

I. Introduction

Innovative and occasionally controversial, Suzan-Lori Parks is one of the most highly acclaimed African-American woman playwrights in contemporary theater. Her use of “rep & rev” (repetition and revision) to re-examine and reconfigure Eurocentric historical episodes is lauded for providing an Afro-centric history and identity—elements that are largely missing from the Eurocentric historical record. Parks uses language reminiscent of African-American dialects and vernacular to give multiple meanings to the spoken word and expose the hidden message behind the dialogue of her characters. Often depicting and exaggerating black stereotypes, Parks draws attention to their invalidity and the ignorance upon which they are based. Parks's plays are noted for their originality, non-linear progression of time, poetic dialogue, political and social agendas, and depiction of the search for identity.

Suzan-Lori Parks was born in Fort Knox on May 10, 1963, Kentucky. Her father was a career officer in the United States Army, so the family moved frequently when Suzan-Lori was growing up. She went to school in six states, seldom spending more than a year in the same school. While her father served overseas in Vietnam, the rest of the family lived in Odessa, Texas, near Suzan-Lori's maternal grandmother. The rhythms and similes of West Texas dialect made a lasting impression on Suzan-Lori Parks, whose work as a writer overflows with colorful dialogue, exploiting the rich resources of African American vernacular speech.

A lively, imaginative child, Parks was an avid reader of mythology and folklore and amused herself writing songs and stories. In 1974, her father was stationed in Germany. The whole family moved with him, and Suzan-Lori and her brother and sister attended local

schools, where they soon became fluent in German. Both of Suzan-Lori's parents emphasized the importance of education. After retiring from the Army, Mr. Parks became a professor of education at the University of Vermont. Her mother later became an administrator at Syracuse University. In high school, Suzan-Lori Parks dreamed of becoming a writer, but was discouraged by an English teacher who found fault with her spelling. Temporarily abandoning her dream, Parks entered Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts as a science student, but soon rediscovered her love of poetry and fiction and decided to major in English and German literature.

By her own account, the highlight of her college career was a fiction workshop taught by the esteemed novelist and civil rights activist James Baldwin. Baldwin set a formidable example of self-discipline and artistic integrity. He encouraged Parks to find her own voice and to explore writing for the theater. At the end of the year, Baldwin called Parks an utterly astounding and beautiful creature who may become one of the most valuable artists of our time.

Following Baldwin's advice, Parks educated herself in the art of the theater. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Mount Holyoke in 1985, she spent a year in London studying acting, not with the aim of pursuing an acting career, but to deepen her understanding of the stage. Her first play, *The Sinner's Place* (1984), helped her receive honors for her English degree but was rejected for staging by Mount Holyoke because it was too innovative and experimental in form for the drama department. After receiving dual degrees in German and English in 1985, Parks further honed her playwriting skills by studying acting in London and attending the Yale University School of Drama. Returning to the United States, she settled in New York City, working secretarial jobs by day and

churning out one-act plays by night. She haunted the small theaters of Off-Broadway and Off-Off Broadway and produced her first plays in bars and coffee houses. A chance encounter with Village Voice theater critic Alisa Solomon led Parks to an association with the Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association (BACA). It marked the beginning of a fruitful collaboration with director Liz Diamond, who directed Parks's first full-length play, *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* at BACA in 1989. Described as a "choral poem" of African American history, cast in metaphors drawn from the life sciences, *Mutabilities* brought Parks immediate acclaim. Critics praised her uninhibited, imaginative language, and highly original stage imagery. The play won Off-Broadway's Obie Award for Best New Play.

In 1991, Parks became an Associate Artist at the Yale School of Drama. Her work attracted support from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, as well as the National Endowment for the Arts. Her next play, *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1992), also premiered at BACA, but her work was quickly spreading to the theaters outside New York. In the same year, her play, *Devotees in the Garden of Love*, debuted at the Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Parks's *Topdog/Underdog* has universally attracted numerous critical acclaims since it was written. Different critics have set forth different criticism about the text. Among them, Myka Tucker-Abramson has studied *Topdog/Underdog* as personal psychodramas of the two brothers. He writes:

Held in tension throughout *Topdog/Underdog* is the relationship between the personal psychodramas of the two brothers and the larger issues of economics and race.[...] a social drama confronting the issues of racism and classism in

modern America, and a psychodrama in its focus on the individual unraveling of Lincoln and Booth as well as of their relationship. (77-78)

Likewise, David Remy considers the ways in which Parks's use of historical references and figures belies a more compelling sense of personal history within the play.

He comments:

Topdog/Underdog is a play rich in historical overtones, yet these should not be confused with events that shaped the course of American social and political development during the years after the Civil War. Although the Lincoln assassination exerts a pervading influence on how the audience reacts to developments within *Topdog/Underdog*, the assassination itself is nothing more than an augury of the play's ending. Historical fact serves as a backdrop for theater — nothing more — and the events that occur onstage result from knowledge of family history that is repressed rather than acknowledged openly. Therefore, the historical figures of Lincoln and Booth should not be identified too strongly with the brothers who bear the same names. Rather than recreate a scene from history on stage, a scene which is remembered more for a single act of vengeance than for the events that preceded it, Parks chooses to focus instead on the dramatic possibilities inherent in a shared personal history, one which the brothers Lincoln and Booth bring to a denouement marked by violence and desperation equal to that of historical events. (11)

Another critic Richard Hornby bitterly criticizes the drama as structural failure. He comments:

Topdog/Underdog, by Suzan- Lori Parks, the most boring author in America, is a talky, repetitive, disorganized, aimless two-character piece that once again bashes Parks's favorite target, Abraham Lincoln. (465)

Jon Dietrick has studied the drama *Topdog/Underdog* in terms of the dialectical relation of reality and mimesis. He remarks:

In *Topdog/Underdog*, Lincoln's meditation on the highly artificial, theme-park encounter with his make-believe "assaissin" becoming momentarily "real" as the event is reflected in the "Silver metal" of the dented fusebox is, like Zerkow's refusal to distinguish between actual gold and stories about gold, not evidence of the character's failure to distinguish real from imitation but rather evidence of the imitative's inextricable link to the real, and vice versa. Escaping the narrow logic of naturalism, Lincoln's experience is both *mimetic and real*. (67)

Suzan-Lori Parks had also captured the attention of playwright and director George C. Wolfe, whose work, particularly his 1986 play *The Colored Museum*, had close affinities with her own. When Wolfe was named to head the New York Public Theater in 1993, he was eager to schedule a new play by Suzan-Lori Parks. Her association with the Public began with a production of *The America Play*, directed by Liz Diamond, in which Parks first introduced the notion of a black man who works as an Abraham Lincoln impersonator, an idea that recurred in her later work, *Topdog/Underdog*.

