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PLAYING THE GAME: VIOLENCE AND THE REVOLT AGAINST NORMATIVE MASCULINITY IN JOHN UPDIKE'S *RABBIT RUN,* NORMAN MAILER'S *AN AMERICAN DREAM,* AND PHIL ANDROS'S *$TUD*

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

ANN MARIE SCHOTT

December 2011

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine two high-brow examples of Cold War literature by white male authors, Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965) and John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* (1960), through the lens of the lesser-known gay pulp *$tud* (1966) by Phil Andros. Although *$tud*'s gay hustler protagonist Phil seems to be a progressive, even transgressive example of an alternate masculinity, he is actually heavily invested in the binary strictures of normative masculinity and therefore works to uphold or reinforce normativity. $tud, therefore, is not about deviance from a masculine norm but rather a meditation on the ways that American masculinity is already perverse in its violent subjection. Phil does not necessarily represent a 'new gay ethic' as argued by John Preston's introductory essay, but rather, unexpectedly, embodies something fundamental to Cold War masculinity. As such, he serves as a lens through which we can examine the characters of Updike and Mailer in order to better understand the pathologies of white masculinity in the characters of Cold War literature. I will argue that the identities of all three protagonists in question, Rabbit, Rojack, and Phil, are primarily defined by their violent relationships with and among other men, and that these relationships serve to bind, reinforce, and tear away their masculinities. As the Cold War pressure to uphold and contain the domestic sphere conflicts with the traditional associations of manhood with the virility of frontierism, these characters violently resist and flee from heterosexual (domestic) normativity. They queer expectations of normative masculinity by subverting their roles as husbands and fathers and by seeking transgressive and violent sex. Ultimately, *$tud*'s Phil Andros achieves a means to an end of his masculine charade in the form of sexual masochism. He is figuratively and literally

stripped bare by a black master, which is perhaps the logical fruition of postmodern binaries of masculinity. Where Rabbit and Rojack see no alternative to the pressures of masculinity other than flight, Phil resists both the containment of domesticity and the pioneering spirit of frontierism.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Jean A. Phillips and to Billy Avalon, who first told me I was a writer.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I especially want to acknowledge Dr. Jaime Harker for her inexhaustible patience and gentle guidance as my committee chair. She offered countless read-throughs, calming advice in frantic moments of revision, and an ability to decipher chaotic, tortured prose and offer productive articulations. As well, Dr. D. Wayne Gunn read several drafts of the chapter on Phil Andros and offered indispensible criticism. It has been a gift to work with Wayne, a walking encyclopedia of gay pulp fiction and an all-around funny, generous reader.

I am also grateful for the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Martyn Bone and Dr. Deborah Barker, for devoting their time and energy to this project and remaining supportive throughout its composition. They offered countless resources, comments, and conversations that were integral to my success.

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There is a community of graduate students and young faculty at this university that has sustained me personally and professionally during my time here. Through all the cynicism, the disillusionment, and the devastating intellectual ego-blows of graduate education, they have remained—arms open, glasses full, faces forward—constant in their support and humor. To Dr.

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INTRODUCTION

Although McCarthyism had faded by the early 1960s, it had made a lasting impression on the culture of mid-century America.[1] Alan Nadel describes the pressures of the Cold War binary in his study *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age.* He explains that the "story of containment had derived its logic from the rigid major premise that the world was divided into two monolithic camps, one dedicated to promoting the inextricable combination of capitalism, democracy, and (Judeo-Christian) religion, and one seeking to destroy that ideological amalgamation by any means" (3). America's emergence as a world power after World War II called for a redefinition of American identity in which the status of "normal" was both narrowly defined and critically important. This "normal" American identity was socially learned through "the pervasive performances of and allusions to containment narratives," and covered all aspects of appropriate gendered behavior (Nadel 4). As Michael Bronski notes, "traditional ideas about masculinity, maleness, and male sexuality were profoundly altered by men's experiences during the war," and American men in the 1950s were "eager and extraordinarily anxious to redefine [themselves]" (13). Gender performance became crucial to the exhibition of good character and devout patriotism. In other words, an individual's inappropriate gender characteristics, within Nadel's model, would have been considered an act of

[1] During the late 1940s and 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy and other American politicians tried to contain the American household under the guise of an effort to combat the spread of communism and secure perceptions of American identity on a global stage. In so doing, they established a "normal" model for American men and women and created negative, often incriminating associations for deviations from that model. See Michael Sherry's *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

treason to American democracy. This system reified conformity and complacence, leaving little room for interpretation or manipulation. Homosexuality was often conflated with gender inversion and this conflation negated its viability as an identity. Although plenty of American men and women had been living outside of the accepted binaries of gender and sexuality for many years with little fallout, and even as queer pop-cultural iconography became more prolific in the 1960s, white men writers of this period remained heavily invested in the idea of "normal" masculinity and seem paradoxically to long for the containment of the 1950s.[2]

Masculinity became necessarily fraught under these pressures. New prerogatives for the patriarchal containment of women and families began to complicate the American frontier myth that had traditionally informed masculinity as something essentially violent and resistant to domestication.[3] As Cold War men became more and more responsible for maintaining neat, middle-class nuclear families thereby protecting and performing the portrait of successful capitalism, the frontier myth that had shaped masculine identity until this point began to be harder to attain. Susan Clark has noted a perceived resurgence in the masculine virility of Cold War men due to the contradiction of domestic pressures. In her study *Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West*, she explains that "[t]he realism of the military West rested upon the gendered mythology of an American West at the site of the hero, the warrior—the one who is necessarily silent about his mastery" (2). I would argue that the Cold Warrior arose out of the need to reclaim frontier masculinity from the realm of the domestic which threatened to feminize and abject it. The tension between these conflicting forces called for a particular,

[2]See Chauncey's *Gay New York* for a history of the men and women who lived non-normative lifestyles long before the strictures of the Cold War. See Smith's *The Queer Sixties* for a study of coded queerness in popular literature and culture during the 1960s.

[3] The term "frontier myth" is from Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America.* University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

splitting variety of masculine performance that embraced virility and reacted violently to perceived feminine elements, even within themselves.

As the pressures on American masculinity mounted, so did the pressures on creating a great American narrative to express that masculinity. What resulted were stories of men reacting violently against the systems that bound their identities, which both bolstered the perceptions of violent American masculinity and called into question the institutions that facilitated such bindings. The literature of mid-century America reflected these shifts, as the perceived rugged virility of high modernist male protagonists began to give way to less stable, more ambiguous male characters. Arthur Schlesinger notices this phenomenon in his subtly homophobic 1958 essay "The Crisis of American Masculinity." He wonders:

> What has happened to the American male? For a long time, he seemed utterly confident in his manhood, sure of his masculine role in society, easy and definite in his sense of sexual identity. The frontiersmen of James Fenimore Cooper, for example, never had any concern about masculinity; they were men, and it did not occur to them to think twice about it. Even well into the twentieth century, the heroes of Dreiser, of Fitzgerald, of Hemingway remain men. But one begins to detect a new theme emerging in some of these authors[:]…the theme of the male hero increasingly preoccupied with proving his virility to himself.

While Schlesinger's analysis is dismissive of elements of masculine insecurity that existed long before the Cold War in American literature, and while his exemplary masculine authors are questionable at best, his argument marks a distinctive shift in the perceptions of masculine identity from the 1950s into the early 1960s. Schlesinger is concerned with what Phil Andros and I will call "the Game" of masculine performance. Like Susan Clark, he sees the male hero

of the Cold War as “preoccupied with proving his virility,” obsessed with overcoming the double threat of non-normative gender and sexuality that seems to be ominously creeping in to ruin democratic society. Clark notes that “[what] the Cold War imposed as a consensus was a set of claims about the reality represented by the national narrative that not only abjected gendered, racial, and working-class subjects, in the name of threatened manhood, but also put manhood itself in an impossible—splitting—position” (10). This impossible environment required of men a fair amount of performativity, and as I hope to show, forced an element of homophobic violence that became irrevocably tied to understandings of American masculinity. Gender performance and sexuality for these characters is a Game, but not necessarily a fun game.

The literature I have chosen to analyze through this lens was published by white men writers between the years of 1960 and 1966. The first chapter will compare John Updike’s *Rabbit, Run* with Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream,* arguing that Mailer’s main character re-imagines Updike’s as a somehow more extreme, effective example of the violence that results from the Cold War’s strict proscriptions for gender and sexuality. Mailer’s narrative hero plays the Game much more seriously, and with much graver results. Further, I hope to show in my reading that this re-writing evidences the very masculine competition between these high-brow authors for the much-coveted crown of Great American Writer, and that the journeys of Rabbit and Rojack parallel the struggle between Updike and Mailer for that homosocially-sanctioned honor. The second chapter takes a dive, reputationally speaking, into the seedy world of gay pulp fiction as I analyze the lesser-known story collection *$tud* by Phil Andros. In this chapter, I argue that the gay hustler whose experiences are chronicled in its pages is representative of not only marginal, queer, or transgressive ideas of masculinity, but of the same challenges and perversities facing Rabbit and Rojack: namely, that normative masculinity is inherently

contradictory to the identities and experiences of real (imagined) men. These characters each attempt to resist the Cold War strictures on their identities, while remaining irrevocably invested in playing the Game: performing the socially-sanctioned ideal of masculinity.

The spectrum of these fictions may seem vast in genre, but what I hope will become clear in my analysis is that these pieces, regardless of the disparity in their audiences or agendas, all represent, collectively, the phenomenon of Cold War men who are primarily defined by their violent relationships with and among other men, and that these relationships serve to bind, reinforce, and tear away their masculinities.[4] This line of reasoning follows the work of Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet,* but the coded homoerotics are far closer to the surface and thus far more explicitly provocative. So the gay hustler of 60s pulps has become an artifact of performative masculinity, and may actually serve to elucidate the violent perversities of "normal" (heterosexually-identified) men characters of this limited timeframe as we can begin to see, in a general sense, the performative nature of Cold War masculinity. Rabbit and Rojack queer expectations of normative masculinity by subverting their roles as husbands and fathers and seeking transgressive and violent sex with inappropriately-classed women. Phil Andros, acting as the hero-character of his own narrative, turns the expectation of heteronormativity on its head, applauding instead a lifestyle of explorative, non-monogamous, transgressive sexual encounters.[5] However, he remains bound by the restrictions of the culture around him, and is acutely aware of his marginality within that culture. Phil clings to the effects of stereotypical masculinity—leather, muscles, and sweat—to avoid becoming transgressively feminine and thus a visible "B & B [bosh and bullshit] leatherboy" (Andros, "Tattooed" 78). He quite obviously plays the Game of performative masculinity. So, a change in the object of desire

[4] As Eve Sedgwick has argued

[5] Phil also turns the expectation of the "ideal gay man" on its head by resisting monogamy. See Hubert Kennedy's *The Ideal Gay Man: The Story of* Der Kreis.

does not mean a change in the pathology present in this era of masculinity. Rather, such a change reconfirms the pathology's pervasive presence. As Phil traverses queer possibilities in the framework of performative "normality," he retroactively queers Rabbit's and Rojack's respective revolts against the heteronormative domestic situations, making the homoerotics of their narratives explicit. So even though these characters experience moments of violent homosexual panic and latent homophobia, their most basic pull is toward erotic fulfillment with other men, and this pull profoundly shapes how they see the world.

Although Rabbit and Rojack bastardize the traditional ideal of masculine virility by giving in to non-productive violence and sexual subjection, their ultimate instinct is to flee from these problems in an attempt to reclaim the frontier (in the vein of Slotkin's performative cowboys). They are obsessed with maintaining the normative masculine performance even when they cannot sustain its essential elements, and it seems that the frontier offers the last hope: the unknown. Rabbit and Rojack *run* into the oblivion of ambiguity, embracing the infinity of 'other possibilities' for their identities. These are not hopeful projections for the future of American masculinity. Instead, the men who cannot exist within the system are cast out of it: they are abjected and flung into the wilderness with no certain future or sustainable identity. Therefore, Rabbit and Rojack become two additional horror stories about the unsustainability of life outside the "normal."

