purge, there were more women working than before the war" (31). Leuchtenburg is even quite clear about who these women were. They were not single, unmarried women, but the wives and mothers whose role was supposedly at home. He states that "[b]etween 1940 and 1960, the proportion of working wives doubled, and of all persons who entered the labor market in the decade after 1949, three-fifths were married

[15] In his work, Lynes lists an increased attention to fashion as being an indication of men doing women's work and Kimmel notes that interior designers were sexually suspect men (168). The new domestic roles for men also implied emasculation as men were expected to fulfill duties such as changing diapers or the day-to-day drudgery that was traditionally viewed as women's work. On the other hand, even the role of secretaries in the work force implied possible emasculation as they took over many jobs, however menial, that men had formerly done for themselves. But more fearful in the work place, were the growing presence of women who worked alongside or above men. Many men were judged as weak by simply having to answer to a female despite the circumstances.

women" (74).[16] For the married man, there was a fear that he was losing his area of control, that of the breadwinner. If women had to work to supplement income, it could only mean that the man was simply not doing enough on his own. Even the increased contribution of more work from the woman for the family was seen as a threat to masculine conception.

The duality of the workingwoman verses the domestic woman was not the only contradiction facing women in society. In addition to the expectations of carrying on the duties at home, while also working to support that family, women were being sexualized in popular media at an alarming rate. The monthly magazine *Playboy* hit shelves in 1953 and the Miss America Pageant began airing on television in 1954. Wives, then, were split between needing to be everything for the family and everything sexual for the husband. For society during the cold war, women were not just the household organizers and in charge of childrearing, but an integral component of domestic containment. Elaine Tyler May notes that "wives in the postwar era were recognized as sexual enthusiasts whose insistence on conjugal satisfaction would contribute to erotically charged marriages. Sexual containment—unlike sexual repression—would enhance family togetherness" (102-03).[17] The conception of women was thus variegated with many

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[16] Contrary to popular portrayal of the women workforce in a show such as *Mad Men*, married women were indeed increasing in numbers. Stephanie Coontz declares that "[m]arried women comprised the majority of the growth in the female work force" in this time. William Chafe states that between 1940 and 1960 "the number of single women in the labor force declined…[and] the number of mothers at work leaped 400 percent" (*Paradox* 188). He goes on to say that "the greatest growth in the female labor force took place among well-educated married women from families with moderate incomes" (188). Once children were of a certain age, women, in great numbers, were returning to work.

[17] The show *Mad Men* reflects a great deal of these changes occurring in society at this time.

competing expectations. This last idea even puts the impetus of successful families—the last bulwark against a Red threat—squarely on the shoulders of women.[18]

Problems for women were only compounded by reactions to the 1953 publication of the Kinsey Report on Female Sexuality, which followed a similar report on male sexuality late in the previous decade. Kinsey's research found that there were actually very few sexual differences between the male and female, stating that, "In brief, we conclude that the anatomic structures which are most essential to sexual response and orgasm are nearly identical in the human female and male. The differences are relatively few" (qtd. in Pomeroy 328). This rippled like shock waves through America, especially in the more conservative sectors of the population. If women were already gaining in numbers and influence in the work and public sector then there was something quite dangerous about women being on an equal footing with men sexually. Wives and daughters were not supposed to be enjoying and engaging in sexual acts at the same rate as men, or so went public thought.[19] A contradiction occurs here since part of domestic containment was women promoting a healthy sexuality at home with her husband. It seems implied, though, that the wife's sexual passion could not equal or surpass that of her husband's, even though it needed to be receptive to his needs.

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[18] Lingering in this time period still, were powerful prejudices of Momism, an idea developed out of Philip Wylie's popular 1942, *Generation of Vipers*. In it he details the damage wrought on the American man by smothering and power-hungry mothers.

[19] Wardell B. Pomeroy, a researcher for Alfred Kinsey, declared, in his published account of his work with Kinsey, their research, and the reaction to it, that, "[i]t had been one thing to publish research about the sexual behavior of American males, but as one might expect, to discuss the behavior of American women was quite another thing" (327). Pomeroy is quick to point out, that there was nothing "intrinsically sensational in the material, but only the American double standard operating again" (331). Scholar Miriam Reumann writes that a "poll of *Newsweek* readers revealed that coverage of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was ranked as equaled in public interest only by the possible advent of a third world war" (93-4).

These findings changed, then, the way in which women—especially wives—were viewed. After Kinsey's report was published, numerous editorials, diatribes, and cartoons from the vitriolic to the utterly frivolous appeared to either condemn or make light of this phenomenon. Marriage and family expert, Emily Mudd stated that "American women emerge from all those pages of careful analysis with far more sexual drive than they had ever been given credit for" (qtd. in Reumann 95).[20] It is, of course, important to point out that the loudest critics of Kinsey's work and the most lasting impressions on the public psyche were more often than not based on conjecture and rumor about the reports, spread by individuals who had not even read the findings. Women, based on reports not analyzed or understood, were seen as a threat to masculine hegemony in the bedroom. This spurred on the need to sexualize the female to be an object of male consumption as an act of containment.

If women were participating in sexual activities—whether pre-or extramarital or simply for pleasure—at the same rate as men, then there was a potential threat not only to the family but to the entire country as well.[21] As May points out above, since it was a woman's job to maintain conjugal satisfaction and happiness at home as an important aspect of domestic containment, to deviate from this role was a threat to masculine authority, successful child rearing, and security from outside corruption. The inevitable failure of women to be everything all at once rendered them culprits of something undermining family, society, and the place of men in society. All the problems that women were going through in society were actually perceived by men as being

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[20] Quoting one of the first reviews of the report, Reumann notes that the author egregiously extrapolated from Kinsey's report that "American women were often aggressively sexual, as measured by the quickness to arousal, pleasure in orgasm, and long-term sexual drive" (95).
[21] Ironic in this fear of female sexuality is how it corresponds to the report on male sexuality that Kinsey had published. Given that that report discussed a wide degree of sexuality—including homosexual acts—among men, then a report that said that women were just as sexual as men gave a lot of men something to consider.

threats to their own stability. Thus, areas where men made women feel inferior—the workplace and at home—were also the areas that seemed to threaten men's superiority and standing.

Women were not, however, the only cause of male instability, even if they were the most visible antagonists. In popular imagination man's place in society seemed to be in utter disarray during the 1950s and sexuality was a major factor in the consideration of masculine authority. Much of the interest in sexuality dates to that first Kinsey report in 1948. Reumann states that *Male Sexuality*

> …affected Americans' understanding of gender norms and relations, focusing popular attention on the relation between ideal codes of masculinity and actual male sexual behavior, and promoting discussion of what it meant to be a man in the atomic age…[taking] on new meaning for readers and reviewers at a time of widespread concern about the state of American masculinity (54).

Clearly, Kinsey had tapped into something that was beyond just interest in sexual behavior, but went more into ontological issues of manhood and notions of masculinity. One of the most interesting findings from that report was the seemingly rampant occurrence of homosexual acts between men. Kinsey believed that at least a third of the male population had homosexual tendencies and, of those, thirteen percent were predominantly homosexual. These numbers were startling to readers, possibly pointing to a weakness within the ranks of men. It is often believed that homosexuality was a singled-out aspect of the report when, in reality, homosexuality was listed as a deviance, an aberration of sexual experience that pointed to kinks in the armor of a pure masculine idea of sexuality. There was definitely fear and suspicion of gay men, but it was as a fear of otherness, not necessarily homosexuality as a lifestyle. Reumann demonstrates that the cause of male insecurity was not limited to the possible presence of gay men in society.

"Sexual identity," she states, "whether heterosexual or homosexual, had become a crucial component of modern American character" (198), thereby increasing need for normalcy and appropriate sexual behavior. What was most crucial from these findings was that there were conflicting types of men that challenged a normative understanding.

Given the perceived threat from women at work and at home, as well as insecurity with regard to sexuality, confusion about men's essential identity within society developed. Margaret Mead, writing in 1949, questioned that if "one essential element in the definition [of maleness] is beating women in every game that both sexes play," then maleness could not be "absolutely defined" (236). Increasingly, it seemed that a true definition of manhood was becoming harder to come by.[22] Crisis, then, was what men were feeling, because that is what was being sold, from the newsstands to the television show. McConachie, speaking of the power and ubiquity of advertising, notes that "[a]s never before in American life, commercials helped to hollow out an empty self by facilitating status anxiety, personal insecurity, and other fears" (100-01). Capitalizing on the anxiety of customers, advertisers were able to sell products while also selling fears that may or may not have been justified. There might not be a better example of this than the report published by the editors of *Look* magazine in 1958 entitled *The Decline of the American Male*.[23]

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[22] This wasn't simply pop psychology gleaned from self-help books but evidence from more legitimate sources. Reumann explains how "[p]ostwar research in the physical and social sciences underlined the contingency of masculine identity by suggesting that there was no such thing as an essential masculinity" (61). It should be noted that while there were plenty of accounts of crisis coming from more legitimate areas, it was voiced loudest within the public sphere.

[23] The book itself is divided up into three essays. The first, the one I mostly discuss, is "Why Do Women Dominate Him?" by J. Robert Moskin. The second and third essays are, "Why Is He Afraid To Be Different?" by George Leonard, Jr., and "Why Does He Work So Hard?" by William Atwood. The bibliographic citation for this source is under the name of the book, *The*

This short piece, published by one of the leading picture magazines of the day,[24] contained three parts, the first of which read like a scientific, studied analysis of the American male. Written by *Look* editor, J. Robert Moskin, and entitled "Why Do Women Dominate Him?" this essay starts off by pointing towards the most obvious of man's problems:

> Scientists who now study human behavior fear that the American male is now dominated by the American female. These scientists worry that in the years since the end of World War II, he has changed radically and dangerously; that he is no longer the masculine, strong-minded man who pioneered the continent and built America's greatness (3).

As was the case in the 1940s, the notion of the pioneer and the masculine type who conquered the wild is disappearing. There was no wilderness to explore, only suburbs to develop. Also disappearing, now, is the remembrance of the kind of man who landed on Normandy Beach and won back Europe from the Nazis. In his place stands an emasculated figure brought low by the American woman. The Korean War in the early 1950s provided very few heroes, saw the much-publicized dismissal of the masculine hero General Douglas MacArthur, and ended not in a United States victory but in stalemate. This, coupled with increasing fears of Soviet-US conflict, made the American man feel just as emasculated internationally as on the domestic front. Where the last generation had been victors, a new generation of soldiers and patriots were forced to accept a weakness in the might of America and its male military force.

However, despite a regressive military situation and a rapidly changing American landscape, it is still women who were largely blamed for men's ailments. "From the moment he

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Decline of the American Male and is listed under the names of the editors: William Attwood, George B. Leonard, Jr., and J. Robert Moskin.

[24] *Look*'s circulation was ahead of the popular *Saturday Evening Post* and was, in fact, only second to *Life*, peaking in sales and advertising in the mid 1960s.

is born," Moskin in *Look* magazine states, "the American boy is ruled by women" (4). The report even explains how men are controlled everywhere they go by women, from their mother and wife to working women and their secretary.[25] It is easy to catch the hyperbolic tone of these accusations, which are only reinforced by the near-absurd cartoons depicting men in diminutive positions. It was not, however, just the popular press that was raising concerns of masculine instability. Cultural historian and social critic Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. wrote an essay, in the same year as *Look*'s *Decline of the American Male*, entitled "Crisis of American Masculinity" that addresses some of the same issues. Schlesinger refers to what the popular press was touting as "the fashionable answer": "Male anxiety, many observers have declared, is simply the result of female aggression: what has unmanned the American man is the American woman" (295). He is quick to point out, though, that "[s]imple observation refutes this supposition" (297), claiming that in an equal society some individuals will naturally rise above others while there will always be some who will fail. Despite debunking the notion, Schlesinger is clearly stating that this feeling—as "immature" or "amounting to panic" (295) as it may be—is largely felt by society, leading to destabilized notions of masculinity.

Look's editorial piece, seen clearly in the second essay, "Why Is He Afraid to be Different," also hints at a common feature of 1950s male life that was a much-discussed topic, the issue of conformity. Moskin states that "[f]emale dominance may, in fact, be one of the several causes of the 'organization man' who is so deplored today" (20). This man was the nine-to-five train commuter immortalized by his grey flannel suit, lost in the crowds of conformity as men joined the ranks of a business world that prized togetherness and teamwork over

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[25] It is no coincidence that membership in the Boy Scouts of America rose dramatically in this decade as many feared the emasculating effects of women and sought to find greater male influences in the lives of boys.

individualism. Diggins states that a 'social ethic' was born "based on cooperation, security, group well-being, and surrender to the 'togetherness of the whole.' Even ambition seemed at risk as more Americans chose to get along, rather than to get ahead" (209). At risk by this belief was not only individuality, but also one's own conscience—identities were lost in this sea of sameness.

It was not just work force production that led to conformity, but also the pressure built up from the Red Scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Although McCarthy's witch hunt was famously squelched by his infamous exchange with Joseph Welch during the Army-McCarthy hearings leading to his censure by the Senate in 1955, the suspicion and paranoia it introduced into American life did not go away as easily. Norman Mailer sums up much of this feeling, again in "The White Negro," when he states,

> One could hardly maintain the courage to be individual, to speak with one's own voice, for the years in which one could complacently accept oneself as part of an elite by being a radical were forever gone. A man knew that when he dissented, he gave a note upon his life which could be called in any year of overt crisis. No wonder then that these have been the years of conformity and depression (338)

This feeling of conformity extended to individuals outside of radical writers and dissenters such as Mailer, such as William Whyte's scathing critique of what came to be known as the organization man in 1956, published under the same title. This work, along with its fictional counterpart, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* by Sloan Wilson, critiqued the lives of those company men who were subject in almost all facets of their lives to the will and betterment of the company, exchanging self for group. They work nameless and faceless all day long and return to their "little boxes made of ticky-tacky" as the hit song by Pete Seeger, critiquing

middle-class conformist attitude and their identical suburban homes early in the next decade, claimed.

Despite opposition to the role, the need to conform most often won out over any desire to be an individual. As a part of domestic containment, people were expected to adhere to their acceptable gender roles. Barbara Ehrenreich states, "In the 1950s…there was a firm expectation…that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives. To do anything else was less than grown-up, and the man who willfully deviated was judged to be somehow 'less than a man'" (11-12). Russell Lynes, commenting on the conformity and paranoia, describes how the county was "seemingly on the search for abnormality at the same time that we distrust our standards of what is normal" (105). Public derision of difference became a way to force or keep people in their assigned roles. The country's expectation for its citizens may have been for individuality and non-conformity but not at the cost of appearing different.

Dominant and Subordinate Masculine Types

It would come as no surprise that these impossible and contradictory positions sparked not only dissent but backlash, essentially providing the stimulus for multiple, competing types of masculinity within society. In my opinion, it is this variegated conception of masculinity that provides the basis for thoughts of a masculinity crisis. It was not, as popular psychology testified, a lack of authority that started the crisis, but confusion over what was expected and which male type to follow in society. Again, there is a resonance from *Salesman*. In that changing period, Willy was at a loss because he had nothing to give to society, no level of usefulness. He represented a subordinate masculinity sacrificed in order to reify the dominant. By 1955, the conception of the dominant was rife with problems, leading to an inability to meet its expectations. This is why Schlesinger's sentiment from the epigraph moves away from simply

calling women the culprit and towards confusion over basic identity, echoing Margaret Mead's identification of a lack of an essential male identity. Schlesinger poses the question,

> Why is the American man so unsure today about his masculine identity? The basic answer to this is plainly because he is so unsure about his identity in general. Nothing is harder in the whole human condition than to achieve a full sense of identity—than to know who you are, where you are going, and what you mean to live and die for (297-98).

Man's basic struggle in this era, then, was simply trying to find a secure place for his own identity. The difficulty in this task, I would argue, stems from there being simply too many conflicting examples of dominant—or acceptable—masculinity. In this era, essentially, there is a blurring of dominant and subordinate types, to the point that a great deal of confusion is generated. So, how exactly does this profusion of types play out—where did they come from and how did society respond to them?

I do not mean to suggest here that there is a discreet list of identities clearly recognized by society. Looking back—as well as at popular representations—the idea of the flannel suit emerges as a specific, accepted type. From the viewpoint of hegemony, the man in the flannel suit was the blank slate standard upon which society wrote expectations of acceptable manhood. This man worked for the company, contributed to the economic boom, and had his established role at home. However, given the backlash against this conformist type explained below, modern conceptions of manhood were rebelling against that type in trying to write a new version of manhood. Mostly what was at play in this time period were competing obligations, challenges against so-called established norms, and generational conflict, that found their way into multiple masculine types in various ways.

Feminist theorist Susan Bordo, in her highly personal account of male representations in Hollywood, complicates one of the most dominant representations of manhood, the father. She describes what she saw as the two dominant father archetypes of this decade: Stanley Banks from *Father of the Bride* (1950) and Stanley Kowalski from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). In describing their differences, she states,

> If ever there were contrasting male types, the two Stanleys…are those types. Kowalski—the abusive but sexually vital king of the household. Banks—the gruff but indulgent 'good provider' who ultimately comes round to every demand his wife and daughter make. I began to see the two Stanleys as competing prototypes for the soul of men in the fifties, and progenitors of images of masculinity (110-11).

Thus, for Bordo, the dual representations of the father lean toward clown or ape. Brando goes a long way towards affirming a prevalent character type noted by film theorist Stella Bruzzi: the "domineering father who is frequently out of control" (38). Banks, on the other hand, is more than just the 'good provider' but also takes up an emasculated male position by not truly calling the shots, his principal purpose being to provide for every whim of his wife and daughter.[26] His type is also seen prominently in the television show such as *Father Knows Best*, first airing on television in 1954, which seemed to endorse that respectable—if somewhat ineffectual—patriarch of the family. While Kowalski characterizes patriarchy with violence and raw sexuality,[27] Banks makes more a mockery of patriarchal authority. Between the two Stanleys we

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[26] He predates the bumbling fool whose buffoonery and stubborn ignorance would find fruition in the antics of Dick Van Dyke.

[27] There are, I would add, complications with associating Kowalski with fatherhood, even if it does provide nice evidence of competing male types. Kowalski was not yet a typical father—merely an expectant parent. Because of this, I believe he does more to reinforce another masculine type discussed below. It is notable, though, that in movies such as *The Wild Ones* and

have what Bruzzi describes as an extreme characterization of that figure: "either obscenely dominant or awkwardly weak" (39).

In between these types, though, would be yet another characterization for fathers: the man in the grey flannel suit, immortalized on film by Gregory Peck in 1956. With *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, we see the character of Tom Rath beset by money troubles and a disconnected family trying to move up the conformist ladder while addressing his experiences in World War II. By the end, he has attained material comfort and managed to bring his family closer together. While Peck's portrayal of the upright father seemed to paint this character type as a positive representation of masculinity, there was another side to this representation that was not as positive. Bruzzi states that the flannel suit was "a site of conflict, irresolution, and painful compromise…a contradictory figure in whom several ideals of post-war American masculinity collide but ultimately fail to homogenize" (40)—as head of the household he was emasculated by the presence of the woman and in the public sphere he could be accused of being a yes-man for corporations. Thus the role of the father was a mix of conflicting types, from domineering to buffoonery to weakness. Bruzzi demonstrates that although there are a few instances of the father in postwar Hollywood that seemed to affirm the authority of the patriarch, these seemed to be a "significant anomaly" as the era was marked more by instances of "Hollywood undermin[ing] the traditional family man" (38).[28]

Rebel Without a Cause, the older generations—usually represented by the father figure—is seen as largely ineffectual.

[28] I do acknowledge, however, that drama—and good entertainment—is about conflict. Therefore, contentious and troubled types are clearly more present in plays and films than normal, contented types. Bruzzi's claim, though, about a large presence of troubled representations of men/fathers in society at this time does stand.

Fathers, of course, are not the only masculine types in society, and there were many more role models that didn't adhere to fatherhood for the public imagination. In the world of domestic containment, the different types of father and/or responsible male types—organization man, benevolent though emasculated father, buffoon, egghead,[29] etc.—might have been critiqued by society in often ambivalent ways, they were, nonetheless, accepted in larger society and their ubiquitous place on the silver screen testified to their importance to society. Reacting against this image of the popular and benevolent man was another type, popularized early in the 1950s, that of the bad boy.[30] It was the affluence of the fifties that allowed this type to really take hold as an inspiration for a whole new grouping in society, the American teenager.

With disposable incomes and a ready car, teenagers were able to have lives of their own outside of the family and it did not take advertisers any time at all to catch up to this new opportunity. From soda shops to drag races, books, films, and the new rock 'n' roll movement were all designed to speak for and cash in on this new economic sector. The culture that the adolescent spawned also filled the country with new uncertainties. Crime waves soon became attributed to "juvenile delinquents."[31] Sex became a major concern as fears of just what was going on in cars while rock music played plagued parents. While there were plenty of sitcoms that promoted "the essential health of the American family" (Diggins 188), offering many reliable instances of the responsible child and teenager, the film and music industry fulfilled the

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[29] This was a term that vice-presidential candidate Richard Nixon leveled against the Democratic presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson, for his intellectualism.

[30] Another take on the bad boy is the idea of these characters as the not-yet-a-man phenomenon. These were men that were acting like boys, old enough to have jobs and families, but resisting that compulsion in an effort to find themselves or rebel against the status quo.

[31] The fear of this phenomenon was felt even in the higher classes of society. In the *Playbill* for *Cat* is an advertisement from the Police Athletic League that reads: "Fight J.D. Support P.A.L.: Juvenile Delinquency—can not be sermonized or editorialized out of existence. It must be brought to a standstill."

teenagers need to carve out their own unique niche in society. And for this group, a whole crop of heroes filled the pages of their books, magazines, and movie screens.

For good or bad these new heroes were the role models for fifties adolescent culture. Gone was the allure of Frank Sinatra for young bobby soxers and in came the sexual magnetism of Elvis Presley. The dominant male type for the major movie stars had shifted from actors such as Humphrey Bogart and Henry Fonda to Marlon Brando and James Dean. What drew these masses of teenagers was not just sex appeal, but something deeper. What was different from earlier stars was a level of introspection or even wariness about the world, a tenderness that ran alongside something dangerous. I would argue that this dualistic notion among adolescent identity found much of its popular origins in 1951 with the important literary character of Holden Caulfield. J.D. Salinger's searching protagonist from *The Catcher In the Rye* was unsure of both the world and himself, causing readers en masse to identify with this unlikely (anti-) hero. Diggins wrote that Caulfield "embod[ied] their worries and their wonders, their revulsions against the phoniness of adult society" (200). Just like them, Caulfield felt lost within this adult world and while he did rebel, there was tenderness and a longing within him that struck true to so many.

This duality of tender and tough was seen in many aspects of popular culture. Bad boy Elvis Presley might have been merely "Elvis the Pelvis" to disapproving parents, but to his fans he was "Love Me Tender"—a soft heart behind a leather jacket and tight blue jeans; "Presley was for the young the perfect symbol of all that was exciting and forbidden, a voice that seemed paradoxically both aggressive and tender, strong yet vulnerable" (Diggins 196). It was this softer side that came to symbolize many of the newer stars of this era. One of the biggest actors at the time also embodied a similar conflicted malaise with the world, James Dean, who

> played the restless, searching youth, hungering for innocence, knowing too much about the compromises and complacencies of the world…[who] would make no reconciliation with reality. To do so was to adjust and settle down, precisely what society demanded of the fifties generation (Diggins 198).

If adolescents were being blamed for crime waves, seemingly out-of-control promiscuity, and being caught in the crosshairs of racial tension[32] then they were naturally going to feel alienated from the adult world. James Dean and other similar sensitive rebels of the silver screen all took up the mantle of Holden Caulfield, acting with sincerity and sadness mixed with a whole lot of rebellion.

James Dean, however, was not the originator of this wistful, angst-filled persona, but Marlon Brando whose mix of rebellion, aggression, and childishness was a new type for popular representations of manhood right at the end of the 1940s. As Bordo explains of this enigmatic actor, "Marlon Brando's portrayals of macho consistently maintained a highly self-conscious, critical edge… bent on 'deconstructing' macho rather than playing it straight" (111-12). She goes on to explain that his rough exterior, seen so readily in parts of *Streetcar*, was equally matched by the vulnerability he showed in relation to Stella: "Brando also brought an emotional expressiveness, a willingness to portray male *need*, helplessness, dependency, that helped to shape a very different kind of romantic male ideal" (112). One need only look at Humphrey Bogart's portrayal in *Casablanca* or John Wayne's in *Sands of Iwo Jima*—both popular films of the 1940s—to see how emotionally expressive and different Brando's performance was in

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[32] This not only stemmed from the growing concern over race in the country and the way its dissent with society was a threat on par with unruly youth, but also with the way that rock and roll culture stemmed from black culture.

Streetcar. The tough edge still remained, but this actor's vulnerability was quickly leaving a deep impression not only on his audiences but a score of succeeding actors as well.

Soon to follow in Brando's footsteps, in addition to James Dean, were Montgomery Clift and Paul Newman, all exemplifying the sensitive rebel type. What these young actors all had in common was their propensity for being sensitive men. Reumann states how new "stars like James Dean and Montgomery Clift projected an image of vulnerability and sensitivity, and postwar Western films such as *High Noon* (1952), *Shane* (1953), and *Broken Arrow* (1956) featured flawed and troubled heroes" (68). This had become such a trend by the middle of the decade that a critic such as Arthur Schlesinger was lamenting the fact that older actors such as Cary Grant and Spencer Tracy were having to take leads with such young heroines "because so few of the younger male stars [could] project a convincing sense of masculinity" ("Crisis" 295). What Schlesinger was missing, though, was that this new type of masculine representation was not the hero for the audiences who respected stars like Bogart, Grant, or Tracy. The new, flawed heroes were "defin[ing] a sexy male ideal…that had nothing to do with being good husband material" (Bordo 119) or the wrangling masculinity of the Marlboro Man.[33] The sensitive rebel was the hero of a whole new generation of filmgoers and the male type it personified presented a challenge to whatever could be characterized as a dominant archetype for masculinity.[34] These

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[33] Philip Morris first introduced the Marlboro Man in 1955 as a way to make filtered cigarettes look more masculine.

[34] Bruce McConachie refers to this persona as the Empty Boy, a type that "became one of the most important 'psychological identities' available to cold war Americans" (64). This masculine type, for McConachie, was set against the hegemonic masculinity and was noted for the "tensions and contradictions that crossed the fault line of gender in the Cold War." He explains, "The vulnerability of the boy feminized the role, rendering him more emotional and even more neurotic than the hegemonic male of the era. Likewise, the openness and innocence of the boy allowed for a casualness in body language and a tenderness with others that ill suited the controlled toughness of the 'normal' breadwinner" (64).

new masculine representations, then, were at odds with what was expected, as the popularity of a James Dean was just as prominent, if not more so than a Gregory Peck.

While the genesis of the angst-filled male might be attributed to a combination of Holden Caulfield and Marlon Brando, another element here that helps round out an idea of the rebelling male persona at this time was the Beat. Although not published until 1957, *On the Road*, the story of Jack Kerouac's beat adventures across the United States in the late 1940s was first written in 1951. Along with Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and William S. Burroughs *Naked Lunch*, this epochal narrative of the beat lifestyle came to represent—fairly or not—an entire grouping of mostly men living a countercultural lifestyle. The beat way was not necessarily subversive or political in any set way but represented a life lived against the grain. Its followers reflected, expressed, and lived the emotions generated by the world around them, but resisted the rampant commercialism and even Judeo-Christian customs of the country. The beats seemed to personify much of the sentiment captured by Mailer in his "The White Negro":

> If the fate of twentieth century man is to live with death from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as an immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self (339).[35]

To be beat was to live a life that hearkened back to hobos catching trains across the country, to live without connections away from the worries of everyday life, existing only for the immediate

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[35] While this quote seems to get at the heart of American masculinity throughout the twentieth century, going all the way back to Hemingway. Mailer might have had that in mind, but it is important that this was written in 1957 in response to what Mailer was feeling about current cultural ideas.

moment. The adventures of Kerouac's protagonists, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, are not about conflict and self-discovery, but about living in the present.

The feeling generated by *On the Road* amounted to a movement that seemed to characterize an entire generation. Leuchtenburg speaks of the Beats' iconoclastic stance when he says that they "rejected the canons of respectability—organized religion, striving for material success, homage to the state" (106). As such, they provided a counter to much of America at this point. One need only compare Sal Paradise to Peck's Tom Rath to note not only the disparity of popular masculine types competing with each other in this decade, but to observe the anti-establishment stance of the beats. Ehrenreich recognizes two distinct strands of male representation and protest within the beats: "one directed against the white-collar world and the other against the suburbanized family life that work was supposed to support" which resulted in an "all-out critique of American consumer culture" (52).[36] Faced with impending catastrophe such as nuclear fallout or with conformist subjection, the beats chose a more apathetic existence—one that didn't necessarily oppose, but certainly didn't endorse.

There is, however, one more male identity that did oppose the conformist lifestyle and actually came into high prominence, the playboy. The reason for the emergence of this new type is summed up in *Look*'s *Decline of the American Male*. In the first essay, Moskin states that "[f]emale dominance may, in fact, be one of the several causes of the 'organization man' who is so deplored today. What he is doing is just building his own masculine world. His office is *his* castle; his expense account buys him comfort and service" (20). Many men, it seemed, attempted to build their own masculine world that would provide a respite from the feminized world of the

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[36] Interesting that one of the fears of the immediate years following World War II was a return to the Depression and the beats seemed to symbolize that economically displaced masculine figure roaming the country. Only this time, it was by choice—an act of subversion.

office and home. The stimulus and some of the means for this escapist lifestyle appeared with the publication of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* magazine in 1953 that allowed the ordinary man to fantasize himself out of his everyday life. This monthly publication, featuring unabashed stories of male prowess alongside pictures of nude women, came to symbolize independence for men seemingly caught in an emasculating trap. For its male readers, *Playboy* did not have to mean a private, hidden idea, but an assertion of independence from seeming family ennui. Hefner knew this was the case when he stated in his now famous editorial of the first issue, "We want to make clear from the very start, we aren't a 'family magazine.' If you're somebody's sister, wife or mother-in-law and picked us up by mistake, please pass us along to the man in your life and get back to your *Ladies' Home Companion*" (qtd. in Bordo 120). As opposed to other types of manhood in this period, the *Playboy* lifestyle seemed a glamorous escape. Bruzzi states how, coinciding with *Playboy*'s trumpeting of the bachelor lifestyle, "Fatherhood means a loss of identity, a loss of masculinity and a loss of life" (74). While the beats might have simply given up on everything, the playboys embraced a consumer lifestyle, refusing to give in to the family role, at least in their imagination.

Despite the clear titillation in its pages, there was a reactive force behind the magazine. David Savran explains that the "reconfiguration of workplace and home signaled a feminization and domestication of normative, white, middle-class masculinity." "[T]his feminization," he goes on to say, "was perceived by many as being the sign of a male identity crisis" (*Taking* 48). For many men, this meant women were the blame. As stated above, one way to react against women was to eroticize them, turning them into sex objects only fit for male gaze. Within the pages of *Playboy*, then, this male fantasy of treating women as merely sexualized objects was realized.

For men who felt trapped at home these pin-up girls of *Playboy* put women where men felt they belonged.

