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Militarized Desires: Consumerism in American Literature, 1939-1955

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Rachel Lou Mykkanen

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Michael Szalay, Chair
Professor Richard Godden
Professor Jonathan Alexander

2014

DEDICATION

To

my brother,
who taught me my ABC's,

my mother,
who let me read at the table,

and

my father,
who told the best stories.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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FIELD OF STUDY

Twentieth-Century American Literature

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Militarized Desires: Consumerism in American Literature, 1939-1955

By

Rachel Lou Mykkanen

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2014

Professor Michael Szalay, Chair

My dissertation investigates the American WWII homefront and its commitment both to war production and leisure consumerism. A look at literature of the period shows that rationing did not produce a straightforward repression of desires; wartime restrictions and price controls resulted instead in multiplying forms of desire, and an increase in societal and individual attention paid to consumption choices. Since the war economy rests upon production for destruction, violence irrupts throughout the novels I examine. As more women entered industry, more energy was invested into maintaining an image of the consumer as inherently female. Meanwhile, the underlying social scripts for the eventual redirection of desires toward more traditional and coherent categories were established. I argue that postwar 'reconversion' signals broader sociocultural changes rather than relatively limited industrial shifts. Wartime advertisements marketed bright futurity, promoting faith in the idea that hardship now would be transformed into peace and prosperity later, both for you and your progeny. I contend that skepticism toward such highly publicized myths emerges in tropes of childlessness or perverse children, which I examine in each of the novels here.

In my chapter on Saul Bellow's first novel *Dangling Man* (1944), I argue that his protagonist should be viewed not as an existential hero but as a lens on the homefront economy and its psychic repercussions. As Joseph's life begins to revolve around consumption and frustration, he projects blame outward with violent results. Next I turn to two authors who worked for the WPA in the 1930s and defense plants in the 1940s, before becoming hard-boiled crime fiction writers in the 1950s. Chester Himes and Jim Thompson engage directly with the war economy through their early semi-autobiographical novels, contributing essential voices of dissent in an enforced atmosphere of consensus. Yet both displace industrial violence onto the women in their lives. Finally, Norman Mailer's political allegory of the postwar period critiques the amnesia involved in maintaining an economy based on war. In 'The Postwar Tomorrow', I contend that the wartime shift toward nondurable commodities had significant ramifications for the specific forms of American consumerism appearing in subsequent decades.

INTRODUCTION

"When I look up, I see people cashing in. I don't see heaven, or saints or angels. I see people cashing in on every decent impulse and human tragedy." Joseph Heller, Catch-22.

Thanks to the work of a variety of historians, a revisionist dismantling of the WWII “good war” myth has been underway for decades. The American effort to wage a just battle bolstered by technological prowess and undergirded by societal consensus amounts to an idealized construct, where the reality remained marred by racism, sexism, injustice, and ever-growing corporatism. A more ambivalent reality existed. My project seeks to examine the role literary productions played in the discourse of the times—embedded as they were, to what extent do they themselves reflect a darker side to the good war? Although trenchant critiques have dismantled many aspects of the dominant self-congratulatory mythos of wartime, a coherent sense of the lived reality is still difficult to find; consequently, the literary turn seems appropriate. A full account of literary responses to the war provides a field too broad for the scope of this project, so I will constrain my examination to fictionalized accounts of commodities and of consumerism.

Marshalling all available resources toward a common goal, the American war machine did not merely produce physical military material, weapons and warplanes, but also produced ideological effects, a kind of war-mindedness that has had reverberating consequences for American culture, and American consumerism.¹ I am interested in considering not only how

¹ “Relations of production are first reproduced by the materiality of the processes of production and circulation. But it should not be forgotten that ideological relations are immediately present in these same processes.” Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970), 141.

commodities have shaped American consumer culture through historical developments in their incarnations, but also in tracing the ways in which literature responds to the commodity in its colonization of human desires. The 1940s saw a shift in the American economy describable as a turn to Keynesian-Fordism, or the combination of a permanent arms economy with mass consumerism. I seek to demonstrate that novelists of the period attempt to portray clearly, or to otherwise make sense of, the more unacknowledged aspects of such a system.

While accounts of the war's overall economic importance appear widely in histories of the period, fewer narratives address how the WWII years were crucial to the development of American consumer culture. Mass consumption as societal principle was concocted alongside Fordism in the 1920s to smooth out differences between the laboring masses and capital. Promises of alliance made early in the century were undercut by the consistent devaluation of the worker who was made increasingly flexible and superfluous. The 1930s saw a series of compromises regarding state control of the economy; compromise triggered vocal divergence, even as a wartime consensus seemed to form. New Deal reformers lobbied for the early expansion necessary for war mobilization, but then found themselves defanged and pushed out by the military-industry alliance that they had helped to birth. The degree of collusion between industrial and military forces in the United States was nearly unique among the Allied belligerents, but commonly seen as unavoidable. Civilian munition ministries were not feasible in the U.S. because of the lack of a higher civil service. Apart from the inevitable conflicts of interest, civilian agencies did not possess sufficient disposable personnel. Placing military buying in civilian hands, though a nice ideal, was considered impracticable in the American political economy. "Practically every other industrialized nation during World Wars I and II relied on some variation of war production council," writes economic historian Paul Koistinen.

He adds, “Without such a system, the World War II American military assume levels of power that were unusual, and unwise, in a democratic country”.² By 1942, the ties between industry and the military were sufficiently strong to resist laterally any political attempts to share or limit their power (using high-level councils, for example). The alliance between the military and industry would remain strong well into the postwar years, as encapsulated in President Eisenhower's well-known warning.³ I am interested here less in the permanent arms economy itself than in its effects on consumerism, in large part because relatively few accounts fully link the two concepts together. Critics who consider militarism and consumerism incompatible should consider the simple fact of postwar military expansion. The immediate postwar period is recognized as being a boom time for the consumer, yet simultaneously, and despite ostensible demobilization, the national defense budget far outstripped prewar levels. Of course, the postwar period demonstrated that a militarized economy is best suited to ongoing militarism, arguably, therefore, 'peacetime' lasted only until the onset of the Korean War in 1950. The postwar boom is commonly read as an expression of released consumer desires, freed from the strictures of wartime austerity; I would argue that such a model is reductive. A look at literature of the period shows that rationing did not produce a simple repression of desires, and that wartime restrictions and price controls effectively resulted instead in proliferating forms of desire, and an increase in societal and individual attention paid to consumption choices. Therefore, the historical concept of

² Paul Koistinen, *Planning War, Pursuing Peace* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 504-505.

³ In his farewell speech from the White House, President Eisenhower outlined his concerns for America's future, the most notorious admonition being that “we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.” Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Public Papers of the Presidents* (1960), 1035- 1040.

“reconversion” needs to be centrally challenged. Generally used, the term 'reconversion'⁴ refers not only to an industrial reconversion (“guns to butter,” or more concretely, aircraft plants to automotive plants) but also to an ideological shift, from a wartime mindset (including not only patriotic values like unity, but also economic values such as thrift) to a 'peacetime' mindset (requiring different consumer modes and different societal values). Literal changes in production cannot be denied, but contra traditional views which link literal demobilization of military personnel to societal demobilization, this project will argue that not only did the American economy remain militarized, but that Americans entered the 'postwar' era of mass consumption as militarized consumers.

While the war years are commonly depicted as a time of rationing and sacrifice on the American home front, they were also a time of close to full employment and consequently of regular and widely distributed wages. After Depression-era privation, even the strictures and shortages of wartime were not enough to conceal a wartime boom. Americans had money, and while increased income taxes and the buying of war bonds siphoned a portion of those wages directly into the war effort, sufficient surplus remained to allow a broad base of society to engage in consumerism. The specifics of a war economy led, therefore, to a particular form of leisure-based consumption. Statistics indicate that a relatively short supply of durable goods did not curb consumer desire; instead, new desires were created and then channeled into burgeoning outlets for nondurable goods, particularly entertainment. Live music and clubs boomed in popularity, cinemas were packed, and diverse forms of nondurable goods were purchased by wartime Americans. In *The Birth of Bebop*, Scott DeVeaux provides an historical context for the rise of

⁴ The term “reconversion” itself disseminated contemporarily from official levels, most notably in the last year of the war when the powerful Office of War Mobilization (which managed rationing, price controls, rents, profits, and civilian production levels, among other matters) was renamed the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion.

new musical forms even as “the outbreak of World War II transformed the economics of entertainment.”⁵ While the music industry seemed endangered by wartime material shortages (particularly of shellac for making records, and rubber to tour except by railroad, bands found themselves mostly confined to the larger cities. Fortunately, due to defense contracts, the cities contained large numbers of wage-earners seeking entertainment. In a world marked by destruction and uncertainty, the ephemeral achieved new value. Moreover, the limitations imposed by rationing, far from repressing consumer desires, resulted in a new hyperconsciousness in regard to consumer impulse. Production constraints effectively serve to resurrect a mass consumer culture. Where rationing and price controls increase consciousness over consumer habits, the commodity itself simultaneously appears in increasingly spectacular and spectral forms. Consumerism, far from ceasing during the war, adopted new and complex modes.

Moreover, unlike all other major combatants, Axis or Allied, the United States not only manufactured vast amounts of war material, but also saw a wartime increase in the quantity of 'nonwar' goods produced.⁶ By 1945, a full half of the world's manufacturing of all goods was done in the U.S. It follows, therefore, that the celebrated consumers began finding outlets in the revitalized economy of the war years; consequently, the 'boom' years immediately after 1945 are better understood not as a 'break', but as expressive of a continuity with consumer trends during the war years. Nonetheless, many popular cultural and economic histories of the period still tend to refer to the war years as a liminal time, a time set apart in which a caterpillar of a country became a butterfly of a global power, yet claiming that the chrysalis resembles neither creature

⁵ Scott Knowles DeVaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 68.

⁶ Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: the United States since the 1930s* (Yale University Press: September 23, 1997), 69.

substantially. While historians have drawn political lines of entailment between the war and both the New Deal of the 1930s and the subsequent Cold War period, cultural histories frequently treat the war years as a mechanical device propelling American society from the Depression to the 'postwar boom'. Such claims are particularly evident in discussions of consumerism in the 1940s. A large aspect of the 'good war' myth involves economic sacrifices—rationing, price controls, and shortages. In the popular American imagination, WWII's inspirational power derives not only from battlefield victories but from market victories: Rosie the Riveter, victory gardens, and scrap metal drives. America's role in WWII allowed the nation to submerge militaristic zeal within productive capability, a linkage of 'might' and 'technological skill' which amounted to a third industrial revolution. 'Militarism' figured as 'production' also allowed Americans to avoid considering themselves violent belligerents. Michael Sherry's study of militarization since 1930 discusses the American tendency to consider war and its causes as outside agents. Sherry argues that post-WWI Americans viewed “military vigilance and action as imperatives imposed upon them by external forces, they rarely acknowledged that their immersion in those imperatives arose also from their own values and ambitions.”⁷ Such a mindset explains how, despite war's central role in late-century American history (specifically its economic history), America does not see itself as a militaristic nation. World War II provided an opportunity for America to solidify a specific conception of itself in relation to war, one in which its virtues were straightforwardly economic in nature.

During the war years, some writers found it difficult to resist the dominant myths of the times. In 1942, Henry H. Arnold, the General of the Air Force, commissioned John Steinbeck to write a book that would encourage military enlistment. *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber*

⁷ Ibid., ix.

Team offered a nonfiction account of Steinbeck's travels to various Air Force bases to research the formation of bomber teams. Steinbeck notes that despite America's attempts to avoid war, the nation had nevertheless been thrust into a war specifically designed for its evolving personality: "If we ourselves had chosen the kind of war to be fought, we could not have found one more suitable to our national genius. For this is a war of transport, of machines, of mass production, of flexibility, and of inventiveness, and in each of these fields we have been pioneers if not actual inventors."⁸ Steinbeck here gives readers an uncomplicated account of the war economy: war and production are codetermined, or in the words of a W.P.B. poster designed by a member of the Hollywood Writer's Mobilization, "Production lines *are* battle lines!" Yet cynicism about the profits of war also appears frequently in novels addressing WWII, though often not openly until years later. In *Catch-22* (begun in 1953) Joseph Heller creates the duplicitous and murderous war profiteer Milo Minderbinder: after organizing the bombing of his own troops, Milo "was all washed up until he opened his books to the public and disclosed the tremendous profit he had made"; financial success resulted in his full recuperation.⁹ Going into WWII, the average American was skeptical concerning corporate and industrial involvement in war, having been disgusted over the war profiteering during the WWI years. The shifting attitude of America toward her corporations derives in no small part from the work of advertising, an industry experiencing an unexpected boom during the war years (to which I shall return later).

Shifting years for a moment, consider that while the immediate postwar years did see a

⁸ John Steinbeck, *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber Team* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1990), 3.

⁹ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster/Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1996), 269. While the novel's anachronisms and publishing date make it clear that Heller's primary target is the America of the 1950s, the quotation is fitting here, since the 1950s permanent arms economy was born in WWII, perhaps leading to Heller's choice of setting.

resurgence in the amount of durable commodities purchased by American consumers, we concomitantly see a decline in the number of Americans involved in the actual production of these particularly physical commodities. Many commentators have written about the class shift that took place at the time. Andrew Hoberek, building upon C. Wright Mills' description of the new middle class, describes the postwar period not as a simple boom period, but rather as one of continuous middle-class expropriation, a time when Americans shifted from small-business ownership to white-collar employment.¹⁰ The middle class found themselves proud new owners of bountiful material goods, but no longer holders of capital (more people than ever owned a car and a house in the suburbs, but were no longer entrepreneurs). I would suggest that we extend the timeline of both expropriation and consumerism back into the war years, and consider the relation of militarization to both phenomena. Material shortages struck small businesses hard due to defense contract prioritization, resulting in the fact that despite a 'booming' economy, “[m]ore than half a million small businesses of all types failed during the war years”. Soon after the United States entered the war, 17.4 percent of all defense contracts, measured by dollar volume, were held by three corporations, and ultimately more than two-thirds of the 240 billion dollars of government money devoted to the defense industry went to only 100 corporations.¹¹ Even as consumerism becomes inseparable from corporatism, so corporatism becomes inseparable from an emergent military-industrial complex.

The rise of corporate capital in the war years was effected largely by defense contracts, but we see also the return of partial Fordism, as a consumer infrastructure is erected to help

¹⁰ Andrew Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-collar Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2005).

¹¹ Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2003), 65.

support the economy in the postwar period. The militarization of the American economy influenced new forms of consumerism, specifically leisure-based consumerism. The war years in America saw the genesis of a movement from durable goods to immaterial goods emblematic of late-stage capitalism. While “reconversion” after the war did signal an increased availability of durable commodities, consumers continued the wartime trend of increasingly investing in images and lifestyles. It follows that consumerism was anything but ancillary to a general wartime ethos. During the war-driven search for consensus, we see the invention of the “American Way”: a merger of democracy and consumerism that provides a unitary and defensible national identity for which to fight.

Despite what appears to be an abundant degree of popular and scholarly interest in World War II, the question of how life was actually lived on the American homefront remains difficult to answer fully. As mentioned previously, despite the sometimes successful attempt to forge a ‘unified’ nation, many groups were excluded from or resisted full participation in the war effort. Here I attempt to take a look at wartime atmosphere through the lens of novels written during the period. All four of the primary novels I discuss here are written in the first person, and all four contain autobiographical elements. My task involves situating these works in the context of burgeoning American consumerism and its links to the war economy.

During the war, a ‘loyal’ consumer seemingly abided by the cultural mores lauded in propaganda posts: rationing, recycling, and general thrift. Yet the commercial entities often underwriting the advertising of the era held a more ambivalent relation to those values, and so did the average consumer. Rationing did not atrophy consumer demand, but rather sharpened the degree of energy spent regulating desires. As consumption became the focus of hyperconscious attention, we frequently see the displacement of unchecked desire onto the other. Often the

working class (a socioeconomic other) is typified by excessive and inappropriate consumer choices, as we will see in *Dangling Man*, a trope that echoes throughout books of the period and beyond. Within working class milieus, as portrayed in Thompson and Himes, a more complex racial and sexual othering animates the descriptions of consumption and demand.

Asked to consider the role of women on the American homefront, the average person today would probably mention the war's most iconic figure: Rosie the Riveter¹². The necessary entrance of women into the workforce, and specifically heavy industry, has been celebrated for furthering gender equality, yet the process was fraught with tension. Nearly every poster depicting women, whether in the home, the factory, or a victory garden, showed her with a shining, made-up face, rendering visible an investment in traditional femininity at the moment women enter the male sphere of production. America's cultural atmosphere preferred and promoted the woman's role as consumer rather than producer. Contemporary war posters much more commonly depicted women as housewives, engaged in thrifty tasks: canning, collecting scrap metal, and using ration books. These tasks were considered an important aspect of the war effort. Lizabeth Cohen explains that "consumers [generally figured as female] were responsible for higher productivity and full employment" and their mass consumption promised "a more democratic and egalitarian America for all its citizens."¹³

The post-Depression re-expansion of mass consumerism occurred in forms both concrete and promissory. Though war bonds did restrict spending, for most Americans, the 1940s were a time of enhanced material wealth. Despite rationing, meat and sugar consumption were up, and all manner of other nondurables had booming sales. Postwar prosperity did not spring into

12 Though a 1940s viewer would point to the Norman Rockwell cover of Life magazine rather than the little-used Westinghouse poster.

13 Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Knopf, 2003), 56.

existence on VE-Day; the foundation was determined during the war. The ignition of consumer desire comprises the second half of my argument: advertising, supported both by business and by government funding, popularized a vision of the future structured around manufactured goods. My project suggests that we not omit the degree to which consumption was predicated on war production. I attempt to consider the effects of the war economy through male narrators invested in it to varying degrees—Bellow’s Joseph is a potential inductee, Thompson’s Jimmie Dillon and Himes’ Bob Jones work in coastal defense industries, and Mailer’s Mike Lovett is a wounded ex-soldier coming to grips with the immediate postwar period. All engage with the militarized economy, and in doing so work through issues of sexuality, spectacularity, and violence.

Joseph, the protagonist of Saul Bellow’s first novel, feels caught in a liminal space, floating outside the war effort as neither worker nor soldier. Yet his copious leisure time draws him inexorably into the war economy as consumer. Recording his interiority, Joseph strives for the philosophical life, but provides a more accurate inventory of his economic life. I argue that the identity crisis he suffers results not from general existential malaise, but rather from his economic complicity. Joseph desires the companionship of the literary pantheon, but finds himself overwhelmed by the actual war dead. It is precisely Joseph’s anomie that makes him the ideal mass consumer; feeling a deep lack in his life, he attempts to satisfy that need with purchasables. As his identity becomes that of a consumer, he finds himself feminized and subject to condescension. In response, Joseph directs blame for his excess desires onto the women in his life.

Multiple critics have pointed out the lacking treatment of women in Bellow’s novels, who are typically characterized as whorish, maternal, absent, or all three. Midcentury critic Leslie Fiedler complained that “the whole of Bellow’s work is singularly lacking in real or vivid female

characters; where women are introduced, they appear as nympholeptic fantasies.”¹⁴ Gloria Cronin writes more recently that Bellow’s protagonists “remove themselves from the presence of the female body—chaotic, wicked, and unclean—in favor of the calm cleanliness of books and abstract transcendental thought.”¹⁵ Though Joseph prefers his library, the dangling man’s most inescapable entanglements involve his teenaged niece, his frustrated wife, and his working-class mistress. I trace the faultlines of violence running through the narrative, as the militant substrate ruptures cryptically into Joseph’s life. The violent climax of the book involves his inappropriate corporal punishment of a teenaged niece, a scene I read for not just its fetishistic tone but also economic motive. Ultimately, Joseph accepts his inability to be free of the war economy; in a country animated by collective destructiveness, the individual man may dangle, but cannot escape complicity. Already trapped in a system with no outside, he surrenders his self, but not without leaving some clues as to whom he really blames.

This project investigates the proliferation of sexual and desiring modes, including, but not limited to, the male homosociality of military/industrial life and new productive and consuming roles for women. The underlying social scripts for the redirection of desires toward more traditional and coherent categories were established during wartime. I argue that postwar ‘reconversion’ signals broader sociocultural changes rather than relatively limited industrial shifts. Wartime advertisements marketed bright futurity, promoting faith in the idea that hardship now would be transformed into peace and prosperity later, both for you and your progeny. The coming “baby boom” was no accident, but rather carefully engineered through public policy,

14 Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Dalkey Archive Press, 1960. 363.

15 Gloria Cronin, *A Room of His Own: In Search of the Feminine in the Novels of Saul Bellow* (Syracuse University Press, 2001), 4. Her description becomes particularly interesting once the theories of Klaus Theweleit are applied to it.

economic incentivizing, and advertising. I contend that skepticism toward such highly publicized myths emerges in tropes of childlessness or perverse children, which I examine in each of the novels here.

Since the war economy is central to my historical and theoretical concerns, my second and third chapters will examine literary works directly depicting the defense industry and its production of materials and of material desires. Both of my primary authors wrote prolifically in the hardboiled crime genre, but drew upon autobiographical material to pen novels about military plants in California. While Bellow's attitude toward the war may have been shaped by his youthful leftist politics, Himes and Thompson had a material investment in the shift to a war economy: in the 1930s both did creative work for the WPA, capturing a written portrait of regional America, but in the 1940s both writers ended up building war machines. As a state uniquely shaped by the WWII influx of both capital and workers, California has provided a particularly fertile setting for novels portraying wartime and postwar anomie. Jim Thompson's debut novel *Now and On Earth* (1942), and Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) both read as desperate cries for recognition at odds with the dominant and positive image of wartime successes and "full employment." Set during the war, these novels portray not only contemporary labor realities, but concurrently depict a consumer market replete with price controls and rationing, allowing insight into how domestic economic forms of repression may produce and shape specific consumer desires, while foregrounding production's role in that process. I also contend that in both works, female characters provide a central repository for processing contradictions inherent in the war system, since American women were not only being molded into 'loyal' consumers, but also making forays into heavy industry.

Now and On Earth provides readers with a likable, if unreliable, first person perspective on wartime California. A formerly successful writer, the narrator fails to “get an extension on [his] fellowship; they were afraid that the war would so change things that any material [he] gathered would have no value,” a sentence that concatenates the novel's concerns with the commodification of art and the economy of war.¹⁶ Over the course of his life, Jimmie Dillon transitions between a series of historically significant labor functions. He shifts from a service role (a cover for lucrative illicit black-market dealings) to state-sponsored intellectual labor in the prewar period. Once in the wartime aircraft factory, his initial discomfort with blue-collar work slowly morphs into preoccupation and psychic damage from his new role as bookkeeper. He devotes much of his description of the plant to detailing the various ways in which the system of production results in waste and confusion, a situation that in his mind, will leave them “in one hell of a mess” and “is getting worse by the moment.”¹⁷ Other than waste and slippage, Jimmie also describes the plant's systematic dehumanization of its workers as well as efforts at union-busting. For the sake of the war effort, Jimmie ultimately compromises his health, sanity, and political convictions. Though a novel set in a wartime aircraft factory, Thompson almost never mentions the ongoing war itself. While some may be tempted to read such silence as a subordination of the war to other, even more broadly historical social and economic forces, I contend that Thompson deliberately avoid direct mention of military engagement in order to render his homefront critique brutally coherent.

My second chapter not only uses Jimmie's accounts of the plant as a portrait of the realities of war production, but also attends to the concomitant disintegration of his dysfunctional

¹⁶ Jim Thompson, *Now and On Earth* (New York: First Vintage Crime, 1994), 73. Further references to this edition will appear in the text rather than footnotes.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81, 84.

family life. The novel opens with his young daughter questioning him about money; she wants to buy a new hat and her mother has already spent the rent money on new clothes for her siblings, a scene that establishes what will be a pervasive concern with the economic underpinnings of the family's collapse. Rather than participating in myths of wartime prosperity for all, Thompson's account links his childhood spent "existing in a shack" to his family's current struggles. The money spent in the novel is on consumables (food, clothing, and alcohol), and experiences (trip to Tijuana and resultant abortion). Overall, I plan to demonstrate how this book traces the process by which wartime production necessarily created wartime consumers, and how the excess produced for destruction inculcates consumer desires for ephemeral commodities. Further, I argue that Jim Thompson elides women from defense production to convince readers that Dillon's family, centered on his simple and fertile wife Roberta, destroys him by chaining his creative nature to destructive labor.

If He Hollers Let Him Go by Chester Himes is the most well-known and critically examined of the texts I investigate here, though most readers focus more on narrator Bob Jones' complex psyche than on his WWII backdrop. While his narration borrows from the hard-boiled mode Himes will employ in his later detective fiction, the overarching movement of the plot belongs to the naturalist genre. The implacable forces directing the life of shipyard worker Bob Jones link to the war economy. Chester Himes himself worked in a series of Los Angeles defense plants, and found the experience so demoralizing that it receives scant mention in his two-volume autobiography, *The Quality of Hurt*, largely because he had already captured the experience in his first two novels. I investigate his text as a chronicle of the times, reading Jones' paranoia as symptomatic of a militarized (and racist) society. Written against the grains of the era's public patriotism, this book provides a complex instantiation of contemporary racial

tensions and power relations. Subverting the image of war-time employment as beneficial opportunity for black workers, Himes describes Bob Jones' socioeconomic oppression as a sort of traumatic social death. Consumer products often mark or contain social or psychic realities, for example, the gradual disintegration of his car echoes the internal destruction being experienced by Jones. Himes bitterly indicts women's apparent complicity in wartime, which seems essentially due to their sexuality. The white factory worker Madge, underwritten by judicial-military power, serves as Bob Jones' nemesis; her incursion into the space of industrial production allows her to undermine Bob Jones' future, after his girlfriend Alice symbolically evacuates his hope of a stable domestic life with her excessive desires. An examination of both industrial working conditions and commodity culture reveal the extent to which both war workers find their inner and outer lives manipulated by the forces of militarized consumerism.

While some consider Mailer's second novel *Barbary Shore* (1951) to be more political screed than fictional narrative, his funhouse mirror turned to the immediate postwar period goes beyond the simply didactic. While Thompson's and Himes' novels include the quotidian violence endemic to the defense industry, linking it to destructive actions abroad, Mailer's work takes place during the Pax Americana, yet violence permeates not just his characters' rhetoric but nearly their every action. Of the four main authors examined here, in reality only the young Norman Mailer was drafted, and only his narrator actually experienced the battlefield, or so he assumes. Mike Lovett can only remember the war in scattered, dreamlike bursts, and his past socialist leanings appear equally fragmented. I contend that *Barbary Shore's* narrator Mike Lovett suffers from amnesia, due not simply to his war experience, but also the submerged war economy. The world of commodities rests upon a structural forgetting of productive labor. This necessary amnesia becomes all the more essential when a nation finds itself engaged in

production for destruction. Economic forces govern social relations, and circumscribe the stories we tell.

Repression and violence become a part of nearly all sexual acts in the book, and I believe that the lines of desire between the six characters living in a roominghouse reveal the postwar political motivations and economic realities Mailer wants to outline. McLeod and Guinevere function as keepers of the house, though Guinevere's interactions with her tenants leads her husband to compare the place to a brothel. *Barbary Shore*'s female characters also provide a portrait of the postwar period's forcible reversal of women's wartime movement away from the home toward education and employment. War propaganda highlighted the central importance of consumption, but women were necessarily given more productive roles; after the postwar shift, only the roles of consumer and housewife remained accessible to many women. Guinevere and Lannie provide skewed portraits of the postwar woman, overflowing with unsatisfied desires: one waxes poetic about becoming a ruined object, and the other accepts money from a government agent after he beats her. Women are blamed for, and punished for, America's inability to resist the fruits of what Mailer terms 'state capitalism'. I briefly turning to Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953), comparisons between the two novels reveals a common reliance on the idea that human relationships have become hollowly transactional, leaving only the constancy and emptiness of the underlying militarized carceral economy. Strikingly, all four novels end with the intervention of military, governmental and/or carceral forces. Two narrators end up being drafted, two encounter a federal agent, and the police dismantle the lives of two. At the end of *Barbary Shore*, the roominghouse is forcibly emptied. Family, political community, and urban spaces cannot cohere in the postwar world, Mailer seems to imply. I argue that Lovett's solution for the future involves creating a lineage between McLeod and himself—the

same impossible dream of purely male generation that secretly animates Bellow's Joseph. By so doing, Mailer extends the idealistic view of (fantastically multiracial) male homosociality he formulated in *The Naked and the Dead*, proffering it as an imperfect solution to a war economy upheld by female consumers.

The Postwar Tomorrow

As mentioned above, the conventional narrative attributes the "postwar boom" to a release of pent-up consumer demand, which had been suppressed by wartime rationing. The war was fought and won for the preservation of the "American Way," not an ideological ideal, but a material standard. And thus an era of peace, prosperity, and unparalleled consensus descended upon the American nation. A more critical approach might suggest that in the postwar era, the consumerist architecture instantiated during the war years finds full expression, accompanied by a barely submerged continuation of the arms economy. While I am arguing that the economic substrate persisted more than it dramatically changed, the social landscape necessarily morphed. Much of wartime leisure-based consumption had been at the hands of young war workers, flush with wages and away from home. Maintaining mass consumerism necessitated the continuation of a war economy, and the strong bonds forged between industry and the military had no intention of melting away.

The allegedly 'postwar' period in America featured a militarized economy and militarized consumers. Some changes were inevitable, but the necessary 'reconversion' only superficially involved restarting automobile plants; more essentially it prepared the thousands of returning soldiers for their roles in the reworked economy. First, the postwar expansion was fueled by rapidly ballooning amounts of borrowing and credit, increasingly amnesiac forms of spending.

Second, the labor surplus and the need for continued consumerism received the same solution—returning women workers to the domestic sphere, reworked as the single-family home. The postwar period required the multifarious desires of wartime to be channeled into peacetime stability, continuing the consumerist zeal reborn during wartime while rationalizing and taming the excesses. The unprecedented production accomplishments of wartime necessitated a loosening of social strictures and an allowance of excess. In the postwar era, we see efforts at the recontainment of that biopower. The most essential project of reconversion was not industrial, but social: biopolitical intervention figured as a return to domesticity. For many on the homefront, the war was waged to preserve the American Way, a particularly economic form of liberty. Ewen believes that “[t]he vision of freedom which was being offered to Americans was one which continually relegated people to consumption, passivity and spectatorship” and I seek to show that at no point in the twentieth century was that type of freedom more apparent than in the postwar era.)¹⁸ On a subliminal level, the sacrifices of war needed justification, but even on a superficial level, the fantastic promises made by wartime advertisers required fulfillment.¹⁹

Technology provides a strangely divided test case for the reinvestment of desires. On the one hand, technocratic fantasies allow the libidinal impulse to escape the messy, female world of the body and transmute the masculine into its perfected, disembodied form. The space age was, visually and technologically, ushered in by the rocket, whose phallic appearance draws comment from many quarters—Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* loops sex and war in an infinite regression (overtly computational) while Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying*

18 Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 213.

19 The 'helicopter in every driveway' image, for example.

and Love the Bomb (1964) lets a farcical cowboy literally love his enormous metallic substitute member, and the massive destruction it causes.²⁰ On the other hand, the value of technology for the average American cannot be extricated from its commercial purposes; a rocket may be impressive, but a car transforms everyday life. When wartime advertisers sold the American public a vision of the future, it was one in which war technologies were tamed and repurposed for the peaceful postwar years. Some advertisements overextend promises of appropriated machinery; a surprising number depict helicopters as common forms of family transportation. But even those that take a more conservative view of demobilized industry consistently link the production of wartime technologies to a more efficient and technologically-assisted peacetime. As airplane plants turn back into automobile manufacturers, they promise that the cars to come will be as advanced and dependable as the bombers that helped win the war.

Yet the consumer use of technology muddies the purely masculinist ideals projected upon it. While cars remain at the center of male American fantasies for decades to come, many of the other promised innovations aim themselves squarely at the model consumer, and her model home, now located in the burgeoning suburbs. Washing machines, self-cleaning ovens, vacuum cleaners, and more serve to bolster an image of the new suburban paradise. Shopping was structurally instilled as suburbia's primary activity. Developers clustered suburban communities not around main streets, a common meeting place, but rather around shopping malls, the ultimate privatized space, where no nonprofitable activities need be included.

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²⁰ Kubrick loosely based his film on a 1958 novel called *Red Alert* which dealt with nuclear war in a far more serious light. The film diverges by using technological sexual fantasies to lampoon Cold War masculinity and politics.

The postwar transition remains visible in one of America's most beloved landmarks. Originally built in 1955, Disneyland not only presents a microcosmic view of societal tensions at the time of its incipience, it also participates in the perpetuation of cultural norms and fantasies. Walt Disney's trips to amusement parks sparked a desire for a sanitized, controlled place for familial interaction. Disney strove to avoid Coney Island's excesses, to tame the teeming masses. We can see this as an echo of the necessary postwar recontainment of the autonomous female war worker, who must be moved from the 'niterey' to the suburban bedroom where she produces not bombs, but a baby boom. Perhaps domestic technologies do help fulfill an aspect of masculinist fantasies by keeping American women tied to the house and hearth. Rosie the Riveter was an icon, and the supporting reality faded away, leaving only a nostalgic image.

The war years trained Americans to consume, voraciously, not only objects but also images. Wolfgang Haug argues that in a commodity-driven system, "a general voyeurism is reinforced, habituated, and determines the human instinctual structure"; a theme park built to resemble the cinematic appeals directly to such a voyeurism.²¹ There was no Tunnel of Love, and there were no darkened corners, and yet Disneyland sparked desires. Like commodity advertising, Disneyland's success is due in large part to its facility at creating and managing expectations. The war years encouraged consumerism, while shifting an increasing portion of that consumption from durable to immaterial goods. While "reconversion" after the war did signal an increased availability of durable commodities, consumers continued the wartime trend of increasingly investing in images and lifestyles. King and O'Boyle explain that "[i]n the theme park, rides are mechanisms designed to position the visitor's point of view, much as a camera

²¹ Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1986), 55.

lens is aligned, moving riders past a series of meticulously focused vignettes to advance the narrative.”²² According to a Disney designer, the entire Park was designed along similar lines:

When we began designing Disneyland, we looked at it just as we do a motion picture... In filmmaking, although we can control the sequence of events, the viewer might walk in late and, through no fault of our own, miss Scene One and never catch up to the story. But in Disneyland, we had more control. We designed the entire Park so that a guest couldn't miss Scene One or Two. From the moment he entered our 'theatre,' that is, our front gate, Scene One would begin for him.²³

After seeing an early Disney animation, Sergei Eisenstein famously remarked, “How much (imaginary!) divine omnipotence there is in this! What magic of reconstructing the world according to one's fantasy and will. A fictitious world. A world of lines and colours which subjugates and alters itself to your command.”²⁴ Disneyland and the world beyond its gates were less malleable than drawn figures, but a certain sense of omnipotence persisted. The cartoon foundation for Disneyland's aesthetic provides an important key for understanding its aims and appeal. Disney understands how wartime changed the commodity, making its durable and substantial form increasingly inessential. What Disney purveys is the purely spectacular and experiential; the park primarily deals in “happiness.” The omnipotent animator can promise the spectator anything; any need can be fulfilled. Leiss argues that intensified commodity circulation leads to fragmentation of needs and an increasing indifference to their specific quality. Disney capitalizes on this with an infinitely malleable and fantastical world that addresses not specific needs but needing itself, promising no byways to happiness but the desire itself.

22 Margaret King and J. G. O'Boyle, “The Theme Park: The Art of Time and Space,” In *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and Their Influence* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011): 6.

23 *Disneyland: The First Thirty-five Years* (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney, 1989), 15.

24 Sergei Eisenstein, and Richard Taylor. *The Eisenstein Collection* (London: Seagull, 2006), 87.

Animation also reveals a confidence in the basic plasticity of the world, wherein destruction could be transmuted into its formal opposite. The most impressive American accomplishment of the war was its production of flying machines; one of Germany's most terrifying accomplishments was its production of V-2 rockets.²⁵ The rocket ship as transportation device would meld these two technologies into a new syncretic form.²⁶ Both Werner von Braun and Walt Disney, however, wanted to disavow the idea of the rocket as a simple symbol of past/present military technology, and instead they aspired to resell it as a symbol of future technology - specifically, a shiny representation of the imminent "Space Age."²⁷

Werner von Braun believed that making space travel a reality involved first making it a common (both ubiquitous and shared) fantasy. He also straightforwardly understood that to be effectively disseminated, fantasies must be marketed: "It was a matter of synthesizing the philosophical aspects [of space travel] into neat packages and solid statements which the public would buy."²⁸ Imagineer John Hench consulted directly with Werner von Braun when designing the Moonliner, which essentially resembled a V-2 rocket, though its fins had been replaced by

25 According to Nazi propaganda, the Allied bombers necessitated the birth of the Vergeltungswaffe 2 (Vengeance Weapon 2), and Germany produced over three thousand of these revenge bombs. More lives were taken in the V-2's production than in its deployment. The primary V-2 assembly line was located in an underground factory called Mittelwerk, which employed up to 60,000 concentration camp laborers. Some of the most horrifying labor conditions took place at the factory's creation, when Buchenwald camp labor widened and expanded enormous tunnels under the Kohnstein Mountain.

26 The V-2 was the first known human artifact to achieve sub-orbital spaceflight, which is to say, enter outer space.

27 Disneyland was funded through programs Disney produced for ABC television. Werner von Braun was consulted in the making of three focused on space travel, "Man in Space" (1955), "Man on the Moon" (1955), and "Mars and Beyond" (1957).

28 Erik Bergaust, *Wernher von Braun: the authoritative and definitive biographical profile of the father of modern space flight* (Washington, D. C.: National Space Institute, 1976), 161.

‘landing gear’, which the bomb had not needed. Some compare the landing gear to the fuselage of Lockheed’s Super Constellation, a plane with a notably stellar name first produced by TWA in 1951. That airplane was the successor to the C-69 Constellation, originally commissioned by the USAAF and used primarily for long-range, high-speed troop transport.²⁹ When the war ended, the Constellation’s transition was seamless, as planes currently under production received slight modifications and became civilian airliners. TWA received the first on October 1, 1945, and the line became very popular due to its comfort, as it was the first pressurized airliner in wide use.

As evident from its name, the Moonliner was meant to be lunar transport, and was even playfully included in a series of promotional postcards featuring the range of aircraft operated by TWA. Much like the locomotive circling the park, the Moonliner was presented as a scaled down version of an ‘actual’ technology. The TWA Moonliner’s 79 foot height outstripped even Sleeping Beauty’s Castle, serving as a strong focal point for the east wing of the park, and just barely evading aviation regulations that structures over 80’ must supply a blinking red light for the safety of actual aircraft. It was constructed of seam-welded aluminum, like a jet or the V-2, and painted with red stripes and the TWA logo; everything about its appearance hovered between the familiar and the fantastic. In 1967, Disneyland scrapped the by-then Douglas Moonliner since lunar travel seemed imminent. And in fact, two years later, thanks to Werner von Braun’s many efforts , an American would walk on the moon.

The American readiness for the Space Age can be read as optimism “firmly rooted in the collective postwar weariness of the world; by breaking free of the Earth, the thinking went, humanity might break free of its primal nature—namely its proclivity toward self-destruction—

²⁹ Yet it was insistent pressure from TWA shareholder Howard Hughes, another future-minded entrepreneur, for large civilian airliners with greater range that had led to the creation of the first Constellation (the L-049).

and realize its true destiny as a unified species.”³⁰ Yet inside the dream of a “unified species,” a trope common to the majority of SF stories involving attackers from outer space, lurks a desire to minimize human difference, even to silence those who mobilize difference in their demands for equal treatment and voice. A space-traveling future for humanity, however, would primarily extend and continue the desires of the past, as the dream of interplanetary travel is one of exploration and colonization. Disneyland colonized southern California for suburbia, turning productive fruit trees into a site for accelerated consumerism.

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A tour of Disneyland's 1950s Tomorrowland provides a look inside the park's goals. Monsanto's House of the Future opened in 1957, a cantilevered five-room futuristic living space, fully outfitted with furniture and appliances. Nearly every item in the building was made of plastic. The show house operated just as wartime advertising had: it built upon present success to incite desires for future products, and for change itself. Upwards of 20 million guests will walk through the House of the Future before its demolition in 1967. The nuclear family situated in its suburban home provides an ideal site for privatized consumption. Just as helicopters would not show up in every driveway, many of the Monsanto House's 'innovations' would not catch on—the height-adjustable sink or the ultrasonic dishwasher, for example (though the microwave most certainly would). The increased diversification and specialization of commodities means that “each aspect of a person's needs tends to be broken down into progressively smaller component parts, and therefore...it becomes increasingly difficult for the person to integrate the components into a coherent ensemble of needs and a coherent personality structure.”³¹ Not only the house's

30 Marina Benjamin, *Rocket Dreams: How the Space Age Shaped Our Vision of a World Beyond* (New York: Free, 2003), 37.

31 William Leiss, *The Limits of Satisfaction* (Montreal: McGill Queens UP, 1988), 18.

devices, but Disneyland in general attempt to suspend the consumer in a fully immersive environment to simulate the satisfaction of all needs (as long as one is in the Park). Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* claims that "[w]e make the finest packages in the world... The stuff inside is mostly junk."³² Disney circumvents the issue by selling only the packaging. The Monsanto House also represents the perfected vision of what I see as the transition from consumption culture during war to the nuclear family consumption units in the post-war period, simultaneously emblematic of technological fetishism and the relegation of women to the domestic consumption regime. The House attempts to present the future as inseparable from a renewable source of consumer goods; it is more than convenient that the glorified building material is literally plastic. Many of the legacies of technological fetishism can be seen in neoliberalism, most notably the preference for a technocratic elite and the tendency toward neophilia. David Harvey describes neoliberalism as a force which connects "technological dynamism, instability, dissolution of social solidarities, environmental degradation, deindustrialization, rapid shifts in time-space relations, speculative bubbles, and the general tendency toward crisis formation within capitalism," and it seems startling how many aspects of his list can be traced to the lingering effects of the war economy discussed in this project.³³

The shift to suburbia could not happen without a burgeoning network of roads. Autopia serves as a site for training people (particularly women and children) to become suburbanites by naturalizing the freeway. Particularly in the American imagination, driving functions as the ultimate expression of autonomy and control. We will see that its metaphorical power was strong at the time; in their novels, both Himes and Thompson use access to a car as potently symbolic

³²Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 235.