Where Rabbit and Rojack ultimately see no alternatives to the pressures of normative masculinity other than flight, Phil resists both the containment of domesticity and the pioneering spirit of frontierism. His ultimate act is to settle, but not in the socially-sanctioned domestic sphere. In fact, Phil achieves a means to an end of his masculine charade in the form of sexual masochism. He is figuratively and literally stripped bare by a black master, which is perhaps the

logical result of the insufficient binaries of identity in the 60s. Phil's identity is ultimately completely undone, and thereby reified in postmodernity. The charade of his tough-guy persona is destroyed by his masochism. His whiteness is undone by his fellow masochist's 'passing' and by his own complex relationships with race and class. Finally, Phil's status as trade, which has allowed him to exist within the realm of homosexuality without deviating from the norms of masculinity, is abrogated when he becomes a sexual slave, not only allowing him to have gay sex without financial exchange but removing the element of consent which has allowed him to retain a stance of power in his sexual encounters as well as in his narrative. So, it seems that where Rabbit and Rojack fail in their revolutions of normativity, where they remained mired in the politics of sexual dominance that has governed their relationships, Phil succeeds in revolting; but it takes an overhaul of his identity to complete this transition.

CHAPTER 1

HOW ROJACK OUT-RUNS RABBIT: VIOLENT HETERONORMATIVITY IN JOHN UPDIKE'S *RABBIT, RUN AND* NORMAN MAILER'S *AN AMERICAN DREAM*

During the Cold War, American authors were responsible for establishing a consumable portrait of American identity that was both comparable to and distinct from the great works of the European tradition. In writing a distinctly American identity, these authors were simultaneously reflecting the sociopolitical values of the Cold War and projecting such values onto American culture. With the importance of this identity creation, a great debate began to surface among the critics of high culture as to who would be the "Great American writers" to usher in a new era of literary importance that could bring America's cultural capital to the level of its military might and establish the country in yet another realm of patriarchal global power. Several writers have been discussed as potential holders of this title, and two of the most prominent of them are John Updike and Norman Mailer. In an article mourning the death of Mailer, John Walsh also mourns the loss of this Cold War drive for greatness, saying "If any writer believed in the existence of the Great American Novel it was Norman Mailer. He believed in it utterly, called it the 'big one' and dreamed of bagging it—like a hunter in search of game" (1). This is a particularly appropriate image of Mailer, as it aligns his literary greatness with the masculine virility of a man on a hunt: for these white male residents of the Cold War canon, creating the Great American Novel is also defining what it means to be a man in Cold War America.

John Updike's 1960 novel *Rabbit, Run* portrays the stresses surrounding the life of an average American man who decides to leave his family. Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, a character constructed within the Cold War confines of containment, is compelled to break that confinement by running from it, enacting a series of highly symbolic acts of violence. Rabbit 'runs' from the strictures of the Cold War's heteronormative prerogatives by abandoning his family, seeking asylum with a prostitute, and refuting accusations of blame for the death of his infant daughter. He embodies a certain depression resulting from the binds of the "socially constructed masculine gender identity" that irrevocably tie him to marriage and fatherhood (O'Connell 14-5). This is complicated for Rabbit as he sees women only as maternal or sexual objects and thus attaches to them no reflexive value for his own existence with them.[6] He reacts to this restrictive system of heteronormativity by enacting violence on the women in his life and by fleeing from them in order to seek freedom from the grappling hooks of domesticity. In running, Rabbit attempts to reclaim some fractured frontiersman identity, but since he cannot live up to the pressures of the containment-era, he is inherently non-productive, bringing death and destruction with every sexual act he commits. He is, therefore, an extreme example of the latent violence that is inherent in the constructed system of Cold War masculinity.

Four years after the publication of *Rabbit, Run*, in 1964, Norman Mailer began to publish serial portions of what would become the novel *An American Dream* in *Esquire* magazine. Although its main action centers on 32 hours in the life of social elite Stephen Richards Rojack, the novel sets out with very similar themes to Updike's *Rabbit, Run*. Although these two novels have not been critically compared in this way, it is feasible, considering Mailer's essays in *Advertisements for Myself* (1992), that this was a conscious challenge to Updike's choices in

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[6] For example, as soon as Rabbit chooses the part-time prostitute Ruth over his wife Janice, she "begins to represent the same burdensome limitations the wife did" (O'Connell 15).

Rabbit, Run.[7] Rojack similarly flees from a life that is stiflingly heteronormative, murdering his wife and tossing her body from her upper-story bedroom window in order to frame her death as a suicide. Rojack proceeds to have brief affairs with two less-than-reputable women, as well as several fleeting bouts of sexually-charged violence that culminate in a show down with his mobster father-in-law Barnard Oswald Kelly. Finally, after the remnants of Rojack's domestic life have been exterminated, he drives south toward the unexplored wilderness of the Yucatan. To say that Rojack *runs* is an understatement. More violent, more feral, and more independent, he is the (Ro)jack(rabbit) to Harry Angstrom's Rabbit[8]. Where Updike hints at instances of incest, murder, rape, and transgressive sexuality, Mailer obsesses over them, adding to the list cannibalism and blatant homoeroticism. Because the "American Dream becomes another cultural mode of regimenting the individual, of rarefying and stultifying his true nature," Mailer so names his novel to implicate the very forces Rabbit was running from and to show a more extreme scenario for fleeing "the ambiguous values in contemporary America" (Kaufmann 36). Like Rabbit, Rojack identifies himself as something inherently 'other' than the domestic father/husband of the Cold War nuclear family structure. Rojack's 'American dream,' like Rabbit's imperative to run, involves a violent reaction against the binding systems that attempt to define his masculinity. As well, the literary feud between the two *Great American Authors* parallels the destruction of their own main characters, and Mailer's version of Updike's novel exposes the realm of masculine crisis within which they both wrote.

[7] The volume expresses Mailer's dissatisfaction with the works of other writers and presents his personal edits to the works of such contemporary writers as Gore Vidal, Saul Bellow, Samuel Beckett, and James Baldwin.

[8] Like *Rabbit, Run*'s Rev. Eccles and Rabbit, Mailer's novel similarly contains characters with highly symbolic names, such as Cherry, who achieves her first 'vaginal' orgasm with Rojack, and Barnard Oswald Kelley, whose name associates him with the John F. Kennedy's conspiratorial assassinator Lee Harvey Oswald.

Initial Images of Masculinity

Both *Rabbit, Run* and *An American Dream* begin with glimpses of the complex parameters of Cold War masculinity. Rabbit and Rojack are nurtured by the essentialist ideals of gender difference and therefore thrive in homosocial settings rather than the socially-sanctioned heterosexual domestic pairs into which they must eventually enter. This phenomenon breeds a disconnect between what is nurtured and what is expected upon adulthood. *Rabbit, Run* opens with Rabbit approaching a group of boys playing a friendly game in the street. For Rabbit, a former basketball player obsessed with what he perceives as the glorious athletic success of his past, the game reminds him of the idealized heroic masculinity that has been stifled by his marriage. Mary O'Connell notes that "basketball is a metaphor for a certain kind of aspiration and achievement on which male identity depends" (53). That aspiration is nurtured and protected by the homosocial realm to which it belongs, and Rabbit's sudden encounter with this part of his past takes on a distinctly queer quality:

> His standing there makes the real boys feel strange….The cigarette makes it more sinister still. Is this one of those going to offer them cigarettes or money to go out in back of the ice plant with him?...The ball, rocketing off the crotch of the rim, leaps over the heads of the six and lands at the feet of the one….That old stretched-leather feeling makes his whole body go taut, gives his arms wings. It feels like he's reaching down through years to touch this tautness. (Updike 5-6).

This scene captures the essence of slippage from the homosocial into the explicitly homosexual realm. Basketball represents a purely masculine environment, and the sexual excitement Rabbit feels upon reentering such an environment is evident here, as his body goes "taut" and he "reach[es] down…to touch this tautness." The boys around him sense this sexual charge, and his

presence among them takes on a "sinister" pedophilic nature. He still longs for the "admiration" of boys because his time among them has been the only time he has felt exceptional; the only time he has felt that he has reached his masculine potential (Updike 7). However, he resists the knowledge that he no longer belongs in this space, playing among young boys, and that his presence among them is suddenly inappropriate. Rabbit is haunted by the trauma of losing the homosocial gratifications of basketball after his marriage to Janice and spends the novel looking for replacement gratifications from the men in his life.

Rojack's story also begins with a glimpse of his haunting, homosocial past. As Rojack is a more extreme incarnation of Rabbit, his episodes are usually strikingly more violent and sexual. Rojack's vivid opening is a memory of his days in the military during World War II, (another homosocial community of men) and its sexually-charged violence will continue to manifest itself throughout the novel. Violence is always sexual for him, as "murder offers the promise of vast relief. It is never unsexual" (Mailer, *American* 15). Rojack remembers killing a German gunman who he perceived to be gay: with "blood and mud like the herald of sodomy upon his chest," and later, his own butt experiencing "delicious pain" from stray shrapnel, Rojack recalls pulling "the trigger as if I were squeezing the softest breast of the softest pigeon which ever flew" (Mailer, *American* 4).[9] Rojack attempts to associate his victory in this scene to that of a sporting event, recalling the same homosocially-sanctioned masculine comradery that Rabbit feels when he recalls playing basketball in his youth. "I felt like a halfback who has caught a fifty-yard pass and run another forty-eight for the longest touchdown in the history of the school" (Mailer, *American* 6). Likening this violent victory with sports not only aligns Rojack with the same masculine vocabulary in which Rabbit lives, it attaches to that vocabulary

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[9] Michael Snyder has a more thorough explication of the homosexual imagery in this scene in "Crisis of Masculinity: Homosocial Desire and Homosexual Panic in the Critical Cold War Narratives of Mailer and Coover" (264-6).

a distinct homoeroticism. Rojack has murdered a "fat faggot" and is therefore rewarded by his male platoon, who celebrates by "cheering, buzzing," and "kissing [his] mouth" (Mailer, *American* 5). Again, Rojack's experience slips from the violent homosocial comradery of negating the homosexual, (or reaffirming the heterosexual) into the explicitly homoerotic. This becomes the paradox in whose parameters Rojack will live for the rest of the novel: he reacts violently in order to establish his heterosexual masculinity, but his reactions always have a homoerotic element that is gratifying to Rojack.

Like Rabbit, Rojack trivializes his relationships with women and is gratified by his relationships with men. He desires approval from the powerful men in his life and continually relives the scene with the German gunman in hopes of receiving the congratulatory approval from those men. Unlike Updike's Rabbit, however, this contradiction seems a conscious critique for Mailer's Rojack. The paradox of homosocial/homosexual slippage in the novel, as I will show, is so prevalent that it is blatant. As well, its prevalence might illuminate the argument of this chapter's title: namely, that Rojack is a character written in homosocial competition with Updike's Rabbit and that he actually goes farther into the paradoxical abyss of Cold War masculinity than Rabbit. Mailer and Updike are thus engaged in the same struggle of competitive, homosocial masculine identity in which we find their protagonists, and which is elemental to Cold War identity. Their literary feud parallels the struggles that Rabbit and Rojack face in navigating the inherent violence of their perceived ideal masculinity. Indeed, Updike and Mailer define their own merit reflexively, and their professional relationship with each other parallels Rabbit's relationship with his coach or Rojack's with his father-in-law.

Rabbit and Rojack Run

The initial violent trauma inflicted by both Rabbit and Rojack is the severance each makes from his wife. After Rabbit's symbolic basketball game, he returns home to find his pregnant wife Janice watching television in a dark room. After a brief argument, Janice pleads with Rabbit, saying "Don't run from me, Harry. I love you" (Updike 12). Rabbit shrugs off this remark and leaves their apartment with the intention of picking up their young son from his parents' nearby home. However, Rabbit soon decides to flee to West Virginia in the couple's car instead. Marshall Boswell interprets Rabbit's flight from his wife as a realization of the stifling mortality of his lifestyle: "In a sense, the nagging claims of his daily life—however innocuous—become during his period of self-evaluation a surrogate for the objectless anxiety he feels welling within him….and at this moment he recognizes both the finitude of his everyday existence and the infinity of the *other* possibilities evoked in its stead" (emphasis in original, 34). The sight of his parents caring for his son as he spies on them through a window seems to be the moment of recognition cited above. Rabbit realizes that he does not belong within the contained borders of domestic heteronormativity as he sees it enacted successfully by his aging parents. "Harry's boy is being fed, this home is happier than his, he glides a pace backward over the cement and rewalks the silent strip of grass" (Updike 21). Rabbit has attempted to exist within that family structure and has failed to achieve its promised "happiness." He therefore must tear it apart in hopes of finding the so-called "infinity of *other* possibilities." In so doing, he negates any significant presence of his wife, objectifying her by his inconsideration. His only thought of her as he prepares to leave is a moment of bargaining: Rabbit tells himself that he isn't intimately connected to Janice in order to negate her importance in the equation of his life: "He doesn't know her that well. He never knows what the hell she'll do. She doesn't know herself. Dumb"

(Updike 21). In thinking of her as a dumb stranger, he is able to dissociate from his commitments to her, and this thought is his first act of violence.