Given that the escapist idea of *Playboy* was realized simply by purchasing a magazine and other consumer luxuries, Bordo states how "*Playboy*'s style of male rebellion was better suited to most American men than Kerouac's beatnik or Mailer's 'hipster,' who achieved their manhood by living a life of danger and marginality, even madness" (120). Living the life of a playboy meant indulging in all that was out there, without leaving the comforts of home—"*Playboy* offered an escape from domesticity that did not require giving up bourgeois comfort" (Bordo 121). McConachie affirms this consumer lifestyle, noting how "[t]hrough stereo sets, imported liquor, the right clothes, and other products, the playboy could declare his independence from the family values of the fifties and enjoy (at least in fantasy) the 'playmate of the month,' the ultimate in pleasurable consumption" (101). *Playboy* offered yet another masculine type to embody, that of the sexual voyeur/consumer whose lifestyle was not predicated by the family or national concern, but by hedonistic material pleasures. The beat, the playboy, the rebel, the organization man, the patriarch, and the family man, then, were all appearing as distinct and competing versions of the American man during the decade of the 1950s and almost all have a cameo in Williams's *Cat*.

Analysis of *Cat*

The 1955 staging of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* encapsulates almost perfectly this variegation of types as well as the angst and worry of the age. Within the characters of this stage piece are many representations of the types seen in society, especially masculine ones. The sheer profusion of these types adds to a blurring of any single dominant representation. I would argue that this is reinforced by the conflicting reactions from the critics. Within the same review, writers would

dole out near universal praise for Williams's drama and the acting by its cast, while also faulting the play for being confusing, offensive, or deliberately withholding. I do not believe that this is due solely to ambiguous writing by Williams, but something within the play with which audiences could strongly relate. While more specifics of the reviews are dealt with below, it is enough now to say that the play's ability to capture the contradictions of the 1950s lifestyle—making it a dissection of the personalities and peculiarities of the time—rang very true for audiences, keeping the first run going for 694 performances, sparking a well-received national tour, as well as an Academy-award nominated film starring Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor.

An interesting characteristic of the critical analyses of this work is the sheer ambiguity and vagueness toward the play itself. Scholars and critics have ranged over topics from Williams's use of homosexuality, its critique on materialism, its connection to Cold War culture, and to dramaturgical concerns over whose story the play stages.[37] My contribution to the rich texts that treat this play is an investigation of the character types seen onstage in this play, their connection to historical societal types, and how those would resonate with audiences watching. Every character onstage exemplifies some of the contradictions and ambiguities of the era.[38]

Of course, one of the types to be targeted in this era would be the organization man, embodied in this play by Pat Hingle's Gooper. In his suit, concerned with the bottom-line, with no personality of his own, and a law partner with the last name Bullit— eerily close to Pollitt—

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[37] The critics I am using here are specifically Robert Corber, David Savran, Brenda Murphy, and Bruce McConachie.

[38] There is certainly contention here as Brenda Murphy has effectively analyzed the fact that there are two (or more) versions of this play and that the different ways *Cat* was conceived by Williams and Kazan changes ideas of interpretation. It can be argued, for instance, that Williams perfectly captures much of the malaise affecting many of the young men of the country, while Kazan turned the play into a Hal to Henry V coming-of-age story. It is a testament to the power of this play, though, that no matter which version is used, aspects of 1950s culture inform an understanding of this play.

Gooper could easily be characterized as a conforming nine-to-five businessman, who amidst all the attention on death wants to concern everyone with pesky papers and contracts. He is a man who, despite being the eldest son, is disliked by his own father and mother and displays himself as nothing more than a selfish consumer—with his papers and numbers and a grave concern over the state of his car during the climactic third act storm. Lastly, given his clear association with the organization man, the audience would have seen him as the domestically emasculated type. Williams also drops hints at this connection when, in the first act, we hear Maggie tell Brick in a disparaging way how Gooper was forced by Mae to stay in the delivery room to watch the "wonder and beauty" of the birth of his twins (9). His actions in the play consist of snooping on his more popular little brother, making off-handed snide comments instead of being forthright, and having his wife fight most of his battles for him. His lack of manliness is important for the audience to see, functioning less as a contrast to Brick and more to exemplify his type, the gray-suited workingman, whose domestic life seems like subjection to the needs of his wife and kids. In much the same way that Mae can be seen as an unfriendly counter to Maggie, Gooper is a dislikable foil to the irresponsible, but convivial alcoholic.

We see embedded within the characterization of Mae a great deal of the anti-female opinions of the time. In fact, I would say that the unsympathetic Mae, played perfectly by Madeleine Sherwood, is the archetypal figure for the despised woman that is causing this masculine crisis. We clearly see the effects of her influence on Gooper, but it is not just her control over him that would cause audiences to loathe and fear her. The dislike of this character is more revealing about audiences and the opinions of women at that time than it is about a stage villain. In truth, she is no more conniving than Maggie, springs from the same type of society, and is simply looking to take care of her own. Why, then, would she seem to be so loathsome?

There are important contrasts between Maggie and Mae in this play, but a director or actress would actually have little to do to situate audience dislike of Mae.[39] Dressed in a stuffy, loud high society dress as opposed to just a slip, the costumes of Mae and Maggie respectively, do a lot in determining which female character the male audience members would like. Mae, as well, has seeming complete control over her husband, making her representative of the female dominance so feared in pop psychology tracts of the period. Further, Maggie is childless and desires sex with her husband. Mae, described by Maggie as a "monster of fertility" (9), has five children and one more on the way. These two women are on opposite sides of female portrayal as seen clearly in Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers*, when he explains how in desiring the "American Ideal Woman, the Dream Girl of Nation Adolescence…We thus made mom. The hen-harpy is but the Cinderella chick come home to roost" (196-97). On the one side are the desirable women that men fantasize and purchase *Playboy* magazines to gawk at—which could easily include Maggie—but once men have that, or at least a variation of it, they turn these women into mothers who lose their sexual allure. Williams presents not just masculine types, but stereotypes of women as well, female types that all play upon male anxiety.

This is clearly seen with the treatment of Big Mama, who represents an older version of both Mae and Maggie. While she clearly possesses a great deal of spunk—that is demonstrated with the sexual joke she plays upon the Reverend—Big Mama also has a great deal of nervous energy, making her another cat on a hot tin roof. The audience's first interaction with Big Mama is during the first act when she barges into the locked room of Brick and Maggie, brusquely

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[39] It should be noted that, regarding characters such as Gooper and Mae, much of the audience's positioning towards them is simply good playwriting. Williams needed drama with sympathetic characters and villainous ones. Despite the intentions of the directors and actors, Williams meant for these characters to be interpreted in a specific way. Part of the grotesque aesthetic is quite clearly painting characters in overly drawn moral certainty.

informing the exasperated Maggie that no one is allowed privacy here: "No, not in *my* house" (21), which is a statement that challenges the authority of Big Daddy before he is even seen in the play. She then proceeds to declare their childlessness and Brick's drinking as being due to Maggie's inability to satisfy Brick sexually, noting the cultural tendency to see happiness and comfort in marriage to be the responsibility of the woman.

Big Mama's attitude towards Brick through the whole play represents a case of "Momism"—the attack on the American mother's smothering influence over their male children described by Philip Wylie. He states that the mother's boy, "having been 'protected' by her love and carefully, even shudderingly, shielded from his logical development through his barbaric period, or childhood…is cushioned against any major step in his progress toward maturity" (208). In this showdown between Maggie and Big Mama are two blatant attacks on women—the wife who can't satisfy, leading a man to drink, and the mother who has stunted her son's growth towards a healthy maturity, and it seems clear that Brick is delayed in his maturation.[40] Whichever way one looks, though, the woman is to blame. This might have struck an average male theatergoer of *Cat* as particularly pertinent, since *Decline of the American Male* stated: "From the moment he is born, the American boy is ruled by women" (4). For many, then, Maggie—and even all the female characters—might have been the cat, but it is Brick—the American man—who is in a cage, smothered first by Big Mama (mother) and now Maggie (wife).

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[40] Obviously, much of this discussion borders on the issue of homosexuality that is a big part of this play. While I do deal with that issue later, my analysis is choosing not to make it the main point of my argument as it has figured largely in the work of other scholars. For my analysis, there is more at play here—more historical referents—than just a closeted interpretation of Brick.

Another main function of Big Mama[41] is her attempted usurpation of Big Daddy's authority. When Big Daddy enters the play, seemingly free from anything medically threatening, he is bent on reasserting the authority that was taken from him by his wife. We see this right away when, after being rebuked by Big Mama for stopping a toast in his honor, his hostile and angry response attempts to put her in her place: "I put up with a whole lot of crap around here because I thought I was dyin'…An' you thought I was dyin' an' you started takin' over; well you can stop takin' over, now, Ida, because I'm not goin' to die" (37). Remembering how she told Maggie that it was *her* house, we see Big Mama as a usurper of Big Daddy's place. Given that Kazan cast the diminutive Mildred Dunnock as Big Mama, the idea of her taking power from the hulking Burl Ives would be powerful, even insulting, similar to Micheál MacLiammóir's Iago to Orson Welles's Othello in that 1952 film. Big Mama's real force in this play, though—and by extension, Mae's and Maggie's—is her threat to masculine/patriarchal authority. Whether through economic or sexual means, women in this play are creeping into the arena of men.

Possibly, though, the worth of Big Daddy's authority is meant to be suspect and we are not supposed to view him as the noble patriarch whose power is being eroded, despite the Horatio Alger, self-made man imagery he evokes.[42] I believe that Big Daddy has never truly been the commanding force that Kazan and Ives would have us believe. It is my opinion that Big Daddy represents a flawed sense of patriarchy—a status neither worthy of following nor

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[41] It could also be argued that Big Mama is also part of Williams's critique on rampant materialism as Big Daddy references more than once her obsession with buying and consuming. This would reflect fears of the woman holding the purse strings and spending men's money—a masculine anxiety heavily featured in *Decline of the American Male*. However, given that Big Daddy is very wealthy, she is also merely an extension of his wealth and ability to spend how and wherever he likes.

[42] Of course, Kazan's staging might have changed Williams's original intention as Williams was neither partial to either folk singer Burl Ives or the petite Mildred Dunnock—echoing Miller's conflict with Kazan over *Salesman*.

replacing. Further, I believe that Williams gives us the clues to sustain this impression, the most obvious one simply being the language he employs. This is most pointedly demonstrated when Big Daddy states that Brick's late-night track antics would have been acceptable if had been chasing "poon-tang" (36). Reviewers consistently pointed out his colorful and crass dialogue—John McClain of the *Journal American* complaining directly of the vulgarity of the show, "We know a spade is a spade, but it doesn't have to be a dirty, fetid, miserable, filthy garden implement. Mr. Williams shouldn't have to resort to that." Much of Big Daddy's talk is overtly shocking and sexual,[43] even in his more private moments. In his conversation with Brick he reveals his own past of "bumming around"—the type of verbal imagery more associated with the Beats than the patriarch and overseer of "28,000 acres of the richest land this side of the Valley Nile!" (42).

Given the rampant spending of Big Mama, her usurpation of authority, as well as the familial strife tearing the family apart, it would seem that Big Daddy has not been the forceful presence often associated with patriarchy. While he is full of shouting and degrading insults to his wife and guests, such as the Reverend and the Doctor,[44] these are largely ineffectual and ignored by those around him. He tells the latter two to leave and stop bothering him, but they do

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[43] Some of the dialogue was excised from the performance, including a joke about elephants that, while added to later productions, was not acceptable for 1955.

[44] Besides the major figures of the play, even Reverend Tooker was an important type. The 1950s witnessed a tremendous boom in churchgoing, with McConachie noting that churchgoing "increased from 86.8 million to 114 million" (212). Also seen at this time was a reaction against religious hypocrisy with Will Herberg's very popular *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* calling into question the authenticity and sincerity of those filling pews of churches. He writes,

> God was now less an acutely experienced presence than a shallowly accepted convenience. Paradoxically, Americans were both religious and irreligious at the same time…In an ever-changing social environment, institutionalized religion functioned as 'self-identification and social location…To be seen in church or the synagogue was the best evidence that one was a solid member of the community (209-10).

Thus, even this seemingly insignificant character in *Cat* carried with it important implications.

not, instead leaving of their own accord later in the play. Even Gooper, Mae, and their children, who are clearly not liked by Big Daddy, do not back up or relent in front of his supposed fury. There is finally the question of Big Daddy's succession. Big Daddy's decision to wait so long to decide upon to whom and how to pass down his estate, despite the severity of his health, paints him as both irresponsible and negligent of his duty. At the start and at the end of the play, nothing is decided upon for sure—all the characters relying more on hope than anything else—with Big Daddy facing death and a contentious end to his "28,000 acres" legacy earned in a suspect manner to begin with.[45]

It is, however, in his conversation with Brick—one rambling digression after another that reveals the two endlessly sparring with each other while evading the truth—that we see Big Daddy show an awareness of his own shortcomings in life. His tale of Marrakesh—in which he tells the story of a woman who forced her barely walking and naked female child to sexually proposition Big Daddy—is delivered with barely any context other than to associate him with seedy elements of the world. He also reveals his connection and possible (sexual) involvement with Straw and Ochello that exposes his rootless, wandering past and an inheritance dubiously received from two homosexuals. The idea of excessive virility with Big Daddy is furthered in this scene when he expresses to Brick his desire to be sexually active now at the end of his life. The violent imagery he employs here though further taints the character of Big Daddy, associating him with reckless sexual aggression: "I'll strip her naked an' choke her with diamonds an' smother her with minks an' run her from Jackson to Memphis—*non-stop*!" (47). This excessive aggression is simply part of Big Daddy's character given the similar rhetoric that

[45] The homosexual references to Big Daddy's 'bumming around' and unique relationship to Straw and Ochello are often attributed to be the cause of his colon cancer.

he uses to characterize his life in general: “All my life I been like a doubled up fist—poundin’, smashin’, drivin’!” (45) It is in Big Daddy’s realization of the extent of Brick’s alcoholism, though, that reveals a self-awareness at his failure to be the leader of the family. He simply states, “This shows how I let things go!” (48). It is telling that the grounding of this scene is the idea of mendacity—a term that Kazan didactically introduced into the play itself, [46] thus marking the entire moment between father and son as superficially constructed, rendering any possible honesty between the two characters essentially worthless. In this scene, Big Daddy effectively paints himself more as a deviant than the rightful patriarch he is supposed to be and that Kazan felt was so important to the structure of the play. For the patriarch, at the end of life, surveying what he is in charge of, all he can see is a mess—one that he either created or let happen. This is metaphorically represented in the last act when Big Daddy enters and watches the storm sweeping over his lands and replies, “Looks like the wind was takin’ liberties with this place” (76)—possible references to the undermining of his eroding authority. Big Daddy is an epitome of the hollow man, a physically imposing and aggressive life force that is empty and rotting underneath.

The story goes, of course, that Williams would originally have had Big Daddy not reappear in the final act, interrupting the last act only to scream in pain—demonstrating his fading from the family and the world. Kazan, however, felt that such an important character as

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[46] This moment comes right at the start of the second act, when Mae flips on the radio and the voice coming from the other end says, “Th’ disgustin’ mendacity which my opponent has shown—” before Big Daddy yells for it to be turned off. The same moment in Williams’s original version have the stage directions simply say, “The room is suddenly blasted by the climax of a Wagnerian opera or a Beethoven symphony” (49). Brenda Murphy notes that Kazan made this didactic change to “foreshadow[] the discussion of mendacity by Brick and Big Daddy” (124).

Big Daddy had to come back. Kazan's need for Big Daddy to affirm a transition[47] from himself to Maggie/Brick demonstrates a need to provide a cleaner conclusion than Williams had originally intended. The ambiguous, even open-ended and sour ending of the original version denies a respectable finish that was too much for this famous and more traditional Broadway and Hollywood director. The heteronormativity of the Broadway conclusion insures that the patriarchy is sustained through Brick. In this version, even Maggie is simply the agent by which patriarchy is sustained and not a usurper of that power. This passing of the torch is physicalized in Burl Ives's lusty grab of Barbara Bel Geddes after she announces her pregnancy. In this action, Big Daddy is able to make her into a sexual object even while affirming her ability to carry the heir to his estate. However much Maggie might have been seen as usurping authority, her objectification at the hands of Big Daddy ensures her position as a sexualized agent of masculine endeavor.

Despite audiences being drawn to Bel Geddes as Maggie and intrigued by the larger-than-life portrayal of Big Daddy by folk singer Ives, it is Brick, portrayed by Ben Gazzara, who remains the hero. At least, this was the case for Kazan and also Arthur Miller who wrote, in "The Shadows of the Gods," that *Cat* "is a play seen from the viewpoint of Brick, the son" (191)—essentially making the conflict between father and son by emphasizing Brick's status as son as opposed to husband. However, amidst all the grotesque and varied types, how would an audience understand Brick? How does he reflect, contest, or represent notions of dominant and subordinate masculinities for society at this time, in the same way that the other characters were reflections of prejudice and anxiety?

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[47] This also renders Big Daddy as a positive masculine type who is in charge of his family and sets things right.

Brick is a unique type of protagonist whose addiction to alcohol is matched only by his utter indifference to the fate of all those around him. While Kazan makes him an active member of the conclusion, the rest of the play—as well as the original ending—suggests that Brick could not care less for even his own fate. Brick both reflects and contradicts many of the masculine types of society in ways that none of the other characters do, effectively standing in for America's search for masculine identity. A great parallel can be drawn here between Brick and America when, in a letter that John Steinbeck wrote to Adlai Stevenson, he stated, "If I wanted to destroy a nation, I would give it too much and I would have it on its knees, miserable, greedy, and sick" (652). When one sees the image of Gazarra on his knees in front of Big Daddy, still clutching his bourbon poured from his huge bar unit, one can clearly see a critique of an America crippled by its own greed and sickness.

The connections go even deeper when we look at what social critic Dwight MacDonald, at midcentury, wrote about what he saw as the infantilism and "adultized" children who, fearful of responsibility, were growing up as a symptom of our mass-produced culture. He writes, "Peter Pan might be a better symbol of America than Uncle Sam" (10). The economic safety of the 1950s might have allowed people—especially younger members of society—more time to be kids, it also gave them more time to not grow up, to live in a Neverland, reliving a youth that they have clearly moved past. MacDonald went on to speak of the country's "cult of youth, which makes 18-22 the most admired and desired period of life" (10), reversing indeed, the dominant representations of older, self-assured masculinity. Turning to Brick this criticism seems especially apt. What his struggles with Skipper boil down to is a refusal to be admitted into adult life, clinging to the idealism and, especially, innocence of youth. His frantic plea to Big Daddy affirms this naiveté: "Why can't exceptional friendship, *real, real, deep, deep*

friendship between two men be respected as somethin' clean an' decent without bein' thought of as—*fairies!*" (56). The evening preceding the action of the play found Brick trying to jump hurdles on the high school track, taking him back to when he was happy, at peace, and idealism was strong. Ultimately, Brick has turned to alcohol, a desperate attempt to forget his present by clouding it in a drunken haze. The drinking is his attempt to stay in Neverland: "A drinkin' man's someone who wants to forget he isn't still young an' believin'" (53), as he explains to Big Daddy.

There is, I would argue, more complexity here as Brick is consciously rejecting a world he doesn't like and not simply sloughing off. This is a sentiment already elucidated above by Norman Mailer in his discussion of the Beats, where he claims that the only answer for twentieth century man is to exist by himself with no past, no connections, and no roots, living entirely for the self. This type of narcissist escapism seems particularly suited to Brick. While he has clearly been dealt blows in life—inability to play sports, the loss of a dear friend, a potentially closeted lifestyle—he is doing nothing to address these issues but divorcing himself from the world around him. He faces death rather than his own problems.[48] *Cat* exemplifies a generational quandary, as its drama brings attention to the not-yet-a-man type, uncertain of his role and place in this changing society.

Audiences watching *Cat* could associate many different aspects of Brick's persona and characterization with many different types in society. First and foremost would be the bad boy

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[48] This is a condition taken by many in society as they faced the realities of World War II, the Holocaust, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and a conformist lifestyle that praised consumerism above everything else. Mailer goes on to say that, "One is Hip or one is Square…one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life, or else a Square… doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed" (339). In this passage, I see revealed important insights about Brick as the American man and what constitutes a confusion of dominant and subordinate masculine types.

type, borrowed from Marlon Brando and James Dean, of whom John Patrick Diggins states: Dean "communicated the emotions of a crippled romantic, a moody idealist whose dreams about the world have already been destroyed by his resentment toward it" (197). This seems to be right in line with how Brick's emotional complexity and alienation from the world has literalized into him being actually crippled throughout the play.[49] He clearly possesses a moody idealism that will not reconcile with his present circumstances which is evident from his wanting to cling to the idea of a pure friendship. This connection to James Dean is interesting since *Cat* premiered in March of 1955 and Dean died in September of that same year. The height of Dean's popularity—so representative of masculine angst and moodiness—would have been strong during the run of *Cat*.[50]

Besides Dean, of course, was the enigmatic Marlon Brando whose character in *The Wild Ones* achieved screen immortality when—in response to being asked what he was rebelling against—he replied, "Whaddya got?" Brando's rebelliousness, Dean's angst, Montgomery Clift's pensiveness all went to display an anti-hero type, one who distanced himself from the responsibilities of a conformist lifestyle and who seemed horrified by the state of the world in which he found himself. While this type might have met with disapproval by the older generation, it was adored by the younger. As Susan Bordo writes of this new representation: "A new breed of 'rebel male' actors began to define a sexy male ideal…that had nothing to do with being good husband material" (119). The emerging popular type did not settle and get married

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[49] Reviewer John Chapman even refers to this "totter[ing] around on a crutch" as being overdone and "dull after three long acts."

[50] Both *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause* came out in 1955, with *Giant* appearing in the next year.

and did not conform to society's strictures; Brick is a reflection of this strain.[51] Their rebellion was not one of anger or excitement, but a dispassionate removal from society's expectations. From their leather jackets, fast cars, to the way they wore cowboy hats and smoked, they personified cool for an entire generation. Whether or not Williams meant for Brick to be seen in this light, Maggie's description of him seems particularly well-suited to that hip ethos: "you have that rare sort of charm that usually only happens in very old or hopelessly sick people, the charm of the defeated. You look so cool, so enviably cool" (13).

As discussed above, this same angst-filled representation was also popular within literary circles, courtesy of the popularity of Holden Caulfield.[52] As Leerom Medovoi discusses, in an essay in *The Other Fifties*, "*Catcher* was read by teenagers, but it was patronized by the most culturally influential of adults…As the reception of [the work] reveals, cold war intellectual culture authorized dissent in youth culture" (282). Medovoi also writes about how Caulfield, in his search for something else within the stasis of American politics and identity, was placed by many writers on par with Huck Finn. By linking these two characters, we can see a desire to recognize American—not just youth—culture in the eyes of these protagonists where something pure and even vulnerable remains in the face of the unrelenting truth and reality of the adult world. Again, Brick is clearly reflected in this representation not only of youthful angst, but also conscious rebellion against current American culture. As noted by Arthur Miller, Brick "is a lonely young man sensitized to injustice [trapped] in a world whose human figures partake in various ways of grossness, Philistinism, greed, money-lust, power-lust" (191). From Brando to

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[51] While Ben Gazzara was popularly received, the role of Brick would affirm this anti-societal strain when Paul Newman, one of these new 'rebel male' actors, took up the part in the 1958 film.

[52] It could be argued, of course, that the searching, angst-filled youth who is not ready to grow up even in the face of dire circumstances saw one of its first and best prototypes with Hamlet.

Caulfield and on to the Beats, dissent, at this time, is a powerful force in masculine representation.[53]

Besides the angst-fueled, alienation of Brick, many audiences could possibly interpret his narcissistic removal from society and responsibilities as being from someplace completely different from Brando and Caulfield, that of Hugh Hefner. As detailed above, *Playboy* was about more than just desirable women in the centerfolds, but a projection of a certain lifestyle. As Susan Bordo states, "*Playboy* offered an escape from domesticity that did not require giving up bourgeois comfort. Far from it. Imported liquor, great stereo equipment, mile-long cars, and snazzy bachelor pads were the accouterments of the Playboy lifestyle" (121). While this isn't fully Brick Pollit within *Cat*, the similarities are clearly there. Clad only in a bathrobe, with a gorgeous woman on his bed, a stocked liquor cabinet, and a great TV/radio system, Brick not only resembled the *Playboy* lifestyle—"the most mainstream (and long-enduring) version of male rebellion against domesticity," as Bordo calls it—but possessed that cool detached air that Maggie both hates and desires. Audiences who would have been envious of the lifestyle espoused in the pages of *Playboy* would have seen an aspect of that lifestyle at play with Brick. As Barbara Ehrenreich states, "The real message [of *Playboy*] was not eroticism, but escape—literal escape, from the bondage of breadwinning" (51). Unlike the other two husbands represented in the play—the emasculated Gooper and the almost ineffectual Big Daddy—Brick is a man neither controlled by his wife nor held down by any sense of responsibility. He is a character who holds many meanings.

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[53] Of course, it is no irony that Mailer's "The White Negro" was first published within the pages of the magazine *Dissent*, which first appeared in 1954, a year before *Cat*'s premiere.

An obvious problem with this last sentiment is the question of Maggie and whether or not she controls Brick? While it is her struggle throughout the action to simply get Brick to pay her attention, let alone conceive a child with her, the cards are predominantly in her favor at the end as she is poised to be the one victor in this play. However, did the audiences see it that way? Was Maggie a domineering character who controlled the life of her husband? I've demonstrated above that Mae's character—as performed by Madeleine Sherwood—would no doubt have been met with derision by audiences and Maggie, in many ways, is very similar to her sister-in-law. They are both trophy wives who work to control their husbands for their own, and their family's, financial security. The big distinction between the two is arguably the sexuality of Maggie. Though a "monster of fertility," Mae is not a sensual character, which is a far cry from Maggie who, in her first few moments in the play, strips down to a slip, lounges across the bed, and rubs herself with an ice cube. This was clearly a selling point for the producers of the show when, after only a few weeks, the *Playbill* went from a non-descript cover page with nothing but the title and name of the author on it to a drawing of Maggie draped provocatively over the bed in her slip.[54] However, was this image just titillation for audiences or an acknowledgement that the play has a woman calling the shots in the bedroom?

The fear of a woman's forthrightness in the bedroom was very much alive in this period. Although Elaine Tyler May notes that "wives in the postwar era were recognized as sexual enthusiasts whose insistence on conjugal satisfaction would contribute to erotically charged marriages" (102), when *Decline of the American Male* states that "the girl regulates all physical contact" (9) there is the assumption that women's growing influence has taken over even the

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[54] McConachie notes how a later-run reviewer even mentioned the sexual allure of the play as being one of the main selling points (124).
The usage of this provocative image continues with the 2013 revival of *Cat*.

bedroom, a fear that was amplified by the findings in Kinsey's *Female Report*. Reumann describes how one of the most common explanations for sexual problems for men was that "women's increasing [sexual] demands were harming American men and causing sexual chaos…Authorities expressed a great deal of concern over the power women held to sexually shame men" (81). Maggie demonstrates throughout the play that the urge to have sex—either for the pleasure she craves, or for the baby she needs to have an heir to Big Daddy's estate—is solely in her hands. While Maggie's sexual attitude towards Brick in the first act could prove titillating for an audience, it could also reflect some of the anxieties about the authority of women at this time.

Arthur Schlesinger recognizes this anxiety when, in comparing the characters of Brick and Jimmy Porter—of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*—he states how they are both "all too characteristic modern heroes. They are, in a sense, castrated…Neither is capable of dealing with the woman in his life" (294). He then goes on to claim that "the intentness with which audiences have watched these plays suggests that…the Pollit-Porter dilemma expresses in vivid and heightened form something that many spectators themselves feel or fear" (294). Indeed, the portrayal of Maggie as originally written would have, at least in Kazan's mind, prompted this type of reaction that Schlesinger sees. However, the performance belies this reaction.[55] The critics—and the popularity of the show—seem to have nothing but favor for the portrayal of Maggie.[56]

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[55] Again, good playwriting comes into play here, as well. Williams knew that audiences respond to characters that want and seek change in their lives. This was deliberately written into Maggie to build audience sympathy for her. To a certain extent, this is also done with Brick. While he claims to not want anything, he ardently desires for what he can no longer have, Skipper.

[56] In a letter written to his agent Audrey Wood, Tennessee Williams expressed his concerns over the changes, saying that the new ending "would change Maggie from a strong woman who

Each review of the opening performance of *Cat* heralds Barbara Bel Geddes as rapturous and wonderful. The rest of the cast and the storyline might have been vulgar and petty, but Bel Geddes is almost always described with adoration, far from reflecting societal fears of *the woman*. William Hawkins of the *World-Telegram* says she is "magnificent as the ambitious frustrated young wife," a sentiment echoed by Walter F. Kerr of the *Herald-Tribune* and John Chapman of the *Daily News* who repeat each other in calling her performance, "luminous." Even Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times* refers to her as "vital, lovely and frank." It isn't until John Beaufort's review in the *Christian Science Monitor,* a week after the premiere, that we get an acknowledgement of the possible fear of Maggie in society. He states how "Maggie is a symbol of Mr. Williams' misogyny, a misogyny probably not equaled in the drama since Strindberg." This harsh critique is then qualified by what he sees as a contradiction within the performance: "Miss Bel Geddes' only fault is that her natural charm belies Maggie's unnatural lack of it." For Beaufort, there is a difference between what Bel Geddes is doing and what Williams has written. [57] It would seem that such a carefully written and eccentric character as Maggie would hardly be a figure of scorn from the author.

Elia Kazan's wish was to "project an image of the healthy, loving young wife whose deprivation of her husband's sexual love was making her own sexual desire unbearable," because, as Murphy states, he "did not want the sense of a calculating sense of sexuality" (115-16). Painting Maggie in this sympathetic light, makes her, as McConachie says, a "wholesome

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achieved her will through dominating a weak man to a generous woman who gave him back his manhood" (Murphy 100).

[57] Later critics would agree with what Beaufort identified as "Williams's misogyny." While almost all reception favored Bel Geddes during the initial run of *Cat*, critics began to note the more sinister side of Maggie the Cat after the characterization of her by Elizabeth Taylor in the popular Hollywood film.

mother-wife eager to help her husband regain his heterosexual desire" (113) allowing another focus of the play to be dimmed in favor of sympathy for Maggie and compassion for the plight of Brick—the reaffirmation of Brick as a heterosexual. Maggie, therefore, becomes a sexualized agent in the restoration of heterosexuality.

Fear of the powerful nature of women in the 1950s society, led men to retreat and invent new roles for themselves. As much as Caulfield and Brando could be read as reactions against a cold war, conformist lifestyle, there were also reactions against the sexualized female. *Decline of the American Male* lists three strategies men used at the time to deal with women's increasing aggression at home and in the bedroom, stating that men had the option to live a life of bachelorhood, on par with the lifestyle espoused in the pages of *Playboy*, withhold sex, or turn to homosexuality. Barbara Ehrenreich, discussing a Dr. Abram Kardiner writing during the 1950s, explains how the thinking of the time led many in society to view homosexuality more as a retreat from heterosexual expectations and duties than an actual sexual choice (24). For many, Brick did not necessarily represent a man who views himself as a homosexual, but as a man who has psychically retreated from his life, seeking haven in what was viewed as an aberration or sickness. Williams, of course, remained quite ambiguous as to just what we should feel. Most of the reviewers, of course, picked up on this ambiguity, and clearly noted their frustration. John Chapman, in the title of his review calls it a "Frustrating Drama" and Walter F. Kerr keenly sees that the secrets are not totally revealed even by the end, stating that there is a "tantalizing reluctance—beneath all the fire and all the apparent candor—to let the play blurt out its promised secret."