Topdog/Underdog marked something of a departure from the exaggerated language and surreal imagery of the playwright's earlier work. Set in a single room, it explored the conflict between two brothers, ominously named for President Lincoln and his assassin,

John Wilkes Booth. *Topdog/Underdog* extends the ambiguous fascination with the Great Emancipator that Parks first displayed in *The America Play* in 1993. Lincoln, who began his mature life shaking money from suckers in a three-card monte scam, has given up the hustler's life to take a job at a boardwalk arcade. There he plays his namesake in earnest, wearing a top hat and a false beard while patrons take turns assassinating him with a popgun. He does this act in whiteface, thus reversing the conventions of the minstrel show ("I'm a brother playing Lincoln—that's a stretch for anyone's imagination"), and also underlining the African American ambivalence toward the man who both freed the slaves and, in the minds of some, patronized them. *Topdog/Underdog*, which the playwright describes as being about family wounds and healing, continues in this line. Instead of breaking out into fresh territory, Parks seems content to settle for a comfortable, if seedily furnished, room in town. The play, which represents contemporary reality as a dog-eat-dog world, dramatizes race (specifically, in terms of the lives of two young African-American brothers) as a contradiction between dreams of a possible life and the reality in which the chance of their realization is the ultimate gamble. In fact, the play is as popular as it is within the ruling class culture industry because of the view of race it forwards at a time when the intense contradictions of race in the U.S. are reaching explosive dimensions (such as, to give but one example, the disproportionately high percentage of African-American youth criminalized and incarcerated, and made into cheap exploitable labor in prisons).

At a time when the systemic connection of the history of racial oppression to the class divisions in capitalism is becoming ever more evident, the play offers the view of a post-race society in which the logic of the systemic is displaced by the logic of the individual and hence the system is let off the hook. The two characters Lincoln and Booth, two underprivileged brothers with a volatile relationship both lead unenviable lives: Lincoln

(a former three card monte hustler) struggles to hold on to a "legit" job whilst Booth wishes to emulate his older brother's former swindling lifestyle, during which he became known as the Topdog. Booth still needs to learn "the tricks of the trade", but resents his Underdog status, and in the meantime makes ends meet by shoplifting. With a passable general knowledge of American history (a prerequisite if one is to gain a multilateral perspective), the symbolic character names allow one to deduce the ultimate outcome of this play. Their fate is further alluded to by their "chosen" livelihoods. Their names were given to them by their father "as a joke", who along with their mother abandoned them as infants. This rejection, which is handled by both differently, is persistently a source of aching analysis.

The play opened at the Public in 2001 with actors Jeffrey Wright and Don Cheadle as the Lincoln and Booth, directed by George C. Wolfe. After a sold-out run at the Public, it moved to Broadway's Ambassador Theater, with rapper and actor Mos Def replacing Cheadle as Booth. In 2001, Parks received the coveted "genius grant" of the McArthur Foundation. *Topdog/Underdog* was awarded the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Suzan-Lori Parks was the first African American woman to be so honored. Time magazine named her one of its "100 Innovators for the Next New Wave" (4).

After the success of *Topdog*, Parks and her husband, blues musician Paul Oscher, moved to Los Angeles for six years, where Parks broadened her creative activities and taught a graduate playwriting seminar at the California Institute of the Arts. While seeing nine of her full-length plays produced, Parks has not confined her efforts to the live theater. In Los Angeles, Parks wrote a television adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2005), produced by Oprah Winfrey, and starring Halle Berry. Her own book, *Getting Mother's Body*, a Faulknerian "novel in voices" set in West Texas,

was published in 2003. At the same time, Parks undertook her most ambitious theater work to date. She set herself the daunting task of writing one complete short play every day for a year. She held herself to this rigid program while fulfilling a demanding travel schedule, writing in hotel rooms and even while waiting in airport security lines. The resulting work, *365 Plays/365 Days*, has been produced by 700 theaters around the world, in venues ranging from street corners to opera houses. With major theaters in the largest cities acting as "hub theaters," coordinating the efforts of smaller groups throughout their metropolitan areas, it is the largest grassroots collaboration in theater history. Parks has received numerous awards and honors throughout her career, among them a National Endowment for the Arts grant, a Rockefeller Foundation grant, the Whiting Writers' Award, a Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays, and the PEN-Laura Pels Award for Excellence in Playwriting. In addition to the aforementioned Obie awards and Pulitzer Prize for drama, Parks has been awarded a Guggenheim fellowship and the prestigious MacArthur Foundation fellowship, also commonly known as the "genius grant."

Since 2000, Parks has directed the Audrey Skirball Kirn's Theater Projects writing program at the California Institute of the Arts. Her first novel, *Getting Mother's Body*, was published in 2003 to favorable reviews. Parks has written two screenplays: *Anemone Me* (1990) and *Girl 6* (1996). The film version of *Girl 6* was directed by Spike Lee. Parks is writing a stage musical about the Harlem Globetrotters entitled *Hoopz*, in addition to adapting Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* for a film to be produced by Oprah Winfrey.

Since her first play, *The Sinner's Place*, Parks has demonstrated a passion for searching for knowledge, history, and identity. The stage in *The Sinner's Place* was to be covered in dirt, an innovation that Mount Holyoke's drama department refused to

accommodate. *Betting on the Dust Commander* is largely about family relations, upheaval and movement. This second play has been attributed to Parks's constant relocation during childhood. Parks gained critical and popular attention with her third production, *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, a tetralogy of four short plays—*Snails*, *The Third Kingdom*, *Open House*, and *Greeks*. In *Snails* a white naturalist disguises himself as an exterminator so he can “bug” the home where three African-American women live, thereby gaining insight into the actions of these women in a non-white-influenced surrounding. Through this “study” the women lose identity and respect and become objects to be manipulated and examined. *The Third Kingdom* re-enacts the Middle Passage across the Atlantic from Africa that many slaves endured at the beginning of their captivity. In lieu of the dearth of known history from these subjugated people, Parks provides memories and cultural references that create a new, solid history for African Americans to follow. In *Open House* Blanca, a former slave is dying and her memories are being stolen from her—symbolized by continuous tooth extractions—linking her loss with African Americans' loss of culture, identity and voice. In *Greeks* Parks further elaborates on the assertion that African Americans have an unsure link with their past and therefore have a difficult time understanding their present. Parks continues to search for an African-American past in her fourth play, *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1990). In this play, the main character, Black Man with Watermelon, is continually beaten, enslaved, and killed, yet always returns to the stage to tell his story. Parks highlights the importance of “telling the story” as a way to fight the negation of African Americans, whose literary silencing during the years of the slave trade has rendered their story almost forgotten.