Rojack similarly separates from his wife by objectifying her, but in the sense of his out-running Rabbit, he enacts a quite literal violence upon her body in order to do so. Before Rojack murders his wife, they talk on the phone and (unlike Rabbit's wife's wish for him, "Don't run,") Deborah says to Rojack, "Run. You must *run*" (emphasis in original, Mailer, *American* 20). In the context of Updike's novel, it seems that Deborah is encouraging her husband to run from the binds of their marriage, and when he arrives, she perpetuates this encouragement by instigating several threats to his masculinity. Like Rabbit, Rojack admits that he is "not very happy," and he and Deborah provokingly compare stories of their extra-marital trysts (Mailer, *American* 22). When she mentions that she frequently performs anilingus (which Rojack had "taught…to her,") on her various boyfriends, and that she indeed has "had the most famous practice" in the act, Rojack reacts violently (Mailer, *American* 30). Not only is Deborah's prideful admission a vocal acknowledgement of Rojack's taste for homoerotic sexual acts, it is an insult to his status as her husband. Judith Fetterly notes that "It is this view of himself as nothing that Deborah continually aggravates by saying he is nothing but a bully or nothing but a coward, by reminding him that he is not her father or her first husband or her real lover" (140). In exposing the extent of her extra-marital sexuality, Deborah is emasculating her husband by lauding the ease with which she subverts their domestic arrangement. In order to reclaim his virile masculinity, or perhaps in a moment of homophobic panic at the reminder of his sexual tastes, Rojack strangles Deborah until she is dead.

Like Rabbit, Rojack has effectively objectified his wife in order to easily remove her from his life, and therefore remove himself from the domestic structure. Rojack's

objectification, however, involves transforming Deborah into a door, the threshold to his rebirth as an independent man.[10] "I had had a view of what was on the other side of the door, and heaven was there…and I thrust against the door once more and hardly felt her hand leave my shoulder, I was driving now with force against that door: spasms began to open in me and my mind cried out" (Mailer, *American* 31). Rojack's perceives his act in explicitly violent sexual terms, and it is this final 'rape' that will be the beginning of his new violent sexuality.[11] Finally, Deborah moves from the object (door) to the abject (corpse). Rojack looks at her face: "A beast stared back at me. Her teeth showed, the point of light in her eye was violent, and her mouth was open. It looked like a cave" (Mailer, *American* 40). Again, Rojack has taken the act of Rabbit to an extreme by objectifying his wife in order to sever his life from her. Nigel Leigh suggests that "[t]he murder is a hysterical attempt by the self to get free of the miasma of social existence" (91). The murder is in fact Rojack's recognition of the "infinity of *other* possibilities" outside his dependence on Deborah and his self-initiation into that infinity. Mailer attributes this fear of domesticity to a distrust of socially-controlled normativity. In his notorious article *The White Negro,* he declares: "Sharing a collective disbelief in the words of men who had too much money and controlled too many things, [the post-war generation] knew almost as powerful a disbelief in the socially monolithic ideas of the single mate, the solid family and the respectable love life" (341). After the murder, Rojack is free from his dependence on Deborah's wealth and social connections: "Throughout their relationship Rojack views Deborah through the lens of the status he gets from his relation to her and the power to which she provides access" (Fetterly139). In fact, Rojack has married Deborah for these reasons, not for heterosexual love.

[10] "Killing Deborah cancels Rojack's social contract with the 'dream' world of capitalist success, status, and privilege" (Leigh 105).
[11] "He wishes a more authentic self, one in line with the one meaningful experience in his life; and that self is obtainable only through an act of violence" (Adams 75).

Domesticity Revisited (Or, Rabbit, Ruth, Rojack, and Ruta)

Both Rabbit and Rojack attempt to establish their subjectivities by repeating cycles of objectifying women. In the heteronormative paradigm, a man cannot exist without a female counterpart. His whole identity is dependent on making a successful, productive union with a woman. This is the reason that both Rabbit and Rojack seek new "domestic" situations immediately after leaving their wives. Laura Adams argues that "like Adam, the new Rojack is incomplete without a mate," and this Adamic reading seems to apply to Rabbit as well (82). Heteronormative sociology is so ingrained in the identities of Rojack and Rabbit that each, having destroyed the heteronormative situation surrounding him and with no cultural or psychological framework for a non-normative existence, have no choice but to replicate their unsuccessful domestic situations again and again. And in fact, it is this forced replication that initiates both Rabbit and Rojack in the chains of destruction and death. Even mock-domesticity is a site of violent reaction, rejection, sexual transgression, and death, and Rabbit and Rojack each repeat the acts of violence on their pseudo-wives that they committed on their actual wives.

Rabbit revisits domesticity with Ruth, a part-time prostitute who has been sanctioned by Tothero, his former basketball coach and one of the revered men in his life. Of course, Tothero's symbolic sanctioning of Rabbit's heterosexual pairing is itself homoerotic in nature: "Rabbit starts to push up from the table, but Tothero sets a rigid urgent hand on his shoulder, the coach's touch, that Rabbit had so often felt on the bench, just before the pat on the bottom that sent him into the game" (Updike 59). By accepting the sexual offer of Ruth, Rabbit is receiving the male approval he desperately seeks, and the memory of Tothero's "pat on the bottom" prepares him for the act. There are hints of Rabbit's intensity in their first intimate act—a hug—just inside

Ruth's door on their first night together. "It's insanity, he wants to crush her, a little gauge inside his ribs doubles and redoubles his need for pressure, just pure pressure, there is no love in it….By nature in such an embrace she fights back" (Updike 66). After reassuring Ruth to let him stay with her, Rabbit insists that she remove her makeup and discard her diaphragm. He says, "If you're going to put a lot of gadgets in this, give me the fifteen back" (Updike 67). This situation is only gratifying for Rabbit if he can degrade and humiliate Ruth, first by acknowledging that he has paid her for sex, then by watching her urinate and saying, "Good girl" as if she were a child, and finally, by ejaculating inside her without contraception (Updike 68). Compliant with his wishes (although somewhat begrudgingly,) Ruth becomes the perfect replacement for Janice. She is indulgent of his sexual eccentricities, but not without a sense of ironic commentary. When Rabbit tells Ruth, "This is our wedding night," she responds with "Say, I think you're sick" (Updike 69). Ruth is sexually experienced, and has a vocabulary for understanding non-normative sexual pairings. But Rabbit can only understand sexuality within domesticity, and therefore a sexual union with a woman is always a wedding, and sex is always meant to be procreative.

Of course, Ruth is not a virginal bride. Rabbit has idealized her and projected the virgin bride identity onto her, thus idealizing and objectifying her in the same way that he removed Janice's identity earlier.[12] This is another act of symbolic violence that Rabbit commits on a woman in reaction to his discomfort within a normative structure, and his inability to remove himself from that structure. He does this perpetually, calling her "[m]y queen" (idealization) and "my good horse" (objectification) alternately (Updike 97). Finally, in meeting with an old basketball opponent who formerly dated Ruth, Rabbit re-enters the homosocial realm of

[12] I am paraphrasing deRougemont: "Like other forms of depersonalization, idealization and projection also indicate an unwillingness or 'inability to apprehend the presence of an actual person in a woman'" (O'Connell 25).

competition, and Ruth becomes the ultimate object to be traded between men. Rabbit is reinitiated into his competition with Rodney Harrison, and sex with Ruth is the currency for barter. Rabbit is stunned to realize that Ruth is "a real hooer" and that she would "blow guys" (Updike 159). The elements of his imagined marriage are undone with this epiphany and Rabbit must humiliate Ruth by making her perform the act he imagines to be the ultimate degradation in order to prove his dominance over Harrison and over his 'bride' who has transgressed his utopian domestic ideal. Ruth asks, "Why does Harrison mean so much to you?" and Rabbit responds, "Because he stinks. And if Harrison is the same to you as me then I stink" (Updike 159). It is clear in this moment that it is men who serve as the ultimate pinnacle of success (or failure) for Rabbit, and that in order to redeem himself from the humiliation of his 'wife' fellating his opponent, she must as well fellate him.[13] Just as in the novel's first scene, Rabbit is excited by male gratification, and it is quite symbolic that what he will use to challenge his male opponent Harrison is a non-procreative, arguably homoerotic act. He says, "Tonight you turned against me. I need to see you on your knees. I need you to…do it" (Updike 161). O'Connell notes of this act, "even now the scene resonates as a fantasy of male power over women," but it also resonates as a symbol of trade and homosexual transgression (39). Ruth again begrudgingly indulges his desires, seemingly just to avoid the awkwardness of refusing him, but their mock-marriage has ended, and Rabbit will again revisit domesticity.

Rabbit makes his next attempt to reclaim domesticity when he returns to his wife after his daughter is born, an experiment that is doomed to fail. All Rabbit can attempt to do is perpetuate his domestic situation: he is compelled to perform the role of caring father and husband, but he is completely ill-equipped to do so. After bringing Janice home from the hospital, Rabbit can

[13] As well, "Rabbit's need to empower himself by humiliating women simultaneously disavows lack and makes the most abject admission of it" (Sethurman 115).

only think of having sex with her. "His wish to make love to Janice is like a small angel to which all afternoon tiny weights are attached" (Updike 208). He needs this reclamation of dominance to consummate this new, imagined marriage to his actual wife. The weak and tired postpartum Janice refuses Rabbit, but he proceeds to use her passivity (specifically the friction of her buttocks, an "unwilling masturbatory object") to gratify himself sexually (O'Connell 27).[14] In this homoerotic act, Rabbit does not need or desire Janice's participation, and is surprised that she "has imagined it into something rare and precious she's entitled to half of when all he wants to do is get rid of it so he can move on" (Updike 213). Rabbit's violence toward his new (reclaimed) wife on their imagined wedding night is his use of her as a receptacle of the thing he wants to be "rid of." Janice refuses to continue to be degraded by Rabbit, and ultimately emasculates him by saying "I'm not your whore, Harry" (Updike 213). Ramchandran Sethurman argues that "he can only desire women who are either mother surrogates or whore-objects. When he sees the desiring subjects as *women*, Rabbit cannot love, and he avoids desire at all costs" (emphasis in original, 114). I would argue that Rabbit is incapable of feeling love for women because he is incapable of seeing humanity in women; and thus he enacts violence and sexual degradation on the women in his life in order to establish or reinforce this objectification. Janice's declaration that she is not his whore is her declaration that she is in fact better than a whore-object, and this statement reaffirms her humanity and her cognition. Her self-assertion ruins his perception of her as an object, and this reversal of objectivity disorients Rabbit and causes him to lose his own subjectivity. He has not found the objected gratification he needed from this would-be wife, and domesticity has once again failed him. This is enough to make Rabbit run, once again.

[14] The homoerotic objectification continues. Ramchandran Sethurman argues that "Rabbit…phallicizes the zones of Janice's body, particularly the 'fierce sight of her breasts' with 'coarse purple tips,' and makes these part-objects into a 'metaphor for wholeness' that Janice lacks" (113).