³³ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 69.

of personal efficacy. The portmanteau thrusts itself into one's mouth via the pronunciation of the ride's name, but no early rider or new visitor could be faulted for reading it more simply as "a utopia." The track includes those wonders of engineering germane to the freeway—tunnels and overpasses—as well as a brief scenic route. The national highway system was created during wartime by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, and large scale expansion began after war's end. Coney Island bustled due to an unparalleled "synergy between mass transit and popular amusement" which allowed the same transportation technologies that shaped the city to be echoed at its margin.³⁴ Disneyland would perversely mirror this situation, built in parallel to the I-5 freeway, which was expanded by two lanes to absorb future traffic. As the I-5 was nearing completion, Disneyland held its opening day ceremonies.

Less than a year later, on June 29, 1956, President Eisenhower will sign the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, the largest public works program that has existed up until that time, with an initial allocation of \$25 billion dollars to be distributed over the next decade.³⁵ The freeway expansion program will markedly alter the face of America, serving as the vital arteries governing which communities thrive and which wither away, permanently sidelined by their distance from the busy roads. Moreover, according to J. Flink, the 1956 Act "ensured the complete triumph of the automobile over mass-transit alternatives in the United States and killed off, except in a few large cities, the vestiges of balanced public transportation systems that remained in 1950s America."³⁶ This triumph will be particularly complete in Southern California, thanks also to the General Motors streetcar conspiracy. During the first half of the 20th century,

34 Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: U of California, 2004), 108.

35 Its ongoing cost will surpass \$128 billion, as reported in the 1991 Interstate Cost Estimate.

36 James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1990), 372.

Los Angeles possessed a substantial network of trolley cars, the Los Angeles Railway, which at its height contained over 20 streetcar lines and 1,250 trolleys. During the war years, rationing and conservation were preached on the individual and household level, but on the industrial level, the inherent wastefulness of war was visible. The oil companies had dominated American energy policy since the 1920s, and the mechanized nature of WWII only reinscribed their tight grip. Any outside, 'national' control of petroleum reserves, particularly in the name of 'conservation' was easily repelled by the companies' experience and claims of 'expertise'. The voluminous extraction of oil that took place during the war enhanced overall productivity, and cemented the corporate position, making postwar change more challenging. Autopia found its corporate sponsorship, naturally, in oil companies: first Richfield Oil (later the 'R' in ARCO) and then Chevron Corporation.

Autopia would be so successful, and so central to Disneyland's vision, that two more tracks would open in the park: the Junior Autopia (1956) and the Midget Autopia (1957), specifically designed for children only. The park itself repeatedly reproduces its own foundational necessity; Arsdale quotes Walt as saying that "we could see that the freeways eventually would hit Anaheim as a sort of hub, so that's how we selected Anaheim."³⁷ The term 'autopia' will later be used, with varying degrees of irony, by a variety of critics to describe the car-based culture of Los Angeles and southern California. "A-utopia" can, of course, also be read as a negation. Paul Virilio posits that "[e]very technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress," thus the invention of the airplane is also that of the plane crash³⁸. This ghostly negativity finds a companion in those innovations borrowed from

³⁷ Van Arsdale France, *Window on Main Street: 35 Years of Creating Happiness at Disneyland Park* (Nashua, NH: Laughter Publications, 1991), 17.

³⁸ Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1999), 89.

purely destructive military technologies. Although Disney wants to supplant and replace the outside world, he cannot exclude the accident. Even the freeway's playfully miniaturized version contains attenuated forms of the roadway's ills. There may not be car crashes,³⁹ but since the vehicles are arranged in a series on a track, the toy cars inevitably end up in miniature traffic jams. The track is necessarily repetitive, producing the potential for ennui. And most concretely, the child-sized cars actually consume gasoline and emit exhaust. Disneyland borrows from military hierarchy the importance of uniform, and the "untailored jumpsuits" worn by Autopia operators "generate about as much respect from peers as the grease-stained outfits worn by pump jockeys generate from real motorists in gas stations."⁴⁰ The workers also habitually breathe the car exhaust, as carcinogenic as that produced on actual freeways. Though the park's primary product may be an immaterial experience, its working conditions are not without danger.⁴¹ The miniaturized freeway reproduces the contradictions which it seeks to escape.

The Autopia route's pleasantness owes much to the trees, shrubs, and flowers attending the roadway. We can see the naturalization of technology via plants elsewhere; Walt was adamant that his plastic homes and concrete mountains be surrounded and substantiated by an eternally green background of trees, bushes, and flowers. At the time of the park's building, one of its most unusual features was the care and expense paid to the landscaping. The one hundred sixty

39 The course was not originally free of accident, in fact, according to Van Arsdale: "The operators called Autopia 'Blood Alley,' with some justification...there were no safety belts...[a]s a result, giving first aid to the young drivers who had teeth knocked out was a frequent activity" (39).

40 John Van Maanen, "The Smile Factory," In *Reframing Organizational Culture* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991): 62.

41 For decades, the Frontierland shooting gallery used actual pellets, and the perpetually chipping paint exposed 'cast members' to unhealthy levels of lead. A handful of Disneyland employees have even died on the job due to accident.

acres purchased as the site for Disneyland had been covered in trees, primarily groves of orange and walnut, yet only a handful of original trees remain—just a few tall examples of eucalyptus which serve as backdrop for Adventureland. The Disneyland Line (an employee newsletter) reported in May 1971 that “[m]ore than 800,000 bedding plants are planted annually” demonstrating that a ‘natural’ appearance requires constant and expensive renewal.⁴² A perpetually lush environment means that plants cannot live out their natural cycle of growth and decay, but rather need to be replaced before they can wither.⁴³ Similarly, Disneyland’s worker population largely draws from student populations, a flexible and renewable source that need not age on the job.

Future technologies will seem to offer us autonomy, but ensure that we are carefully controlled. Every journey on the Autopia track begins and ends in the same place, just as the average freeway traveller repeatedly traverses the path between work and home, reminding us again of Heinlein’s formula: “They went to work to earn the money to buy the food to get the strength to go to work...” ad nauseum.⁴⁴ The freeway seems to offer more travel options, but in fact increases homogeneity—the interstate system comprises only 1 percent of the nation’s roadways, but carries 20 percent of its traffic. Those towns placed close to the interstate receive traffic and business, while those farther away, fall by the wayside.

In 1955, as actual main streets are being systematically erased from most American lives, Walt Disney ushers his guests into his amusement park through an idealized, dehistoricized Main

⁴² *The Disneyland Line*, (May 1971), 5. Accessed at UCI Special Collections: Orange County.

⁴³ One Disneyland guidebook claims that “a ‘magical’ growth retardant was added to all the [Storybookland] trees and shrubs to further restrict growth to no more than one inch per year” (42).

⁴⁴ Robert Heinlein, “Them,” In *The unpleasant profession of Jonathan Hoag* (New York: Berkley Books, 1983), 155.

Street USA. At the heart of every smaller town, the main street served as the hub of communities, providing space for diverse economic and social activities, and allowing differing social strata to mingle. The suburbs replaced the main street with the shopping center, a space designed purely for commercial purposes. In her memoir, Disney's daughter claims that Main Street USA is, in some important sense, based on Walt's own hometown of Marceline, Missouri. In the late 1940s, Missouri businessmen formed an association with the aim of widening Highway 36 to four lanes across the street. Marceline is bypassed entirely by the highway, which lies three miles north, and most local shoppers now frequent the chain stores in nearby Brookfield. The town's main street has declined as its fantasmic double, the Disney property of Main Street USA, has been reproduced in Florida, Paris, and Hong Kong.⁴⁵

Disney did not find new technologies remotely threatening; his perfect era, the 'carefree times' crystalized in Main Street USA, was one in which "the gas lamp is giving way to the electric lamp, and a newcomer, the sputtering 'horseless carriage', has challenged Old Dobbin for the streetcar right of way" (16). And, indeed, Main Street USA contains reproductions of a horse-drawn carriage as well as a streetcar, a silhouette-cutting shop and a movie theater. Those designers outfitting the street for the first day used a mix of actual antique lighting fixtures, benches, and hitching-posts as well as replicas handcrafted by Studio artisans. Disney found important inspiration in Henry Ford's Greenfield Village, which also sprang from an obsessive form of nostalgia. While Disneyland has received perpetual updates through the decades, Main Street has changed less than any other portion of the park. Since Disneyland has only one entrance and exit, it is always the first and last scene that visitors to the park experience.

⁴⁵ The Main Street USAs in Florida and Paris are both less Midwestern and less turn of the century than the Disneyland 'original.' The Hong Kong version is almost a precise duplicate, though its animating 'story' is, of course, different (hinging on a romanticized version of colonialism).

Main Street USA encapsulates Disneyland's initial aim: to replace excessive desires with new, more appropriate ones. Coney Island allowed different classes and ethnicities to mingle, even lasciviously; Disneyland's admission price (unheard of at the time) was designed to keep out the 'unwashed masses'. Public transportation is replaced by the freeway; vernacular culture is submerged beneath corporate logos. More communal living arrangements are supplanted by the suburban home, as typified by the Monsanto House, which only contains room for a nuclear family. Ethnic difference can be appropriated and tamed, as Adventureland's Tiki Room presents the exotic Other as singing entertainment.⁴⁶ Every corner of Disneyland offers a substitution for something lost. As this project seeks to demonstrate, America's particularly spectacular and leisure-based consumerism owes even more to WWII than popular histories would indicate.

⁴⁶ In 1966, It's a Small World will provide a more perfected image of globalization. Originally, the puppets in folk garb were intended to sing national anthems from each continent. The result was deemed too discordant, and a single 15-minute anthem was the famous result.

CHAPTER ONE

“You dirty...dirty no-account”: Saul Bellow’s *Dangling Man* and Consumer Desires

I

Saul Bellow, as a fledgling author, was aware of the burgeoning syncreticism between American democratic forces and consumerism, and positioned himself in resistance to the war economy. In a letter written to his friend Dwight McDonald, Bellow admits that he may have to self-promote the “semi-autobiographical” *Dangling Man*, since “Max Lieber, my agent, is a patriot, and the Notes [draft manuscript] is not exactly a sweet little bundle of V’s”.⁴⁷ Such epistolary admissions underscore two perhaps obvious aspects of the book: the links between youthful and intellectual Joseph and youthful and intellectual Saul Bellow, and his recognition that his (and Joseph’s) viewpoints lay outside of the general patriotic wartime *esprits de corps*.⁴⁸ As a young man, Bellow was a devotee of Marx, and more specifically Trotsky, even traveling to Mexico in an attempt to meet the man. Bellow’s subsequent rejection of Marxism is due in part to the general disillusionment of the American Left following the revelation of Stalinist atrocities, but perhaps stems from more individual reasons, to be examined here.

Saul Bellow’s first novel *Dangling Man* (1944) describes a proliferation of consumer desires in action. A portrait of the war years, this book carefully traces the increased importance of commodities to daily life, despite (indeed, because of) shortages and rationing. Many readers of this journal-like novel move quickly beyond Joseph’s position as a potential Army inductee

⁴⁷ Saul Bellow, *Letters of Saul Bellow*, Ed. Benjamin Taylor (York, NY: Penguin Group, 2010), 34.

⁴⁸ Ironically, his agent Max Lieber was actually a covert agent of the Soviet Union who ended up fleeing to Mexico to avoid the trial against Alger Hiss.

(suspended in bureaucratic red tape), in order to consider his condition as spiritually or existentially emblematic. However, a precipitate move to the transcendent ignores the clear cultural relevance of Bellow's work. Bellow carefully embeds his protagonists in a specific social context, marked by consumption. Many critics focus on the extent to which Joseph's interiority and insular preoccupations disconnect from the world around him; readers frequently point to his narcissistic isolation as reflected in the formal qualities of a personal journal. His narration does reflect high levels of self-absorption and a tendency toward projection, but Joseph remains both imbricated in and highly observant of the world around him. His acute awareness of and resistance to his context fuels his attempts to disconnect himself from his friends, family, and past. Revealingly, Joseph refers to his personal journal as “a record of [my] inward transactions”;

'transactions' cast his 'interiority' as market exchange.⁴⁹ Rather than relying solely on Joseph's reports of his mental state, and considering them as reliable or unreliable, I will consider what is less directly said, and (I would argue) more revealing. A borrowed book, stolen socks, and proffered oranges, in that they are variously borrowed, stolen, and proffered, effectively extend lines of desire between otherwise 'alienated' individuals.

Where contemporary critics praised it for its very contemporaneity, those who have followed tend to lift Bellow's works away from their specific historical context. In a brief review for the *Contemporary Jewish Record* (August 1944), Clement Greenberg describes the novel as slow-moving and incomplete-seeming, yet states that it is still better than its fictional peers, insofar as the book “raises the relevant issues in a relevant manner, which no other recent American novel does.”⁵⁰ Bellow's engagement with the world of ideas is laudable enough, but

⁴⁹ Saul Bellow, *Dangling Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 1.
Future citations from this edition will appear in the text rather than the footnotes.

⁵⁰ Clement Greenberg, “Review of *Dangling Man* by Saul Bellow,” *Contemporary Jewish Record* (August 1944).

the attempt to consider the extent to which those ideas and ideals are workable in wartime America remains the book's primary accomplishment. Irving Kristol's review in *politics* (June 1944) went so far as to label the book “our best war novel.”⁵¹ How could a book that takes place entirely in the city of Chicago and never mentions any specific military actions be called a 'war novel', let alone be a contender for the 'best' in that genre? Paul Koistinen argues that carefully examining periods of economic mobilization for war reveals the degree to which extreme situations force submerged truths about American power structures from hiding. Periods of economic pressure foreground the coalitions between the nation's elites, revealing “the nation's most basic contradiction: an elitist reality in the context of a democratic ideology.”⁵² Likewise, the wartime context of *Dangling Man* allows Bellow to examine the social and personal consequences of an economy linked to destruction.

II

The novel begins with the concept of the doppelgänger—Joseph claims to be, or have been, two different selves. He explains that “for legal purposes, I am that older self, and if a question of my identity were to arise I could could nothing but point to my attributes of yesterday”; he then shifts into the third person to emphasize his distance from 'Old Joseph' (14). Joseph pokes fun at his former self, stripping him of his identity markers and status. Perhaps

51 Irving Kristol, “Review of *Dangling Man* by Saul Bellow,” *Politics*, 1 (June, 1944), 156.

52 Paul Koistinen, *Planning War, Pursuing Peace* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), xv.

partially due to the inherent narcissism of the journal form, Joseph is prone to projection, a habit visible not only in his characterizations of others, but also when describing his environment. Given that Joseph frequently fails to see the doubling consequences of his own habits of projection, Bellow, as author, might be thought to highlight his character's blindness by confronting him in the text with a proliferation of mirrors ('Old Joseph', Etta, Vanaker, and the Spirit of Alternatives). Some of the doubles are recognized, even created, by Joseph, while others are not. Although doubles display the splintered nature of Joseph's identity, such doubling does not produce a surfeit of identity, rather its destabilizing effects ultimately yields forms of willful self-erasure.

From another viewpoint, the mirroring and the projection can be seen as figures for the inherent commodity exchangeability indigenous to postwar capital, a concept that directly appears in the novel. During an encounter with his tailor, who is "busier now than he was in his best year, 1928," Bellow has Joseph neatly summarize the function of value under capital, an abstracted concept that allows every commodity to interact or be equated with every other commodity:

I walked away, fingering the button which had been threatening for weeks to drop off, weighing the value of its stability against that of the fifteen cents, representing three cups of coffee, or three cigars, or a glass-and-a-half of beer, or five morning papers, or something less than a pack of cigarettes, or three telephone calls, or one breakfast. (80)

The easy equivalences here may in fact remind a reader of the section of *Capital* dealing with exchange-value, when a certain amount of linen becomes equivalent to a coat. That communication between objects (here, linen and coat) is only a way-station; as in the market, they ultimately become freed from all notion of actual substance. A button as an expression of the value of coffee, cigarettes, and breakfast reveals the non-natural or 'purely social' nature of

exchange, when a commodity becomes a “two-fold thing.” Simultaneously concrete and abstract, the doubled commodity provides a metaphor for Joseph’s condition. We may also note that the potential objects that Joseph loses in the fifteen cents given to Mr. Fanzel are all consumables, either food or media (morning papers, telephone calls). Exchangeability results in further abstraction; Marx explains, “Just as, therefore, in viewing the coat and linen as values, we abstract from their different use values, so it is with the labour represented by those values: we disregard the difference between its useful forms.”⁵³ The commodity’s abstraction of value also abstracts labor, unmooring it from its effects. Even workers who did not support war voluntarily through war bonds, did so involuntarily through taxation, and directly through material production. As this journal entry continues, Joseph’s tone becomes increasingly ironic, and he reaches bitterly for telling literary examples. He summons Dostoyevsky’s mercantile Luzhin, layering another coat on his economic palimpsest, to ironically explain the inevitability of economic disparity.⁵⁴ Then “Vae victis!” irrupts the text; translatable as “Woe to the vanquished!”, the phrase originates from Livy’s account of a Gallic attack on Rome. After taking the city, the Gauls agreed to accept a Roman ransom, but furnished them with unfairly weighted scales. Upon hearing their complaints, Brennus, the Gallic leader, pitches his sword onto the scales, and uttered his infamous shout. Martial action displaces any ‘natural’ sense of value; Joseph implies

⁵³ Karl Marx, *Capital; a Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, . Friedrich Engels. Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International, 1967), 52.

⁵⁴ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. Trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 121. After the quotation used in the text, Luzhin continues on, saying, “Science now tells us, love yourself before all men, for everything in the world rests on self-interest,” a phrase similar to the opening line of Joseph’s journal entry: “Look out for yourself, and the world will be best served.”

that war does not only 'vanquish' those on the losing side, but also claims victims from within the nation. Economic critiques and literary allusions haunt the text as remnants of 'old Joseph' (despite his attempts to become detached), showing that abstraction and equivalence preoccupy Joseph, and providing a key to reading his condition.

Commodity equivalence becomes important, as we see the re-solidification of brand name importance during the war years. "The average housewife, having plenty of money and few ration points, tended to buy canned goods graded 'fancy' rather than 'choice'; similarly, she would buy a brand name, with its connotation of quality, rather than the cheaper, unknown brands, except when nothing else was available."⁵⁵ Thus ration points create another economic layer complicating the already obfuscated issue of price. Price is a monetary (hence socially determined) representation of value, masking social relations between laboring persons and making the commodity into a 'social hieroglyphic'.⁵⁶ Constrained categorically by rationing, consumers weigh and consider not only a product's apparent qualities and price but also further abstractions such as grade and brand name. This process leads to a heightening of a situation where commodities "are not simple things, but rather an unstable unity composed of many characteristics, qualities, and 'messages'."⁵⁷ While wartime saw the appearance of fewer durable commodities in the marketplace, all commodities became more complex, 'unstable' objects; as a result, consumer desire for these multilayered objects also became more confused and layered. Throughout *Dangling Man*, readers see evidence of Joseph's own capricious consumer urges,

55 Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know*, 123.

56 Karl Marx, *Capital*, 166.

57 William Leiss, *The Limits*, 26.

particularly as they relate to the consumption of food. The January 22nd entry, in its entirety, reads:

I ate a large breakfast, intending to go without lunch. But at one o'clock, intensely hungry, I tossed aside Abt's pamphlet and went out for lunch. On the way back I bought several oranges and a large bar of chocolate. By four o'clock I had eaten them. Later, at Fallon's, I had a large dinner. And a few hours later, in the movies, I added to all this a whole package of caramels and most of a bag of mints. Now, at eleven, I am still hungry. (85)

Joseph attempts to begin the day with a sensible and restrained approach to eating, and even tries to enforce a personal system of rationing by planning to deny himself lunch. His attempt at restriction leads only to a perverse proliferation of desires. Rejecting a political pamphlet, and its reminders of the wartime world, Joseph retreats into restaurant meals and rationed consumables (oranges, chocolate and sugary candies) as well as an escapist trip to the cinema. Acutely aware of his own dissatisfaction, Joseph gravitates toward rationed and restricted goods not despite shortages, but because of them. Struggling with a militarized economy, he insists on working out the contradictions in his own life, since he views himself primarily as a 'moral man' and a 'good citizen.'

Joseph suffers as an isolated individual, but as such he typifies the ideal mass consumer. To maximize profits, capital must create needs that are satisfiable only on the individual level; engendering group satisfaction is too efficient. Afflicted by anomie, each consumer seeks satisfaction in the market and its palliatives. Unable to bear time alone in his room, now devoid of internal resources, Joseph flees his room to engage in restaurant meals and films. As a writer, Bellow eschews reinforcing the ubiquity of advertising by peppering the text with brand names, though we know that Joseph feels persecuted by the corporate world's appeals, primarily on the

radio. Joseph listens to a symphonic music program, but is “disturbed when [he] fail[s] to catch the announcer before he begins to advertise someone's credit-clothing” (6). He briefly attempts to retreat into his own mind, but unable to bear his own thoughts, he turns the radio back on and hears (presumably) a few lines from “Mr. Five-by-five,” a 1942 hit sung by Ella Mae Morse. The lyrics of the song (a tribute to Jimmy Rushing, celebrity vocalist of Count Basie's Orchestra in the late 1930s and 40s), as transcribed in Joseph's journal pull us into the sphere of wartime entertainment. The classical and symphonic are displaced by the popular and superficial. The song also functions as a joke at Joseph's expense, as it closes out a paragraph in which he ate a superfluous lunch and as a result, experienced breathlessness climbing the stairs to his apartment. Joseph's weight becomes a point of contention throughout the novel (its growing size assailed by family members, particularly his niece Etta), reinforcing our sense that his consumer desires are unchecked and multiplying.

Newly prominent brand names embody the corporate images concocted and bolstered by the advertising industry, a field experiencing a somewhat unexpected wartime boom. Advertising costs became tax deductible in May of 1942, a change of particular importance, given a wartime excess profits tax of 90 percent. As Roland Marchand puts it, “the government was heavily subsidizing forms of advertising that were 'essential' only in that they kept established corporate brands and images before the public.”⁵⁸ Public relations advertising boomed from \$1mil to \$17mil between 1939 and 1943. Micheal Leff writes that advertisers managed “to maintain brand visibility without clashing with the wartime ethic of sacrifice and without creating unfulfillable product demands” by “[c]ombining the company name with public service messages...providing 'momentum' to secure future sales and influence.” Brand names littered wartime propaganda,

⁵⁸ Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*(University of California Press, 2001), 320.

allowing corporations to 'lend' their support even as they promoted themselves. A variety of metaphors were crafted to facilitate a corporate/national association—a corporation's reliability resembled the U.S. Army's, a factory foreman likened to a military sergeant. Consumers who desire peace or wartime victory found themselves also supporting the corporation sponsoring the wartime messages. The message read 'everyone (and the corporations) does their part for the war effort'. Together, both the strictures and shortages of war, and the advertised promises of a goods-laden future won the minds and bodies of American workers, though it was not always easy.

Workplace conditions during WWII exacerbated the sense of worker isolation: “the dramatic increase in the size of plant workforces, extensive geographical mobility of workers, enormous employee turnover, round-the-clock shifts, frozen wages, and larger contingents of [ostensibly temporary] women workers,” made it increasingly necessary for corporations to use the idea of a common cause to cement worker loyalty.⁵⁹ The semi-official representations of American social and technological superiority bolstered the already entrenched sense of national exceptionalism that would find new forms in this war. Unprecedented levels of production necessitated by total war required a new, nominally pluralistic view of the United States. National propaganda, interfused with corporate advertising, equated production lines with the war front and encouraged all Americans to suppress their divergent desires and class dissatisfactions in the name of a common effort. Some Americans were more encouraged to give of themselves than others. Historian Gary Gerstle compares two war bond advertisements from a single city in Massachusetts: one for the general newspaper and one for a labor paper, “intended for the city's heavily ethnic working class.”⁶⁰ Responding to market segmentation, the two

⁵⁹ Roland Marchand, *Creating*, 316.

⁶⁰ Gary Gerstle, "The Working Class Goes to War," In *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II*, Ed. Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1996): 111.

advertisements differ vastly. The one in the daily paper, intended for businessmen, emphasized the financial benefits of bonds, while the other ad emphasized the importance of a pluralistic America uniting to fight Hitler's fantasies of racial purity. Gerstle does not attempt to “contrast the self-interestedness of businessmen with the idealism of workers”; rather, he demonstrates how workers affiliated themselves with the war effort out of a desire for societal acceptance.

Dangling Man provides us with an adman as a character. Joseph's artist friend John Pearl works for an advertising agency, “drawing 'cartoon faces of bilious men and headachy office girls'” (64). Pearl remains undaunted by the “tremendous unimportance” of the “nonsense” that his agency produces, believing that there is “only one worth-while sort of work, that of the imagination” (64). His presence proves anomalous, given that a majority of Bellow's characters seem as inextricably mired in hopeless pursuits as Joseph himself, or at least are presented as such by our narrator. John Pearl, painter and adman, feels “that he has escaped a trap”; Joseph seems to agree, crediting Pearl's imagination and artistry with providing the freeing mechanism. Yet the narratorial mention of the professed artistry of the fascist Italian General Bergonzoli seems to cast the adman's “victory” in a sardonic light. Joseph loses respect and admiration for his friends over the course of the novel, deliberately allowing his social bonds to wither, while his familial ties undergo a similar fate.

III

Joseph's tension with his older brother is primarily financial in nature. His brother Amos is a self-made man, whose fortune derives from his careerism allied to his marrying money, choices that Joseph himself did not make, to Amos' continued frustration. E. P. Thompson

reminds us that “class is a relationship, not a thing”, and at several points in his journal, Joseph directly compares himself economically to those around him; he remarks on the strain put on a friendship by his slipping class status, a comment both on class and the commodification of relationships.⁶¹ In pursuit of Joseph's social decline, we might consider Bourdieu's diachronic conception of social 'subjects in motion' rather than appealing to 'class' per se. A 'synchronic' definition of class would tend to omit issues of 'class trajectory' and attendant notions of strategic 'position-taking'.⁶² Dressed in his brother's hand-me-downs and eating at his table, Joseph is acutely aware of his social and economic position.

It is well-known that the war years saw a level of relative economic equality unmatched in the American twentieth century; regardless, class differences did not entirely cease to rankle. Historian Michael Leff argues that during wartime, inequalities may have caused more dissatisfaction, not only because the war effort was supposed to be collective and free of profiteering, but also because a high degree of governmental involvement in the economy made disparities seem more calculated than might be considered the case under conditions of 'impersonal market forces'. Joseph is acutely aware of disparity, while his brother concerns himself only with maintaining the disparity: “You have to take into account what people are accustomed to,' said Amos; 'their standard of living. The government overlooks that.” Joseph's narration draws our attention to his slippage away from his brother's standards, and the obvolute interaction of class and family incites dramatic repercussions.

61 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*(New York: Pantheon, 1964), 11.

62 Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000), 156-163.

IV

While the journal structure and Joseph's general diminished affect make labeling a 'climax' for the book difficult, the scene where he spans his teenage niece is certainly one of the more striking. Most critics have not emphasized Joseph's expression of a doubly taboo desire in a book written a decade before *Lolita*, yet even the putative 'innocence' of the 1940s does not allow a reader to overlook an uncle who admits that "when she was twelve I undertook to tutor her in French as a means of broaching other subjects," particularly since the scene in question ends in a spanking (41). While a casual reading might consider the episode simply one of a series of violent irruptions, the complexity of its development and connection to Joseph's familial past set it apart as a freighted scene.

For starters, the sexual nature of Joseph's struggle with Etta is available through a few channels, one of which is an example of fetishistic displacement. As an aside, Bellovians frequent reproduce his later renunciations of Freud and Marx in their own readings of his works. We should keep in mind, however, that Bellow's attitude toward both sources is essentially reactionary. Explaining his own 'freedom' from such canonical worldviews involves a recognition of their appeal; Bellow admits that both schools of thought were "the source of powerful metaphors which had such a grip on you that you couldn't escape them for decades."⁶³ At twenty-three, Saul Bellow was undoubtedly still under the sway of mentors later denied.

In Freud's account of the fetish, the desiring subject transfers libidinal energies away from the original object of desire in order to avoid confronting lack, or the trauma of castration anxiety. Upon confronting an 'unwished-for perception' and experiencing a negative affect, the

⁶³ Saul Bellow, *Conversations with Saul Bellow*, Ed. Gloria L. Cronin and Ben Siegel (Jackson: U of Mississippi, 1994), 264.

subject represses the unwanted knowledge.⁶⁴ An inappropriate desire is masked by a substitute. In shifting his or her desire to a substitute body part or object, the fetishizing subject remains aware that the desire is phantasmic, but such a recognition does not affect the desire. Joseph takes Etta's neck (and to a lesser extent, her hair) as his fetish; witness how he discusses 'necks' before recounting the actual spanking, during which he “[s]eiz[ed] her by the hair fiercely,” while “pressing down her neck” (48-49). What 'unwished-for perception' provoked Joseph's fetishistic displacement? When looking into the face of his niece (a face that he insists mirrors his own), what vision did he confront and repress? The simplest answer remains the most expected: his inappropriate incestuous desire needed to be disavowed. Joseph seems to have long repressed desire for his niece. He previously undertook her tutelage, but admits, “I was unsuccessful. My missionary eagerness betrayed itself too soon, before I had her confidence. She told her mother that I was teaching her 'bad things'” (41). The connection of 'missionary' with 'eagerness' make it difficult to read either word as lacking a sexual undertone, particularly since Joseph admits Etta's account of his motivation as centering on 'bad things'. Furthermore, Joseph frankly evaluates the physical attractiveness of his sister-in-law. His brother's advocacy of the benefits of marrying a wealthy woman reduce Dolly not simply to a source of property, but to property herself. Joseph states that he has “always admired” her “very graceful neck,” and unsettlingly points out that his teenage niece inherited it, a further objectifying move which indicates the scene's connection of the familial with the economic. More alarming is his segue into the book of Isaiah, expressing his understanding for how the “haughty” daughters of Zion are marked for destruction by their displaying of necks and 'wanton' eyes.⁶⁵ The prophet Isaiah's

64 Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” (1927).

65 The 'wanton' nature of the biblical eyes can be seen as underscoring Joseph's projection; the descriptive power of 'wanton' displaces desire onto its object.

startling concatenation of sex and violence is soon disavowed by Joseph, who admits an obsession with femininity as typified by “delicacy in conjunction with the rugged ancient machinery of procreation” but declares himself “the very opposite of vindictive in regard to this duality” (41). His awkwardly constructed denial seems by its very overemphasis to reveal the underacknowledged. The attention paid to the neck as locus of sexuality helps to disguise imperfectly Joseph's inappropriate desire.

Joseph provides a scriptural exegesis of his own preoccupations, but Bellow gives readers only a few verses, leaving much of the import of the passage from Isaiah hovering alongside the text. Extended, the passage from Isaiah describes Jehovah's intended punishment of those given to economic oppression, and as such further underscores Joseph's disavowed vindictiveness. The prophet Isaiah warns that the ruling class in Jerusalem has become greedy and corrupt, exploiting the poor, and thus Jehovah threatens to punish their women, thoroughly stripping and smiting them. Despite the force of the entire passage (Isaiah 3:12-26 KJV), the verses immediately preceding and following Joseph's chosen verse should serve to make my point:

15 What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

16 Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet:

17 Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts.

One is struck immediately by the violence of this passage, lending further support to contradict Joseph's disavowed aggressive tendencies. Scriptural scholars disagree as to the specific meaning of “secret parts,” whether it denotes only the denuded scalp, or actual full nudity. In any case,

exegetical understanding of the verse echoes the conflation of hair and vagina, and designates that vacillating locus as the site for retribution. The passage from Isaiah continues with a long list of the physical ornaments that the Lord will divest from his overly materialistic people. The lines quoted by Joseph mention the 'tinkling of feet' resulting from the wearing of ankle bracelets. Wealth here consists of ornamentation, in this instance concentrated in the feet, reminding us of the dinner discussion about the rationing of shoes wherein Amos and Dolly insist that their wartime hoarding is not 'unpatriotic' as Joseph asserts, but rather necessary as an expression of their "standard of living" (42). Joseph, like a wrathful god himself, wishes to punish Etta and also Dolly for their materialistic ways, and his appeal to the prophet's words implies that punishment will involve stripping them, in some sense.

Joseph pretends to see a disconnect between wealth and wastefulness, pointing out that his brother and family "for all their sense of property, were careless; there were numerous broken records" (46). For one concerned with music, this particular carelessness at a time of war might prove particularly galling. Shellac, the primary material in record-making, was in short supply; Japanese forces cut trading lines to East Asia early in the war, while extant supplies of the raw material were needed for bullet casings. Only careful recycling of old records allowed new recordings to be made.⁶⁶ Thus, more directly than through their dinnertime complaints about coffee and shoes, Amos' affluent family displays their true indifference toward rationing. Their tendency toward waste also underlines one of the tense realities underlying war production: a war economy easily evades problematic overaccumulation, as most military materials are created in order to be destroyed.

The fetishistic nature of Joseph's desire also results in rampant objectification,

⁶⁶ Scott Knowles DeVaux, *The Birth of Bebop*.

dehumanizing and dismembering the female form—what one could, following Marx, call the “splintering of human nature into a number of misbegotten parts.”⁶⁷ By reducing Etta's body to a series of discrete parts—neck, hair, thighs—Joseph thus makes each disunited component more accessible, fungible, and non-human. Thus Joseph both attempts to recuperate Etta to his (ostensibly nonmaterialistic) familial line, but also to punish her for becoming commodified by reenacting that commodification. His retaliatory violence is all that most critics read into this scene, seeing Joseph's outburst as one in a string of violent encounters. Yet reducing this spanking to simple physical punishment ignores the scene's entire import. Neither Joseph's grabbing of Etta's hair or his pinning of her between his legs can be construed as resembling any conventional form of corporal punishment—both are manifestly acts of sexual dominance rather than avuncular reprimand. But sexual punishment here, as suggested by the inclusion of the passage from Isaiah, contains an economic motive. Etta's own invectives against her uncle reveal her submerged knowledge of the complexity of his motives. When she says: “You dirty...dirty no-account. You crook!” the ellipsis may elide another, more predatory or scandalous epithet (48). In any case, the word 'dirty' is repeated, underscoring her former claim that he was “teaching her bad things” (41). Unable to vocalize fully her accusation, Etta reverts to the more available economic insults that she began with: 'beggar,' 'no-account,' and 'crook'. She seeks to evade even familial connection with Joseph by refusing to call him 'Uncle', due initially to her class pretensions; once threatened, her economic preoccupations again come to the fore. Thus at no point can we reduce the subtext of this scene to merely sexual or economic—the two desires are intricately related. For example, a network of terms extends from 'neck' (apparently a mere, though charged, body part): Joseph's own 'neck' is described as stiff, providing a peculiar pivot

⁶⁷ Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's conception of man in capitalist society* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 134.

point for his ambivalent desire; his brother Amos pleads with him to not be 'stiff-necked,' but rather to pliantly accept his fraternal gift of money (placing Joseph in the dependent position of a child). Ergo, 'neck' and 'stiff-necked' interanimate physical and economic desires. Amos wants to recuperate Joseph for a traditionally and economically 'successful' life, having previously encouraged him to join his firm and marry a wealthy wife of his own. Instead, as I have argued, Joseph attempts to negotiate a double in Etta. He insists that his niece looks exactly like him, neatly excising her father from the equation altogether. We can see this as a reflection of his desire to appropriate Etta, removing her from the materialistic milieu she inhabits, in order to remake her in his own image. By attempting to claim her, Joseph effectively cuts Amos from the familial genealogy, extending a direct line of inheritance from his grandfather through himself to Etta. The putative shared visage of uncle and niece reveals yet more: as Irving Malin puts it, “[i]n spanking Etta he also spans his own narcissistic image.”⁶⁸ Through Etta, Joseph seeks both to possess and punish a version of himself, a version that desires to live in a commodified world.

One might be tempted to blame the cultural prudence of the 1940s for Joseph's making no mention of Etta's buttocks, the focus of spanking, though reference to her 'round, nubile thighs' operates as a sufficient substitute. Nonetheless, the spanking functions to bring the buttocks to prominence as a source of spectacle. While discussing Freud's “A Child is Beaten”, Eve Sedgwick notes that the “redrawing of the frame” produced by the spanking position serves to “de-differentiate and reunite” “the other characters of the drama.”⁶⁹ When confronted by Etta's parents and his own wife, even as he spans, Joseph collapses himself into those around him,

⁶⁸ Irving Malin, *Saul Bellow and the Critics* (New York: New York UP, 1967), 117.

⁶⁹ Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 183. Applying a reading of Freud's “A Child is Beaten” to her own childhood fantasies (of being spanked herself), Sedgwick also posits that the “decontextualized, legless, and often headless figure of di/s/play creates in turn a free switchpoint for the identities of subject, object, onlooker, desirer, looker-away.”

reflecting back their suspicion, and accuses Dolly of suspecting Etta of “covering something up,” while denying the extent of his own cover-ups. Violent spectacle implicates its viewers.

As 'the characters of the drama' gather, Etta attempts to extend the charges against Joseph, accusing him of taking advantage of his brother's absence to invade the intimacy of his wife's drawers (an intrusion, rendered sexual by innuendo), in order to find a pin with which to stick Amos' proffered hundred-note to the conjugal bed. Innuendo extends the gesture towards 'cash payment for sexual pleasure'. Violation and penetration thus circulate on an unwanted gift of money. In effect, Joseph twins money and marriage, even as he uses his own marital bed only for oversleeping, and uncovers another man in his mistress' bed. Money and marriage also figure in Joseph's projected anxieties about his niece, as revealed in his description of her. Etta's face resembles that of Joseph's except that it is 'unworked,' a word that slips easily from denotation toward class accusation: Etta has never worked and will never have to work. She will instead, with “inherited” capital coded in the “very graceful neck” that she “has inherited” from her mother, serve as a sexualized and objectified repository of wealth. Like “her mother's people” before her, she will eventually bestow her privilege on a husband. Joseph resents her family's pattern of inheritance, but cannot fully resist taking pleasure from such a world. His repressed desire thus reveals a longing for a self that can easily and seamlessly integrate with a world of money.

Joseph's submerged yet readably inappropriate desire for his niece also may be read as a template for his desire more generally, particularly as it relates to consumption under war conditions. Ultimately a fetish (here the 'neck') never fully obscures that which it is designed to hide; disavowal involves an affect mode in which one knows exactly what one has chosen not to

know. Thus disavowal's complex misdirection points us directly towards what lies beneath the commodity form: destruction.

V

In addition to exposing the complexities of Joseph's imperfectly repressed and sexualized desires, the spanking incident also foregrounds his ensnared relation to a further facet of a war-driven economy: technology. Whatever it developed into, Etta and Joseph's disagreement initially centered on a conflict over listening habits (or a clash of sonic desires). In *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986), Friedrich Kittler draws lines of entailment between military and consumer technology, arguing that “[t]he entertainment industry is, in any conceivable sense of the word, an abuse of army equipment.”⁷⁰ Kittler's phrasing alludes to how military command structure shut down WWI efforts to ease the pains of trench warfare among the U.S. Expeditionary force through radio programming. Despite his pleasure in the phrase “an abuse of equipment” (Kittler repeats it several times), he does not ultimately seem too interested in the political ramifications of his entertainment-military connection. Yet for our purposes, it may be worth further considering his work on the relation between media technologies and the body. For Kittler, modern media technologies could not exist until the concept of the soul had given way to a more scientific understanding of neurobiology, at which point machines might be understood as taking over certain functions of the nervous system.

Joseph mentions his involvement both with the phonograph (a technology of sound storage and reproduction) and with the radio (a technology of dissemination). Late in the book,

⁷⁰ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999), 96-97.

Joseph tells an anecdote which speaks to an outsize interest, on his part, in owning a phonograph. While, at the outset of their relationship, he and Iva lived less communally, they struggled with their landlord's propensity to deprive them of heat—a serious problem during the wintry months in Chicago. Ultimately, their complaints over the cutting of electrical power turn not on loss of heat, but on the loss of sound: “we might easily have borne the chill. But we were listening to a Brahms concerto” (107). In his rage, Joseph physically accosts the landlord, and the couple are forced to move into a roominghouse.

By way of the phonograph, Joseph seeks solace in the voices of the doubly dead: the works of the literally dead Haydn's works having lost cultural relevance in the era of big band, swing, and bebop. Joseph echoes Kittler, when Kittler writes that “[o]nce technological media guarantee the similarity of the dead to stored data by turning them into the latter’s mechanical product, the boundaries of the body, death and lust, leave the most indelible traces.”⁷¹ Joseph uses Haydn's composition as a sounding board for his own ruminations, showing that he requires an externalization of his mental struggle mediated by a commodity (the phonograph record). Though the Haydn record orients Joseph toward God, Joseph (sans soul) demurs: instead, he replays the recording and renews his meditation. In the realm of the aesthetic, Joseph seeks a palliative for his tumultuous class anxieties, brought to the fore by the presumption of his brother's financial offer. After Joseph has begun his third playing of the Haydn record, broadcasting his self-absorption to the household, Etta comes upstairs to protest. She wants to listen to one of her multiple Cugat records, procured by her mother despite wartime rationing. As a bandleader, much of Cugat's success was attributable to his ability to track popular music trends closely. He made recordings of rumba, the conga, mambo, cha-cha-cha, and the twist as

⁷¹ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, .

each dance came into fashion. Like Etta and her parents, Cugat reportedly privileges financial success over artistic integrity. A frequently reprinted quotation from his autobiography *Rumba Is My Life* (1948) summarizes the reasons for his switch from concert violin to popular artistry: “I would rather play 'Chiquita Banana' and have my swimming pool than play Bach and starve.”⁷²

The phonograph spins at the end of the record as Joseph punishes his niece, and what echoes of wartime production might we hear in a room filled by “the tac-a-tac of the machine”?

VI

Can we follow the familial traces further?

At the center of a crowd of spectators, Joseph briefly attempts to help a fallen, convulsing man before drawing back at the approach of the police, who reveal to Joseph that the man has a “wallet like my father's” (83). The father's wallet activates a traumatic trace, causing a sudden ache in a scar left by an aunt desperate for a sister's (his mother's) last words. Joseph elides these connections by labeling the event a “prevision” of mortality, thereby effacing the link to his past.