Ultimately, the introduction of homosexuality—while remaining elusive and baffling to critics—serves a larger purpose of reifying masculinity in this play. David Savran writes how

homosexuality becomes the "obstacle that must be overcome if the greed and ugliness embodied by Gooper and Mae are to be forestalled and Brick and Maggie conceive a child in the very bed once occupied by Jack Straw and Peter Ochello" (*Communists* 102). Essentially, painting Brick as a homosexual allows there to be dramatic conflict. Left alone, Brick could fall into the subordinate masculine types listed above—the rebel, the playboy—and keep the play unresolvable and open to interpretation. However, seeing Brick as struggling with homosexual tendencies that are finally overcome by Maggie's insistence allows an audience to view the play as finished, with the conflict resolved, as Kazan seemed to have wished. Robert Corber writes that Big Daddy is ultimately rescued from his taint of "bumming around" by not only "provid[ing] Straw and Ochello with an heir" but by "fulfilling the patriarchal injunction to reproduce" (119). I see the same thing happening with Maggie and Brick, a repetition of the cycle begun by Big Daddy. The end of Kazan's version leaves little doubt that Brick will be with Maggie so long as the alcohol at the end is delivered. Not only does he defend Maggie to Mae and Gooper, but he also claims to admire her as the lights dim.

Despite whatever else the play might have communicated to its audiences, Kazan managed to make the play about overcoming homosexuality with an ultimate reassertion of the patriarchy, an exact example of domestic containment. While the "curious wicker headpiece representing giant cornucopiae" (5) that adorned the major set piece of the bed might have been utter irony for Williams—possibly even a reference to horns and cuckoldry—in the hands of Kazan, the heteronormativity and promise of reproduction is implied, even with these grotesque characters. This, then, is the manner in which masculine hegemony is reaffirmed, by the assignation of Brick as one possibly afflicted with homosexuality that is rescued. He goes from

sharing characteristics with many of the competing subordinate, marginalized types in society to a more positive type that reaffirms both patriarchal succession and masculinity itself.

Whether he is figured as a playboy, bad boy, homosexual, rebel, or all of these, Brick most assuredly suffers from a debilitating case of narcissism—a condition believed to be widespread at this time. This was no doubt due to the popularity of psychoanalysis and the rise of advertising agencies that McConachie above asserted had "helped to hollow out an empty self" for the American consumer. I believe that whatever type Brick meant to his audience, his self-absorption—and inability to project a true identity with wants and needs—would have come across very easily. Erich Fromm elucidates this condition when he writes that

> For the narcissistically involved person, there is only one reality, that of his own thought processes, feelings, and needs. The world outside is not experienced or perceived *objectively*…he has withdrawn into himself; he cannot experience reality…He either does *not* react to the world outside, or if he does, reacts not in terms of *its* reality, but only in terms of his own processes of thought and feeling (35-6).

Ultimately, this might be where an understanding of Brick may lie. The world of the 1950s, as outlined above, was fraught with competing and contradictory types for both men and women. There is an inability to locate just what the American man is and is supposed to be. This struggle poses Willy Loman's late 1940s individual issues with manhood into a national struggle over masculine identity.

The battle against competing types in *Cat* is a jockeying for a specific positioning of the masculine representations in order to define and legitimate hegemonic masculinity in a drastically changing society. The narcissism of Brick is only going to get worse with the next two decades, leading to an even greater fragmentation of the self. The range of masculine types

may not splinter more than in this time period, but a dominant representation becomes even more elusive to attain. Brick and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* display masculine identity amidst a profuse confusion of subordinate masculine types. As Carrigan, et al. note, "the construction of hegemony is not a matter of pushing and pulling between ready-formed groupings, but is partly a matter of the *formation* of those groupings" (594). Given that hegemony is a "historically mobile relation," Connell is careful to note "that hegemonic masculinity embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy. When conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded" (77). Keeping the dominant masculinity obscured in ambiguity ensures competition and fighting between subordinate masculinities. In the next decade this becomes a part of masculine representation. From this point, masculinity exists without a single dominant type and instead alternates between culturally acceptable types and challenges to them.

IV. FAILINGS OF AMERICAN MASCULINITY

"It hit you in the stomach, man, like a ten-ton truck
and it hit you in the balls, blew 'em away."
Ardell, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*

This chapter examines some of the volatile changes that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, focusing specifically on the ways in which white masculine identity was impacted by these major events.[58] This era symbolized a period of transition, leading to troubled and uncertain notions of what it meant to be both an American and a man. Most apparent in this time period is the supposed diminution of the dominance of the white male. To claim that the white man lost his authority in this period would be false; to say, though, that the white man lost an assumed, unchecked authority is, perhaps, more appropriate, echoing the words of feminist scholar, Abigal Solomon-Godeau, from the Introduction: "the recent visibility of masculinity itself…attests, if nothing else, to a destabilization of the notion of masculinity such that it forfeits its previous transparency, its taken-for-grantedness, its normalcy" (70). Also important here is Sally Robinson's claim that in the period of the late sixties and seventies there was a transition whereby "articulations of white men as victimizers slide almost imperceptibly into constructions of white men as victims" (5). The current chapter, then, will examine the ways in which white

[58] Attempting to pare down any of this subject matter to a few isolated incidents would do the history a grave disservice; to treat each event with due credit, though, would be far too overwhelming a subject. I, therefore, focus on some of the most important and lasting events. Instead of attempting to tell the history of this era, I am merely trying to tell a history, a dominant narrative arc that can be read through the events.

masculinity—whether with validity or not—became equated with victimization, (re)affirming perennial ideas of crisis that seem to surround the concept of masculinity.

The central focus for examination of this time period will be the two stagings of David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*. In this play, centered on the conflict in Vietnam, we get a portrait of the American male, diminished and disillusioned, but constantly striving for an ideal that eludes him. Admittedly, this play was seen by a relatively few number of people and had little impact outside of its New York audiences. It stands, however, as representative of the effect the events of this time period had on the nation. *Pavlo Hummel* seems, to me, a reflection of American masculine life at the time, driven to confusion.[59] The representation of Pavlo Hummel not only reflects what some critics have called the narcissism of the era, but also, from its Off-Broadway premiere in 1971 to its Broadway opening in 1977, highlights the changing perceptions of masculine ideals in the country.

Before beginning an analysis of *Pavlo*, it is necessary to situate an understanding of the place of hegemonic masculinity coming out of the 1950s. The last chapter suggested that the culture of the 1950s had started to raise the idea of competing acceptable types. From the playboy to the beat and the rebel, challenges to acceptable types of masculinity were being seen everywhere. However, the type personified by the grey flannel suit—the Tom Raths of the world—was still largely the most acceptable form of masculinity. Little doubt is left at the end of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* that Gooper, mocked though he might be in the play, is a figure that will maintain his money, power, and authority. At the end of the 1950s, the conservative Republican Vice-President Richard Nixon, while a punching bag for the media, seemed poised to sweep into

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[59] "I have written [these plays]," Rabe says, "to diagnose, as best I can, certain phenomena that went on in and around me" (*Pavlo* xxiv). For a writer who went through basic training and active duty in Vietnam, his plays became an exorcism of the experience.

the presidency, a representative of the grey flannel suit maintaining the hegemonic masculine authority.

However, this was not the case. Another figure, a challenger to Nixon's conservatism, appeared. John F. Kennedy, "handsome, debonair, witty, wealthy, and a decorated war hero to boot" (Matthews 18), who portrayed himself as youthful, vibrant, and less tarnished by Washington, garnered a strong base of support, including an important group, younger voters. As William Chafe recounts, "Kennedy appealed especially to the young, giving them a sense that anything was possible only if they would do their part" (170). With "his youthful family, the shock of hair falling over his forehead, his legendary love of touch football games, and the repeated exhortation to the new generation to pick up the 'torch of the American Revolution'" (Chafe 170), Kennedy seemed to be working more to inspire than simply to get enough votes.[60]

The momentum that truly moved the Kennedy camp forward was in the first televised debate where "the debonair Kennedy out[shone] an awkward Nixon" (Matthews 15). "Tanned, tall, lean, well tailored in a dark suit," Matthews describes, "[f]rom the moment Kennedy strode in, hijacking the attention of the photographers, Nixon was not the same man. Visibly deflated by his rival's matinee-idol aura and seeming nervelessness, Nixon slouched in his chair, his head turned away, a man in retreat" (148-49). Almost instantly, Kennedy became something of a superstar. Matthews relates how the day after the first debate, traveling in Ohio, Kennedy "was confronted by a new phenomenon in the political world—the 'jumper'—the teenager or young woman who literally jumped up in the crowds to get a better look at the most exciting male sex symbol since the debut of Elvis" (157). Kennedy, then, was following in a line of masculine

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[60] This is a political strategy that is used often and sometimes to great effect, such as with Barack Obama's 2008 campaign. Kennedy, however, made this type of political platform his own, continuing this successful strategy through to his momentous inauguration speech.

exemplars in popular American culture from Frank Sinatra in the 1940s to James Dean, Elvis, and what would be The Beatles in a few short years. Wearing Brooks Brothers suits, yachting with his beautiful wife, maintaining friendships with Hollywood starlets,[61] or being entertained by Frank Sinatra, Kennedy embodied a popular masculine image, elevating not just his political appeal but I would add, his masculine legacy.

The popular masculine types at this time were largely being shaped by the film icons of the day. This period witnessed the emergence of the sleek and debonair James Bond, embodied by Sean Connery, coolly defeating the Communist threat with style. Alongside the sleekness of Bond were the quiet stoic leadership of Gregory Peck, the authoritativeness of Charlton Heston, and the laidback sexiness of Steve McQueen. Kennedy was not simply a politician, but very much in line with masculine representations that honored toughness, sleekness, and even virility. "What [Kennedy] possessed," Matthews states, "was an innate ability to be *liked*, to have people want him as a friend, lover, son, brother, leader. Men and women both wanted to follow him" (20).

November 22, 1963 in Dealey Plaza would change all of that. Journalist James Reston forlornly noted, "What was killed [in Dallas] was not only the president but the promise…the death of youth and the hope of youth, of the beauty and grace and the touch of magic…He never

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[61] Although the truth of Kennedy's adulterous nature would start to be revealed by the 1970s, very little of this came to light during his lifetime. Much of this had to do with the Kennedy family covering up any indiscretions, but much of it simply had to do with the time period. As Thomas Reeves states in his work, *A Question of Character*, "Republicans had heard the stories, of course, but elected not to use them. Many reporters, in Washington and around the country, were aware of Kennedy's extramarital affairs." However, Reeves notes, the "largely all-male press corps at the time permitted certain misconduct by major public officials to go unnoticed…Kennedy's sexual adventures, then, were off-limits to reporters in 1960, and Jack would enjoy that immunity for the rest of his life" (202-03).

reached his meridian: we saw him only as a rising sun" (qtd. in Chafe 211).[62] Leuchtenburg notes this event as a passing of a sort, an end of the innocence for many in the country, especially among Kennedy's youth following:

> The young felt a special sense of deprivation at Kennedy's death. The slain President had broken through the middle-aged complacency of the 1950's to give a feeling of hopefulness about American society and a free field to the idealism of young people. They had admired, too, the President's gallantry and the impression he conveyed of a valorous adventurer (134).

Kennedy, at the same time, was able to evoke the adventurer of times past and the hope for the future[63] and his death marked a change in how we viewed popular masculine representation. In the words of politician Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "we will never be young again." While the older establishment was quickly restored with the paternal Johnson (and then Nixon), for a brief time, Kennedy posed a challenge to acceptable masculinity, hearkening back to the rebels and the playboys of the 1950s. Kennedy helped embody a contrasting type to the one outlined in the following case study. The hope and optimism that he instilled in the youth would seem to find fruition in the activism of the later 1960s. Just as Kennedy represented a youthful challenge to the established order, the later 1960s would see a youth culture rebelling against the older

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[62] There is, however, a great deal of speculation about the political legacy of John F. Kennedy, with many claiming that he instilled hope and bolstered the country's confidence while others claim he did very little except elevate the Cold War and initiate the Vietnam conflict. Others would say he laid important groundwork for Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and others could counter by saying his interest in the Civil Rights movement was merely political and something towards which he only paid lip service. No matter what his specific record, though, "[h]e was by any measure the most beloved president of modern times. Three decades after his death he remains the standard by which we measure our country's leader" (Matthews 20), setting the tone for decades to come with both Clinton and Obama compared, at various times, to Kennedy.

[63] It can be noted that Kennedy was the president to truly initiate excitement about the space program, setting up hope for masculine adventures in an all-new frontier.

establishment. The events that followed his death would challenge the prosperity of the nation, thrusting the country from its supposed nostalgic happiness of the 1950s into the challenging period of the 1960s.[64]

Interestingly, much of the anxiety that these changes caused for the American male can be traced to America's foreign policy directives that were furthered by Kennedy himself. As Christopher Lasch states, "Experience of inner emptiness, loneliness, and inauthenticity"—traits that I will demonstrate as endemic of the later 1960s and 1970s—"are by no means unreal or, for that matter, devoid of social content…They arise from the warlike conditions that pervade American society, from the dangers and uncertainty that surround us, and from a loss of confidence in the future" (26-7). The very event to which Lasch is referring is Vietnam, an event that did much to undermine America's conception of itself and men's confidence in themselves. Playwright David Rabe, through his Vietnam War trilogy, captured the reactions, turmoil, and conflict of the war, especially in regards to representations of the American male through his involvement.

Vietnam & *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*

> "I want to know what it is. The thing that sergeant saw
> to make him know to shoot that kid and old man.
> I want to have it, know it, be it."
> -Pavlo Hummel

The Vietnam War was the first military conflict that the United States would definitively lose. While no sovereign territory of the United States was given over in the struggle and no

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[64] Admittedly, this is somewhat of a simplification of the transition. As the last chapter indicated, the 1950s was not simply the "good old days" for America and times during Kennedy's presidency, the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis, to name a few, were far from innocent days. However, much of the turmoil that the 1960s is known for occurred after the death of Kennedy, largely during the Johnson and Nixon presidencies.

foreign ruler controlled any part of the country after the defeat, the country's confidence was shattered all the same.[65] Countless losses—both in financial terms and human sacrifice—the shaking of a country's faith in their ruling leaders, and a diminished position in the international community were all costs of the Vietnam conflict. There is no way to easily assign culpability for this war. By American politics simply following the policy of containment that started with the Truman Doctrine, and set into motion by the Korean War, Vietnam largely unraveled on its own, increasing and exacerbating depending on which leader was fueling the conflict. Once begun (as recent history reminds us, as well), it was hard to go back, "the war was no longer debatable. The gamble having been taken, nothing remained but to see it through" (O'Neill 320). The divisive split in the country between hawks and doves was very real and palpable. Overall support for the war tended to be a steady decline that ruined the presidency of Lyndon Johnson and negatively characterized Nixon's. It became an impossible bind that had devastating effects on the county. As Johnson famously said to Lady Bird, "I can't get out, I can't finish with what I've got. So what the hell do I do?" (qtd. in Chafe 238). Feeling as though his hands were tied, Johnson—amid much political conflict in 1968—chose to step down. The Vietnam conflict, however, would not end with Johnson's resignation, but would escalate to a great degree under his successor.[66]

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[65] While the Vietnam War serves as an important part of this chapter, I will do very little in examining its causes, the goings-on within the war, and the major political fallout. I am mostly examining how the Vietnam War affected the self-conception of the American male (with a special emphasis on the soldier).

[66] My current study, admittedly, does a grave disservice to the importance of Lyndon Johnson. Johnson is historically regarded with great admiration, but as a president brought down by terribly unfortunate circumstances. As Chafe states, "Rarely had one individual, or any single administration, aspired to do so much, generated so many expectations, raised so many hopes, or ultimately suffered so many setbacks" (234). Ultimately, Johnson was crippled by the growing unrest in the country and weighed down by the foreign policy his administration advocated. Even

Given that the conflict was a highly polarizing one for the public, often the most visible face of derision for Americans was the soldier. Where World War I had been viewed as the Great War and the soldiers of World War II were liberating heroes, the ordinary soldier in Vietnam was seen, at best, as a conformist and, at worst, as a killer. Historian Loren Baritz blames the system—indifferent to it being Johnson or Nixon—stating that some of the excessive violence, as seen with the My Lai massacre, could "be explained by the bloodlust of unsupervised boymen who could not tell the difference between friend and enemy, by the official demand for killing…and by cynical officers who intended to profit from high death reports" (296). The intensity of public scorn, because of an inability to change governmental foreign policy, was aimed directly at the American soldier.[67] The military's emphasis on body counts as opposed to victory—coupled with the negative image of the war for the country itself—basically set the soldier up to fail. The protagonist of David Rabe's play perfectly captures a snapshot of a specific masculine type that emerged at this time. Pavlo is a character that would appear to be a marginalized cipher, not worth much. However, Pavlo comes to stand for many of the misguided male youths that had to transition from the hope and promise of the 1960s to the fear and insecurity of the later 1970s, beaten down and caught in an impossible bind through their involvement in the war.

There were two main differences between the soldier of World War II and the soldier from Vietnam—age and purpose, clearly reflected in the youth and directionlessness of Rabe's soldiers. Baritz states that the "average age of the American soldiers in Vietnam was just over

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from a personal perspective, the image of Johnson on his Texas ranch, wearing a cowboy hat, and wrangling steers did a great deal to bolstering a popular idea of the American cowboy that the Republican party, as this chapter will analyze, adopted.

[67] This action itself is also an example of conflicting subordinate masculinities.

nineteen" (283)—"[y]ounger on the average by seven years than their World War II counterparts" (Herring 347). Not only did age lend a level of youth and immaturity, but the military itself—given the nature of the war—changed the way they employed their troops, acting more like a business than in other wars.[68] Since there were no major battles to be won, territory to be gained, or enemies to be routed out, what the military needed most was fresh (or refreshed) troops that were ready to go on a mission of either defense or killing. To keep them fresh, soldiers were employed for 365-day tours, pushed into units already formed, knowing no one, attempting to complete their duty with other soldiers who were also simply counting down the days.[69] Baritz notes that this lack of direction did a disservice to the whole operation: "there was no external purpose to the war—not defending national goals, not resisting an evil enemy…there was no animating justification for combat or for risk" (288). As a result, this disconnect

> …made it difficult for some to develop a sense of shared enterprise with other GIs outside their own unit. Because the replacements were inserted into the war as individuals, not as members of a unit, these GIs were in fact moveable parts, separate cogs in the war's machinery (288).

The traditional viewpoint of World War II soldiers was that of a unit on a mission—a band of brothers—united in a joint task; in Vietnam, it was individuals, following orders, trying to stay alive—masculine representation reduced to pieces in a machine. This isolation and separateness of the soldiers is clearly reflected in Rabe's work.

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[68] Baritz explains that the military at this time was largely imitating principles borrowed from industry (299).

[69] Susan Jeffords notes that "the 365-day calendars handed out by the Red Cross emphasized the extent to which the individual soldier's perception of the war was focused on the immediate survival of a given number of days rather than on 'winning' the war" (7).

Rabe wrote a first draft of *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, the first in his Vietnam trilogy,[70] upon his return from his own 11-month tour of duty in Vietnam in 1968.[71] Rabe sent this draft to Joseph Papp at the Public Theatre only to have it remain forgotten for a few years while, in the meantime, he wrote his masterful, domestic reaction to the Vietnam War, *Sticks & Bones*. Eventually, *Pavlo Hummel* would appear in 1971, produced by Papp and received laudably as an Off-Broadway success and earning Rabe a Drama Desk Award for promising playwright. The play tells the story of Pavlo Hummel, an awkward kid who desperately craves meaning for his life as well as a sense of his own masculine identity, only to fail time and again, ultimately dying pathetically in a futile war. As Rabe himself tells it, the "character Pavlo Hummel is a teenager ruled by a kind of crippled male ambition and need that somehow is drawn toward a rifle and violence as a way to fulfillment" (Afterword 195). Rabe is careful to point out that the play is not an anti-war piece, but employs the war as a backdrop to culture and struggle in our society,[72] emphasizing a flawed masculinity that was born out of the Vietnam conflict. As Johnson and Nixon, as well as the military brass, engaged in a war that was both near impossible to win and hotly contested at home, those soldiers engaged in the struggle were caught in a system that dragged them further down. The soldiers in Pavlo's play spend almost zero time discussing the futility of the conflict or their impossible mission, instead they engage in a battle

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[70] The cogency of a trilogy remains a little skeptical. While *Pavlo Hummel*, *Sticks & Bones*, and *Streamers* are usually seen as making up the trilogy, Rabe's other Vietnam play, *The Orphan*, is published with the others but often dismissed from inclusion because of its elevation of the material to the level of Greek tragedy and its relatively lesser critical reception.

[71] Throughout its reception, particular attention has been paid to the capital awarded to Rabe by virtue of having served in Vietnam, with Martin Gottfried stating in 1971, "Rabe was in Vietnam, and he knows."

[72] He says in the introduction that plays about bad families or delinquent youths are not anti-family or anti-youth, but that "family, marriage, youth, and crime are all viewed as phenomena permanently part of the human pageant. I believe war to be an equally permanent part of that pageant" (xxv).

of subordinate masculinities that ultimately leaves the power structure sustaining the war unexamined. The sharpness of Rabe's critique is in the way audiences view the Vietnam conflict through the eyes of, essentially, a failure, unable to see his own status as a pawn to the system.[73]

Audiences are introduced to Pavlo in the last moments of his life. He is seen in a Vietnamese brothel, dancing brazenly around and bragging of his heroics to a prostitute named Yen. However, at the height of his supposed success, a grenade is thrown through the window and Pavlo lands straight on it and is quickly killed. The audience next meets Ardell, a black sergeant who exists only in Pavlo's mind, who acts as a kind of Virgilian guide and conscience keeping the audience in tune with Pavlo's inner thoughts. Ardell brings Pavlo to military attention and has him explain what happened. When Pavlo says that the grenade hit him "in the abdominal and groin areas," Ardell retorts, "It hit you in the stomach, man, like a ten-ton truck and it hit you in the balls, blew 'em away" (8). Ardell's plain speaking cuts through Pavlo's glossing over of his death, revealing the emasculating way in which he perished. Dying neither as a soldier nor as a hero, Pavlo begins this play about manhood in the military as a pathetic figure who dies by having his "balls" blown away. Rabe foregrounds, quite didactically, the idea that his title character is a nobody. Anything from this point on, from an audience perspective, is grounded in the knowledge that Pavlo dies pathetically, coloring all of Pavlo's life—his struggles, his lies, his achievements—with failure.[74]

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[73] This is a play wherein hegemonic masculinity would not be achieved through reception. New York audiences, most probably against the war, would clearly side or see Rabe's critique of the war. Instead, this is a play that tells a story of hegemonic masculinity being reified by both the clash of subordinate masculinities and an inability to direct anger at the actual source.

[74] In a way Rabe's didacticism here is probably unnecessary. It may be that the playwright simply saw far too many youths like Pavlo headed to Vietnam, directionless youth looking for a male type to embody that neither learned from the experience nor found their way home.

The action of the play covers Pavlo's stint in basic training through his eventual death in Vietnam. Although the title centers the idea of basic training as the central aspect, the training is a metaphor for Pavlo's own development, however faulty and brief. Certainly, the question of whether or not Pavlo actually achieves any type of acceptable masculinity is debatable. The actual basic training is fairly straightforward, complete with degrading and emasculating treatment from a drill sergeant, grueling physical tests, as well as the hazing of fellow men in attempts to establish a pecking order. Describing the 1971 performance, theatre critic Martin Gottfried wrote of the staged military training—clearly drawing a connection between the play and a masculine audience—as "an experience millions of us have endured in such nearly identical ways." The process involves attempts, through backbreaking work and berating, sometimes educational, treatment, to turn recruits into men. "A traditional technique for turning American teenagers into soldiers at boot camp," Loren Baritz explains, "was for the drill sergeant to accuse slackers of being queer. The formula was that only 'real men' could become soldiers, and the military's first job was to teach youngsters manhood, not soldiering" (21-2). This treatment is seen again and again in *Pavlo*. The effect on Pavlo and, by extension, many men involved in this experience during this time, was to confuse their own identity and value system and tie it indelibly to the cause of the war.

We are first introduced to Sergeant Tower, Pavlo's drill sergeant—who stands tall on the stage elevated by a platform—directly after Pavlo's first scene with Ardell. It is the start of basic training and Tower is putting the recruits into their place and establishing his authority. True to form, Pavlo sets himself off from the others and is punished with push-ups. Distinctive to the treatment that the recruits face in breaking down individual identity is the assertion of their manhood while being antagonized. Starting off by declaring, "YOU A BUNCH A LIARS. YOU

A BUNCH A FOOLS!" (10), Tower quickly reminds them of their gendered status: "YOU HAVE BALLS! NO SLITS!" (12). This, of course, is turned against them later when Tower states, "You sound like pussies… You sound like slits" (37). Tower emphasizes here the divide between acting like a woman and being a man: soldiering was a trait of masculinity and the first job of basic training was to beat anything that did not square with a tough, steely (but conformist) masculine demeanor out of the men. However, for Pavlo, the main obstacle is in his inability to establish basic human connections with his fellow soldiers, presenting himself as an awkward and weird social outcast. Even more, Pavlo fails to even see why he is an outsider, remarking to Ardell at one point, "Didn't I do enough push-ups? How many do you have to do, Ardell?" (35).

Mistakenly believing that he can prove himself to those around him and eventually earn their respect, Pavlo continually strives to be accepted and to embody dominant masculine traits, only to repeatedly fail at his attempts. He volunteers for extra duties, sucks up to his fellow soldiers in an ingratiating manner, and after a grueling run he starts doing push-ups to demonstrate his manliness. Pavlo is merely following an idea of masculinity that is embraced by the military; he is attempting to show strength, leadership, and service, but he does not know how to do it right. His actions do not gain him respect, only disdain. At one point, in a pathetic and vague attempt at gaining acceptance, he corners Sergeant Tower and relates a story of not wanting his mother to see him off to basic training because he didn't want to see her cry. Whatever Sergeant Tower was supposed to get from the story, however, doesn't work and Pavlo is left looking awkward and weird again.

Variously accused of being a thief and a liar,[75] Pavlo is clearly distanced from his fellow recruits. Even the one person with whom he gets close, Pierce, becomes so exasperated with Pavlo that he asks, "Don't you have any pride, man?" (20). Pavlo's main antagonist, Kress, dislikes him based on his strange otherness. This is demonstrated in one confrontation when, after Kress claims that Pavlo's head is up his ass, Pavlo replies, "Well maybe I'd rather have it up my ass than where you got it" (16). Later, in response to Pavlo's bragging about stealing cars, Kress yells, "I don't want to talk to you because you don't talk American, you talk Hummel. Some goddam foreign language" (18). The insults don't simply stop at un-American qualities but, taking a cue from their own drill sergeant, move into attacking his masculinity: "You wouldn't know a cunt if your nose was in it. You never had a piece a ass in your life" (30).[76] The disdain for Pavlo eventually escalates the attacks from verbal to physical assaults. At one point, his fellow bunkmates throw a blanket over him at night, beating and kicking him. Later, Kress physically attacks Pavlo after Pavlo attempts to gloat over the fact of Kress having failed basic training. Pierce even says to him, "You beat him; you had ole Kress beat and then you fixed it so you hadda lose" (43).[77] Pavlo's subordinated masculine status and his actions that keep him

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[75] When money turns up missing, it is Pavlo whom they accuse. And Pavlo, consistently telling tall tales of his life, from his murderous uncle in San Quentin to his own car-jacking hijinks, makes himself ridiculous to his fellow recruits.

[76] At this point in his life, Pavlo is in fact a virgin, revealing later in the play that he only lost his virginity when he went to Vietnam—presumably with Yen, the prostitute whom he is with in the brothel when he dies.

[77] During the course of basic training, Pavlo attempts to commit suicide, but not in a more traditional masculine way such as shooting himself, but takes pills and is quickly discovered. Gender differences between suicide attempts have been expounded at length, but for my current study I relied upon Diane G. Denning's article on suicide differences between genders.

beneath his fellow recruits, makes him an ideal model for my investigation into the workings of hegemonic masculinity.[78]

Due to the selectivity of the draft process, it was clear from which sector of the population soldiers were being drawn. Baritz suggests that the draft "was an ideal model of discriminatory social policy…biased by level of income." Because of this, "[p]oor young Americans, white as well as black and Hispanic, were twice as likely to be drafted and twice as likely to be assigned to combat as wealthier draft-aged youth" (284). As one essay states it more explicitly, the "draftees who fought and died in Vietnam were primarily society's 'losers,' the same men who get left behind in schools, jobs, and other forms of social competition" (Baskier and Strauss 10). Class, then, figured largely in who was and who was not being sent to Vietnam. Onstage for both the 1971 and 1977 performances of *Pavlo* are representations of society's marginal figures[79] that made up the ranks of the army, none of them shining examples of American exemplarity.[80] They were, to a certain extent, what Andrew Hacker in *The End of the*

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[78] I am not convinced, however, that Pavlo is meant to represent one weirdo in a sea of normal individuals. While for the sake of the drama, Pavlo is a singular out-of-touch and misguided individual; he is also an Everyman character that represents a great many of the soldiers involved in the war. The discussion that follows on class and the war, I believe, links Pavlo with those around him.

[79] Just as audiences to the 1949 *Salesman* could breath a sigh of relief at not suffering the same fate as Willy, so too, it could be argued, would audiences of the *Pavlo* performances feel relief at having been able to opt out of the Vietnam conflict due to their class standing and so not suffer a similar ignominious fate.

[80] Chafe sums this up perfectly when he states, "The lives of a whole generation were transformed—those at home by having to decide whether to support a struggle many saw as the antithesis of what their country stood for, and those in Vietnam by the brutality of the military combat, the trauma of guerilla ambush, the escape into drugs, and the knowledge throughout that people in the United States were not united behind them" (237).
James Fallows, in his essay "What Did You Do In the Class War, Daddy," goes so far as to say that, for "all the talk about conflict between 'young' and 'old' that the war caused, the lasting breach was among the young" (25). David Rabe, in an interview with Susan Faludi, affirms this,

American Era referred to as "'superfluous Americans'…human beings who have failed in a society that expects success of its citizens" (79). These expendable male Americans reportedly filled the ranks of the military during Vietnam, a fact that disturbed George Gilder in *Naked Nomads*, claiming it to be dangerous. They are, in a close connection to *Pavlo*, "the ones to leap on the grenade" (25). Gilder goes on to elucidate their dire conflict,

> …they join the ability to kill with a knowledge of their own expendability. It is a terrible combination when they lose their sense of ever reaching the dominant class…when they feel they cannot meet the test and make it as men; when, indeed, they cannot even find the testing ground. Then their talent for death can be turned against themselves (26).

This violence towards each other in a replacement of being able to fight those in charge of them, is an affirmation of R.W. Connell's claims about hegemonic masculinity: it is "always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities…The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works" (183). The system of hegemony is kept in place as a process that keeps men locked in a constant battle for supremacy, a system that turns potential allies or friendships into enemies. As Rabe states, "They end up lashing out at peers meant to be their comrades" (Afterword 195) with no one really gaining any type of upper hand, a constant negotiation between subordinate types. None of Pavlo's fellow recruits, or even Sergeant Tower himself who is black, are necessarily above him in social standing. What results from their struggle of subordinate masculinities is an affirmation of the status quo and the hegemony of masculinity as no one is trying to change the system, but

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stating, "It just almost makes you sick…We're over there for nothing. Nobody here cares. The country was not threatened in any real way. It was a fiction" (388).

are simply jockeying for more clout. What the audience is made aware of,[81] is Pavlo's low standing among men, even men already scorned by much of society.[82] While some action is seen in the course of the second act, the real war going on in this war drama is between the soldiers themselves.

Eventually, Pavlo makes it out of basic training. Despite constant ridicule and marginalization from everyone around him, Pavlo graduates. In a scene of extreme pride and, while standing on the sergeant's platform, wearing his uniform and sunglasses, Pavlo imagines Ardell talking him up: "you're goin' out on the street, they gonna see you…An' they gonna cry when they see you" (51). This parallels one soldier's non-fictional account of basic training; he recounts, in Martin Baker's *Nam*, a work which gives testimony from actual veterans of the war, "by the time you get to end of that whole process [basic training], you feel like you're the baddest thing that ever walked the earth" (40). It is at this moment that the first act ends and in the second the audience leaves a straightforward narrative tale and is plunged into disjointed confusion, lost in Pavlo's increasing dissolution.