Rojack, like Rabbit, is compelled by his inner voice to "Go to the girl" in order to find another heteronormative domestic situation in which he can attempt to perform his prescribed social role (Mailer, *American* 89). Time and time again, this socio-cultural compulsion will fail to fulfill Rojack as he fails to perform it in a productive way. And unlike Rabbit, Rojack's first pseudo-wife is not presented as a potential love object, but is initially and continually a receptacle for Rojack's sexual proclivities. Almost immediately after murdering Deborah, "[s]omething fierce for pleasure [i]s loose," and Rojack goes to find his wife's maid Ruta in an animalistic hunt for sex (Mailer, *American* 41). It seems as if the violence of murdering his wife not only arouses him sexually, but excites him toward seeking a replacement 'wife' with whom to recreate a heteronormative situation. Like Rabbit, but more directly violent, Rojack prefers to penetrate Ruta anally. As well, Rojack associates Ruta, who is German, with the German gunman he killed in the war. "You're a Nazi," he says as he continues to penetrate her anus (Mailer, *American* 44). Michael Snyder suggests that "[i]n Rojack's case, having anal sex with a woman means turning her into a man and having a proxy homosexual experience" (266). Here, homoeroticism is not necessarily homosexual, as it is a subversion of the productive prerogative of heteronormative (vaginal) intercourse. Rojack, like Rabbit, is objectifying Ruta for his own gratification, and as he associates her with the homosexual Nazi, this act becomes one of homosexual panic, a sexual performance of power. He has killed gay Nazis, and has murdered Deborah, and in so doing has conquered both of them. Now, like Rabbit, he must conquer his new 'wife,' Ruta, and just as Rabbit does with Ruth, Rojack chooses a non-procreative (homoerotic) act of sexual dominance. He recalls that "she was becoming mine as no woman ever had, she wanted no more than to be a part of my will" (Mailer, *American* 45). Rojack perceives a projected ideal, and along with his associations of her with his Nazi soldier, this

dehumanizes Ruta. While his union with Ruta satisfies his sexual needs for the moment, Rojack will soon seek another female object with whom to perform a slightly more tenable domestic pairing.

Rabbit's second attempt at a return to domesticity is his reconciliation with his real wife, Janice. Rojack also feels a distinct need to reconcile with domesticity after the death of his wife, and attempts to do so with a lounge singer named Cherry. After it becomes clear that he will get away with the murder, he makes a plea for just such reconciliation, saying "God…let me love that girl, and become a father, and try to be a good man" (Mailer, *American* 162). This is reminiscent of Rabbit's prayer to "Make it be alright" as Janice is giving birth (Updike 167). Each character hopes that he can become "alright," a "good man" by loving a woman and becoming a father, which is a shallow and cripplingly normative understanding of the accessibility of such ideals. The first time Rojack has sex with Cherry, he acknowledges the fact that "[n]othing was loving in her; no love in me; we paid our devotions in some church no larger than ourselves" (Mailer, *American* 127). Rojack is performing sexuality without love, and his devotion is only to himself. He is convinced that by 'marrying' Cherry, he is saving himself from the transgression of alone-ness. Like Rabbit, Rojack insists on removing Cherry's diaphragm, and perceives that "her will [is] anchored like a girdle of steel about her womb" (Mailer, *American* 127). Rojack is specifically concerned with impregnating Cherry in order to control her will; in making her his 'wife' by making her mother to his child. Rojack's actual wife Deborah did not produce any children for him, making their union unfit in the heteronormative paradigm. Nigel Leigh reads the potential impregnation of Cherry as a sign of domestic harmony for Rojack. He says, "Genital release with Cherry represents the perfect harmonious coupling: 'There was a child in her, and death…'" (105). However, this is not a

harmonious union, but a dominating murder: Rojack perceives this procreative act as the pinnacle of his existence, and this apocalyptic orgasm symbolizes both the end of this 'marriage' and the inevitable death of Cherry. Cherry prophesizes her own death after her orgasm, saying "I always had the feeling once it happened I would soon be dead" (Mailer, *American* 179).

As Judith Fetterly argues, "Although presented as a testament to his powers, her remark has the effect of reminding him how rarely men give sexual pleasure to women and therefore of eliciting fear that she may be lying to him and that he, like all the other men she has been with, is unnecessary for her pleasure. Only in the context of this fear can one understand the crucial importance of the vaginal orgasm in Rojack's sexual mythology" (141). The 'vaginal orgasm' must bring death for Cherry, and is thus apocalyptic. Like Rabbit, who is afraid he has killed Ruth by forcing her to fellate him, Rojack has *actually* killed Cherry by giving her an orgasm. Each situation assigns a great deal of power to the sexuality of men. Rojack objectifies Cherry by claiming ownership over her sexual satisfaction, and thus her body and her life. *Her* fate is thus ultimately decided by *his* penis. This is especially important for Mailer, who had ongoing philosophical feuds with feminist theorists like Kate Millet, who wrote extensively on this subject (as well as Rojack's violent masculinity) in her book *Sexual Politics.* Perhaps most prevalent in the work is Millet's chapter on "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" in which she refutes the reality of the vaginal orgasm, giving men little power over the sexual satisfaction of women.[15] Of course, like Rabbit, Rojack's appetite for women is ultimately about maintaining power in his relationships with men, and the vaginal orgasm is just a symbol of his control over this woman-object.

Like Rabbit's Ruth, both Ruta and Cherry are ultimately unfit potential 'wives' for Rojack. Ruta and Cherry are lower-class working women, (transgressing socially-sanctioned

[15] See Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, pages 15-20, for more on the "myth of the vaginal orgasm."

class pairings) and have an unconvincingly short honeymoon period with Rojack in the 32 hour duration of the novel. As well, they both turn out to be mistresses of Rojack's notorious father-in-law Bernard Oswald Kelly. Like Rabbit, Rojack eventually negates these marriages by bringing death. Both characters are completely incapable of fulfilling their domestic roles, even in imagined circumstances; and they subvert normativity with the opposite of procreative success: violence and death. Just as Cherry is aware of the apocalyptic nature of her orgasm, Ruth is aware of this violent characteristic in Rabbit. As Ralph Wood notes, "She calls him 'Mr. Death himself'….She sees him as the Unmaker—the father of her own unwanted child, the cause of Rebecca's drowning and of the deep grief he has brought to everyone concerned" (135). Wood also notes that "[w]hen Rabbit is sexually most liberated, he is most dangerous. His search for ecstasy often brings death into the world" (131). I would argue that it is not his quest for sexual ecstasy, but for a normative existence that makes him the undo-er of the domestic and the bringer of death. Rabbit serves as a sort of angel of death, as he is indirectly responsible for the death of his infant daughter who drowned in a bath while he was away, as well as for the death of Ruth's unborn child when she chooses to have an abortion in his absence. He is inherently non-productive because he cannot sustain these marriages. He is an unfit father and husband because he places no value on the domestic. This indirect or symbolic violence manifests itself again because of "Rabbit's denial of the female presence" (Sethurman 105). Rabbit's objectification of the women in his life culminates in the ultimate act of symbolic violence, and his baby dies because of his helpless passivity. Rojack's more extreme version of this denial is the ostentatious violence he enacts on his real and imagined 'wives.'

Men and Masculinity

In addition to their initial gender construction among homosocial communities, Rabbit and Rojack are strongly bound to and influenced by men in their lives. When each man removes himself from his domestic life, he finds the greatest affirmation, as well as the greatest conflict from the strong male figures he seeks out. Of course, as Eve Sedgwick has argued, within patriarchal strictures of normativity, women act as items of exchange in more significant relationships "between men". As previously mentioned, Rabbit is concerned with the approval of men to the point of needing his former basketball coach to sanction his relationship with Ruth. As well, his younger sister Miriam is a similar item of trade who resents and subverts her role as such. Rabbit encounters her on a date with a boy, and feels the need to challenge the boy and establish dominance: "[H]e doesn't like the way the kid is sitting on the inside of the booth with Mim on the outside in the man's place," then, in an act of domination, "Harry reaches over…puts his hand on top of his tidy haircut and pushes him down again and walks away" (Updike 157). The boy reacts by telling Miriam, "He's in love with you," but Rabbit is incapable of loving his sister, like all women, and is really just obsessed with dominating her—containing her sexuality and her independence.

Rabbit finds comforting camaraderie with the interloping Reverend Eccles, who has taken specific interest in Rabbit's flight from domesticity. At first Rabbit "feels a dangerous tug drawing him toward this man," the danger of which is an attraction that subverts normativity (Updike 92). Rabbit is comforted by the flirtatious affirmation and guidance offered by Eccles, who tries to get him to return to his wife. Eccles's golf game is particularly charged with flirtation and homoerotics: "Rabbit notices how his mouth stays open after he laughs," and perceives this as a "flirtatious cave" (Updike 108). Finally, Eccles challenges Rabbit, saying

"The truth is…you're monstrously selfish. You're a coward" (Updike 109). Although laughing off this diagnosis, Rabbit is suddenly engaged in a patriarchal battle of wits. He employs Eccles's young wife as his newest object of exchange, thinking of her as "a fine-grained Ruth" and realizing that "[t]here is a world of women beyond Janice" (Updike 102). Rabbit's entrance into the infinity of other possibilities (outside of domestic bounds,) allows him to consider every woman as a potential object for his dominance. Made bold by his flirtations with Eccles, Rabbit slaps Mrs. Eccles's ass, hoping that she will snitch to her husband and initiate a feud between them. He imagines this dialogue: "*And he slapped my sweet ass, that's yours to defend. What! Your sweet ass! I'll murder the rogue. I'll call the police*" (emphasis in original, Updike 107). Rabbit is surprised when his imagined romance with Mrs. Eccles does not serve to destroy another domestic situation, but rather reaffirms his isolation from the ideals of society. It is finally from Eccles's pursuing voice that Rabbit runs after the burial of his daughter.

Rojack has similar relations with men, though often more blatant and more violent. He is confronted by Cherry's ex-boyfriend Shago, a black lounge singer, in her apartment, and the fight that ensues is almost comically homoerotic.[16] When Shago insults Rojack by saying "Up your ass, Mother Fuck," (a statement with obvious sexual implications,) Rojack reacts violently:

> I took him from behind, my arms around his waist, hefted him in the air, and slammed him to the floor so hard his legs went, and we ended with Shago in a sitting position, and me behind him on my knees, my arms choking the air from his chest as I lifted him up and smashed him down, and lifted him up and smashed him down again. (Mailer, *American* 192).

[16] Michael Snyder does a thorough explication of the scene's homoerotic elements on pages 267-8 in "Crisis of Masculinity: Homosocial Desire and Homosexual Panic in the Critical Cold War Narratives of Mailer and Coover."

It is important to note here that Cherry is capable of holding her own with Shago. She tells him, "It's done, Shago. Out of here" (Mailer, *American* 192). She does not need Rojack's protection, and is actually offended by his brutality. But Rojack is not (and was arguably never) motivated by his affection for Cherry or a physical threat from Shago, or even (as Snyder suggests) by the suggestion of homoerotics. Instead, this improvisational brutality is part of the idealized virile masculinity that Rojack performs to compensate for his normative insufficiencies. He is empowered by violence and brags to Cherry, "I always feel good when I win a fight" (Mailer, *American* 196). The posture of this fight mirrors the murder of Deborah, and Rojack is similarly sexually-charged in its aftermath. After winning this fight and reaffirming his masculinity, he absorbs Shago's masculine power by adopting his umbrella, a tangible symbolic phallus, as an ornament to his newly bolstered masculinity.