The aunt who scratched him (and here we should remember that Etta, too, attempted to claw his face) is the same “self-willed” woman responsible for the young Joseph's traumatic first hair cut, in a style called a “Buster Brown” (a cartoon child originally created for use by the Brown Shoe Company). Accompanied by a large talking dog and a preternaturally pretty child, Buster sported wide (sometimes) blue eyes and a blond pageboy. Thus Joseph's aunt, in the matter of the haircut, not only severed a connection with his mother through the removal of his feminine curls, but also recasts her nephew as a commercialized figure, in the image of an advertisement. Buster's prototypically Aryan coloration adds insult to injury. The struggle

⁷² Xavier Cugat, *Rumba Is My Life* (New York: Didier, 1948), 148.

between aunt and nephew over the cutting of his childhood curls strangely echoes the later physical struggle between uncle and niece. The proximity of the spanking episode and the recalled haircut prompt readers to consider the two together: similarities are select, but striking--an emphasis on hair, a struggle of wills, and attempts (one successful) to scratch. The scratch left a visible and sensitive trace on Joseph's forehead and leads him to his mother's final moments, and subsequently to a photograph of his grandfather, taken shortly before his death. The grandfather's "sulphurous" beard carries devilish connotations, connecting back to the German mother of handsome Joseph's childhood friend who declared that "Mephisto war auch schön." Thus genealogical connections extend to anti-semitism, an issue that runs just beneath the surface of the novel and of Joseph's mind, as evidenced by his nightmares. Ultimately, Joseph reinscribes his select lineage only to deny it: "It may be that grandfather's head hangs over both of us, but if and when it devours us it will be devouring two people who have nothing else in common" (54). By loosing the link between himself and Etta, Joseph attempts to disavow the parallels carefully constructed by his account. He turns his grandfather's death mask into a universal death's head, as a prelude to the announced truism that 'death' will eventually claim both Etta and himself. More concisely, he attempts to deny the commonality upon which he has insisted up to this point. Joseph first clings to family, and then denies them, while simultaneously shedding additional apparent selves, causing the collapse of both social world and individual identity. Bellow thus positions the reader in a similarly unsustainable position, caught inside the first person narrative of a self-destructive narrator, particularly unrecuperable since the narrator both constructs and destructs himself in narratological and interpersonal ways rather than simply physical ways. Paranoia structures his diary; although Joseph rebuffs his friends throughout the book, the lack of a hello from a former comrade strikes him as a gross insult. Violence also

attends his thoughts, as a chicken carcass in his mother-in-law's kitchen appears as a bloody threat, which we may perhaps read as a silent rebuke for his rejection of his wife as possible mother. The disintegrative properties of doubling surface in his circular dialogues with the invented Tu As Raison Aussi, the Spirit of Alternatives. This imagined interlocutor pleasantly engages Joseph, but when the Spirit admits he is “not supposed to give answers,” Joseph angrily drives the “two-faced” “cheat” out of the room (104).

VII

While “the home” has long been considered a moral and economic hub, prior to suburbanization during the postwar period, 'homes' often contained a complex network of individuals. Paul Groth, an urban geographer, claims that the taking in of boarders was so common in the early twentieth century that “use of the term 'single-family house' is misleading” since “one-third to one-half of all urban Americans either boarded or took boarders at some time.”⁷³ The rate of boarding increased during the war years as workers migrated to cities in search of 'war work,' a movement that often created extensive housing shortages. While a handful of companies built housing for their workers, others did not. At Willow Run, Ford's anti-labor policies not only determined the position of the factory, but even induced attempts directly to sabotage a proposed governmental housing project.⁷⁴ In many areas, pressure from residents who resented and feared the influx of 'outsiders' meant that housing projects were shoddy, 'temporary' constructions or did not advance past the planning stage. Nonetheless, an overall increase in the number of home owners during the war years saw an eventual move towards

⁷³ Paul Erling Groth, *Living Downtown: the history of residential hotels in the United States*(University of California Press, 1994), 92.

⁷⁴ Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know*.

increasingly mass-produced housing for working class Americans. Though incomes increased for workers, class stratification flourished, as “the 1940s produced some individuality in upper-class neighborhoods, whereas a sense of sameness pervaded smaller ones.”⁷⁵

The rise of mass consumerism engendered an increased emphasis on 'privacy' and 'private spaces', which would allow for increased leisure-based consumption. We will have to wait until after the war to see the full flowering of this ideal in suburbia, a space that not only requires significant investment in consumer products (so many rooms to fill) but also prioritized the much-discussed 'environment of competition' as setting for status objects.⁷⁶ Though the consumer paradise of the suburbs does not exist in 1944, the novel reveals the extent to which desire for a private space already operates as a social ideal. Though they once lived in a flat which afforded them a higher degree of privacy, early instances of Joseph's violent irruptions resulted in a move to a roominghouse. Joseph's initial inability quietly to suffer landlord autocracy presages his ultimate explosion over Etta. Class slippage attends Joseph's progress through the novel, and the various spaces he inhabits index his changing position. Just as Carson McCullers's *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1939) grounded its exploration of desire in an Army camp (a space bounded by position and power), *Dangling Man* employs similar tropes of containment and invasion to reveal Joseph's anxieties and desires. The porous borders of a crowded roominghouse result in regimes of private consumption being threatened by an amorphous invasion of sound and scent.

An old woman downstairs, dying throughout the novel, serves to annotate Bellow's

⁷⁵ William Young and Nancy Young, *World War II and the Postwar Years in America: A Historical and Cultural Encyclopedia*(ABC-CLIO, 2010), 25.

⁷⁶ Most notably in Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* (1959), but see also: Alison Clarke, “Parties are the Answer” in *Consumption: Disciplinary approaches to consumption*, ed. Daniel Miller, pg. 261-285; Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, *The suburb reader*,pg. 258-259.

mortality thematic, even as her frailty enforces a regime of quiet on the music-loving Joseph. More significantly, bodily noises emitted by an ancient neighbor (Vanekar) frequently interrupt the couple's privacy: abject sounds punctuate their domesticity. His hacking cough, persistent and timely, persuades Joseph of Vanekar's malevolence: "His coughing, I am convinced, is partly alcoholic and partly nervous. And it is also a sort of social activity" (7). The elderly man also refuses fully to close the communal bathroom's door, allowing his "splashing" to be heard in the other rooms.

In addition to his sonic trespassing, Vanekar is also a thief. The objects Vanekar takes from the young couple are not irreplaceable, but intimately personal (socks and perfume), marking his thefts less as transgression, than as bodily violations. Tellingly, Vanekar's activities trouble the gender line; he steals Iva's bottles of perfume, presumably for his own use. Iva brands him a 'kleptomaniac'; she expresses disapproval but allows that his thievery may be an involuntary condition. In the early to mid-twentieth century, kleptomania was often linked to either female hysteria (a theory eventually dropped on the ground that men were more given to kleptomania than women) or castration anxiety, connecting theft to bodily fears.⁷⁷ Though Iva resents the invasion of her personal space, configured as not simply the room but also her body, she does not seek any form of incarceration for her neighbor, considering the appropriate authority to be the landlady. She does, however, insist upon an attempted tightening of borders, telling Joseph to keep the door locked. As readers we are likely, initially at least, to accept Iva's amateur diagnosis, but our trust in the simplicity of Vanekar's compulsions may well weaken as we learn that the neighbor appropriates and uses not just Iva's perfume, but also Joseph's socks. With Joseph, Iva, and Vanekar's eventual expulsion from the rooming house, the perfume bottles

⁷⁷ Aboujaoude, Elias and Lorrie Koran. *Impulse Control Disorders*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

are found in Vanekar's wastebasket—empty. Joseph angrily accuses Vanekar of “standing in my socks and stinking of my wife's perfume,” a compound violation of his family's bodily and spatial integrity. Miasma (via sound and odor) has attended his penetration of their ostensibly separate rooms and personal spaces.

Vanekar's actions also exhibit a peculiar form of wastefulness. The neighbor's property becomes “Vanakar's favorite dumping yard,” a site where Joseph sees a pair of his own socks, “evidence” “wrapped...in a piece of paper and thr[own]...away” (91). Vanekar's actions allow for circulation of goods outside both price controls and the market in general, a circulation surreptitious beyond even the wiles of the black market. Essentially, Vanekar's theft provides an example of another tactic whereby consumer desire may evade market dependence and more particularly the rationing of clothing. The market circulation of the clothing provides another marker for Joseph's class position. Given that Vanekar not only takes Joseph's socks (a form of hand-me-down), but that Joseph wears his brother's cast-offs, Vanekar may be understood to operate as an elusive double, reflecting Joseph's class descent (44). Amos, a wealthy hoarder, can afford generosity; Vanekar, a thief, can afford wastage. Together, they unite two aspects of capital within the conduit of Joseph's resistance. The transfer does not serve to elevate Joseph to his brother's stature, but rather to pull him down closer to Vanekar's position.

The relation of rooming-houses to class trajectory is further explicated through Joseph's relations with his sometimes mistress, Kitty Daumler. The affair began when, through his work, he arranged a trip for Kitty who afterward asked him “to appraise some of the things she had bought. For that purpose I went to her apartment” (69). As a white-collar service worker, the class of worker typical of the postwar period, Joseph's offered 'appraisal' (a form of labor) ieeks to direct Killy in the consumption of nondurable leisure products which she soon expands into

further leisure activities. Joseph tellingly describes “the real Kitty” as a “lively, plump, high-colored, scented, gross girl, behind the talk” (70). His choice of modifiers links her entirely to a world of commodified sensuality. Her conversation simply screens over her 'real' self, a 'real self' which itself proves to be a screen, colored and scented, presumably with the help of beauty products, as 'high-colored' can denote both a natural flush and an exaggerated vividness. As in Haug's formulation, Kitty has commodified her own mere 'appearance of use,' which functions as a sort of promise.⁷⁸

The characterization of Kitty positions her as one of a new sort of woman prominent on the home-front. Much scholarly emphasis has been placed on the increased employment of women, and the cultural shifts prompted by legions of working women. Historian Elaine Tyler May points out that these workers may have had their identities complicated by work, but were still encouraged to view themselves as daughters, sisters, wives, and future wives.⁷⁹ The continued emphasis on 'traditional gender ideology' led young women to 'support our boys,' in ways that frequently involved romance and sex. May argues that long-term commitments to female employment in wartime change had social significance than increased sexual autonomy during the war years. Female autonomy continues to surface as a literary theme throughout the war years, and do so with increased vehemence during the immediate postwar decades. It should be noted, of course, that such autonomy was also a function of women's role in the workplace, necessitating relocation away from protective families and into urban rooming-houses, hence the appearance of Kitty Daumler.

⁷⁸ Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1986).

⁷⁹ Elaine Tyler May, “Rosie the Riveter Gets Married,” *MidAmerica* Vol. 75, No. 3 (1993).

The prodigious growth of the defense industry, primarily in major cities, led large working populations to migrate toward the hoped-for opportunities; in *DM*, Iva's friend abandons her baby with her parents in order to go “to California to work in an aircraft factory” (119). Factories rarely prepared for (or even considered) the matter of worker housing, leading to escalating rents (despite price controls) and overcrowding. Concurrently, wartime advertising began to instill postwar dreams hinged on a private home. Yet the novel shows that the social ideal of a private home existed in tension with desire for a more communal past. Joseph sexualizes the communal working-class environs of his memories. As a young child, he lived in a 'slum', which he describes as “the only place where [he] was ever allowed to encounter reality.” That 'reality' consisted of violence and sex—“a man rearing over someone on a bed, and,...a Negro with a blond woman on his lap” (60). Joseph carries the power of those sexually charged memories into his adult life, and invests them in Kitty's rooming-house, with its “brass nipples of call bells.” To be precise, and as explicit as Bellow's narration, his mistress's room is exceedingly warm, close, and made wet by Joseph's arrival. Initially, he allows himself to be comfortable and enclosed there, in a liminal space where the only demands made upon him are romantic. Her rooming-house, with its promiscuous rooms, allows him a voyeuristic glimpse, through a slightly opened door, of a unknown 'woman in a slip, sitting before the mirror with a razor' (likely engaged in personal grooming), though her 'crooked arm' and 'angry face' lend the razor sinister shades, that harken back to the working-class violence of his childhood. Joseph's attitudes limit the range of his early radical politics, insofar as his narration casts him as a voyeur projecting his excess desire onto his surroundings. Histories of the home front often reflect the era's prohibitive attitudes toward working-class consumption. I am not suggesting that the emphasis on policing the economic desires of the working-class was in any way unique to the period, but rather I

would suggest that Joseph's attitude proves symptomatic of an overall economy of desire. Where desire, where sexual or consumer oriented, becomes the focus of hyperconscious attention, we may see the displacement of unchecked desire onto the other. In this case, the socioeconomic other is typified by excessive and inappropriate consumer choices, a trope that will echo throughout books of the period and beyond.

VIII

Despite being linked by his pattern of consumption to the arms economy, Joseph's social identity begins to slip. With a war underway, and the nation at nearly full employment, the only culturally appropriate position for a healthy young white male involves war production, either as cannon fodder, or fodder for the fashioning of cannons. Having relinquished his white-collar service job, and believing himself unable to find another job since he is classified as a battle-ready 1A, Joseph “dangles” outside of the system of accumulation; he cannot avoid the attendant feeling “that there is something unlawful in being abroad, idle, in the middle of the day” (5). He leaves his room only to consume meals, or sometimes a film, his only means of engaging appropriately. Total war involves the militarization of all spheres of life, and consumption itself became part of the war effort. Through the conjunction of propaganda and social pressure, “tasks that had been viewed as private and domestic were brought into the civic arena and granted new political importance,” consequently the consumer found her buying decisions a matter of public import.⁸⁰ Even though the popular rhetoric of the era brought domestic decisions into the public sphere, one should note that consumption decisions were still gendered as female concerns.

⁸⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 67.

Advertising and government pamphlets universally depicted the shopper as female. Propaganda posters drew parallels between the home front and the war front, but the casting of the latter as thoroughly masculine, feminized the former. Governmental agencies designed a 'Home Front Pledge' casting the marketplace as a battlefield, where pursuit of rationing guidelines, though militarized, “implicitly acknowledged that food matters were women's work.”⁸¹ Joseph recognizes that as a consumer he has lost some of his masculine identity, admitting that “now, like any housewife, I am listening to the radio” (6).

His loss of societal position is made particularly clear to Joseph toward the novel's end. His wife, as sole breadwinner, assigns him daily tasks, which he resents. His injured pride allows the couple nearly to exhaust their spending money, since cashing his wife's paycheck highlights his inappropriate, outsider status. At the bank, Joseph's diminished position is made humiliatingly clear. The bank manager challenges Joseph's identification cards, and worse, “he addressed [Joseph] by [his] first name, as though [he] were an immigrant or a young boy or a Negro”⁸² (130). Already feminized as a consumer, he now experiences racial and class slippage. Such moments bring Joseph's agency into question; though I am arguing that he is deliberately erasing his own identities, Bellow does not allow that erasure to be easy or uncomplicated. The tension-producing reality that the war could be both imperialist and genocidal is finally unbearable. Having alienated his friends and former comrades, severed familial ties, disconnected himself from the working world, and struggled with his problematic Jewishness, Joseph finds himself as afflicted as ever by the violent contradictions of his historical moment.

⁸¹ Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 38.

⁸² The equivalencies of status between immigrant, young boy, and “Negro” hinge on the centrality of masculinity to the war effort, and similar issues will resonate throughout Chester Himes' wartime memoir.

He even seems to echo it in certain ways. Joseph accuses himself of “shortsightedness” and of “inflationary, grandiose, tasteless attitudes,” critiques that could easily be shifted from Joseph to the imperatives and trajectories of the wartime economy itself. By 1944, most Americans no longer marveled at the production capacity of the American war machine, but, instead, worried about the shift to peace. In the years immediately following WWI, America had experienced high levels of inflation, which the public feared would happen again. Price controls provided stability and some a guarantee that consumer desires would be fulfilled, while at the same time evidencing the degree to which state controls derived from war. Having erased his possible identities and loosed his relational ties to those around him, Joseph finds himself still unable to avoid imbrication with an economy founded on production for destruction. His attempts to free himself from his painful knowledge become more desperate.

IX

As an aspect of his self-disintegration, Joseph also delimits his possible relations with the future. We already suspect that Joseph has obviated any chance of reproduction, his attempt to claim Etta notwithstanding; during their most tender moment in bed, Iva functions primarily as nursemaid to an ill Joseph. Taking it further, we see that his impossible attempt to claim Etta as daughter has a counter-productive motive, intended to function as a death to the line, an ending. Moreover, his traumatic dream of massacre locates the “remarkably infantile” dead in “large cribs or wicker bassinets” (87). Not only is the next generation figured as already dead, but the broad impact of this image narrows when Joseph compares the “atmosphere of terror” to his father's descriptions of Gehenna, a Yiddish term for a place of punishment. The massacre in his nightmare proves identifiable: a Jewish pogrom conducted by the Romanian Iron Guard, and

occurring in Constanza and Bucharest in 1941. Joseph's ability to see the war clearly, either in imperialist or moral terms, is complicated by his fraught relationship with the Jewish dead, though describing himself as "an outsider" he despises the "smile of complicity" from his dream guide. Yet his 'complicity' stems not from reproduction, but production, and Joseph has failed to extricate himself from America's wartime economy. Such a struggle is not unique to Joseph, but extends outside of the text to its author, explaining some of the book's ethical vacillations.

Bellow's struggle as a young writer attempting to conceptualize the war lies in a seemingly unresolvable division: was the war fundamentally an imperialist struggle or an ethnic genocide?

Joseph, like many of his generation, has lost faith in the future. It is tempting to read the change that the journal records as a move from life-seeking to death-driven, or more accurately, from being an individual with a future to an individual without one. He initially tracks his change in literary terms, finding himself drawn to Goethe's suicidal Englishman as well as to Shakespeare's murderous Barnardine, both figures who express a "contempt for life" (9). Joseph grows increasingly unable to read books, those "guarantors of an extended life" on which his sense of an intellectual self depends. "Guarantors," taken from legal discourse, appears to be a guarantee but simultaneously indicates a debt. Joseph's store of books as promissory sign of intellect stood in stead of a fully realized economic life since Joseph emphasizes that he could "see them and touch" his books, but the substitution no longer functions. The "superior life" first "became tenuous" and now "[b]ooks do not hold me," the wording of both statements showing that he is losing his grasp (2). Still maintaining his analytic mode, Joseph recognizes the death-drive often masked by the "narcotic dullness" of his daily routine (8). Yet his intellectual postures break down over the course of the book, though Joseph essays to shore up their ruins. In Joseph's most revealing moments (while describing the relation between himself and Etta, for

example), he attempts to retreat from the specificities of the world into a broader existentialist dread of mortality. As readers, however, we should not be too easily drawn into his contemplation of so-called universal themes, knowing that they are a bait and switch. His grandfather's death mask cannot simply function as a universal death's head in an era which saw the murder of millions of Jewish people, and Joseph's dangling cannot be simply an expression of *thanatos*. His personal drift toward death can be seen as echoing a larger societal change, echoing not simply the wartime death tolls, but the more basic reconfiguration of society to serve the cause of destruction. Joseph flees the specific for the general to avoid his own recognition of the fact that his daily actions are caught up in an economy of death. Joseph's idleness does not cause him to dangle, but rather his inability to reconcile himself with the knowledge that the war is imperialist in nature while also genocidal. Joseph's 'consumerist blinkers' occlude the ethical force of his economic analyses. He dangles, attempting to disconnect himself from his lateral ties, but still inextricably bound to the wartime economy.

While the average American remained in a state of relative ignorance (or more perniciously, denial) about the extent of and even existence of the Nazi concentration camps and mass graves, Jewish-Americans were often more intimately aware of what happened abroad.⁸³ According to Haskel Lookstein, after 1942 any American reader of the Yiddish press was aware of Hitler's Final Solution, though most American Jews reacted with disbelief, and a 'muted public response'.⁸⁴ On the homefront, the concentration camps were not widely publicized until their

⁸³ Although the general press reported Nazi murders starting in late 1942, “[a]s late as May 1945, when asked how many people the Nazis had murdered, the median answer by Americans was one million.” Haskel Lookstein, “The Public Response of American Jews” found in Robert Shapiro's *Why didn't the press shout?: American & international journalism during the Holocaust*(KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 2003): 130.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

liberation at war's end in 1945, and the attendant representations via newsreels. Upon reaching the camps, then-General Eisenhower insisted on the dissemination of the footage, feeling a 'duty' to “testify at first hand about these things” in order to dismiss feelings on the homefront that reports of Nazi atrocities were merely 'propaganda', revealing the extent to which the 'average American' might be drawn toward denial.⁸⁵ For a time, the Nazis' genocidal nature remained partially obscured. The early and most notorious newsreel entitled “Nazi Murder Mills” revealed the horrors of the camps, containing some of the most-viewed footage of the twentieth century, yet the narration at no time mentions the ethnic identities of the victims.

The 1940s saw what many cultural critics mark as a widespread transition from identification with the group marker 'American Jews' to that of 'Jewish-Americans'. Europe, not only distant, but now dangerous, would never again be a home for either the recent influx of émigrés fleeing Hitler or previous arrivals. Jewish-Americans also found themselves experiencing more economic success and social acceptance than ever before, at a time when assimilation became increasingly coded in consumerist terms. As a group, their cultural impact would continue to grow and expand; Saul Bellow and the Jewish writers who followed him would influence that growth. The Holocaust remains a semi-submerged specter throughout Bellow's career, perhaps most significantly in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), whose titular character, an elderly Jewish man, resists memories of the Holocaust and silences dialogues, yet the blood in his memories literally rises up from the ground. By its very elision in that later work, the crypt inheres as 'unspeakable reality', but in Bellow's first novel, no such allowances were

⁸⁵ Eisenhower, Dwight D., *Crusade in Europe*(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948), 408-409.

possible.⁸⁶ Dangling Man gives us signals that Bellow's reticence is not due entirely to the 'muted response' allegedly common to Jewish-Americans in the immediately postwar period, but has specific ties to his left-leaning past. One can follow Ernest Mandel and characterize World War II as an imperialist war without diminishing the enormity of its genocidal effects, yet for the young Saul Bellow, it seemed to be an either/or choice.⁸⁷

Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) attempts to explain the rise of fascism in the absence of capitalism's primary contradiction, using readings of the history of human societies as well as individual psychic development, with sweeping and complex results. As a response to WWII, their work encapsulates many of the moral and ethical concerns circulating at the time, and several of the book's insights are useful here. Adorno and Horkheimer posit an inherent link between sacrifice and commodity exchange, insofar as both involve the substitutability of incommensurable objects. Such substitutability destabilizes ethics based on respect for the living, making commodity exchange inherently violent. Not only commodity exchange but also other forms of modern rationality (most significantly bureaucratization and technology) effectively erase the distinction between the living and the dead (or inert). Such a distinction is also essentially erased by the very impulse toward self-preservation. In an attempt to avoid death, self-preservation involves imitating that which cannot die—the non-organic—creating a strange intermingling of self-preservation and self-destruction. Thus both

⁸⁶ Here I use Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of 'crypt' from *The shell and the kernel: renewals of psychoanalysis*, (of Chicago Press, Sep 1, 1994): 140-143. Traumatic loss is “a segment of an every so painfully lived Reality—untellable and therefore inaccessible to the gradual, assimilative work of mourning” which becomes entombed in the subject's psyche (141).

⁸⁷ Ernest Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War*, Verso, London, 1986. While Mandel may evade some of the more difficult questions about Stalinism and the Soviet Union's role in the war, see him for his detailed reading of the relations between imperialist powers in WWII.

individual self-destructiveness and collective self-destructiveness (of the military-industrial variety) are a type of perverse attempt at self-preservation, “a mimesis of what is dead”.⁸⁸ As Joseph retreats from his social connections, he realizes that he can escape neither death nor, more significantly, dealing in death. He joins the army to imitate the dead: “relieved of self-determination, freedom canceled” (143). Adorno and Horkheimer see no possibility of escape, and Bellow does not provide one: even Joseph's attempted collapse of the ego fails, since the world itself is coercive. The young Saul Bellow, in a 1944 letter, stated that Joseph's self-sacrificial gesture was not a solution, but an 'irony'. He writes, “As to what I would advise Johnny to do, concretely I can't say. In general I would say, 'Be a revolutionist. Nothing we have politically deserves to be saved',” and ends with a conclusion not unlike Horkheimer and Adorno's.⁸⁹ In a world dominated by the violent logic of the commodity, and in a country driven by collective destructiveness, the citizen may dangle, but not elude civic complicity.

Therefore Joseph's fear of self-government is a fear of hopeless entanglement. In a number of ways Irving Kristol may be right in saying that *Dangling Man* is the quintessential WWII novel; depicting not the battlefield but the home front, Joseph's struggles reveal the nature of a militarized economy as well as its psychic costs. If the world cannot be changed and cannot be escaped, he would rather participate directly in its central mode of destruction than be a bystander. He makes a direct statement in this regard during an argument with Amos, who demands that Joseph should attempt to become an Army officer in order to raise himself.

Recognizing that “[t]here is no personal future any more,” Joseph renounces Amos's mercenary

⁸⁸ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*(New York: Continuum, 1993), 57.

⁸⁹ Written to David Bazelon. *Letters of Saul Bellow*. . Benjamin Taylor, 69. The paragraph begins: “I don't advise others to follow the *Dangling Man* into regimentation. That was not advice.”

attitude (read as a reflection of a dominant American viewpoint), and disowns his “neat vision of personal safety...but not a future of another kind” (44, 45). Yet another kind of future does not seem available. The connection between Amos's attitude and Joseph's decision appears after his decision to volunteer, when he again refuses to let his status-driven brother capitalize on his enlistment. When Amos invites him to dine with him at the club, surrounded by his fellow financiers and others profiting from the economic upswing, Joseph declines: “I know he would have introduced me to his friends as 'my brother who is going into the Army,' and would thereafter be known as a man who was 'in it.'” (140). He refuses to play the patriotic part that Amos desires, performing a role that would allow Amos access to his sacrificial status as justification for the war economy. The final words of the book provide a sobering coda:

I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom canceled.
Hurray for regular hours!
And for the supervision of the spirit!
Long live regimentation! (143)

His final decision represents the failure of an attempt to live outside the war economy, or a rational self-destructive world. His capitulation functions as a coded admission that Joseph has *always* been “in other hands.” Unable to avoid capitalizing on the suffering and death brought by the war, in joining the Army, he will at least be the labor, not a profiteer. The double valence of 'relieved' here sees Joseph psychically unburdened by the abdication of an impossible ethical task. No 'moral citizen' can free himself from an economy that doesn't “mind climbing on the back of the dead” (44). 'Regiment', of German derivation, did not become a military term until the 1550s; previously, and in various forms, 'regiment' designated a system of government or regime. Etymologically, 'to be regimented' is 'to be ruled'. Joseph's final exclamation grants longevity to social control and civil engineering: the Army literally produces regiments, while

the pervasive logic of capitalist accumulation requires social regimentation outside of wartime. Despite wartime successes for large corporations, executives remained anxious about the possibility of continued state economic controls in the postwar period. Considering remnants of New Deal policy to be a danger lurking 'within' America, corporations began to link the concept of fighting fascism abroad with a need to resist 'regimentation' at home. Corporations continued their Depression-era tactics of conflating themselves and their products with the 'average man' and 'simple things.' The war years enlivened that message using a common enemy, and a yoking of consumer abundance to peace. "We" were fighting together against 'regimentation' in order to preserve a peaceful future for free enterprise, safe from economic regulation. Adorno and Horkheimer are correct; one cannot escape from an inherently coercive and violent social system without changing the system. Joseph cannot escape, but in charting his failure Bellow evidences the extent to which 'freedom' from consumption has become impossible.

CHAPTER TWO

“No more emotion to spend” : A Family at War in Jim Thompson’s *Now and On Earth*

I

After working for the WPA in the 1930s and defense plants in the 1940s, Chester Himes and Jim Thompson both became prolific and influential producers of hard-boiled crime fiction in the 1950s and early 1960s. Their books were among the most brutal and gritty of the period, centering on morally ambiguous or ‘degenerate’ protagonists making their way through an unfeeling, senseless universe. Yet both started their novel-writing careers with books leaning more toward autobiography, pseudo-memoirs focused on time spent working for California’s defense industry. Can we draw lines of entailment between the war-based economy and the violent antiheroes of their crime fiction? And what else can these insider views of the WWII defense industry tell us? M. Keith Booker writes that Thompson’s crime novels are suffused with “Brechtian suggestions of close parallels between the activities of capitalists and those of criminals,” and I would suggest that Thompson’s linking of the two springs not only from previous progressive traditions in crime fiction (particularly Dashiell Hammett) but also from his experiences in the wartime economy.⁹⁰ The solidification of corporate capitalism as the dominant form in America accelerated due to the influx of defense contract money. Any residual WWI-born suspicion of big business warmongering faded from dominant discourse, but critical eyes marked the nascent formation of a military-industrial complex. Some felt the transition to an economy orientated to production for death particularly viscerally; Jim Thompson and Chester

⁹⁰ M. Keith Booker, *The Post-Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950s* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 109.

Himes both supported themselves as creatives in the 1930s, crafting a folk history of America, then found themselves literally building war machines in the 1940s. We might suspect that the nature of WPA writing helped precipitate the reactions of both writers, who likely picked up a commitment to regionalism that may have produced a reaction when exposed to the ‘consensus’ of wartime and the postwar years.

Both writers’ early works, Thompson’s *Now and On Earth* (1942) and Himes’ *If Hollers Let Him Go* (1944), focus on the details of Californian defense factory work. Critic Michael Denning rightfully positions his own work, with its driving focus on labor, as a response to what he sees as historical materialism’s over-theorization of both capital and commodities.⁹¹ Since my own project seeks to focus on the ramifications of the concomitant erecting of a militarized and a consumer economy during WWII, I recognize the force of Denning’s corrective. While the chapter ahead maintains the project’s overall focus on commodities, I do turn to two novels centered on war workers in the defense industry, and will endeavor to further a look at the experiences of labor during the war. Despite working for the WPA before the war, neither writer rests easily in his leftist affiliation. Jim Thompson’s leftist leanings, though visible throughout most of his life, were not at their acme during the war years; in *Now and On Earth*, his fictional alter-ego Jimmie Dillon directly addresses Karl Marx, berating him for the flawed world in which Jimmie finds himself. Though Chester Himes strongly supported labor solidarity, even centering his second novel *The Lonely Crusade* (1947) on a union worker, he remained deeply suspicious of the Communist Party, and included negative depictions of Communist activists in several of his books, including *If He Hollers*. Yet both authors engage directly with the war

⁹¹ Victor Cohen, “The Labor of Culture: An Interview with Michael Denning,” *The Minnesota Review*, ns70 (Spring/Summer 2008). Accessed 14 December 2012: http://www.theminnesotareview.org/journal/ns70/interview_denning.shtmlhttp://www.theminnesotareview.org/journal/ns70/interview_denning.shtml.

economy through their early novels, contributing essential dissent in an enforced atmosphere of consensus.

Large corporations triumphed in the 1940s; if not directly supported by generous defense contracts, most found their reputations restored by the revitalized advertising industry. While advertisements may have depicted factory workers with unbelievably wide smiles in the face of the hard labor and extended hours forced by war quotas, productivity was most certainly up. The War Labor Board set wage rates for all workers and arbitrated disputes; a patriotic No-Strike Pledge remained intact for a while. Though strikes were not entirely absent, a common enemy helped ensure the appearance of accord. Wages were high enough not only to allow workers to fund the war through taxes and bonds, but also to participate in the post-Depression re-expansion of consumerism as dominant mode.

This resurrection of the consumer market happened in forms both material and promissory. War bonds not only financed the war, but also restrained consumer spending. Business may have welcomed the influx of war wages, but economists including Keynes feared the inevitable inflation such spending would bring.⁹² Given economic realities, my argument about consumerism is necessarily two-fold. Deprivation is relative; for the average American, the 1940s were a time of increased material prosperity. Postwar prosperity did not appear *ex nihilo* after the surrender of Japan, nor were the forms of consumption determined then. The creation of consumer desire makes up the second part of my argument; advertising, acting with the backing of both business and the government, promoted a vision of the future structured around manufactured goods.

⁹² John Maynard Keynes, "How to Pay for the War," *Economic Journal*, vol. 50 (June—September 1940): 321–326.

II

Thompson's novel primarily shifts between his poles of militarized production and what we might characterize as a militant family life, emphasizing the pervasive nature of his violent reality. This semi-autobiographical text functions as a twist on family drama, involving few settings and focusing on limited groups of people. Since Thompson writes prevalently in the stream-of-consciousness mode, readers cannot escape the extreme interiority of Jimmie Dillon's narration, and his cycles of emotion. Dillon emphasizes his family's distress, and with an implicit naturalistic bent, outlines some societal causes for their condition. Yet most of the characters remain abject and beyond easy sympathy. Leonard Cassuto argues that both sentimental fiction and hardboiled crime tales "position the home as a center of value against the public market economy, and at the same time acknowledge that the two realms aren't really separate—thus marking an unarticulated contradiction of the pervasive public ideology of separate male and female spheres."⁹³ Thompson manipulates this model, admitting the conflation of public and private, and investigating the embedded contradictions, but he systematically evacuates the home of its sentimental value, depicting the domestic space as unstable and violent, as a direct result of a militarized and consumerist economy.

Like Bellow's Joseph, Jimmie displays a hyperconscious awareness of his family's debilitating consumption; unlike Joseph, who remains on the fringe of middle-class society despite his lack of employment, the Dillon family slips repeatedly and inexorably into poverty, doing so despite Jimmie's constant string of jobs. The Dillons cannot engage in the mindless and compulsive consumption so deliberately itemized by Bellow, yet an emphasis on leisure-based

⁹³ Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 11.

consumption emergent under conditions of wartime production appears just as plainly in their domestic life. For the Dillons, participation in consumer culture is a zero-sum game; any purchase invalidates another, and any foray into 'leisure' goods requires a painful loss in other goods. Nevertheless, the family cannot resist the game. Moreover, purchase 'power' rests on Jimmie's sacrificial labor on behalf of the war economy.

The Dillon family's destructive desire for consumer objects emerges on the first page of the novel, when the eight-year-old Jo accosts her father on his way home from his first day of work at the aircraft factory, clinging to his sleeve and her hopes of a new hat.⁹⁴ She wants new fashion because her mother bought new shoes for her siblings, using the rent money; her desire typifies a recurrent economic pattern in the novel, whereby any object purchased means another good gone without, and leisure goods supplant necessities. Jimmie purchases the book's first meal with a dollar borrowed from his mother, who reminds him to repay her quickly since his sister needs "a permanent, and some new stockings," ergo Frankie's appearance matters as much as a the family dinner (14). The seeming incongruity of 'necessary' purchases points to the explosion of consumer desires finding expression in the war economy. Throughout the book, consumer desires surface continually, usually without fulfillment. The objects actually purchased highlight the manner in which militarized forms of consumer desire center on commodities which are no longer simple 'objects' but instead "highly complex material-symbolic entities" comprised of shifting and constructed characteristics.⁹⁵ Advertising plays a central role in diversifying and fragmenting consumer desires, but economic strictures and rationing play a role as well. Jimmie explains that "[i]f you want fresh meat, you buy it before six. Otherwise you buy

94 Jim Thompson, *Now and On Earth*, 1.

95 William Leiss, *Limits to Satisfaction*, 82.

bacon, or lunchmeat—which is two-thirds cereal and a fourth water—or do without” (14). He arrives precisely at six, and can only buy lunchmeat, a substance whose unsubstantiality he recognizes.

All of the family’s purchases seem to contain a nasty trick beneath a glittering surface. Most notably, whiskey must be purchased to stave off the deleterious effects of Jimmie’s alcoholism. His health, interpersonal relationships, and ability to work all suffer in relation to his drinking, but attempting to reduce his intake produces violent physical symptoms. Sociability cannot comfort. When guests appear, supplies are purchased; despite an appearance of reciprocal purchases, the family ends up going hungry on such nights. In the most painful and vivid example, Jimmie forces himself to scarf down tuna sandwiches, remnants of the reciprocal purchases born of sociality, only to vomit blood immediately upwards. Leisure purchases purge the body of necessities. His uncontrollable body can no longer consume in a standard manner, requiring a dose of whiskey instead. Dillon’s alcoholism derives from his adolescent employment as a hotel bellboy, a job that unofficially involved supplying hotel guests with bootlegged booze and other illicit pleasures. His past links labor to crime, connecting Dillon’s exploitation as a bellboy to the ruinous modification of his laboring body. Ruin further attends the sale of his labor to production for destruction.

Given the first-person narration, we as readers tend to trust Jimmie’s account of the family’s cashflow; significantly, he consistently blames excess expenditure on the female residents of the house, particularly his wife Roberta, whose religious tithing draws his reproof. Yet Jimmie’s wife and sisters seem primarily to desire leisure—they want to go out for the night, to have a drink and to dance—such activities require money. His younger sister, Frankie, obtains such commodities in her own way through the sale of her body or company. His other, more

simple-minded, sister finds monetary security in marriage, but threatens her own seemingly stable supply through frivolous spending, a habit which results in her return to the family. Happiness seems to hinge on purchases; poverty no less than wealth renders purchases fetishistic, and engenders excessive attachments. Lukács emphasizes the centrality of commodification to the “age of modern capitalism,” as it lends a “phantom objectivity” to all aspects of “the total outer and inner life of society”.⁹⁶ Objectification and alienation work together to occlude social relations, and the modern subject experiences self-estrangement as a 'natural' extension of a lifestyle increasingly centered on the consumption of material goods.

III

A glance at Thompson’s biography reveals his deep reliance on personal experience for the material of his novels. Thompson began writing short pieces as early as his teens, though he turned briefly to the far more lucrative path of illegality as a bellhop, furnishing bootleg alcohol, prostitutes, and heroin to hotel guests. After a nervous collapse due to alcoholism and tuberculosis (a background he gives to his narrator Jimmie Dillon), and a stint working in the oil fields, Thompson returned to school and began publishing in various magazines and journals. In the early 1930s, he primarily wrote as the head of the Oklahoma Federal Writers Project, but in the early years of the war, he ended up in the aircraft factory used as setting for his first novel. His second book, *Heed the Thunder* (1946), centers on a former generation of a family that bears eerie resemblances to his own forbears. Thompson returns directly to a prevalently

⁹⁶ George Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), 83-84.

autobiographical mode again in *Bad Boy* (1953) and *Roughneck* (1954), both of which explore stories culled from Thompson's colorful working life. His most popular writing, that for which he is best known, takes the form of pulp fictions, rapidly and feverishly produced during the early 1950s. Many critics have also indicated the unsettling biographical echoes in his hardboiled crime fiction, even in the grimmest and darkest among them. The presence of the explicitly personal throughout Thompson's oeuvre serves to ground even his more fantastical narratives in the world of the known. Indeed, the degree to which Thompson ties everyday consumer capitalism to the most savagely criminal actions constitutes an embedded economic critique.

IV

Autobiographical considerations aside, Thompson's protagonist in *Now and On Earth* could not have found a better place in which to experience a culture-wide encounter between production and death. The aircraft industry sits at the epicenter of the WWII economy; the drama of its achievements and expenditure cannot be overstated.

Before hostilities ended, the nation built nearly 300,000 military planes at a cost of around \$45 billion, almost 25 percent of the nation's total munitions spending for World War II. To achieve that record, the aircraft industry had to be vastly expanded at the government's expense, converted from hand to mass production, and greatly assisted through subcontracting... War production made aircraft among the nation's giant industries.⁹⁷

During the war, aircraft manufacture was the world's largest single industry; the U.S. churned out twice as many airplanes as the United Kingdom or Soviet Union, the closest contenders. No

⁹⁷ Paul Koistinen, *Arsenal*, 38-39.

war technology was more central to overall victory and overall destruction, and the industry's evolution may serve to typify what happened in many defense industries.

Before World War II, aircraft-building was a shop job; all moving parts were handmade and usually engineered on the workbench. American shops built less than a thousand aircraft for the U.S. military in 1939; by 1944, the peak production year, the industry generated 96,318 airplanes.⁹⁸ The necessary rate of production led to proletarianization; mass production requires an assembly line. Thompson's novel depicts worker antagonism towards the line, in an implicit, but brutal, hierarchy among the various workers, the "time-study men" are the least popular in the plant. Already experiencing 'speed-up', relatively skilled line workers directly refuse to aid any process resulting in a change to the pace of work, and thus abuse or ignore the time-study men. Thompson also records the extended hours imposed in order to meet production demands, impositions that may restructure his home life: "in jail for forty-eight hours a week and a lunatic asylum on Sunday" (238).

The aircraft industry also relied on and influenced the procurement of the war's most contested base commodities: aluminum, petroleum, and rubber. Each material was controlled by limited corporate powers. At war's outset, Alcoa was the only American producer of aluminum, and resisted early expansion, causing shortages and delays. In 1941, the creation of NDAC broke Alcoa's monopoly, when the government, giving high priority to the war, directly invested around \$700 million in new plants. Rubber became essential in the age of mechanized war, while supply lines to Southeast Asia were compromised by the Japanese military. Synthetic rubber became the necessary solution, yet oil companies restricted the development and distribution of

⁹⁸ Bill Yenne, *The American Aircraft Factory in World War II* (Zenith Imprint, Sep 10, 2010), 8, 16. All historians of the period admit that precise numbers are relatively suspect, since output schedules varied from individual producer to producer.

the product (most notoriously because of Standard Oil's agreement with German firm I.G. Farben). In general, "mobilization agencies had no way of determining whether national and private interests were the same or differed, whether strategic and commercial aims matched or diverged."⁹⁹

Indeed, the initial push toward war production met surprising resistance from the business community. Robert Sobel writes: "Big business was far stronger in 1938-1939 than most contemporaries had realized. Small- and medium-sized firms suffered greatly during the depression, but the large concerns emerged without undue difficulty, and often stronger than they had been in 1929¹⁰⁰." Though the Depression had hit hard, the U.S. still had the world's largest manufacturing base, thanks to the stability of corporate power. Nevertheless, most industries were initially hesitant to shift into war production, considering the venture risky. In 1933, relatively strict Congressional restraints (prompted by residual ill-will over the U.S. entry into WWI) had been placed on war profiteering. Yet the necessity of a drastic speed-up in production led first to unofficial, and then to official revisions of laws regarding start-up capital and tax amortization. Almost \$4 billion was put into expanding the aircraft industry between 1940-1945, and 90% of that money came from the government.¹⁰¹ The automobile industry had essentially to be bribed into ceasing automobile production in order to aid directly in the war effort. Participation in aircraft production could be incentivized, but curtailment of civilian production required more of a fight.

⁹⁹ Paul Koistinen, *Arsenal*, 154.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Sobel, *The Age of Giant Corporations: A Microeconomic History of American Business, 1914-1984* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984), 177.

¹⁰¹ Paul Koistinen, *Arsenal*, 59.