At the start of the second act, we get a taste of what life is like for Pavlo at home when he returns from basic training before being deployed. In the first scene, we see Pavlo interacting with his half-brother, Mickey, a relationship that appears to be just as contentious and faulty as any interaction with his fellow male recruits. Mickey seems, at first, to be concerned about Pavlo especially in reaction to Pavlo's admitting that he had come across as a little off to the other

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[81] This type of irony is clearly a large part of the structure of drama itself, even essential to it. As it pertains to this play, though, it is clear that despite the social standing of these men—not to mention their racial and socioeconomic background—a pecking order is established among the men and the narrative is largely a white male narrative. This is seen in other plays about war and soldiers such as *The Brig*, *Woyzeck*, and David Rabe's *Streamers*.

[82] Pavlo's reliance and closeness with his conscience-like figure, Ardell, reveals how he has to invent camaraderie and brotherhood, as he is unable to get it for himself.

trainees. However, the most important thing that Mickey displays is an utter lack of trust in Pavlo and anything he says. Mickey first claims to not know where Pavlo was and then, later, that there is no reason that he should believe Pavlo. Pavlo becomes adamant and insists he is going to Vietnam, going on to shout, "I'm different than I was! I'm not the same anymore. I'm not an asshole anymore!" (54)—even stating that "I don't need you anymore, Mickey. I got real brothers now" (55).[83] Mickey knows all too well the tricks that Pavlo plays and is not buying any of it.

It is no accident that in this scene we see Mickey dressing up in a fancy suit, drinking, and bragging about how much sexual action he is seeing—qualities that Pavlo himself would like to embody. Mickey, then, serves a fundamental purpose for Pavlo in supplying yet another masculine model to follow, and another one that he can't possibly reach. I believe that this has already been affirmed when, while still in basic training, Pavlo lies to everyone claiming that his real name is Michael.[84] I believe Mickey is an ideal that Pavlo has been reaching towards his whole life. However, it is his scene with another family member from home that reveals the great uncertainty that Pavlo feels towards his own masculine identity.

Pavlo's mother is so enigmatically drawn as to make an audience unable to understand much about her. We learn from Pavlo, in his interaction with Tower, that his mother would have cried seeing him leave for basic training; from Mickey, we hear that their mother was either a

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[83] While Pavlo is at home, he relates how he went out to a bar in his uniform, hoping to pick up girls, only to find himself by a girl who calls him one of millions of robots (56). This nearly echoes the experience of one veteran who tells how his brother told him not to wear his uniform when they went out together to bars (Baker 274).

[84] I differ here from some scholars and critics who want to believe Pavlo. Almost all of Pavlo's stories, except possibly when he is speaking to Brisbey, are lies, made up to assert a dominant masculine trait that he does not have. So, I see no reason to imagine his name is Michael. It is more fitting with Pavlo that he try to align himself with a more dominant type, substituting Mickey's identity and possibly stories for his own.

prostitute or simply slept around a great deal after Mickey's father died; and from her own scene in the play, we see her as a wooden, unemotional, and disconnected mother, whose rambling story verges on the pointless. Whatever Rabe's intention for drawing such an odd character, the main idea is that she is neither close to nor has she impacted Pavlo's development and sense of identity in a positive way. It is no coincidence, then, that it is his mother he is imagining telling about his sexual relations with Yen in the brothel when the grenade is thrown, desperate to gain her attention, even if for all the wrong reasons. It is not, however, his mother who has affected him most, but his lack of a father.

In this scene, his mother reveals that she suspects that Pavlo is going to Vietnam to kill himself, "So you see…I know what to expect. I know…what you're trying to do" (60). The idea of death by combat in Vietnam is an important idea at this time. In Martin Baker's account of Vietnam soldiers, one veteran claimed, "A lot of guys wanted to die there. I mean, I wanted to die there. All my fucking friends died there" (266). Ironically, then, Pavlo may have finally succeeded in life, through his death. In response to her statement, Pavlo asks point-blank—seemingly as a question he has posed multiple times—"Who…was…my… father?" (60). Her telling response might be one of the most important ideas in the whole play:

> …you had many fathers, many men, movie men, filmdom's greats—all of them, those grand old men of yesteryear, they were your father. The Fighting Seventy-sixth, do you remember, oh, I remember little Jimmy, what a tough little mite he was, and he leaped upon that grenade,[85] did you see, my God what a glory, what a glorious thing with his

[85] With this line it becomes clear that Pavlo, in his death, was merely fulfilling expectations put on him by his own mother, still desperately trying to gain acceptance and love.

> little tin hat…He was like them, the ones I showed you in movies, I pointed them out (60).

This selection is vital both to the construction of Pavlo himself and to the reveal of the play. After struggling for most of the play to understand this difficult and "weird" individual, we learn that Pavlo's only masculine role models in his life have been "filmdom's greats," masculine exemplars of the silver screen, such as John Wayne and his heroic World War II films. Pavlo, to gain the approval of his mother and meet his perceived ideals of masculine perfection is pursuing exactly what is expected of him, ultimately to no avail.

This pursuit of masculine ideals through the war was clearly something that had influenced Rabe. Many soldiers in Vietnam were pursuing masculine heights that their masculine forebears had achieved in earlier wars, treating Vietnam as a rite-of-passage. In Martin Baker's *Nam*, we hear the voices of these grunts and what led them to the conflict. One detail noticed right away, from multiple accounts, was the idea of innocence lost, soldiers being seduced (or horrified) by the brutal reality of Vietnam. One veteran simply says that "I was young and innocent and I was under the impression that enlisting was the All-American thing to do" (35)—merely following a scripted idea of masculinity. Other soldiers admit the extent that images of manhood from Hollywood or the past had romanticized the fight they would have and honor they would attain: "I was seduced by World War II and John Wayne movies" (33). This type of rhetoric is evident in multiple sources. Dubbert relates the story of one soldier, torn about his guilt over his experiences in Vietnam and how it led to a confusion within himself: "I felt sorry, I don't know why I felt sorry. John Wayne never felt sorry" (277). Mark Gerzon, in his study of conceptions of masculinity and dominant models, also notes the influence of John Wayne: "When Vietnam veterans recall what led them to Vietnam, what made them *want* and *need* to go,

they do not speak of communism or domino theories or patriotism. They speak of John Wayne" (32). The role of media glorified one notion of the soldier and masculine model that men were meant to imitate, but the reality of the war was something entirely different. In reality, there was simply nothing guiding these men and directing them what to do or who to be. As one of Charlie Company's soldiers who participated in the My Lai massacre claimed, "I just lost all sense of direction, of purpose" (Faludi 318).[86]

The military, in employing a discriminatory draft policy as well as advocating 365-day tours-of-duty, were clearly not expecting to teach and train these soldiers into men or even into a loyal "band of brothers." "It was said that the military brass," as Baritz describes,

> …understood that Vietnam was a teenage war, that the kids were unruly, and that there was not much that could be done about actually imposing discipline on these post-adolescents, strong boymen who were juicers and drank too much, or were smokers on skag or pot, and were too irreverent to obey by instinct or tradition (283).

These unruly kids, given constant exposure to drugs and a lax disciplinary system, were then allowed access to weapons, "convert[ing] late adolescents into potent, godlike men" and encouraging them to get a high body count in order to succeed. In so doing, these young soldiers "became free, autonomous, and dangerous" (Baritz 296). Baker records the voices of the soldiers who underwent transformations and brutality during the war, with one soldier stating,

> I realized I was looking in a mirror and hadn't recognized my own reflection. Was that me? I had to smile to make sure. I was looking at a stranger. I'd changed. I'd never seen

[86] Faludi notes the importance of My Lai as a metonym for the war itself, "My Lai was Vietnam, the equation went, and Vietnam was where it all of a sudden fell apart, where America's boys, representative of a once hopeful and idealistic nation, suddenly went off the rails" (318).

> myself before. I'd become one of those guys that I'd seen when I first arrived in-country. Now I had that look in my eyes (122).

Even Pavlo undergoes a similar transformation, losing his innocence and naiveté and embracing what he assumes is an accepted militaristic ideal. Since the structure of the military, as Baritz notes, was "designed to exploit the troops for the personal advancement of the leaders. The result was chaos: drugs, desertions, mutinies, riots, atrocities, and murder" (293). Nothing could be more chilling than the words of one American solider who seemed to truly enjoy this anarchic environment of unruliness and death:

> …in the Nam you realized that you had the power to take a life. You had the power to rape a woman and nobody could say nothing to you. That godlike feeling you had was in the field. It was like I was a god. I could take a life, I could screw a woman. I can beat somebody up and get away with it. It was a godlike feeling that a guy could express in the Nam (Baker 191).

One begins to see how My Lai was not accidental and how brutal acts such as the ones described here were a kind of perverted masculine rite of passage.[87]

The idea of combat is pitched to Pavlo in basic training as both honorable and, most importantly, sexual. It is this skewed and wrongfully glorified image of combat that Pavlo takes with him to Vietnam. While working on bayonet training, Tower's rhetoric is filled with sexual imagery: "You got to want to put this steel into a man. You got to want to cut him, hurt him,

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[87] Ray Raphael disproves the notion that modern life can any longer sustain acceptable notions of proving manhood, stating that "[w]ith no common road into manhood, and without even a commonly accepted definition of what manhood entails, we cast about fitfully for self-styled facsimiles of initiations in order to express and affirm our status as men" (23). These soldiers were, in many cases, simply following the model already set down for them, but to less reputable results.

make him die. You got to want to feel the skin and muscle come apart with the push you give" (38). It is Sergeant Tower as well who is figuratively with Pavlo as he has sex for the first time. While engaged in intercourse with Yen, Sergeant Tower in a flashback describes the soldier's rifle: "You got to have feelin' for it, like it a good woman, like it you arm, like it you rib…You got to love this rifle, Gen'lmen, like it you pecker and you love to make love" (65-66). During the cadence call that ensues, Pavlo even gets out of bed and imitates his fellow soldiers, with Rabe's stage directions explaining, "*Something of Pavlo's making love to* YEN *is in his marching*" (66). Weapons and fighting, then— both figured as male activities—are equated with sex for Pavlo, an idea that was shared by one of Baker's soldiers: "A gun is power. To some people carrying a gun constantly was like having a permanent hard on. It was a pure sexual trip every time you got to pull the trigger" (206). All of this seemed to inspire Pavlo.

It is Pavlo's urgent need to gain respect and reach masculine acceptance that propels him into action, but it is his inability to meet these expectations that kills him. Even before being deployed, Pavlo worries that he won't be able to prove himself, stating to Pierce during training, "I'm not gonna get a chance at what I want…They're gonna mess with me—make a clerk outta me or a medic…some little goddamn twerp of a guy with glasses and no guts at all" (44). These fears prove to be prophetic as he is assigned to be a medic in his first experience of Vietnam.[88] While serving his time as a medic, Pavlo is introduced to a wounded soldier, Sergeant Brisbey, "an old man, damn near, got seventeen years in the army; no legs no more, no balls, one arm" (62). The experience of working with Brisbey has a profound effect on Pavlo, both humbling him and spurring him on to a more determined state. The honesty that Pavlo shows toward Brisbey—confiding in him of his virginity before the war and his attempted suicide—is his most

[88] This was also David Rabe's assignment during his tour in Vietnam.

genuine interaction in the play. It is, of course, telling that it is with someone with whom he probably doesn't consider a real man anymore. But he also receives from Brisbey the horrible lesson that to not die in the war could leave you so emasculated as to face the world as a "living feeling thinking stump" (69). This leads Pavlo to implore his captain to move him to the front—"I want to feel, sir, that I'm with a unit Victor Charlie considers valuable enough to want to get it"—who correctly identifies Pavlo's need: "You want to get killed, don't you, Hummel" (72). If Pavlo is going to face a reality with no balls—i.e., no worthy masculinity—he might as well die in the process, earning some respect.

When Pavlo finally gets to see some actual combat, he gets that wrong too, again misinterpreting his own influences and role models. Earlier in basic training, Pavlo was greatly impressed by a Corporal who engaged in conversation with him. This Corporal told of a Sergeant he knew while in Vietnam who one time was able to tell that an approaching old man and young girl were loaded with explosives and he shot them before they had a chance to kill the company. Pavlo takes this story as an ultimate example of masculinity even trying to mimic it for himself later. In this late scene in the play, we see Pavlo argue with a Vietnamese farmer and, convinced the Farmer is hiding something, Pavlo shoots him in the foot and then the head, right before being wounded himself.[89] Ardell, in response to Pavlo shouting that he now wants out of Vietnam, states, "When you shot into his head, you hit into your own head, fool!" (80). By this point in the play, there is very little narrative cohesion with details and stories coming out simply as fragments. Thus, the more action that Pavlo sees in the war, the more it disrupts the linearity and, by extension, the integrity of Pavlo's mind. Reviewers for both productions characterized

[89] Clearly the prevalence of stories of violent soldiering, from Baker's work to more popular representations of Vietnam in film testify to the fact that Pavlo is again not being singularly pointed out as misguided and violent, but representative of a larger grouping of soldiers.

the actors playing Pavlo as chaotic during the latter half of the performance, dancing across the stage.

Pavlo's stint in Vietnam ultimately kills him, ironically, at the height of his supposed masculine prowess. As he enters his regular brothel, looking for Yen, Sergeant Wall[90] is drunk and talking about how he wants to take Yen back to America with him. Pavlo, straightforward and courageous for the first time in the play—stands up for himself, shouting at Wall and threatening him. When Wall pulls out a switchblade, Pavlo kicks him in the groin—clearly to be interpreted as cheap and unmanly—and throws Wall outside the brothel. As he prances around the room he imagines being seen by his mother, "up tight with this odd-lookin' whore, feelin' good and tall, ready to bed down" (85). In this moment, Pavlo's actions make him feel like a conqueror: "Gonna eat up Cleveland. Gonna piss on Chicago" (5). In a doubling of moments, the end of the first act with Ardell talking up Pavlo's importance is mirrored in this moment, proud of himself for one of the few times in his life, that is until the grenade, friendly fire.

Pavlo's death, as revealed earlier, isn't even glorious, but a pathetic vanishing away, first in a hospital, then a morgue, packed away next to medics' lunches. Pavlo's earlier threats to Wall—"I don't wanna see you no more. You gonna disappear. You are gonna vanish" (84)—prove quite chilling for his own fate. The end of the play sees Pavlo placed in a coffin, while he and Ardell engage in a Jody call that ends abruptly when Ardell cuts off Pavlo mid-call, silencing him, and disappearing him from view, with the slamming shut of the coffin. Pavlo's existence, then, is seen as simply wasted. Right near the end, seemingly in response to his pitiable end, Pavlo loudly exclaims the word shit in frustration over his life, which Rabe

[90] We first meet Sergeant Wall when he is saying his goodbyes to Brisbey before being relocated to Supply, an event that must have meant something to Pavlo.

characterizes as "*a howl into silence*" (87). Pavlo's entire life it would seem is a pathetic howl into silence, a paltry comparison to Ginsberg's culture-defining epithet of the 1950s, ironically reflecting the cultural shift.

From basic training to becoming a man, from killing people in combat to sleeping with prostitutes, Pavlo sought for any type of meaning, which ultimately escaped him. As Rabe describes in a postscript to the published play, "Pavlo has a "wide-eyed spontaneity," but also possesses a complete inability "to grasp the implications of what he does…Pavlo is in fact lost…he will learn only that he is lost; not how, why, or even where. His talent is for leaping into the fire" (89). In his actions, Pavlo tries to embody—and even imitate—stronger and more positive representations of masculinity, but is simply unable to understand how to do it. As scholar Carol Rosen states, "[w]hat Pavlo wants is to be in touch with the power that will make him a man among men" (249); Pavlo simply doesn't get it.[91] Figuring Pavlo as, unfortunately, a masculine representation to be drawn from the conflict, then masculinity in America was indeed troubled and losing itself.

When the war finally ended, it proved very difficult for the country to move forward. As Herring notes, "Among a people accustomed to celebrating peace with ticker tape parades…the end of the war left a deep residue of frustration, anger, and disillusionment" (346). To combat these feelings, the nation, immediately after the war, "experienced a self-conscious, collective amnesia" (Herring 347). This made the efforts of the soldiers—honorable or not—not only invalid, but dishonorable, stripping them of any masculine pride in their service. As opposed to

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[91] The evidence for Pavlo simply unable to have basic understanding is most clearly revealed in a story he relates to Yen. As a child, he almost drowned in the Hudson River because he was swimming down instead of to the top—confused about which way was up. Pavlo didn't stand a chance in life, always swimming down to the bottom in an effort to reach the top.

returning as heroes, soldiers returning from Vietnam were met with scorn and derision. Ehrenreich notes how that while the "Second World War had produced a generation of men whose memories of masculine adventures had made them chafe at post-war civilian 'conformity'…Vietnam produced a generation of men like [returning veteran] Wayne Felde, whose hallucinatory flashbacks to the war led to his fatal shooting of a policeman in 1978" (105). Instead of GI Joe, the country got Travis Bickle, Robert De Niro's disturbed character in *Taxi Driver*.[92] The 1978 film *The Deer Hunter* displays the the damaging and disturbing effect of Vietnam upon soldiers from a small town. It makes *The Best Years of Our Lives*—the WWII film about soldiers' reentry into domestic life—look like *It's a Wonderful Life.*

The image of the Greatest Generation[93] and the nation-saving soldiers of World War II was traded for the stereotype of a "drug-crazed, gun-toting, and violence-prone individual unable to adjust to civilized society" (Herring 348), contributing to a growing sense of defeat among American males. Susan Faludi comments upon the importance of this war, viewing it as a "defining event of American masculinity, the bridge that collapsed just as the nation's sons thought they were crossing to manhood" (298).[94] We are not allowed a picture of post-Vietnam

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[92] In the 1976 film *Taxi Driver*, Robert De Niro's character is a Vietnam veteran who, disillusioned by the crime and filth around him in New York City, begins a campaign of vigilante justice. The character of Bickle, who in the film also attempts to assassinate a presidential candidate, was partly inspired by George Wallace's attempted assassin, Arthur Bremer who wrote in his diary, that he intended "to do SOMETHING BOLD AND DRAMATIC, FORCEFUL & DYNAMIC, A STATEMENT of my manhood for the world to see" (*An Assassin's Diary*). This film would also go on to inspire John Hinckley Jr.'s attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan in 1981. Conceptions of manhood were indeed so culturally skewed that some viewed the assassinations of public figures as a positive action worthy of respect.

[93] This refers to the title of Tom Brokaw's celebrated study of the generation that endured the Great Depression and World War II.

[94] Using Susan Faludi and her 1999 work, *Stiffed*, admittedly raises important issues. She holds an elegiac nostalgia for a very narrow section of the American male population. Further, through

Pavlo as he chose suicide as a misguided heroic action. But we can imagine that his return to his domestic life would be handled just as ignominiously as he handled his time of training and service. David Rabe states that the war was "the swamp where history paused and could have shown us who we were and who we were becoming. In its flash and violence it was a probe into the depths, an X ray knifing open[ing] the darkness with an obscene illumination against whose eloquence we closed our eyes" (Afterword 197). The cultural amnesia, it would seem, was large. In the end, though, Vietnam was only one link in a chain of events that would reevaluate man's place in society, contributing to feelings of being in a crisis.

Other links in that chain forged a link to reevaluate the standing of the American man. These events that rocked the United States during the 1960s and 1970s were tumultuous and many. There is simply not enough space to detail all of the events that impacted masculine representation. From Selma to Woodstock, civil rights to the feminist movement, Stonewall to Watergate, America saw a sea change in the way society operated and the way in which gender and race roles were understood. Many of these changes were taken by white American males to be a challenge to their authority. Chronicling voices of the period, Studs Terkel's 1972 *Working*, affirms this sentiment as in the leadoff voice of that piece, Mike LeFevre. In this Midwestern steelworker's account, we hear his frustrations with a system that keeps him low and frustrated. "Who you gonna sock? You can't sock General Motors, you can't sock anybody in Washington, you can't sock a system" (xxxii). This frustration has caused him to feel a sense of victimization

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pity and an avoidance of many cultural factors, she wants to elevate the stature of her work to that of a *Masculine Mystique*. It is, however, a flawed work suffering from a narrow scope and biased point of view. However, while the criticism surrounding Faludi is important, the ideas about manhood and masculinity that she taps into are nonetheless valid, if only from the perspective of the cultural zeitgeist. The men she talks about and the situations many of them went through were in the public mind and her evidence and interpretation of the history is, at least, rich and worthy of argument.

at the hands of other sources. His frustration ultimately leads him to taking out his rage on people just like him: "'Cause all day I wanted to tell my foreman to go fuck himself, but I can't…So I find a guy in a tavern. To tell him that. And he tells me too. I've been in brawls. He's punching me and I'm punching him, because we actually want to be punching somebody else" (xxxiii). The average workingman or the everyday Vietnam soldier seem united in their anger at the system, but also in their tendency to turn it inwards and fight each other, an action that seems to be only bringing themselves down in the process, a process reinforcing the masculine hegemony.

David Rabe's Vietnam plays clearly repeat this tendency. Theatre and gender scholar Carla McDonough, deftly acknowledges this as characteristic of Rabe's male characters. "Throughout [his] plays," she states,

> Rabe's characters constantly face loss as they fail to live up to the ideals that the American media presents to its men (for example, the John Wayne of countless westerns and war movies), yet they remain unable to imagine new definitions or positions for themselves that do not recapitulate these ideals…pinned down by cultural expectations that confuse rather than clarify who or what they should be…indicating their seeming inability to confront and to move beyond their limited versions of a gendered self (104).

In these war dramas, masculinity as represented, is in a constant battle with itself, subordinate type against subordinate type. Embodied in the character of Pavlo Hummel is an Everyman representation of a male character desperately unable to achieve any type of masculine acceptance in his world. I believe that Pavlo's struggle parallels much of the American male's dilemma during this time period. Through his character we can discern a representation of selfish narcissism, diminished masculine authority, victimization, and a feeling of simply being lost.

A distinct masculine type began to emerge out of this victimization, the loner. Although he had stood at the conclusion of the 1950s as a picture of the grey flannel suit, by the late 1960s, the "reclusive, solitary, [and] wary" (Leuchtenburg 227) nature of Richard Nixon had shifted. The Republican strategy had been to shape Nixon into a cowboy, an American archetypal hero, by figuring him as the center of a new Republican party. Leuchtenburg reminds us that the "red-white-and-blue American, John Wayne addresse[d] the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach in 1968, the same year that he starred as Rooster Claghorn in *True Grit*" (217). At their next convention, the Republicans again foregrounded members of their own party—"screen stars who embodied the certitudes of an earlier America – John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Glenn Ford, and Pat Boone" (Leuchtenburg 259)—who were sure to garner Republican support based on their popularity and the image of manhood they represented. The strategy, it seemed, was to have Nixon represent the rugged conqueror of the West who stood for law and order.[95] However, while attempting to represent the cowboy of America's yesteryear, Nixon's behavior revealed himself as a loner: "Nixon shunned contact with most of his staff and cabinet members, preferring to spend hours in isolated contemplation rather than engage the world around him" (Chafe 367).[96] While the goal was to have Nixon stand for a dominant masculine ideal, his secrecy and paranoia led him to make mistakes, criminal and unethical, that cost him his

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[95] It is no coincidence that Nixon and his staff shifted the political focus to matters where morality and tradition could be leaned on. As Chafe phrases it, they "helped shift the axis of American politics away from one that focused on horizontal issues such as income, class, and economic need toward one that focused on vertical issues such as religiosity, anti-elitism, and law and order" (367).
It is also ironic that our ideals of tough masculinity—American soldiers—were not only experiencing disgrace and defeat across seas, but were engaging in brutality condemned by most of America.

[96] Obviously his secretive and almost maniacal handling of Vietnam as well as Watergate itself testifies to a less than heroic masculine type for society.

presidency and reputation. Nixon, it can be argued, can stand as a representation of manhood that, out of paranoia and entrenchment, lost power and authority, ending up as a lone loser to the system. The personas of Pavlo Hummel and Nixon clearly differ in many respects—such as Nixon's public persona being tight and reserved and Pavlo's as more eccentric—but they converge around the idea of a loner, marginalized (whether self-inflicted or by society), and different. The hope of a counterculture youth movement, born out of the hope that Kennedy instilled has long been extinguished and after the turmoil of the '60s and '70s, masculine representation seems to be embracing lone victimization as an acceptable type.

Under the auspices of Joseph Papp and the Public Theatre, *Pavlo Hummel* had its Off-Broadway premiere in 1971 to favorable reviews. The play came out at the height of anti-Vietnam fervor, while Nixon was attempting to bomb North Vietnam into surrender. Martin Gottfried, reviewing the play in 1971 for *Women's Wear Daily*, stated that the conclusion of the play revealed "a pointless death in a useless war." The reception of the play seemed to fit perfectly within the antiwar rhetoric of the period. Douglas Watt, writing for the *Daily News*, declared, Pavlo "is a cipher, representative of all the wasted flesh and meaningless activity of that insane war," and Richard Watts, writing for the *New York Post*, didn't seem to connect with the protagonist: "I felt Pavlo never really developed as a character."

However, when the play was revived six years later by the Theatre Company of Boston and staged at the Longacre Theatre the reception by almost the exact same critics was notably different, most importantly in the elevation of Pavlo into an American type. As Martin Gottfried, in 1977, stated, "He is all of life's unnoticed young men and the parameters of his story are those of archtype" (*sic*). Gottfried essentially elevates Pavlo to a kind of Everyman—very telling for a

story about an eccentric failure. If he is an Everyman, then the climate of the times was viewing a great number of men as lost nobodies. What, then, had changed?

By the time the 1977 production of *Pavlo Hummel* premiered, the Vietnam War had been over for two years, marked most pointedly for Americans by the media coverage of the evacuation from the roof of the Saigon embassy on April 29, 1975 and the fall of the city the next day. A new president was trying to face the challenges of America in its worst recession since the Depression, experiencing an oil crisis over foreign challengers from the Middle East, and a diminishing confidence in American might and hopes. This staging of *Pavlo* seemed to rip the band-aid of that first U.S. military defeat right off. As T.E. Kalem, writing for *Time*, stated with much more venom than any critic in 1971, "Now that Viet Nam is over and shamelessly and shamefully forgotten, the stress of the play has been shifted by history from outrage to pathos." Emphasized in his statement is the anger and sadness still trailing behind the memory of the war, but also highlighting the cultural amnesia that struck the nation in its aftermath.

The reaction to the war itself is a key aspect in analyzing both productions' reception. In 1971, critics responded differently to the discussion of Vietnam, either chiming in with their own critique of the war or mostly avoiding the discussion. There was clearly anger and confusion as with Martin Gottfried's "pointless death in a useless war," but there was also confusion about all that was occurring at the time. Jack Kroll states it best when he says that "Rabe treats the Army as a microcosm of the ironies and personalities at large in the society itself." He goes on to say that Pavlo is a character that is "mixed up with the endemic quasi-madness of our time." For Kroll, the cultural moment in 1971—a time in which the war was still ongoing and the country was still processing the upheavals of the 1960s—was one more of confusion and madness than anything else. By 1977, that tone was almost entirely bitterness. Critics gained perspective and

spoke bitterly of the recent past, calling Vietnam an "insane war" (Douglas Watt), a "consciously suppressed issue" (Howard Kissel), and "the heart of darkness that was Vietnam" (Kroll). The memory of the war and the waning of American confidence in the post-Vietnam War years translates into a kind of a bitter despondence. John Beaufort even sees that in the performance saying how the "characters themselves seem even more devoid of decency, humanity, and compassion than when they introduced the Rabe Vietnam trilogy in 1971." When Clive Barnes wrote of the 1971 performance he stated, "What Mr. Rabe is saying—war is hell, especially when it is Vietnam—is not at all original, and this is the play's major defect." By 1977, the play or simply knowledge of Vietnam and what it did to both the soldier and the country had become direr. Barnes reflects this change as he elevates the play into much darker territory claiming that the play is "an abstracted, existentialist scream of pain at the horror of war and the nearness of death…There is no theme except the terrible and basic theme of waste—human waste." Instead of the "Raw-boned and awkward, good-natured and stupid" description of Pavlo in 1971, Barnes now states that he is a "modern, urban, American Wozzeck." This reinterpretation shifts an understanding of the play from a protest piece to a portrait of a man brought low by circumstances, a cultural resignation.

The differences between these productions, however, are in more than just when they were staged. Most notable about the latter production was that it starred Al Pacino, who had already scored major success in such blockbuster films as *The Godfather I* and *II*, *Serpico*, and *Dog Day Afternoon*.[97] While William Atherton had received excellent praise for his original interpretation of Pavlo in 1971, the popular masculine traits—and star power—of Pacino

[97] This company, with almost the same cast—especially Al Pacino—had first staged this play in 1972, but decided they would move it to Broadway and Pacino was onboard in an effort to use his star power to bring attention to up-and-coming playwrights.

elevated not only the importance of the play, but the status of the title character. Very little in the original 1971 reviews mention anything charismatic about Atherton or how Pavlo is played: "He is a not very bright, extravagantly ordinary boy, interested in nothing and interesting to nobody" as Martin Gottfried stated. Moving to 1977, though, the reactions are different with nearly every review mentioning the quality of Al Pacino and his "luminous and pathetic performance" (Barnes). Howard Kissel admits that Pacino tips the scale from how we are supposed to view Pavlo, stating how his playing makes us "care about Hummel, almost against our better judgment." Barnes, electrified by Pacino's performance, describes how Pacino "moves like a boxer, and addresses the audience directly with the daring impudence of an Olivier." The 1977 performance transforms the play into a "remarkable portrait of a man continually battered by life" (Edwin Wilson *Wall Street Journal*). Coming only six years after its first premiere, many of the same audiences and reviewers were seeing this play again, but somewhat differently. Interpreting Pavlo in a different light and the physical body of Pacino, arguably, carried the greatest impact. Alongside the negative interpretation of Pavlo as a pathetic cipher, audiences were seeing Michael Corleone, Frank Serpico, and, for Broadway audiences, the tough guy Bickham, Pacino's Tony Award-winning character in *Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie?*. Is this an elevation of Pavlo's negative characteristics into something more accepting in society by 1977? Admittedly, the complications that Pacino brought to the character certainly injected a lot of interest into the play and while his performance changed how Pavlo was originally seen, it also brought a good deal of attention to a play that was speaking volumes about society.

The story of Pavlo Hummel fits the cultural shift that was reflected in Christopher Lasch's critique of the country in his 1979, *The Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch notes that in this era we see the emergence of the 'new narcissist,' a personality "haunted not by guilt but by

anxiety. He seeks not to inflict his own certainties on others but to find a meaning in life" (xvi). Lasch goes on that the new narcissist "extols cooperation and teamwork while harboring deeply antisocial impulses…[and] demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire" (xvi), traits that perfectly capture Rabe's immature Pavlo. While desperately seeking the attention and cooperation of his fellow recruits, his behavior (which possibly includes theft and the taunting of Kress) disavows the idea that Pavlo is working towards togetherness. Moving to the performance itself, the most dominant characteristic of Pacino's characterization was his restless movement: "shuffl[ing] about the stage like a neophyte boxer" (Wilson), "nervousness" (Kissel), "moves like a boxer" (Barnes), a "dynamo" (Gottfried). Pavlo is beginning to embody something essential about life in this time period of 1970s American male disillusionment. Above all, Lasch's "new narcissist" wants, like Willy Loman, to be liked: "Notwithstanding his occasional illusions of omnipotence"—which, for Pavlo are seen in his first act scene with Ardell and his pompous braggadocio over Wall right before he is blown up—"the narcissist depends on others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience" (10). These symptoms of narcissism were clearly not symptomatic of just the losers in society, but resonated with larger representations of the American male, even mirroring personality traits of Richard Nixon. It is my estimation that the story of Pavlo's struggle, confusion, and ultimate inability to meet masculine ideals points to feelings of a loss of authority, victimization, and a status as paranoid loner. This subordinate type reinforces the notion of hollow man, lacking power, seeking affirmation, and marking a diminishment of self.[98] Pavlo's struggle, his particular contribution to masculine representation,

[98] This was a sentiment also seen in the character of Nixon when Leuchtenburg states that "many who opposed the Vice-President did so less because they disagreed with his views…than

bore a close resemblance to that of Nixon, supporting an argument that the American man was fading into feelings of isolation and loss.