The final showdown in *An American Dream* is between Rojack and his father-in-law, Bernard Oswald Kelly. Barney Kelly has helped get Rojack off the hook for murdering his daughter Deborah, and in this meeting, Rojack learns that he has shared not only Ruta and Cherry with Kelly, but also Deborah, with whom Kelly had an incestuous romance. In fact, Kelly announces this fact to Rojack and says, "We're closer than you expect" (Mailer, *American* 233). Sensing a threat, Rojack arms himself with Shago's umbrella, deciding that he "felt stronger now, like a derelict provided with a cigarette, a drink, and a knife….[he] made no attempt to hide it, sitting with the stick laid over [his] knee" (Mailer, *American* 235). The phallic reminder of his previous violent victory over a rival male gives Rojack comfort. Kelly is obviously aware that Rojack has been attempting to subvert his patriarchal authority, both by sleeping with three of his woman-objects and by killing his daughter/lover. The two men have established the terms of a bargain in which neither can tolerate the actions of the other. This

climactic scene, like the ones before it, is communicated in terms of sexual violence. Rojack describes the tension between him and Kelly:

> His body gave off the radiation of a fire, there was heat between us now the way there had been heat between Ruta and me in Deborah's hall; suddenly I knew what it had been like with Cherry and him, not so far from Ruta and me, no, not so far, and knew what it had been like with Deborah and him, what a hot burning two-backed beast, and I could hear what he offered now: bring Ruta forth, three of us to pitch and tear and squat and lick, swill and grovel on that Lucchese bed, fuck until our eyes were out, bury the ghost of Deborah by gorging on her corpse… (Mailer, *American* 254)

The suggestion of cannibalism, which Rojack initially fantasizes about after killing Deborah, is suddenly the least taboo offering. It is here that Rojack (and his perceived Kelly,) finally faces the root of his issue. Judith Fetterly suggests that "Barney Kelly elicits…fear acutely. No matter where Rojack goes, he discovers that Kelly has been there first and has in effect displaced him; and he comes to fear that he is simply acting out Kelly's desires" (137). In marrying Deborah, in murdering her, in sleeping with Ruta and 'marrying' Cherry, and finally, in arming himself with Shago's phallic umbrella, Rojack has been grappling for the patriarchal power that is held by his father-in-law. In this final confrontation, Rojack realizes that mastering Kelly is impossible, and that his violent reactions against the normalizing forces of patriarchal heteronormativity are futile. In fact, his imagined infinity of possibilities has taken the shape of Barney Kelly, who now even dominates his sexual subconscious. Like Rabbit, who has also realized the futility of his acts, there is only one logical way to proceed: to run.

Ah: Runs

The final image in *Rabbit, Run* is ambiguous, as Rabbit begins to run from his most recent conflict with Ruth. "Although this block of brick three-stories is just like the one he left, something in it makes him happy" (Updike 264). This is an ambiguous image, as it is unclear to where Rabbit is running, and as Rabbit seems arbitrarily happy regardless of the obvious fact that his running will not take him away from the seemingly endless series of "brick three-stories" symbolic of family life. Rabbit's final run is only as hopeful as his ignorance seems to allow. He will continually repeat his quest for happiness by repeating his performance of domesticity, which will never fulfill him. And in the process, he will spread death and destruction to those around him.

Like Rabbit, Rojack runs farther and with a more extreme desperation throughout his narrative. From his position on the precipice of a friend's balcony in the first scene, Rojack feels mystically pulled by the moon forward into oblivion and feels compelled to "leap the miles of darkness to that moon" (Mailer, *American* 18). He is thus always pulled by that mystic, feminine moon into a stance of flight. Rojack's more extreme and totalizing ambiguous final run is westward to Las Vegas, and then south to Guatemala. The ambiguity of this run is in his vision of phoning Cherry, which calls into question both his sanity and his narrative credibility. He remembers calling her the previous evening and indicates his own potential insanity by recalling, "in the morning, I was something like sane again, and packed the car, and started on the long trip" (Mailer, *American* 270). If Rabbit's run is irrationally cyclical, Rojack's is irrationally fantastic. Las Vegas, his imagined city of "a million light bulbs" on the moon, and the further destinations south of the border, are as far away from American domesticity as Rojack can conjure (Mailer, *American* 46).

Updike and Mailer have each constructed portraits of American Cold War masculinity in which male characters react violently to being contained or defined by heteronormative social structures. Updike's Rabbit exhibits a mostly passive, symbolic violence that is buried among instances of seemingly normal heterosexual promiscuity and virile masculine independence. It becomes clear, however, that women are merely objects to Rabbit, who cannot be satisfied by his attempts to pair himself with them. This objectification leads to violence and death as Rabbit removes himself from his prescribed social roles. Mailer's Rojack is more explicitly violent, committing acts of murder, transgressive sex, and brutality. This explicitness not only exposes more of the subtle strictures of heteronormativity, inviting examination of what seems to be the unprovoked (even psychotic) violent episodes of a seemingly normal American man, but invites critique of those strictures. By out-running Rabbit, Rojack has exposed the roots of these issues, but neither Updike nor Mailer can make use of this knowledge, and each novel ends somewhat ambiguously, with the Game in stalemate. The competitiveness of Mailer's narrative shows his own participation in this masculine Game of male-affirmation among the Great American Writer contenders, exposing the homosocial roots of his insecurities and motivations.

What most concerns me is the title of Mailer's novel, as *An American Dream* becomes the subject of both novels, as well as a warning for the apocryphal future of American masculinity. Ultimately, both Rabbit and Rojack are protesting the restrictions of American masculinity, even as they are still committed to the Game of performing that masculinity. They are blind to the homoerotic misogyny that fuels their sense of manhood. If men ultimately survive by seeking the approval of other men, or by fleeing normative domestic structures for the mythic frontier (just as their mythic forefathers have done), then what about the women they leave behind? If the paradigm of heteronormative domesticity does not work, must the women

be violently removed from the equation of American life like Cherry, Deborah, and Rebecca have been, or left to stagnate like Janice? And what of the mythic frontier itself? The final trajectories of Rabbit and Rojack are unknowable; the direction of each is ambiguous as he makes his final run.

CHAPTER 2

MOONLIGHT, BOSH, AND BULLSHIT:
PHIL ANDROS'S *$TUD* AND THE CREATION OF A 'NEW GAY ETHIC'

"And I was always a conformist, if nothing else…he said ironically, with his tongue in someone else's cheek."

-Phil Andros, "Love Me Little, Love Me Long"

The out gay pulps of the 1960s served as a liberating force for gay men, who for the first time saw mostly positive representations of gay sex and identity in their pages. Samuel M. Steward began writing gay pulp fiction under the pseudonym Phil Andros in the early 1960s and became a unique and abiding voice in the burgeoning genre. His 1966 story collection *$tud* follows a protagonist hustler, also named Phil Andros, through an episodic world of fetishism, sadomasochism, and miscegenation that pioneered such topics within the genre and legitimized new understandings of gay sex and identity. In his introduction to the 1982 reprint of *$tud,* John Preston argues that Steward's writing was the "beginning of a new gay ethic;" a bible of sorts for the "children of Stonewall" (13, 12).[17] However, though Steward may seem to be a progressive voice that anticipates the openness of gay liberation, I would argue that his hustler persona Phil is actually heavily invested in the *norms* of Cold War masculinity. His queering of gay identity and his over-essentialization of gender not only work to destabilize binary definitions of each,

[17] As Michael Bronski has argued, early gay pulps "functioned pedagogically" to show gay men "how they might live their lives" (8).

but to reinforce those delineations.

As the nation grappled with the challenge of defining and evaluating American manhood, gay American men grappled with the challenge of publically defining their identities as such in a nation that considered them overly feminine, backwards, deviant, and even traitorous. There were, in fact, subtle markers in these definitions that protected certain individuals from derogatory associations. In his study, *Gay New York*, George Chauncey delineates some of these pre-gay liberation subtleties, which gave men like Phil a platform for subverting the Cold War binaries of gender and sexuality. Chauncey notes that "many of the terms used in the early twentieth century were not synonymous with *homosexual* or *heterosexual,* but represent a different conceptual mapping of male sexual practices, predicated on the assumptions about the character of men engaging in those practices" (Chauncey 14). Throughout the first half of the 20th century, these terms became popular among groups of homosexual men and their subtleties were often understood in the larger culture, as well. For example, the term *queer* was used to label a man with masculine gender characteristics and homosexual interests, while *trade* marked a man who embodied the masculine ideal of gender and who was sexually "normal," (heterosexual) but who would accept sexual advances from queer individuals. "*Trade* was also increasingly used in the middle third of the century to refer to straight-identified men who worked as prostitutes serving gay-identified men, reversing the dynamic of economic exchange and desire implied by the original meaning" (Chauncey 70). This seems to be the definition most closely in line with Phil's actions and self-perceptions. With such markers in place, a man could have sexual encounters with other men, while still ascribing to the conventions of normative masculinity, thereby protecting his viability as an American man.

Steward held a "continuing ambivalence toward his fellow homosexuals—those for

whom, presumably, he would be writing," and this ambivalence allowed him to criticize their lifestyles through a unique lens of removed intimacy (Spring 258). In his writing, Steward decried the same elements of male homosexuality as did mainstream mid-century America, including effeminacy and out relationships between men, especially when those relationships resembled normative marital structures. In contrast, Steward was passionate about privately documenting his frequent sexual encounters with men of all ages and races and found his promiscuity to be an ideal manifestation of homosexuality. If *$tud* is the beginning of a *new gay ethic*, as Preston argues, then it is a complicated ethic in which the marginal (gay) man, guarded by the distinction of trade, exhibits the fundamental perversities of American masculinity. Phil Andros employs trade as the ideal way to simultaneously embody and subvert the masculine ideal.

The stories of *$tud* carry with them a complicated and telling history. Most of them were originally published in magazines mostly in Europe and collected in a hardback volume that was shelved for several years before publication due to financial issues.[18] A later pulp edition was pirated and sold in 1969.[19] Andros's literary reputation remained largely underground until much later (in 1981) when he was briefly applauded by George Whitmore, a member of the Violet Quill writing community, for his ability to "blur the distinction between 'jack-off books' and literature," and again in 1982 when Preston applauded *$tud* specifically in his introduction to its reprint (Bergman 54).[20] The 1966 edition of the collection included six stories that are not

[18] Steward's prolific submissions to *Der Kreis* included none of the adventures of Phil Andros, who was banned from its pages by editor Rolf for being too racy. Instead, several of the Andros stories appeared in the Dutch magazines *eos* and *amigo* (Kennedy 43-4). For a detailed account of the publication difficulties Steward's *$tud* faced, see Spring's *Secret Historian*, pages 329-340.

[19] I use the word "pirated" liberally here, as the first paperback volume was approved by Steward and the later-printed hardback volume was printed under an earlier contract between Steward and Lynn Womack of Guild Press(Spring 340).

[20] The Violet Quill was a group of gay writers who met regularly in New York to read and critique the works of fellow members in 1980-1.

included in the 1982 reprint and, due to the extreme rarity of the original version, are also not included in this analysis.[21] As Michael Bronski makes clear in *Pulp Friction: Uncovering the Golden Age of Gay Male Pulps,* "One of the primary features of the paperback revolution was that the books were, in essence, disposable," so few of them are available today outside of anthologies or special collections (16). Four of the *missing* stories appear in the later story collections *Below the Belt and Other Stories* (1975) and *Different Strokes: Stories* (1984). As a character and narrator, Phil went on to "write" and star in five later novels between 1970 and 1975, and Steward revealed himself as the author behind the hustler persona in his 1981 memoir *Chapters from an Autobiography.*

The obscurity of *$tud* reveals something about the nature of its subject and the climate of mid-century American publishing standards. It also reveals something about the nature of the collection itself; namely, that *$tud* exists as it has always existed in the liminal space between literary merit and pornography, between cultural legitimacy and artificiality. As Patricia Juliana Smith notes in the introduction to the collection *The Queer Sixties,* "Marginal as they were in terms of social acceptability—and, in most cases, literary quality—pulps nevertheless were often the only source of gay or lesbian representation available to many queer subcultural readerships" (xxi). *$tud* is an anomaly in that it has seemed to transcend its backwards, illegitimate publication history and smutty reputation to achieve a remarkable staying power. It is *literary* in that it is John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963) re-imagined and repurposed in order to challenge Rechy's additions to perceptions of queerness "in the popular imaginary": it is a literary intervention, despite its pulp appearance (Smith xxi). *City of Night* similarly chronicled the

[21] The six stories not included in this analysis (with dates of their original publication) are "The World Rat, Number III" (1965), "The Peachiest Fuzz" (1964, originally published by "John McAndrews"), "Love Me Little, Love Me Long" (1966), "I (Cupid) and the Gangster" (1964), "The Tattooed Harpist" (1965), and "The Blacks and Mr. Bennett" (1963).

experiences of a hustler, who is ambiguously called only "youngman." The novel became popular with both straight and gay readers, but is generally criticized for the predatory, isolated, and often ambivalent portrayal of youngman's encounters. Of the novel Steward complains, "I'd read John Rechy's *City of Night*…[but] Rechy's waffling attitude about his nameless hustler was annoying; I had the feeling he was holding back, afraid to reveal himself, carefully cultivating the icy center of his being and saving it for—what or whom?" (Steward 113). *$tud*'s version of Rechy's youngman, Phil Andros, "affirmed a gay lifestyle outside the bounds of heterosexual expectations" and thus established a new perspective for queer audiences that was funny, frank, and unapologetic (Smith xxii). In this way, Phil's unrestricted narration of his exploits seems a much more reliable artifact of mid-century queer masculinity. So, Whitmore's question, "When does lit begin and porno leave off?" begs for a closer examination of this relic of queer identity and the complicated ethics bound within it (165).