In *The America Play* (1993), Parks again brings dirt onstage. The play's setting is described as “the great hole of history” and centers on the Foundling Father, a black man

who resembles Abraham Lincoln, who re-enacts the President's death as a sideshow act. The repeated death resembles that in *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, and, as in previous plays, the characters in *The America Play* are searching for clues to their identities. Foundling Father's wife and son dig in the sand around the great hole for clues to the truth, and they uncover objects that suggest that many accepted truths are in fact lies and distortions based on perception.

Parks continues the sideshow atmosphere in *Venus*, a play based on the life of Saartjie Baartman. Baartman was an African who was brought to Europe during the Victorian era and put on display as the Venus Hottentot because of her African physical features. After her death, a scientist removed her buttocks and genitalia, which were displayed in a Paris museum well into the twentieth century. In *Venus*, Parks rewrites this history, refusing to let Baartman be a docile pawn in her own life. She makes Baartman an accomplice in her fame and destiny. Venus is a willing participant and receives financial rewards for her work. She uses her African “otherness” to obtain wealth and love, thereby causing modern audiences to rethink the seeming nonparticipation of Africans in their own history.

Parks explores Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in two plays, *In the Blood* (1999) and *Fucking A* (2000). In *In the Blood*, Parks's Hester is a woman who lives under an overpass with her five multi-ethnic, illegitimate children. The play stresses that identity and culture are becoming increasingly difficult to discover and claim, a condition that leads to disillusionment and diaspora. Hester is abandoned and ill-treated by society and her lovers, and the play ends in tragedy. For *Fucking A*'s Hester, the “A” stands for Abortionist. This

play too ends in tragedy as Hester's son, who was a sweet youth, has become a violent and brutal man.

In *Topdog/Underdog* two brothers, named Lincoln and Booth, struggle to succeed in life. Lincoln once ran a three-card monte scam but has decided to earn his living by honest labor. He becomes an actor at the local arcade, impersonating Abraham Lincoln and re-enacting Lincoln's death. Booth decides to earn money by learning Lincoln's card tricks and setting up his own three-card monte business. The brothers argue frequently, culminating in Booth murdering Lincoln over a card game. Although there are similarities in themes and characters between Parks's earlier plays and her later works, the deaths in these later plays, unlike those in *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* and *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, are true deaths for the characters, and their exits are final.

II. Economy: A Basic Factor in the Construction of Masculinity

According to the Oxford English dictionary, masculine means “having qualities or appearance traditionally associated with men”; that is, masculinity has to do with particular traits and qualities rather than with biology. Collins’ thesaurus has the following equivalents for masculine_ “male, manful, manlike, manly, mannish, virile, bold, brave, butch, gallant, hardy, macho, muscular, powerful, red-blooded, resolute, robust, stouthearted, strapping, strong, vigorous, well built”. This list tells us what our societies whether it is western or eastern, think of real man. Masculinity, then, is a social definition given to boys and men by societies; like gender it is a social construct. Nature makes us male or female, it gives us our biological definition, but it is society which makes us masculine or feminine. It defines how boys/men should behave, dress, appear; what attitudes and qualities they should have, how they should be treated, etc. thus, masculinity as a characteristic is socio-cultural. This is why it can, and often does, differ from community to community, and time to time. Masculinity, like gender is not static- it is constantly reconstructed, it may keep changing in response to changes in economic patterns, natural or man made disasters, war or migration. This is also why different kinds of masculinity are manifest; working-class, bourgeoisie or intellectual masculinity may be quite different to cowboy-masculinity; Japanese masculinity may be different to European or Indian masculinity; hegemonic masculinity to marginalized masculinity. This is why it is better to speak of masculinities rather than one kind of masculinity.

Regarding the issue of the construction of masculinity and femininity Kamala Bhasin in her book *Exploring Masculinity* (2004), says:

Masculinity does not exist in isolation of femininity. In a way, femininity is negative masculinity: a woman is what a man is not. In most societies,

masculinity and femininity are mirror images of each other; if men are expected to dominate and control, women must be submissive; if men are supposed to order, women have to take orders; if men are allowed to be hot-tempered; women have to be patient, and so on. Even though there are masculinities, masculinity normally means having qualities like strength, assertiveness, fearlessness, independence, authoritarianism, ambition. Power, control over others and leadership are considered important markers of masculinity almost universally. (33)

In this paragraph Bhasin talks about the interdependence of the construction of masculinity. If one does carry the masculine behavior the other is expected to carry the feminine. Kamala Bhasin talking about the transitoriness of masculinity says it can change according to the situations and society it belongs to. She further says:

Men are commonly described as aggressive, assertive, independent, competitive, insensitive and so on. These attributes are based on the idea that there is something about men which transcends their local situation. Men are seen as having natures which determine their behavior in all situations. Notions of masculinity may change, men may dress differently, the “breadwinner ethic” may collapse, but it does not change male power as such; only the form, presentation or packaging of masculinity may change. Masculinity is always local and subject to change. What does not change is the justification and naturalization of male power or masculine ideology. (9)

In his pioneering text *Masculinities*, Connell warns against transcultural or transhistorical concepts of masculinity, including biologically grounded theories based on genetics or hormones and the uncritical use of psychoanalytic theory. He prefers an analysis

of masculinity as an object of knowledge based on the material circumstances that shape the “relational concepts” of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 43–44). Connell insists on dividing masculinity into a plurality of kinds, reflecting class, sect, race, and sexual orientation, and on tracking the ways these varieties relate to the hegemonic forms of masculinity that societies celebrate as ideals. Thus, boys who aspire to manhood, and men seeking to express theirs, follow masculine scripts generated in and for particular milieus, but they must also negotiate their course in relation to the hegemonic forms of contemporary masculinity and femininity.