Thompson traces Jimmie Dillon's interactions with fellow workers outside the factory through the sharing of rides. Automobiles are emblematic of wartime industrial conversion, their absence standing in for a seismic shift from consumer to military production. Yet a more realistic appraisal shows automobiles to be the exceptional case: since auto factories were, in the government's view, some of the only facilities that could be converted rapidly to airplane production, large defense contracts went to corporations in the auto industry. The cessation of car production as well as tire and gasoline rationing is thus a standout case. Dillon, notably, mentions none of this, attributing both his own lack of a car and the general disrepair of his coworkers' cars to market forces. A high demand for automobiles on the West Coast, caused by an influx of war-workers, led to higher prices.

Dillon explains that jobs like his own are both difficult to obtain and difficult to retain, saying, "I mention all this...because of the newspaper talk to the effect that the aircraft plants have made the WPA and other relief agencies unnecessary. Nothing could be further from the truth" (162). Thus Thompson directly positions his text as an alternative to the conservatism of the flag-waving news media, underscoring the book's critical tone. Admittedly, his account predates the pressures of the final years of the war, when not all jobs could be filled, but even the metrics of the later phase depend upon considering only those useful for work, rather than those in need of aid.

Once hired by the wartime aircraft factory, Dillon's initial discomfort with his return to blue-collar work slowly morphs into obsessive preoccupation, as he gradually experiences psychic damage from his new role as bookkeeper. He devotes much of his description of the plant to detailing the various ways in which the system of production results in waste and confusion, a situation that in his mind, will leave them "in one hell of a mess," one which "get[s]

worse by the moment” (81, 84). The text carefully itemizes factory failures, and structures portions of the text as a corollary to the narrator’s attempts at organization as a bookkeeper. Beyond that, however, the extended explanations of the extent of production errors and excess essentially function as whistle-blowing. Though the newspapers hail the plants’ successes, and equipment ultimately arrived at battlefields, the war machine heedlessly consumes valuable materials before the planes are even finished, while the efficiency of the production line is constantly questioned: “I spoke of having turned out fifty planes. The Government has accepted that many, but only a few of them are complete” (164). Thompson’s reports can be historically corroborated. In one volume of his scrupulously detailed economic history of the United States’ relation to war, historian Paul Koistinen estimates that “waste among the armed services probably was somewhere in the region of one-quarter to one-third of total wartime military outlays.”¹⁰² We are shown the growth and maturation of extravagant military waste, a common cliché in the decades to come as the war economy rolled forward, and a theme to which we will return later.

Other than waste and slippage, Jimmie also describes the plant's systematic dehumanization of its workers—from the partially clothed men in the Drop-hammer Department who are “covered with scars from the splattering metal” to those trapped in the Plannishing Department whose sanity is compromised by a noise “too frightful to describe” (75, 76). Before the aircraft leave to inflict destruction on enemy bodies, their production scars those who aid in their manufacture. With Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) as direct ancestor, the novel portrays the dark side of industry—not only do we see the bodies and minds deformed by the plant’s mechanization, but as in Sinclair’s work, we witness a family torn asunder. Illness, abortion,

¹⁰² Ibid., 509.

madness, and constant violence plague the home, leaving it irreparably broken. Jimmie describes his family's trauma in economic terms; after a brutal fight, he writes: "We have spent something tonight that we can never replace—that I, I know, cannot replace—and we have solved nothing" (140-41).

The novel also outlines the plant's efforts to undermine collective bargaining. When Jimmie receives a promotion, the superintendent contacts him to give him a raise directly, rather than via arrangements with the union. In an insidious version of union-busting, the company circumvents the union contract and coercively forms an individual contract with Jimmie, ostensibly to the benefit of the now "[i]ndustrious," "[s]ober," and "[c]onservative" worker (90). For the sake of the war effort and his family's survival, Jimmie compromises his health, sanity, and political convictions.

Strikingly, for a novel set in a wartime aircraft factory, the war itself remains almost entirely unmentioned. While it may be tempting to read such silence as a subordination of the war to other, even more broadly historical social and economic forces, I believe Thompson chose to avoid direct mention of military engagement in order to leave his homefront critique uncomplicated and intact. The justice of the war, or even its specific nature, does not need to be considered in order to illuminate the destructive effects of total war on American industry, and on the American home. While not all families resemble Dillon's, his dark vision attempts a generic homefront truth. The grimness of his limited experience also allows a vast aporia to contain the ongoing horrors of a war in which over thirty million civilians died in addition to the battling soldiers. While the United States experienced the tragedy of Pearl Harbor (a military base), multiple European cities were decimated and whole national frameworks crumbled. Yet even given the seeming success of U.S. consensus, Dillon's family cannot remain psychically intact.

Women are a natural locus for economic contradiction. Already figured as model consumers, they now find themselves caught within a culture which while encouraging rationing for war, simultaneously excites the desire for consumption. As the economy becomes militarized, and the reproduction of daily life undergoes attendant changes, women's bodies appear as complex sites subject to modification. Not desire, but production for death will drive the economy, while structuring emergent economic forms.

The demands of war production pulled women into industry in unprecedented numbers, creating a cultural crisis which needed to be reconciled. Total war provided the justification for the gender and racial intermingling that occurred in the factories. An alignment of the nation against an external enemy required homefront unanimity, but lived tensions emerge dramatically in texts like Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Women penetrated nearly all traditionally male industries, even those involving pure physical labor, like the lumber industry. Economic rationalization for the male "head of the household" model (which, of course, was never fully backed by lived realities) ebbed considerably, prompting fears across multiple strata that women would not 'return to the home' after the war. Such a possibility might not only destabilize gender roles, but would also mean a labor crisis. The participation of women in war plants was a necessity, one that needed to be contained within reasonable bounds; the task of containment fell to the advertising industry.

The imaging of female war workers mobilized women through manipulation, reacting to as well as shaping shifts in social mores. Simultaneously, omnipresent images portrayed women as careful, patriotic consumers, dedicated to consumption rather than production. The drawing of

a consistent association between consumerism and women effectively attempted to prepare the script for their postwar resumption of domestic roles. At the same time, rationing regimes made the role of the consumer more visibly politicized than ever before: “good citizenship and good consumership were promoted as inseparable, and women gained special stewardship over both.”¹⁰³ Advertising, in its new dual role of selling the war and the future, promulgated an ideal woman—selfless, reproductive, and a shopper. While women contributed to total war, either directly through production or indirectly through regimented consumption, their status as consumers was linked to their reproductive potential, making them into symbolic talismans for futurity. Anxieties over profiting from destruction could be contained by shifting such worries to the ‘naturalized’ figure of women as perpetual consumers. Simultaneously, advertising linked current production for war to future consumer products, for future housewives. Thus women became repositories for a core contradiction within the war economy. As in the other works discussed here, sexual and economic desires are conflated; the “single” ribald joke circulating in the aircraft factory, which Jimmie includes in its entirety, is essentially a cost of living joke:

A newly arrived aircraft worker walked into a bar and ordered a cheese sandwich and a bottle of beer. The waitress took the dollar bill he proffered in payment and gave him back a dime in change.

Ruefully the air crafter asked her if there wasn't some mistake.

Oh no. Sandwich, fifty. Beer, forty. No mistake.

“Funny,” said the air crafter in a tone that said it wasn't. And his eyes settled on the buxom mounds of her bosom. “What's those?”

The waitress colored. “Why they're my breasts, you fool! What'd you think they were?”

“Didn't know. Everything else is so high in here I thought they might be the cheeks of your ass.” (161)

Women might work alongside men, but were expected to maintain a feminine appearance, hence the liberal expenditure by Thompson's working sister on cosmetic goods. Thompson's novel

¹⁰³ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 83.

depicts a version of the gendered economy of the 1940s, but seems deliberately to avoid the possibility of women being producers as well as consumers. His sister Frankie brings home money, even supplying her brother with whiskey. Yet her work merits brief mention, and then only in relation to Clarence, the man she is seeing, “employed as a carpenter in the shipyard where Frankie works” (54). Dillon underemphasizes Frankie’s work to maintain the binary between his gendered worlds: the factory full of men, and his home replete with women.

To understand Thompson’s maintenance of gendered realms, I would like to turn to the work of German sociologist Klaus Theweleit. He begins his exploration of male fantasies by examining the writings of some of the era’s most terrifying men, the proto-Nazi Freikorps, whose images of women vacillate between the poles of the nonthreatening, 'white' maternal figure, and the dangerous Red flood of uncontrolled female sexuality. Initially, he describes the pale, 'evaporating' female as an integral part of fascist fantasies, as expressed in a literature where “the raw material for the man's 'transformation' is the sexually untouched, dissolving body of the woman he is with.”¹⁰⁴ Female figures as love-objects prove not only exchangeable (for a multitude of other objects), but also ultimately derealized. The desired woman as fantasy becomes the white, cold ground upon which fantasies are projected. For the Freikorpsmen, the white, virginal love-object represented one side of symbolic womanhood; the other was the promiscuous, working-class 'Red flood' which threatened to engulf their masculinity, and their nation. Even as violent force, the feminine remains amorphous and changeable. Theweleit primarily examines literature written by the Freikorpsmen, so his examples describe women violently or dramatically made into disappearing objects. Depersonalization of women is not, however, the sole province of fascists. As his analysis unfolds, his model’s applicability to imperialist economic narratives more generally becomes apparent: “Since women were excluded

¹⁰⁴ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 35.

from processes leading directly to the production of surplus value, they remained less sharply defined, more malleable. Productive processes define those who are engaged in them quite precisely, allowing (or forcing) them to assume an identity with relatively firm outlines.” By implication, men, as prototypical ‘producers’ maintain a coherent, well-delimited social identity, while women, as ‘antiproducer’ (or ‘consumers’, for our purposes), remain unformed and malleable, and as such the repository for all manner of fantasies and projections.¹⁰⁵

After a brutal day at the plant, and incapacitated by industrial strength glue which needs to be forcibly scrubbed from his skin (thus that meant to ‘connect’ materials literally ‘tears apart’ his flesh), Dillon encounters his wife naked in the bedroom:

And she was more white, more beautiful and maddening than I had ever seen her.

I had seen her that way five thousand times, and now I saw her again. Saw her for the first time. And I felt the insane unaccountable hunger for her that I always had. Always, and always will.

And then I was in heaven and in hell at the same time. There was a time when I could drown myself in this ecstasy, and blot out what was to follow. But now the epigamic urgings travel beyond their periphery, kneading painfully against my heart and lungs and brain. A cloud surrounds me, a black mist, and I am smothered. And the horrors that are to come crowd close, observing, and I feel lewd and ashamed. (49)

In Jimmie’s reality, no desire leads easily to its object. Just as food and even alcohol cannot sustain him, his sexual need (described as ‘hunger’) leads only to despair. But what exactly comprises the nebulous, claustrophobic ‘horrors’ that seem to strike him (‘to come’) at the moment of orgasm? The density of his stream of consciousness pathologizes his relationship to his wife, figured immediately as a white ground for projection. She is also something primarily to be seen, and to be seen the same way ‘always’, like any static image. Through mention of heaven and hell, Dillon shifts his fantasy from an angelic figure to one who threatens his integrity at a biological level.

¹⁰⁵ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 323.

The Greek root of ‘epigamic’ ‘gam’ functions to denote marriage (as in ‘endogamy’ or ‘polygamy’). Yet the biological specificity of ‘epigamic urgings’ immediately shifts into the vaguest of evocative descriptions, as sexual desire seems both to metastasize and terrorize Jimmie, as if a spectral infant pressed against his internal organs. Jimmie fears what ‘follows’ sexual emission, and it seems clear that the “horrors that are to come” may be the phantasmic forms of potential offspring.

The specter of female engulfment as outlined by Theweleit seems operative here, yet despite characterizing Roberta as a dangerous miasma, Jimmie does not convincingly perform the expected defensive posture of a stiff, well-defined and contained self (though his fear of ejaculation could be seen as an attempt to remain erect). His bodily integrity continually comes into question over the course of the book; he vomits blood and bile (expelling an internal and abject flood) he fantasizes about crawling insects (rendering porous the border between real/unreal, interior/exterior). Even when describing Roberta as a ‘smothering’ ‘black mist’, Jimmie admits that a part of him enjoys engulfment, and that he previously fully submitted, ‘drowning’ himself in a thought-obliterating ‘ecstasy.’ Perhaps, “as effluvia, the feminine dissolves the limits of the private body,” allowing the sexual absorption of Jimmie into an ‘antiproduktive’ realm that he somewhat covets.¹⁰⁶ Wartime economics shape his desire, to the extent that a deep ambivalence between rationing and consuming territorializes his relationship with his wife. He feels a similarly split attitude toward his war work: resenting the very underpinnings of the factory, he nevertheless appreciates the cerebral aspects of accountancy, with its opportunity to make order out of chaos.

¹⁰⁶ Maud Ellmann, "A Sphinx without a Secret," In *The Waste Land - T. S. Eliot*. . Michael North (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2001): 258-274. 272.

Theweleit's reading of modern industry seems entirely pertinent to any economy hinging on production for destruction:

Just as guilt and fear had been injected as antiproduction directly into the bodies and erotic productions of the nonproletarian strata, now the production of wasteful goods and of the human body as waste were introduced as antiproduction into industrial production. From this point on, every act of lovemaking, every industrial process entitled a modicum of self-destruction. Working and making love became exercises in dying; only to a limited extent were they still creative, life-affirming processes. Every single commodity a worker produced was a piece of his own death.¹⁰⁷

The endemic wastefulness of the airplane plant and Jimmie's morbid sexuality seem to corroborate Theweleit's account of modern industrialization as imbued with death. Thompson's narrative entirely rejects the view of women as either 'loyal' or 'self-sacrificing.' Though he admits the previous generation (as embodied by his mother) endured hardship, his narration often implies that any sacrifice was secretly manipulative. His wife, sisters, and daughters (for Jimmie lives in a world of women) function less equivocally as selfish drains upon his being.

The bid to shift blame onto the person of the female derives from the imagistic production of an increasingly commodified sexuality, but also because they were figured as the model consumers. Cohen writes that "the consumer embodied the loyal, self-sacrificing citizen on the home front," and while Mrs. or Miss Consumer certainly identifies an ideal promulgated by Madison Avenue, I believe that Cohen underplays the conflicts embedded in the valorized image.¹⁰⁸ As the economy's revitalization hinged in large part upon production for death, women provided a site for the displacement of any resultant guilty feelings among male workers. Female consumers not only spend the war wages earned in plants, they also provided a focus for the familial dreams used by propaganda to motivate war participation. The future must be kept safe,

¹⁰⁷ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 420.

¹⁰⁸ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*.

particularly for women and children. Any shame or guilt felt due to treating women as commodities can be ameliorated by displacing that objectifying desire onto them, the ultimate consumers.

Thompson's view of women as snares tying the male to a violent economy leads him directly to noir. His femme fatales take pleasure and pride in binding men to their plans and will. Hence Thompson's equivocal treatment of crime; rather than an 'outside' which threatens the stability of the social order, Thompson's later fiction figures crime as pervasive and unavoidable. Roberta's sex binds Jimmie inexorably to family life, and to dependency on the war economy as the source of internalized contradiction whose resolution inclines to criminal forms.

VI

Jimmie's eldest daughter Jo seems to provide some hope of escape from the mandates of sex and commodification. Following in her father's footsteps (and literally taking his words into her mouth), Jo exemplifies class aspiration, and an attempt to transcend femininity. By 'femininity,' I refer to Thompson's cycle of sexualized snares, constitutive of the consuming mother as a type. Earlier I argued that Joseph's spanking of Etta functions as a central crisis in Bellow's first novel. Thompson, likewise, sets a child at the epicenter of a climatic scene, a scene fraught by sex, specularity, and violence. Dillon's struggle over what constitutes meaningful labor bleeds into his familial life in multiple ways. His disdain for his wife's philistinism surfaces repeatedly. In an eerie parallel to Joseph's attempt to appropriate Etta to his own dying line, Jimmie clearly encourages Jo's interest in words and reading, as a path to his own vocation.

Roberta resists.¹⁰⁹ In response to her mother's repeated attempts to curtail Jo's intellectual aspirations, Jo taunts her mother, imitating her as a figure possessed of merely physical attractions. Outfitted with "rouge and lipstick and bobby pins," Jo emphasizes her mother's existence as image. She then lies on the floor, revealing her lack of undergarments, and begins to writhe in sexual parody.¹¹⁰

The spectacle shifts from burlesque to Punch-and-Judy-like farce, as Roberta frantically beats her small double who cannot stop "laughing...wildly" (138). Jimmie's narration grows more detached, and a reader may find it difficult to estimate the relative seriousness of statements such as "I knew that she would kill her" (138). His account of the fight, in its initial stages, features shifting female pronouns ('she' and 'her'), the extent of whose repetition prompts identity confusion (Jimmie speaks of "the Jo that was Roberta"). The mother's explosive rage shifts the scene toward horror; Roberta "scream[ed] curses as she beat and kicked and slapped [Jo] all at once" (138). The profuse simultaneity of her violence accords with a need to obliterate her child, while the mother's epithets ("b-bastard" and "son-of-a-bitch") attack familial legitimacy and twist gender. Roberta's anger stems from a correct identification of herself as the object of her child's sexual parody, but the extent and intensity of her anger remains open to question.

109 Roberta has also resisted all of Dillon's attempts to encourage her own intellect, though she has willingly shaped her superficial appearance (and commodity purchases) to his excessively specific desires: "She had no girdle on (I think they make a woman look cramped), only the frilly white panties which she buys...by the dozens because she knows I am disturbed by the potential uncleanliness of colors; and she used no perfume because I object to that for much the same reason" (175). Following Theweleit, we might notice that Dillon desires his wife to be white, clean, and insubstantial. Yet Dillon admits he wants even more.

110 Chapter Four will contain a reading of another small child performing a sexual parody of her mother, both cases suggesting a genetic guilt for spectacular sexuality.

I would argue that Jo's performance mirrors not only her mother, but also her father. Jimmie secretly fears and loathes Roberta's reproductive potential, yet cannot extricate himself from their sexual relationship. He recognizes the accuracy of Jo's burlesque as a product of the family's cramped living conditions, conditions under which the sounds and perhaps sights of intercourse cannot be fully withheld from children. Yet Jo's parody contains elements that her father seems unwilling to read, particularly in relation to Jimmie's fear of procreation. Jo highlights Roberta's fecundity in contrast to her own juvenility, by replaying an act of seduction emptied of possibility. Yet her performance prefigures her own ensnaring fertility. Jo genuinely resembles Roberta (hence the shifting pronouns that punctuate Jimmie's account). Constrained in her class aspirations by a jealous mother, Jo performs an alternate future (one divorced from her father's ambitions), simultaneously spiting her mother and exploiting her father's fear of child-bearing women as ineluctable snare.

All family members participate in this sexually symbolic scene. The horrific slapstick of the scene escalates once the two youngest children involve themselves—the violent Shannon furiously strikes at “groin” and “rump” while Mack attempts to assist her by proffering a toilet plunger and babyish encouragement: “Heah, Shan’. Hit ‘em wif a ‘tick” (140). The childish dialogue contributes again to the dark humor of the scene, while the choice of targets seems to point again toward the submerged horror of reproductive sex.

VII

Now we may better understand the grim nightmare from the novel's second chapter. Jimmie recounts a childhood memory of near-starvation; after the birth of his younger sister,

their undernourished mother cannot even nurse the child. A bottle of malted milk is purchased with the family's last money. Though referred to as simply "milk" throughout the passage, malted milk is not only a substitute for mother's milk here, but is itself a highly processed product—a dehydrated gruel made of malted barley, milk, and wheat flour. The processing grants the product a far longer shelf life than any form of actual milk. Promoted as a healthy, 'complete meal' in drink form, marrying together convenience and pseudo-science, malted milk found widespread popularity during the war years.

Once obtained by the family, this necessary comestible repeatedly becomes dangerously inedible. First, due to accident (the Dillon children are harassed for their poverty by local ruffians), the milk becomes mixed with glass. Since it cannot be discarded, the mother and Jimmie attempt to salvage the milk. The very moment that the family finishes the meticulous act of removing the shards of glass, the baby begins thrashing, and her diaper slips down. The second ruination of the milk takes place between sentences, but we can only assume that excrement renders the milk finally inedible. When Jimmie's mother manages to procure a replacement bottle, through performance of their extreme need, the druggist includes a tiny bottle which he "would have had to throw out in the alley before long anyway" (9). Not realizing the power of the opiate "soothing syrup," his mother doses the milk with the whole bottle, and the entire family slips into a deep, drugged sleep; their combined neglect nearly killing the children. Thus the substitute mother's milk undergoes a threefold contamination, first by glass, then by feces, and finally by poison—nurture itself being systematically called into question. Thompson implies that for the impoverished, even the most basic and necessary consumption is wracked with peril.

Jimmie heightens the allegorical nature of his dream narrative by setting it within an unnaturally lengthy sleep. In his mind, Jimmie slowly flees a horrific face, reminiscent of his earlier description of his mother's despair. An irresistible but undefinable force draws him toward a laughing girl, and they mutually recognize each other as father and daughter. We see here another version of the desire for male generation, since Jimmie's dream-offspring appears without her mother. As this vision from his future attempts to pull him closer, his mother appears. Epitomizing his fears, the mother, unable to feed her child, acts as the agent of destruction, murdering Jo, the future child, with her bare hands. This dream proves prescient of Jimmie's projection of blame for poverty onto his family, and more particularly on the consuming dyad of mother and child. Dreaming, Jimmie experiences relief at his failure to help his child: in sleep, he "stood motionless and horrified, sad yet relieved" (10). The dream-death of Jo represents the eradication of another mouth to feed.

Dillon carries a deep guilt regarding his ambivalence toward his children, particularly Shannon. Born during a period of extreme familial poverty, they had tried twice to abort her fetus. When she runs away from home, finding sanctuary with another druggist, he laments that she wasn't born to a family that could care for her properly. Later, she disappears for four hours, only to be found huddled in a dark closet, covered in her mother and Frankie's makeup and nail polish. Roberta initially reacts with rage, but the entire family eventually realizes the desperation involved in Shannon's actions.

A little girl who had never been wanted—and who, I realize now, knew that she had never been wanted—trying to make herself wanted; fighting at the last ditch with a weapon she had always scorned to use. Trying to make herself pretty. I thought of her fierceness, how with the animal's desperate impulse for survival, she had struggled against neglect and slight. The tantrums she had thrown to secure a new dress or a warm coat; her swiftness in striking before she could be struck; her dogged determination to have the food she desired—and needed. (93)

Jo employs makeup in an ironic mockery of her mother's sexuality, but the younger Shannon straightforwardly demands acceptance via her use of implements of societal beauty. She covers herself in war paint, fighting fiercely for a portion of love in her family's emotional war of attrition, only one battle in an overall struggle for survival that she has been forced to wage—fighting even for the basics of food and clothing. We might ask what measure of Dillon's narration consists of projection onto his children, but his daughters appear preternaturally attuned to the actual poverty of love and affection within the familial unit.

The precocious four-year-old Shannon also uses money in perhaps the most direct, and most tragic way; unwanted and ignored by her own family, the most violent member of the Dillon clan collects money from the local drugstore owner by parlaying her skills into a form of job, since money seems to be the only currency conceivably exchangeable for love. If we consider abandonment to be an inheritance Jimmie desires but attempts to resist, in running away, his daughter may be thought to mirror his latent wish, in leaving the family that didn't want her.

Wartime advertising hinged on a belief in futurity, a belief that hardship now would be transmuted into subsequent peace and prosperity for you and your progeny. A lack of belief in such advertised myths leads to tropes of childlessness or perverse children, featuring heavily in wartime novels. Joseph's marriage seems sexless, and he dreams of empty bassinets after a massacre. Jimmie knows that he attempted to abort his young daughter repeatedly, and sets up an abortion for his sister. In the 1940s, a rejection of reproductive futurity amounted to a rejection of consumerist futurity. The much-mentioned "baby boom" of the fifties did not arise simply from the pent-up desires or romantic feelings of returned servicemen, but was rather engineered and

encouraged by governmental policies, economic incentivizing, and advertising. Thompson's text center on family life, while brutally interrogating the ability of families to survive without complicity in destructive production.

VIII

Now and On Earth's most personal and painful story, though in receipt of only intermittent and cryptic attention, centers, I would argue, on Jimmie's father. Dillon engages with his father in three different modes: flashback, dream fantasy, and mediated current involvement (until the father's death, when he slips entirely into constructed time). Thus of all the characters, Dillon's father has been made the most literary, featuring almost as a textual device. The flashbacks set up the flickering image of the father, always either absent or arriving too late. Dillon's mother stands for pitiable constancy, years of ill-treatment having undermined even her ability to walk. The arrival of the migratory father, laden with suitcases and trinkets, proves unable to heal the scars inflicted by poverty. As narrator, Dillon lets past moments hover alongside, or directly beneath, his accounts of the everyday, contributing background but not cause, context but not explanation. Memories seem linked to current experience mostly by the presence of violence or pain, that which undergirds a militaristic era of American life.

His father enters the current time of the narration through a letter from his older sister, Marge. The family often fought over the father's institutionalization, necessary for primarily economic reasons. Sister Marge, married into the middle-class, retrieves her father from the mental hospital, claiming that since she "charged a new suit of clothes for him and got him fixed up a little," he seems the same as always (107). Yet she immediately admits that her image of a

father is undercut by his cursing, refusal to use the indoor bathrooms, and illiteracy, actions which she sees not as expressions of mental illness but rather as atavistic remnants of his institutionalization and his working-class past. Her accounts are rendered suspect by Jimmie's description of her own mental condition. Like many of the novel's structuring traumas, Marge's infirmity emerges from the text only gradually. Dillon first equivocates, claiming that the kindest way to describe her is to say nothing at all. Then he reveals that she suffered from Bright's disease (an archaic term for a variety of kidney diseases, usually acute or chronic nephritis), but refuses to explain its cause. The disease nearly kills her, but ends up killing only her class consciousness. After years of "blinding herself" to the material conditions of her childhood, the disease ensured that "...her mind [was] swept free of what misery and poverty she had known before" along with everything else that she knew, particularly "the value of time or money" (117-118). She gravitates childishly toward material goods (a prescient model of the ideal modern consumer), never considering more than surface appearance, certainly never the realities of labor. The most successfully escapist among her siblings, Marge is nevertheless abandoned by her husband, becoming yet another dependent in Jimmie's household. He steps into the shoes of his father, tied to the family he struggles to support.

Once sent back to the institution, Jimmie's aging and unraveling father dies from eating the Excelsior stuffing from his mattress. "Excelsior," a term used for wood wool, intimates ironies: the Latin term means "ever upward," a word frequently used in the titles and mottoes of ambitious organizations, yet singularly inappropriate for low-cost mattress stuffing. The source of the material's name remains obscure, but it has a long history as an industrial product. Since 1842, patents existed for machines that would transform wood into thin, absorbent curls, a cheap

substitute for hair, previously prevalent in the stuffing of mattresses.¹¹¹ Killed by a base material, the manner of Dillon's father's death reinforces Thompson's preoccupation with the desperation of poverty.

Record-keeping in the modern era has shown that while suicide rates tend to remain constant in the aggregate across decades, a significant decline appears in times of war. In their comprehensive study, Dublin and Bunzel attribute falling rates to increased levels of communal activities, but also to an expanded civic spirit since “[t]here is no time during war to indulge in personal or imaginary worries.”¹¹² Since even neutral nations experience some drop in suicide rates, I would argue that causes for the drop are less than transparent. As part of a national purpose, an individual experiences reduced autonomy; the government dictates that draftees ‘give’ their lives to their country through an exposure to possible death. Civilians ‘give’ their lives to the nation in alternate ways. Such implicit ‘gifts’ are heightened, of course, when nations engage in combat, and mobilize their occupants as parts of their arsenal. Total war makes all members of a combatant country responsible for a portion of the land’s defense, and unable to abandon that duty. In allowing Dillon’s father this escape, why does Thompson choose such a horrifying method?

Interestingly, when Jim Thompson’s birth father died, Thompson circulated this precise story to a number of his friends, accompanied by his very real grief. Yet his close family members insist that no such event ever happened.¹¹³ Establishing an absolute separation between

111 William Baker, “Machine for manufacturing wood so as to be used as a substitute for curled hair in stuffing beds,” U.S. Patent 2654, (1842).

112 Louis I. Dublin and Bessie Bunzel, *To Be or Not To Be: A Study of Suicide* (New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1933).

113 Robert Polito, *Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

the purely fictional and the merely fictionalized events, in a semi-autobiographical novel, may seem redundant; but Thompson's narrative interweaving of options, in this instance, merits consideration. According to the accounts of Thompson's friends, "the excelsior-in-mattress story" was "performed" along with the explanation that the death was designed specifically to make the son forever feel guilty.

Jimmie Dillon's last interactions with his father happen through dream sequences, when he interrogates and finally interviews that father who has left him. Karl Marx functions as another dead and absent father, one who has abandoned Dillon; just as he talks to his actual father in his dreams, so, in a moment of desperation, he questions Marx. Within the dream, our narrator Dillon furnishes one explanation for his father's horrifying choice of death. During a dreamed conversation, his father explains that he used compulsive eating as his own form of escapist indulgence: "Food. You drink. Mine was food. When you are walled in, you do something" (220). Like his son, Dillon Sr. compares life to a prison, with vicious consumption as the only consolation. An anecdote from the family's past cements this reading. In an attempt to support her children, despite their father's absence, Jimmie's mother briefly runs a boarding house. To feed her two male boarders, she sacrifices her children's pet chicken. Unluckily, her husband arrives home that day, and quickly devours all of the family's food, including that earmarked for the paying guests. Through his actions, the father not only further jeopardizes the family, but also refuses to recognize the gravity of their situation. His class mobility, albeit limited, depends directly upon his abandonment of his dependents.

Beyond the symbolism of death by eating, we must consider the source of the poison. The manner of the father's death sharply calls into question not just consumption, but the status of the bed. Given that Jimmie problematizes emission, his father's act might be read as penance

for the sin of conception. A congruity between father and son persists despite Jimmie's attempts to distance himself. Dillon mentions the sartorial sloppiness of his father, who was not elevated even when he wore fancier clothes, but stained and ruined them, offending his son, who is something of a dandy. Yet Jimmie's protestations merely serve to measure the slightness of his ascendancy in class terms.

Jimmie resists connections to his father by repeatedly highlighting the differences between them, while secretly craving his father's solution to a troubled familial economy: abandonment. Struggling with the war economy only heightens Jimmie's anger at his father, whom he blames mostly for committing the sin that he himself has duplicated, the very act of becoming a father. In committing suicide, his father abandons the family again, in the most extreme way possible. Both father and son seek to abandon their families in response to persistent need and poverty, but the links between them serve also to highlight the specificity of Jimmie Dillon's family situation: he desires to flee from the women in his life because they are marked by the war economy, that is, they are violent, desiring consumers.

Jo dreams a coda to Dillon Sr.'s death: Seemingly no longer serving merely to tether her father to a violent economy, Jo penetrates beyond death, to witness the backless suit in which her grandfather was buried. A suit without a back signifies the abject poverty of a family that must withdraw resources even from the dead. Conservation of cloth serves as a dark form of rationing; scantied funereal garb and cheap coffins serve as central goods in death-driven economies, whether at familial or national levels. Jo's clairvoyance reveals not only her family's lack of resources, but an emptiness at the heart of production for death. Jo sees beyond surface gestures towards the 'honored' dead, to reveal cut corners, shoddy materials as offered by "spoiled-beef barons and shoe-peg barons."¹¹⁴ Even if we grant the limited quality of WWII supplies, the need

¹¹⁴ William Faulkner, *A Fable* (New York: Random House, 1954), 69.

to conserve fabric and funds expended on death here contrasts ironically with America's expanded economic commitment to devoting 'full' resources to war and by extension to the ruined body.

IX

Dillon relates that he nearly left Roberta once, after encountering a wealthy ex-girlfriend and spending time with her in a hotel. The clandestine couple reunite passionately, and write letters proposing to leave their respective spouses; plans fail when Lois mentions "a sorority sister whose husband owned a big advertising agency in Des Moines" who would hire the writer if "[Dillon] would just be nice" (149). Jimmie reacts with classist rage; arguably, his umbrage stems both from guilt and from the suggestion that he use his talent to craft ad copy inseparable from military promotions.

As the best face of modernity, the advertising industry displays consummate sensitivity to the anxieties and ailments of modernity; given that wartime consumers feared the possibility of imminent death and destruction, advertising distracted them with thoughts of the future. Though Madison Avenue feared that the price controls and rationing of the war years would be its destruction. A militarized economy turned out to be its savior. After Pearl Harbor, private established the War Advertising Council, comprised of volunteers from major corporate advertisers, ad firms, and the media. One of WAC's first and most important clients was the Treasury Department, who needed the Council to sell war bonds, and implicitly, the war.

Increasingly dependent on the WAC, by 1942, the Treasury Department began allowing businesses to deduct the full cost of advertising from their overall taxable income. "With high excess-profits tax rates, that meant that the government was footing more than 80 percent of

some company's advertising bills. Especially at these cut rates, goodwill advertising directed toward postwar sales, the continued allegiance of distributors, employee productivity, or political aims became a highly attractive investment.”¹¹⁵ Even those companies who weren't selling war-related commodities had a good reason to pour money into advertising, and the industry boomed. Through its campaigns on behalf of the Treasury, and in its other ventures, the WAC succeeded in “arousing the reading public, dispelling apathy, and bringing the war into the life space of the individual.”¹¹⁶

While stirring poster images of battlefields and soldiers played upon pathos, other consumer-oriented propaganda materials emphasized the positive, in the protection of corporate interests. For example, the bulk of those posters focusing on food issues championed canning and victory gardens, since both involved images of abundance rather than deprivation. Canning, in particular, connoted traditional, homey values, while not implying that consumers should be purchasing or consuming less. Wartime led to the diversification of consumer desires, a necessary state for the rebuilding and rebirth of American consumer culture. The proliferation of desire led to a robust market for ephemeral and leisure-oriented commodities even during the war years, as well as a concomitant investment in advertising's promises of a goods-oriented future. “In wartime, goods which are unobtainable are still advertised, merely to keep industrial power in view,” and to reinforce the consumer's dependence upon that power, a force now inextricable from military might.¹¹⁷ Acting on behalf of military and governmental interests, advertisers had to encourage a degree of thrift and rationing, but the message were carefully

115 Mark H. Leff, “The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Mar., 1991): 1312.

116 Frank W. Fox, *Madison Avenue goes to War* (Young University Press, 1975), 58.

117 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 162.

time-stamped. One ought willingly to restrict current purchases, advertising told consumers, knowing that one's sacrifice now enabled a peaceful future replete with disposable goods. A sense of commodities as ephemeral became not only a promissory, imagistic ideal, but found material basis in the availability of nondurable goods during the war.

Its birth in wartime and subsequent close relation to the White House has meant that in the eyes of many critics, the Ad Council is and has been "little more than a domestic propaganda arm of the federal government."¹¹⁸ Moreover, the government's official propaganda wing relied upon lessons learned from the ad industry. The Office of War Information's success at incorporating advertising's more powerful methods upset many writers within the department, who believed that Americans deserved to hear a more unvarnished version of the truth. By 1943, unresolved ideological conflicts prompted the resignation of many writers along with Francis Brennan, chief of the Graphics Bureau. In his resignation letter, Brennan explained his grievance: "In my opinion those techniques have done more toward dimming perceptions, suspending critical values, and spreading the sticky syrup of complacency over the people...than any other factor in the complex pattern of our supercharged lives."¹¹⁹ The increased dependence of wartime propaganda on images over textual explanation or reasoning reduced participation in the war effort to a matter of spectacle, obviating thought. We see a substitution of national cohesion for the lost local bonds, lost in the face of dramatically accelerated mobility due to both military conscription and war worker migration.

118 Megan Barnhart, *"Selling the International Control of Atomic Energy," The Atomic Bomb and American Society: New Perspectives*, . Rosemary B. Mariner and G. Kurt Piehler (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 106.

119 Francis Brennan letter to Elmer Davis, 6 April 1943, general corresp., folder: D 1941-43, box 1, Pringle papers, LC, cited in Fox, *Madison Avenue Goes to War*, 52.

Thompon's account of war production details the everyday running of an aircraft factory, and no attribute of the factory is clearer than its wastefulness. Advertising also played an essential role in promoting what became an essential feature of a consumerist economy: deliberate waste, or planned obsolescence. "If, during the 1930s, the practice of 'progressive obsolescence' (as it was then called, perhaps to conform to New Deal ideology) was a sometimes desperate attempt to build markets in a shrinking economy, the period following World War II saw obsolescence installed as a basic underpinning to the 'populuxe' ideal of suburban prosperity."¹²⁰ While Ewan's approach provides an illuminating history of obsolescence, he glides over the war years; his account skips quickly from the 30s to the 50s. *Captains of Consciousness* describes advertising as responsible for a cultural and economic shift to an ever-changing, and wasteful model, yet does it not make sense to draw lines of entailment between a militarized economy, waste, and ephemerality? I would argue that despite the publicized wartime return to 'thrift', the underpinning wastefulness of war production led to a culture wide embracing of obsolescence, whether as given or as desired opportunity.

"Planned obsolescence"--the phrase became popular, and even pervasive, in the 1950s, and many of its users assume its origin to have been in the boom age. Yet the term's introduction to the world of marketing can be more accurately connected to a real estate broker named Bernard London, who wrote and self-published a triad of 1930s pamphlets on the theme.¹²¹ London feared that Depression-era consumers were "retrenchment-mad," determined to make their belongings last as long as physically possible. In his tracts, he advanced a plan to make

120 Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, 244.

121 *Ending the Depression Through Planned Obsolescence* (1932), *The New Prosperity Through Planned Obsolescence: Permanent Employment, Wise Taxation and Equitable Distribution of Wealth* (1934), and *Rebuilding a Prosperous Nation through Planned Obsolescence* (1935) can all be found at the Library of Congress.

commodities (from clothing to appliances to vehicles) deteriorate at a predetermined rate, necessitating regular consumer action. London, as a real estate broker, even believed that people should be compelled to move to a new house every several years. By desiring the frequent replacement of otherwise durable commodities, London's dream hinged on ephemeral goods, and a dream that became increasingly real in the two decades following his pamphlets.

Yet advertising alone could not convince financially depressed Americans to relinquish their worn but useful objects. Business might conspire to push the idea of obsolescence, but the war itself established a structural imperative towards an economy built upon waste, one that necessarily, therefore, glorifies the ephemeral. The rationing of durable materials led to flimsier substitutes, and overall, experience became a substitute for substance. As postwar investments in the research and development necessary for continued military ascendancy expanded, so technological innovations made a case for obsolescence. We shall see the wartime ramifications of this attitude in Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, and trace its full flowering to the rapid and growing popularity of science fiction.

X

Jimmie relates a two-page summary of Robert Heinlein's 1941 short story "They"—a paranoid tale about a man in an asylum convinced that all of his daily activities consist of external pretense and manipulation (243-245). Those who surround him gently direct all of his movements, erasing most aspects of his free will. In the asylum, the patient attempts to work

through his situation without using ‘their’ logic, but the doctor and attendants reason with him or simply interrupt his efforts at introspection. At story’s end, Heinlein reveals that the man’s paranoia participates in fact; the story closing with his captors preparing a new iteration of his confinement. Jimmie clearly takes the science fiction tale as a corollary to his own lifework. Heinlein’s story critiques the inanity of existence, and his description of working life echoes Thompson’s attitude throughout the novel: “ They went to work to earn the money to buy the food to get the strength to go to work to earn the money to buy the food to get the strength to go to work to get the strength to buy the food to earn the money to go to—’ until they fell over dead.”¹²² The logic of Heinlein’s tautology unravels toward the end, a performance of incoherence not dissimilar to Thompson’s own terminally fragmented text. The carceral nature of Jimmie’s perceptions hinges on a similar point; he claims that even his favorite work, that of writing, “got [him] in a dump with six strangers. It got [him] in jail for forty-eight hours a week and a lunatic asylum on Sunday” (238). Painful awareness of their predicaments can save neither Dillon nor Heinlein’s unnamed protagonist, though the latter can at least reject his imposter wife for a moment toward the story’s end. Heinlein’s narrator wishes that his wife were “a sanctuary of understanding and sympathy in the boundless depths of aloneness” (an idea Jimmie seems to have abandoned), but she proves to be merely the closest and most duplicitous of the ‘creatures’ who confine his godlike potential. Jimmie can’t escape his “angel-Fury,” his “Frankenstein monster with silky lashes and a white smile,” a body simultaneously mythical, horrific, and spectacular (246). Fondness for Heinlein emphasizes Jimmie’s own paranoid tone throughout *Now and On Earth*. His wife Ramona’s mostly-undressed style of sleeping seems a deliberate trick to ensnare him. He claims that all of the members of his family deliberately weaponize each

¹²² Robert Heinlein, "Them," In *The unpleasant profession of Jonathan Hoag*(New York: Berkley Books, 1983), 155.

other: “You can hurt me through them, just as they can hurt me through you. You all hold that threat over me constantly” (192). Yet Thompson’s critique never becomes as total as Heinlein’s; while affairs may be as rotten at the top as at the bottom, he allows that not all forms of life are as confining, as punishing as poverty.

XI

War workers built weapons, receiving controlled wages for that labor. Given a cultural imperative to support the war effort, the reduced market for durable commodities, and psychological pressure placed on futurity, many workers invested ‘surplus’ wages in war bonds. Over the course of the war years, the U.S. Government borrowed \$187 billion from its populace in the form of bonds. The cash loaned by its population enabled the Federal Government to maintain production; one might say that a virtuous (or vicious) circle enabled the state to advance defense contracts so that war workers could build war material, and receive wages. Total war means that no American life went untouched by the war effort; if one’s labor did not directly underwrite warfare, one’s savings might and one’s taxes certainly did. Pacifist and hawk alike could not escape the militarization of the entire economy.

Given the national nature of even a ‘world’ war, spending money in another country can be read as an attempted subversion of the total war dynamic, rendering the road trip to Tijuana significant not only for the amount of money Jimmie Dillon (and his boss) spend on drinks and frivolities, but also for the seeming removal of the money from the American war economy.¹²³

¹²³ Admittedly, the money did not escape the war economy, since by 1942, the Mexican government had cut all ties with Axis powers. Mexico's position resulted in an increased influx of U.S. capital, as Mexico became a vital source of the raw materials (mineral and oil) necessary for war production.

The destruction of capital which could otherwise have been invested in war bonds (present war production and future consumerism) finds a more substantial expression in a secondary result of the trip: the termination of Frankie's unwanted pregnancy.