Although Steward had a nuanced idea of queer identity, he remained heavily invested in the "veneration of masculinity" for which 1950s cultural conventions, even within gay communities, had called (Kennedy 166). Steward maintained a close relationship with sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, and became an unofficial contributor to his Institute of Sex Research. Kinsey rocked the country in 1948 with his controversial study *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* which exposed among other things the frequency of homosexual activities among men and the pressures of cultural norms on sexual expression. In his memoir, Steward elaborates on an idea gleaned from exposure to Kinsey and his research: "I…learned never again in my life to use the word 'normal,' which I once thoughtlessly employed in front of [Kinsey]. He jumped on me….From that moment the word was sliced from my vocabulary, and replaced with something more exact, but clumsier, such as 'majority practice'" (Steward 99). In *$tud*, Steward invents a

realm away from "majority practice," and away from even minority (gay) practice. Every sexual act is somehow transgressive beyond the transgression of queerness and is thus made uber-queer. The fact that Andros is having sex with gay men is normalized by his other actions: namely miscegenation, orgy, and sadomasochism, to name a few. The liminal boundaries defined by transgression are challenged when those transgressions are themselves transgressed. The original transgression of homosexuality is thus reified in a Foucauldian sense, and homophobia is thus reversed, or expanded to include the new enactment of queerness. However, each encounter is invested in some way in a larger binary of conventional gender dynamics, forming a logical contradiction of priorities. Steward at once attempts to create a likeable, strong narrative voice for homosexual men and to wryly reduce homosexuality to the shallow pursuit of orgasm. In so doing, he creates a space for queer identity within the framework of stereotype and marginality. Justin Spring argues that "[b]y approaching the subject of homosexual activity with openness and quiet good humor, [Steward] hoped to provide not only erotic entertainment, but also a basic enlightenment about the everyday nature of the non-relationship-oriented sexual encounters that had taken up so much of his life" (346). The collection offers a field of extreme sexual scenarios that defy even the most liberal understandings of queerness. In many ways, the complexity of the collection lies in the failure of logic, which is perhaps the logical fruition of queer theory.

Phil represents a series of contradictions that evidences this tension that is still relevant in our conversations of queer and gay identities. He is devoted to the binary of normative gender and is constantly beefing up his masculine performance and denying any suggestion of femininity. However, he is also perpetually subverting the masculinity he attempts to portray: he embraces the criminality of his actions, clearly reveling in his career as a hustler. The gay

hustler seems the (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) answer to anxieties surrounding the questionable masculinity of gay men in the 1960's: as trade, Phil is allowed to be ultimately masculine, with ties to other men that are explicitly sexual, rather than homosexual or homosocial. He is also able to embrace other transgressions of the normative binary systems, such as miscegenation and sadomasochism, within the safety of sexual play. This occupation allows him to explore the perversities of "normal" American masculinity while remaining dissociated from the dangerous stigma of being an out homosexual man. As George Chauncey notes, "trade constituted a widely admired ideal type in the subculture," because of its secure location in the realm of socially-sanctioned masculinity (16). In fact, it takes Phil most of the collection to actually admit he is a homosexual. Before doing so he frequently degrades himself, suggesting that he is less than "a real man," but without the "sissy taint" found in other, less masculine homosexuals (Andros, *$tud* 50, 136). Finally, when he is experiencing a rarely candid moment with a client, he admits, "I'm homosexual. Or maybe as the good doctor [Kinsey] in Bloomington said: 'Man's a sexual animal'" (Andros, *$tud* 141). Even in this coming-out, there is an element of ironic denial. Overall, Phil contradictorily works to destabilize masculinity, even as he attempts to reinforce it. His sexuality, while always ambiguous, is never fraught. As he defines queerness through his own interactions with labels, definitions, performances, and perceptions, he illuminates the internal contradictions of Cold War gender and sexuality.

Like Steward, his narrator Phil is well-educated and sex-obsessed. The leather-clad pariah is as much tough guy as he is intellectual curio, which is to say, his personality is carefully constructed by Steward to exist outside of normative American society, as well as outside that society's understanding of queer culture. Phil is, therefore, too smart to be a whore and too butch to be a fairy; he is a hustler enigma. He is trade: a carefully constructed persona with the

power to simultaneously communicate and challenge the nuances and mores of masculinity in the 1960s. *$tud* presents masculinity as an identity bound in artifice and homosexuality as a game of sorts, complete with its own rules, players, and penalties. Updike's Rabbit and Mailer's Rojack are also involved in this game of gender performance, but they are less playful: the game is not fun for them. Phil is distinctly aware of this game: he understands and criticizes it even as he participates in it. One of his most basic rules is to "[k]now thyself, old fruit. And if thou canst not know thyself, know others. But at least—be well adjusted" (Andros, *$tud* 89). Although Phil certainly knows himself and others and manages to be surprisingly well-adjusted, he employs elements of artifice to protect himself from becoming *too gay*, from slipping into the realm of negative connotations of homosexuality he has absorbed from 60's cultural norms. Again, Phil is nostalgic for the 1950s masculine ideal—for a time when *men were men.* He must contain his own sexuality by playing the game strategically and effectively, protecting himself above all others along the way. However, even this containment is tongue-in-cheek and his performativity is always ultimately exposed and self-aware, adding a complexity that was not only a coded nod to a potential gay readership, but a criticism of the burgeoning gay liberation identity of the late 1960s.

As a narrator Phil makes a point of communicating his intellectual pursuits and previous literary interests as well as integrating a particularly smart brand of humor into every story. Unlike John Rechy's youngman, for whom "being smart on the streets included pretending not to be," Phil uses his intellect as a tool of power, and is not afraid to display it prominently (xiii). As he states at one point, "five minutes in a person's library can tell you more about him than a full course of digging through his itches on a psychiatrist's couch—provided you know your books" (Andros, *$tud* 126). Throughout the stories of *$tud*, Phil assumes a certain level of literary

experience from his audience and expects that audience to consume his literary, philosophical, cultural, and scientific allusions as if they were examining the most intimate areas of his psyche. Literary allusions abound: the first story in the collection is titled “The Poison Tree” and alludes to a William Blake poem by the same title. In another story, Phil examines a stranger, he “began to deduce as Sherlock might have” (Andros, *$tud* 150). When he meets good-looking older men, he wonders “[w]hat portraits were growing old in their attics,” alluding quite appropriately to one of Steward’s most admired authors, Oscar Wilde. A bit less expected are his allusions to Homer, Plato, Voltaire, Freud, Flaubert, and Shakespeare.[22] However, these allusions are as much a part of his constructed persona as his leather jacket, and their frequency marks ironically juxtaposed elements of narcissism and insecurity. Steward uses Phil’s intellectualism to bend the expectations of his readers, who would assume a hustler to be desperately uneducated, or perhaps to have a certain amount of street sense or practical experience, but very little literary knowledge.

Phil uses this performed intellect to manipulate or disarm the people and situations around him. In the same way that he is protected from being *too gay* by being incredibly masculine in appearance, his constant intellectual performance is a tool of power in his line of work. Even though it destabilizes the low-brow working-man mystique, it allows him the comfort of dominance over other men, and Phil perpetually measures his cultural class against that of his clients. In the story “H_2,” he is excited to find a bookshelf in a client’s apartment and is able to deduce the man’s entire professional and sexual history by browsing its contents. He then uses this knowledge to manipulate the man sexually. Similarly, he meets a blond man in “A Collar for Achilles” and is excited by the man’s potential ignorance, as it will reinforce his

[22] The references to Shakespeare include the description of his encounter with Ace Hardesty, whom he considers to be the Othello to his Desdemona, which is perhaps also a nod to a character in Rechy’s *City of Night*.

narcissistic obsession with his own intelligence:

> He might have been as beautiful as the rosy-fingered dawn over the wine-dark sea, but he was sure as hell stupid. Everybody said so, and I hoped to be able to prove to myself that he was. That way he'd keep the tradition alive about blonds being beautiful but dumb, and I'd be able to maintain my admiration for the intellectual powers of the man I loved. Me. (Andros, *$tud* 167)

Here, Phil is hoping for the same allowance of power, which he again uses to manipulate the man sexually. In a later story, "Arrangement in Black and White," Phil meets up with an older, wealthy man for sex. When he gets to the man's apartment, he observes the setting and decides that the man is his intellectual equal based on his taste in art: "There was a large Picasso of the Rose Period on one wall, a Modigliani on another. A sculpture by Epstein stood at one side of the room, in front of a floor-to-ceiling window looking over the dark lake." When confronted with the abnormality of a hustler noticing such finery, Phil simply says, "I'm an unusual hustler" (Andros, *$tud* 136).

However, just as other parts of his persona will be deconstructed by hints of sarcasm or contradiction, so too is his brain power. During the same encounter, Phil misattributes a famous quote and receives the requisite "polite flattery" that follows: his trick, a wealthy older man says, "I guess I could learn a thing or two from you" (Andros, *$tud* 138).[23] This moment playfully negates Phil's cultural pretentions and counterbalances the extremism of his intellectual obsession. The power dynamic in this encounter is gravely different from earlier episodes and Phil finds himself unable to keep up with the intellect of his trick. He "couldn't think of anything else" and for the first time in a sexual scenario, he covers his naked body with a

[23] He attributes the quote "An image of God cut in ebony" to Bishop Jeremy Taylor. The well-known quote was originally written by the eccentric Thomas Fuller.

dressing gown, as "[s]omehow the place and the occasion made [him] put it on" (Andros, *$tud* 145). This is one of very few moments where Phil is vulnerable, exposed by the failure of his intellectual façade, and it works to further expose the artifice of his masculine persona. Without intellectual control he feels exposed, and after some urging from this client, he admits aloud for the first time, "I'm homosexual," foreshadowing his eventual submission to the inevitable pull away from conventional masculinity and into transgressive sexuality (Andros, *$tud* 141).

In addition to Phil's intellectuality, perhaps the most significant element of his persona is his status as trade. Phil is continually aware of the artifice of the leather-clad hustler persona and is always ready to expose the pretense of the leather scene and in so doing, to expose the charade of his own identity. Of a fellow hustler, he observes, "He wore the [hustler] 'uniform' as if it were his working clothes….With the hustlers and the leather crowd you could generally tell it was all a masquerade, a drag, a play-pretend dressup costume party for itty bitty boys, with everyone more or less self-conscious" (Andros, *$tud* 180). Here, *$tud*'s narrator is negating his own masculine identity, as he too participates in this illegitimate, even silly, game of performance. He associates the hustler with drag, a campy performance of femininity, and degrades the hustler's performance of masculinity to the level of children's dress-up games. Steward once wrote of the leather scene that "the entire affair has become a ritual, a Fun and Games sort of thing, and in essence there is no difference today between a female impersonator or drag-queen and a leather boy in full leather-drag. Both are dressing up to represent something they are not" (qtd. in Spring 302). Yet the hustler performance is integral to Phil's identity as trade as it allows him to remain within the binary in which he is so heavily invested, even as he embraces the complexity of its artifice.