Revivals

In turning to the revivals of the plays already analyzed in this study, we see important adaptations being made to make the work relevant to the time period. Writing for NBC, Leonard Probst declares that George C. Scott's 1975 revival of *Death of a Salesman* "is not trapped in 1949. It has gut-level meaning for America in 1975." Given the canonicity of this play, it seems natural for critics to want to draw connections to the current time period. And 1975 had a lot to offer. Walter Goodman, of *The New York Times*, even asserts that the play works better in this time period than when it originally premiered. *Death of a Salesman*, he states,

> …returns to us, a quarter of a century after its first appearance, at a low point in our national morale. In 1949 we had won a great victory in a necessary war; now we have lost an unnecessary and dishonorable war. Then we were on our way to prosperity; now we are in the grip of a recession which gives little sign of soon receding…Much that we took for granted 26 years ago has become problematical.

Given the atmosphere of the 1970s, with the economy sinking and the conception of the American male as a failing loner, the representation of Willy would obviously come to mean something else entirely for his audiences.[99] While Jack Kroll, in his review, still continued to

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because they thought he typified the hollow man of a synthetic society" (115). And, again, O'Neill, in his opinion in 1970, states that Nixon "remains a strangely hollow man. He lacks a solid sense of his own identity" (17).

[99] In the first chapter of this study, I did argue that there was more economic instability in 1949 than is commonly remembered and *Salesman* reflected much of that anxiety. However, in comparing the years of 1949 and 1975, there are important differences. Instead of having just won a war, America had lost; instead of helping to rebuild the world economically, America was trying to save face in front of the world. The year 1949 was one of slow, but sure forward

notice Willy's function as a scapegoat—even referring to the play as a "great public ritualizing"—what is more often seen in these reviews is a new and much different Willy, less likable and less pitiable. George C. Scott also made the decision to cast black actors for Charley and Bernard, thus referencing the civil rights disturbances. Willy's resentment and anger towards these neighbors, then, turns into a reflection of current anxieties of an encroachment into white authority by blacks, prompting one reviewer to characterize Willy was "an Archie Bunker type" (Probst).

While review after review describe Scott's Loman as "bald, heavy and stooped" (Gottfried), "bald, shambling" (Watt), "bald, shambling, shapeless…the most devastating burnt-out case ever seen on a stage" (Kroll), he is certainly not a character who is passing easily into obsolescence. Scott, most famous for his 1970, Academy Award-winning title role in *Patton*, brought a fire to the role of Willy, surprising many critics with an unforeseen anger and intensity behind the role—bringing real animation behind his story of hitting a man for calling him a walrus. T.E. Kalem of *Time*, wrote that "[w]hen [Scott's] head is bowed, it is not in resignation but rather like that of a bull bloodied by the picador yet ready to charge again"[100] and "[w]here the lines have Willy on the verge of whining, Scott roars out a *défi* to a malignant fate. Never has the father in Willy come across so forcefully." This sentiment is seconded by Christopher Sharp in *Women's Wear Daily*, calling Scott's Loman "an animal to be gazed at through bars" stating that this "Loman touches us not because he is like what we are, but because he is so unlike what we are." Willy, moving from Lee J. Cobb to George C. Scott, from '49 to '75, represents the

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progress, whereas 1975 seemed to be a cataclysmic decline. These differences are important in understanding how audiences related to Willy Loman.

[100] Clive Barnes, writing for *The New York Times* also referred to Scott as a bull and even as a bullfighter, as well.

passing of a period in America. Whereas Cobb displayed a Loman who was a throwback to the Depression, a sad sacrifice at the altar of growing prosperity, Scott displayed a Loman who was a victim of the excesses of those postwar years; as the economy and faith in the government crumbled in that decade, so too did the everyday working man; he is a last man standing not going gentle into that good night. This was a shift in characterization that also mirrors the shift from Atherton to Pacino for *Pavlo Hummel*. Pavlo is clearly as ineffectual in society as Willy is, but both are frantically fighting to their end in the latter half of the 1970s.

The world of *Salesman* in 1975 is much darker than it was 1949. In this revival it is not just Willy who seems disjointed and out of place, as Edwin Wilson says that the characters "are all aliens—to one another and to themselves." Consistent among the reviews on this revival of *Salesman* is the accepted notion that Willy is a failure: "doomed by his own inadequacies" (Beaufort), but also implicated in this picture is a condemnation of society. While Edwin Wilson wants to see "Willy [as] a symbol of all who failed," the same sacrificial rhetoric from 1949, Clive Barnes claims that his failing "is a failure of society." It can be supposed that in this revival, Scott, as Willy, personifies this shambling and angry man who is fighting like a bull against a society that is failing. While there may not have been a dry eye in the house for the *Salesman* in either time period, the earlier audiences were crying for the necessary sacrifices made to get the country to economic security, whereas the later audiences were likely crying for the failing they were living through.

The only hope that is seen in this production is, ironically, with the character of Biff. While the reviews of the 1949 performance rarely discussed Biff at length, two reviews of Scott's production put a great deal of emphasis on the son. James "Farentino is superb," Douglas Watt states "as the pathetic Biff, the high school athlete turned drifter…Emotionally bruised,

questioning, faltering in speech when he isn't angry, or else happily dreaming about farm life, Farentino's Biff is an enormously appealing figure." This appeal was also noted by Christopher Sharp who attributes much of Willy's failing to something inside the son. "Farentino's Biff," he states,

> …is almost Dostoyevskian in the way the character slips in and out of a spiritual abyss…Willy is drawn toward Biff because of his older son's iconoclasm. Willy hopes here that the key to Biff's personality is a greatness that Willy can't recognize because he has never found it in himself.

Willy, the father, is clearly doomed, but the idea here—distinct from earlier productions—is that Biff is full of hope and promise but is mired down by the circumstances that surround him.[101]

This sentimentality towards the younger generation—possibly due to the emphasis on this generation through the popular culture, youth counterculture, and the Vietnam struggle of the preceding years—is also found in the revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Appearing in 1974, this new production was met with drastically mixed reviews. Again, as with *Salesman*, some critics thought it carried more poignancy than the one twenty years earlier and had even improved upon the original, while other reviews panned it as a pathetic play seeing a terrible revival, the "whole thing is a kitten on a tepid tile floor," as Jack Kroll summed up. In almost all circumstances, though, the understanding of the play remains mostly the same, which is why the drastic differences in opinion seem odd. The one noticeable change is the softening of Maggie, Brick, and Big Daddy, all of whom are given descriptors such as vulnerable and naïve. Two

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[101] It should be noted that, from a purely theatrical perspective, James Farentino might have simply been a good actor and resonated with his audiences and reviewers more so than Arthur Kennedy did in the same role. While I certainly believe his positive reception is telling about society, this is not to suppose that a less superb actor would have had the same impact.

reviews, however, zero in squarely on Keir Dullea's characterization of Brick. While Walter Kerr condemns Dullea's characterization, in describing the performance he hits upon something important. He states that Dullea "brings to the outbursts a near-delirium, an interior terror…[and he] confronts Big Daddy so foursquarely and with such obvious virility that it was difficult to question his complete sincerity." Dullea's Brick, from this description, counters the nihilism and angst of the part that Gazzara brought to the original. Louis Snyder, writing for the *Christian Science Monitor*, goes even further, stating that Brick is

> …the most sympathetic figure in this stageful of rambunctious characters…His hidden sorrows, his outward obliviousness to the mundane concerns of this particular household, and his snappish defensiveness when his private world is challenged, make him the enigmatic key to the resolution of this darkening situation of death and inheritance.

Oddly, Brick becomes the moral center of the play—even if what he has to offer is hollow—not just for Maggie but for the whole situation of the family. In other words, the Broadway premiere, the Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman 1958 film performance, and even later revivals largely focused on the character of Maggie as being the central character. However, in 1975, something about Brick resounded with audiences and critics. Whether it was the same liberal intellectuals that tapped so keenly into feelings about the Vietnam War with *Pavlo* or simply Keir Dullea's performance, Brick with his depressed alcoholic disempowerment struck a chord. In reaction against Willy's failings, Biff's lack of direction, and Pavlo's confusion, Brick is a man who is tired and giving up.

By the end of the 1970s, many white American men felt the changing tide of culture to be pushing directly against them. Chafe states it most succinctly when he says,

> At the core of white dissatisfaction was a feeling of being victimized for someone else's advantage. Although statistics indicated that blacks and poor people…still lived an immeasurably more painful existence than lower middle-class whites, the *impression* existed that ghetto dwellers and slum residents were now in the driver's seat (396).

I believe it to be no coincidence that in 1976, Iggy Pop[102] released the song "The Passenger," which featured stark imagery of America and a secondary place for the protagonist of the song. In this song, Pop speaks of riding through the "city's ripped insides," staring at the "bright and hollow sky." The singer states how all that is seen belongs to him, yet he is merely the passenger. This song seems to deftly note the shift in the representations of American men—a shift that may not point toward an actual loss of authority, but instilled a feeling that the white male was no longer driving.

In this time period, then, there emerged from popular culture to theatre to even the president a representation of a fractured, beaten-down figure. This type was so ubiquitous that it became the most popular character in the culture. Everywhere, it seemed, were images of men in peril, having rights taken away from them, and ending as isolated loners in society. These representations affirmed the popular idea that masculinity was indeed in crisis, a sentiment that would only increase in the upcoming decades.

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[102] As a popular masculine figure himself, Iggy Pop stands for a type of masculinity that, along with the likes of David Bowie, Lou Reed, Freddie Mercury, and Andy Warhol, is clearly neither dominant nor in line with past notions of manhood and whose popularity speak to a shift from earlier figures such as Elvis or The Beatles to the marginalized gender-bending glam rock of the seventies.

V. ANGST TO DESPONDENCE: MASCULINITY IN THE '80S AND '90S

Shelly and Willy: The Salesman Under Reaganism

> And for the first time, he wished he were far away.
> Lost in a deep, vast country where nobody knew him.
> Somewhere without language, or streets…
> And when he woke up, he was on fire.
> Travis, *Paris, Texas*

The previous chapter ended with the image of the American man, devastated by the events of the 1960s and 1970s, reduced to the position of a passenger as America moved forward with someone else driving the car. Just who or what is driving the car is not as important as the fact that the American man no longer feels in charge of his country, his destiny, and his future. A look at a different masculine image in the next era presents a slightly different idea. In the opening shots of the 1984 film *Paris, Texas,* directed by German filmmaker[1] Wim Wenders, Travis, played by Harry Dean Stanton, is seen wandering across the American desert. His appearance is that of a wandering hobo: bedraggled suit, unkempt beard, vacant, wandering eyes, and, incongruously perched on his head, a bright red ball cap. We soon learn that Travis has no memory of who he is, where he is going, and where he has been. He is a man without a history, without a home, and without a future. As he wanders through the mountains and the deserts,

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[1] Before one can dismiss this film as simply the viewpoint of a foreign director, it should be noted that the film script was written in part by playwright Sam Shepard and contains his mythos of the American West and the rugged, but fragile idea of the cowboy.
Sam Shepard's plays from the late 1970s to the present consistently raise issues of masculinity, fatherhood, and American identity in the West. Most notable—and similar to the issues raised in *Paris, Texas,* is his *True West,* which reveals a struggle between brothers and a father wandering lost in a desert, imagery that he revisits in *The Late Henry Moss.*

mysteriously headed for nowhere in particular, we are left with the idea, in 1984, of the passenger from last decade, lost.

A dire look at the state of the American man was not simply the theme for one German filmmaker. In the same year that *Paris, Texas* was awarded the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival, David Mamet's Pulitzer-Prize winning drama, *Glengarry Glen Ross* told another intriguing tale about the American man in a state of defeat. Mamet's play takes its audience into the lives of real estate agents and their cutthroat business—a snapshot of the underside of the business world that was being given unfettered rein by the Reagan administration. The bitter infighting and struggle reveal a world without loyalties, friendship, or even a place of safety for these lowly salesmen. Like Pavlo's military training, *Glengarry Glen Ross* is another excellent example of the workings of hegemonic masculinity, as these subordinate masculine types fight and struggle over each other in a desperate gamble to be on top, a position towards which none of them are headed. In its undercutting of the materialism and feigned optimism of Reagan's America, this play, as well as a perennial revival of a stage favorite, reflect anger and frustration within the representations of the average American male in this decade.

Mamet's portrayal of America in the 1980s stands in stark contrast to that being propagated by the rhetoric of the Republican party and its leader, Ronald Reagan. The "new morning in America," that heralded unchecked affluence and popular masculine images, such as Rambo, may have temporarily rescued the country from the gloom of the 1970s, but to many it was merely a veneer covering a rotten core—*Sleepwalking Through History*, as the title of one study of the era succinctly states. "When Ronald Reagan was president," historian Sidney Blumenthal declares, "all things seemed possible, as they do in daydreams. We would be rich, powerful, and sleep well…no side effects would be experienced" (xiii). Cultural historian

Bradford Martin, however, states that "a look at the vicissitudes of presidential popularity during Reagan's two terms reveals that a sizable swath of the American public disapproved of the way he handled his job, even at moments of his greatest triumph" (ix). A fitting critique for this decade and the Reaganism that loomed so large during it lies right in Mamet's drama, revealing a great deal of anger coming from the white American man—anger, not just towards a system that would keep him down, but also at minorities, at women, and at other men. A look at that system and how it fit into an idea of Reaganism needs to be examined to fully flesh out an understanding of Mamet's intent.

In very simplified terms, Ronald Reagan won the 1980 presidential election by selling hope to the American people. In one televised debate he looked straight at the camera and simply asked, "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" After a disastrous conclusion to Nixon's presidency, the continuation of the "long national nightmare" through Ford,[2] and the ongoing economic and international decline through Carter, Reagan's smile and optimism seemed something positive on which Americans could hang their hopes. Reagan's platform was simple enough: strong self-reliance and a reduction in the American government. This stance would promise redemption for the country: the "American spirit of individualism, competition, and personal pride would be restored and with the shackles of government bureaucracy removed, individual citizens would once again be liberated to maximize their abilities and aspirations" (Chafe 452). Employing rhetoric and imagery from previous decades, Reagan acted and sounded like a cowboy of old; as he himself phrased it, "the voters 'rounded up a posse, swore in this old sheriff, and sent us riding into town'" (qtd. in Chafe 448). Reagan seemed the fruition of the

[2] I refer here to Ford's famous utterance upon assuming the presidency, that America's "long national nightmare was over." His presidency, however, was plunged into doubt when one of his first actions was to pardon Richard Nixon of all criminal activity related to Watergate.

cowboy imagery employed as early as the 1968 Republican convention, but was much better suited at it than Nixon.

It didn't take long for this sixty-nine year-old president to prove his mettle to the American public. Through nothing that Reagan had accomplished, the Iranian hostages, held for 444 days—which had remained a black eye on America's international reputation—were released on his inauguration day, an opportunity that Reagan seized to emphasize his new tougher stance on world politics, a change from the seemingly effete Carter. Then, on March 31, 1981, John Hinckley, Jr. fired upon President Reagan. However, after the disastrous and conscience-shattering assassinations of the previous decades—from JFK to MLK to RFK—Reagan's survival, and at his age, "seemed to many people a providential reversal in the nation's fortunes" (Wilentz 142). His promises of hope and change for America seemed, to many, to be paying off. "Reagan appeared to the American public as a hero rebuilding America's vaunted strength and dominance in the world" (Chafe 456).

Reagan's popularity even seemed to inspire a rebirth of optimism, not to mention machismo, in American cinema. As film scholar Stella Bruzzi states, "Hollywood was moving, along with the Right, towards the belief that society needed the re-emergence of traditional patriarchal authority" (119). It was within the president himself, whose face had been familiar to Americans for a few decades —from the small screen to the silver screen—that this patriarchal force emerged. With his calm, paternalistic demeanor Reagan had become a leader for the nation and a model for masculine heroes of the era. As Susan Jeffords, in *Hard Bodies*, explains of Reagan's reinvigoration of the White House with manliness:

> one of Ronald Reagan's most powerful and effective activities in the White House was to convey certain distinctive images of himself as a president *and* as a man—chopping

> wood, breaking horses, toughing out an assassination attempt, bullying Congress, and staging showdowns with the Soviet Union (12).

In her investigation of masculinity and film in the 1980s, Jeffords states that it "was in the search for a hero in the 1980s that Hollywood plot lines and presidential politics became intimately confused" (*Hard Bodies* 6). Ronald Reagan, she goes on, "became the premiere masculine archetype for the 1980s, embodying both national and individual images of manliness that came to underlie the nation's identity…[he] became one of the ways through which many Americans felt a personal connection to their national identity" (11, 12). Reagan and his influence loomed larger than his own policies. There was nowhere better to feel this connection with Reagan and popular masculine images than in the Hollywood blockbusters.

The male stars of this era's most popular movies stood for ultra-masculine imagery, [3] violent films that left its heroes bloodied, bruised, but victorious: from *Robocop* to *Lethal Weapon*, from *Star Wars* to *Indiana Jones*. But no star or film embodied the essence of the era—and its link to Reagan's own brand of American identity—as much as Sylvester Stallone's Rambo. Unlike the Rambo displayed in 1982's *First Blood*,[4] Stallone's veteran by the 1985 sequel was

> …no longer a confused and tearfully inarticulate misfit, he is now a determined and demanding leader; no longer destroying property in a blaze of revenge, he rescues other

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[3] It is no coincidence that one of the most popular non-fiction books in 1982 was Bruce Feirstein's *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*. In it, the author laments the loss of Real Men in society, stating that we have "become a nation of wimps. Pansies. Quiche eaters. Alan Alda types—who cook and clean and *relate* to their wives. Phil Donahue clones—who are *warm* and *sensitive* and *vulnerable*" (1). Interestingly, the magazine *Redbook* had declared Alan Alda "America's Sweetheart" in 1976.

[4] The writing for *First Blood* began before Reagan came to power. At one point, David Rabe wrote a version of it. The ultimate script seems entrenched within the 1970s, trying to reconcile and come to terms with America's defeat in Vietnam and moving forward.

> forgotten heroes…he is a hero, reviving for a disillusioned nation the very ideas of heroism itself (Jeffords, *Remasculinization* 130).

The connections to Reagan are not just in sheer heroism, but also in the nature of Rambo's enemy. As Jeffords explains, "Rambo's worst 'enemy' in the film is not the Vietnamese or even the Russians, but Marshall Murdock, a Washington bureaucrat" (129). This was a theme seen in many 1980s films. In 1988's *Die Hard*, for example, despite the clear threat from the foreign terrorists/thieves, it is the bureaucrats in the form of inept FBI agents that gives Bruce Willis's John McClane the most trouble. The enemy for Reagan was the exact same inept bureaucracy. In his 1980 inauguration address, he famously stated, "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." This, then, is the same fight as in the '80s films with merely different terms, government is hindering the [white] man's (and, by extension, America's) full potential and only by sheer will and brute strength can the hero recapture the glory for America.[5] I stated earlier that the flannel suit type of the 1950s had represented an acceptable masculine type. Now, in the 1980s, a tough masculine cowboy standing for individualism and rescuing America's masculine image was replacing that and attempting to rescue as well, that isolated loner.

This fixation on individualism functioned as a central tenet in Reagan's presidency. It was an individualism that conjured the conquering frontiersman of old—rugged men who needed

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[5] Jeffords notes that the male protagonists of these popular films "can be more appropriately identified as 'populist' heroes than the vigilantes that typified action heroes of the 1970s"—figures such as Dirty Harry who often ended their films alone. In the 1980s, on the other hand, the heroes had saved some aspect of their society and at the end they were reintegrated back into society, often as the leader.
It is important to recognize, however, that while these heroes such as Rambo, might have been rescuing some lost glory for America, these men did it alone, emphasizing and glorifying a level of individualism that was both unrealistic and narcissistic. They were heroes, first and foremost, by themselves.

neither a woman nor any support (except maybe for fatherly approval) to enact great deeds. This redeeming aspect of individualism was not the case at the close of the malaise-ridden 1970s, where there was more a concern and worry towards extreme individualism. As Joe Dubbert explains in *A Man's Place* in 1979:

> By the very nature of their successes, men often cut off from one another, from families, and even from culture and social change. In other words, American men caught up in the fever of the drive for success, power, and profit often found themselves severely limited in their attainment of what might have been significant growth and personal development (303).

In Dubbert's estimation, then, the pursuit of the American dream was the exact cause of crisis. He admits that there "once *was* a frontier of open unsettled space, the very essence of which was that it beckoned men to invest, expand, explore, grow, dominate, and progress" (302), but the current environment of the American man is now frontier-less and he is damaged from his past actions. This apparently changed with the ascension of Ronald Reagan, as unfettered individualism and material gain—the conquest of a new American frontier—became the keys to happiness and success. Living for the moment and for oneself were rewarded values. As Haynes Johnson states it, "Success for the nation, success for the individual: In the public mind, the two were indivisible" (13).

The media images being transmitted during this era gave viewers a picture of who they wanted to be; it rewrote their past for them, and instilled a glorious new future that had not seemed possible in the previous two decades. Johnson states how television "presented, reflected, and reinforced, America's image of itself" (140), which had profound effects on the country's political involvement and activism: "Under Reagan's lulling spell and the television

trance, increasing numbers of Americans became spectators instead of participants" (Johnson 141). What Americans seemed most fixated on was wealth. Two of the biggest television series of the decade were the primetime soap operas *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, programs that detailed the wealthy and the fabulous living opulent lives. In 1984, the same year Madonna became the "Material Girl," saw the premiere of *The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, which allowed the average American a glimpse into how the other half lived. Almost every aspect of the culture was attuned to this wealthy and just out-of-reach lifestyle. Johnson states it best when he declares, "Not in decades, perhaps not in the century, had acquisition and flaunting of wealth been celebrated so publicly by so many" (194). This was the America that many people wanted to be a part of, the life that they wanted to lead.

The average American, though—like the state of the actual country—was not living up to these dreams. Sean Wilentz notes that although "middle-class material standards rose…many of these purchases were made with credit cards or other forms of easy credit," (203) forestalling any type of financial reckoning while trying to buy the good life here and now. One popular voice representing the bleaker side of the economic outlook was Bruce Springsteen. Although he had consistently portrayed the underbelly reality of the American dream, his blockbuster 1984 album *Born in the U.S.A.* truly highlighted this alternate America, an America where "those jobs are going, boys, and they ain't coming back, to your hometown." As gender historian Michael Kimmel notes, the characters in Springsteen's songs "are classic American tragic figures, whose tragic flaw is that they believe in the Dream" (215). Even the title track of this album is an ironic condemnation on the treatment of the youth who fought an inexplicable war in Vietnam only to come home to find themselves unemployed and underappreciated. The biggest irony, though,

came when Reagan attempted to use the song as part of his reelection campaign in 1984, mistaking (or attempting to appropriate) the chorus for a patriotic anthem.

Other troublesome contradictions pockmark Reagan's tenure. Reagan had run on a platform of a reduction in taxes and government, while at the same time upping the ante in defense against the communist threat. This was a task that proved impossible to achieve, as one cannot spend less while spending more. His policies, then, sent the defense budget skyrocketing, and the national debt soaring: "Reaganomics became an exercise in self-contradiction. One could not massively *expand* military spending, *cut* taxes sharply, *and still* have a balanced budget" (Chafe 453). Reagan's economic plan of supply-side economics resulted in tax cuts for the wealthy that did little to help those below.[6] In addition, the president's actions—from the most opulent inauguration in presidential history, to his refusal to increase minimum wage, to actions that reduced union's effectiveness[7]—pitted Reagan against much of working-class America.

As economist Dean Baker explicates, Reagan's economic policies "removed protections of various types for workers in the bottom three-quarters of the labor force" (5), increased the "pressure of international competition" (30), and endorsed a "one-sided application of market forces [that] had the effect of redistributing income from those who lost protection to those who were able to maintain it" (5). During this time, the face of the worker and the character of the job

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[6] Reagan's own Director of the Office of Management and Budget, David Stockman, publicly admitted that supply-side economics was nothing more than the trickle-down theory long rejected from the late nineteenth century and used to horrible outcomes during Herbert Hoover's presidency. Embarrassingly, Stockman even admitted that they had got the numbers wrong and were completely unsure which direction the economic plans would take the country. These policies put America into an awkward economic position.

[7] When, in 1981, air traffic controllers went on strike, Reagan bypassed traditional channels in dealing with unions and fired the 11,345 workers, which Dean Baker points out "ushered in a new era in labor-management relations" (69), one that clearly was not as accommodating to the worker.

changed the American worker from a skilled professional to an underpaid service clerk. Chafe observes that in the 1980s, the country faced "the 'outsourcing' of high-paying factory jobs, with classified employment ads focusing on jobs at McDonalds and Wendy's, not GM or Ford" (442). However, big business and Wall Street were booming like never before, thanks in part to the administration's turning a blind eye to unethical practices through deregulation policies. As Sean Wilentz describes, a major fault of the administration's deregulatory stance towards business was to effectively license "a laissez-faire cycle of fraud and collapse" (199) where taxpayers ended up footing the bill of bad business and unregulated practices. These policies were keeping the lower workers of America—such as the salesmen employed in *Glengarry Glen Ross*—unable to succeed in this new morning in America.

The values of intense individualism and greed that characterize this decade became intimately bound up with and intensified by the narcissism of the previous decade. Historian Gil Troy describes the time period as "[g]oing from the 'Me Decade' to the 'Mine All Mine Decade,'" (17).[8] The ethos of the Reagan era was simply a rehashing of the rhetoric that fueled the American dream, ideas that gave empty hope to the Willy Lomans of this country even as they failed. As Blumenthal critiqued, "Reagan presents himself as the self-made man. He tells us that he's like us and that through the free market we can succeed as he has" (41). What became evident, though, was that only those with money and power were going to succeed and if you didn't have it, then you needed to find a way to get it. This trickle down selfishness went from government policy to corporate practice. As Blumenthal declares, "Reagan has emerged as the

[8] In 1976, author Tom Wolfe wrote an editorial that critiqued American society for being obsessed with the self, calling the generation of the 1970s, the "Me Decade"—a criticism picked up by Christopher Lasch in his critique of the culture.

avatar of a new age of narcissism, where the pursuit of happiness has been reduced to the ruthless quest for money. When the conservatives say 'me,'" Blumenthal continues,

> …they don't say it like the 'me generation,' satirized by Tom Wolfe…they mean me, myself, and mine. They don't mean anything as altruistic as an interest group, which inevitably means others. They're not an interest group, but America; and they define America as themselves. Others can join them by becoming them. All one needs is the membership fee (108).

The dominant masculine type, therefore, was imbued with macho values and an individualistic greed that served the self before all others. This macho version of greed and power, like the violent heroic movies of the day, also occupied a central place in film.

Many of the enduring images and cultural events of the 1980s are framed by corruption and greed. Comedies such as *Trading Places* or *Working Girl* consistently set the corporate world as the corrupt backdrop of American life. The most iconic role centering on greed and power in this decade goes to Michael Douglas for his portrayal of Gordon Gekko in 1987's *Wall Street*, an Oliver Stone film that attempted to expose the corrupt workings of those in the financial district.[9] Gekko was based in part on real-life Wall Street stock trader Ivan Boesky, who went to jail for his insider trading. Boesky's famous sentiment about his world stance can be

[9] The film was timely released just a few months after Black Monday, when the realities of the soaring deficit came to reality and the stock market crashed. It is no coincidence that a sequel to this movie was made in 2010 during another financial downturn due in part to unregulated Wall Street practices.

seen as a motto of 1980s business practice and worldview: "Greed is all right…Everybody should be a little bit greedy…You shouldn't feel guilty" (qtd. in Johnson 215).[10]

This selfishness—and its seeming endorsement by the Republican administration—is exactly what spurred David Mamet to write his 1984 drama, a work that in his own words concerns "how the hierarchical business system tends to corrupt. It becomes legitimate," he goes on, "for those in power in the business world to act unethically" (Roudané 47). Mamet does not, however, just stop at critiquing the business world, but carries his criticism all the way to the White House:

> Economic life in America is a lottery. Everyone's got an equal chance, but only one guy is going to get to the top. 'The more I have the less you have.' So one can only succeed at the cost of the failure of another, which is what a lot of my plays—*American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*—are about. That's what Acting President Reagan's whole campaign is about (Roudané 47).

If the cultural viewpoint at the time was that greed was all right, Mamet's purpose, according to Clive Barnes of the *New York Post*, was to "hold[] up a mirror to America with accusatory clarity." In effect, the men that occupy this real estate office are simply extensions of the selfish individualism running rampant in Reaganism. From their empty sell of Scottish-sounding real estate in the backwaters of Florida to unwitting buyers to their crass machismo attitude, *Glengarry Glen Ross* is a distortion of the individualistic values espoused by Reagan in the era.

Mamet pulls no punches and spares the audience little, resulting in what Douglas Watt of the *Daily News* compared to being sent, "[d]own the drain…in the human sewer where

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[10] Haynes Johnson also points to Donald Trump as an archetypal figure for money and self-promotion in this age of greed, "Trump was important to the eighties only because there were so many types like him and so many others who wanted to be like them" (195).

[Mamet's] people squirm and writhe and nip at one another." Even *Wall Street* was given a Hollywood sheen to make it attractive, but not so with Mamet. His play doesn't even display the men on top, but their lower henchmen. Their habitat is barren at best, but more pathetic in its vulgar reality, from a kitschy Chinese restaurant to a trashed office space that has been burglarized. This is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* for the sales world of 1980s America, a sentiment tapped into by Edwin Wilson of *The Wall Street Journal* when he stated that, for Mamet, "American business is a jungle, a world of ruthless, corrupt, conniving petty thieves who will do anything to make a sale." Based in part on Mamet's own experience in working at a real estate office in Chicago in the late 1960s, the play's most obvious quality is the brutal language that feels like its own form of poetry. The shortness of the play and the awkward construction, the first act's three duologues with little character development, followed by a mess of a second whodunit act, would not seem to lend this play a lasting importance; indeed, it was panned by some critics. But, there is something about *Glengarry Glen Ross* and the hopelessness and near-depravity of these characters as well as its critique of the workings of America that struck a chord with its audiences.

Although the three duologues that comprise the first act are brief, much is gained just from the interaction of these six characters. In the first of these, we are introduced to the only character that might pass for a protagonist, Shelly Levene, an obviously down-on-his-luck salesman who is aging out of this business in a not too graceful manner. In this brief scene we see him beg a favor from the office manager, cajole and harangue him by relying on stories of past success in an attempt to get back on track with his sales. The most pathetic moment comes, however, when Shelly doesn't even have the funds to pay his present bar tab not to mention the bribe he is trying to work over on Williamson. While it seems plain that Williamson is not very

high up on the pecking order as well, the elder Shelly is clearly nearing the end of his game, introducing the important theme of generational divide. Mamet's own notes divide the characters by those in their 50s and those in their 40s. For Mamet, this is a cruel game based on age, agency, and cultural capital. Shelly is close to being out of all three.