While Thompson's sympathetic leanings tend most often to depict women as the captors in a coercive system, here he depicts the consequences of a woman 'getting caught', in the parlance of the times. Most of any possible sympathy remains deeply submerged, as Thompson's treatment of Frankie's abortion focuses on the economic ramifications; the family's primary concern revolves around where to acquire the fee necessary for "the job we need doing" (251). The war did nothing to suppress the black market dealing in illegal abortions. Jimmie states that "it'll cost to beat hell the way things are out here now. They're all getting by so good, and they won't touch it unless you make it worth their while" (227). Market demand has raised the fee from the 'depression rate' of fifty dollars, and while Jimmie speculates that the 'job' might be done for one hundred dollars, convincing an abortionist to 'touch it' ends up costing two hundred and fifty dollars. Abortion is priced as another necessary luxury. Price controls cannot influence this particular commodity, and the inflationary force produced stems from a literal release of desire.

Historically, rates of abortion in America have fluctuated with the times, but in no period has abortion disappeared. During the 1800s, a booming birth rate allied to spiritualist movements spurred a high abortion rate; by the midpoint of the century, certain published accounts reported that American women were aborting nearly one in five pregnancies. Such reports cannot be verified, and may well have been alarmist, yet a considered mapping of societal forces offers clues. In his social history of abortion, Martin Olansky suggests that modernization and urbanization increased the act's occurrence, since "[t]he probability of premarital intercourse

leading to marriage declined as mobility increased and community enforcement of moral codes decreased,” leaving more women pregnant out of wedlock and in need of a solution.¹²⁴ The war years saw a sharp intensification of both of Olfansky's factors, as young people uprooted themselves from their homes in search of potential war work. As mentioned previously, communities varied in their response to an influx of workers, but most cities remained ill-equipped properly to house burgeoning populations, and people found themselves lodged in close quarters, and in proximities *Dangling Man* identifies as a contributive source of diverse desires.

Thompson re-anchors the economic underpinnings of the situation; in some sense, Frankie's body has always been for sale. In a moment of seeming sympathy, Jimmie describes Frankie's complicated status even as a “little girl”—she was “thirteen in years and eighteen in size” and her “eyes were as innocent and blue as a ten-year-old's” (241). Frankie appears here as a “highly complex material-symbolic entit[y]” appearing sexually available despite her actual elided age and the childlike innocence that apparently emanates from her eyes.¹²⁵ Thompson provides another example of the peculiarly sexualized child, whose complex status draws forth conflicting yet multiplying desires. Subsequently, as an attractive adult, she can still be acquired; Jimmie, unable to resist the coercive hints of Moon (his direct superior at the aircraft plant) for fear of losing his position, permits Moon to buy his way into the family. Dimes for the children, four pounds of pork chops, and a range of alcohol specific to each family member (gin, rye, and aged sherry)—Moon offers luxury items oriented to each desire. In effect, Moon's Tijuana expenditure functions as an installment payment on Frankie's commodified body. Thompson's

¹²⁴ Marvin Olasky, *Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in America* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1992), 39. (Olasky has an anti-abortion bias.)

¹²⁵ William Leiss, *Limits to Satisfaction*.

myriad female relatives do not literally enter the space of his factory, but through Jimmie, Moon carries the factory into Frankie's body.

XII

A debt-deflecting half-truth at the beginning of the novel echoes ironically throughout the novel's examination of Jimmie's laboring life. The aircraft factory withholds the workers' first paychecks, doubtlessly to ensure that they stay on the job longer, despite extended hours and dehumanizing work. Overdue rent brings the landlady calling, but through indirect discourse we learn that she is "nuts about writers—any kind" and believes that Dillon "work[s] in aircraft to get material for a book" (53). Throughout the novel, a tension exists between Dillon's own rosy memories of past writing glory and his family's unsubtle hints that a return to writing would lift the family out of its current impoverishment. The book's slightly meta-fictional ending ultimately validates the landlady's assumption, though readers know the twisted path to truth.

The novel's lack of formal coherence—the absence of tight plotting; the superfluity of flashbacks; the frequent textual 'stutters' or aporias—intentionally represent the fragmented psyche of a writer and wartime worker. To borrow from Derrida's famous reading of the incest prohibition, we might consider how "[w]hat appears as formal incoherence...critically denounces at the same time, but without its knowing, the absence of a concept of nature, of reason, or of freedom."¹²⁶ Thompson's text signals the struggle to find a space for the work of writing, a space of freedom and value. Unable to perform work he considers worthwhile, our narrator swings helplessly between the two chaotic poles of the homefront: the production line

126 Jacques Derrida, *Glas*(Nebraska Paperback: 1990), 199.

and the domestic sphere. While the aircraft factory demonstrates waste and ruthlessness, mangled forms of consumption and desire signal the perversity of the home.

As demonstrated, both the factory and the home are riven by violence. The office boys torture their co-workers, going so far as to violate a worker's nether regions with a broom, while the factory itself scars and ruins men. Dillon's troubles at the aircraft factory are coupled with familial relations so embattled that he refers to a rare peaceful Sunday as "an armistice" (68). Richard Godden reminds us that "[t]o work within the capitalist system is to wound oneself and forget, not the wound, but how the wound was made."¹²⁷ A novel as filled with violence as Thompson's functions as an open wound, even as the text endeavors to reveal the injurious instrument. The metaphor is particularly apt since Jimmie Dillon and his family suffer from the production of actual weapons.

I would argue that the primary conflict in the novel revolves not around Dillon's fractured home life, or even his fraught relationship with his father, but around his own perceived class slippage. Such a statement may seem strange in light of what I have identified as Thompson's attempts to connect his family with a broad national narrative of impoverishment. A preoccupation with class partially undoes these attempts, and regrounds Jimmie's class position in the wartime economy. His inability to write stems from his material conditions, both manual and intellectual: his body wracked by addiction to unsatisfying consumables and his mind territorialized by attempts to impose order on the wasteful chaos of the aircraft factory. Yet his putative loss of words (undermined by the very existence of a novel which contains the semi-autobiographical Jimmie) may also reflect the accelerating disappearance of the regional America recorded in Jim Thompson's early writings, particularly with the WPA. What wartime

¹²⁷ Richard Godden, *Fictions of Capital: The American Novel from James to Mailer* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 58.

consensus enacted in largely phantasmal form, postwar increases in corporate power and the push to suburbia will accomplish at the war's end.

James Dawes believes that statistics gained power to define populations in the wake of the Civil War, conflicting and contending with more local and regional definitions of community: “War had revealed the cohesion and consequently the power made possible through the tendency of numerical accumulation to flatten out difference and distinction,”¹²⁸ thereby creating the consensus and unity necessary for conquest of an external enemy. The Progressive Era saw the formation of a relatively large state bureaucracy ready to ‘prepare’ the nation’s resources, a bureaucracy whose remnants gained traction in the interwar years, leading to a faster, if not easier, mobilization the second time around. Yet while we associate modernization with the turn of the century, I would argue that WWI still saw a fairly fragmented “United States.” Entering the Great War saw opposition grounded largely in local, ethnic communities—Irish Catholics opposed helping Britain, while German Americans wanted the nation to remain neutral. Once committed abroad, the U.S. Expeditionary Force consisted mainly of small units still associating themselves with their place of origin. Just as advertising was born in the initial stages of the modern age, but found fuller expression during WWII, so the ability of consensus to efface local difference came to fruition during the 1940s. Postwar conservatism and suburbanization finished the job. By the beginning of the 1960s, Walker Percy publishes *The Moviegoer*, a book lamenting the extent to which even the South, the most distinctive of U.S. regions, has seen its singularity effaced by the economic ramifications of a perpetual war economy.

The violence that permeates Dillon’s life ties his struggle to the sign of a war economy. As a writer, Thompson wavers—while his crime fiction highlights the endemic violence

¹²⁸ James Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War through World War II*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 26

underlying the U.S. economy of the 40s, 50s, and 60s, his more autobiographical works struggle with expressing the connection. The novel that follows *Now and On Earth, Heed the Thunder* (1946), attempt to trace naturalistically his clan's genealogy of poverty. Thompson's thesis that the roots of poverty can be found entwined with history is certainly not wrong, just as an understanding of the early 20th century helps unearth the seeds of wartime corporatism and consumerism. Yet he often seems to emphasize the homogeneity of poverty; poor families are all alike. While such moves his family into a broader drama, they also undercut the very structure of *Now and On Earth*. The power of this novel lies in the unremitting attention Thompson pays to the particular and the explicitly quotidian: in Dillon's family, every action shows evidence of the reach of total war.

XIII

Returning to the question of Jimmie's labor, we are reminded of Michael Sherry's assertion that Americans generally maintain an odd myopia about war, seeing it as entirely externally imposed, and consistently underestimating the role of their own particular talents and ambitions.¹²⁹ Jimmie's initial distaste for the factory finds naturalistic expression generically, as he maligns the dehumanization endemic within industrial labor. Yet as his own status in the department begins to rise, his complaints center more on the waste and disorder with which he must contend as a bookkeeper, not simply a worker, but as a facilitator of weapon-making. As a social 'subject in motion', Jimmie navigates between his working class past and the limited

129Tiny, violent Shannon's attitude eerily reflects some assessments of the martial spirit of the United States: she was "always hoping a little that you will try to spank her. You are then in the position of an aggressor, and she fights best when she has been attacked. And there is nothing she loves more than a good fight" (15).

social mobility granted him first by his writing, and then by his bookkeeping. He thus experiences another, more subtle seduction, and his desire to take an intellectual position leads to his brief romance with the war economy.

Yet Jimmie gets out of the factory, achieving perhaps the only victory in the novel. After the unearthing of his Communist past, Dillon violently explodes, and attacks his more vicious fellow workers. He receives a visit from a FBI agent. Underscoring previous assertions of a total lack of solidarity between workers in the plants, both chief Baldwin and his boss Moon defend Dillon. The overdetermined does not take place, and despite his leftist leanings, Dillon receives a promotion. Yet given a choice between a steady, well-paying job resulting in direct support of the war effort, and the uncertainty of writing, Jimmie leaves the factory. His decision ends the book, and pointedly, his family appears only indirectly in the final scene centering on his choice. Strangely, he justifies himself not to his dependents, but to his former superior, Moon.

The ending recasts the interpersonal violence of the factory as a failure of friendship. Though industrialized production moves too quickly for anyone to help a struggling worker, Murphy aids Dillon on his first day. Yet Dillon later alienates Murphy inadvertently through the influence of the manipulative All-American Gross, who uses Murphy's ethnicity (as a probable Mexican American) to drive a wedge between the workers. Vail and Busken arguably provide a model of male friendship, though their actions emphasize the potential violence of affiliation. His direct superior's connection to Jimmie escalates, primarily through his mercenary wooing of Frankie; Moon becomes important enough to be the narrator's final interlocutor. Ultimately, his former boss realizes Dillon's deepest dream through means that Dillon would never consider: Moon has enlisted in the Navy, fleeing both Frankie and his wife for the deadly homosociality of war.

The novel's closing words ("Probably I'll never be able to explain to anyone. Not even if I wrote a book...") clumsily reassert the semi-autobiographical status of the book, yet simultaneously question the efficacy of its sustained critique.¹³⁰ The choice of Moon as audience for the final explanation also undercuts the nobility of Dillon's forsaking his new position at the aircraft plant. Their connection implies a commonality between them, proving the implicit gendered thesis of the novel: women drove Dillon to war production, just as they drive Moon to actual war.

Free to write, we may imagine that Jimmie successfully recuperates his daughter Jo to his own lineage. After all, unlike Joseph, Jimmie escapes. As Foucault reminds us, the 'author function' still operates; the writer may become immortal, but "he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing."¹³¹ This work cannot contain that resolution; though the ghost of his oil-field working father visits Jo's dreams, and though she dreams of becoming like her own father, she has been shaped by her historical moment. The misogyny of the novel pits Jimmie the writer-worker against his superficial and materialistic wife and sisters, and this divisive binary makes Jo's fate inevitable. She will be the ideal consumer, created in wartime to support the postwar economic structure.

¹³⁰Thompson also gestures toward the dangers of dissent: "I don't know why the word ["f—k"] should be so much more popular in aircraft than it is elsewhere, but there must be a reason. I've been dallying with the idea of writing Ben Botkin about it—perhaps doing a little paper on it—but, of course, I won't" (160). The reference to Ben Botkin, prominent folklorist, gestures to Thompson's past work for the WPA. Ostensibly, Dillon is kept from the writing both by his demanding job and by the lack of an audience for 'unpatriotic' exposés.

¹³¹ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 103.

CHAPTER THREE

“Looks like this man has had a war”: Chester Himes and the Los Angeles ‘homefront’

I

The 1940s witnessed what multiple commentators (including Amiri Baraka) described as a seismic shift in the way African Americans related to America as a nation, a shift directly traceable to war and the militarized economy.¹³² Historian Scott DeVaux reminds us that the majority of white male Americans experienced WWII service as “a force of democracy, the great leveler,” binding together men across regional and class lines in the face of death (the original great leveler). On the other side of “the racial divide, however, the leveling process seemed mainly aimed at bringing all black Americans down to the lowest common denominator.”¹³³ Total war extends the consequences of combat more diffusely; sites of military power and production served as loci for homefront violence and tension. War plants and military bases, particularly in the American South, served as central arenas for racial conflict. The peak year for racial violence, 1943, sat squarely in center of America’s war years, seeing large riots in Detroit and Harlem, and myriad brutalities in the south. The industrial jobs newly available to greater numbers of African Americans fueled rising expectations of increased social equality, but those aspirations were continually frustrated by pervasive racism. War inevitably sees the terrible

132 “Between the thirties and the end of World War II, there was perhaps as radical a change in the psychological perspective of the Negro American toward America as there was between the Emancipation and 1930.” Amiri Baraka, *Blues People; Negro Music in White America*(New York: W. Morrow, 1963), 179.

133 Scott Knowles DeVaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*(Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 245.

return of myths of winning equal treatment through acts of sacrifice or valor (promulgated by the mainstream media), and in his first novel, Chester Himes mocks and undercuts those hollow dream-images.

In his two-volume autobiography, Himes gives relatively brief mention to the years 1941-1944, which he spent working a series of jobs in Los Angeles, partially due to the fact that his first two novels fictionalize much of his experience there. What he does write gives a sense of why he may not be eager to reminisce about the era:

Up to the age of thirty-one I had been hurt emotionally, spiritually and physically as much as thirty-one years can bear. I had lived in the South, I had fallen down an elevator shaft, I had been kicked out of college, I had served seven and one half years in prison, I had survived the humiliating last five years of Depression in Cleveland; and still I was entire, complete, functional; my mind was sharp, my reflexes were good, and I was not bitter. But under the mental corrosion of race prejudice in Los Angeles I became bitter and saturated with hate.¹³⁴

His first novel concerns the life of an African-American worker, Bob Jones, in the wartime shipyards of Los Angeles. *If He Hollers Let Him Go* opens with a trio of Bob Jones's dreams, one in which he purchases a "little black dog with stiff black gold-tipped hair" on a layaway plan, one in which black workers are interrogated in regards to the death of a white man, and one in which he is mocked by two white employers for his lack of tools.¹³⁵ Before we know anything else about our narrator, we see the extent to which Jones's experiences as a part of wartime production have infiltrated and occupied even his subconscious mind. Written against the grain of the era's public patriotism, this book provides a complex instantiation of contemporary racial

¹³⁴ Chester Himes, *The Quality of Hurt: The Early Years, the Autobiography of Chester Himes* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 76.

¹³⁵ Throughout this chapter, the page numbers for *If He Hollers Let Him Go* to the 1986 Thunder's Mouth Press edition, and will appear in the text.

tensions and power relations. Bitter that his race kept him out of the Hollywood screenwriting industry, Chester Himes himself worked in a series of shipyards from 1941 until 1944, making his naturalistic account an important one. Subverting the dominant image of war-time employment as beneficial opportunity for black workers, Himes describes Bob Jones' socioeconomic oppression as a sort of traumatic social death. Consumer products often mark or represent social or psychic realities, for example, the gradual disintegration of his car echoes the internal destruction being experienced by Jones. Jones's collapse arises not simply from war work, impossible dreams, or systemic racism, but an acute concatenation of all those factors. Christopher Breu argues that Himes's deeply negative representations of 'intersectionality' are centrally important to the challenge Himes makes to mainstream culture; these images are "less appropriable and inscribe in the aesthetic realm cultural conflicts that we in our deeply and violently idealist society attempt to purge from the space of representation."¹³⁶ Himes' work spectacularizes the underemphasized, providing a surfeit of what we might consider 'rationed' images, and I believe this type of negativity also resists capitalist reappropriation. His images have the complexity we might associate with commodities, but remain resolutely historically and materially grounded. As violence and sex collide in Himes's novel, he provides a revisioning of the racist and sexual fantasies of dominant American culture, baring submerged desires and anxieties.

As in Thompson's fiction, the use of first-person narration brings readers uncomfortably close to not only violent actions, but to murderous fantasies. Both books link the production of war materials to the reproduction of violent daily life. By considering how both industrial

¹³⁶ Christopher Breu, "Freudian Knot or Gordian Knot? The Contradictions of Racialized Masculinity in Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*," *Callaloo*, 26, Number 3 (Summer 2003): 769.

working conditions and nondurable commodities deform the psychic and lived realities of two wartime workers, we can access another vantage from which to view militarized consumerism. Like Mailer, Himes has been criticized for his bitter treatment of female characters. Viewing the gender issues in the novel through the lens of commodification does not dismiss Jones' misogyny, but attempts to read it economically. Himes himself remained thoroughly aware of how his writings are perceived; the first sentence of his introduction to a 1973 collection of his work is: "These writings are admittedly chauvinistic." He is not speaking of a younger self; the last essay was published in 1969. Himes also believes that his "talent is sufficient to render these chauvinistic writings interesting, or at least provoking." While we are not interested in qualitative judgements here, nor rationalizations, Himes' treatment of women in his novel does provide an essential key to understanding his portrayal and critique of Los Angeles' "Jim Crow war industries."¹³⁷ Also late in his life, Himes explains that he "put the slang, the daily routine, and complex human relationships of Harlem into [his] detective novels, which [he] prefer[s] to call 'domestic novels'" since they are focused on characters "who don't worry about racism, injustice, or social equality. They're just concerned with survival."¹³⁸ His explanation also helps situate his first novel. Generally seen as a subset of sentimental fiction, a 19th century genre which strove to appeal to the emotions of its readers, domestic fiction traditionally focuses on a young women experiencing a series of hardships. Himes accentuates the grim naturalistic tendencies of the form, casting his first protagonist Bob Jones adrift in a world which is literally trying to kill him. His early novels take place in wartime Los Angeles, a place his union character Lee Gordon calls

¹³⁷ Chester Himes, *Black on Black*(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 7.

¹³⁸ Chester Himes, *Conversations with Chester Himes* Ed. Fabre, Michel J. and Robert E. Skinner (Jackson, MS: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1995), 129.

a “bloated, hysterical, frantic, rushing city.”¹³⁹ While Harlem will later receive an understanding if colorful depiction in Himes’ detective novels, his antipathy for LA (“the most over-rated, lousiest, countriest, phoniest city”) shines through in his earliest books, and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* outlines the concrete reasons for his attitude.

Critic Christopher Breu historicizes his reading of *If He Hollers Let Him Go* by highlighting its publication as occurring during the shift from the progressive 1930s to the conservative 1950s without emphasizing WWII, despite its central importance to the novel’s structure. We may accept his assertion that “wartime Los Angeles... becomes a synecdoche for the political-economic and cultural conditions of the U.S. as a whole in the mid-20th century” without losing the fact that the war is the necessary frame.¹⁴⁰ Himes gives not only a portrait of racism at the American mid-century, but vectors it through war; his critique hinges on the deadly irony of a culture which considers your life expendable enlisting you in a campaign to kill foreign others. Those narratives which counter the predominant image of American heroism or even inclusion as centering on whiteness most often formulate resistance from within a specific ethnic community, but Himes’s text forms parallels between his own African American experience and the experiences of other minorities. This intersecting subjectivity may become possible largely due to his understanding of the racist underpinnings of the war itself. Yet in order to mend the divisions placed between minorities, Himes’ text locates primary blame in a female consumer rendered even more dangerous due to her status as a worker. Richard Wright noted that paradoxes (or binaries) structure the whole of the novel. Building on that idea, A.

139 Chester Himes, *Lonely Crusade* (New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1986), 131. In ‘hysterical’ we see the city’s inherent feminine threat.

140 Christopher Breu, “Freudian Knot or Gordian Knot?”, 776.

Robert Lee points out that the violence (“real and imagined”) suffusing Bob’s life cannot be easily categorized since it is both “too elusive” and “too compacted.”¹⁴¹ Though the novel’s violence does slip between tangible and intangible forms, filling the book’s crevices miasmatically, the blame for it crystallizes around only a few poles: work, whiteness, and women.

II

Finding support for Chester Himes’ assertion that Los Angeles defense plants in the 1940s exhibited Jim-Crow-style segregation proves sadly easy. As industrial production on the West Coast boomed and the military siphoned young men away into combat, economic demand caused relatively rapid incorporation of previously marginalized labor forces, including both women and people of color. Though the amount of black workers incorporated into the defense plants necessarily increased during the war years, it remained the case that “within and outside the workplace, African American encountered disheartening and capricious restrictions that made economic parity with whites virtually impossible.”¹⁴² Despite the production pressures of wartime and FDR’s 1941 signing of Executive Order 8802, even limited inroads against the racist labor practices of the defense industries were not easily won.¹⁴³

141 A. Robert Lee, “Violence Real and Imagined: The Novels of Chester Himes,” In *The Critical Response to Chester Himes*, Ed. Charles L. P. Silet (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999): 69.

142 Josh Sides, *LA City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*(University of California Press, Jun 1, 2006), 57.

143 The text of the order begins: “WHEREAS it is the policy of the United States to encourage full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders”. [accessed at <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/thelaw/eo-8802.html>]<http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/35th/thelaw/eo-8802.html>]

The Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) was formed to implement US Executive Order 8802. Given minimal funding, personnel, and enforcement power, its effectiveness was limited, particularly in the South. Delta Shipyard in New Orleans, despite being one of the area's largest warship producers, "refus[ed] to hire blacks even when the company was understaffed by 40 percent."¹⁴⁴ Hate strikes against integration or advancement of black workers remained fairly common throughout the war, despite industry pledges.¹⁴⁵ Yet FEPC's sheer existence engendered "the expectation that the federal government could and would intervene on their behalf," a belief which deeply impacted the growth of the civil rights movement.¹⁴⁶ African American advocacy groups necessarily took matters into their own hands. Executive Order 8802 itself was largely the result of pressuring by A. Philip Randolph, and due to its inefficiency, other groups (most having links to the "Double V for Victory" campaign) brought complaints of injustice directly to the defense plants. The simple fact that Himes' book is set in a shipyard, and Thompson's setting was an aircraft factory, reflects a concrete disparity wherein African Americans were consigned to the heavier industries. In 1941, "[i]n Los Angeles there were only about one hundred African Americans among the eighty-five hundred shipyard workers."¹⁴⁷ Even given the efforts of African American organization as well as FEPC enforcers, change was slow. The majority of workers were kept at the level of laborer, which Himes' text supports. A member of Jones' crew reports that "Bessie ask Kelly the other day 'bout going to

¹⁴⁴ Josh Sides, *LA City Limits*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ For more reading on the prevalence of strikes during WWII, see Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*, and Nelson Liechtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II*.

¹⁴⁶ Josh Sides, *LA City Limits*, 32.

¹⁴⁷ Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 32.

school—she been here three months now—and he told her they still filled up. And a peck come right after—I was standing right there—and he signed him up right away” (12). Keeping workers out of training means they can’t draw a mechanic’s pay, even if they are already performing some tasks meant for mechanics.

Bob Jones’ position as a black leaderman was a far from common occurrence, and even before the plant strips his title from him early in the novel, we see the everyday pressures and slights that he faces: his crew must be comprised of exclusively black workers, his white supervisors lob condescending insults at him, and even low-level white workers treat him with suspicion. After Madge slings a racial epithet at him and he curses her, Jones’ position is taken from him. Attempting to appeal to the appropriate channels further reveals the structural racism permeating Atlas Shipyard. As economic necessity required opening the doors of industry to previously excluded minorities, maintaining the overall power differential meant pitting the workers against each other: black workers against Southern black workers against Mexican Americans against female workers. Even labor solidarity is unsettled by the shifting demographics. The influx of white war workers, primarily from the South, has bolstered the local union, and Herbie Frieberger, the shop steward, refuses to reprimand Madge for her racist actions since it will inflame the new workers. The need to expand membership numbers means majority rule, and what should be a source of solidarity substantiates racial divisions, leaving the workers unable to defend themselves against management’s machinations.

After hearing of Jones’ social worker fiancée, his department supervisor Mr. MacDougal (who “didn’t like for the colored fellows to call him Mac”) asks suspiciously whether Jones has heard of the Executive Order 8802, and forces him to admit that the plant follows the directive. Mac then reminds Jones of the punitive nature of advancement: “Take your punishment like a

man, then make a comeback. That's the American way, my boy" (174). After Jones 'humbles' himself, he attempts to believe that the system may be fair and he would eventually be reinstated. Upon returning to his crew, he finds his entire crew "working like mad" and "knocking themselves out" (175). He finds that the overtly racist supervisor Kelly offered a "plum job" to the crew now that they have a white leaderman. None of the workers can resist leaving a "place smoky, smelly, sweltering [where] the din was terrific" for the superstructure job: "cool, airy, with a good view of the harbor" (176). Management's attempts to divide labor finally succeed with Jones' crew. Humor had been the central signifier of their racial solidarity; now Ben's joke that "Ole Marsa's gonna free us at last" provides a final resigned commentary.

Ben's joke about 'Marsa' resonates substantially for the mostly Southern members of the crew ('Ain't nobody in here from California'). The New Deal caused federal funding to pour into the South during the second half of the 1930s, effectively ending the rule of the sharecropper model, in which poor laboring tenants worked the land to pay off perpetual debt. The federal funds sought to rectify the problem of overproduction, which it did for the landowners, who simply let go of their now superfluous sharecroppers. No longer linked to the soil by a form of debt slavery, African American agricultural workers became mobile wage-seekers, and as defense factories began needing more and more workers, this labor group filed into some of the positions. Many Southern urban factory workers also found the promise of 'war work' alluring, and most of those migrating to Los Angeles were drawn from that pool. The large-scale movement of African Americans starting in 1940 is called "The Second Great Migration" by some viewers. Close to five million African Americans left the South for perceived opportunities in the North, the East, and particularly the West. The "Southern negroes" referred to throughout Himes' text are products of this labor shift.

WWII sees the much delayed industrialization of the South, yet during the war years, its migrating workers are assumed to retain its former legacy, both of racism but also uncontrolled desire. California and the West, in many ways, still functioned as frontier land, unclaimed by either the efficient, high-consumption North, with its controlled desires, or the South, whose low-wage, coerced labor background was metaphorically connected with uncontrolled desires. This conceptual binary reveals its instability in the war years, where heightened monitoring and regimentation of consumer impulses resulted in a dispersement of desires necessary to maintain consumer interest in an uncertain era. Perverse and proliferating desires engendered by not just advertising's promises but also rationing's hyperattention help nurture a rapidly expanding consumer base, but the desires must ultimately be redirected toward the 'socially acceptable' outlets of women and technology.

III

Bellow's Joseph bumbles his way through a world stuffed with petty commodities pulling him in every conceivable direction, expanding his waistline and drawing his soul toward Haydn. Jimmie Dillon also cannot be satisfied by the many objects he consumes, though he also struggles to procure enough to placate his house full of hungry mouths. Himes' Bob Jones relies largely on the two overdetermined poles of his masculinity—a gun and a car. Few objects carry as much symbolic weight in the American imagination, and both are further freighted by their importance to the war effort.

Jones' attachment to his car concatenates an overdetermined desire for mobility with a systematic betrayal of that hope. The '42 Buick Roadmaster serves as a sign of Jones' material success as "a key man in a shipyard, as important as anybody now" (10). His position inside the

war economy initially grants him a sense of accomplishment. War rationing directly impacts how Jones feels about his car; since automobile production has been halted during the war, scarcity imbues his possession with extra value. He rejoices in the fact that “rich white folks out in Beverly couldn't even buy a new car now.” His job and car allow him a momentary faith in the putable American commitment to equality; he carefully itemizes the objects which give him position: working clothes, “keys and wallet, identifications, badge, handkerchief, cigarettes...a ten and some ones” (9). Yet after receiving stares of “cold hatred” from a white pedestrian couple deliberately delaying his car, Bob’s driving become aggressive and erratic. Beyond his road rage, his “arms were rubbery and my fingers numb; [he] was weak as if [he’d] been heaving sacks of cement all day in the sun” (13). Bearing the weight of racial hatred functions as labor, leaving Jones enervated. The effects of racism resonate throughout the novel, but are consistently tethered to Jones’ employment. Freed from work at the plant by “a sick pass to go home,” Jones feels “unchained” and “free”; as a result, “[t]he car drove easy all of a sudden” (37). The novel’s plot will follow Jones’ gradual systematic loss of power and autonomy, most often figured as his control over women and freedom of movement. At story’s end, the factors meet. His girlfriend Alice refuses to lend him her car, insisting that he remain and face charges. Despite having a temporary hideout, Jones insists on returning to his car, which also betrays him—his gasoline has run out. Not just random bad luck, but the racial profiling resultant of endemic racism ends his flight; the police who stop him “just stopped [him] because [he] was a black boy in a white neighborhood” (195). Despite his belief in the car’s promise of social mobility, Jones literally runs out of gas.

His faith in weaponry proves equally tenuous. “.38 Special” uses the cartridge name to refer to a pistol, most likely the Model 10, “the most successful handgun of all time,”

particularly popular for police and military purposes¹⁴⁸. In the 1930s, police departments particularly favored pistols using the .38, and S&W produced a version with fixed sights. From 1942 to 1944, S&W produced the Victory model under military contract; hundreds of thousands were distributed to allies, and U.S. Airmen carried them in case of land combat following a downed plane. Jones' pistol is most likely similar or identical to those carried by the police who arrest him, and he may be issued another one once conscripted into the military. In a text so infused with psychoanalytic thought, a gun cannot simply be a gun. Jones' subconscious makes this clear: in a dream, his gun is even larger—"a .45-calibre short-barreled revolver"—and it won't fit in a holster. Even after dream-Bob "open[s] his trousers and sticks the end of the holster down in [his] trousers" he finds that "still it showed" (100). Jones finds the world around him perceives him as a threat due to his masculinity, and what it perceives as dangerous virility. Yet his gun provides only the barest degree of security to Jones; he "could have kept walking into .45 slugs until the weight of 'em pulled [him] down...but [he] couldn't walk into this woman with so much white inside her" (124).

IV

In *Now and On Earth*, women are kept out of the factory. Jimmie Dillon's home life has a surfeit of women, but only Roberta is a sexual object for her husband, though Frankie, Madge, and Jo participate in the cultural sexualization of women in personal and idiosyncratic ways. The novel's overall emphasis remains clearly on familial life as the ultimate prison for those ensnared by sex. Bob Jones encounters a panoply of female characters over the course of *If He Hollers Let*

¹⁴⁸ Dean K. Boorman, *The History of Smith & Wesson Firearms* (Guilford, CT: Lyons, 2002), 46.

Him Go, but almost all of them function sexually for him in some way. These depictions are complicated by racial and class intersectionality, as his girlfriend, lovers, rival, and nemesis span these categories, yet the two central figures, Madge and Alice, provide symbolic repositories for the two aspects of wartime anxieties centered on women. The factory worker Madge, while certainly also representing endemic racism, plies her spectacular sexuality in the formerly exclusively male world of heavy industry. Alice seems to spur Bob's momentary turn toward accepting assimilation through consumerism, as they construct a dream of postwar suburban family life complete with "victory garden." Yet both characters also reflect the interplay of sexist fantasies, as Madge becomes Mrs. Perkins in the courtroom, using marriage as authority to indict Jones, and Alice spends much of the novel seeking out thrills in the burgeoning nightlife of Los Angeles' Central Avenue.

It should not be out of place here to remind the reader that gender is a culturally constructed category, and that while the reaffirmation of consistent (labeled "traditional") roles for men and woman may be aligned with the stability of the status quo, regulation of gender does not necessarily assuage psychic needs. In my account of the war, we see a proliferation of sexual and desiring modes, including the homosociality of military and industrial life as well as the widening productive and sexual roles for women. The social scripts for a swing back toward more coherent categories were set in place during wartime, but did not find full fruition until postwar 'reconversion', a term reinflected by the sociocultural changes attending relatively limited industrial shifts. The postwar literary world proliferates with disillusioned, distressed men seeking deracination and, very often, comfort in the company of other men.¹⁴⁹ Judith Butler famously posits that "heterosexual melancholy is culturally instituted as the price of stable

149 See: the novels of Jack Kerouac, John Updike, *All the King's Men*, and others.

gender identities,” and the resolution of wartime possibility by the postwar ‘return to the (new suburban) home’ may be seen as one proximate cause for the host of male postwar narratives fleeing women, in addition to the pervasive vilification of women outlined here.¹⁵⁰ In addition, as I have suggested throughout, women function as the ideal consumers, and the permanent war economy thus links fantastically to them.

The white factory Madge appears as a constructed spectacle—“a peroxide blonde with a large-featured, overly made-up face, and she had a large, bright-painted, fleshy mouth...[h]er big blue babyish eyes were mascaraed like a burlesque queen’s” (19). Himes itemizes her features, and describes each as dependent on artifice. All of her facial features are described as ‘large’, and her appearance of excess is read as availability, immediately aligning her with the world of the burlesque, and thus commodified sexuality. As a transplant from Texas, she has a cultural script ready for her encounter with Jones: “she deliberately put on a frightened, wide-eyed look and backed away from me as if she was scared stiff, as if she was a naked virgin and I was King Kong” (19). Such behavior not only externalizes and literalizes the racist undertones of the original film, it also reinforces Madge’s self-presentation as cinematic image. At the time of the novel’s writing, *King Kong* (1933) may have been over a decade old, but the immensely popular film was re-released in 1938, 1942, 1946, 1952 and 1956, each time finding significant box office success. While the choice of film seems overdetermined, we might note that Fay Wray’s character Ann Darrow is positioned as a feminine outsider to a masculine world, one situated aboard a ship, echoing the specificities of Madge’s own labor conditions. Madge produces her own miniaturized version, in which Bob must play the role of the exotic and bestial Other who

¹⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990), 70.

sexually desires her character. She will reprise “her act” multiple times before the novel’s end, ultimately with violent results.

Madge’s made-up face signals a deliberate choice for female workers. Changing styles in clothing were less available, due to work uniforms and fabric rationing, but femininity as sign needed to be upheld with increased vehemence, given their incursions into traditionally masculine realms. Without full skirts, women could instead rely on elaborate hairstyles, and the complexity of the high-profile “victory rolls” signified a variety of values connected with patriotism, thrift, but also fashion.¹⁵¹ Hair fashions of the period primarily derived from cinema stars, whose long curls cascaded downward. Given the need to secure hair while working with machinery, we can perhaps draw conclusions from the fact that the short hairstyles of the androgynous 1920s did not reappear, but rather the general preference was for elaborate updos that amassed one’s typically feminine locks on top of the head. In a dine-dance cafe, Bob sits by a white woman with “blond hair, dark at the roots, piled on top of her head. In the dim orange light her lipstick didn’t show and her mouth looked too thin for her features” (39).

Bright red lipstick may be the most prominent cosmetic look of the 1940s. Nearly every poster depicting women, whether in the home, the factory, or a victory garden, showed a shining, made-up face. Was it necessary to render one’s face visibly invested in traditional femininity at the moment one’s hands appropriate masculine industries? Though manufacturers needed to shift from metal tubes to paper tubes, and make other packaging compromises, the sales of cosmetics did not decline. In fact, with war wages putting disposable income in the hands of large populations of young women, the cosmetics industry was revitalized. Our wartime writers connect makeup specifically to sexual availability. Madge’s full face of makeup shows her

¹⁵¹ The name itself may be a pun based on the military slang for an aileron roll performed to signify victory.

dangerous commitment to myths of sexual power, while both of Jimmie Dillon's young daughters appropriate makeup to invade the equivocal place of womanhood. In the next chapter, *Barbary Shore's* Guinevere epitomizes the continuing centrality of cosmetics to the postwar period. Nondurable goods in general did a brisk business throughout the war years, unencumbered by either rationing or price controls. Haircuts, beauty treatments, and tattoos became increasingly popular and pricey. WPB even enabled prioritization of beauty products as necessary to public morale.¹⁵² Material shortages even spurred the creation of new products, as when Max Factor introduced stocking cream to mimic the look of now rationed nylons. Connections to the war could be even more direct. The cosmetics industry, like other civilian industries, found military technology useful for its own purposes. USDA researchers developed the disposable aerosol spray can in 1941 for insecticides used to battle malaria in the South Pacific theater, paving the way for hairspray, spray deodorant, and other cosmetic mists.¹⁵³ Soldiers spending months under the Pacific sun inspired the 1944 invention of sunscreen. Military innovation boosted consumerism at home, furthering its connection to the war.

V

Actual violence does not come easily to Bob Jones, despite its saturation of his environment. After being sucker-punched at a dice game, he finds himself haunted by "blue eyes blistered with hate" (33). As a borrowed 'chiv' is pressed into his hand, Jones imagines attacking

¹⁵² Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know*, 122.

¹⁵³ Jim Core, Rosalie Marion Bliss, and Alfredo Flores, "ARS Partners With Defense Department To Protect Troops From Insect Vectors," *Agricultural Research Magazine*, Vol. 53, No. 9 (September 2005).

the 'blond boy' by "cutting out his eyes and slashing up his mouth," as retribution for his hate-filled eyes and words. His fantasy makes him ill: "Bile rolled up in my stomach and spread out in my mouth. I started retching and caught myself...My skin was tight and burning but it wouldn't sweat. Only in the palm of my hand holding the knife did I sweat" (35). His bodily integrity deeply violated, Jones feels overflowing with bitterness. The miasmatic fluidity of his fear and anger can only be rectified by the rigidity of his 'eight-inch' weapon.¹⁵⁴ The tightness of his own brown skin entraps him. The release offered by sweat only cools his weapon-holding hand, further impressing him toward the bloody retribution which he finds sickening. Accepting the violence offered to him requires Jones to release himself fantastically from his own skin.

His transition requires projection; though Jones cannot change his exterior, he can switch internal places with the 'blond boy'. Whiteness serves as protection, a mark of security and backing by institutions of power, and as such, produces affective responses inside the individual. Back inside the factory, a structure built to produce violence and death, Jones inadvertently visits a threat of death upon 'his boy', who momentarily becomes so scared "you couldn't see the white for the scare" (127). Suddenly Jones' omnipresent fear of death visibly appears in his would-be victim's face, forming a perverse connection. Death can be the common leveler promised by the battlefield, yet the reversal here does not last. As the "colour came back into his face", the blond boy remembered the power conferred to him by that blood; once "[w]hite came back into his soul," "he was ready to die for his race like a patriot" (130). Himes' point becomes clear—the war is here, on the 'homefront'.

The next time he sees his planned victim, Jones realizes that he is "thinking of him as 'my boy' now," inverting paternalistic racist discourse.

¹⁵⁴ This reading, like many others, is anchored in Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*.

I was going to kill him if they hung me for it, I thought pleasantly. A white man, a supreme being. Just the thought of it did something for me; just contemplating it. All the tightness that had been in my body, making my motions jerky, keeping my muscles taut, left me and I felt relaxed, confident, strong. I felt just like I thought a white boy oughta feel; I had never felt so strong in all my life. (38)

Jones' sense of autonomy has a double valence. First, he inhabits the mirror version of a world where systemic racism in the legal system makes it possible for a white man to kill an African American with impunity. This imagined freedom from the constant threat of death actually improves his sense of connection to all people, particularly white ones, since they are no longer simply possible agents of his death. Beyond that, though, he connects white mastery with the ability to kill, which is the concrete project of wartime. After deciding to commit murder, Jones possesses "[t]hat filled-up feeling of my country. [He] felt included in it all; [he] had never felt included before. It was a wonderful feeling" (38). He now more fully feels his connection to war, and to America. From here, he heads directly home to pick up his gun, another signifier of his inclusion in a society of murderers. Later, jokingly, he will describe a room full of wealthy white dining patrons as "[t]he great white world" and "strictly D-Day." (56). His associative chain neatly connects leisure consumption to war victory, a link facilitated and smoothed by 'whiteness'.

While much of Jones' internal narrative begins to circle on his desire to violently revenge himself against white people, during an early scene where he interacts with two young white men, magnanimously offering them a ride in his car, he specifies that the 'whiteness' against which he reacts is an expression of privilege rather than an essentialized characteristic.

I began wondering when white people started getting white—or rather, when they started losing it. And how you could take two white guys from the same place—one would carry his whiteness like a loaded stick, ready to bop everybody else in the head with it; and the

other would just simply be white as if he didn't have anything to do with it and let it go at that. I liked those two white kids; they were white, but as my aunt Fanny used to say they couldn't help that. (41)

Jones' ruminations also align white privilege with perpetual potential violence, casting his own violent fantasies as a variety of protective self defense. The events of the novel make it clear that the depth of Jones' fantasies do not undermine but rather substantiate the pervasive violence of the world in which he lives; his night terrors are an echo of real world terrors. Yet once his fantasies are externalized in the form of his .38 Special, Jones' self-protection also becomes machismo, the technology of the weapon making him feel "tall, handsome, keen" and when a "little black girl...switched by...[he] smelled her dime-store perfume and got a live-wire edge" (42). Jones' possession of a weapon gives him an assumed control over the passing woman, in his mind she is instantly infantilized and commodified. Her perfume (marking her as a consumer) also reinforces his mechanistic mastery; he is 'wired'. Himes clearly plays with readerly assumptions about black masculinity, but the wartime setting grants weapons additional symbolic potential. The gun also gives him his own version of the "loaded stick," which he imagines gives him freedom of place as well, from his neighborhood peopled by "solid cats in their pancho conks" (43).¹⁵⁵ Yet when the autonomy granted to him by his car breaks down at the novel's end, if he "had to be caught [he would] rather be caught right there in the heart of the Negro district" (194). That will not be the case.

155 The choice of descriptors here is interesting, since "pancho conk" is the slang term for an elaborate chemically straightened and pomaded hairstyle, which both resists wartime societal norms of short, militaristic haircuts and relies on consumer products for its execution.