The status of trade is extremely important to Phil and his fellow hustlers, as it allows

them to perform homosexual acts without relinquishing their masculinity, and this is somehow a more socially-acceptable manifestation of same-sex desire. He is not perverting the normative marital structure by becoming romantically involved with another man, as his hustling allows only for casual sex with multiple clients. As well, Phil is able to keep himself emotionally removed from his partners, as his sexuality is his economic livelihood. His affairs with men are business, not pleasure, and this step of removal allows Phil the security in his masculinity that he needs to function within the strictures of conventional Cold War manhood. When Phil begins to be conscious of his own pleasure, he is instantly self-deprecating. In one instance, he thinks to himself, "More and more of late I'd been finding myself combining business and pleasure, or even sometimes forgetting about the business end of it. By this time next year, I thought wryly, I'd be a fruit in full flower" (Andros, *$tud* 180). This is an ironic coming-out that humorously deflects Phil's homosexuality with a self-deprecating feminine association.[24] However, his fear of becoming a fruit is a very real anxiety. He is confronted with this problem in the story "Once in a Blue Moon," when he meets the young farm boy, Kenny, and is "afraid [he] might fall in love with him" (Andros, *$tud* 160). This is the only instance in the collection in which Phil allows himself to kiss another man. When he confesses to Kenny that he is a hustler, he is suddenly disgusted. He thinks, "I felt very dirty, as if my body were coated and covered with the dried accumulations of saliva from all the tongues that had ever been placed on me, and the stiffened and flaking layers of semen that had been spilled on me….I shuddered a little in the dark" (Andros, *$tud* 157). Here, it is the frequency and economic element of his encounters that disgusts him. Where once he was unflinchingly proud to wear the hustler 'uniform,' this moment of genuine affection makes him realize that his persona has kept him removed from intimacy—that he has been merely a receptacle of other men's sexual desires. Again, this

[24] Again, this association is potentially incriminating when considered in Nadel's containment binary.

moment exposes the contradiction of Phil's character: he is invested in the gender binary of mass culture, but is ashamed of this investment when he feels genuine affection from or toward another man.

Phil is so caught up in this turmoil-inducing binary that he is unable to imagine a relationship between men that is not heteronormative or that does not follow the patterns and mores of conventional relationships between men and women. This is part of a larger culture of homophobia, bound in strict understandings of gender and sexuality that must assign a partner in a relationship as either passive or active against the foil of the other. Within this imagined normative framework, there is an inherent emasculation that occurs as one of the men in the relationship must logically act as the wife. This is problematic for the butch-obsessed Phil, whose anxiety is evident in the story "Sea Change." Here, Phil's otherwise butch friend Howie is emasculated when he enters a monogamous relationship with another man. Phil visits him months after the relationship begins to find the former leather-clad factory worker keeping house for his partner and studying to be a beautician, or "hairburner" (Andros, *$tud* 192). Phil's most horrifying realization is that Howie is "play[ing] the woman's part": he is keeping house, cooking, cross-dressing, and even taking a passive role sexually (Andros, *$tud* 193). As one of the few glimpses into long-term relationships between men in the collection, this story becomes symbolic of Phil's anxieties of gender and sexuality and of the anxieties of the culture around him. Men who were trade or who cruised in bars were perceived as masculine, while those who established monogamous relationships with other men were assumed to violate gender conventions, with at least one man devolving into a wife. Of course, this story is problematic, as it essentializes gender, portrays the feminine as grotesque, and invalidates gay relationships. But it does so with a sharp irony that again at once voices and makes light of Phil's complex

relationship with gender.

The most captivating example of the gender ethic of *$tud* is the story “The Easter Kid.” The story follows Phil on an everyday *job* with a client who turns out to be just as consumed with artifice as Phil himself and thus gives him a wild ride through the game of gender performance. The client, Pasquale, shows up on Easter, with a humorously fake name to match his tough-guy persona. Pasquale reflects Phil in every way, even down to the hustler *uniform*. He describes Pasquale’s appearance in relation to his own: “We both had identical costumes on, from the black leather jackets and caps to the levis and boots” (Andros, *$tud* 50). But he trumps Phil’s hustler *costume* by actually owning a motorcycle, a phenomenon rarely encountered at one of his motorcycle bars. Phil affectionately describes the leather bar scene, saying, “It was fashionable that year to follow the patterns of moonlight and bosh and bullshit that passed for the kind of Fun and Games that the gay boys called sadomasochistic; and which were about as closely related to the real thing as a Woolworth diamond is to a 10-carat from Tiffany’s” (Andros, *$tud* 48). Although Phil is able to see and analyze the performativity of the leather scene, he realizes that he is as much a participant as the other men involved. He is a player in the “Fun and Games,” and has the illusion that his awareness of the artifice somehow gives him power and control over the scene. This description foreshadows Phil’s eventual entrance into a very real world of sadomasochistic fun and games that allows him to subvert normative gender expectations. As the collection continues, it is this artifice that must be melted away or turned on its head in order for Phil to find the ultimate satisfaction he craves.

After an initial introduction, the two men ride to Pasquale’s hotel room on his motorcycle and upon arrival, Phil discovers that Pasquale has become aroused by the trip through the San Francisco hills. Phil performs his usual duties, but finds Pasquale hard to satisfy. After several

failed attempts at sex, Phil facetiously suggests, "We might wheel your bike in here…I noticed you got excited enough over that" (Andros, *$tud* 57). To his surprise, this suggestion excites Pasquale and the two men wheel in the motorcycle and incorporate it into their sexual experience. Man morphs into machine as Phil ties Pasquale to the motorcycle and has sex with him. The bodies of the men are objectified and made inanimate in the ultimate act of artifice. A few days later, Phil learns from the bartender at the biker bar that Pasquale's peculiar request was a practiced bit that had been performed many times before. The bartender tells Phil that Pasquale "always picks up a stud who's hustlin', and rides him up to the Stanford [Hotel]. And he pretends he can't get excited….And after a while he suggests the motorcycle bit, and you help him wheel it in….'At's the way he likes to get his kicks" (Andros, *$tud* 62). When Phil discovers that he has been played by a superior trickster, he is furious. He is accustomed to being the clever, manipulative hustler that can make a trick do whatever he wants. He says, "I hate being a patsy for anyone," and feels that being sexually manipulated feminizes him (Andros, *$tud* 63). Although Phil is acutely aware of the artifice of the leather scene, he seems to miss the irony of his situation, and Phil's authoritative voice is unreliable as such. Again, Steward seems to be nodding to a potential gay readership that could share the ironic revelation of such artifice without the knowledge or involvement of his narrator.

This story stands out as an introductory dalliance into Phil's gay ethic. Trade is represented as the utmost manifestation of subversive masculinity, but its effectiveness as such is limited by its own artifice. When one hustler hustles another, both are exposed and degraded.[25]

[25] This moment is not unlike the tender encounter between fellow hustlers youngman and Pete in Rechy's *City of Night*. The two hustlers sleep side by side, holding hands, and both feel so alienated and degraded by the event that they never speak again. The main difference between the stories and between the collections themselves seems to be the humor given to this hustler reflexivity by Steward.

However, Phil is able to move on from this embarrassing episode with little grief and is finally able to laugh about it and continue his performance.

Perhaps the most pronounced element of the new (somewhat paradoxical) gay ethic contained in the pages of *$tud* is Phil's obsession with the body. He is constantly aware of the state of bodies—his own and those around him. His obsession with masculinity is tied intimately with this fascination, as he looks for the roots of gender in physical sex and locates his personal value and the value of others in the physical presence of their sexual bodies. As Judith Butler has argued in *Bodies That Matter*, "once 'sex' itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. 'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes visible at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (2). Phil's physical body and the bodies of other hustlers become a cultural currency of sorts. Not only are bodies bought and sold, consumed, enjoyed, and tossed aside, they are the markers of cultural existence in a system of "normalcy" that is otherwise quick to negate or complicate them. As well, when individuals do not appear properly gendered, they are abjected and "their very humanness…comes into question" (Butler 8). Again, in a culture that is quick to cast out queerness of any kind, it is essential that queer men cling to masculinity, even if that masculinity is performative.

Steward saw narcissism as "one of the important elements of homosexuality," and his protagonist constantly makes note of his own good looks, again taking a single characteristic to an extreme in order to highlight it in a larger context of social mores (81). Phil's narcissism is another manifestation of his gender anxieties: he is glorifying the characteristics that make him desirably masculine while simultaneously airing his own desirability for maleness. In one story,

Phil describes himself narcissistically: "I looked in the mirror. It was a kind of hard sexy face that stared back at me. A lot of scores said that I was a dead ringer for the guy who played in the Bond movies, Agent 007, except for the hair….Oddly enough, it was the sort of face I'd go for myself if I saw it on the street" (Andros, *$tud* 158-9). He is his own ideal sexual partner and has convinced himself that he is as masculine as he appears even as he ironically exposes his extreme vanity and attraction to men. Almost every element of Phil's carefully constructed persona is projected onto his physical body and he uses the maleness of that body to confirm his subjectivity in a culture that threatens to objectify the feminine and abjectify the androgynous.

As Phil uses his own body to secure his place in the binary, he also looks outward, projecting his physical standards and connotations on the bodies of the men he encounters. He often describes the men he sees as having working men's bodies: of a fellow hustler, he says, "His chest was tremendous, bulging…His upper arms were at least 18 inches around and his forearms were as those of Hercules" (Andros, *$tud* 165). He values the smell of "oil and leather and armpits" (Andros, *$tud* 55). The suggestion of muscle built from *real* work is tantalizing, as it assures a man's masculinity; his ability to perform a physical task to earn a wage is his enactment of the American dream.[26] A man's body is his currency in society and is his only confirming marker of maleness. Phil is a worshipper of bodies, and each body (like each man's bookshelf) is coded with ways to control it. To Phil, sex is a contest of bodies; it is another part of the game to be played, but this game is concentrated in the materiality of the bodies involved. Sex has no connection with romance or mutual satisfaction, but is instead a struggle of physical power between unconscious forces of the physical body. Phil explains this phenomenon in the story "H_2":

[26] As Justin Spring notes, "Steward's fascination with rough trade was in fact part of a well-established tendency among middle- and upper-class homosexuals for taking their sexual adventures with men of working or criminal class, whose masculinity may have seemed greater due to their more violent, less predictable natures" (59).

> Considered objectively, the bed is a lonely battleground for attack and siege, assault and penetration. Of the two in combat, one is the victor, another the conquered. And once you are engaged on this battlefield, locked in mortal struggle until the miracle of the orgasm separates you from your opponent--you are absolutely alone. Neither money nor brains nor good looks will come to your aid. Your success as a lover boy depends on the workings of the secret muscles, the rustling come-and-go of the hidden blood, the silent snapping of reflexes and the unheard click of closing synapses--all functioning uninhibited and unhampered by thought, rationalization, and analysis--to produce the ultimate teaspoonful, the release of which deflates the arteries, slows the pounding heart, closes the pores, arrests the perspiration, and soothes the raw and gasping lungs. (Andros, *$tud* 128)

These "secret muscles" and "closing synapses" are given a mysterious, even sinister quality, and the body here is seen as an uncontrollable force in opposition with another, until the advantage of power is delivered (in the form of orgasm) to the most capable body. As Butler notes, "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive element" (2). As such, the body becomes a landscape for the airing of countless issues, including gender, race, and violence; and sex becomes the battle between opposing forces upon that landscape. Even the book itself, in its pirated pulp form, became a marker of a certain transgressive physicality, its pages course and cheap; as did its status as pornography, a categorization that associates its subject with physical, (sexual or masturbatory) rather than intellectual pursuits.

This particular scene is also explicitly reminiscent of the sex-as-death attitudes of Rabbit and Rojack. Rabbit is mostly concerned with having sex on his own terms and in his first encounter with Ruth he "shoves up through her and in addition sets his hand under her jaw and shoves her face so his fingers slip into her mouth" (Updike 74). He is affirmed by his ability to do violence to women's bodies, and the narrative suggests that his sexuality has the ability to kill Ruth. Rojack also sees sex as a reflexive enactment of violent power; a contest between bodies. He says, "murder offers the promise of vast relief. It is never unsexual," and describes every act of violence he commits in sexual terms and every sexual act in violent terms (Mailer, *American* 15). Rojack describes his first sexual encounter with Cherry as such a contest: "Nothing was loving in her; no love in me; we paid our devotions in some church no larger than ourselves, we met in some depth beneath the lights and salts of one's eyes and mind" (Mailer, *American* 114). The next morning, Rojack decides "I was a murderer" suggesting that he has somehow won this violent contest of bodies, and that Cherry will die as a result. For these men, sex and violence are conflated in the game of masculine performance. As such, death and orgasm become not only linked, but governed by the higher forces of physicality that excuse the agency of men as a symptom of the larger forces of binary difference.