Through the other duologues that comprise the first act, audiences witness scenes that Frank Rich, writing for the *New York Times*, says, "dramatize primal duels for domination, power and survival." These are brief instances of the workings of hegemonic masculinity—subordinate types fighting and canceling each other out in a desperate attempt to get ahead of the other. We witness the upper hand of Williamson holding firm in the onslaught of the desperate antics of Shelly, the conniving of Moss as he tries to manipulate Aaronow into doing his bidding, and the salesmanship of Roma as he fakes a genuine companionship with the pathetic Lingk in order to make a sale. But, while we witness these games and feats of ownership over the other, it is also very obvious that none of these men have much clout or power of their own. The real power of this play, the "downtown" owners of the business, Mitch and Murray, are never seen and are only represented by their mouthpiece, the office manager and the mystique that characters such as Levene and Moss assign them. Thus, it is clear in the first duologue that Williamson, the company's yes man, does probably not even have the ability to help Shelly out. When Levene promises that if given some good leads—not guaranteed to him at the start of the play due to his lack of selling—he will close and deliver on them, Williamson states, "What if you *don't*? Then I'm *fucked*. You see…? Then it's *my* job" (23). There is a prominent theme of looking out for oneself.

In the next scene between Moss and Aaronow, both workers at the real estate office, the audience once again feels the invisible pull of Mitch and Murray. Throughout this exchange, we

see Moss pulling a con on the office's worst seller, Aaronow, who, if possible, is more down on his luck than Levene. Moss is attempting to bring Aaronow on board with an idea to steal the "good leads," the Glengarry leads, trash the office to make it look like a robbery, and take the leads to a rival office for potential money and a job. However, the way Moss delivers this information constantly confuses whose idea this is for the seemingly helpless Aaronow. Throughout the dialogue, Moss relies on emphasizing their subordinate and almost inhumane treatment under Mitch and Murray: "And we *enslave* ourselves. To *please*. To win some fucking *toaster*…to…to…and the guy who got there first made *up* those […] He made *up* those rules, and we're working for *him*" (35). Moss is demonstrating not only their own lack of agency in blindly following someone else's rules, but their subordinate status to the dominant (masculine) leaders who call the shots. In the next passage, he gets even more explicit in speaking about his omnipresent, but invisible bosses: "when they *build* your business, then you can't fucking turn around, *enslave* them, treat them like *children*, fuck them up the ass, leave them to fend for themselves" (36). Building solidarity with Aaronow on the basis of joint subjection, Moss is actually making a calculated move to gain the upper hand over his fellow worker. If he can force Aaronow into doing his work for him, mainly robbing the office of the good leads, under the assumed notion that they can both get a job with a rival office, then Moss gets off scot-free and ahead of his subject competitors. By the end Aaronow is merely a victim of the machinations of his cleverer partner.

In the first two scenes, and the next one—a simple display of Roma's selling ability—we see the way in which less successful men sustain the pecking order by fulfilling their subordinate role. Mamet's scenes are a working of Connell's "relationships…constructed through practices that exclude, that intimidate, exploit, and so on" (*Masculinities* 37). Mamet very vividly displays

the uneasy alliances, the constructing of enemies, salesman persuasion techniques, and aggressive intimidation. What is centrally important, though, is that as long as these characters continue their infighting in order to be accepted by Mitch and Murray types, the system that sustains those in charge is reified. Michael Kimmel explicates this idea as simply part of the fabric of American culture. There exists, he asserts, a

> …nostalgic longing for that past world when men believed they could take their place among the nation's elite simply by working hard and applying themselves. Alas, such a world never existed; economic elites have always managed to reproduce themselves despite the ideals of a meritocracy, but that hasn't stopped men from believing in it. It is the American Dream. And when men fail, they are humiliated, with nowhere to place their anger (221).

There is no need for Mamet to actually stage Mitch and Murray; they have no drama in this play, as they are merely the untouchables at the top. The drama that audiences want to see is the story of those men at the bottom, those that fail, are humiliated, "with nowhere to place their anger." Not one character in this study is able to direct their frustration at the right source; Mitch and Murray simply aren't there to be seen.[11] As much as Moss might resent the subjective treatment he gets, he is desperately seeking to win in that same world he finds deplorable. These are desperate men and when they fail, they hit bottom.

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[11] When Mamet wrote the screenplay for the 1992 film version of this play, there was a decision to add the character of Blake, played by Alec Baldwin, who would function as a stand-in for the bosses. While Baldwin gives an amazing performance in his brief scene, it feels rather redundant and forced. Although only an ambassador of Mitch and Murray, Blake gives a physical personification of the authority. Turning to the stage play, Mitch and Murray loom larger and seem more out of reach and powerful based simply on the fact that we know nothing about them.

The clear resonances with Reaganism truly come across in Roma's sales pitch to Lingk. The scene begins with Roma unobtrusively speaking his mind at a booth in the Chinese restaurant, with his potential buyer merely being privy to what he is saying. Slowly, Roma directs his charm toward Lingk, tapping into the very popular social view of the 1980s, selfish individualism. As Johnson explains, "Reagan personified a short-term approach. Living for today was what counted" (140). And this is exactly what Roma is selling: "What I'm saying, what is our life? It's looking forward or it's looking back. And that's our life. That's *it*. Where is the *moment*?" (48). In laying his groundwork for the eventual sell, Roma continues to assuage the obvious fears of Lingk, again emphasizing action and selfish individualism in the face of caution and patience:

> I trust myself. And if security concerns me, I do that which *today* I think will make me secure. And every day I *do* that, when that day *arrives* that I need a reserve, (a) odds are that I have it, and (b) the *true* reserve that I have is the strength that I have of *acting each day* without fear. According to the dictates of my mind (49; emphasis in original).

Roma is clearly emphasizing the personal, the heavy reliance on the self, the "I." If Roma can sell Lingk on personal agency and make Lingk take this action because it is what he, Lingk, wants to do, then Roma wins. As becomes clear in the second act—and what was probably obvious to the expert salesman, Roma—Lingk is a man without personal agency that does very little on his own. Roma, then, was offering Lingk the opportunity to participate in the now of Reaganism.

It is to Roma that Mamet assigns much of the likeness of successful masculine representations of the day, a success that does not necessarily grant him positive values. Towards the end of the play, Roma—whom critic Howard Kissel claims to be "a relic of the Brylcreem

era"—laments the lost days of the frontier—a time probably better suited for Roma: "it's not a world of men […] it's a world of clock watchers, bureaucrats, officeholders […] there's no adventure *to* it. Dying breed" (105). According to Nightingale, Roma is the "frontiersman, boldly venturing where others fear to tread" (94), in other words, the cowboy type. By claiming it as a dying breed, Roma pictures himself as a last man, standing in the corrupt business world of the 1980s, looking back at a more pristine and sacred time for men. Roma's posturing clearly recalls Willy's idealization of his father and brother Ben conquering new frontiers with their masculine initiative. The irony, of course, is that Roma is solidly entrenched in the corruption of his day and is not morally above it.

Roma shows his top dog status in other ways, outcompeting all of the other men around him in the verbal showdown that closes the play. In *The Gender Knot,* Allan Johnson states how "patriarchy encourages men to fear all the things that other men might do to exert control and thereby protect and enhance their standing as real men in relation to other men" (54). This "control-fear spiral," drives an almost paranoid feeling; a man tries to present himself as better than those around him, to be in control of all situations, and to never seem vulnerable. What men fear the most, in this scenario, is being attacked and so what occurs are brash, aggressive display(s) of masculinities for the benefit of other men. Michael Kimmel describes these types of performance in *The Gendered Society,* "When we do gender, we do it in front of people; it is validated and legitimated by the evaluations of others. Gender is less a property of the individual than it is a product of our interactions with others" (122). As Allan Johnson explains, "a man can elevate himself or make himself feel more secure simply by challenging other men's credentials as 'real men,' like the stereotypical Old West tough guy picking a fight" (95). Mamet's rhetoric throughout, but especially that employed by Roma in the last part of the play, is one long

example of words and imagery a man might use to gain mastery. In his attack on Williamson in the penultimate moments of the play, Roma masterfully emasculates Williamson over and over using different tactics, each one more humiliating: "Where did you learn your *trade*. You stupid fucking *cunt*. You *idiot*. Whoever told you could work with *men*?" (96). In explaining Williamson's job for him, Roma continues, "To *help* us. *Not* to fuck us up…to help *men* who are going *out* there to try to earn a *living*. You *fairy*. You company man […] You fucking *child* (96, 97). Ultimately, Roma's ire is misdirected. The individual who he is clearly most angry at is the man who just reneged on the deal that put him over the top, Lingk.

Mamet masterfully stages Lingk's backing out of the deal in such a way that an audience can be both impressed by the skillful trick that Roma and Levene, acting as one of Roma's big-time clients needing a ride to the airport, attempt to pull on Lingk and horrified by the tactics involved. Clive Barnes refers to the salesman's world as a "shark and mouse game, where the benefits for the buyer are largely illusory and the profits for the seller are vast." John Beaufort goes on, drawing a larger comparison, stating that what is displayed are the "ruthless ways of salesmen who divide their time between defrauding clients and cutting each other's throats. The author's purported target is American's spiritual malaise." The connections with America are, of course, exactly at the heart of Mamet's intention: "This is a play about power. This is a play about guys, who when one guy is down…the guy who's up then kicks the guy in the balls to make sure he stays down" (qtd. in Mosher 239). Given that Mamet made clear the connection to (and condemnation of) Reagan, the play is clearly an indictment of more than just the salesman's world, but the current state of American culture.

Mamet's play also demonstrates another act of misdirected rage. Throughout the play, the white salesmen single out multiple ethnic minorities for ridicule. The "Patels," and the "Polacks"

are dismissed as worthless leads, with their ethnicity seeming to undermine some pure quality of the American dream. Here, a foreign element is holding the salesmen back. The other main force complicating their rise to riches is women. Although no woman is actually seen in Mamet's play, they contain a force that emasculates some men and blocks other men from success. Levene mentions needing to support a daughter and Lingk backs out of his deal with Roma because of his wife—a figure that Roma had been rightfully battling all along, recognizing that Lingk did not function without his wife's say-so. The blaming of these gendered and racial others lends the play a special significance within the context of masculine crisis. Sally Robinson states, in *Marked Men*, that the post-1960s white male was facing threats from multiple social movements that threatened his place of dominance. To compensate for these winds of change, cries of crisis were declared to bring attention to white men as a group: "White men have, thus, been marked, *not* as individuals but as a *class*, a category that, like other marked categories, complicates the separation between the individual and the collective, the personal and the political" (Robinson 3).

David Savran helps to contextualize this feeling of being victimized by groups that still hold less cultural capital than white men: the "remarkable prosperity of white men relative to women and African Americans by no means prevented them from later identifying themselves as the victims of the slender and precarious gains made by these groups" (192). Again, simply viewing themselves as victims gave traction to their fictitious fears, allowing their anger to be palpable. There exists an undertone of fear of the other in *Glengarry Glen Ross* that threatens the standing and lifestyles of these men struggling to keep afloat. The importance of Roma's pitch to Lingk is that he is selling him a more popular version of manhood, one not hampered by special interest groups dragging men down. Or, as Nightingale states, "Roma appeals to a side of him

that is not wholly intimidated by conventional morality and maybe would like to assert itself and even take risks" (100).

There is no doubt that *Glengarry Glen Ross* is an angry play—both from the perspective of the playwright and the rhetoric and attitude necessarily employed by the actors. "It is about men throwing themselves with all their resources at a meaningless world, battling it in hopes of emerging richer if not wiser. It is a world of pain, futility and comic bravado," as Howard Kissel observes. He concludes this thought by asking, "do only salesman inhabit such a place?" By urging his readers to expand the world of Mamet's play to their own, he considers it able to speak to the audience, to connect personally with their lives. Not every critic, however, viewed the play as transcendently. The "endless stream of vituperation" that Douglas Watt observed was not a "bitter comment on the American dream" but merely "a slice of life that sends you out of the theater neither transported or even informed, just cheerless" (Watt). "At its best," states critic Edwin Wilson, "'Glengarry' is a corrosive, if extremely foul-mouthed, indictment of corruption." For many of these critics, this play bears a close resemblance to another play opening a block away at around the same time: "'Glengarry Glen Ross' is not just about the world of salesmen (although I suspect it is a more honest look at that world than the play about a salesman opening later this week)" (Kissel). In Edwin Wilson's estimation, though, "Mr. Mamet's lack of breadth and vision becomes apparent when 'Glengarry' is set next to 'Death of a Salesman,' which has just been revived at the Broadhurst Theater."

Very few reviewers and critics of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, especially for the 1984 opening, failed to draw comparisons to *Salesman*, often pairing Shelly and Willy as counterparts. Jack Kroll's review for *Newsweek* is as much a review of *Glengarry* as it is his opinion of Miller's award-winning drama. Kroll begins by laying the groundwork for both plays: "'It's contacts,

Ben, contacts!' 'Give me the leads!' exhorts Shelly (The Machine) Levene."[12] For Kroll, Shelly is the "Willy Loman of the '80s," and they share a similar end: "Willy dies the death of a salesman; Shelly…suffers a fate that's a kind of grotesque counterpart to the ignominious end of Willy." Even the rhetoric employed by Shelly in his first scene seems to blatantly recall Willy: "You run in *streaks*" (21), recalling past glory where he made the sales and built the company, just as Willy supposedly did when he was the "New England man." These men are past their prime and getting succeeded by a younger generation, against their will. If Shelly's demise isn't suicide in the mortal sense, it is suicide from a career perspective.

The issue dealt with in Mamet's play is not merely an ageist argument, but has resonance for a great number of men in society. Writing for ABC, Joel Siegel wrote, "The low man gets fired; only the high man gets the good leads. The pressure takes its toll. For the low the system is suicide. And David Mamet wrote this play to tell us we're all the low men." Just as Kimmel claimed that Springsteen's characters are all Willy Lomans brought down by the relentless and crushing pursuit of the American dream, so too are the characters in *Glengarry* and *Salesman* representative of a certain defeat characterized by the negative reality of Reaganomics in the 1980s.[13] But the main difference between the plays might just be in the tone: for those living under Reaganism in 1984, *Glengarry Glen Ross* was their tragic reality while the revival of *Death of a Salesman* was their catharsis.

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[12] The connection to Ben is important as Christopher Bigsby declared that the principle of the salesmen in Mamet's world "is that of Arthur Miller's Uncle Ben in *Death of a Salesman*: never fight fair with a stranger. And the world is full of strangers" (13). This was an idea picked up by critic Richard Corliss who states that Mamet's "characters all fight by the same rules: dirty."

[13] This was similar to critics connecting audiences to Pavlo in the previous decade. There seems to be a need for, especially, male audiences to identify and relate to these characters held down by a system, headed for failure.

The connections between these two plays, of course, go beyond just their joint premieres. Sidney Blumenthal discusses the plays in relation to what he sees as the delusion and fantasy that characterized Reagan's America, "[i]n any play some roles are dictated by the nature of the play. Other roles are invited by the central character. Still others are excluded. The self-deluded Willy Loman, for example, cannot walk into the cynical world of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (xvi). Benedict Nightingale also connects the two plays thematically, but he characterizes the two men a little curiously. "In Miller's 1949," he states,

> the American dream was deeply compromised but still had its moral and perhaps even its spiritual aspects. By Mamet's 1983[14] it had become heartless and soulless, a Darwinian mix of unscrupulous competitiveness and greed. Willy Loman had been reborn as a small-time Ivan Boesky (91).

One first questions whether the American dream was operating with a moral compass even in 1949 or if that is nostalgia being attached and secondly, it seems odd to characterize Willy, not to mention Shelly, as a Boesky-type. It should not be forgotten that before his fall from grace, Boesky had managed to swindle millions of dollars from people; Shelly and Willy can barely rub two nickels together. These two salesmen are, and always have been, at the losing end of schemes concocted by individuals like Ivan Boesky. While *Salesman* does not come across as cynical and heartless as *Glengarry*, self-delusion is as much apart of Shelly as it is of Willy and both men end up tossed aside by their society.[15] What is, perhaps, most striking here is the way

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[14] Nightingale was referring to its actual premiere, which was in London in 1983. It would open in Chicago and then New York in the next year.

[15] I also disagree with Nightingale when he claims that Shelly is "*even more* compromised and distorted by pressures of commerce and the harshness of American society" (89; my emphasis). Shelly does attempt to bribe his boss and actually commits a felony to try to get ahead, but Willy's action was suicide, which would seem to be the most extreme act of desperation.

in which Shelly Levene is merely a portrait of that American failure that has dogged the steps of success throughout American history—a reminder of the sacrifice and the cost of blindly following the American dream. When Shelly is put up alongside Willy Loman, the sad reality is that very little has changed for the American man in almost forty years.

Director Michael Rudman did make some significant stylistic changes for his 1984 revival of *Salesman*. This was most notable with the physical characterization of Loman himself. Reversing the trend of a larger actor playing Willy, a tradition begun by Elia Kazan and not the playwright—Miller had originally envisioned a small man, resembling his Uncle Manny who provided the original inspiration for the role—Dustin Hoffman took on the role, with Joel Siegel noting an important difference between a big man and a little man losing to the American dream.[16] Besides Willy's size the designers made a distinct clothing change, possibly influenced by America's current obsession with fashion and material possession. Changing the idea that Willy should be dressed in faded and worn clothes that would reflect his low social standing, this Willy is "a trim, immaculately outfitted go-getter in a three-piece suit – replete with bright matching tie and handkerchief," which Frank Rich emphasizes to note his pathetic contradictory position in life: "Is there anything sadder than a nobody dressed for success, or an old man masquerading as his younger self?"

As opposed to the almost caustic portrayal of George C. Scott, Hoffman seems to impart a more sympathetic, almost likable side to the character. Clive Barnes declares, "His final triumph is that he is lovable, even funny. You can see why his wife loves him – passionately." Edwin Wilson affirms this, claiming, "Mr. Hoffman presents a man who is eternally optimistic

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[16] Granted, this may have been less a conceptual choice than the reality of the diminutive Hoffman wishing to take on the role of Willy Loman.

despite a world, both inside and outside his home, that is falling around him." However, in Hoffman's characterization, Willy's frustration and anger still shone through, a duality that Frank Rich termed, "the brave fighter and the whipped child." Rich goes on to state that "Hoffman doesn't trudge heavily to the grave—he sprints. His fist is raised and his face is cocked defiantly upwards." Richard Schickel of *Time* calls him a "scrappy, snappy little bantam" as well as a boxer, "shadowboxing the gathering shadows, hoping to the end for a T.K.O. over reality."[17] Ultimately, this was a redeeming element of Hoffman's portrayal, as Jack Kroll states, "it's the virtue of Dustin Hoffman's performance as Willy that he rips and tears at this archetypal role, looking for the blood and the heart of this poor slob who embodies every self-deluded sucker." This fight, it would seem, is not very different from Shelly Levene desperately struggling against a system that cares almost nothing about him; it is the same story of a loser fighting a losing battle.

This revival differed from past productions in another important way by deemphasizing Miller's societal critique and zeroing in on the father/son storyline. The emphasis on Biff and his relationship to his father was received in a much more sympathetic fashion than the previous two Broadway stagings of Miller's work, although the previous incarnation with James Farentino was hinting towards this type of reception. Granted, much of this is simply due to the outstanding performance by John Malkovich and the interaction between Hoffman and Malkovich during the play's climax. But a good number of the critics elevate Biff's plight to a dominant theme; this is not just Willy's fall from grace, but the story of a man from the younger generation failing to meet his father's standards and come to terms with himself. As Howard Kissel states, "[f]or us

[17] There are echoes here of Pacino dancing around as Pavlo. There is apparently something tragically sad in the frenetic energy of someone who is merely headed towards failure and death.

the most sympathetic character in the play is Willy's oldest son, Biff, who is crippled by his knowledge of his father's dishonesty and basic lack of decency." Frank Rich emphasizes the same struggle when he states that the work "is most of all about fathers and sons…The drama's tidal pull comes from the sons' tortured attempts to reconcile themselves to their fathers' dreams. It's not Willy's pointless death that moves; it's Biff's decision to go on living." The audience identifies with the plight of two generations in this production, the realization of obsolescence and the reality of a bleak future. It is in the latter struggle that the potency of this production for its 1984 audience has the most significance. "Once Biff accepts who he is – and who his father is," Rich states, "the cathartic recognition seems to break through Mr. Malkovich (and the theater) like a raging fever." The audience's catharsis, then, comes not from weeping over the sad state of Willy, but from identifying with the plight of Biff, as he struggles to cope with a destroyed relationship with his father and his own half lifetime of dashed expectations and failings.

Clive Barnes calls *Salesman* "an epigraph for times past, a warning for times present," speaking towards its continued relevance. The sad reality, of course, is how very little progress has been made in changing the conditions for the low men of America. Whether or not an audience member sees Mamet as more crass than Miller or Shelly more desperate than Willy, it is almost undeniable that the two characters merely reinforce the realization that the trope of the American failure is a part of the nature of American society and not just a product of the times. Even in the supposed best of times of Reagan's new morning, there is a bleak flipside to that optimism that lends a degree of angst and failure to representations of the American man.

<u>The Psychological Retreat of the '90s Male</u>

By 1999 it became evident that a Broadway revival of *Salesman* was simply a perennial reality. However, by the time Brian Dennehy took on the role of Willy Loman, the social conditions were different, indeed much less pertinent, both in how the play was staged and the cultural context from which this revival emerged. The portrait of a man brought low by the social conditions around him—a casting off from the business world, the suffocating skyline closing him in—were given much less emphasis and instead the production focused on the picture of an individual caught in the throes of a psychological crisis. The Willy Loman gracing the dark, dream-like stage of Robert Falls's production at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre was sensitive, uncertain, and depressed about his place in the world. This production of *Salesman* was a drastic reinterpretation that changed the tradition of viewing the play, a change that coincided with the alteration of the conception of the male in society.

Leaving behind a discussion of *Glengarry* and the 1984 revival of *Salesman*, the conclusion of this case study examines the psychological and introspective 1999 revival of *Death of a Salesman* starring Brian Dennehy. As I did when analyzing the different receptions to the two stagings of *Pavlo*, I examine some of the cultural changes and new perceptions of masculinity that occurred in the 1990s to produce a Willy Loman who seemed more depressed than a victim of societal conditions. Indeed, this was a decade that favored introspection, and accepted masculine types were leaving behind the hard machismo of the 1980s and replacing it with a softer, vulnerable side.

Influenced by the civil rights, feminist, and gay/lesbian movements of the previous two decades, the theatrical output of the 1990s began prominently staging different voices on their main stages. Taking a backseat on the Broadway stages were the concerns of straight white men. Voices such as Anna Deavere Smith, Spalding Gray, Richard Foreman, and Paula Vogel began

to be heard in earnest. Plays ranging from Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy*, Terrence McNally's *Love! Valor! Compassion,* Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women,* Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* and Suzan Lori-Parks's *The America Play* began to tell a different American story. To take one example, while homosexual characters in much of American drama had long been relegated to the sidelines, either cloaked in ambiguity like Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or marginalized out of focus as the character of Larry in Lanford Wilson's *Burn This,* in the 1990s, many of the stories being told were about gay/lesbian individuals, as well as blacks and women. While two of the most important playwrights of the 1990s were still men—August Wilson and Tony Kushner[18]—one was black and the other was gay and their plays focused hardly at all on straight white males except possibly to condemn.

Popular representations of men in culture were also changing. In this decade, there began to be a great deal of introspection, with men actively seeking answers in self-help books and men's groups. This signified a clear break from the individualistic hero of the '80s. A film such as *Regarding Henry,* which displays a drastic transformation of cold 1980s lawyer to soft 1990s family man, is a perfect example of this trend. In this film, Harrison Ford's character Henry has an intense devotion to his cutthroat lawyer profession that causes him to devalue his family and not appreciate them. Thanks to a near death experience and selective amnesia, he is able to be reborn as a new sensitive man, appreciative of his wife and kids, putting his old ways behind him. The film stands as a perfect statement of the new 1990s man. The men's movement gained in earnest in this period and even the president of the United States took on a drastically new masculine persona that helped rewrite the rules for what was expected of the American man.

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[18] Kushner, in *Angels in America*, queered any aspect of normal, straight white masculinity and removed from focus the father to such an extent that even the divine was a sexually charged hermaphroditic angel.

Gender theorists, Michael Kimmel and Michael Kaufmann noted a difference between presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, which characterized masculinity in the 1990s.[19] If Reagan personified the hard body movies of the 1980s, then Clinton was an excellent stand-in for the emotional accessibility of the '90s protagonists. In one of his debates against George H. W. Bush, Clinton showed his soft side by getting down on the same level with one of the questioners and coming to near tears with her on the state of the economy. What came across with Clinton was a warmth and openness that was appealing on a very personal basis. Michael Kimmel states that with Bill Clinton "we seemed to have elected our first new man as president."

William Chafe speaks of Clinton's popularity in a way that recalls descriptions of Kennedy, "Clinton was like a box office matinee idol for those who responded positively to his personal message" (509). While Clinton's popularity was less in his first term, stemming mostly from his handling of healthcare and an obstructionist Congress, he would reach greater heights in his second term, despite the sexual scandals and a Republican Party attempting to bring him down. What was it about this sensitive and drastically changed version of masculinity—as opposed to Reagan and the hard body men of the 1980s—that became so appealing to many Americans?[20] "Broken yet strong, sensitive but tough," states scholar Brenton Malin, "Clinton was the model of a conflicted masculinity characteristic of the '90s" (7).[21] A sense of conflicted

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[19] Although I figure Bill Clinton as the embodiment of the soft difference to the hardness of Reagan, Kimmel and others have emphasized the importance of George H.W. Bush and his "wimp"-like qualities as the transitional figure (261).

[20] Breaking recent tradition of first ladies, Clinton also had a wife whose career and ambitions were not simply decided by her husband's status as president. Hilary Rodham Clinton had been a lawyer involved in the Watergate hearings whose strong and ambitious drive, as recent history tells us, would take her career higher than first lady. Such an impassioned wife characterized Clinton in a different way than most of his presidential predecessors.

[21] It is, perhaps, of note that a 1990 revival of *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, which functioned almost purely as a vehicle for Kathleen Turner, was critiqued for displaying Brick as too removed and

masculinity was exactly the cause for the startup of support groups and resurgence in the men's movement in this decade that caused the American man to look inward appearing softer in his display of masculinity.

Spearheading this resurgence in the men's movement was poet Robert Bly whose parabolic self-help work, *Iron John*, laid the foundation for the new male. For Bly, the time seemed right for the American man to be assertive and look inward for the answers instead of outwards towards iconographic role models.[22] Michael Schwalbe, whose ethnographic study of the men's movement is chronicled in *Unlocking the Iron Cage*, states that the "activities [at their weekend retreats] were means to create and explore feelings, to achieve self-knowledge, to experience emotional communion, and to give new meaning to the identity 'man'" (6). The ultimate end of Bly's mythopoetic program, which borrowed heavily from Jungian philosophy, was for men to find and to be in communion with every man's inner Wild Man. Bly is careful to note, that the "kind of wildness, or un-niceness, implied by the Wild Man image is not the same as macho energy…[but] by contrast leads to forceful action undertaken, not with cruelty, but

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too disengaged from the events happening around him. It is my opinion, though, that Brick in this production functions as a perfect forebear to the 1990s male. The culture wars that were just gearing up in the early 1990s, which James Davison Hunter described as pitting Americans against fellow Americans in a fight to determine "*how we as Americans will order our lives together*" (34; emphasis in original); a fight so extreme as to prompt William Chafe to wonder "whether it was possible any longer to speak of Americans as a common people who share the same values, goals, and institutions" (517). In the midst of this struggle comes a representation of a white male checked out and distanced from the concerns of his wife, his moneyed brother, and his lineage-concerned patriarch. The fights consuming America at the beginning of the 1990s left many men feeling left behind, causing Brick to resemble many of the men seeking solace in the groups of the men's movements.

[22] Michael Schwalbe quotes one mythopoetic writer stating that "the 'primary images' of manhood in U.S. culture offered little hope or options, 'Rambo and Oliver North, on one hand, or Fred Flintstone and PeeWee Herman on the other" (109). It is further interesting that the Heathcliff Huxtable and Steven Keaton, of *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties* of the 1980s, found their opposites in Al Bundy of *Married…with Children* and Homer Simpson of *The Simpsons*, a transition from knowledgeable and authoritative patriarchs to bumbling, emasculated idiots.

with resolve" (8). A man finding his own Wild Man put him in touch with a more pure and innocent version of himself.[23] This concept of man is both strong and resolute, but smart and sensitive enough to know when to use his force; as Bly phrases it, the "Wild Man, who has examined his wound, resembles a Zen priest, a shaman, or a woodsman more than a savage" (x).[24]

Bly's Wild Man—unkempt, bedraggled, inside all of us only waiting to be discovered, rescuing men from being lost in a world where expectations do not match up with reality—hearkens back to a figure introduced at the top of this chapter, Travis from *Paris, Texas*. As the film reveals, Travis sent himself into the desert in an almost post-traumatic stress move after his brutal split from his wife. The horrific treatment they enacted on each other sent him spiraling out of control, but in a way that allowed him a rebirth as a new man. In a move that could be seen as prescient, the Wild Man of Bly seems to rescue Travis—as an archetypal American male

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[23] There was, however, a dangerous, even polemical side to the men's movement. Kimmel states how the "leaders of the mythopoetic men's movement tapped into a deep current malaise among American men…that we have lost the ability to claim our manhood in a world without father, without frontiers, without manly creative work" (211). While Bly was careful to assert that his movement and ideas were not anti-feminine and merely attempting to rescue aspects of manhood, David Savran notes how the movement's "detractors attack it for its alleged misogyny, racism, and homophobia" (169-70). It became difficult for these groups to employ the rhetoric and imagery of empowerment and reinvigoration without, however innocently, employing anti-feminist rhetoric. Susan Faludi noted a similar occurrence with another, faith-based men's group, Promise Keepers. In an instance of justifying anti-feminine rhetoric, Faludi reports one Promise Keepers speaker and preacher telling his audience, packed into a sold-out football stadium, to go home and reclaim his rightful role at home: "I'm not suggesting that you *ask* for your role back, I'm urging you to *take it back*" (229). The world of the men's movement was decidedly isolated, "the cry of anguish of privileged American men" (Kimmel and Kaufman 263).[23] As Schwalbe reports that most of the mythopoetic men, "were white, middle- or upper-middle class, between 35 and 60 years old, and self-identified as heterosexual" (19). Their desire for change within men, after all—given their overall success compared to other minorities—could also come across as polarizing and even vindictive.

[24] A parallel can be found here in Benjamin Hoff's 1992 *The Te of Piglet*, a Taoist application of the world of A.A. Milne, and sequel to *The Tao of Pooh*, that highlights the soft and sensitive nature of the character of Piglet to emphasize tender and virtuous masculine qualities.

figure—from wandering lost in the desert as a man waiting to be found to one on a mission of self-discovery. Travis in the 1980s is a tragic figure, but by the 1990s, he could almost be read as a redemptive one.

The trend of representing men sensitively marking a turn away from brawn of the 1980s into the softness of the 1990s, was reflected in popular film. Arnold Schwarzenegger, of *The Terminator*, went from action hero to sensitive protagonist in movies such as *Jingle All the Way, Twins* and *Kindergarten Cop*[25]—the latter of which demonstrates that the "whole man of the eighties would rather be a father than a warrior" (Jeffords *Hard Bodies* 142-43).[26] These films merely employed his tough guy skills as a contrast to emphasizing his entry into an emotional, softer, and sensitive world. A similar transformation occurred within Mel Gibson's *Lethal Weapon* character, Martin Riggs. In the 1980s, Riggs was emotionally cut-off and even mentally unstable, a marginalized character who fought for the good guys, but with a great degree of

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[25] Admittedly, two of these films were both late 1980s, but the transition away from Reagan hard bodies and wimp-like characteristics of the next period, began during Bush's presidency, as Kimmel and Kaufman had noted.