In *The Birth of Bebop*, Scott DeVeaux provides historical context for the rise of new musical forms as “the outbreak of World War II transformed the economics of entertainment” (283). While the music industry seemed endangered by wartime material shortages (particularly of shellac for making records, and rubber for touring vehicles), those restrictions paradoxically contributed to unprecedented levels of “nitery” entertainment. Unable to tour except by railroad, bands were mostly confined to the larger cities. Fortunately, due to defense contracts, most large cities contained great numbers of wage-earners seeking entertainment. In *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, “Central Avenue” serves as the primary entertainment district and acts as a central location for the investment of desires, mentioned longingly by his upper-class girlfriend Alice and sneeringly by Bob’s supervisor at the plant. Los Angeles’ Central Avenue did indeed highlight not only the intense popularity of live entertainment during wartime, but also the importance of that time period for the development of jazz.

Jones’ crewmate Ben explains passionately that “[a]s long as the Army is Jim Crowed a Negro who fights in it is fighting against himself” (121). Excluded from full participation in the country’s war project, African Americans found alternate avenues for identification. Black musicians became rallying points for pride. Scott DeVeaux explains that “dropping out was a visceral reaction” and the “necessary precondition” for the creation of bebop.¹⁵⁶ DeVeaux traces the resistance of many African American musicians to conscription in the U.S. Army, a conflict that recognized the body as contested site, and deployed its defenses. Musicians evinced the

¹⁵⁶ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 248. I hesitate to overextend or appropriate the concept of ‘dropping out’, but as a psychic reaction to an unbearable reality, a similar phenomenon can be seen to surface in most of the novels I’ve discussed. Certainly Norman Mailer believes himself a participant in the phenomena.

symptoms of physical ailments, sometimes through painful artifice (eating soap or combining drugs). Young black males sometimes found it more expedient to startle their questioners by imitating and inhabiting stereotypes, not only by discussing ‘killin’ crackers’, but also wearing ‘zoot suits’ and other ‘hipster’ garb. In a direct way, by adopting the uniform of a cultural underclass perceived as disruptive to order, some young men evaded donning a military uniform.

Yet as American uniforms increased the likelihood of death abroad, the ‘hipster’ uniforms carried danger at home. In 1943, Chester Himes wrote “Zoot Riots are Race Riots” for *The Crisis*, the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Himes lends an edge of satire to his account of “the great battle which took place on Main street and points east wherein the combined forces of the United States navy, army, and marine corps, contacted and defeated a handful of youths with darker skins. Yes, we have now defeated the ‘zoot-suiters’; all we have to do now is to defeat Germany, Italy, and Japan.”¹⁵⁷ Himes’ use of satirical synecdoche emphasizes the power differential between the sides, not only in terms of number but also institutional backing. Later historians will report that the Los Angeles police force not only aided and abetted the riots, as implied in Himes’ account, but joined in. Taken in the other direction, the link supports the implicit claim of *If He Hollers Let Him Go*: the war itself possesses racist aims.

By the end of the 30s, at least three million Mexican-Americans lived in the U.S., and the largest concentration was found in Los Angeles. Typically underpaid and kept confined to the worst housing areas, a subset of Latino youth responded by creating a specific youth culture, marked by a particular style of speaking, music, and most notably, dress. The trend spread to youth of different background, but similar political sentiment. Visually, the mode of dress

¹⁵⁷ Chester Himes, *Black on Black*, 220.

directly challenged the strictures imposed by war production. In the face of rationing, the ‘zoot suit’ employed baggy slacks, an overly long jacket (sometimes reaching to the knees), and an overall ‘overuse’ of fabric. The outfits often included a stylish hat and other sartorial details which resisted not only rationing, but also the shift to increasingly practical and sedate clothing for men. According to Himes, African Americans “improved the zoot suit to its present sartorial splendor,” after which “Mexican youths took it and went.”¹⁵⁸

Throughout the nation, the flamboyant and baggy “zoot suit” was associated with music; a 1942 *Life* magazine article mentioned the outfit’s connection to “needle nuts,” “gandydancers,” and “jitterbugs.”¹⁵⁹ Such a feature in a major magazine provides more evidence for the theory that entertainment, and specifically nightclubs featuring dancing, found new appeal and a broader consumer base during the war. Upon closer examination, the imaginative, slangy compounds used to corral the zoot suit wearers contain some dark assumptions. “Jitterbugs” extends the name of a dance to its practitioners, but derives from a word applied to alcoholics experiencing delirium tremens. Then “needle nuts” alliteratively connotes music mania, yet includes a not terribly stealthy nod to a connection between jazz and heroin. On the surface, “gandydancer” looks like a synonym, but actually specifically denotes a type of railroad worker: one who tamped down the earth between rails. The term is thought to derive from the practice of work songs, or chants, to coordinate labor. Though not all ‘gandydancers’ were southern African Americans, many were, and this form of “occupational art” has a long history in the South.¹⁶⁰ *Life* magazine’s use of such loaded terms seems upon examination to cast both racial and class

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁵⁹ *Life* magazine. September 21, 1942. 45-45.

¹⁶⁰ See: *Gandy Dancers*, a 1994 film made by Maggie Holtzberg-Call and Barry Dornfeld.

aspersions upon the zoot suit crowd, while indirectly accusing them of transgressive substance abuse. While the article overall attempts a light tone regarding the garb and the War Production Board's opprobrium, the appropriation and deployment of slang reveals the media's vilification of burgeoning youth cultures, particularly those associated with minority groups.

At the same moment, the movement's appearance in *Life* magazine also reveals the degree to which mainstream media had begun the process of subsuming and defanging marginalized youth movements. The spectacle provided by the 'excesses' of zoot suit culture drew the interest of white youth, and expanded the possibilities for their leisure time. And the 'hipness' of the article's slang also nods to what will become the essential role of youth cultures to the U.S.'s consumer infrastructure. Making the youth 'gangs' increasingly visible provided a draw to 'niteries' and other venues, while it simultaneously allowed many Americans to ignore the essential labor of African Americans and Mexican Americans in wartime industries, and to continue to refuse these groups full participation in the national discourse, or even the sense of war cooperation. The ambivalent attention paid to 'fringe' youth cultures imperfectly conceals a double economic tension; while the U.S.'s dominant cultural and economic forms systemically exclude or subordinate young men of color, not only does total war demand their bodies for battle and labor, but leisure activities and artistic forms are mined for a 'style' that will animate mainstream culture.

The postwar period will see increasing amounts of white spectators embracing jazz and bebop, and adopting associated styles of dress. These appropriations split along class fantasies, as Dick Hebdige points out, with the white "hipster" wearing zoot suits cleaving closer to the aspirational dreams of the black community, while the "beats" focused on a romanticized view of

poverty, appearing “studiously ragged.”¹⁶¹ The white hipster, in Norman Mailer’s view, also appropriates the very stereotypical virility assumed to render Bob Jones so dangerous. An attraction to the margins typifies commodity culture. Jimmie Dillon largely keeps a studied distance from his Mexican American coworker Murphy, yet in the novel’s most extended description of leisure time, Tijuana serves as a venue for both economic and sexual excesses. Himes’ novel provides a more complex and equivocal profile of style, class, and nightlife.

VII

The African American population of Los Angeles doubled during the war years, largely due to a rapid influx of defense workers. Housing restrictions enacted in the early decades of the 20th century ensured that most of the city’s existing black occupants resided along Central Avenue, and endemic housing shortages meant that the majority of newcomers ended up living there as well. The opening line of Raymond Chandler’s *Farewell My Lovely* neatly foreshadows the incipient wartime shift: “It was one of the mixed blocks over on Central Avenue, the blocks that are not yet all negro.”¹⁶² Himes’ book mentions that some new workers moved into the neighborhood Central Avenue crosses at its north end: Little Tokyo, where homes were emptied by the policy of Japanese internment, a loss which haunts Bob Jones and the opening pages of Himes’ text. By war’s end, the area would be packed, and generative of a vibrant arts scene and urban culture. *The Negro Motorist Green Book* for 1946 shows that businesses serving a African

¹⁶¹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style, Volume 4* (Sussex: Psychology Press, 1981): 49.

¹⁶² Raymond Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 1.

American clientele were heavily concentrated in the immediate vicinity of Central Avenue.¹⁶³ As previously emphasized, limited necessary rationing of durable goods matched by an influx of war wages meant that leisure-based consumerism was booming: “Despite the exigencies of war, fun was not rationed. Clubs up and down the coast were packed.”¹⁶⁴ Transportation limitations meant that both performers and audiences found themselves concentrated in urban areas, which led to new opportunities for musicians. Scott DeVeaux states that “[n]ot until the outbreak of World War II transformed the economics of entertainment did the concert format offer the potential for profit” and he carefully outlines the other consequences of gas and rubber rationing: crowds grew, fees rose, and engagements became longer and more profitable.¹⁶⁵ The Dunbar Hotel (mentioned in the novel) served as the epicenter of entertainment on Central Avenue, lacking the restrictive (and discriminatory) policies of other hotels.¹⁶⁶ A wide range of entertainers spent time there; Charlie Parker arrived in 1945 for a short gig, and stayed on Central Avenue for over a year. Himes mentions that the “Last Word,” a jazz club, has just opened, demonstrating the booming live entertainment industry. The demand was so intense that after-hours establishments called “breakfast clubs” began to proliferate. Southern workers, black and white, brought business to the area, and ostensibly upset whatever racial relations existed in Los Angeles before the war.

163 My next chapter discusses the process of suburbanization, and Central Avenue would become a casualty of that process, its scene all but disappeared by 1960.

164 Arthur Verge, “Daily Life in Wartime California,” in *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War*, Ed. Roger Lotchin (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000): 23.

165 Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 283.

166 Originally named the Somerville Hotel, it was built in 1928 to rectify the complete lack of fine hotels in Los Angeles willing to serve African Americans. Named for its owner, the first president of the LA NAACP, it was the first hotel to be built entirely by black workers.

Class striation among African Americans was heightened by the influx of war workers from the South; the upper classes blamed the working classes for the expansion of racist policies at white-owned businesses. Alice's mother maintains strict social divisions, reinforcing the white-dominated status quo. "We have earned their respect and admiration and they accept us as social equals. But just a few of us have escaped, just a few of us... You know yourself, Bob, a lot of our people are just not worthy, they just don't deserve any more than they're getting... Southern Negroes are coming in here and making it hard for us..." (52). Mrs. Hamilton not only resents the presence of working-class Southerners, but pathologizes their situation, reproducing cultural assumptions that the low-wage labor background of Southern workers results in the possession of dangerously repressed desires, making them 'unworthy' of equality. Mrs. Hamilton specifically differentiates herself from "most working people" by their leisure time choices; those who work in factories enjoy the movies and bars, while the Hamiltons prefer "the legitimate theater" (50). Though Alice depends on the influx of newcomers for her own leisure desires, when speaking in "her best social worker's voice," she takes a different tack. Alice and her friends contain social injustice as "a ghetto problem" related to class and education. Their solution, echoing the opinions of their upper-class hosts, requires "stop[ping] all these Southern negroes from coming into the city" (84). Protecting their social property requires a class-based exclusion. Despite their ostensibly 'social' perspective, Alice and her friends do not place blame for the expansion of Jim Crow policies on the white Southern workers streaming into Los Angeles (though Jones will).

Sitting with Alice's friends, Jones feels intensely frustrated with "cut-rate jive in social workers' phraseology that proved a certain intellectualism"; when asked to contribute, he reanimates Swift's modest proposal, suggesting that "we ought to kill the coloured [sic] residents

and eat them. In that way we'll not only solve the race problem but alleviate the meat shortage as well" (84). His pastiche, like his literary allusions throughout the novel, receives no intratextual audience, particularly from a crowd that considers *Native Son* to be a "vicious crime story" proving "our men are rapists and murderers" (87-88). The dramatic irony here reappears throughout the book, reminding readers that Jones is an educated man created by a well-educated author, and calling in Wright's book as a sort of forebear.¹⁶⁷ Himes also preempts his future critics by containing them within his novel, foreclosing the well-meaning liberal response he imagines his own 'vicious crime story' will receive. His imaginative work also silences more women, notably ones situated in the Hamiltons' comfortable home "with rum-and-coke setups" waiting for Alice's white coworker to join them. Himes' criticism here involves racial divisiveness, but it centers on the Hamiltons' class position and its assimilationist aspirations.¹⁶⁸ As we will see, his willingness to indict Alice for her leisure choices makes Jones remarkably unfeeling toward her own experiences of racism.

VIII

Picking up Alice for an evening out further reveals the spatial demarcations of Los Angeles. Her family's home is on the "West Side" and "[w]hen you asked a Negro where he lived, and he said on the West Side, that was supposed to mean he was better than the Negroes

¹⁶⁷ Following in Richard Wright's footsteps would be lucrative as well; from 1940 to 1945, Harper's sold almost a million copies of Wright's books.

¹⁶⁸ Bob Jones himself largely denies his class aspirations, but he is not hesitant to cast classist aspersions. Women remain the locus for his criticisms. When Alice's acquaintance Cleo begins loudly declaiming interracial relationships, Jones says that "she looked and talked just like any other Southern girl who's never been farther than grammar school" (85).

who lived on the South Side; it was like the white folks giving a Beverly Hills address” (48). The West Side lies far from the crowded environs of Central Avenue. Class is a relation, and the Hamiltons are invested in maintaining their social difference, while Jones feels “like an intruder and it made [him] slightly resentful” (49). He will retain his ‘outsider’ viewpoint whenever interacting with Alice’s family or friends, giving those sections of the novel a more satirical tone. Though Alice claims that she doesn’t “want to always be running after white people,” her statement masks a deep desire to maintain her own class position (54). Her class mobility lends her social mobility, an ability to ‘pass’, except when accompanied by her boyfriend Bob, whose class markers (including skin tone) threaten her acceptance by white society. Being excluded from white establishment undermines Alice’s class position, but juxtaposing herself to the working-class bolsters it. In Jones’ view, Alice employs him as an escort since “she figured that the people in her class didn’t patronize such places and the only way she’d get there was for me to take her,” emphasizing and taking advantage their class differential (46). Her spoken desire to go “slumming down on Central Avenue” reinforces Alice’s outsider status, and Bob jokes that she ironically “sound[s] just like the other white people” (54).

Madge dangerously disrupts gender roles by her position as an industrial worker; given that status, her excessive desires proliferate until they threaten Bob Jones’ very life. While she locates feminine threat in the working world, his bourgeois girlfriend Alice represents the threat of women as consumer. Her interactions with Jones circle on the leisure activities they engage in together, and her cinematic appearance gives us further evidence of her symbolic role. Alice “fell into the living-room like Bette Davis, big-eyed and calisthenical and strictly sharp” (53). Jones’ particular comparison is an interesting choice; Davis frequently took edgy roles—playing shrews, prostitutes and an adulterous killer. Nevertheless, she became an audience favorite, and

by 1940, Bette Davis was Warner Bros most profitable star. And the war years were profitable years for the studio system. Despite restrictions on set expenditures and some rationing of film stock, cinemas (like live entertainment venues) found gas rationing to benefit them. War years saw near-record audiences, reportedly reaching ninety million per week. The celebrity system also received a boost during wartime; advertising war bonds became a way for cinema stars to exercise their civic duty while raising their own profile. The conduit from screen to sale was seamless: [a]s the Minuteman logo imprinted on the closing frame of wartime films reminded patrons, outlets for the sale of war bonds were in the lobbies of most of the nation's theaters."¹⁶⁹ The connections between Madge and Fay Wray, and between Alice and Bette Davis, draw a line of alliance between women and the spectacular business of war. Yet even Jones, while inebriated, imagines himself as the star of *A Guy Named Joe* (1943) with a difference: he would "go out blowing up the white folks like that cat did the Nazis," a fantasy so stirring that it makes him cry.¹⁷⁰ Jones' vulnerability to heroic film imagery speaks to the deep importance of cinema to the era. Yet just as he desires the recognition being a hero would give, some "ordinary" white soldiers walk into the bar and suddenly "[e]very eye in the room was on them," not him (74).

The comparison of Alice to Bette Davis also obliquely makes a point about cinematic representation. Film portrayals of African-Americans revealed the slow nature of social change—while the number of servant roles declined during the war years, partially out of

¹⁶⁹ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (York: Columbia UP, 1993), 82

¹⁷⁰ Himes' choice of film adds a possibly ironic layer to Jones' emotionality. The heroically sacrificial act Jones describes happens toward the beginning of the film. The main character Pete, now dead, finds himself reporting to the heavenly "General". His angelic mission is to watch over Ted, a rookie pilot. Ted falls in love with Pete's former girl, Dorinda, and she steals a plane to keep him from also dying. With Pete's guidance, it is she who heroically destroys "the largest Japanese ammunition dump in the Pacific." We will see the film's trope of military entanglement continuing past death in Himes' own "Heaven Has Changed."

concerns that films could be used as propaganda against the United States, they were primarily replaced by entertainer roles. In addition to troubling similarities to minstrel shows of the past, these roles were structurally ancillary: scenes featuring black entertainers were often 'segregated' from the overall plot of the film, allowing them to be removed entirely before Southern screenings.¹⁷¹ Under pressure from government directives and progressive groups, Hollywood too often solved the problem of problematic representation by simply removing roles for African-Americans altogether.

Jones does enjoy the spectacle that Alice provides, but “her best social worker’s voice” entirely deflates his attraction to her, as she reinstates the class difference between them. Sensitive to feeling used by Alice, he insists on taking her not to the jazz joints she craves, but to a downtown hotel restaurant “filled with solid white America,” as militarized as the nation itself. Jones itemizes the crowd: “younger folks no more than half of whom were in uniform, with their brittle young women with rouge-scarred mouths and hard, hunting eyes. There was a group of elderly Army officers, a brigadier-general, two colonels, and a major; and apart from them a group of young naval officers looking very white” (56). The entrance of Jones and Alice “brought on a yellow alert,” referencing the newly developed air raid signal system (56). The dining room functions as battlefield; Jones “jerked a belligerent look” and “began getting on [his] muscle” (57, 58). Deeply cognizant of the room’s eyes on him, Jones loudly jokes to Alice’s dismay. She begins strategic position-taking by ordering in French, then discussing literature and politics. Jones realizes that “she was fighting; that she’d been fighting before, [he] let her fight” (59). For a moment, he seems empathetic toward his girlfriend’s own pitched battle. Then she

¹⁷¹ Linda Harris Mehr, “The Way We Thought We Were: Images in World War II Films,” in *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War*, Ed. Roger Lotchin (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000): 35.

inadvertently confirms his secret anxieties; she doesn't like to go to white-centric establishments together since "with [him] everybody here knows just what we are" (60). Injured and accused of being "boorish," Jones refocuses his attack, engaging her on the economic level. For the nearly thirty dollars spent on dinner, Jones tells her, he "could have bought a hunting licence, gone hunting and shot a couple of pheasants, bought a quart of liquor and got drunk and gone to bed with two country whores and had enough money left over to buy gasoline home" (61). Like Bellow's Josef, Jones gravitates toward a fantasy hinging on rationed goods (gasoline and alcohol), while also emphasizing his talismans of masculinity—his gun, car, and facility with women. Struggling with being objectified through the gaze of others, he over-performs the roles assumed of him.

Unsettled by further racism, Alice takes them somewhere else, crossing class lines to the house of people who "were more the kind of people [Jones] should know" (65). Himes populated the streets of Central Avenue with colorful characters, and in one sense, Stella and her friends are a continuation of that portrayal—meant to stand against both "the great white world" and the "withered soul and body" of upper-class African Americans (53). The signs of excess in the room include "littered ashtrays" and a "gallon bottle of wine and three dirty glasses" (65). Alice's friend Stella unsettles gender boundaries, proving to be bafflingly attractive: though she "wasn't even half pretty" she possesses "an animal sensuousness" and Jones' "gaze followed her on its own" (66). Thwarting beauty standards, her vitality puts her in a liminal, semi-human space. Like in the case of Daisy Buchanan, the solution to Stella's mystery lies in her voice: "a husky liquor voice with queer undertones" (66). The entire wine-soaked scene that unravels in the small apartment has 'queer undertones'. Jones drowns his growing awareness of the relationship between Alice and Stella in wine. His masculinity dangerously threatened by an excess of

women, Jones “lets [his stomach] go into the sink” (67). Bodily integrity undermined, he slaps Alice unthinkingly and leaves the party, drunkenly smashing his tires into the curb.

The next day, he feels “an odd sort of embarrassment for [Alice]; a sort of mixture of shame and betrayal and repulsion” (70). His understanding of her desires has been curiously undermined. In an interesting choice of language, Jones tells her that “it just got [him] for a chick like you to go for a hype like that” (71). The word ‘hype’ evolves over the first half of the twentieth century from meaning a confidence trick or hustle to referring simply to publicity or promotion.¹⁷² By referring to her sexual choice as a “hype,” Himes diminishes the possibility of Stella as a true partner, and emphasizes that Alice has made a consumer decision.¹⁷³ When later considering the possibility that she has a romantic connection with Tom Leighton, Bob Jones speculates that Alice may not think these infidelities ‘count’, since neither a woman nor a white man is exchangeable with Jones. He believes Alice’s confession that she “feel[s] like a slut” is meant not as an apology, but a plea for discretion (67). She doesn’t want her class position threatened by the revelation of how widely she spends her sexual coin. Alice hopes that her relationship with Stella can remain as discreet as the rest of her class-crossing leisure activities. Here, as always, we encounter Jones’ unreliability as a narrator; his conscious and unconscious minds are striven by the effects of racial hatred, inflecting the book’s entire atmosphere. Tyrone Simpson II writes that “racial paranoia and the epistemology of prediction it implies may have stood for Himes as a virtually inevitable consequence of black life in the United States.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Jonathon Green, *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* (London: Cassell, 2000), 758.

¹⁷³ It may be useful to point out that, as a slang term, ‘queer’ also previously referred to a confidence trick, or counterfeit money.

¹⁷⁴ Tyrone Simpson II, “‘I Could Always Feel Race Trouble...Never More Than Two Feet Off’: Chester Himes's Melancholic Perception.” *African American Review*, Vol. 43, No. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 2009): 233.

Whether Jones' fears and predictions were correct or not hardly impacts how his mind reacts, and his own role in shaping his social interactions is left deliberately ambiguous. Regardless, his connection to Alice fluctuates in relation to his own willingness to stomach her desires.

IX

In David Ikard's black feminist critique of *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, he states that Himes' "project of black resistance to white racism is gendered in ways that reify rather than subvert white patriarchy" partially through its "erasure of the black female social perspectives in the novel."¹⁷⁵ Ikard rereads the novel by emphasizing the character Ella Mae's embedded critique of Bob Jones, without giving Himes much credit for the inclusion of Ella Mae, whose commentary does complicate the book's portrait of women. Beyond her, Himes provides depictions of a significant group nearly entirely elided from the mainstream media: female African American workers.¹⁷⁶ Of the approximately one million African Americans working employed in homefront war industries, a full 600,000 were women. Karen Tucker Anderson deflates the congratulatory historical narrative emphasizing personal and social mobility granted by defense employment.¹⁷⁷ Her work points out that while working outside of the home may

¹⁷⁵ David Ikard, "Love Jones: A Black Male Feminist Critique of Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go*," *African American Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer, 2002), 299.

¹⁷⁶ The experiences of African American female workers were depicted in the African American press, lending extra sting to the exclusion of these accounts from multiple anthologies. For a useful overview of many of these texts, see *Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II*, edited by Maureen Honey.

¹⁷⁷ Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women. Workers during World War II," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Jun. 1982): 82-97.

have been a novel opportunity for many white women, African American women had a legacy of supporting their families with outside employment.

In *Atlas Shipyard*, there are “a lot of women on board, mostly white” and while his most important antagonistic relation will be with a white woman, he does include black female workers (18). Jones’ crew includes a helper named Bessie, whom he calls “beautiful,” but describes cursorily as “brown-skinned, straightened-haired, and medium-sized”; perhaps it is her work wardrobe of “clean cotton waists, blue denim slacks, and a brown sweater” that ensures he “never looked at her any closer” (16). Encountering another woman in his crew, Jones leaves out the sartorial descriptions he pins to most people he encounters, describing Peaches simply as a “short-haired, dark-skinned, thick-lipped girl with a placid air—that’s as much as I’d seen” (21). Jones’ deliberate notation that he hasn’t visually appraised his co-workers seems a sign of respect, particularly given his treatment of the novel’s other women. Most importantly, declining to catalogue his team’s attire more fully substantiates their worker status since they are removed from the realm of consumption.

His girlfriend Alice, on the other hand, fully participates in consumer culture, with no mention of rationing (significantly, only Jones runs into rationing—in relation to gas, whiskey, and meat). In one particular scene,

She was togged in a flowing royal-purple chiffon evening gown with silver trimmings and a low square-cut neck that showed the tops of her creamy-white breasts with the darker disturbing seam down between; and her hair was swept up...and held by two silver combs that matched the silver trimmings of her gown...Black elbow-length gloves showed a strip of creamy round arm. (53)

Himes includes the outfits of most characters, but the catalogue-like specificity of this description emphasizes Jones’ voracious eye as it evaluates her attire. Untouched by clothes

rationing, her outfit ‘flows’ and has copious “trimmings,” the excess underwritten by its imperial color. Jones’ eye also lingers on Alice’s color, pointing out the ‘creamy’ tone of her arms and breasts, framed and highlighted by her clothing. Ella Mae tells Jones that he “got the whitest colored girl [he] could find” (47). Ikard points out that Ella Mae’s critique has an economic base; he prefers lighter skin because “relationships with white woman were also viewed as material markers of black male success.”¹⁷⁸ Jones responds by saying she “sound[s] like a black girl,” chalking her words up to jealousy (47). Himes provides another portrait of the way in which structures of discrimination reproduce themselves. Jones pits women against other women rather than consider them fully. Because much of Jones’ energy is invested in considering how ‘whiteness’ can be ‘worn’ or ‘not worn’, he tends to quickly dismiss any consideration of how their skin color affects the black woman he knows. He seems particularly blind to the intersection between race and gender.

As mentioned earlier, the shipyard hierarchy deliberately restricts Bessie’s access to training, despite three months of employment. Her crewmate attributes this slight to her race, fairly, but her gender doubtlessly plays a role. All three women in the crew are referred to as “helpers,” a diminishing title despite their job parity. We know the parity exists because it is transgressed:

‘Conway, you’re an evil man. You don’t get along with nobody. How you get along with him, Zula Mae?’

‘He’s all right,’ she said. She was Conway’s helper. ‘You just got to understand him.’

‘See,’ Conway said. ‘She’s my baby.’

Arkansas gave her a disdainful look. ‘That’s ‘cause she still think you her boss. Don’t you let this guy go boss you ‘round, you hear.’ (21)

¹⁷⁸ David Ikard, “Love Jones,” 308.

Kept trapped in a subordinate position by the plant's unofficial discriminatory actions, Conway tries to establish his superiority over Zula Mae. Calling her his "baby" reinforces her subordination and reduces the threat to masculinity caused by female workers. When Peaches lends vocal support after his run-in with Madge, she says "'Bob done just right. There's more'n one of these dirty white tramps needs cussing out'" (106). Her endorsement of Jones reinforces the misrepresentation of women workers as sexually promiscuous, while displacing it specifically onto the white workers. Such rumors circulated viciously throughout the war. The most common targets were women who actually joined the armed services; they were accused of being either prostitutes for the male troops, or lesbian nymphomaniacs. War workers were not immune from similar slander. Jones claims that, in his factory, "a lot of them were prostitutes anyway; they were always firing some of 'em for tricking on the job." Such an assertion becomes necessary because female workers upset the established order. Male workers produce objects—warships, bombers, bombs—and produce images of women as objects—literally painting pinup images onto bombers as well as perpetuating the rumor of the 'loose woman'. Peaches' loyalty to Jones does not render her as accepting as Zula Mae. Finally driven out by the men's racially-oriented humor one day, she registers the women workers' complaint: "It was getting too rough for them. When Peaches passed Willie she pinched him on the leg with a pair of pliers" (108). Peaches reminds the male workers that she too possesses tools and a will. Jones engages in mild sexual repartee with her, but within the shipyard, even jokes have a deadly edge: "What I've got will kill a little boy like you dead" (110). In counterpoint to Jones' earlier infantilization (the 'little black girl' walking by), Peaches returns the favor. Though her appearance in the narrative is slight, Peaches stands as a momentary counterexample to Himes' indictment of consuming women, though she remains directly complicit in the war.

Himes' novel centers on the systemic racism inherent to the American system, magnified by the racial and economic injustice of World War II itself. Publishing the novel, along with his "four furious essays," was not an action without risk in the war and immediate postwar years. Critical voices were not welcome, particularly those of African Americans. According to historian Patrick Washburn, the African American press faced the pressures and investigations of the White House, the FBI, the Office of War Information, the Justice Department, the army, and even the Post Office, all of whom considered its protests and grievances to border on treason. Attorney General Francis Biddle served as an unlikely ally, ultimately recognizing that the appearance of cohesion was more important than suppressing dissenting voices.^{179 180} Himes' dissent manifested in a variety of forms, including biting satire.

Published in 1943, while Himes was writing for *The Crisis*, "Heaven Has Changed" uses the death of a 'Negro soldier' as basis for a dream vision. The satire begins with the form itself. Historian Mark Leff describes American advertising and propaganda as being "full of bluster, high emotion, guilt over the greater sacrifices of soldiers, and other techniques appropriate to a country virtually compelled to fight the war 'on imagination alone.'"¹⁸¹ Not only did posters manipulate images of battlefields to sell war bonds, sentimental fiction abounded in the popular

¹⁷⁹ Unlikely given that he originated the first version of the first Attorney General's List of Subversive Organizations, and it was in fact called simply "the Biddle list." Despite personal doubts, Biddle also authorized the relocation and internment of Japanese American (labeled as "enemy aliens") after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick Scott Washburn, *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press during World War II*(New York: Oxford UP, 1986).

¹⁸¹ Mark H. Leff, "The Politics of Sacrifice," 1314.

press. Himes skewers the commercialization of death by first using his dead soldier to critique popular consensus, and secondly, refusing to let his soldier remain dead. His death (while temporary) emphasizes the front line position of his African American company, which “hurled [themselves] against the enemy.”¹⁸² Arriving in heaven, the soldier finds thousands of black people working in cotton fields, and realizes that the afterlife has racial divisions too. Heaven has a hierarchy, in which a white “Big God” delegates responsibility to “Little Gods,” who directly manage the people. Satire coats the dream world, where “Jim Crow” literally walks about as the cruel and immovable overseer. Yet the dead soldier arrives just in time to spread the word that “Po Uncle Tom is dead,” and a rebellious spirit is born. The conflict soon becomes generational, as many ‘relatives’ of Uncle Tom fear change, while ‘Uncle Tom’s children’, led by his son, desire revolution.¹⁸³ Through direct protest (“OLD JIM CROW HAS GOT TO GO!”), the Big God allows the people to have an election. Himes wryly comments on the nature of power through the Big God’s worry that “if I ain’t got a god out there working for me, I can’t stay here two minutes.”¹⁸⁴

The proponents of political change also happen to be “young jitterbugs,” so “they offered to hold a contest between swing and the spirituals to see which made the people happiest.”¹⁸⁵ The musical contest supersedes the election, and underscores the deep importance of musical forms to Himes’ conception of the African American community. The spirituals have an almost

182 Chester Himes, *Black on Black*, 189.

183 Obviously ‘Uncle Tom’ is a literary as well as cultural reference, and we may speculate that the change happening in heaven may forge a place for fiction similar to *Native Son*.

184 Chester Himes, *Black on Black*, 192.

185 *Ibid.*, 193.

hypnotic power over their listeners, who “become ecstatic” and “transfixed”; their victory in the contest may be due to established politicians who “stuffed the ballot box.”¹⁸⁶ Ultimately, more violent protest causes white society to compromise. Himes seems to imply that social justice comes to fruition only through the actions of the African American community, and a compromise between the old and the young. Although Bid God couldn’t imagine a world without him, as a result of societal change and the acceptance of new ideas, “Old Jim Crow is gone to hell where he belongs.” The broken promise of ‘forty acres and a mule’ not only finally finds realization in heaven, but also gets technologically updated: “Peace grows and flourishes on the peoples’ forty acres and they harvest it with their new tractors and sweep their homes with new brooms and dress their children in pretty clothes.”¹⁸⁷ Work still exists in heaven, but the farm and domestic labor literally produce peace, a striking reversal of a war economy.

The dead soldier returns to find his regiment grimly preparing for battle, afraid not of death but boredom, since the afterlife “must really be a drag.” The returned soldier delivers the line promised in the title, encouraging them to “be brave and fight valiantly.”¹⁸⁸ Here the satire comes full force: only by sacrificing himself in war can an African American man reach a just society. Or more specifically, the only way to escape the war economy is to be processed through it, really no escape at all.

XI

When Alice calls Jones one day to reinvest in their relationship, he awards her “the Robert Jones medal for distinguished service” (161). Continuing the joke, she calls him “General

186 Ibid., 194.

187 Ibid., 194.

188 Ibid., 195.

Jones,” again allowing him a brief fantasy of importance. Meeting her also frees him from work, and the confluence of factors renders him joyful. The renewal of their union stems from two immediate causes. First, Alice delivers a long-winded speech about the necessity of accepting the “segregated pattern in which we live” despite its deleterious systemic effects, touting the ‘non-commercial’ side of life as the truly valuable, the ability to be the “captain of [one’s] soul” (169). Yet at this moment in time, an African American man can most likely not be a captain of industry, nor a captain in the Navy. In March 1944 the “Golden Thirteen” would become the first African-American commissioned naval officers. Despite Executive Order 8802, Navy policy would not allow them positions on ships in active duty; as a result, their appointments involved managing labor gangs ashore. Captaining one’s soul seems relatively cold comfort. Alice’s father, “one of the richest Negroes in the city if not on the whole West Coast,” works as a doctor (6). Alice wants Jones to accept class striation, attempting to become her class equal (through renouncing his working-class position and returning to school).

Secondly, she renounces her lesbian love interest Stella. Carefully revising history, she insists that “[w]hile she’d been hep to the play, it had only been curiosity on her part” (170). She repositions herself as a responsible consumer with appropriate desires. Bob’s reappropriation of her body leads him to reinvest in a future together. Out of his tenuous newfound hope and wholeness, Bob offers to sell his car in order to buy a house for the two of them. Alice immediately suggests a location out of town, far from his factory, a sort of proto-suburban location. Jones even “resolved right then to get some place where we could have a victory garden,” displaying the ease with which domesticity was recuperated by the wartime status quo (172). Jones appears suddenly willing to sacrifice both personal autonomy in the workplace and the primary concrete symbol of his self-image in exchange for Alice’s version of ‘self-

preservation.’ Yet his narration seems to anxiously overstate that Bob “didn’t think of marrying Alice as a way out” but rather “what I wanted, what I’d always wanted” (172). His desire to adapt remakes Bob Jones, reworking his goals and leaving him fantasizing about being an older, “dignified” self counseling a ‘frustrated’ youth like his current self. A union with Alice would cement his entrance into a higher class, where money could ameliorate ‘frustration.’ Moreover, Jones feels the need “[t]o settle down before they settled [him]—in San Quentin or some place. Then [he] got a strange yearning to have some children—two boys and two girls” (163). His yearning doesn’t seem strange for a man avoiding being ‘settled’ into ‘some place’ like the Army; if Jones is not “engaged in work essential to national defense,” a family might still offer him some hope of deferment.¹⁸⁹ In his desperation to flee the militarized carceral trap set for him by American society, Jones dreams of a union which Himes portrays as yet another trap. Until the very world is restructured, freedom is impossible, and the military and the suburban home are two sides of the double-bind.

The novel gives us an imagined resolution of not only the book’s conflicts, but also societal anxieties. Bob will escape from the working-class, being whitewashed by education and made into a fit mate for Alice, who will abandon her excessive sexual outlays and become a perfect housewife. The flaws in the plan become clear almost instantly:

Then we became serious and talked about means.

‘You can keep your job until the first baby comes,’ I consented, feeling very male and important. ‘But after that it’ll be home, sweet home for you, baby.’

‘It might be some time before we’re able to afford a baby,’ she pointed out. ‘You’re going to be a schoolboy for about three years—don’t forget that, Papa.’

‘Oh, we’ll have the baby whether we can afford it or not,’ I said.

She gave me a sly, sidewise glance and began giggling. ‘How do you know?’

I was startled for a moment, then I began laughing. (171)

¹⁸⁹ A IIIA designation was given to men with dependents, according to *Selective Service Regulations*. Volume Three. Classification & Selection, 1940. In 1948, childless husbands were no longer eligible, and in 1953, the paternity deferment was eliminated.

Bob finds self-efficacy in his ability to impregnate Alice and move her back from the workplace into the domestic sphere, described in sentimental cliché (“home, sweet home”). Yet she immediately retrieves her autonomy, first by mentioning the practical economics of child-rearing and then juvenilizing Bob by calling him a “schoolboy.” An even more significant challenge is embedded in her cryptic joke. When Bob insists on the inevitability of progeny, Alice ‘slyly’ insinuates that pregnancy can be avoided, or even terminated, without her future husband’s knowledge. She undercuts the assumed inevitability of procreation, and suggests other paths, or rather, dead-ends.¹⁹⁰ Bob reacts with alarm, but then normalizes the situation by laughing, yet Alice’s dark joke effectively undermines their future planning, and foreshadows the collapse of their relationship (and Bob’s future). In the narrative, she receives even more direct blame; when Jones flees from the police, she encourages him to turn himself in, and he can only find refuge in the house of another lover. The reader may infer that Alice, meanwhile, will likely return to her other lover: Stella. America’s carceral culture will foreclose Jones’ future options, but here we intuit that for him the peaceful domestic scene is already bankrupt.

XII

Nearly all of Jones’ experiences, fantasies, and anxieties can be linked to the issue of bodily integrity. Jim Crow laws perpetuated an ongoing attack against not only the autonomy of African Americans, but also their very bodies. Housing and labor restrictions strove to limit the

¹⁹⁰ *In Now and On Earth*, Roberta's first abortion attempt is instigated without her husband's knowledge: Jimmie “found Roberta in a faint on the bathroom floor, a swollen twist of slippery-elm bark protruding from her” (93-94). While Roberta's rationale was grimly economic in nature, Alice's wealthy parents render her economic justification slightly more suspect.

free movement of populations, and furthered the harm done to bodily integrity by poverty and crime. Laws prohibiting ‘miscegenation’ tried to restrict the economic ramifications of those romantic relationships that were not stopped by the threat of violence. Violence stands as guarantor of racial restrictions—a truth illustrated by the life of Bob Jones. The bodily assault has penetrated to his subconscious, but his body isn’t spared. His sleeping mind is riddled with nightmares; at book’s end, he is nearly beaten to death, and thinks to himself, “Well, [Madge] got me lynched all right” (184). It’s evident that the men brutally ‘punishing’ him concentrated their rage on what they found most threatening: “I hurt in the groin as if I was ruptured” (184). Within the biopolitical ramifications of racial segregation, “[t]he rape-lynching complex comprised only one aspect of a larger assault on bodily integrity, but certainly was its most graphic”; for that reason it forms the center of Himes’ associative network of the threats posed by structural racism.¹⁹¹

Jones’ fears surrounding bodily integrity lead to one of his more spontaneous violent acts; after flirting with Ella Mae, she “made her mouth wide so that her lips encircled [his] completely...and her tongue came out and played across [his] lips, forcing itself between [his] teeth” (48). Jones responds angrily, “almost knocking her down” and “snarl[ing]” (48). Ella Mae attributes his violent reaction to his fancy dress, believing he uses it to differentiate himself from her: “Get dressed up and can’t nobody touch you” (48). Her accusation rings true, though its veracity gestures toward Jones’ more deeply entrenched fears of harm; his dapper dress attempts to gain the protection afforded to the upper class. His reaction to Ella Mae presages his later undoing—as a threatening woman, she encloses and penetrates him.

¹⁹¹ Eileen Boris, “‘Arm and Arm’: Racialized Bodies and Colored Lines,” *Journal of American Studies*, 35 (2001): 1.

The novel builds toward its apex moment of violence with cinematic precision. Jones' hopes for his future are gradually diminished at the shipyard—first forced to humble himself to his supervisor, he then finds that his crew has been bought out. Separated from his comrades by institutional machinations, he becomes spatially isolated while examining the crew's next job. In a scene fitting either a screwball comedy or a thriller, Jones finds himself trapped in a bunk room with his nemesis Madge. As he rejects her advances, the tone shifts to horror. Madge reprises the self-cast cinematic role from her first encounter with Jones, becoming the imperiled white maiden with so much over-the-top effort that she becomes a movie poster: "I saw the stretch and pop of her lips...with a weird stark clarity as if her face were ten feet high" (180). In response, "the air got rock-hard in [his] lungs" and his "whole body got rigid," but this belated rigidity cannot satisfy Madge, who now seeks the terrible denouement of the script she enacts. Madge becomes a real threat, subverting the stereotype as a white, and female, rapist. Angela Davis' work *Women, Race and Class* influentially expresses what is now a commonly accepted truth: rape is not primarily a sexual act, but one of violence and dominance. "Rape bears a direct relationship to all of the existing power structures in a given society," and as the novel establishes the network of racially-oriented violence accentuated by the war economy, Madge is implicated as agent of that violence. Madge becomes a rapist not due to her "forbidden sexual desire for the black hero," but out of a desire to dominate and destroy Jones.¹⁹² Her excitement stems from her power; in an early rehearsal of their sexual dynamic, when physically overpowered, Madge says, "All right, rape me then, n——!" (147, *substitution my own*). Her ultimate weapon is "the word," but Himes links the two most troubling words in America together, making Madge's threat not female, but white. Their final encounter makes the

¹⁹² Calvin Hernton, "The Postscript," *A Case of Rape* by Chester B. Himes (Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1984): 107-40.

connection even clearer. Locked in her physical pantomime of death, Madge flatly reveals the terrible motive of her violent charade: “‘I’m gonna get you lynched, you n—— bastard.’” (181, *substitution my own*).