Robert A. Nye in his article *Locating masculinity* (2005) talks about the types of rituals which are considered to be masculine, he names them to be ‘masculine rituals’. He further says:

Between the male body and cultural ideals of gender lies a zone in which men enact masculinity in rituals, speech, and gesture. This is a crucially important and under researched part of gender studies. It encompasses the historically male-segregated settings of the workplace, the gym, the school, the military training ground, the monastery, the club, and drinking venues, where masculinity has been transmitted from older to younger men by the force of personal example and the appropriation of technique. Just as individual men do, collectivities often adopt deeply gendered strategies and languages for dealing with bosses, initiates, and outsiders and for establishing who they are. (1950)

Certain cultural rituals in which only males are invited and taken masculine also make men to be different than women in their behavior and tradition. These very rituals also contribute to the construction of their masculinity.

He further says:

A generation of discourse analysis and social constructionism, the women's movement, gay bodybuilders and butch women, transsexual and transgender experiments, unisex clothing, and other innovations of capitalist consumer culture have loosened but not eliminated the connections among sex, gender, and sexuality. The conceptual ability to separate men from masculinity and women from femininity and the willingness to tolerate a plurality of masculinities and femininities have advanced measurably in the last decades. However, in crises, whether real or invented, societies tend to revert reflexively to what appear to be stable gender norms centered squarely on bodies, despite the growing absurdity of treating biological sex as foundational in any respect. On its face, each episode of "remasculinization" we identify ought to undermine fatally the universalistic pretensions of a category so unstable that it must be wholly reconfigured every generation or so, but those of us who teach gender and sexuality know the subtle forms resistance to this conclusion can take, even within the age groups in our culture most disposed to flexibility. (1955)

In the same issue Connell has argued that:

We must make the effort to break down or reform gender norms beyond the academy. We must struggle against the violence that intimidates women, gays, and racial minorities; lobby for equal pay and justice in local and global workplaces; and implement real gender equality in schools, sports, and the professions. We must seek change, in other words, where we work and live". (1956)

Regarding the history of masculinity, R. W. Connell in the book *Masculinities Studies Reader* says:

Masculinities come into existence at particular time and places, and are always subject to change. Masculinities are, in a word, historical ...But so far the argument has lacked historical depth and appropriate scale. To understand the current pattern of masculinities we need to look back over the period in which it came into being. Since masculinity exists only in the contexts of a whole structure of gender relations, we need to locate it in the formation of the modern gender order as a whole- a process that has taken about four centuries. (245)

According to Connell four developments seem particularly important for the making of those configurations of social practice that we now call masculinity. First “is the cultural change that produced new understandings of sexuality and personhood in metropolitan Europe. After crumbling of the monastic system, the power of the religion to control the intellectual world and to regulate everyday life began to slow, contested but decisive decline. Emphasis on household and marital heterosexuality displaced monastic denial as the most honoured form of sexuality. The cultural authority of compulsory heterosexuality clearly followed this shift” (Connell 246).

Second “is the creation of overseas empires by the Atlantic seaboard states. Empire was a gendered enterprise from the start, initially an outcome of the segregated men’s occupations of soldiering and sea trading. Apart from few monarchs (notably Isabela and Elizabeth), the imperial states created to rule the new empires were entirely staffed by men, and developed a statecraft based on the force supplied by the organized bodies of men. Because of this the consequence was a clash over the ethics of conquest and a demand for

controls. Insatiable greed and ambition, the greatest ever seen in the world is the cause of their villainies; that extended to new emerging gender form” (Connell 247).

Third “is the growth of the cities that were the centers of commercial capitalism. Throughgoing individualism, first industrial revolution, the accumulation of wealth from trade, laving and colonies, a calculative rationality began to permeate urban culture. The entrepreneurial culture and workplaces of commercial capitalism institutionalized a form of masculinity, creating and legitimizing new forms of gendered work and power in the counting house, the ware house and the exchange. At the same period the emergence of sexual subcultures was seen in the form of; molly houses cross dressing, dancing together, and sexual intercourse with each other” (Connell 247).

Fourth “is the onset of large scale European civil war. Gentry masculinity was involved in capitalist economic relations but did not emphasize strict rational calculation in the manner of the merchants. Gentry masculinity was closely integrated with the state. The gentry provided local administration and staffed the military apparatus. In these sense gentry masculinity was emphatic and violent. License in sexual relationships, especially with women of lower class, was a prerogative of rank. It was even to a degree celebrated by the libertines. It seems that homosexual relationships were being increasingly understood as defining a specific type of man” (Connell 247).

Masculinity studies sometimes called Men's studies - is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to topics concerning men, masculinity, gender, and politics. As a relatively new field of study, men's studies was formed largely in response to, and as a critique of, an emerging men's rights movement - itself a response to both the real and perceived advantages brought to women by feminist political action - and as such, has been taught in academic settings only since the 1970s. In many universities, men's studies is a correlate to

or part of a larger women's studies or gender studies program, and as such its faculty tends to be sympathetic to or engaged in feminist politics.

In contrast to the discipline of Masculine Psychology, Men's studies programs and courses often include contemporary discussions of men's rights, feminist theory, queer theory, patriarchy, and, more generally, the social, historical, and cultural constructions of men and virility. They often discuss the issues surrounding the changing forms of male privilege, as well as the anxiety that men in developed countries face as a result of their loss of privilege and clear gender roles in light of the feminist movement. Importantly, scholars engaged in the field of Men's studies tend not to agree that this anxiety is justified, and analyze the socio-historical institutions and attitudes that have led men to assume that their power and authority should be necessarily greater than, or at least necessarily different from, that of women.

Due to its relative newness and the debate over the purpose or mission of men's studies, the boundaries and subjects of men's studies are always under debate and constantly changing. This is also due to the fact that many male and female scholars of men's studies have varied and often disagreeing politics, including feminism, pro-feminism, the men's movement, men's rights advocacy, the mythopoetic men's movement, and masculism. Some men's studies scholars also figure the loss of male privilege as a form of male oppression, pointing to women's superiority in reproductive freedom and choice, as well as archaic attitudes towards child custody and domestic violence laws that criminalize men without a jury trial. Despite this, the majorities still identify as feminist or pro-feminist, and hold that whatever gains have been made by women are still dwarfed by the inequalities they face in the home, under law, and on the job market. As well, some feminists contend that men's studies is unnecessary, as related disciplines such as sociology, history, psychology, political

science, and literature are already dominated by the theories and texts of men. Masculinity cannot be understood separately from its relation to femininity. One dynamic in the postwar growth of feminism was women's perceived need to escape from definition by masculinity and patriarchy.