[26] Some of these changes became almost necessary as Reagan's imagery and even anger towards government became overtly hostile in the charged cultural climate of the 1990s. While Reagan had seemingly pitted government as public enemy number one, many viewed Clinton's agenda as overextending the role of the federal government. Wilentz also observes that "[w]ith the cold war over, all sorts of marginal groups began turning their anger against the federal government" (352). Because of this, the 1990s saw a growth of hometown militias, anti-government groups, and even domestic terrorism that tumultuously shaped this decade. Evoking the rhetoric and imagery of the revolutionary leaders of the 1770s, the Patriot movement was anti-tax, anti-government, and dogmatically justified, employing violent imagery and victimization rhetoric that played upon fears to increase its membership. One militia representative reported to Susan Faludi—echoing rhetoric from the early 1970s—"Basically, the white male is the most discriminated-against minority, the largest minority in the country" (*Stiffed* 416). Unfortunately, the end result of this violent and oppositional strain resulted in the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, Texas in 1993 and on its one-year anniversary, the Oklahoma City bombing by a disenfranchised, white male. Of the 1980s, Susan Jeffords had stated the filmic heroes of the day "thrust forward into heroism are not heroic in defiance of their society but in defiance of their governments and institutional bureaucracies" (*Hard Bodies* 19). The 1990s would witness the consequences of that emphasis, with domestic terrorism replacing heroism.

personal danger and recklessness. By the 1990s, Riggs was getting married and thinking about having kids, fully abandoning his self-absorption of the previous decade, opening up to others in an emotional outpouring—Mad Max was settling down. The muscles of the 1980s were becoming the emotions of the 1990s.[27] The earlier decade's top show's tag line, "Who Shot J.R."—a show that emphasized the wealth, extravagance, and sheer brashness of society—became "Who killed Laura Palmer" in the next. *Twin Peaks*, along with *The X-Files*, displayed male protagonists who did not save the day by muscle or display their excess of wealth or greatness, but instead endeared themselves to audiences through the exposed display of their oddities, quirkiness, and vulnerability.[28]

The shift of attention away from the white male on Broadway stages not only opened up newer, fresher voices to New York audiences, but, when it did display masculinity, it also revealed characters greatly softened in tone from their 1980s counterparts. The quintessential crass and selfishly driven Roma from the 1980s became the introspective and soul-searching Prior Walter. The almost all-male dramas of Mamet and Shepard, full of strife and competition became *Love! Valor! Compassion!*, a play where eight gay men are on retreats to reassess heir lives, reevaluate friendships, and contemplate the impact of AIDS on their lives. In addition, much of the innovative solo performance pieces of this period, work ranging in scope from Tim

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[27] Even the children's animated classic *Beauty and the Beast* reevaluated, for a new generation, "men's aggressive behaviors and suggests that they should not only be forgiven but helped along toward revealing their 'true' inner selves" (Jeffords *Hard Bodies* 154), as the movie's Beast transitions from a tough masculine monster to a sensitive and soft man for his heroine.

[28] As mentioned earlier, the shows of the 1980s displayed an America that everyone seemed to want, while the shows of the 1990s displayed a more accurate America. Despite the quirkiness of *Twin Peaks*, the characters were more everyday people. *Roseanne* probably stands as the quintessential representation of displaying actual life in the 1990s—a blue-collar family struggling to get by.
It is of no surprise that one of the most iconic male characters in American film in this decade was the non-threatening and endearing, if somewhat hopeless, Forrest Gump.

Miller, John Leguizamo, Spalding Gray, to Eric Bogosian, emphasize masculine characters examining their place in their own life and in society, highlighting not only a sensitivity, but an anxiety.

This type of introspection was brought to bear on Willy Loman in his final Broadway appearance in the twentieth century. Seemingly influenced by the imagery employed by author William Styron's autobiographical account of his depression, *Darkness Visible*,[29] this *Salesman* revival, starring the hulking Brian Dennehy as the titular character, sought to highlight the psychological side of Willy, his depression, insecurities, and sense of aloneness as opposed to the social aspects long associated with Miller's work.[30] *New York Times* critic, Ben Brantley directly evokes the former work when he says that the production contains "a sense of engulfing night that evokes William Styron's notion of emotional depression as 'darkness visible.'"[31] At the close of the century, then, Willy Loman was depressed.

For this revival, director Robert Falls dispenses with the classic cutaway house surrounded by the looming New York City skyline. In a play that naturally makes porous the boundary between fiction and reality, past and present, Falls's staging makes it even more amorphous, truly recalling Miller's original title, "The Inside of His Head."[32] The design of the play was led and characterized by the lighting of Michael S. Philippi, with spotlights illuminating only sections of the stage where the action was going on, leaving the rest of the stage shrouded in

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[29] Lifting a quote from Milton's description of hell, Styron described his descent and journey through his depressive state as being enshrouded with a darkness from which he could not escape and through which no joy came or anything positive could pierce.
[30] Indeed one *New York Times* article on the revival, by Jesse McKinley, questioned what Willy's diagnosis would be today if he were to be viewed through a psychiatric lens.
[31] Brantley's review here is of the original production that occurred at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, but that was moved wholesale to Broadway a few months after opening.
[32] Critic Michiko Kakutani draws an even closer comparison stating how this form is the same "narrative strategy adopted by Mr. Miller in his own 1987 autobiography, 'Timebends.'"

darkness. And reviewer Ben Brantley's poetic description perfectly captures not only the description of the production, but its thematic relevance,

> The darkness is always waiting for Willy Loman. It laps away at the edges of his sunniest memories. It clouds his vision to the point that he cannot trust himself to drive. It keeps him pulling back, with gravitational force, whenever hopes, however small, are rekindled. The darkness terrifies Willy. You can sense that in the lost, panicked expression that abruptly takes over his face. But there is never any doubt that he is going to surrender to it.

This dream-like atmosphere underscores the aloneness of Willy, emphasizing his utter surrender to being lost between his past and his present circumstances with a tenable grasp on reality.

In this production, continues Brantley, "nothing seems fixed. Entire rooms glide into and out of focus, creating sudden gulfs between people who an instant before were standing side by side." Even the opening image of the play—so often simply reminiscent of a nighttime homecoming, has taken on a sense of night terrors, "The effect is of a sensation that sometimes surfaces in dreams, of returning home and discovering you don't really know where you are" (Brantley). Reviewer Amy Garnerman states how this lighting consistently gives the impression of Willy being trapped, of being in a "box-like room that holds him like a cage" and that Willy is "trapped by the world he has built for himself." If Falls was able to evoke more claustrophobia in just lighting effects than previous incarnations whose intention with the set design was to make Willy look trapped, then this production was quite successful.

Many of these major design decisions, though, were not favorably received by all of the critics. Reviewer Vincent Canby states, "lost [is] the full primal power of 'Death of a Salesman,' the poetic, rock-hard evocation of the last desperate days in the life of Willy Loman…the play

isn't fully there." The title of critic Aaron Mack Schloff's review declared, "'Salesman' Lives, But Only Fitfully," where he laments a dated and anachronistic feel of the play, fifty years after its premiere. Garnerman affirms this sentiment stating the show feels dated and that the "playwright sounds just a little too callow." Arguably one of the major reasons for this disconnect stems from the production's deliberate distancing from the contextual material. Even as Falls's adaptation looked to conceptualize Miller's drama, it also distanced it from some of its major strengths. Michiko Kakutani states that it "seems less a social drama" and that his "dilemmas are more psychological than sociological, more existential than environmental." John McKinley notes this difference when he says that the "signs of the shift in the conflict from the social to psychological are rife in Mr. Falls's production." Gone is the competition for subordinate masculinities. The characters, instead, do not have the energy to even fight. Because the play lost its social primacy, the psychological force of the drama came in and Willy Loman appeared merely as a lost man in the dark about his life.

Given that the economic and cultural climate of the late 1990s was rather calm in relation to former *Salesman* revivals,[33] it seems this distancing from the play's social critique was deliberate. Clinton's administration was leaving the country with a surplus in the budget, there was little in the way of foreign military conflict, and business—from Silicon Valley to the Midwest—was doing surprisingly well. Further, Clinton presided over a decade in which interest in and rights grew for both people of color and LGBT individuals. The concerns of the Willy Lomans of the country were much less pressing than it had been in previous incarnations of the

[33] John Tierney's editorial in the *New York Times* on *Salesman* draws a topical connection with the Clinton-Lewinsky affair to Willy Loman, stating, "Willy's indiscretion hardly seems to rise to the level of a suicidal offense." This is yet more proof that we are removed from the days of the American Dream failing the low men of the country.

play. This revival could not rely on the idea of the failing American man in a time when he seemed to not be failing. Thus, this interpretation focused on a representation of a psychological retreat inward and possibly a surrender.

In addition to exploring the psychological dimension of Willy, this production also deepened the interpretation of the father-son conflict, positioning this theatregoing audience into relation with Biff. The father-son motif was becoming particularly poignant in light of the men's movement of the 1990s. Robert Bly knew that the soft man he condemned and hoped to rescue was unhappy, stating that "[p]art of their grief rose out of remoteness from their fathers, which they felt keenly" (4). In discussing the mythopoetic men, both Kimmel and Kaufman and Schwalbe discuss the importance of the absent father, with the latter describing how "[o]ne thing that many of the men had in common were fathers they described as physically or emotionally 'absent'" (19). These men, Schwalbe goes on, "despite believing that they had rejected their fathers' version of masculinity—nonetheless hungered for fatherly approval…these men still wanted their fathers to see them as men and to accept them for the men they had become" (29).[34]

The reviews of the 1999 revival of *Death of a Salesman* seem to echo these sentiments from the men's movement, as if Willy and Biff had been coopted to the cause. Brantley states that Kevin Anderson's Biff "brings extraordinary conviction to the idea of a man struggling not to become his father and losing the battle." Lloyd Rose, of the *Washington Post*, declares that "the play works onstage, and stays with people, because of the tortured relationship between Willy and his elder son, Biff." He goes on to state that this "is the play about hating your father

[34] This theme of lost fathers was not just in the mythopoetic movement as Susan Faludi reports that the father and the son's grappling with that relationship is a central tenet of the Promise Keepers, as well. Clinton, as well, was not connected with his real father and this became a theme in many of his speeches.

and loving your father and owing your father and, above all, never being good enough for your father." What is remarkable about Rose's review is the fixation on the son and father.[35] Both Willy and Biff hold great resentment to their fathers and the audience is made to truly identify with that sentiment. The audiences were all sons hungering for fatherly approval and struggling to move forward.

Robert Falls's production can function almost as a coda for the twentieth century American male. It signals an end to the familiar masculine representations of the century. Linda Winer-Bernheimer characterizes Dennehy's Willy in the opening moment of the performance "like a man-mountain action hero on a final mission." The patriarchal and hard body masculine figure is fading from view and the son has little means or motivation to rise himself up to take that place. He is merely content to know he is different from his father, but lacks the means to affect any real change. This sentiment of inaction is not necessarily one of sadness, merely of resignation.

As this study moves into the twenty-first century, it is necessary to examine just where this idea of crisis came from and how it will be represented at the start of the new century.

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[35] The first part of this chapter made a reference to Sam Shepard's *True West*, a play that also grapples with father-son relationships. This play did not see its Broadway premiere until 2000, testifying to a similar interest on the themes of sons and fathers in much the same vein as *Salesman*.

VI. THE HOLLOW AMERICAN

"…the frontier has gone, and with its going has
closed the first period of American history."
Frederick Jackson Turner

"The American Century has clearly come to an end."
David S. Mason

In 1819, Washington Irving published a short story called "Rip Van Winkle." In this tale, an insouciant wanderlust subject of George III retreats to the Catskill mountains with his dog to escape, if just for a little while, his nagging and criticizing wife. Once there, something magical happens and when he comes down from the mountain he finds that twenty years have passed and the colony in which he lived is now part of the fledgling United States. This story was very popular and found a thriving home in theatre for a great deal of the nineteenth century, especially in the post-bellum era. What is it about this tale of male escape and the birth of America that intrigued American audiences and for so long? Theatre scholar Benjamin McArthur posits:

> For the American post-Civil War generation, it was a wistful sense of the price of progress that beckoned comic release. Victorians clearly gloried in progress but nonetheless were tugged by memories of a society unrent by division and unhurried by the machine. Rip Van Winkle's acute sense of loss—of youth and identity—expressed in poignant human terms a vague apprehension stealing over the industrialized world (239).

For McArthur, audiences felt true pathos at the plight of Winkle and concerns about America itself.[36] "Rip Van Winkle," and its stage counterparts, spoke to American audiences because it identified aspects of uncertainty within the country, mainly ideas of manhood, pressure from women, and the growth and direction of the young United States.[37]

The consistently cited authority on early America's identity, that famous French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville, characterized the young country in a positive but skeptic, manner, identifying behaviors and attitudes that he felt were peculiarly American. One of his harsher denunciations can be vividly heard in the following,

> I see an innumerable crowd of similar and equal men who spin around restlessly, in order to gain small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others…he exists only in himself and for himself alone (1249-1250).

Even in the early phase of this relatively new nation, a traveler could sense a restless drive and an unhappiness that pervaded life. The relentless pursuit of wealth and possessions, Tocqueville observed, dominated life in this country, and the inability to meet this insatiable demand resulted in feelings of insufficiency. It would seem that the impact of the emerging American Dream, as it appeared to this early nineteenth century Frenchman, defined Americans' lives by creating an emptiness and fostering isolation. By the next decade, the great American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau would write of his fellow citizens, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet

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[36] It is, I would argue, the same type of pathos and reaction to Willy Loman that was present for audiences to *Death of a Salesman* in 1949, especially, and some of its later revivals.

[37] Scholars have since identified Rip Van Winkle as a prototype for the American male, catching hold of an image of American manhood as in adolescence and scared to grow up. In his essay, "Fallen From Time," Philip Young states that "Rip is a stereotype of the American male as seen from abroad…the jolly overgrown child, abysmally ignorant of his own wife and the whole world of adult men—perpetually 'one of the boys'" (570).

desperation." As this study concludes its examination of contemporary American culture by looking at life in the 21st century, it seems necessary first to examine briefly the roots of American rootlessness, unhappiness, and solitude. It is my argument that these sentiments are part of the definition of American identity, not isolated symptoms of current American (masculine) malaise. Put another way, an idea of crisis is neither isolated to just masculinity nor is it limited to specific instances in recent American history; it is, instead, a dominant characteristic of American identity itself. After all, it was symptoms of male crisis—henpecked husband, pressure to work and succeed—that drove Rip Van Winkle to the mountains in the first place. This chapter is an exploration of the possible causes of why crisis rhetoric seems to be so solidly entrenched within American masculine culture. Aiding in this discussion will be an analysis of the 2007 Tony-award winning *August: Osage County*, a play that flips gender dominance. The question this play raises is intimately bound up with the investigation of crisis; the answer, I intend to demonstrate, illuminates an idea of restlessness at the core of American identity.

In his study on manhood in America, E. Anthony Rotundo explains that prior to 1800, the modern idea of masculinity was much different. "The ideal man," he states, "was pleasant, mild-mannered, and devoted to the good of the community" (13). In fact, much of the admirable traits characterizing men had to do with self-control and a great deal of duty and commitment given to the benefit of others, as well as towards the building and maintaining of the community.[38] A

[38] Rotundo draws upon journals and sources such as the writings of minister William Bentley to effectively paint a portrait of an early American man, tempered by his Puritan faith, who looked towards the betterment of the family and the community rather than just himself. Rotundo also cites Arthur Cole's "The Tempo of Mercantile Life in Colonial America" to demonstrate how early eighteenth century businessmen spent more time in the community and with their family

relentless pursuit of wealth, as described by Tocqueville, or the narcissistic individualism of the last half-century seemed to not yet be a part of masculine identity. These traits, it could be argued, did not begin to develop until the start of the 19th century as a direct reaction to the market-driven life of the United States. In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel describes the birth of the Self-Made Man during the antebellum period. This individual was born from the emerging capitalist market and influenced by classical liberal thinking drawn from Hobbes and Locke, as well as more contemporary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson.

This new man, however, was riddled with contradictions from the beginning. As Kimmel explains, the "emerging capitalist market in the early nineteenth century both freed individual men and destabilized them" (17). As the market began to blossom in this new nation, it offered limitless opportunity while instilling relentless pressure. Good of the community was replaced with individualistic opportunism. To succeed as one of these new men was to prove the success of the nation, and to fail was to fail as an American; "the Self-Made Man embodied economic autonomy…The flipside of this economic autonomy," Kimmel explains, "is anxiety, restlessness, loneliness" (17). For the men of this new nation, manhood became indelibly tied with the idea of success—individual, hard-won success—over other men. Central to understanding the modern notions of masculinity within this country is to recognize its competitive spirit. As Kimmel states of this new "man's world:" "If manhood could be proved, it had to be proved in the eyes of other men" (19). Any subsequent argument, then, that the American man is pressured or harried by a multitude of external pressures—from women, blacks, gays, immigrants—has to be balanced with the idea that this country came into its own as a man's world; a world where men put their

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rather than investing all their time in their businesses as would be characteristic in just a short period (167).

identity, their success, and their future on the line to beat other men. This puts into stark relief the idea of subordinate masculinities carrying on a vicious struggle that merely reifies those at the top; America, it would seem, is and always has been a thriving example of the workings of hegemonic masculinity.

The restlessness that Tocqueville witnessed in American men was derived from the pressure to succeed in the commercial marketplace. "If social order, permanence, could no longer be taken for granted and a man could rise as high as he aspired, then his sense of himself as a man was in constant need of demonstration. Everything became a test—his relationship to work, to women, to nature, and to other men" (Kimmel *Manhood* 30).[39] This need to prove himself to other men changed the man's relationship with women; in order for a man to compete in this marketplace meant he had to be away from home a great deal, constantly putting in more hours to succeed. This meant that the running of the house had to be turned over to the woman. Joe Dubbert explains, in his 1979 study of transitioning masculinity, *A Man's Place*, that men "came home too weary and worn to devote much time and interest to family or friends. The tasks of rearing the children therefore fell to females" (307). This had drastic ramifications within society. Fears of the feminizing effect on children—a worry that in part led to the creation of the

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[39] Kimmel goes on to state that "[s]ociety was chock-full of equals—which is another way of saying it was full of *competitors*" (30). A major point that has to be acknowledged is that he, and Tocqueville as well, are only speaking about white Anglo-Saxons at this point. Immigrants, Catholics, blacks, and other non-white men were excluded from the rat race as well as the spoils of success. The Introduction to this study outlined how many of these groups were eventually allowed to participate in American society later in the twentieth century, but it is important to emphasize the exclusionary methods of early America. However, this did not mean that other excluded male groups did not participate or did not value themselves in the same way that other American men; a restless drive to succeed above others seems to be a common thread throughout American masculine history.

Boy Scouts of America[40] to increase the presence of men in the lives of male children—and worries of the growing emancipation of women began to have a large effect on the men of the country. This fear would only grow as the approach to the new century saw the struggle for women's suffrage increase in intensity. If women gaining traction in the running of the household had been an encroachment, then women involved in running the country was sheer usurpation. Women's "role was beginning to transcend its accustomed domain and threaten not just the masculine establishment but the whole of masculine identity" (310). Even early in America's identity the embedded stereotypes that governed gender roles were challenged, but never overturned. Changes to gender roles—such as in suffrage—were met with hostility, anxiety, and usually nostalgia for a bygone era.

While Andrew Jackson had done a great deal to define the identity of the Self-Made Man in the early antebellum era,[41] the American man at the dawn of the twentieth century was also able to look to a president to define masculinity in the changing times. Although a scrawny individual when he began his political career, Teddy Roosevelt had redefined his image, going

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[40] The Boy Scouts stem from a similar scouting movement in England and were formed in this country out of the YMCA. Its main mission had to do with patriotism, spirituality, and masculinity.

[41] For a work that deftly traces the importance of Andrew Jackson on masculine self-conception, see David G. Pugh's *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America*. He lays out an effective case for how "Jackson became the prototype of the American male" (14), drawing upon a range of sources such as Jackson's endorsement by author James Fenimore Cooper—an author who did a great deal to define masculinity within the American frontier—in his *Notions of the Americans*. Interesting, too, is the rock musical, *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, which premiered on Broadway in 2010, that humorously examines the former president, his connection with the frontier, and his status as a rebel; it is Andrew Jackson as an emo rock star.

Pugh also draws a connection between Rip Van Winkle and masculinity in the early nineteenth century. He constructs a link from Winkle to other protagonists who retreated to nature (or away from responsibility) to find themselves, from Natty Bumppo and Daniel Boone, or Huck Finn, I would add. The archetypal character these heroes form is one built on restlessness, anxiety, and an immaturity in regards to their responsibilities.

West to hunt and prove his manhood on the American frontier before returning to Washington a new man. As Dubbert describes him,

> Roosevelt became a national hero to millions who saw in him a savior delivering a once free and natural state from the ravages of an artificial economic and social hierarchy…Roosevelt was above the…sentimental proclamation of aggrieved women and above boastful exploitative paternalism. Roosevelt was simply too rugged, too courageous, too manly to be so negatively affected…He was successfully rescuing the American male from a threat of too much femininity (313, 316).

Through Roosevelt's rugged heroism, the white American man—ravaged by the effects of the Civil War and the threat from the recently freed slaves, turmoil through multiple economic downturns, pressure to succeed in the American Dream, and by the increasing emancipation of women—saw in Roosevelt a masculine model he could emulate to succeed.[42]

Kimmel explains how early American men, faced with the ever-perilous marketplace and a domestic life that was becoming more and more feminized, had "struggled to build themselves into powerful, impervious machines…And they ran away to the frontier, to the West, to start over, to make their fortunes, and thus to remake themselves" (30).[43] Unfortunately, the model by

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[42] In "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," Michael Kimmel goes into detail about many of these pressures that the American men felt, from rapid industrialization in the post-Civil War era to the New Woman that threatened the family. He states how the "Wall Street crash [of 1873] triggered a series of bankruptcies, bank failures, and foreclosures that shook the nation's economic foundations" (139). Of note, as Scott Sandage in *Born Losers* observes, the image of the man committing suicide by jumping out of his New York high-rise was not born from the Great Depression, but emerged during the economic crashes of the nineteenth century: "American men started jumping out of windows long before the Great Crash. A hundred years earlier, in 1829, failed Bostonians reportedly 'preferred death, by their own hands, to a life of misery and disgrace'" (6).

[43] It is of little consequence that this escape was just as often an imagined escape as a physical one. Clearly, not every male in American sought the West, but the allure of the untamed frontier

which Roosevelt had proved his mettle—that American frontier—was becoming no longer dependable. In the late nineteenth century, the limitless expanse of the American West was largely closing. In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner, writing of the significance of the West on the American psyche, stated, "Up to our own day, American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West…Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American…a steady growth of independence on American lines" (199, 201). Importantly, Turner brings up that the "Indian frontier [w]as a consolidating agent in our history" (210), uniting all American men against the common threat of the native American.[44] Simply by moving West, settling land, and possibly fighting Indians, the American male had been proving his manhood and participating in the growth of the nation. However, the main purpose of Turner's publication was to not only note the significance of the West, but to also note its passing: "the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history" (227).[45] In this new age, there were no new lands and, thus, no need for rugged explorers.

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and the opportunity it offered men in the form of solace and strength was great during this period. It is no coincidence that it was during this time that America saw the birth of the modern Western, in the novel *The Virginian*, by Teddy Roosevelt's own friend Owen Wister. This novel was published to great acclaim for the men of the country looking for escape. It is, of course, interesting that the TV series *The Virginian*, was one of television's longest-running series and aired during the tumultuous time period between 1961 to 1971.

[44] In the Introduction to this study, there was a similar claim made in the early twentieth century with the creation of the white middle class that largely drew its identification from a fear of the black population.
It is important to the construction of American masculinity that Andrew Jackson oversaw one of the first mass extinctions/deportations of the American Indian in the young country.

[45] It is ironic, of course, that the end of the nineteenth century saw both the closure of the frontier and the birth of the modern notion of the West and the cowboy who would occupy that realm. If American men couldn't actually prove themselves on the frontier they would create a nostalgic past that had been taken from them, whether that was true or not.

To begin her study on *Manliness & Civilization*—a work on white masculinity at the turn of the century—Gail Bederman highlights the importance of the boxer Jack Johnson and the fear and rage he instilled in the white community.[46] She highlights this as a growing concern amongst white men: "During the decades around the turn of the century, Americans were obsessed with the connection between manhood and racial dominance" (4). American men, hampered by the lack of proving ground, beset by economic troubles, hemmed in by women, were now facing the seeming impudence of another race challenging their supremacy. Bederman recounts how the passions against Johnson led many to implore the previously undefeated white heavyweight, James Jeffries, out of retirement to challenge.[47] When Johnson roundly defeated Jeffries during what was called the "fight of the century" on the Fourth of July, race riots broke out all across America. As Bederman explains,

> many white men panicked when the black champion thrashed the white. By annihilating Jeffries so completely, Johnson implicitly challenged the ways hegemonic discourses of civilization built powerful manhood out of race. Johnson's victory suggested that the heirs of Shakespeare were not the manly, powerful beings they had thought…Many white men could not bear this challenge to their manhood (42).

While new methods were simply replaced to justify white men's supremacy—the popularity of eugenics was then on the rise in the early decades of the twentieth century—formerly unchallenged white male supremacy was clearly being challenged.

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[46] Howard Sackler later dramatized this in the 1967 Broadway hit, *The Great White Hope*.
[47] This event was fascinatingly repeated in 1973 when former tennis champion Bobby Riggs challenged reigning female tennis champion Billie Jean King in 1973. Her defeat of Riggs could also spell extra significance to masculine uncertainty, occurring as that bout did during the height of masculine reaction to the feminist movement. Thus, the white male challenges to both Johnson and King mirror each other in their significance to the psyche of the white American male.

While Kimmel does note that a respite in masculine uncertainty was seen with the advent of World War I and the booming economy that followed, the position of the white American male just after the turn of the century—faced with all these new changes—was perceived as in crisis. As he states, "The grandsons of those antebellum Self-Made Men now found themselves trapped…The very strategies they had used to resolve the earlier identity crisis now led them to scramble relentlessly to grasp that elusive ideal" (16).[48] For Scott Sandage, in *Born Losers*, there was no better figure to encapsulate this American masculine sentiment than Willy Loman. While Willy's father and older brother had conquered the frontier—or at least given themselves over to its mystique and allure—Willy, at the end of his life, had proved very little as far as masculine ideals went, "scrambl[ing] relentlessly" to no avail. The sickness with which Willy suffered was blindly following the elusive American Dream, a problem which has characterized American identity almost since its inception.

American restlessness has, unfortunately, never gone away. Writing of this same anxiety-ridden future-mindedness, journalist David Brooks said of American life in 2004: "Americans move around more than any other people on earth…[they] cram their hours and minutes with activity" (6, 84). In his 2004 work, *On Paradise Drive,* Brooks examines the variety of upper middle class life through a metaphor of driving around the country. What he sees is that the "problems we're most likely to observe during our drive through suburbia are withdrawal, segmentation, and disunion" (74). The sobering reality is not that people are unhappy in the face of the country's overall material success and freedom, but that these symptoms are neither new

[48] As I noted in the Introduction, the turn-of-the-century also brought with it a great deal of anxiety about the rising tide of immigrants pouring into the country.

nor some consequence to the current atmosphere. As Brooks states, "this tendency is not breaking up America; it *is* America" (74).

Brooks charts what could be identified as a dual identity for Americans, from the country's founding to its present—a duality that combines its progressive, capitalist spirit with its religious and conservative principles.[49] These defining values of America, Brooks seems to suggest, are an uneasy pairing that breeds anxiety and restlessness.[50] As he states of early American life,

> Americans feared their own material success and the corruptions it might breed. The country was identified from the first as blessed with plenty and hungry for more. Yet its moral leaders have always regarded wealth and success as a potential poison that shrivels the soul and eventually devours itself. And so has arisen the tension that propels American culture: America hungers for success, and manifestly is a success, and at the same time suspects that worldly success will be its undoing (103).

Brooks cites many works over the past half century, from William Whyte's *The Organization Man* to Christopher Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* to present-day studies, that all purport America's demise because of some failing, moral or otherwise. Despite its overall successes over the past half-century, America, Brooks surmises, "goes through a wave of declinism about every seven to ten years…a mountain of cultural pessimism attesting to the hollowness of contemporary life" (106). By this argument, it seems that America has a natural, almost innate

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[49] This would reinforce Benjamin McArthur's ideas about why the stage version of "Rip Van Winkle" was so popular. It tells the story of the forward progress of the country while also seeming to lament that growth and wish for more innocent times.

[50] Scott Sandage makes a similar argument stating how Whitman's "Song of Myself is the anthem of an always ambitious but always anxious nation" (259).

tendency to rail against its success. It is as if America is both Agamemnon and Cassandra at the same time, optimistically praising its success while gloomily predicting its fall.[51]

It could be argued that this tendency to praise and disdain America stems from the too-vaulted position in which the country holds itself. In *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter claimed, "The United States was the only country in the world that began with perfection and aspired to progress" (36). This leads Brooks, via a comparison to Gatsby's green light that constantly beckons—an allusion, as I mentioned in the first chapter, that C.W. Bigsby consistently applied to Willy Loman—that "[m]aybe America is in fact enflamed and ennobled not by a creation myth but by a fruition myth" (125). In other words, "the tremendous strain of anxiety [that] runs through U.S. history" might just be from the feeling that "we are failing to live up to our ideals and mission, that if we Americans fail, then that will be the most terrible failure in human history" (121). This pressure mirrors the pressure of the Self-Made Man, the pressure of Willy Loman, and the pressure largely felt today. As is true in *Death of a Salesman* with Willy and his sons, this restless feeling is handed down as part of the culture in which men live: "American children, raised in an atmosphere of hope, are also raised with the inevitable flip side of hope, anxiety" (137). The declinism that Brooks speaks of testifies to insecurity about the American man's ability to succeed in a changing world. This constant anxiety instills a defining sense of hollowness at the heart of the American man.

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[51] In anecdotal fashion, Brooks plays fun with America's seemingly perennial strain of self-effacement:

> America is a country that goes every year to the doctor and every year is told that it has contracted some fatal disease—whether it is conformity, narcissism, godlessness, or civic disengagement—and a year later, the patient comes back with cheeks still red and muscles still powerful. The diagnosis is just as grim, and the patient is just as healthy (113).

When this idea is applied to the American man, it has telling consequences for the study of gender as will be seen later in this chapter.

While Brooks notes that in today's society "few believe that Americans are God's new chosen people…Americans are different enough from other peoples to consider themselves an exceptional nation…they have inherited a certain style of idealism, a faith, and fulfilling and chiliastic creed" (119). This was nowhere better demonstrated and also challenged than right at the start of the twenty-first century. While William Chafe states of the immediate aftermath of 9/11, "Never before had America, collectively, experienced this kind of coming together… Americans discovered a feeling of family and support across social, ethnic, economic, and international lines that had not been seen or experienced since World War II" (537, 538).[52] But just eight years later, journalist and former NPR director, Dick Meyer wrote that the "attention we lavished on *American Idol*, Lindsay Lohan, and Anna Nicole Smith proved we could be every bit as superficial as we were before some 2,700 Americans were murdered in a single day" (5); 9/11 reduced to mere headlines of the decade, not epochal change.[53] Other events characterize this twenty-first century start as troublesome for American identity. On the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Chafe writes that it "was more than simply a tragedy within a

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[52] There is something possibly very impactful concerning masculine identity around the event of 9/11. The first is, of course, the notion that the country stood helpless against the terrorist attack with no way to combat that enemy. The second were possible feelings of inadequacy. These, I would argue, stem from the masculine displays of the heroes on Flight 93 and the rescue workers charging into the towers. They could also stem from the handling of those who died during the attacks. The *New York Times* memorialized those who died by writing obituaries in their pages that detailed the family life and heroism of these Americans. As Americans read these lionizing testimonies there is no doubt their own lives appeared to fall short of the seeming perfection of those who had died and could have impacted them emotionally.