Phil is obsessed with the physical body because it is a marker of masculinity and thus a marker of cultural intelligibility, guaranteeing his station within the binary in which he needs to belong. However, the physical body in *$tud* is often complicated by race. Much like the importance of gender in the collection, race serves as a marker of difference, reinforcing boundaries that Phil must either acknowledge or subvert. Although Rabbit and Rojack seek racially-coded partners of lower-class standings or transgressive occupations, Phil quite frankly seeks out black sexual partners. As David Bergman notes, "…sexual desire, which is always at

least about power, contaminates the representation of racial relations. The representation of the attraction that brings men of different colors together cannot help being regarded as racist, and…uncoupling desire from its representation is impossible" (114). As an element of difference, race is an element of power in same-sex couplings. Phil's sexual appetite for black men at the chronological peak of the Civil Rights movement is on one hand progressive, as his physical affections cross boundaries of color and class.[27] But because Phil seeks out men of color to satisfy a certain appetite, race becomes a fetish in the collection and serves not as a marker of unity but as an exotic aesthetic choice. He is quick to aestheticize black bodies, again relying on physicality as the locus of his affection. Phil explores this aestheticization, saying, "Did I like them for that…intense sexuality? For their white teeth or their big dongs? Or did I like them for the exotic effect of the blackness of their handsome bodies against the white sheets…" (Andros, *$tud* 89). Here, he not only aestheticizes them, but violently tears them into portions of bodies, into objects for consumption. Again, Phil is excited by the opportunity to transgress an acceptable norm and the potential for criminality and violence is his main motivation. Continuing in the tradition of the romanticized Noble Savage, Phil has marked black bodies as objects of trade and consumption. By today's standards, many of Phil's interactions with black men are incredibly racist or paternalistic, and his miscegenation actually serves to reinforce the racial binary, and to reconfirm boundaries of class.[28]

Phil's perceptions of black men's sexuality are often violent and troubling, and he is quick to associate this violence with their racially-motivated hatred towards him. The story "Ace in the Hole" chronicles Phil's relationship with Ace Hardesty, a black man in Dallas that he

[27] "Mercer insists that all representations of race must be rigorously placed within their historical, cultural, and erotic contexts before they can be evaluated. An attitude that was progressive in the light of 1957 may be reactionary in 1967 and repulsive by 1987" (Bergman 116).

[28] Phil admires the extreme paternalism of his wealthy client Ben, whose kept black sexual servant, Lem, is literally the son of his former lover (Andros 146).

meets while working in a hotel. Phil sees himself as the Desdemona to Ace's Othello, a comparison that makes Ace seem "darkly romantic" while also assigning normative gender associations to the men (Andros, *$tud* 87). What continues to be significant in this story is the presence of the body, the physicality of skin pigmentation, and all of the violence that comes from the intertwining of white and black bodies. Like many of his other tricks, Phil sees Ace as a purely physical being. But unlike the other men he encounters in the collection, Ace's physical appeal comes from his blackness, the features of which are highlighted in Phil's description of him. Phil sees him as "A coal-black Negro buck" who is "so black that the room lights turned blue when they reflected from his skin" (Andros, *$tud* 83). So, his body is not only black to the extreme that it reflects blue light, but he is described as a "buck," a term that hints at the racist perception of black people as animalistic, wild, and virile. This is the seed of Phil's fascination with Ace's blackness that eventually develops into a dangerous racial tension between the couple.

Phil is acutely aware of the racial tensions of post-integration Texas and makes it known that he is sympathetic. Phil experiences a "sample taste of black bigotry" the first time he goes to Ace's home and finds his landlady disapproving of a white man in her building (Andros, *$tud* 92). After this encounter, he is somehow better-equipped to sympathize with Ace, a victim of racial oppression. He says of his black lover, "the indignities piled on him daily did not pass unnoticed," alluding to several instances of discrimination or verbal abuse that Ace endured in his daily life. Of such experiences, Phil says, "I learned from painful experience that it was not wise to be with him on the evenings of such days because he worked out his anger on me, sometimes very painfully….A century's hates and customs do not disappear overnight" (Andros, *$tud* 95). The paranoia of racially-motivated violence is highlighted in the benighted Southern

town of Dallas, and Phil is aware that his relationship with Ace is "the sort of business that [gets] you tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail, or horsewhipped by the Ku Klux Klan" (Andros, *$tud* 93). The Southern sense of place is prominent for Ace, who affects a thick southern drawl in order to prove to local whites that he knows his place. Phil maintains a sense of security, however, and does little to camouflage his relationship with Ace. As the white partner of the couple, he is less responsible for sexual transgression.

Toward the end of the story, Phil begins to take Ace's violent sex as a sort of punishment for his whiteness, for his association by proxy with larger forces of systemic oppression and discrimination. Of course, this punishment is somewhat exciting for Phil, as well as for Steward, who often had consensual violent sex with black men in order to sexually atone for his whiteness. In one of his journal entries of 1957, Steward describes this idea in more graphic terms. "Most of all at present…I enjoy [the black bodybuilder] Bill Payson…In his attitude of semi-cruelty, you might say, that I like; not cruelty exactly, but more a feeling of 'This is what you deserve, white boy; you scorn me because I'm a nigger, and here I am, shoving this big black tool right down in you, fucking you in the ass; that'll show you what I think of you'…and man—does he" (Spring 246). This, of course, is its own breed of discrimination, as it not only eroticizes racial violence, but falls back on centuries-old racist principles that characterized black men as animalistic, sexual, and violent. He sees black men as having a "look of the jungle," that is "pure sex," or as possessing "some ancient magic we whites could never learn" (Andros, *$tud* 142-3). Phil calls on such stereotypes for his own enjoyment and congratulates himself on being made an olive branch of (sexual) racial reconciliation. He is aware of this phenomenon, however, and wonders "if [he] hated [himself] so much for the percentage of queerness in [him]

that [he] went to bed with Negroes to punish and degrade [himself]," which seems a likely psychoanalytic motivation, though probably a bit too excusatory.

Another aspect of this phenomenon that is problematic is the narrative's portrayal of Ace and other black characters in the collection. Because he is written as a sexual conquest for Phil, his blackness is essentialized and eroticized, and he is only able to speak, to act, in the context of the fantasy in which he exists. Therefore, Ace becomes a vessel for the racially-motivated sexuality that his character must embody. He is, in effect, a slave to the narrative that creates him. Even as he enacts his ultimate violence upon his white lover Phil, who has become a helpless victim of his rage, he does so within the confines of erotic fiction and therefore at the whim of the white-lover-victim. During a particularly violent argument, Phil describes the hatred he feels from Ace: "I had seen that look before—on the faces of Southern whites as they looked at a Negro who challenged their feelings of superiority. It was the hate look, chilling, frightening, as venomous as that of a fanged snake, distilling its life into poison" (Andros, *$tud* 112). Ace has therefore taken on the violent hatred of his oppressors, redirected it into punishment for their crimes and directed that punishment at Phil. This is all part of the larger game of artifice and performance, as Phil and Ace each perform their essentialized racial parts against the foil of the other.

The terminal scene of this relationship is quite appropriately a violent gang-rape, motivated by Ace's discovery that Phil has been seeing other black men for sex. Ace and several other black men tie Phil to a bed and rape him. The scene is incredibly disturbing, as it seems almost entirely racially-motivated. Phil sees his rapists as "black shadows" or "dark voice(s)," and they call him only "Whitey" (Andros, *$tud* 114-5). Each party is disjointed and objectified, creating a distance that allows violence in the particular realm of racial dissonance. This is the

last time that Phil sees Ace, his former lover, and it marks a shift in the perception of Phil's attitude toward sex with black men. Where once he was intrigued about the ways that eons of racial conflict would enter into his sexual life, he is now aware that being punished for his whiteness by black men has become a satisfying inevitability. But his satisfaction is mixed with anger and fear as he realizes he is no longer in control of the encounter and is no longer merely playing at submission. Phil's desire becomes more complicated in this scene. Although the gang rape is traumatizing for him, he will seek out the pain of sadomasochism again and again with a black master and will discover that this complicated mix of pain and pleasure is his true, culminating desire. This racially-charged sadomasochism is reminiscent of Tennessee Williams's 1948 story "Desire and the Black Masseur," in which the white main character Anthony Burns so desires physical abuse from a nameless black masseur that he is eventually broken and literally eaten alive by the man in a scene that is hauntingly sweet and reconciliatory. In the same vein, Phil's answer to racial reconciliation lies with sexual violence, and "the answer, perfection, [is] slowly evolved through torture" (Williams 212).

In the final story of *$tud*, titled "Color Him Black," Phil is given the opportunity "to become a *slave* to a mysterious and unknown Negro, one of the leaders of the Black Muslims," Adam X (Andros, *$tud* 197). Although Phil is concerned that doing so would mean "abandoning [his] maleness, [his] assertive dominance," he eventually relinquishes to the task. Again, Phil is tempted by the potential feeling of atonement. To Bennet, who is already employed as Adam X's sexual slave, he wonders, "Is it atonement…? I've never felt that angle of it because…I haven't any guilt feelings about Negroes in general," to which Bennet replies, "Maybe it's atonement in the abstract….You know, dying for the sins of the world" (Andros, *$tud* 199). In a moment that is again reminiscent of Williams's protagonist, Bennet compares interracial

masochism with Christ-like sacrifice, a metaphor that is complicated at best. Like Steward, Bennet understands being dominated by black men as somehow racially progressive, as reparative for the crimes of his race. However, even after Phil agrees to sexual servitude, he is unable to relinquish control for many months. After all, it is Phil's masculinity, the locus of his legitimacy, of his existence, that is at stake. He is finally dismissed as an unsatisfactory slave, but the story continues under the shadow of his inevitable return to Adam X's lair.

As Bennet says, this encounter, coupled with his relationship with Ace, makes him realize "the extent of the s/m elements" in himself (Andros, *$tud* 199). Bennet then wisely observes, "you ought never to use one term[, sadism or masochism,] without the other—they're so mixed up together in anyone who's like that" (Andros, *$tud* 199). Thus, Phil Andros, the hardened hustler, relinquishes his powerful role and returns to Adam X to confront the cocktail of "anger and anguish and desire" that can only be assuaged by total domination. His need for power, for control over his body and the bodies of others, has always harbored a twinge of desire for submission to a dominant force and his resistance has only propelled him forward through an endless frontier of tricks. He realizes the futility of trying to conform to the strictures of American masculinity and is able to ultimately subvert the binaries of gender and race with which he has grappled. When he does finally return to Adam X, he finds that Bennet has darkened the color of his skin and is passing as a black man. Bennet says of his change, "It's like…wearing a mask at a carnival. You let loose. All inhibitions are gone" (Andros, *$tud* 211). His change is the ultimate culmination and reversal of essentialism—a white man becomes black in order to degrade himself and in so doing, becomes liberated. The ultimate relinquishment of power in *$tud* is, of course, the relinquishing of the physical body. Although it is only suggested, Phil's return to Adam X in the collection's final scene is both a symbol of the

relinquishment of his body and of the ultimate power and liberation he finds in doing so. He can only have the ultimate power he desires when he makes the decision to lose it.

The encounters and ideas of Phil Andros indeed reached more than "lonely old men living in hotel rooms," as the author joked of his readership (Steward qtd. in Preston 12). Along with other gay pulps of this period, *$tud* presented, for the first time, a narrative of a non-normative lifestyle that was frank, humorous, and without the emotional strife or violent ends of earlier popular novels like John Rechy's *City of Night.* Phil's obsession with physicality and his eventual submission to the world of sadomasochism and racial transgression evidence the tension between his strict investment in the Game of conventional masculinity and the contradictions and limits of that masculinity. As Bronski has said of the late 1950s and early 1960s, "Neither best nor worst, it was simply the times as they were, and they were complicated, contradictory, and confusing, and—to our modern and postmodern contemporary sensibilities—often confounding and unnerving when focused on sexuality, sexual identity, and gender presentation" (15). The gay hustler is the perfect catalyst for grappling with these issues, and the collection's humorous delivery and self-criticism allow Phil (and Steward) to subvert masculinity and transgress boundaries of gender, race, and class even while reinforcing them.

In conclusion, Andros's *$tud* works to expose the dramatic nature of Cold War masculinity as it is presented in the works of Updike and Mailer. Masculinity is presented as an act—a Game—of normativity that poorly works to mask the pathological underpinnings of violence that are symptomatic of patriarchal Cold War identity politics. Here, the deviations from normativity, especially homophobia, violent sexuality, homosocial reliance, and the resistance to domesticity, are so pervasive that they transcend the boundaries between marginal and mainstream.

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