The impact and influence of feminism, with its emphasis on the socially constructed nature of gender difference, and its insistence that the personal is political, constituted a challenge both to the naturalization of gender roles in mainstream male scholarship, and to its characteristic compartmentalization, that served to marginalize both 'women' and the 'domestic' sphere. Responses to this challenge that attempted to deconstruct masculinity paralleled the emergence of men's groups and organizations and publications, that combined, sometimes awkwardly, an antisexist intention with a desire to explore maleness from a man's perspective. The privileged power of heterosexual masculinity, and its reluctance to be self reflexive, meant that gay men played a significant role in these early developments.

Yet, although sexual politics had become more prominent in both the public and the academic sphere, men and masculinity did not undergo extensive analysis until the mid-1980s. Ros Coward drew attention to the continuing invisibility of men's sexuality "which is the true dark continent of this society" and commented that "controlling the look, men have left themselves out of the picture because a body defined is a body controlled" (228).

Some analyses of masculinity, by men, implied or advocated the development of a new academic area, 'men's studies'. Men's Studies was attacked for me-too-ism, self-indulgence and lack of engagement with feminism or gay politics. It was suggested that Men's Studies focused on 'men' as opposed to patriarchy, neglected issues of male-female

relations, marginalized feminism, or rendered it invisible, lacked a grounding in feminist research, and did not acknowledge its feminist roots.

Chapman and Rutherford acknowledged that “masculinity remains the great unsaid . . . the cause but still not the site of struggle” (11). Rutherford talked of men’s silences and the ways in which:

feminism has pushed men into a defensive huddle . . . men have used their silence as the best form of retaining the status quo, in the hope that the ideological formations that once sustained the myth of masculine infallibility will resurrect themselves from the fragments and produce a new mythology to hide us in. (25)

Just as the castle of the self is defended against incursion, so the fortress of masculinity has been defended, until recently, against the fierce gaze of analysis and deconstruction.

Bob Connell has argued that masculinity cannot be understood outside of its relation to femininity, and is simultaneously, “a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (qtd. in Ruper and Tosh 71). It is a relational construct, incomprehensible apart from the totality of gender relations. Recent figures such as new man, new lad, and soft lad, cannot be fully understood apart from their location in a pattern of gender and sexual relations.

The impact of the Thatcher era spawned a less optimistic analysis of the possibility of socialist-feminist transformation. Indeed a reaction against feminism could be charted and a new revisionist post-feminist feminism was being elaborated. Rosalind Coward argued that “men’s outlook, priorities and contribution to the home have remained largely unchanged. The main difference is that men are now thought to be doing more than in

previous generations. But the reality in most families is that the man's work still takes precedence" and argued that the absence of confrontation was surprising because "whatever the disagreements among feminists, there had been one point of consensus: nothing would improve the lot of women unless men themselves changed" (qtd. in Whannell 6). The backlash against feminism, the revisions of it, and the political pessimism, all suggest masculinity, structured in dominance and resistant to change. Yet there is a difference between resistance to change and immunity from it, and examination of the tensions within masculinity can be revealing.

Masculinity and Economy

Male identities are continually negotiated between various positions as men pick their way through competing demands and maintain precarious balances. Cash is prominent in many arenas of local life: at festivals, cash donations collected around the neighborhood go at the front of the procession, held aloft for all to see, celebrations are marked by giving cash gifts; a popular necklace, a string of gold sovereigns. Cash is an important sign of success and masculinity: a man is someone with liquidity, not just assets. Holding land and owning property is important, but so too is command over cash, and wealth is a central requirement in most styles of masculinity.

In the mainstream men of all communities with an eye for local status and power games, the accumulation of wealth and its display and mobilization in (often expensive) prestige enhancing spending activities go hand in hand. Importantly, accumulations and spending set performance hierarchies of manliness, and the feminization of those who are not playing the game, or far worse, lose.

Cash is magical substance. While cash, like gold, is of wide importance in the world. Cash appears like gold to have a particular gendered angle: as gold is especially

associated with women, cash appears especially linked with men wealthy men make large cash donations to temples and churches, the names and amounts recorded on notice boards and in the printed festival calendar booklets distributed to houses. When a group of men go drinking together, Rs. 100 notes will be flashed and masculine prestige gained by paying for rounds; men with money in their hands will subsidize an entire evening's drinking and eating. Male sociality demands generous spending, even excess. In this respect, it is not surprising that those who have access to and flaunt considerable amounts of cash, are commonly represented as hype masculine, an effect magnified by rumors of their feminine conquests and drinking.

Cash is than a signifier of masculine status, notes reckoning the worth of a man. This relation between man and money can be traced in several directions. A young man's value is calculated in monetary terms (how much dory he can command) on the marriage market; a mature man's value is at least partly reckoned by his earning power, concretize in bank notes, which may be left raw or converted into other forms of objectified personhood. At weddings the brides brother or cousin takes pride of place as he arrives with a black briefcase stuffed full of notes; the dowry. Since provision of dowry is officially a fraternal responsibility, the briefcase's content speaks directly of his status. Wedding gifts, presented during the ceremony are strictly gendered: women conventionally give cooking pots, household items (ornaments, tea sets) to the bride; men give cash gifts to the groom. Women's gift cling to women, via other women, to the hearth and kitchen; men's cash gifts represent something more masculine passed from male to the groom.

Masculinity Crisis!

However in the last ten years academic research has turned its attention to analyses of masculinity, and, increasingly, such analyses are examining the tensions within and

between masculinities. The concept of a crisis in masculinity has become an element of public discourse. The macho-ization of male culture in the 1980s, and the emergence of new laddism in the 1990s could be seen as aspects of this supposed 'crisis'.

The crisis is, variously, linked to work, education and the family, the media and feminism. For some, the decline of the old manufacturing base, the rise of the service sector, the growth of casualization, part time, and flexi time working, have all contributed to both male unemployment and a 'feminization' of work, whilst, for men in work, greater pressures have exacerbated work family conflicts. Recent hit films *Brassed off* and *The Full Monty* were both rooted in industrial communities hit hard by these changes, in which male self-esteem, wrecked by unemployment, has to be reconstructed.