In *Bonds of Love*, Jessica Benjamin explains that “[d]estruction...is an effort to differentiate,” and the sadist desires to locate and substantiate the other).¹⁹³ Instances of this relation appear throughout Himes’ novel: when he imagines the blond boy’s torn, bloody body, it validates Jones’ ability “to creatively benefit from another person.”¹⁹⁴ Benjamin discusses D.W. Winnicott’s “The Use of an Object” and its analysis of recognition. The subject “can only ‘use’ the object when he perceives it ‘as an external phenomenon, not as a projective entity,’” and this Hegelian structure of recognition appears in a perverted form in Madge. Her act of destruction seeks to deny Jones’ full personhood, but her pleasure would be undermined if Jones truly ceased to exist. Madge needs to prove that her image of Bob Jones—as lusting, virile potential black rapist—does not exist solely in her own mind. To maintain a sense of her own allure, Madge needs to figure Jones as having a dangerously strong attraction to her. Moreover, her fantasies maintain her tenuous position in the social hierarchy. Jones has pointed out that she is working-class, uneducated, abandoned by her husband, and past her physical prime. Her last refuge is the Jim Crow system, and its investment in maintaining an ‘unsullied’ white womanhood. Breu writes that “a racially marked subject in a white supremacist culture[...]is clearly not only the subject of the gaze, but also its object and as such becomes objectified as well as formed subjectively through the lens of various forms of cultural fantasy.”¹⁹⁵ Throughout the novel,

193 Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*(New York: Pantheon, 1988), 38.

194 *Ibid.*, 37.

195 aChristopher Breu, “Freudian Knot or Gordian Knot”, 770.

Jones attempts to maintain his hard-boiled narration, but his voice and his gaze is consistently under threat from the objectifying gaze of others. The cultural fantasy that Madge needs to project onto Jones causes a cultural script to be enacted, as a storm of white soldiers nearly beat him to death.

Standing in his cell after his beating, Jones “felt out of balance, uncoupled, like a little tin soldier out of whack,” a description which not only foreshadows his conscription, but emphasizes how he has been mechanized—both “tin” and “uncoupled” as a railcar. Despite his efforts, he is fully incorporated into the war machine. His unconscious reflects his militarization; in his final dream, after murdering his coworker, a giant man in uniform chases him down. The dream Marine laughingly boasts, saying “I done killed all kinda sonabitches, raped all kinda women’—pointing to the decorations on his chest—‘see these, the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Presidential Memorial Citation, even a Good Conduct Medal. I got these for killing a lot of sonabitches I ain’t even seen until after they was dead” (199). The militarized white world not only allows rape and murder, it glorifies them. Shaken by this dream realization, Jones heads to trial.

The courtroom literally conjoins the realms of industry and justice, as Jones’s company president stands alongside the judge and speaks in his place. Madge, now Mrs. Perkins, elevated by marriage, has agreed not to press charges, a decision which the company president, who takes his place of authority beside the judge, describes as “a patriotic gesture comparable only to the heroism of men in battle” (201). Given the option to enlist or be imprisoned, Jones nearly laughs.

Leaving the court, he finds compatriots, “two Mexican youths” who “were both brown-skinned, about my colour.” The youths express sympathy for Bob’s wounds before they “went out and started up the hill toward the induction centre, the three of us abreast,” reenacting a

miniature Golgotha as they are sacrificed to the Army (203). The crucifixion analogy both overdetermines the equation of military service with death at the same time that it questions class involvement in wartime. Despite his deep qualms about the war industry, particularly its racism, Bob Jones has the status of a war worker, complicit in the war economy. The young men he meets “wore bagged drapes that looked about to fall down from their waists.” Their zoot suit trousers signify their attempted but ineffectual resistance to the military order. Standing in for the ‘two thieves’, their protest remains less articulated in the text, subsumed under Madge’s Judas kiss.

Thompson’s aircraft factory appears largely devoid of difference, free of women workers and populated by the ‘All-American’ Gross and other semi-dangerously jovial white men (like Vail and Busken, who delight in violently homoerotic pranks). The only ethnic outsider appears to be Murphy, and Gross maliciously points out the seeming discordance between his Irish name and his appearance. This naming actually points to the historical reality regarding defense plants, some of which employed up to 10% Mexican American workers.¹⁹⁶ Though Mexican Americans enlisted in the military in smaller numbers (around 350,000 versus one million African Americans), more were allowed to serve ‘heroically’ on front lines, which many historians attribute to an easier assimilation to ‘white’ status. The professed homogeneity of the aircraft plant seems designed to allow Dillon himself to be the ultimate outsider, a former Party member whose submerged past helps to effect his self-imposed exile from the patriotic dream. He has to be the most unlikely worker, as his conscripted labor is the central tragedy of his novel. Despite making essential critiques of larger society, ultimately, both texts most bitterly indict women’s apparent complicity in wartime, essentially due to their sexuality. Thompson keeps women out of

¹⁹⁶ Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II*(University of California Press: June 2008), 20.

the space of the factory entirely to impress upon readers that it is his family, centered on the simple and fertile Roberta, who destroys him by chaining his artist's spirit to war-related labor. The primary villain of Himes' text is the treacherous Madge, supported by judicial-military power, whose incursion into the space of industrial production allows her to manipulate sex and destroy Bob Jones' future, after Alice symbolically emptied out his hope of a stable domestic life with her excessive desires.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bloody Mamas on the *Barbary Shore*: Norman Mailer and Perpetual War

I

Mailer famously believed himself understanding of the situation producing Chester Himes' cry of despair, writing in his controversial 1957 essay "The White Negro" that a black American "has the simplest of alternatives: live a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger."¹⁹⁷ While this statement provides a lucid summary of the central tension of Bob Jones' life, Mailer's essay goes on to formulate a series of troubling rationales for white male appropriation of that painful double-bind, centering on a will to sexual power. Women function as foils, or instruments for male transformation. Even more pertinently for this project, Mailer connects the "psychopathic" ethos of the (white) hipster directly to a disillusionment bred of America's two world wars. To reject the systemic experience of war and a society geared toward war production, the hipster emulates African Americans, who he believes already inhabit an everyday deterritorialized space of battle. But this racial imitativeness is only the beginning. The connection between consumerism and the war economy enables the hipster's use and abuse of women figured as consumers. Despite the unevenness of his prose works, Mailer has long served as a timely concatenation of societal anxieties, and before we further evaluate his appraisal of the hipster style so central to the postwar period, it may be illuminating to examine his own relation to the economy of World War II.

In the spring of 1944, while Saul Bellow was publishing his semi-autobiographical account of the American home front, Norman Mailer was drafted, and sent to fight in the

¹⁹⁷ Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 341.

Philippines. Though he saw little combat overall, Mailer's experience in a patrol on the island of Leyte provided the impetus for his literary debut *The Naked and the Dead*. The book instantly became a popular hit, and still remains the best-selling of all of Mailer's works. The tale takes place on the Pacific island of Anopopei, where a platoon of American soldiers attempt to obey a series of more or less inscrutable orders. Like other novelists writing about WWII, Mailer populated his fictional company with a multiethnic group of characters. Other writers used ethnic difference to emphasize the community built on the battlefield, and to construct a fantastical solution for the real racial tensions of the American homefront. Mailer's portrayal complicates their camaraderie with racism, not only the anti-semitism directed at Goldstein and Roth, but also the condescending treatment of Martinez, who must perform servant-like tasks for the officers.

Admittedly, Mailer's seeming sympathy for Martinez's mistreatment is undermined by his descriptions of the man, which repeatedly revolve around animality and othering—Martinez's speech is rendered as pidgin, and his emotions seem consistently to rule him. Despite this participation in racist tropes, the novel does call into question the idea of war experience as common leveler. The common myth of war's ability to ameliorate racial tensions was advanced on the homefront as much as on the battlefield, perhaps more so, further justifying the total mobilization of the U.S., and Mailer exposes its falsity.

Though racism threatens to divide their group, a common mistrust of women binds them together. The novel's structure emphasizes its naturalistic bent—the episodic flashbacks to life before the war largely function to explain the men's current psyches. Most enlisted not for patriotic reasons, but to escape. Sergeant Martinez flees Rosalita, the girlfriend he has impregnated, while Montana Red flees the very idea of marriage and domesticity. He leaves a town where "The Company owns everything," escaping its contractual duties, but more

pertinently abandoning his mother and sister. This is done as revenge for his father, who “used to be full of ideas, had a bunch of books, but my mother sold them”.)¹⁹⁸ Remember Red’s attitude at this moment, since Mailer will reuse this trope: idealistic man betrayed by mercenary woman. Now that the men have escaped the novel’s women, their resentment only increases. Not domesticity, but supposed freeness draws the soldiers’ ire. Rather than remaining simple recipients of male sexual labor, Brown fears that women on the homefront are occupying their roles as sexual laborers. Brown fastidiously paints a picture of the women on the home front as promiscuous lovers of a good time, willing to share a bed with any available USO or 4-F. His anxiety is predicated on what he assumes is the essential exchangeability of sexual partners; in his view, women are willing to fool around with “anything that wears pants.”¹⁹⁹ His attitude relates to his own quickness to assume that women are identical and interchangeable. Montana Red expresses the same opinion about love: Wyman’s infatuation in the park in early summer cannot be distinguished from any other girl in any other park in early summer; they “both... would look the same in thirty years.”²⁰⁰ Summarizing the general view, Polacki states that “there ain’t a fuggin woman is any good” and that he “wouldn’t trust those bitches with a nickel.”²⁰¹ One might infer, simply enough, that women can’t be trusted with nickels because they will spend them. The soldiers resent material differences because they are deliberately perpetuated even among the troops. Mailer emphasizes the ways in which the officers, particularly Cummings, exacerbate the material gulf between themselves and the common soldiers, the “workers in uniform”. Cummings looks forward to a fascist future when politics becomes “far

198 Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*(New York: Rinehart, 1948), 223.

199 Ibid., 66.

200 Ibid., 257.

201 Ibid., 67.

more naked”, plainly revealing that war is only the “exten[sion of] an imperialist paw.”²⁰² Wars only pretended to fight fascism, in Mailer’s formulation. Rather they perpetuated fascist forms while conducting economic expansion, or as *Barbary Shore* puts it, “the armies of the swindled would bleed each other for slogans that became ever more similar.”²⁰³

Written decades later, the strange *Ancient Evenings* (1983) continues his concern with the economics of politics. In Mailer’s version, ancient Egypt is depicted as suffering from a decline of military might, which has been supplanted by a trade economy. The empire has “surrendered the realities of domination for the centerless confusions of trade—thus sacrificing the glories of Egyptian exceptionalism,”²⁰⁴ Here it seems that Mailer responds to what he perceives as the shifts of the American Cold War period, which in my reading does not replace military might with commercial might, but rather extends the consolidation of the two forged during WWII. Though painted as a period of simple and necessary economic boom, the war years also imparted a legacy of corporatism, industrial-military collusion, and a resurrected consumerist apparatus. Heightened corporate power not only grew out of an economy predicated on militarism and consumerism, but used those factors as bases for societal acceptance of its burgeoning role.

The average American had little reason to trust corporations in the 1930s. Corporate capitalism's rise in the 1920s led to a devastating credit-driven crash, while widespread war profiteering tarnished the reputation of American business during the WWI years. The New Deal and progressive politics of the '30s reestablished the state's ability to employ and support its workers. Yet by war's end, the general American public would consider corporations to be, if not

202 Ibid., 327.

203 Norman Mailer, *Barbary Shore* (New York: Vintage International, 1997), 293. Future citations from this edition will appear in the text rather than the footnotes.

204 Sean McCann, “The Imperiled Republic: Norman Mailer and the Poetics of Anti-Liberalism,” *ELH* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 305.

the national heroes that advertising proclaimed them to be, at least necessary and helpful institutions in many ways. Acceptance underscored economic reality; the distribution of millions of dollars in defense contracts consolidated power in fewer hands. The need for a miraculous speed-up in production meant that large contracts were given to those (large) corporations who had weathered the Depression relatively intact, while smaller businesses often foundered and failed in the absence of defense money. Large corporations often promised production miracles, though the tremendous amount of waste generated in the shift to military goods finds no place in the national narrative. The executive branch aided and abetted corporate control. Regardless of how one reads his Progressive era attitudes, as the war progressed, FDR became increasingly dependent on the War Department, and less concerned about untoward military or industrial power. According to historian Paul Koistinen, the Roosevelt administration's "dramatic shift to the right became so strong that a conservative and recalcitrant Congress considered or enacted legislation to protect the civilian population, guard the interests of small business, and temper the blatant behavior of corporate structures," yet their attempts were largely useless against a shifting tide.²⁰⁵ While critics often bandy about the term 'consensus culture' in reference to the postwar period, the depths of its effects may not always be considered. The mirroring of economic growth in militarized action and preparation requires a strong base, thus "the ideological consensus that favors war economy is operative as a cross-society control system," making the project of dissent both difficult and necessary.²⁰⁶ The war-born 'consensus' becomes postwar support for organized corporate control, particularly since supporting the war meant supporting industry.

²⁰⁵ Paul Koistinen, *Arsenal*, 513.

²⁰⁶ Seymour Melman, *The Permanent War Economy: American Capitalism in Decline*(Simon & Schuster, 1985), 25.

While Thompson's and Himes' works both describe the immediate violence endemic to the defense industry and connect it to its destructive work abroad, Mailer's work takes place after the war, yet violence also suffuses not only his characters' rhetoric but also nearly their every action. "War has become the only method of accumulation" (281). As the line between civilian and military economies became effaced, all consumers and users of technology became complicit in the maintenance of a global situation conducive to the needs of the military. As French urbanist Paul Virilio states in *Pure War*, "All of us are already civilian soldiers, without knowing it ... The great stroke of luck for the military class's terrorism is that no one recognizes it. People don't recognize the militarized part of their identity, of their consciousness."²⁰⁷ Virilio dates his era of civilian militarization from the explosion of the atomic bomb, but as my argument centers the immersive powers of total war in industrial production and wartime consumption, we can trace the precipitating factors of civilian soldiership back considerably farther. Mailer's view finds extended support in the work of Seymour Melman on what he calls the "permanent war economy." Melman describes the dominant economic in America as state-controlled military capitalism, a pernicious version of military Keynesianism whose "unique features include maximization of costs and of government subsidies" and "sustained nonproductive use of capital and labor" leading to a "depletion process in American industrial life traceable to a military preemption of capital and technology."²⁰⁸ In the 'postwar' period, military spending remains a "parasitic growth" on the American economy. The events of *Barbary Shore* (1950) are framed with a hint of science fiction. In his future world, the narrator Lovett listens to the circling footsteps of laborers enduring fourteen-hour workdays. As Ernst

²⁰⁷ Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War* (New York, NY, U.S.A.: Semiotext(e), 1983), 18.

²⁰⁸ Seymour Melman, *The Permanent War Economy*, 7-8.

Junger famously formulated, in an era of total war, “each individual life becomes, ever more unambiguously, the life of a worker; and that, following the wars of knights, kings, and citizens, we now have wars of *workers*,” and given the logic of the novel, it seems fair to assume that Mailer’s future workers also build an economy predicated on war.²⁰⁹

II

If Mailer's first novel *The Naked and the Dead*'s portrayal of fascism in the military was linked to its thesis of perpetual war, a thesis that ties WWI to WWII to the burgeoning Cold War and to the eschatological pull of WWIII, *Barbary Shore* takes up the question of war's perpetuation in putative peacetime. Like Joseph, the latter's main character, Lovett, lives in a rooming-house, a common situation before the postwar housing boom. While attempting to investigate his own traumatized mind, Lovett thus becomes intimately involved with the lives and intrigues of his peculiar fellow boarders. In *Writing After War*, John Limon argues that WWII ushered in a model of war writing in which characters and their lives are explicitly textualized; for Limon, the “experience of being in World War II is best translated into literature not merely as an allegory, but as an allegory in which the characters understand that they are allegorical.”²¹⁰ *Barbary Shore* seems to fit; its young veteran protagonist and the five inhabitants of his house not only read as allegorical representatives of the politically charged culture of the immediate postwar years, but also seem to consider themselves as allegory. The amnesiac Lovett, for example, gradually unravels his past over the course of the novel, eventually realizing that, as former Trotskyite, he retains vestiges of his earlier self. Mantra-like phrases reoccur in the

²⁰⁹ Ernst Junger, Total Mobilization.,” in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1993), 123.

²¹⁰ John Limon, *Writing after War: American War Fiction from Realism to Postmodernism*(New York: Oxford UP, 1994), 147.

vacuum of his mind's history, giving him and the book's readers a description of the state of America in the 1930s and 40s: "a decade of economic crisis, and a decade of war and the preparations for new war" (140). Hollingsworth, as representative of the American government (and heir to Major Dalleson), also stands for militarized capitalism, and exhibits a drive towards death and destruction throughout the book. Guinevere and her young daughter Monina are obsessed by the spectacular nature of mass consumerism, and accordingly attempt to commodify sexuality, a process that fragments and isolates their bodies.

Indeed, Mailer examines this allegory of relations between political forces in the immediate postwar period largely in terms of sexual relations. The socialist, MacLeod, for instance, argues that one can "find relationships with everybody," and yet cannot always stomach his wife's ability to do just that (173). Guinevere McLeod encounters the sexual programme of the government agent Hollingsworth, who, in treating his lovers in a manner both sadistic and objectifying, uses sex to express political power. Repression and violence become a part of nearly all sexual acts in the book, an inclination traceable to the repression and violence inherent to postwar culture. The lines of desire between the six characters reveal the political motivations and economic realities Mailer wants to outline. The intersection between sexual and economic desire and the ways in which these desires are mediated by the militarization of the American economy should aid a better understanding of not only these novels, but also of American postwar culture.

The novel's first line: "Probably I was in the war" establishes our narrator and his (de)formative experience. The "I" of the statement, Mike Lovett, will proceed to describe for us a fantastical postwar summer spent in a crowded New York City roominghouse, but first proves himself nearly as strange as his tale. Writing about the postwar prevalence of the first person in

fiction, Thomas Schaub asserts that these “speakers enact a form which is inherently suspicious of form—of any projected meaning—at the same time that the subject of their ruminations is always the necessity of some such projection if one is to play a role in the world,” and Mailer could scarcely feature a more suspicious narrator than Lovett, or one more desperate for a personal sense of meaning and a ‘role in the world’.²¹¹ Lovett constructs his text as a missive from an isolated room, one far more dimly lit than that of Ellison’s invisible man, at an unspecified future time even more darkly suited to the constructions of fiction since “other men besides myself must contrive a name, a story, and the papers they carry” (5). An amnesiac whose life seems a “masquerade,” Lovett’s condition allows him to display an almost metafictional self-awareness of his own constructed nature while keeping his narrative barely within the bounds of realism, a perhaps important goal for a book with such topically political aims. Given the futurity of the dystopian frame story, we know that Lovett’s entire experience in the rooming-house has already been filtered through his typewriter—his mediated account is a fiction within the fiction. The typewriter sitting in his overheated attic room enables the whole story even more than the MacGuffin-like ‘little object’, which simply moves the plot. From its opening, the novel establishes a mistrust of writers, including its own narrator. Friedrich Kittler points out that the gun maker Remington was first involved in the mass-production of typewriters, even referring to them as “the discourse machine-gun.”²¹² It is clear that Lovett’s typewriter is figured as a weapon, one appropriate to a broken soldier, and significantly Lannie ends up surrendering her own discourse gun before entering the rooming-house.

211 Thomas Schaub, *American Fiction in the Cold War*(Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1991), 79.

212 Friedrich Kittler, *Literature, Media, Information Systems: Essays*. (Psychology Press: 1991), 63.

Yet the weaponization of words may not be the sole source of the novel's suffusive skepticism. Mike Lovett further undercuts his own narration from the outset by introducing us to another writer. Willie the playwright possesses vague leftist ambitions, particularly of returning art to the people. Our ostensibly wiser narrator espouses disdain toward that "kind of superficial optimism prevalent during the war" and simultaneously toward New Deal-era leftist philosophy (9). Willie introduced the narrator to Beverly Guinevere (McLeod), and the first mention of her name is accompanied by this warning not to trust writers. Such an admonition appears so that we as readers, unlike Mikey, might not be "always too ready to mistake opinion for fact" (11). We are thus given a warning against rhetoric in a novel filled with political screeds, alerting us to an instability of meaning, and perhaps chastising the subsequent critics who would develop diagrammatic explanations of the book's allegorical leanings.

While it may be confused in places, one can give a fairly coherent account of the political structure of the book. Since its publishing, readers have criticized the book for its unbelievable human characters and relationships, suffering from being overshadowed by the weight of the book's theoretical concerns. Leslie Fiedler deems the political project of the book largely unsuccessful, writing of Mailer that "only the hectic sexuality which threatens, despite his conscious attempts, threatens to replace politics completely, seems his own."²¹³ Fiedler's negative opinion overtly dismisses the book's emphasis on sex, yet indirectly indicates that *Barbary Shore's* politics cannot be appreciated without the influence of that 'hectic sexuality,' which carries more significance than the book's didactic speeches. A consideration of the characterizations reveals more depth there than often assumed, and adds a critique of how

²¹³ Leslie Fiedler, "The Breakthrough: The American Jewish Novelist and the Fictional Image of the Jew," *Midstream* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1958): 27.

consumerism is used to support what Mailer calls 'state capitalism.' Yet Mailer's finger-pointing finds targets close to home, and he relies on a caricature of consumerism already familiar to us.

III

We have seen that Saul Bellow created young Joseph out of the material of his own life as a fledgling writer in wartime, and biographical details of Mailer's youth reveal that though *Barbary Shore* seems considerably less devoted to realism than *Dangling Man*, the setting and personages echo actual figures in the maturation of another young writer. Both books can even be seen as variants on the classic form of the *bildungsroman*, generically focusing on the proper age and degree of psychological insight, though both novels take a cynical approach to the possibility of character development. Joseph professes his alienation in literary terms, claiming a doppelgänger and atrophying his attachments to external context. As an amnesiac, Mike Lovett begins his tale dramatically disconnected from not simply the external world, but even his own past and identity. His amnesia renders trauma as narrative technique:

...the darkness of the blind is marred by erratic light; thus memory for me was never a wall but more a roulette of the most extraordinary events and the most insignificant, all laced into the same vessel until I could not discern the most casual fact from the most patent fancy, nor the past from the future; and the details of my own history were lost in the other, common to us all. (4)

His past has not been entirely lost, only rendered ultimately suspect. All authenticating categories have begun to leak, and Lovett's mobile self participates equally in the past and the future, the private and the public, and fantasy and reality. Lovett interrogates the concept of "collective memory," consigning his own memories to a common 'vessel' filled with a mixture

of memories, some 'authentic' and some not, some his own and some belonging to others. His own memories become "other" to him, precisely because they are "common to us all." Collective memory does not seem to bring him understanding, but rather to supply a shifting mirage in place of specific knowledge. It erases his memory of the specificity of his wounding, though it does simultaneously extend that wounding to 'all,' emphasizing the universality of his trauma. Yet his amnesiac brain does cling to political beliefs, summoning whole sentences from the ether without knowing when or where he read the original texts. Lines from *Capital* function as an Ur-text, applicable to all.

Andrew Wilson claims that Mailer gives Lovett "complete liberty in an existential sense," making him an American hero free to choose and forge his own course.²¹⁴ While in some senses Mike Lovett resembles the young Mailer and other drifting youths of the postwar era, we cannot dismiss or romanticize amnesia as war trauma, nor unmoor it from its historical grounding: his situation represents not psychic liberty, but the inescapability of systemic violence. Focusing on the trauma experienced by a war-scarred former soldier runs the risk of validating this 'real' trauma at the expense of more insidious and systemic forms of trauma, which may wound not only the body and mind but also the human spirit. I do not seek to minimize the very real pain of soldiers; rather, I would suggest that trauma may be understood not simply at the individual level, but as a generic force capable of victimizing a dominant or oppressive class. Cultural critic Slavoj Žižek suggests that attention paid to irruptions of 'extreme', 'subjective' violence works to occlude constant and pervasive forms of oppression. "Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent," and this basic systemic violence has been shaped by capitalist processes.²¹⁵ The

214 Andrew Wilson, *Norman Mailer: An American Aesthetic* (U of Essex, 2007), 42.

215 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 2.

concatenation of violence and capitalism finds resonances throughout my project, and in this case I believe that Lovett's status as amnesiac transforms his individual, 'subjective' trauma into a sign of a more common, 'objective' violence, connecting the violence of the war and its economy.

Lovett experiences two types of psychic wounding; both involve forgetting and both fragment his experience. The first wound is specifically related to war, consisting of his traumatic amnesiac state, originating mysteriously but connected to his rebuilt face. The linking of a literal 'second skin' to a disrupted and circular sense of the past leads us to his second wound, one related to consumerism: the forgetting of production. The loss of the worker's body necessary to maintain the commodity's illusory promise of use resonates in the sheen of Lovett's constructed skin, reinforcing his amnesia. These wounds are structurally woven into the narration and undergird the novel's plot. Kevin Newmark points out that "the language we speak in order to understand the experience of trauma is also irretrievably marked by it."²¹⁶ A traumatized narrator troubles the book at its most basic level, as trauma makes impossible not only a coherent self with a sense of agency, but also narrative itself. Lovett is not an unreliable narrator; narration itself is a farce.

Consumerism predicates itself on a form of amnesia, thus Lovett's attempt to record the events in the roominghouse, however fantastic they may have been, signals an attempt to remind readers to remember, and even to see what consumption requires them to forget. As didactic as the overt political message may seem, the more powerful ideological warning finds expression between the lines. Fordism not only creates a broader market for consumer goods, such consumption ameliorates the pains of labor, hiding them with desire for leisure. Such blinding is

²¹⁶ Kevin Newmark, "Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995): 254.

particularly necessary in relation to wartime labor, the production of death. What is being forcibly forgotten is one's complicity.

IV

In *Dangling Man*, Joseph's desires take spatial form: his nostalgic longing for idealized communal living becomes displaced by the desire for private space free from intrusion. Yet his room also functions as an analogue for his mind, and as such, becomes an unbearable prison. Ultimately, Joseph flees from his private mental anguish into the heterotopia of the barracks, a perverse variety of communal living. *Barbary Shore* too uses spatial analogies for narrative effect. As in the lurid yet nostalgic childhood memories of Bellow's Joseph, or his visits to his mistress Kitty's humid flat, rooming-house life in *Barbary Shore* appears vivid and full of action. Just as the book's characters all function as unstable allegories, the house too seems to embody typical structures. From the recesses of Guinevere's crowded basement apartment to Lovett's high, lonely tower room in the attic, and from McLeod's monastic cell to Lannie's room painted entirely black, the house's spaces echo characterization and desires. The rooming-house provides a peculiarly insular environment for the playing out of the book's drama. Lovett's writing and Guinevere's housekeeping restrict their work to the home, while McLeod and Lannie both (ineffectively) use the house as a form of retreat or safehouse. Even those who leave the house for the world at large tend to encounter the house's other inhabitants. Social relations become analogous to spatial relations, both in the novels and in the era of their production.

The 1940s saw a transition from a time of rooming-houses and boarders (as demonstrated by historian Paul Groth) to single-family homes.²¹⁷ The housing boom unequivocally took place

²¹⁷ Paul Erling Groth, *Living Downtown*.

in the postwar period, when demand was greatest and the necessary materials were finally freely available, but the shift to suburbia was overdetermined during the war years. The urban migration of war workers led to grievous housing shortages in the places where the defense industry boomed. Few corporations offered reasonably priced worker housing, so rooming-houses became overcrowded, temporary housing became semi-permanent, and the pleasures of community perhaps began eroding. Soldiers on bases and fighting abroad, of course, experienced another form of communal living under crisis, and returned desiring a change. Wartime advertising took careful advantage of the nation's rising dissatisfactions, and consistently portrayed single-family homes at the center of a new, utopic world.

Upon their return, soldiers found both cultural and economic pressures for moving to suburbia. The 1946 GI Bill offered low-interest housing loans to million of veterans (among other benefits), while public policy simultaneously changed the urban housing situation. The Federal Housing Administration adopted policies that “redlined” urban housing districts (particularly older buildings, mixed zoning areas, and racially mixed areas), making them more difficult to insure. Tax dollars also funded what was called 'slum clearance', destroying acres of low-cost housing to be replaced by offices and luxury lofts. Even if a young prospective homeowner wanted to find a reasonably priced home in a demographically diverse urban neighborhood, those options were being increasingly limited at just the time that acres and acres of suburban tracts were forming, linked by roads and interstates funded by public dollars. In 1950, Mailer set his novel in a type of housing that was already endangered, and on its way to becoming extinct. His particular portrayal of such housing does not nostalgically idealize the failing type, but reveals the uncertainty of the times. The rooming-house teeming with intrigue

and betrayal seems almost to reinforce the moralizing push that bolstered the economic move toward 'slum clearance'.

Lizabeth Cohen desacralizes the accomplishments of the GI Bill, emphasizing its role in “making woman financially dependent on men at a time when the transformations of depression and war might have encouraged alternatives.”²¹⁸ Direct support from the government resulted in expanded opportunities for vast amounts of male veterans (the much smaller number of female veterans most often found it difficult to receive their benefits), and those opportunities were often at the expense of women. The proportion of women in college waned as an unprecedented amount of men sought entrance, while an even more extreme displacement took place in most workplaces. The wartime movement away from the home toward education and employment was forcibly reversed. The war economy emphasized the centrality of consumption while necessarily allowing women more productive roles, after the postwar shift, only the role of consumer and housewife remained available to most women. In 1945, 1.6 million weddings take place in America; the next year the number jumps to 2.2 million, remaining the peak year for decades to come.²¹⁹ And, of course, the immediate postwar years are most famous for their ‘baby boom.’

While it may be easy to treat Guinevere’s burlesque past and cinematic dreams as further evidence of her vacuous character, for all his complaining about “bloody papamamas,” it is not McLeod who has been trapped by a domestic life. To return to the spy story unevenly moving the plot, McLeod’s wife and daughter provide the political fugitive with a cover story his pursuers do not initially anticipate, since “for a long time they looked for a man who wasn’t married” (123-24). Though they produce a child, their home remains open to boarders, and Guinevere’s interactions with her tenants leads McLeod to compare the house to a brothel (117). The text

²¹⁸ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 146.

²¹⁹ National Center for Health Statistics.

even denounces the quality of her housework, which Lovett describes as shoddy compared to McLeod's fastidious care for the bathroom. Eventually McLeod believes that 'they' discover his marriage, justifying his effective withdrawal from familial interaction. Yet even Guinevere believes his rejection goes deeper than that: "I'm your bloody salvation...and you don't even want that. You want the ship to go down"—a conclusion which McLeod admits is "possible" (254). What McLeod willingly relinquishes is not his life (yet), but rather his family life and his home.

McLeod and Guinevere function as perverse parental figures, but also as keepers of the house, whose actions help to keep the space intact. Guinevere perfunctorily and unwillingly performs her housekeeping duties, but McLeod's desire for cleanliness approaches obsession. Signs of his careful maintenance appear in the text before he does, setting him apart from his boarders. Lannie delights in dirt and filth, and her pathological untidiness seems to echo Hollingsworth's violent disorder, in contraposition to McLeod's neatness. Yet Hollingsworth's actions are purely destructive, with the arguable exception of the lurid, plastic cross he places above his bed, while Lannie's disordered rearranging of her room (and messy addition of black paint) may be a genuine attempt at shaping the space to fit her own state. Bachelard believes that "space contains compressed time"; suggesting 'topoanalysis' as a technique for studying psychologically our private, intimate spaces, since our memories are themselves "motionless" and the human sense of time only a "sequence of fixations in the spaces of [a] being's stability."²²⁰ Mailer's fictional roominghouse is built accordingly, from the memories of its occupants. The occupants of Mailer's roominghouse overtly furnish the house with their own fractured pasts, and its traumatic 'construction' contributes to its ultimate disintegration. As

220 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* Trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 8.

McLeod collapses, the house disintegrates, thematized during the final interrogation by Hollingsworth's and Lannie's continual littering upon the floor.

Ultimately, the house's community collapses due to the actions of a police state—first its agent Hollingsworth, and then more government agents cause the remaining inhabitants to scatter. The physical house continues to function symbolically. In the last violent scene when McLeod is murdered, Lovett receives a head injury which makes the house itself seem to destabilize, and even become threatening: “the floor came up like a grappler” (306). As the police arrest Lannie and collect McLeod's corpse, signaling an abrupt end to traditional leftist dreams, Lovett flees through a back window into the night, the only one to escape. Law enforcement thoroughly dismantles the fragile community held by the house. As survivor, and ultimately witness, Lovett abandons the roominghouse to end up not in suburbia but in its grim dystopic other: hiding alone in a single room like Ellison's *Invisible Man*, he writes and hopes for the future, but keeps an “eye on the door” (308). Family, political community, urban spaces cannot cohere in the postwar world, Mailer seems to say, and no hopeful alternative appears clear.

V

Mailer makes the traumatized amnesiac Lovett into one who bears witness; his overall purpose at novel's end is to be a survivor, a remnant, the last bearer of a sacred object. The 'small object' becomes an object through the avaricious attitude of Hollingsworth, which he disseminates to Guinevere, who reveals the motive behind the joint reification when she gently asks if the “thingamajig” is “what they call convertible into cash” (252). The small object

becomes commodified by way of its relation to money (the 'absolutely alienable commodity'); as such, it becomes the ideal commodity, entirely disconnected from any attributes or even substance. Without even a wisp of usefulness, the small object appears uncorrupted by productive labor, and yet its acquisition by McLeod is linked to his violent Stalinist past. Stolen by a former revolutionary from an arm of America's bureaucratic state, it has become inseparable almost from his own body. Guinevere's use of the placeholder term "thingamajig" serves to deepen the mystery while also insinuating the technological advancement of the object. A fruit or a vegetable or an idea is generally not thought of as a 'thingamajig'; in 20th century parlance the term implies a 'thinginess' of a manufactured nature. The postwar period saw the rapid expansion of the commodity market facilitated first by the technological 'boom' (as engendered by WWII) and followed by the Cold War's space race, itself an extension of a militarized economy. Hollingsworth and Guinevere's avarice creates a fantasy of the object as ideal technological commodity. McLeod reveals that the thing has a much more biological or at least organic nature, confessing to Lovett that he has made "it almost impossible for [he him]self to continue to live, by grafting the little object into [his] flesh" (242). This (probably) metaphoric action perversely reenacts one aspect of fetishized commodities: their ability to act as extensions of the human form. Alienated from the labor that produced them, commodities appear magically self-generating, able to bestow a fabricated body upon consumers. The role of the worker's physical body recedes, and the commodity's fantastic form succeeds.

Elaine Scarry, in her trauma-centered reading of Marx, emphasizes the extent to which commodity fetishism impacts the human body and sense of self. "Sense organs, skin, and body tissue have themselves been recreated to experience themselves in terms of their own objectification. It is this now essentially altered biological being that, in going on to remake

himself or herself in other ways, enters into that act of remaking as one whose sentience is socialized, fundamentally restructured to be relieved of its privacy.”²²¹ We can see examples of such lived objectification throughout *Barbary Shore*. The novel's opening lets readers know that Lovett's very face has been constructed, remade: “When I stare into the mirror I am returned a face doubtless more handsome than the original, but the straight nose, the modelled chin, and the smooth cheeks are only evidence of a stranger's art...there is nothing I can recognize, not even my age” (3). Artifice gives Lovett a handsome, desirable face—a 'second skin' which resembles the idealized portraits of advertising, even eliding the entropy of age. Both Bellow's Joseph and Mailer's Lovett mentally detach themselves from their appearances, yet confess that their exterior is that of a handsome, desirable man. I would argue that a degree of authorial resistance to the superficiality of mass consumer culture may be seen in the protagonists' discomfort with their own surfaces. Yet where Joseph believes that his attractive surface disguises a 'rotten' core, Lovett experiences this condition as dissociation, separating him externally from any sort of cultural continuity as thoroughly as his traumatized memory does internally. Such a gesture attempts to situate Lovett as narrator outside of the book's central economy, though eventually sex and politics will draw him in.²²²

VI

While *Dangling Man* contains significant yet petty thefts, *Barbary Shore* hinges on a major, even treasonous, act of larceny. With an undercover government agent as antagonist and

²²¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*(Oxford University Press, 1985), 255.

²²² His mentor McLeod will directly remind him that “the condition which allows you to write a book rests upon the continued exploitation of three quarters of the world” (124).

an ending suffuse with police involvement, the book may not quite function as crime fiction, but certainly participates in the tropes of the genre. Thompson and Himes both transitioned from war memoirs to hard-boiled crime fiction, and Mailer's sophomore effort does contain bankrupt social systems and a femme fatale or two. Critic Cassuto points out that hard-boiled crime fiction (like its sentimental realistic forebears) depends upon the "marketplace-household (that is, public/private) division established by capitalism."²²³ The plot of *Barbary Shore* practically spins on the dividing line between the public and private.

After World War II, another subdivision appeared in the genre of crime fiction: the espionage, or spy, story. These stories concern themselves with crimes on the national level, take place on a grander geographic scale, and generally seek to ally reader's sympathies with the state. Mailer's book takes what would be a dramatic plot-motivator in a spy novel—secret information stolen from a U.S. Security agency by a former Stalinist assassin—and relocates it in a cramped rooming-house. Despite a handful of secret identities and makeshift interrogations, the interactions between characters remain firmly in the domestic sphere, perverted though it may be. Such a move clearly reflects not only the endemic paranoia of the times, but also comments specifically on the increasingly politicized state of the American family. I do not suggest that Mailer is yet another anxious writer of the atomic age. War began his writing career, and his second novel clearly displays his understanding of the economic underpinnings of war and their extension into the following decade. It is his understanding of America's militarization that makes *Barbary Shore* seem prescient in many ways. The ideological nature of Cold War tensions extended the legacy of total war; WWII had made production lines into battle lines, and the suburban home, too, served as a cultural weapon, extending the reach of militarized existence. As

²²³ Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 11.

Mailer would put it in a 1961 interview, “love, mother, and family now belong to the flag and the FBI,” and his 1950 novel displays the provenance of that attitude a decade earlier.

In the wake of WWII, the United States sought to avoid another set of national rivalries leading to another conflagration. The immediate postwar economic solution centered on Bretton Woods and the anchoring of international monetary policy to the U.S. dollar. Thus a protected global expansion of markets became possible, though as David Harvey reminds us, “[t]his system existed under the umbrella protection of US military power.”²²⁴ The continued strength and involvement of the military allowed for prosperity and the appearance of peace. Michael Sherry usefully inverts the logic of America’s postwar transition, stating that the willingness of America’s leaders to devote the nation’s energies to waging ideological international battles “obscured the process of militarization, making the latter seem a response to the Cold War rather than its antecedent,” and arguing that “much that emerged by 1950 had been planned, desired, or foreseen by 1945.”²²⁵ While the production of automobiles resumed, experiencing a boom fueled by suppressed consumer desires, the aerospace industry did not simply fade away. Neither did the strong ties forged between corporate industry and the military. The ‘demobilization’ that occurred between 1945 and 1950 can be seen simply as a transitional period connecting stages of national militarization, as the economic and ideological lessons learned during WWII took a relatively brief time to find a new application in ‘peacetime.’

VII

224 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10.

225 Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 125.

Lest Mailer's indictment of America's postwar boomtown seem too idiosyncratic, let us briefly turn from his strange pseudo-spy story to less genre-bending examples of crime fiction. Our look at Jim Thompson and Chester Himes has already established a link between hardboiled crime and wartime. Raymond Chandler's novels neatly span the period examined by this project: his first, *The Big Sleep*, was published in 1939, while the last was published in 1958. Critic Leo Braudy asserts that postwar American detective fiction "indicates how the historical moment could give new relevance and energy to a preexisting literary form, concentrating and distilling the frustrations of the culturally displaced ex-soldier into a general attack on the greed and false corporate values of postwar society."²²⁶ I would argue that the form expresses the 'frustrations' not just of the ex-soldier, but of all participants in the war economy. Throughout Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953), corporatism is said to be inseparable from organized crime: "There ain't no clean way to make a hundred million bucks...Big money is big power and big power gets used wrong. It's the system."²²⁷ Like Mailer, Chandler connects this economy to the war, with interesting consequences.

The Long Goodbye has perhaps the most convoluted plot of any of his Marlowe novels, and also contains some of the bleakest echoes of Chandler's own alcoholism. While hard-bitten protagonist Philip Marlowe's cynical viewpoint usually seems to be a generic convention, in this novel, his dark view of society is repeated by nearly every character. Its source is made equally clear: "We have that kind of world. Two wars gave it to us and we are going to keep it."²²⁸ Stated briefly, Marlowe befriends a scarred drunk, Terry Lennox, and helps him flee to Tijuana. It turns

²²⁶ Leo Braudy, "Realists, Naturalists, and Novelists of Manners." *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*, ed. David Hoffman (Boston: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 101.

²²⁷ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*(New York: Vintage, 1988), 278.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

out that Lennox's wife has been murdered. The police take Marlowe in, but he refuses to betray his friend. The Mexican police declare Lennox a suicide, and Marlowe receives a 'portrait of Madison' in the mail as a type of farewell. A woman named Eileen Wade hires Marlowe to find and mind her alcoholic writer husband, but she is hiding a secret from wartime: Terry Lennox is her first husband Paul Marston, presumed lost. By book's end, she has killed Mrs. Lennox, her husband, and herself, destroying all of the book's relationships.

The last plot twist reveals another connection between the novels—both involve the remaking of a face and its relation to identity. Modern plastic surgery originated in the First World War. At the Cambridge Medical Hospital, Sir Harold Gillies established a facial injury wing where a variety of techniques were developed by surgeons working on thousands of patients, primarily soldiers injured by gunshots or explosions. Mailer's Mike Lovett is presumably one of this number. Chandler's list of experts ("doctors, technicians, hospitals, painters, architects") emphasizes that remaking Lennox's face required both medical and aesthetic expertise. Plastic surgery now has at least two functions: reconstructing damaged faces and letting people look like images.