[53] Contextualizing and making 9/11 into a history that Americans can understand is an ongoing process to this day. It is not, it would seem, an easily categorized event. It can stand both as a new era in America or as a deeply affecting hiccup in our American consciousness, significant but not necessarily defining. The decade since 9/11 has seen an arc from unabashed patriotism to more critical analyses, mirrored in the transition of popular television shows *24* to *Homeland*, the former being a near celebration of America's might and ability to take down terrorism and the latter a much more critical take on America's domestic and foreign policy.

vacuum. Instead, it reflected a systematic disintegration of institutional confidence" (563).[54] Further, journalist Thomas Friedman's work *The World is Flat*, speaks of the interconnectedness of the world through the rise of technology, but it also hints at the struggles facing American workers in the era of outsourcing and global economics. With America's image and prestige taking a nosedive in foreign as well as domestic policy, political scientist David Mason felt compelled to call an end to the era prescribed by Henry Luce: "in the past decade, and particularly since September 11…the influence of U.S. politics, economics, and culture is seen as a threat to peace, harmony, and national identity…The American Century has clearly come to an end" (1, 2). For those Americans still saddled with the restless anxiety to succeed and prove themselves, how do they overcome this statement? It is as if Frederick Jackson Turner has again closed the American Frontier. The twentieth century man had to live after the closing of his masculine proving ground and now, twenty-first century man must live after America's glory days.[55] It would seem that the American man is always in decline—strong, but wounded, uncertain of his future, like *Shane*, riding into the setting sun.

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[54] Martin Halliwell is quick to point out that the problems of the first decade of the new century were not solely due to poor leadership by George W. Bush. The infrastructure of the country had been in decline from both the policies of Reagan and Clinton as deregulation and a fixation on wealth allowed the country to ignore foreign threat and widen the gap between the rich and the poor. In a prescient example, Halliwell notes how Bruce Springsteen's song from 2001, "My City of Ruins," was evoked to capture the imagery of New York and the destruction at the World Trade Center site, when, in actuality, Springsteen had written the song in 2000 about his hometown Asbury Park, NJ and its deteriorating and forgotten state. The problems were not new; they merely highlighted the serious issues at the heart of our society. Of course, it is also important to not downplay the sheer force and devastation of Katrina carried. It clearly wrought more devastation than most had expected.

[55] Continuing the notion of the closed frontier and its ever-present enemy, the Indian: in the modern world, there was no discernible enemy. As Chafe relates, "There was no visible enemy to contain, only an ideology sustained by religious fervor" (535). During the Cold War, masculinity had an enemy to stand against and a model, à la James Bond, towards which to aspire. In this new age, with a shadow enemy, masculinity had no one to prove itself against.

The end of that famous 1953 cowboy film shows the protagonist riding into the setting sun with the audience unsure if he is simply moving on or riding to his death. This image, I would argue, speaks volumes about the representation of the American man. He is, at once, strong and the provider of justice and strength, but also wounded, consistently perceived as in crisis. As this study demonstrated, each era brought with it new conceptions of manhood and new models to follow as well as new worries that its standing might be in peril. But what happens when Shane continues to ride out into the sunset? What if he doesn't come back? This is exactly where Tracy Letts's drama, *August: Osage County*, begins. While Beverly Weston begins the play, the dramatic hook comes through his disappearance and the fallout from the absence of the patriarch. What becomes obvious in the rhetoric employed throughout the entire play is that whenever Letts's characters talk about the patriarch, the home, or the state of things, they could just as easily be talking about the country itself.[56] Letts's play is, in effect, a reflection on the state of America in the twenty-first century, with telling gender implications.

The play is mostly a black comedy with Letts seeming to intentionally throw every thing possible at an audience: drugs, adultery, alcohol, dysfunction, multi-generational discord, forgotten loves, pedophilia, death, and incest. Despite its over-the-top construction, the explosive nature of this comedic romp works very well in performance, especially with such colorful phrases as, "She's the Indian who lives in my attic" and "Eat your fish, bitch." Mostly, critics

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[56] I would argue that Letts shares this tendency with Tony Kushner whose characters in his *Angels in America* function as stand-ins for the country itself as much as they stand for fleshed-out individuals. Another noticeable commonality with Kushner occurs when Karen states, describing her flawed way of looking at life in the past: "How had I screwed it up, where'd I go wrong, and before you know it you can't move forward, you're just suspended there, you can't move forward because you can't stop thinking backward" (59-60). This sounds like a direct quote from Walter Benjamin's description of Klee's Angel of History, a reference point that many scholars have added to interpretations of Kushner's backward-looking angels in *Angels in America*.

loved it or hated it, based on what they were expecting. Charles Isherwood, reviewing the original Chicago premiere said that it didn't "possess[] the penetrating truth or the revelatory originality of a fully achieved work of art," but he still enjoyed it immensely. In spite of what he saw as a painfully long first act, Terry Teachout of the *Wall Street Journal* called it "a glittering piece of black comedy." Peter Marks admits to having higher expectations, but found it "to be a disappointingly hollow experience… worn down by the sheer volume of revelation, and ultimately, by the ordinariness of what's revealed." What's truly revealing about critics' reactions is that so many carried the expectation that it was supposed to be groundbreaking and revelatory. What was this based on—audience expectation or the scope of Letts's analysis? Either way, the play reaches for some type of American statement that either came across in its humor or, for some, fell short.

One of the biggest criticisms seems to be the unoriginality of its characters: "monstrous moms, damaged daughters, sleazeball boyfriends, snide teenagers – are all out of the Guide to Standardized Dysfunctional Stage Types" (Marks). While this criticism is apt, it is perhaps more to the point that Letts was not trying to reinvent the wheel here, but merely give it another spin. Most New York audiences would be familiar with the dysfunction of Williams, Albee, Shepard and would, thus, be receiving this play in a familiar vein. However, Letts does not let it rest as just a "gothic family saga" (Isherwood "Mama"). He inverts the power structure and injects a great deal of commentary on America.

While the setting and some of the context of the play were autobiographical—Letts's family lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma and his father[57] was a college professor and his mother was a

[57] In an odd connection with the father-son dynamic that this study has seemingly revolved around, there is the fact that Letts's father who played Beverly Weston in its premieres, sadly

best-selling writer, with Beverly then functioning as a possible conflation of the two—Letts has constructed a play that could speak as much to America as it does to any specific family. The play is set in Pawhuska, which when located on a map appears to be almost in the center of the country—surely a deliberate decision in a play that tackles issues of American identity, the frontier, and Native Americans. The house, which seems to be its own character in the play, shuttered and blind to the outside world, taking on aspects both of claustrophobia and expanse as the family members seem to be isolated in its depth, as well as confined too tight, is characterized as "*More than a century old*" and built by Irish homesteaders. The notes also indicate, "*Additions, and repairs have essentially modernized the house until 1972 or so, when all structural care ceased*" (9). It was built during the closing of the frontier, when the West, or in this play, the Plains, were being settled and domesticated. The time of decline, an important theme that I will return to below, is just after the end of the tumultuous 1960s and at the outset of the institutional and national malaise over Watergate, Vietnam, and the economic decline that characterized the 1970s.

The audiences of *August: Osage County* are introduced to a household of dysfunction—"so dysfunctional that it's a wonder they're not all dead" (Teachout)—with long-dormant secrets that have rotted the family inside out. The windows are covered up, making the differentiation between night and day impossible; the air-conditioning is off, despite the heat in an Oklahoma summer; and the inhabitants are more aggressive counterparts to O'Neill's James and Mary Tyrone, each with their respective drug of choice, alcohol and pills.[58] The Prologue begins with

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died before the play won much of its recognition, frustrating Tracy to a great degree, neatly underlies the masculine connection between the father and son.

[58] Interestingly enough, the two plays, separated by fifty years, both won the Pulitzer and Tony and in a move that reverses the gender hierarchy, the former won Tony for Best Actor while the

Beverly Weston supposedly interviewing the character of Johnna, the Native American whom Beverly wants to hire as a caregiver for his wife, Violet. Instead of actually interviewing with her, Beverly waxes on about life, poetry, and the problems that characterize his life and marriage. This introductory scene functions almost as an example of some type of reverse colonization as the Native American character Johnna is brought in to both be subjected to the rules of the house, while also being put in charge. In her pill-induced fever, Violet tells Johnna, "You're the house now" (15) and Beverly admonishes, "If you're going to live here, I want you to live here. You understand?" (15). He makes it clear that she is not to interfere—the substance abuse will continue, Violet's cancer will be ignored, and the shuttering of the windows will persist. Beverly seems to be inculcating Johnna within this alternate reality as if it will replace her old one. The only agency that Johnna is allowed is that she is free to read Beverly's books, beginning with T.S. Eliot and his "The Hollow Men."[59] Johnna, it seems, has simply been recruited as a witness to some curious version of end times.

The character of Johnna is a quite problematic character even though she holds great thematic significance. She is a Native American in the heart of the country,[60] appointed to run the household of this dysfunctional American family, and she presides over its great failure. In another added significance, she has rejected the naturalization habits of her family and reverted

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latter carried the Tony for Best Actress. In his review of *August: Osage County*, Charles Isherwood ("Matriarch") spends a great deal of time comparing Violet to her matriarchal forebears in Mary Tyrone, Amanda Wingfield, and Albee's Martha. However, Isherwood, states that "for unrestrained malice and unstoppable powers of emotional destruction, I am tempted to suggest that Violet puts all the rest in the shade." In addition to carrying heavy similarity with *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the play is also indebted to other American classics, most notably *Desire Under the Elms*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and *Buried Child*.

[59] This seems highly reminiscent of British colonial habit to give Shakespeare as required reading to its subjects.

[60] Barbara's running gag on "the Plains" as if it were a state of mind like "the Blues" is a little forced, but most likely points to Letts's idea that America is a depressed wasteland at the core.

her name back to the original Cheyenne. If we are to view the Weston family as a stand-in for America, then Johnna represents the past—America's original owners—coming to reclaim the country or at least supervise the demise of the great American experiment. As Peter Marks of the *Washington Post* states, Johnna is a reminder "of the moral strength and enduring spirituality of the people who had civilized Oklahoma long before all these neurotic Europeans moved in." Serving as a "benign, ethereal counterweight" (Marks), Johnna's mostly passive and demure presence onstage makes her more of a shadowy ambiguous character in performance. Critics alternated between her having the "only unrewarding role in the play" (Isherwood "Matriarch) to functioning as a "constant reminder that the Westons don't exactly have a monopoly on suffering. The nation is built on it" (Oxman). Whether or not her thematic importance is realized in performance is one thing, but given the mention of the house being built by Irish settlers, Johnna's attachment to her ancestral line, and her sanity throughout the play, it becomes clear that Letts was hinting towards a different, prelapsarian America.

Throughout the course of the play, Letts awards stage time to each character to unload their baggage, spewing psychoses, hang-ups, and emotional as well as physical trauma all over the stage. Almost all reveal a certain aspect of America. Bill, in one of his many defenses against his estranged wife Barbara, declaims, "I've copped to being a narcissist. We're the products of a narcissistic generation" (47), echoing Christopher Lasch's indictment. Karen states, "now what I think about is *now*. I live *now*. My focus, my life, my world is *now*. I don't care about the past anymore" (60). Karen's fiancé reveals that he is involved in mercenary work in the Middle East—a telling critique of American foreign policy in the age of Bush. Barbara asserts, "I'm sick of being fair! I've seen where being fair gets me! I'm sick of the whole notion of the enduring female" (76). Violet unweaves two tales of devastation and violence from her parents that recalls

the roving family of Willy Loman's early life, tales that Barbara attributes to the Greatest Generation. Even the house is allowed to take on some American quality when Violet states, "You know this house is falling apart, something about the basement or the sump pump or the foundation" (25). It is, however, Beverly, through a speech of Barbara's, who reveals the most curious connection to the state of America. The quote, already given in part in the Introduction, bears repeating here:

> 'You know, this country was always pretty much a whorehouse, but at least it used to have some promise. Now it's just a shithole.' And I think now maybe he was talking about something else, something more specific, something more personal to him…this house? This family? His marriage? Himself? I don't know. But there was something sad in his voice—or no, not sad, he always sounded sad—something more hopeless than that. As if it had already disappeared. As if it was too late. As if it was already over. And no one saw it go. This country, this experiment, America, this hubris: what a lament, if no one saw it go (123-24).

Many of the characters in the play seem to take on aspects of the country, whereas Beverly here allows America to take on the aspect of his marriage, family, and self—signifying a great failing.

If we position Beverly Weston as the patriarchal center of this play—a character whose de facto theme is evidenced by his affinity for the poem "The Hollow Men"—then we can see that center as hollow. In his legitimate family, there are no masculine heirs, oddly mirrored in the family of Sheriff Gilbeau who also has three daughters. Next in line, Beverly's brother-in-law, Uncle Charlie is oblivious to the idea of patriarchy, as seen in this exchange at the dinner table:

> Barbara: Uncle Charlie should say grace. He's the patriarch around here now.
>
> Charlie: I am? Oh, I guess I am.

Violet: By default (84).

Beverly's illegitimate son, Little Charlie is then the only hope for a masculine line. However, this inept boy-child is stained by the family secret of his parentage, his incestuous relationship with Ivy, and the constant verbal abuse he receives from his mother. He exists merely as a figure of shame and incompetence. Thus, Little Charlie—the stand-in for the corrupt male line—effectively represents the diminishment of masculine authority—leaving the power and control to the females of the family.[61] According to his age, he was born in 1970, at the end of the revolutionary 1960s, at the same time as the house—again, America is implicit here—began to fall into disrepair.[62]

It would seem that the patriarchal line of the Weston family is headed for non-existence. There is not only a lack of masculine heirs to perpetuate the family line, but the men in this play are displayed as almost completely inept. Beverly is characterized as a one-trick pony poetry winner who cared little for his children and wife and merely expressed a desire to drink himself into oblivion. Uncle Charlie has one moment of glory when he stands up to Mattie Fae and plenty of sympathetic moments between his family and, in particular, his son, but these moments do not destine him to be the head of the family. His son, Little Charlie, in addition to being a

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[61] This fixation on a shortcoming in masculine authority makes Letts's drama particularly poignant as the topic of masculine malaise and emasculation is more popular than ever. Journalist Guy Garcia tells us this in *Decline of Men,* professor Harvey Mansfield decries a loss of confidence among men in *Manliness*, Herb Goldberg's 1976 *Hazards of Being Male* about health issues central to men found a new audience in its 2009 reissue,[61] history professor Gary Cross asks in *Men to Boys*, "where have all the men gone?" and then blames a culture that celebrates immaturity. As the second chapter of this study revealed, however, a concern about boys not growing up into manhood as they are supposed to was a concern back in the 1950s. This then causes the 2000s concern to be either a repeat of that concern or an extension of it.

[62] The late 1960s and early 1970s were also great times of activism and protest, but in 2007 with American discontent still high and the country embroiled in two unwanted wars, the activism and protest is greatly diminished. Little Charlie possibly resembles this inaction and listlessness as opposed to the earlier time.

secretive product of adultery has virtually flunked out of life. Letts makes him pitiable, but not necessarily sympathetic. His mother loathes him and an audience can't help but see him as a loser—no ambition, no drive, a thirty-year-old couch potato.[63] Steve is a pedophiliac mercenary and Sheriff Gilbeau seems like a shrinking violet next to the power of Barbara. Finally, the one rational masculine character that can stand up for himself is Bill. However, it is hard for an audience to relate too much to him, as we are never allowed to forget about his affair with a young student that is ending his marriage. We agree wholeheartedly when Karen states — unwittingly speaking about the present very aptly—"this parade of men fails to live up to your expectations" (59).

Ultimately, this leaves the power and authority in the hands of the female characters.[64] So much so that this play could be argued to be an inversion of the gender stereotypes that characterize this country. This study deliberately acknowledged the large acceptance of gender stereotypes that dominate the majority of American's understanding of gender roles. These stereotypes carry assumptions of male strength, leadership, and control of his house as contrasted

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[63] In this respect, Little Charlie is an exact replica of the boy-child described by Gary Cross in *Men to Boys*. He reflects this popular masculine type seen in the high-grossing films of Judd Apatow, whose male characters all suffer from an inability to grow up and be engaged in the world as adult men. Cross accuses the country as celebrating immaturity to a fault, leaving a vacuous absence of mature, responsible men.

[64] This is reinforced in a cultural sense by the gender shift in the economy as well. In his 2010 editorial piece, "The Lean Years," David Brooks writes, "Financial crises stink. In their wake, public debt explodes. Nations default. Economic growth falters. Taxes rise. Unemployment lingers…The biggest impact is on men." He demonstrates that many principal places of employment for men, manufacturing, for instance, were especially hard-hit. This has led, in his estimation, to a lop-sided degree of layoffs with men disproportionately taking a hit. The disparity is beginning to be felt. As he goes on, "We are either at or about to reach a historical marker: for the first time there will be more women in the work force than men." The main reason this disparity in employment, Brooks contends, is men's inability to adapt to "the shifting demands of the service economy." Findings from the Family and Work Institute's 2011 study, "The New Male Mystique," largely affirm not only this shift, but a discontent among men about their changing roles as workers and fathers/husbands.

to feminine acquiescence and loyal devotion to the family. In this play, the descriptions of the masculine now characterize the female characters in the play, while the feminine descriptors could be more aptly applied to the men.[65] The only character that adopts a conventional stereotypical gender role is the problematic Johnna, who patiently takes care of the house and its volatile occupants.

So potent is the power of the female in this play that the male characters have all found ways to escape: Beverly anesthetized himself with alcohol for years before committing suicide, Bill has sought the affections of a much younger woman, Charlie has acquiesced into near silence, and Little Charlie's development has left him languishing in a near-adolescent state. If we take the Westons and their house as a stand-in for America, then the picture Letts has painted of masculinity is dire, but reflective of many of the contemporary sociological concerns about a supposed crisis in masculinity.

I purposefully began this chapter by looking back at the history of men in America. What we see is that perennial notions of crisis appear, to use Kimmel's words, when specific "historical and social changes create the conditions for gender crises…when structural changes transform the institutions of personal life such as marriage and family" ("Contemporary" 123). These crises—like Brooks's notion of declinism—appear almost cyclically throughout America's history. In *Manhood in America,* Kimmel asserts that current notions of crisis are not really new: "Just as in the past, the turn of the twenty-first century found American men increasingly anxious: men feel their ability to prove manhood threatened" (216). As in the past,

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[65] A telling instance of this is Uncle Charlie and Little Charles's exchange on the front porch before the dinner where Uncle Charlie gives him a pep talk and even grooms him with his comb. It is a nurturing and encouraging moment, characteristics that are not present with Mattie Fae or Violet.

that anxiety turns into angst or anger against women and other minorities, a perception of being victimized, and dour predictions for the future. These symptoms of losing power and feeling diminished sound like the same case as the "men as victims"-trope that sustains hegemonic masculinity while painting men as abject and lost.

Christopher Forth believes that this is done for advantageous reasons. As he states in *Masculinity in the Modern West*: "others have seen in the rhetoric of crisis a performative strategy seeking to bring about the very disruption being described…as a reactionary attempt to shore up male privileges during periods when such authority is challenged" (3). This is the perpetuation of what Sally Robinson has called, "masculine vulnerability" (11), whereby men are seen as victims or as fragile, which removes the idea of men as aggressors or as in charge. Viewing masculinity as such requires a change of perception in how we conceive of masculinity itself. Against viewing gender as a coherent system that is destroyed or restored by a crisis, R.W. Connell suggests that it is more accurate to "speak of the crisis of a gender order as a whole, and its tendencies toward crisis" (*Masculinities* 84). In other words, the idea of masculinity is built upon the idea of crisis, either actively in one or heading towards one. The idea of crisis, of course, plays right into the reification of hegemony.[66]

The main tool in sustaining that masculine hegemony is competing subordinate masculinities. To repeat Judith Lorber, "gender dominance and its ideological justification

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[66] This was a sentiment foreseen by Tocqueville. In *Democracy in America*, he has this to say about American power structure and rule:

> Above those men arises an immense and tutelary power that alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyment and of looking after their fate…It would resemble paternal power if, like it, it had as a goal to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary it seeks only to fix them irrevocably in childhood; it likes the citizens to enjoy themselves, provided that they think only about enjoying themselves (1250).

Tocqueville had already seen that power lays not so much in dominating subordinate classes or types, but in keeping them busy and distracted from the power structure itself.

include men's subordination and denigration of other men as well as men's exploitation of women" (4). Most of the dramas in this study have relied on the idea that, to quote Anna Pochmara, "masculine identity is constructed in the process of differentiation: to be a man means not being like women, children, and homosexuals…a constant process of exclusion and rejection" (106).[67] But, in *August: Osage County*, this is not the case. The men in this drama are insignificant to the power struggle and when they do interact, it is done cordially. The power struggle in this play is not a display of competing masculinities.

What we see instead are subordinate femininities and a battle for supremacy through the female sex. The women in this play—the vitriolic matriarch, the nagging aunt, the independent daughter, the stubborn one, the flighty sister, the slutty niece, and even the patient, endearing housekeeper—are all types. The struggle that an audience witnesses is similar to the bitter and verbally abusive battles seen in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, but with a gender reversal: female characters vying for dominance, most vividly demonstrated in the struggle between Barbara and Violet. In the climactic dinner scene of the second act, as the women adopt typical masculine behavior by physically fighting each other, Violet declares, "You can't do this! This is *my* house!" To which, Barbara replies, "You don't get it, do you? I'M RUNNING THINGS NOW!" (97). This comes in the same scene where Barbara seemingly appoints Uncle Charlie as the new patriarch. Clearly, the women are asserting total dominance of the house. The next instance where the masculine is replaced occurs in the final act, when Barbara and Johnna redo the Prologue, with both characters sitting in the same place, with one of them drinking whiskey, and waxing on philosophically, the only difference being that Barbara substitutes for Beverly. Lastly,

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[67] This was especially poignant with a discussion of *Pavlo* and *Glengarry* given that most epithets hurled at other men in the competition of subordinate masculinities revolved around denigrating terms for women, children, and homosexuals.

Barbara's resolute exit at the conclusion of the play mirrors—although we don't see it staged—Beverly's departure; we can imagine he left in much the same way, leaving Violet alone to futilely declare herself the winner.

This play is not a feminist piece, even if it does give some meaty roles to female characters. There is no display of femininity or argument about female empowerment. The women in this play are beyond representations of femininity or even simply strong female characters with worthwhile goals. In fact, Violet, Barbara, and Mattie Fae are almost caricatures. The feminine does not replace the masculine. Instead, female characters battle in ways typical of masculine ones. Where *'Night Mother* or *Top Girls* can easily be read as feminist plays, *August: Osage County* feels like a masculine battle acted out by women. The play manages something odd. The system of masculine dominance is not upended by the replacement of female characters for the male ones. Instead, masculine hegemony is affirmed even with the total disappearance of the male characters. The women in the play act out the same masculine game to much of the same effects. After all, is Violet's fate at the end all that different from James Tyrone's? Both are blamed for their family's troubles and stand, mostly alone, to face those consequences.

The past half-century, a time period of almost constant cries of crisis, has witnessed many changes for both men and women, changes that have impacted culture to a great extent. As Kimmel concludes his article, "It is hardly surprising that today, in the wake of transformations of work, the closing of imperial frontier, and new gains for women" ("Contemporary" 153) we again are finding similar circumstances, results, and reactions. In another work, Kimmel states,

> For many men, resistance meant retreat to a bygone era. To some, the restorative tonic would be found in a return to earlier historic notions of masculine virtue. To others, that era could only be restored by stemming what one writer called 'the rising tide of color.'

> To that writer, it meant both the masses of immigrants flooding America's cities and the streams of blacks migrating north at the same time. But to many men, that tide that threatened to wash over American manhood and dash their hopes for self-making included other groups as well, among them women and homosexuals (*Manhood* 62).

Interestingly, that last quote was used in connection with manhood in the immediate post-Civil War period. The problems of nineteenth century men are similar to those in the present-day, even some of the same issues that engulfed the 2012 political election. While almost 150 years have passed since the end of the Civil War, the cultural landscape remains eerily similar.[68] As Pochmara states, "The peculiar construction of masculinity can be interpreted as a perpetual sense of crisis, which results from the social pressure for continuous validation of male identity…masculinity has been in 'crisis' since its emergence" (114).

The purpose of this chapter has been two-fold. The first has been to show that masculinity was and is predicated on the idea of crisis because of an instability at its core. It is man's constant inability to meet the normative standards that precipitates this crisis rhetoric. The second purpose has been to show that the instability at the masculine core is not endemic to the male sex. It is, instead, a reaction against the pressures of American ideology, specifically around the idea of the American Dream and the way that Americans conceive of happiness and security. Since contentment within America is always in the future, peace is never acquirable. Thus, we find at the heart of American identity, the instability that men claim as their own unique ailment. As more and more women enter the competitive, formerly all-male, workplace, though, they

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[68] This chapter has clearly touched on the issue of women, but in today's society the issue of homosexuals is more pressing than in earlier times as political parties have aligned themselves around the issue of gay marriage and rights for LBGT groups. Race still divides this country as potently as ever and the issue of immigration, principally from Latin America, is one of the most hotly debated topics within this country.

exhibit the same tendencies of instability that have always characterized men. Therefore, I would argue, the notion of an erupting crisis within gender is and has never been wholly accurate. Instead, anxiety and uncertainty is at the core of American identity itself. As family and gender theorist, Stephanie Coontz recently stated in a 2012 editorial in the *New York Times*, "Myth of Male Decline": "How is it, then, that men still control the most important industries…occupy most of the positions on the lists of the richest Americans, and continue to make more money than women?" While she recognizes many of the advances that women have made, as well as acknowledging that men's "patriarchal dividend"[69] has clearly been lessened over the past half century, she argues that these changes have "hardly produced matriarchy." She sees, instead, "a convergence in economic fortunes, not female ascendance." Despite the fact that the 2012 election saw more and more female congresswomen entering into the government, a growing coalition that does not include white man, and referendums supporting gay marriage and progressive immigration reform, actual evidence proving that white male privilege is diminishing will take time to demonstrate. After all, the 1970s employed much of the same crisis rhetoric as today, but there was very little change in the sustaining force of masculinity. Only time will tell if the system is being changed or if it is merely another instance of hegemonic masculinity being reified by the crisis of uncertainty among subordinate types. As this study has hoped to prove through its analysis on the popular images of masculinity, seen in film, literature, politics and, especially, the theatrical works that often quarrel with notions of manhood, there has never been a diminishment of interest in man's standing, despite the hegemony that sustains the power.

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[69] This term, what Coontz calls "lifelong affirmative action for men" is Connell's who used it to describe the given power and comfort granted to men fifty and more years ago.

VII. CONCLUSION: "THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS…"

The 1999 revival of *Salesman*, starring Brian Dennehy, faced criticism about the age of the piece: the material felt quaint and outdated. When Mike Nichols revived *Salesman* for a 2012 premiere starring Philip Seymour Hoffman, none of this criticism resurfaced. As Nichols told Charles Isherwood, "One of the things that's so exciting is that this play is so much about right now…People are counting pennies again." It suddenly seems that, given the Great Recession, the potency of *Salesman* is back. Many of the reviewers even exhibit some cultural amnesia, forgetting many of the other very pertinent revivals of this play, most notably in 1975. "Rarely has [Miller's] take on the hollow heart of the American Dream," writes Sarah Hughes, "seemed more relevant as American self-belief continues to falter amid economic fragility and continued job insecurity." One thing is certain about this revival, though, America's present circumstances weigh heavily on its reception. As Charles McNulty wrote, "The Great Recession is the unbilled star of Mike Nichols' Broadway revival…the scene-stealing specter, invisible but ever-present." Ben Brantley's preview article of the performance is even entitled, "The 99% Onstage."[1]

Like the other three Broadway revivals, as well its original premiere, this version of *Salesman* has its own unique interpretations and characterizations of Miller's text. Philip Seymour Hoffman's take on Willy is much less sympathetic, closer to George C. Scott than

[1] This term echoes the rhetoric of the Occupy movement which sought to make clear the divide between the 1% percent of the country that holds much of the wealth and the 99% of the country that languishes far beneath them.

Dustin Hoffman. Peter Marks of the *Washington Post* calls him a "bully with an intimidating temper" and Chris Jones of the *Chicago Tribune* found more likability with Howard than Willy, citing this as "a problematic element."[2] Another interesting angle of the performance was Nichols' decision to recreate the original Kazan/Mielziner design and Alex North score. In homage to the original and possibly explicitly drawing connections between some of the postwar insecurity—or even Great Depression allusions—Nichols staged this performance as close to Kazan's as possible. And, again, there is no shortage of diverse interpretations from the reviewers. What this points to is a continued fixation on failure, masculinity, and the struggle with finding success within the American Dream. What it confirms is the power structure that keeps Willy Loman a victim and keeps the American public weeping for him.

The popularity of *Salesman* is not due to how topical it is, but because of how it reflects American insecurity and anxiety. It is the same anxiety that runs through *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Pavlo Hummel*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *August: Osage County*. It is anxiety that is at the core of American identity that breaks out into a struggle between masculinities vying for dominance in a competitive culture. All five male protagonists in these plays employ suicide[3] as a tactic of escape from their everyday realities. The struggle of subordinate masculinities is played out in drama and is popular for American audiences because it is a reflection of our culture, a necessary catharsis for our lives filled with restlessness and anxiety. While the subordinate masculine types play out their perpetual struggle against each other, the system that keeps that struggle going is

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[2] Interestingly, this performance of *Salesman* witnessed the first time on Broadway that the actor playing Willy Loman did not take home the Tony for Best Actor. In addition to a potentially weaker performance from Hoffman, an argument could be made for both a possible decrease of interest in the travails of this white male patriarch.

[3] Shelly Levene's may be less of a literal suicide than a career suicide, but his arc in the play is one of self-destruction.

quietly maintained. Even the introduction of women into the same power positions, as *August: Osage County* posits, does not remove the system, merely some of the players.

Eventually, the tide may turn and hegemony might take on drastically different forms. However, works that sustain traditional notions of hegemony continue to thrive. The continued interest in this struggle is affirmed in the latest (and fourth) revival of Miller's interpretation of American restlessness. If further proof is needed of this interest, then consider the revival of *Glengarry Glen Ross* which opened in December 2012,[4] the revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in early 2013, or the film version of *August: Osage County* slotted for a 2013 release. It isn't just that these plays are excellent dramas, but that they reflect the fears that drive this country and it is that fixation on the fear that sustains the hegemony of the masculine. This is the drama that America loves to see.

[4] Despite the play being revived in a recessionary period that would seem to make the material very poignant, the show opened to mixed, and often negative reviews. Ben Brantley describes the show as paced too slow, with an overemphasis on Al Pacino as Shelly Levene, and lacking the fire of past productions; "subtext has been dragged to the surface and beached like a rusty submarine." Chris Jones of the Chicago Tribune blamed not just Pacino's eccentric acting, but by the play being "insufficiently real and specific." For Jones, the production and the actors did not seem to match current day problems or the stakes involved. Many of the reviewers, however, still pay tribute to the power and force of this enduring drama by Mamet.

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