The education of boys is seen as undermined by the growth of an antiswot culture, new lad culture and dumbing down. Reading is regarded by boys as a feminine activity, and studying is 'uncool'. The optimism of girls about the future is contrasted with the pessimism of boys. In the family, it is argued, a breakdown of parental authority, with absent fathers, single mothers, or working mothers, has resulted in a failure to instill moral values. Working women neglect the parental function, and absent fathers weaken the disciplinary process.

In public discourse then, there has been a generalized, ill-defined, and internally contradictory expression that 'maleness' is unsettled. The conditions of existence of this crisis, as outlined above, are predominantly born of the last three decades. Yet it would be a mistake to overstate either the depth, or the uniqueness of this crisis. Masculinity has never been especially stable or fixed and has always been subject to unease and internal tensions. Its boundaries have always been policed, and its parameters reinscribed (take as an example, guides to gentlemanly etiquette throughout the 18th and 19th centuries). Current masculinity is relatively secure in its dominance – it is not really a crisis in male power, but rather a

crisis in the cultural modes through which masculinity presents itself. Roper and Tosh have argued that:

Masculinity is always bound up with negotiations about power and is therefore often experienced as tenuous. It is clear that there are periods when changed social conditions frustrate on a large scale the individual achievement of masculinity and at such times the social and political fall out may be considerable. (18)

However, during the 1960s and 1970s a number of books and articles were published which argue that men are experiencing a contemporary crisis of masculinity. From the early literature it is apparent that the rebirth of feminism and the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and the subsequent rise of the gay liberation movement, eroded the silences surrounding masculinity. They began to expose the mechanisms of patriarchal power, offering both an explicit and implicit critique of patriarchy (or hegemonic masculinity). These factors, together with the impact of social, political and economic change, the rise of the mass media and the declining physical and emotional health of men, allegedly prompted a serious contemporary crisis of masculinity among white, middle-class, heterosexual men in western societies, most notably in the United States and Britain.

The masculinity crisis involves the collapse of the basic pattern by which men have traditionally fulfilled the code of masculine role behavior, namely, the good provider role, and the resultant intensification of gender role strain. In particular, there has been an intensification of what Pleck, has termed 'discrepancy strain', the strain that results when we fail to meet the expectations of the code. The major manifestations of the masculinity crisis, which have taken center stage in the public eye in the last five year or so, include, in addition to the loss of the good-provider role, the failure of the good-family-man role to

replace the good provider role, the tendency for marriages to revert to stereotyped roles, the dynamics of divorce, the treatment of men in the media, the “angry white male”, and the growth of large scale men’s rallies.

The loss of good provider role has been the central factor in the development of the masculinity crisis. White middle-class men are no longer the ‘good providers’ for their families that their fathers were, and that they expected themselves to be. With the majority of adult women in the work force, very few men are sole providers, and most are co-providers. The loss of good provider role brings white, middle class men closer to the experience of men of color and lower class who have historically been impeded from being the economic providers for their family and, consequently, have experienced severe gender role strain. The good provider role has been such an important part of the definitions of what it means to be a man that one would think that its loss would impel an immediate search for alternatives. Although some men are actively involved in constructing new definitions of masculinity that do not require devotion to work, many others seem cut up in denial. For example, men whose wives works full time, but who still consider themselves their family’s provider and justify this attitude by rationalizing that they make more money, or could make more money, or are more committed than their wives to providing for the family.

Silverstein has observed that many egalitarian marriages revert to stereotyped roles. Couples often pledge that they will be egalitarian and many do accomplish this in early stages of their marriages. But there is continual pressure to revert to the over learned stereotyped roles, which can be overwhelming at times of stress, such as the birth of the first child, or the husband being offered a new job that requires that his wife’s career take a back seat. This reversion to stereotyped roles often puts strain on the marriage, potentiates marital conflicts, and fuels the crisis of connection.

Sex-role demands

The contemporary crisis of masculinity theory is, however, clearly described by Joseph Pleck (1981) in his book *The Myth of Masculinity*. According to Pleck, men in modern societies are subjected to an unprecedented number of pressures due to social, economic, historical and political change. This has resulted in a serious crisis of identity as men attempt to meet the many conflicting and contradictory demands made of them by the male sex- role. Pleck argues that due to social, historical, economic and political change many of the requirements of the male sex-role have been rendered obsolete. However, the myths, stereotypes and social expectations persist. The male sex-role has thus become an 'invisible straitjacket' which keeps a man bound to antiquated patriarchal notions of what he must do or be in order to prove himself a man. Increasing numbers of men consequently find it difficult to conform to the traditional masculine norms and, in an attempt to resolve the apparent contradictions between the images of the past and the realities of the present, deviate from society's 'master gender stereotypes' (13). The inability to conform to social expectations for the male sex-role, and the concomitant 'deviancy', results in the experience of sex-role strain, which refers to 'felt difficulties in fulfilling role obligations' or the 'exposure of the actor to conflicting sets of legitimised role expectations such that complete fulfillment of both is realistically impossible' (8).

In short, the crisis of masculinity theory suggests that men today, more than ever, are confused about what it means to be a man, and are attempting to push beyond the rigid role prescriptions of traditional concepts of masculinity. In his analysis Brod (1987) observes that to be a man is to have a particular psychological identity, social role, place in the labour force, and sense of self. In industrial societies, 'real men' defined themselves in three ways. Firstly, they earned money in the public work force and supported their families through that

effort (the man as provider and breadwinner). Secondly, they (should) have had formal power over women and children in those families (the man as head of the house). And finally, 'real men' were unquestionably heterosexual. However, post-industrial societies disrupt such a definition of masculinity. They are heedlessly destructive of the industrial jobs that men traditionally filled, and tend to generate lower-paying service jobs that women frequently occupy.

Moreover, post-industrial cultures are extremely heterogeneous and tend to adopt the values of egalitarianism and the ideology of liberal individualism more readily, thereby making room for greater freedom for women, and offering a wider range of options regarding sexual preference and expression for both sexes. A contradiction thus exists between the hegemonic male image (patriarchal ideology) and the real conditions of men's lives; leaving men to nurse what M. Brenton refers to as a "potent patriarchal hangover" (40).