The book's final scene proves the most disorienting, when the 'dead' Terry Lennox returns a new man. The war had already changed the young Marston into Terry Lennox; the physical shift marked by Eileen Wade, who explained that "[h]is hair was white and his face—it wasn't quite the same face. But of course I knew him, and of course he knew me." Though he has been aged dramatically by his war experiences (the exact nature of which remains questionable), their mutual recognition seems to imply an underlying continuity between the two forms of the man, one obvious ("of course") in Eileen's romantic worldview. In the final scene, Marlowe rejects that continuity, telling Lennox: "It's just that you're not here anymore. You're

long gone. You've got nice clothes and perfume and you're as elegant as a fifty-dollar whore."²²⁹ Marlowe scorns Señor Maioranos specifically in terms of gender and class—Lennox's new purchased exterior aligns him with the women Marlowe dismisses, and the rich people whom he hates. Their friendship has now been rendered a transaction; Marlowe may have "no price tag," but Lennox still "bought a lot of [him]."²³⁰

Critic Ken Paradis reminds us that in hard-boiled crime novels, "the discovery of the criminal is secondary to the characterological effects provoked by immersion in a criminal milieu. [Chandler's] detective story is much less about whodunit than about the agonizing and self-reflexive search for someone who would *not* do it."²³¹ In the postwar era, that person does not exist. War and war dollars have made a 'criminal milieu' pervasive, but beyond that, they have rendered human relations transactionary. Marlowe's much-vaunted "personal autonomy, a unity of self-presence" appears not as social ideal, but as a failure of loyalty and connection.²³² The 'long goodbye' of the title designates the novel's central tragic storyline; Eileen Wade's murderous duplicity fades in importance compared to the disintegration of Marlowe's friendship with Terry Lennox née Marston, finally Señor Maioranos. Terry's pseudonym calls upon the "better years," but cannot resurrect them. The homosocial fantasy of wartime appears entirely

229 Ibid., 378.

230 Ibid., 378.

231 Ken Paradis, "Epideictic Rhetoric and Chandler's Hard-Boiled Detective: The Paranoia of Praise," in *Relocating Praise: Literary Modalities and Rhetorical Contexts*, ed. Den Otter and Alice Grace (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000): 114.

232 Scott R. Christianson, "A Heap of Broken Images: Hardboiled Detective Fiction and the Discourse(s) of Modernity," in *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*, edited by Ronald G. Walker and June M. Frazer, (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, 1990): 135-48.

bankrupted while women cannot be trusted, leaving only anomie. Women disappoint Marlowe, but only a man could break his heart.

After Maioranos/Lennox leaves, Marlowe listens to his fading footsteps, and then to the silence that followed, imagining a possible reconciliation, but one replaced spatially and aurally by emptiness. The book's final lines summarize the state of human relationships: "I never saw any of them again—except the cops. No way has been invented to say goodbye to them."²³³ Mailer's roominghouse interactions will likewise become increasingly hollow, and its community will be compromised by an undercover infiltrator, then literally invaded by a police force. In Chandler's world, human relationships are already overtly transactional and compromised, leaving only the constancy and emptiness of the underlying militarized carceral economy.

VIII

By considering Mailer's approach to female characters, we confront the most notorious and frequently vilified aspect of his work. His concatenation of sex and violence was considered extreme by some, but a wide swath of women readers find his work unbearable due not only to the intimation that domestic violence may be inevitable, but in the tendency of Mailer's female characters to accept their ill-treatment relatively passively. In *Barbary Shore*, Guinevere waxes poetic about becoming a ruined object, and the wealth-despising Lannie accepts money from Hollingsworth after he beats her. Women are blamed for, and punished for, America's inability to resist the fruits of 'state capitalism'.

²³³ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*, 379.

Like all of the book's characters, the female characters inhabit very specific positions. Lovett, Hollingsworth, and McLeod go by their surnames almost exclusively, regularly elevated by "Mister." We know Lannie's last name, but it is rarely mentioned. Guinevere chose her own name, saying "when I was on the stage, I just used to call myself Guinevere, you know one name, like Margo or Zorina. And I like it, I keep it, it's not like other names" (60). Her name functions as a brand marker; it contains her spectacular sexuality, both similar to other versatile stage stars (Zorina was a Norwegian ballerina turned Hollywood actor) and different. "Women who have only first names are somehow on offer to the public; whether movie stars or servants, they are somehow prostitutes. They usually come from the bottom rungs of society; their origin and status do not bear the stamp of a family."²³⁴ Her first and married names effaced, Guinevere desires to be a movie star, acts as a servant, and is treated like a prostitute. Theleweit previously reminds us that the terms 'whore' and 'working-class' converge as a category used to typify women as aggressors, deserving of not just scorn, but also endlessly violent retribution.

From the outset, Lovett yearns to possess and contain Guinevere in his text, reducing her to object. Named for the mythic queen consort of King Arthur and lover of Launcelot, Guinevere faces insinuations of adultery before she even appears in the novel. Just as her naming places her in an allusive network, Lovett's narration consistently situates her as an object in a network of other objects. At their first meeting, "[t]he door opened a crack, a set of plump little fingers curled around it, and a pair of eyes and the tip of a nose appeared in the slit... Slowly, provocatively, the face protruded a little further and two curls of extraordinarily red hair peeped around the door" (13). Here the narration not only carves Guinevere's body up into its constituent parts, but also projects voyeurism onto her very hair. Lovett's daydreams focus on the way "her breasts... thrust upward from their binding in copious splendor, so palpable that they...

²³⁴ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 74-75.

became more real than themselves” (17). The eye, given not just access but also a frame, can itself viscerally appreciate her ‘palpable’ body. He anchors his belief that “she was obtainable” in the visual availability of “some underclothing whose complex network of straps could be seen upon her shoulders” (26-27).

Guinevere is doubly disembodied, not only serving as image, but speaking in “the unexpected and dulcet cadence of a telephone operator” (13). Despite proximity, Lovett hears her voice as mediated, returning to him shaped by the normalizing forces of non-regional speech, and the mechanization of the telephone. A similar example happens later when she takes on “the shadings of a radio announcer” as she “recited to an unknown audience,” again technologically enhanced, at least in her own imagination, or rather, the imagination that Lovett assumes (28-29). Both telephone operators and radio announcers speak to and are available to numerous people across the nation, implying Guinevere’s desire to be disseminated. Switchboard operator occupies an ambivalent place in women’s history. The first female telephone operator was hired soon after the inception of the technology in 1878, and the job remained female-dominated up until the obsolescence of the position. The gendering of public technologies offers insight into the cultural significance of emergent forms of modernity: chosen because Victorian thought postulated that women would be more pleasant and docile, operators received rigorous training to standardize and mechanize their movements and words.²³⁵ Radio announcers of the period, conversely, were predominantly male, framing and legitimizing any female singing voices that might be heard. In Lovett’s mind, Guinevere may strive for validation through women’s labor or male vocal authority, but she will be ineluctably be anchored to housework and sex: “Her voice began the first sentence as a telephone operator and finished the second as a fishwife” (14). We

²³⁵ Because of the demands made upon urban phone operators, they were unionized by IBEW as early as 1912, rendering the work even more desirable.

may be reminded not only of the term “call girl,” which originated in the U.S. around the turn of the century, but may also note that ‘fishwives’ hawk their wares in the street. Only three years later, Raymond Chandler gives a variation on the comparison when describing his book’s main female character’s voice, letting Marlowe tells us that “when she spoke her voice had the lucid emptiness of that mechanical voice on the telephone that tells you the time and if you keep on listening, which people don't because they have no reason to, it will keep on telling you the passing seconds forever, without the slightest change of inflection.”²³⁶ Chandler takes the mechanization of the human even further, replacing the operator with a recording, emptying the voice of any possible authority or value.

IX

Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* provides an invaluable description of advertising and its relation to the creation of mass consumer culture. Writing in the 1970s, Ewen primarily looks back to the 1920s, a time when large-scale, systemic changes to mass manipulation were beginning, were in fact, literally being planned by industry giants. His study argues for sweeping, embedded shifts in every aspect of American life and connects them to the advertising industry. Ewen describes advertising as “an apparatus for doing battle for the control of social space,” a description pertinent to the examination of space undertaken here.²³⁷ Though

²³⁶ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*, 305.

²³⁷ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, 189.

the bulk of the book traces societal changes to their genesis in the early decades of the 20th century, *Captains of Consciousness* also emphasizes that “[i]t was in the 1950s that the proffered dreams of the captains of consciousness, worked out in the twenties, really began to take concrete form.”²³⁸ Here Ewen seems to go along with the general view of the postwar boom years as a unique time. Yet the advertising industry did not lie dormant waiting for the postwar boom, it was intimately involved with the war effort and wartime ideological manipulation. Moreover, as the books of the era have helped to show, the rationing of wartime was an essential factor in the consumer attitudes of the postwar years. I take little issue with Ewen's essential claims about the formation of our mass consumer culture, I only wish to examine aspects of his analysis more specifically in relation to the war years.

In this reading, advertising is not a simple promotion of commodities, but an industry that became increasingly aware of the need to acclimate American consumers to life in industrialized modernity. Each social crisis engendered by industrial capitalism has garnered a response from the market; each innovation has required a price. As advertising created new levels of self-consciousness, instantiating social scrutiny as perverse substitute for weakened community bonds, it offered only commodities as the solution for the very sense of objectification it had helped birth. A shortening of labor hours allowed the worker more leisure time in which to consume commodities. While families once functioned as a laboring unit, now children were detached from that unit and given a privileged place in the consuming culture from childhood through adolescence. Not only did this create a sizable subset of society that was not productive but merely consuming, advertisers also elevated children as the vanguards of progress, malleable minds ushering in escalating acceptance of the promises of the market. As technology lifted

238 Ibid., 206.

some of the burden of housework from America's women, advertisements fostered self-consciousness about physical appearance and emphasized sexual desirability as primary task for the modern woman. Traditional cultures were deliberately destroyed in order to supplant them with the universal “Americanness” of mass consumer culture. Labor unrest, in response to increasingly tedious and tenuous working conditions, was recast as a desire for consumer goods. Workers were encouraged to redirect desires for social change towards purchasables—one worked in order to buy. The new waves of boredom and ennui caused by a lack of purpose are answered by a proliferation of leisure goods and services (and, as we'll see, the anxieties of wartime were answered in much the same way). Individual advertisements may have aimed to engender a desire for a particular product, but advertising in general sought to alter the structure of consumption. Discontent and dissatisfaction needed to be channeled away from political arenas and into the commodified realm, as “[ads] created a vision of social amelioration that depended on adherence to the authority of capitalistic enterprise.”²³⁹

I would like to argue that this transubstantiation of material discontent into material desires was a complex process producing excess. The commodified answers provided by the market required consumers with pliant and plentiful desires. While feminists and radicals saw progressive potential in the destabilization of the social order, “American industrial thought tended to look toward a recomposed conception of authority.”²⁴⁰ We can see this struggle take place in the war decade. As the necessities of production in the war years resulted in an unprecedented amount of women in the working world, social gains were made, though much of women's power was constricted to the consumer realm. The postwar return of workers created a labor glut, so it makes economic sense that the immediately postwar period emphasized the

239 Ibid., 109.

240 Ibid., 129.

importance of the woman's place as being in the home. The energies loosed in the war years needed to be redirected toward the domestic sphere. In *Barbary Shore* (1950), Guinevere and Lannie provide skewed portraits of the postwar woman, overflowing with unsatisfied desires.

Visiting Guinevere one day, Lovett finds her brimming with self-assurance, contrasting with her previous emotional disrepair. The panacea, of course, is comprised of consumer goods; the floor is strewn with packages, “their contents disgorged” in a display of excess (163). Lovett provides a long inventory of nonessential and gaudy items. Finally, he writes:

There were other items so confused with their wrappings that I was unable to classify them, but the ensemble of opened boxes and closed boxes, of white tissue and paper packing, of ribbons and odors grew so overwhelming that I might have thought myself submerged in a dressing room of chorus girls whose naked limbs and mascaraed navels, breasts and black net, peeked out at me through a chiaroscuro of yellow lights and cigarette smoke and costumes hung from the wall. (163-164)

In this passage, the commodities themselves display their magical qualities. Most of the items are meant to augment or adorn Guinevere's body, yet this description shows that her actual body is ancillary, even unnecessary. The products form a seemingly live body—partially unwrapped, partially open, possessing of tissue and odor. The items themselves, as aspects of a promissory body, form fabulous sexualized bodies composed of discrete yet jumbled parts, filling a whole dressing room's worth of male fantasy. These fantastical partial ‘girls’ not only surround and enfold Lovett, but also magically look back at him, though only as a coy ‘peek’. Despite the Marxist lines running through the wreckage of his memory, Lovett cannot resist the allure of her mysterious inventory. It is not Lovett's role as a writer, but his training as a consumer, that allows him to construct such a vivid and spectacular fantasy out of suggestive objects.

Guinevere is enlisting the purchases in a variety of other fantasies. Given their ability to thrust Lovett into sexual reveries, the objects were bought to help Guinevere fulfill a role as sexualized object herself. More unusually, though, Guinevere finds pleasure in the act of purchasing itself—in the pseudo-fulfillment of consumer dreams. The constraints of her budget do not suppress her impulses to engage in exchange and accrue an almost senseless array of goods. While seemingly a dangerous deferral for the manufacturers (they do, after all, need consumers fully to purchase their products), this investment in the mere act of purchasing still retains Guinevere's 'loyalty.' Moreover, it underscores the worker-consumer's position in Fordist economies, where production is buoyed by faster and faster cycles of self-indulgent spending. The post-war boom was buoyed on a rising tide of consumer credit. As deeply dissatisfied as Guinevere is, she primarily looks for solutions within the realm of commodities. Yet she knows that all of her dreams connect to cash. In the mass of boxes, there is one "khaki-colored object" she insists upon keeping. Lovett imagines it to be a brassiere, his fantasies mired firmly in the world of sex, but it's a money belt, the color of Army uniforms, 'preparation' for "handling large sums" (165).

Guinevere also attempts to possess the shifting promissory body proffered by advertising. Meeting Lovett at her door, "[h]er thin lips pursed, but this was beneath the other mouth of lipstick which was wide and curved in the sexual stereotype of a model on a magazine cover, and seemed to work in active opposition to the small mobile lips beneath" (15). Beneath the farcical image of exaggerated sexual openness, her lips, pursing shut, enact a resistant denial. Her second skin (the lipsticked 'other' mouth) depicts her self-fantasy, constructed of media ideals, and this purchased image must perform 'work' in order to suppress Guinevere's irruptive will. Her autonomy should not be overstated, since through Guinevere, Mailer seems to lampoon the

American ideal of individualistic self-creation. Guinevere pertinently exists as a sexualized spectacle—both in the past as a burlesque dancer, and in her projected Hollywood future. Her exploits outside the house remain mythic, as evidenced by her dreams of using Lovett as an authorial conduit for selling one sordid constructed tale, “drawing from [my] own experiences” (63). She strives to become the image or the movie narrative, exchanging domestic chains for the cage of a harlot. The central promise of the nation shifts as, in the postwar period, “[t]he vision of freedom which was being offered to Americans was one which continually relegated people to consumption, passivity and spectatorship.”²⁴¹ But where precisely lies the blame for the shattering of America’s dream?

Robert Solotoroff vividly identifies Mailer’s “vision of the American masses as a huge, collective Guinevere—an insecure, alternatively lethargic and frenzied slattern who will give herself to the authoritarians,” but in this move to grand allegory, he elides the reasons for this feminization of America.²⁴² Beyond the metaphorical commonplace of referring to ships and countries as feminine, can we find further rationale for why our motherland is not a fatherland, and more specifically, why the typical American is a woman? While critics frequently consider Guinevere as a representative example of the new American citizen, we may find it instructive to include Monina and Lannie as participating in Mailer’s citizenship phantasmagoria.

Critic Lauren Berlant’s concept of ‘infantile citizenship’ may prove pertinent to such a reading, though she anchors her critique in more contemporary times. Berlant explains that the modern citizen is popularly constructed in terms of innocence and naïveté, thought of, namely, as a (female) child needing protection and guidance from a parental government. This conceptual shift links clearly to ideals of futurity, as “a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by

241 Ibid., 213.

242 Robert Solotoroff, *Down Mailer's Way*(Urbana: U of Illinois, 1974), 49.

one imagined for fetuses and children.”²⁴³ I think we can profitably connect the postwar image of feminized consumer citizenship with this later form, since the foundations of Berlant’s point of view can almost all be found in the WWII period.²⁴⁴ Berlant connect this metaphor with the concept of the ‘citizen-victim’ as suffering a form of trauma, unsettled by mass images of societal insecurity. While she specifically describes this constructed sense of ‘instability’ as a response to identity politics, the postwar period gives us the inchoate seeds of this struggle to define citizenship. Berlant posits that increasing economic disparity in the U.S. has been occluded by an emphasis on personal economic decisions regarding both saving and consumption, a lens which found its prominence in the war era’s emphasis on the duties of the homefront consumer.²⁴⁵ Again, while on its surface the postwar period was a time of consensus, propped up by the most equitable incomes of the century, the writers examined here all respond to the dissonance below the veneer, made up not only of excluded voices but also anxieties based in prosperity’s reliance on a permanent war economy.

The concept of a government and its citizens operating as a family is a relatively common one. In his 1996 book *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* focused on the use of conceptual metaphors in contemporary politics, linguist George Lakoff suggested that while Democrats typically depict themselves as “nurturing parents,” Republicans more successfully

243 Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), 1.

244 Berlant also contributes to our understanding of the central importance of advertising to the postwar decades by saying that it “helps bring to consciousness a will to happiness that transcends any particular advertisement or commodity, but which becomes authorized by them” (11). Being surrounded by commodities tethers our happiness and self-creation to those objects, as we’ve seen in Guinevere’s use of purchased items.

245 Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America*, 8.

perform the role of “strict fathers.”²⁴⁶ While he sees both parties as embracing a parental model, I would suggest that while ‘strict fathers’ emphasize a form of self-sufficiency, the overall rhetoric is patronizing, heightening the infantilization of citizens. Lakoff also believes that conservatives more effectively manipulate their parental metaphor to sway citizens. In *Barbary Shore*, interloping Hollingsworth threatens McLeod’s place as father, supplanting ambivalent guidance with a strict, violent control. Both Guinevere and Lannie seem to submit in a childlike fashion; their support aids and abets Hollingsworth’s eventual murder of the father. Allegorically, this murder functions as Mailer’s prescience about the conservative turn in popular American politics. Hollingsworth may contain an unstable mass of symbolic possibilities, but as a character his background and cultural markers identify him as a member of the era's conservative turn—ostensibly Christian, externally prudish, Midwestern, and small town. He works for a governmental security organization, likely FBI or CIA, aligning him both with police powers and bureaucracy. Yet his superficial blandness belies his deep attraction to sex, violence, and disorder. He also embodies the naked fascism that a dissatisfied America may not be able to resist.

X

Guinevere’s attempts at more interpersonal solutions for her discontent are all marked by the structure of consumption. Monina, her young daughter, serves as the most startling repository for Guinevere's ambitions, while also providing an uncanny mirror of her mother. Shirley Temple, the quintessential child spectacle, had her last two hit films during wartime, but found it impossible to segue from child stardom to a more adult persona. Guinevere no doubt sees her as

²⁴⁶ George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (: U of Chicago, 2002), *ibid.*

a model for Monina's future, yet we see the clear difference through the sexualization of Monina, something relatively unthinkable in the case of Temple (though it is perhaps more thinkable in relation to Harry Revier's 1939 film *Child Bride*, notorious for its extended nude swimming scenes starring a 15-year-old playing a 12-year-old girl). Guinevere attempts to retard Monina's natural rate of development for commercial purposes, claiming that in Hollywood there are "not so many roles for kids five years old as there [are] for infants...[s]o I want her to stay young" (48). As a result, the child (who is "big to be in a high chair") has trouble speaking clearly or feeding herself and Lovett romantically imagines her "a sullen angel, perplexed by the mechanics of living." Angels are both beautiful and insubstantial. The mother's success at turning her child into an image-based commodity inheres in Monina's initial appearance "steeped...in a light so intense her flesh appeared translucent," her flesh seems bleached as white as a screen, or even on the verge of becoming incorporeal (47).

The child eerily shadows Lovett's attempted seduction of her mother, silently watching and hiding memories of her father. She vacillates between imitated enticement and naked suspicion. Her cultivated infantilization causes her to refer to 'Mister Lovett' as "Ditter Luft doodooking." The tiny coquette attempts to say 'good-looking', but in babyish language it becomes a scatological title, reinforcing the perversity of her compliment. A more elaborate attempt at pseudo-seduction occurs during a scene in which Guinevere regales Lovett with tales of her burlesque past and the lovers it drew, reinforcing her specularly and sexuality as sides of the same coin. While her mother spins yarns of a fading allure, Monina enters the room, and Lovett "looked about uneasily. The child was completely naked" (61). Guinevere's first, unguarded response is to casually equate the child with herself, before she 'let her figure go,' reinforcing a reading of Monina as sexualized double. While Roberta reacts hysterically to her

child's sexual mimicry, Guinevere initially reacts calmly, having essentially formed the child in her own image. She then shifts to a more socially 'appropriate' response, screaming at the child to get dressed. Ignoring her mother, "Monina coquetted, her arms raised, the tiny hands at her neck. I found myself reluctant to look at the child, for her body was extraordinary. She was virtually a miniature of a girl of eighteen, the limbs round, slender curves flowing from shoulder to hip, her luminous blonde hair lovely against the pale flesh" (61). A 'miniature' does not appear naturally, but must be deliberately constructed in another's image; she has "been minted into the same coin as her mother" (88). Monina has been methodically built out of her mother's own fantasies and desires, all of which seem to hinge on the saleability of sexuality. Earlier she has insisted on Monina's own complicity in her display: "Oh, she's got the looks...[a]nd don't think she don't know it, that little bitch" (47). Her name is a particularly unusual one, and I think it may not be going too far to suggest that the name might function as a portmanteau, constructed out of 'money' and 'vagina,' neologistically encapsulating Guinevere's dreams.²⁴⁷ Lovett's description of Monina's childish flesh as morphologically resembling sexual maturity conflicts uncomfortably with her babyish incompetencies. Standing behind her mother on the same plane, the figures of mother and daughter combine to offer a naked display of the overdetermined connection between sex and reproduction. Presumably to gain maternal attention, Monina performs sexual availability, even as she literally represents her mother's own sexual performance. Monina's ability to function as a perfect 'miniature' (a constructed duplicate of an object) connotes her ability to be a commodity.

This scene depicts a startling example of the sort of indiscriminate sexualization that has become a mainstay target for critiques of advertising. From the subliminal level to the overt, "sex sells" is a basic truism of the marketing trade. Since its inception, modern advertising exploited

²⁴⁷ Popular only in the Philippines, from what I can tell.

the female form, but in the 1940s, Elliot Springs pushed against conventional boundaries by harnessing drawings of scantily clad young ladies to headlines filled with double entendres. Though the ads also contained paragraphs of ad copy, Springs understood that an ad did not need to be informative, only memorable. The advertisements did not slip easily into the mainstream (both *Life* and *Family Circle* refused to print the 1950 “Buck Well Spent” ad, which exploited racial stereotype as well as sexuality), yet they were no failure. Springs Cotton Mills profited from the approach, as “surveys showed the ads resulted in far greater brand recall than any other campaign from 1947 to 1951.”²⁴⁸ Using the conduit of humor, increasingly explicit images and language were brought into public circulation, and proved to be economically effective. In America, censorship mores directly respond to the profitability of particular forms. In film, the 1950s saw increased loosening of the Hays Production Code largely because a number of films with envelope-pushing content (particularly the films of Otto Preminger) became financial successes.

Apart from tropes of citizens as childlike, the repeated sexualization of children in the novels I have discussed here also reflects shifts in advertising, and accordingly, in consumer demographics. *Now and On Earth* portrays the shift; a generation earlier, the children seek necessities, but during wartime, Jimmie’s young daughter Jo specifically desires new fashions. Changes in the way images of children and childhood are manipulated in the public sphere reflect not only historical but also political shifts. Children became consumers shortly after the emergence of ‘teenager’ as social category. The word ‘teenager’ was first published in 1941, in an issue of *Popular Science*. Thomas Hine believes that the word “leaked into the language from

²⁴⁸ Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub., 1998), 58.

the world of advertising and marketing.”²⁴⁹ Historians trace the rise of “teenager” as market demographic to the increasing independence of young people, partially as a result of full employment: both mothers and fathers were often absent from the home, in factories or the army, and the increased mobility of the period meant that many families lived far from their extended relatives. Economic stability also meant that adolescents often did not need to help support the family, leaving them with expanded leisure time. Teenagers would be at the center of the popular image of 1950s leisure culture, happily using the family car to take their steady date to the drive-in cinema. Teenage leisure spending expanded the consumer base, as advertising used images of youth to sell products to all consumers. Henry Giroux takes this approach even further, positing that over the course of the late 20th century, childhood as construct was “transformed into a market strategy and a fashion aesthetic used to expand the consumer-based needs of privileged adults” and that “sexualizing children may be the final frontier in the fashion world.”²⁵⁰ As fashion models show, a useful substitute for a sexualized child is a lithe underdeveloped young woman.

XI

When Mailer has Lannie pawn a typewriter in order to join the household, she relinquishes a machine figured as both weapon and worthwhile work in a failed attempt to belong to a family, the central theater of American consumerism. Her quirkiness seems bohemian at first, but her self-destructive circling back on the abject soon unsettles our image of the former Trotskyite.

²⁴⁹ Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*(New York: Bard, 1999), 10.

²⁵⁰ Henry Giroux, *Stealing Innocence: Corporate Culture’s War on Children*(New York: Palgrave, 1990), 18, 60.

Even Lannie's deliberately unstylish clothing “seemed to alienate her head from her long legs,” foreshadowing the perhaps inevitable objectification of her form, while a “large perforation in one sole exposed extravagantly the soiled flesh of her foot,” the word choice serving to performatize and sexualize her poverty (101). Marcuse’s revitalization of the New Left won’t happen for nearly another decade, but the connection of mass consumption with a type of political complacency finds ample demonstration in the character of Guinevere, and in some ways Lannie anticipates the cultural rebels who express dissatisfaction through a rejection of mass goods (the American roots of this attitude reemerge in the immediate postwar years). Her efforts are continually thwarted; even her desire for escape leads to consumption, as she buys and empties a series of bottles.

Despite her renunciation of material goods (“all those little chains”), Lannie cannot avoid becoming a desirable, consumable object. Lovett's sexual involvement with her only reinforces her exchangeability, as his interactions with her “soiled flesh” spur him to fantasies about the “farm girl” of his fragmentary memories. Again functioning as a repository of cultural notions, his unreliable memory links together disparate women into an undifferentiated mass. The novel's unmoored male, Lovett attempts to embody his name, but when Lannie challenges him, immediately folds. He passionately shifts to a display of force, shades of Hollingsworth, but Lannie knows precisely the economic relation between them, and says, “You came to me because I was easy, and you thought it would not cost you anything”; in his angry response, Lovett also speaks of money: “You give me no credit” (155). The economic brings them around to the familial, and as Lovett holds the sobbing Lannie, says, “We were not lovers, but father and child, and yet for me who had fathered nothing, this was man’s estate” (155). He attempts to claim Lannie as an even more fulfilling form of property, allowing him to feel, almost to taste, “that

most savory of emotions, a certain small affection for myself” (155). Moreover, Lannie has been attempting to reject societal norms and to refuse the position of wife/mother/consumer, but proves recuperable for the pseudo-nuclear family in the form of a child.

Lannie also becomes involved with Guinevere and Hollingsworth, further complicating the existent sexual morass. Lovett as comforting father is not as convincing as he believes, and Lannie turns to Hollingsworth, a violent ‘strict father,’ or as she will explain, one of “the guards of the country we live in” (214). Lovett gave her money she calls “charity for the crippled and the drunk,” while Hollingsworth gives her enough for a full case of liquor. In the final showdown, Lannie insists that Hollingsworth is “absolutely right...[b]ut then he isn’t. I mean...” she finished lamely, jerkily, the outburst of her private thought amputated as she heard her voice” (270). As she attempts to disagree with his authority, she violently self-censors her own dissent, cutting off the possibility of resistance. The impossibility of bodily action is underscored not only by her being ‘amputated’, but also ‘lame’ and ‘jerky’, rendering her a broken puppet. A minute later, McLeod formally demands to speak, a request Hollingsworth immediately denies. Lannie accepts Hollingsworth’s violence as inevitable. Toward the book’s end, Hollingsworth beats her viciously and then gives her money. Her own writing, now scribbled by hand, retells Hollingsworth’s memories of imperialist wartime violence. Lannie inhabits the nightmarish form of the worker: she produces his myths, silences her dissent, and receives his pay. Her appearance inescapably reverts to the abject, as she methodically breaks her “oiled waxed curls,” undoing careful beauty techniques, and dirties her suit with liquor stains and telling ashes (211). Painting the entirety of her bedroom black, she curls up in the darkness. Should Lannie’s repetition of the past be considered pathological or performative? Beyond this, does she enact a collective injury, or is she trapped in an individualized traumatic moment? Her daytime wearing

of a pajama suit sans undergarments is lent a darker analogue, as we consider Lannie's full symbolic power in the postwar book's layers of allegory

A broken little girl in a black room, Lannie wears torn clothing over her pathologically shrunken frame, a startling image in the wake of the war's concentration camps. As discussed in my first chapter, public knowledge in America of the camps was limited and uneven throughout the war years before becoming an inescapable spectacular reality after the war, primarily through newsreel portrayals. Concentration camps served as containers for those forcibly ejected from dominant society, and through Lannie, Mailer argues that ejection took place for economic reasons: "the poorest of the poor used to be driven to the room where they were given death by gas" (212). Lannie narrates a horrific tale of the concentration camps where stripped naked bodies are first slapped lasciviously, and then encouraged to fight to the death inside the showers. While the novel regularly concatenates sex and violence, the grim specificity of Lannie's story gives her sexual availability a more unsettling valence. Refusing to profit, as she surrenders herself to the police at story's end, a sacrifice with the "stigmata of cigarette burn" on her wrist, she may not have "the blood of a friend in [her] mouth" (310, 213).

Like Bob Jones or Philip Marlowe, Lannie sees American postwar society as a prison writ large, but she goes further. Lannie understands the inner workings of a system in which "there was a new consumer and new commodities, and every shell could find as customer its enemy soldier" (218). The concentration camps were not simply prison, after all; they were work camps. The earliest camps were purely for 'reeducation', as Germany still experienced high rates of unemployment. Yet the war brought the need for production miracles on both sides of the conflict, and "concentration camp inmates [were forced] into hundreds of German armaments

enterprises from 1943 onwards.”²⁵¹ The specific arrangement between the SS and industry involved a fixed daily rate for prisoners, regardless of how many hours were worked in that day.

Due to camp conditions, the generally undernourished and weakened prisoners could not match the output of non-camp workers unless the working day was forcibly extended to ten, twelve, or more hours (136). Particularly since the inmates were already viewed as dispensable, many weapon factories felt comfortable working vast numbers of them to death. Here we see some evidence for Ernst Mandel’s belief that explanation for the Holocaust lies not only in imperialist racism but also the “deadly partial rationality of the modern industrial system” (91).²⁵² The need for war was paid in human life, not only on the battlefield but also in the factory. If we believe, with Mailer, that the permanent war economy persisted past the end of WWII, we must continue to calculate the human cost.

XII

Spurning the maddened Lannie, Guinevere carefully contains their sexual experience as a sort of consumer choice that bolsters her sexual bravado, saying, “If we had a good time once, well I can always say I tried everything...” (261). As if to underscore the commodified way she treats Lannie, Guinevere then summarizes her qualities: “that Lannie is quite a character. She's a very wonderful and strange girl.” Guinevere delivered her last remark as though it were a

²⁵¹ Jens-Christian Wagner, "Work and Extermination in the Concentration Camps." *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories*. Ed. Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann. London: Routledge, 2010: 133.

²⁵² Ernest Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War* (London: Verso, 1986), 91.

manufactured article she sold across a counter” (262). Here Guinevere reinforces her system of desires by perversely and fantastically performing as the counterparts of her usual roles. First she constructs a cinematic persona, casting herself as a romantic lead flippantly discussing a female interest, as evinced by the phrase 'quite a character' and the meaningless modifiers that follow. Then she casts herself as a purveyor of goods (at least in Lovett's view), treating her words themselves as salable commodities. Her mimicry serves not to empower Guinevere, but to normalize hierarchical consumption as social form. She attempts to enter the 'boy's club' by exchanging information on their common sexual partner, yet can only inhabit the role of consumer. Even in situations that would seem dramatically to threaten the reinstatement of patriarchal authority (McLeod's passivity, the lesbian affair), Guinevere herself reconstructs a relatively coherent system of consumption in which to invest her energies.

On a basic level, this involves her elaborate stories of the gifts given to her by former lovers, reinforcing her exchangeability. Going even further, Guinevere's internalization of a regime of consumption leads her to view herself as a consumable object, specifically in relation to sex. In Guinevere's fantastical construction that “when a man starts pawing me, I can tell there's going to be bruises, and I feel like a white sheet or a carpet or something, and a guy with muddy boots is just walking all over it,” her body represents a commodity designed not simply to be used, but to be ruined or destroyed during that use (89). Her sexual posture reinforces an economic system built on violence, and one predicated on the nondurable. Guinevere's self-reification can be seen as symptomatic of consumer culture, and a world in which “commodities borrow their aesthetic language from human courtship; but then the relationship is reversed and people borrow their aesthetic expression from the world of the commodity.”²⁵³ All of the book's

²⁵³ Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*(Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1986), 19.

characters seem to distance themselves from their bodies, presenting their appearances as exchangeable goods, but Guinevere participates most fully in this model. From her first moments in the novel, she deliberately manipulates her appearance, and treats her sexuality as her primary possession.

The clean white sheet also invokes specularity, specifically the blank film screen, while the muddy footprints stand for the fantasies (violent or otherwise) projected on such a canvas. Guinevere sees herself as a blank page waiting to be marked, a receding symbol of malleability, in a fantasy that hauntingly echoes those in Theweleit. Her fantasies are not hers alone, and Hollingsworth heightens the horror of her commodification by directly and viciously referencing her consumability:

...he named various parts of her body and described what he would do to them, how he would tear this and squeeze that, eat here and spit there, butcher rough and slice fine, slash, macerate, pillage, all in an unrecognizable voice which must have issued between clenched teeth, until his appetite satisfied, I could see him squatting beside the carcass, his mouth wiped carefully with the back of his hand. (203)

Here Lovett plays the acoustic voyeur whose eavesdropping moves through layers of fantasy, leaving him and us complicit with a meticulously evoked image that reveals not only Hollingsworth as careful carnivore, but also Guinevere's dismembered corpse. The murderous reduction of a woman into a 'bloody mass' effects "the dissolution of the body itself, and of the woman as bodily entity as well as love object."²⁵⁴ Lovett and Hollingsworth meet across the woman reduced to dead meat, the red miasmatic fantasy that is the complement to the white ideal.

Guinevere plays the straying wife to Hollingsworth's corrupting force, but their expression of sexual desire is triangulated through the absent third figure, so that it seems

²⁵⁴ Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 96.

obvious that Hollingsworth truly wants to possess (in his destructive mode) McLeod the husband/father. In their lovemaking scene, he manages to incorporate Guinevere more successfully than her husband ever has: “I could hear the sequence of you're his wife and yes I'm his wife and his wife and the nourishment of such a feast furnishing its perpetual circle of absorption so that the banquet once exhausted could only furnish the next, and his wife devoured became his wife resplendent, until he sleeping, the producer of wives, might almost have been merged himself, but never quite” (206). The government agent whose conservative espousings mask a sadistic nature approaches McLeod through the domestic scene, since as husband and father he has further betrayed his revolutionary spirit, joining “all the bloody papamamas with their brat in the baby carriage” (269). Knowing himself degraded by his retreat into family life with its consumerist trappings, McLeod nevertheless manages to subvert that status for the sake of his radical desires. Accepting his status as a father (one caught in a brothel), toward the book's end McLeod simultaneously achieves a limited rapprochement with his young, commercialized daughter, and also attempts to negotiate a son and heir in Lovett.

A second fantastical murder takes place during McLeod's voluminous explication of his legacy. McLeod himself has just been reduced to a broken mass by Hollingsworth's avaricious interrogation. His mouth maintains the last remnant of his masculinity with its “rigid muscle armor,” though Lovett fears “another mouth long concealed would present its frail credential” (235-236). His self-recrimination “pour[s] forth over [Lovett's] head” in a manner “[f]luvial” and “torrential,” “expos[ing] the last festering cocci of the sore” and “open[ing] another” (237). The abject feminine miasma threatens to subsume both men. Lovett saves them by projecting the flood back onto the female form. As McLeod speaks, Lovett imagines the man suffering next to his wife's “warm flaccid body...expand[ing] its bulk to become all the women he had ever

known”; what is arguably ‘her’ flaccidity ‘expands’ as she loses her individuality, becoming purely exchangeable: “the flesh of his wife had become just that, and as flesh was the denominator of meat and all the corpses he had ever seen and created” (240). Nearly unmanned by his wife’s commutability, McLeod regains his position when she is reduced to a corpse, and he becomes the corpse-maker, given a sharp outline against the flood. McLeod dries himself out with language, the “puckering of his mouth” providing the site for theoretical evacuation, the orifice through which he attempts to generate an ideological heir.

In his final scene, McLeod has “killed the alternatives” (his wife and child) and prepares for his own demise. Yet when Lovett offers to take his mantle, his “tense voice” allows his mouth to regain its rigidity. Words disseminate a male birthright, a sterile transmission, celebrated by “a bear hug [that] wrestled [Lovett] about the room” (305). Taken by her mother, Monina wails that she “want[s] her daddie,” but he now belongs to Lovett. Faced with the corpse, Lovett reenacts their symbolic bloodline: he touches McLeod’s “flaccid fingers” and then “remember[s] once to touch the envelope he had given” (309).

XIII

Lovett cannot trace the origin of his political consciousness, but biographers specify a particular source for the young Mailer’s beliefs as espoused in the novel: French radical Jean Malaquais, *né* Wladimir Jan Pavel Malacki, who had his own scarring experience in WWII. Conscripted into the French army, Malaquais wrote a bitter *Journal de guerre*, then was captured by Germans, but managed to escape both them and the French military, fleeing in the company

of fellow radicals to Mexico City and finally America.²⁵⁵ In America he became the mentor to a variety of young writers including Norman Mailer, and the most likely source for the Trotskyite rhetoric filtered through Lovett. The novel is dedicated to him.

In *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer includes a debate featuring Malaquais originally published in *Dissent* magazine. He thoughtfully warns readers of its “difficulty,” and restores his original choice of title: “Reflections on Hip,” not “Hipsterism.” In it, Malaquais gives us a sexual parable nearly as convoluted as Mailer’s:

Once upon a time there was a myth named *le prolétariat*. Though obviously a male, the myth was believed to be pregnant with child—a well conformed socialistic baby true to the Scriptures. Baby being long overdue, the congregation of the faithful first became skeptical, then frankly disgusted. Feeling cheated, never allowing they may have misread the Book, they repudiated *le prolétariat*, sued for divorce, and being an idealistically inclined flock, started to shop around for a better, less sterile myth.²⁵⁶

Since the workers never deliver the revolution, the ‘wandering faithful’ in America will then gravitate to “the long neglected bastard-brother of *le prolétariat*: marijuana-soaked Hip,” understood by Malaquais as only another face of the *lumpen*. Malaquais and Mailer may not agree perfectly on the matter of Hip, but the gendered rhetoric of Malaquais’ political parable shows that they share a common enemy. The deep mixing of metaphors enacts a slippage from religious prophecy to the market, but a dysfunctional family structure lies at the center. The key word at the beginning is “obviously”: the workers are and will be male, always. The faithful found their myth, and this perfectly male union would be perfect if not for a desire for progeny leading the faithful astray, as common wisdom would dictate a woman need be involved. The sterile male union rankles, then disgusts, allegorically. We might be understanding of the

²⁵⁵ Bill Marshall, *France and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History* (Oxford: ABC-Clio, 2005), 756.

²⁵⁶ Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself*, 1957.

betrayed feelings of a 'faithful' Leftist after Stalin, but Malaquais disdains them, returning to the religious register: because they could not properly interpret Marx's scriptures, they sink to the lowest level and become consumers, shopping around. The moral could be read as: circumvent the woman, whose consumerism provides the support for state capitalism, and *le prolétariat* will be free. Though in this debate Malaquais repudiates Mailer, he reveals their common dream: the myth of male generation; only superficially opposed to Mailer's orgiastic hipsters, the proletariat's 'sterility' is its power, its guarantee of immortality.

With his own family long past recuperating, and with the possible political acolyte Lannie clinging only to lovers, McLeod's last desperate attempt to form a bond centers on Lovett, as spiritual son and replacement. As formally contractual as possible, McLeod's will "bequeath[s] in heritage the remnants of [his] socialist culture." To leave us in confusion, Lovett then numbers the willed possessions as two: "the heritage...and the little object as well" (311). The works discussed in previous chapters feared the growing collusion of consumerism and new forms of family, and in *Barbary Shore*, we see the full shape of the nightmare: atomized family members seek fulfillment in commodities, becoming mistrustful of even interrelational bonds as a substitute. Mailer himself does not mourn the fallen family, as this novel's diseased, disintegrating household should make clear. McLeod's reduction of solidarity to the familial leads to his literal destruction, and Mailer's experience of the postwar rise of conservatism render suspect any other political uses of the trope of family. On some conceptual level, war production found its justification in the conservation of 'the American Way'—a peaceful future for "all the bloody papamamas with their brat in the baby carriage" (249). Yet ironically, McLeod summons that image as a nightmare for the revolutionary, and himself seeks transmission of the 'little object' directly to a male heir, circumventing the traitorous 'mama'. The family structure,

however, has been rendered indelibly suspect, and like Joseph's attempted claim on Etta, Lovett inherits only a dying line. Total war makes a soldier of all, and "[f]or the warrior caste, war is not only death production, but a means of reproduction; each war deforms the human spirit and guarantees that the survivors—or some among them—will remain warriors."²⁵⁷ Lovett's only hope lies in the "creation" of "brothers" through war's losses, depending again on violent homosociality and the rejection of women.

Thus we return to *The Naked and Dead*, not least for its ambivalent, but perceptible valorization of the homosocial, and fantastically multiracial, theater of war. While Sean McCann's reading of Mailer rightfully illuminates much of Mailer's political import, his claim that "Mailer became one of the first adherents of contemporary identity politics, demanding for the good of the republic that every citizen struggle to acknowledge his or her particular subject position" seems far too idealistic (even for a critic skeptical of 'identity politics'). McCann's own assertion that, for Mailer, "compelling bonds of common identity can be fully established only through violence and especially through his two favored narrative scenarios—war and buggery," allied to Mailer's consistent linking of the feminine with spectacle-based consumerism serves painfully to underscore earlier feminist readings of Mailer, readings which recognized that his ideal 'citizen' remains the violent son of the founding fathers: male, and ultimately, white.²⁵⁸ Leftist writers assuage their guilt for the wartime and postwar collapse of the Left by shifting responsibility for the war onto women, whose circumscribed incursions into production and encouraged adoption of consumption together made them threatening, complicit, and fantastically entirely to blame. This rewriting of myth ensures that the old white men who

257 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, xvi.

258 Sean McCann, "The Imperiled Republic," 314.

manage wars in the popular imagination are mere Macbeths, propped up by bloody-handed wives and mothers.

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