Moreover, while social, economic, historical and political change has rendered the traditional male role obsolete in some respects, the mass media (and other important socialising institutions such as the church and the education system) still propagate the old stereotypical roles for men and women. Men are thus confronted with contradictory and conflicting images of themselves, and the increasing irrelevance of the traditional roles, compounded by women's challenge to their power. While a number of complex social, economic, political and historical factors have contributed to the development of the contemporary crisis of masculinity, the most important are; first is the rebirth of feminism and the women's liberation movement; second is the gay liberation movement and the increasing visibility of homosexuality; and the third is communication revolution and the rise of popular culture.

From the literature it would appear that the rebirth of feminism and the women's liberation movement provided the primary impetus for the recent crisis of masculinity. Since definitions of masculinity are historically and socially reactive to changing definitions of femininity, it is to be expected that an indirect but inevitable consequence of a feminist questioning of what it is to be a woman would be a growing questioning of what it is to be a man. Moreover, a fundamental principle of feminist theory and criticism is a critique of masculinity, and in particular patriarchal ideology, or masculinism, as the power- base upon which institutionalised or hegemonic masculinity is founded. The 1960s saw the rebirth of two influential movements within feminism, namely the liberal tradition, which is primarily concerned with the attainment of equal rights for women, and the radical tradition, which is essentially concerned with subverting and revolutionalising existing patriarchal social structures (Bouchier, 1983; Eisenstein, 1981). Since its earliest beginnings in the 18th century, the women's movement and feminists in particular have been regarded as a subversive influence and a threat to moral values and social order. As S. Heath points out, feminism makes things unsafe for men, since it unsettles assumed positions and undoes given identities. Insofar as masculinity has traditionally been associated with male dominance over women, minorities and other men, the reality, or even the possibility, of female equality can generate anxiety in men about their masculinity.

Reaction to the women's movement and the new wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s can broadly be identified by three counter movements: the anti-feminist movement; the pro-male movement, and the pro-feminist movement. The anti-feminist movement was marked by a tendency to reverse the claims of feminism, and argued that it is women who have special social privileges and that it is in reality men who are the true victims of oppressive sex-roles. In reaction to the rebirth of the women's movement and feminism,

various men's liberation movements were formed to fight discrimination against men. The pro-male movements, often closely allied to the anti-feminist movement, saw the solution to the problem in the vigorous reassertion of traditional masculine values to counter the feminising effects of home, school and church where women dominated. The third reaction to feminism and the women's movement, although initially less influential, was the pro-feminist men's movement. During the 1980s a small, but significant group of men began to openly embrace feminist principles as a possible solution to the alleged crisis of masculinity. These movements and organisations often had a strong anti-male violence component. Ultimately, it was the pro-feminist movement which gave rise to the development of the new field of study in the 1980s and 1990s known as men's studies.

The Gay Liberation Movement And The Increasing Visibility Of Homosexuality:

Already as early as 1957, H. M. Hacker (1957) commented that the 'flight from masculinity' as seen in the alleged increase in homosexuality was a reflection of male sex-role conflict, and an index of the burdens of masculinity. Indeed, homosexuality has always been regarded as an indicator of insufficient or inadequate masculinity. Significantly, fear of homosexuality (homophobia) is an integral component of the male-sex role and patriarchal ideology. To many heterosexual men the increasing visibility of homosexuality is regarded as a threat to hegemonic masculinity and the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo. In short, within a patriarchal (essentially homo-phobic) society, homosexuality poses a fundamental challenge to conventional understandings of masculinity and femininity, and the assumptions by which heterosexuality is socially and culturally constructed as the 'natural' order of things. It therefore stands to reason that gay activists were the first contemporary group of men to address the problems of hegemonic masculinity, to apply the

political strategies of the women's liberation movement and to align with feminists on issues of sexual politics.

The communication revolution and the rise of popular culture as one of the prime sites for the reproduction and perpetuation of gender distinctions and the stereotypes and myths of patriarchal ideology, the media have played a significant role in precipitating, even fabricating, the recent 'crisis'. It may be argued that the media hold the key to social, political and cultural change, since the visibility of change makes awareness unavoidable. As a result of the media the sheer rate of change has become significant, irrespective of the content of media messages, which increasingly offer multiple, often contradictory, images of men and masculinity - from traditional machismo to the sensitive and emotionally expressive 'new man'.

In reality, it may be argued that the notion of masculinity is a myth since, as Brittan argues, there are a wide range of extremely divergent conceptions of masculinity. Since gender does not exist outside history and culture, both masculinity and femininity are continuously subject to a process of reinterpretation. Moreover, a number of masculinities coexist within a given social dynamic.

Masculinity is then local and subject to change. What does remain relatively constant is masculine ideology, or 'masculinism'. While masculinity refers to those aspects of men's behaviour that fluctuate over time (such as fashion trends and popular fads, myths, stereotypes and sex-roles), masculinism refers to the ideology that justifies and naturalises male domination (patriarchy).

One of the flaw in the crisis of masculinity theory is that it assumes that all men constitute a class, and have the same sense of collective identity, thereby over categorising

men. Clearly, all men do not have the same interests, nor do they share collective identities or the same class position.

Indeed, it may be argued that the men's liberation movements which have emerged in response to the crisis of masculinity, are inherently contradictory of their own stated aim, namely to destroy discrimination at its social roots. It is frequently classist (focusing on middle-class men), racist (focusing on white men), and sexist (focusing on heterosexual men), and makes little room for the diversity of male roles and forms of masculinity, or masculinities.

Finally, the crisis of masculinity theory assumes that all men - men in general - are in crisis. However, this thesis is far too simplistic. The crisis of masculinity would only be a crisis if the relations of gender were perceived and experienced as problematic by a significant proportion of men and not only an elite group of white, middle-class, heterosexual intellectuals, who possess the power with which to afford the indulgent exercise of liberalism.

The notion of a general crisis implies the break-down of heterosexualism and the decline of men's power and authority. It suggests that men in general believe that their traditional powers and privileges are being appropriated by women.

Therefore, the alleged crisis is nothing more than a realisation among (some) men that women and other groups have begun to make inroads into areas of control traditionally appropriated by men, implying yet another change in the power balance between the sexes and race groups. The crisis of masculinity is thus far more than the experience of sex-role strain. The so-called crisis of masculinity represents a time of renegotiating taken for granted assumptions, a shifting of the balance of power between the sexes, and a redistribution of power in human relations in response to these changes. Men's heterosexual

identities are contingent upon an array of structures and institutions. When these shift or weaken, men's dominant positions are threatened.

Adolescence in western society is traditionally seen as a difficult and challenging of life, a “disturbing ‘phase’ that young people have somehow to ‘get through’” (19). Now, according to some theorists, recent social change has made adolescence even more fraught. Contemporary life is characterized by increased anxiety about personal and environmental risk, precarious employment, rampant consumerism, greater individualization, and increased instability in. According to most observers this has had a pronounced effect on young people, either because they are most affected by such change—particularly increased family breakdown or precarious employment—or because they have not yet acquired the skills necessary to cope.

While young men and women must both negotiate these social changes, as suggested in the introduction, they are not represented as coping equally well. Youth studies scholar Anita Harris notes, “young women are often represented as simply more capable of adjusting to change than are young men.” (41). Indeed, the prevailing discourse surrounding young women in late modernity is of their proficiency, adaptability, independence, and empowerment. This sense of female empowerment is captured in the idea of “girl power.”

According to Harris:

Girlpower constructs the current generation of young women as a unique category of girls who are self-assured, living lives lightly inflected but by no means driven by feminism, influenced by the philosophy of DIY, and assuming they can have ... it all. The evidence for these new ways of being is drawn from a wide range of areas: girls' educational success; their

consumption, leisure, and fashion practices ... sexual assertiveness, professional ambitions; delayed motherhood and so on. (17)

When it comes to young men, however, the tone of media reporting (and the topics that are reported), as well as public pronouncements from politicians, commentators, and policy makers, is altogether less positive. Unlike young women—who are represented as being empowered by feminism and finding new opportunities in the changing labor market—young men are often described as being “left behind”; floundering at disproportionately afflicted by psychological conditions, or taking greater risks with their health. There is no male equivalent of “girl power.”

Tanner has been particularly outspoken on this matter, and has contributed several newspaper columns on the topic Masculinity Crisis. In one newspaper article, he argues, “All around us [. . .] we can see the rage, the alienation, disaffection and disconnection from our younger men. Ultimately, this manifests itself in a range of antisocial behavior, including violence and drug abuse” (11).

In this way, we can conclude that, in late capitalism, economic power as a definitive term has replaced the old notions of body-located masculinity which was based on the notion of muscular body and courage. It reveals the shifting notions of masculinity that make masculinity an arbitrary social construct.

III. Economy as a Determining Element in the Construction of Masculinity of Characters:

In *Topdog/Underdog* Lincoln, a previously married and relatively prosperous hustler, has been left by his wife and is now working in a mall, dressing up as the historical Lincoln; his brother, Booth, has likewise been abandoned by his girlfriend, Grace, and is wholly dependent on Lincoln for money other than what he can make pawning stolen goods. Both characters are in crisis - economically and with respect to their masculinity - and Parks's notion of wealth is both a cause of and a metaphor for the crisis.

Set in a seedy urban studio apartment, *Topdog/Underdog* explores the relationship between two brothers, Lincoln and Booth, so named as a joke by their father. A former master of the con game three-card monte, Lincoln earns his living by donning whiteface and impersonating Abraham Lincoln in a local arcade, where patrons pay to re-create the former president's assassination with an assortment of cap guns. He has recently been kicked out by his former wife, Cookie, and has moved in with his younger brother, Booth. Nicknamed 3-Card, Booth earns his living by stealing, or "boosting" as he calls it, what he needs. He dreams of becoming a more accomplished and celebrated dealer of three-card monte than his brother. The first half of the play develops this central conflict: Lincoln is content to work at the arcade, earn his paycheck, and take his dose of whiskey, which the brothers affectionately call "med-sin," while Booth dreams of the prestige, the money, and the women that could be his, with Lincoln's help, as a hustler of three-card monte.

Lincoln resists Booth's attempts to draw him back into the world of three-card monte. He left the game when his partner was murdered, and though he resents his position at the arcade, he is glad to earn an honest living and even takes a certain pride in his work. In a scene that is both humorous and foreboding, Lincoln practices his arcade routine with

Booth, who suggests that he make the assassination more dramatic. Lincoln experiments with several groans and gestures as Booth pretends to shoot him. In contrast, Booth finds Lincoln's job demeaning and tries repeatedly to persuade Lincoln to pick up the cards so they can work as a team. The siblings take different approaches to their struggle for survival; when Lincoln receives his paychecks, one of the first items in the budget is the bottle of whiskey that takes their minds off their dismal surroundings and their bleak prospects.

In their cramped and dilapidated quarters, Lincoln and Booth relate to each other in primarily combative ways. Though they share lighthearted, even mutually respectful moments, as when Lincoln brings home his paycheck, or when Booth shows Lincoln the new suits that he has boosted from a department store, the brothers exhibit an increasing level of tension in their relationship. Several elements establish the foundation for their conflict and foreshadow an ultimately violent confrontation between the brothers: the details of their family history, remembered differently by each brother; Lincoln's playful but biting sarcasm with regard to Booth's love life; the implication that Booth has betrayed Lincoln with his former wife; and Lincoln's continued refusal through most of the play to teach Booth the secrets of three-card monte. Moreover, the play's central image of a president and his assassin contribute to the uneasiness of the play.

Lincoln returns home in the fifth scene of *Topdog/Underdog* to find Booth expecting a visit from his girlfriend. Lincoln has just lost his job at the arcade and squandered the money from his final paycheck. While he is still hopeful of his girlfriend's imminent arrival, Booth slowly realizes that she has stood him up. In this moment, when both brothers are vulnerable, they begin to discuss their past: the departure of their parents, the \$500 left to each brother by their parents, and their efforts to support each other in the wake of their abandonment. "I didnt mind them leaving cause you was there. Thats why Im hooked on us

working together,” Booth says. “If we could work together it would be like old times.”

Lincoln finally relents and decides to show Booth the tricks of three-card monte.

Encouraged at first, Booth soon discovers that he has much to learn and, when the lesson is over, he storms out of the apartment with his revolver to search for the woman who stood him up. “Thuh world puts its foot in yr face and you dont move,” Booth says in response to Lincoln’s objections. “You tell thuh world tuh keep on stepping. But Im my own man, Link. I aint you.”

Lincoln returns home in the play’s final scene with a pocket full of winnings, having made a successful and lucrative return to the streets. Drunk and self-satisfied, Lincoln relents when Booth suggests that they wager money on a game of three-card monte. Lincoln puts up the money he hustled during the previous evening, and Booth wagers his legacy of five hundred dollars, the inheritance that he received from his mother. Overly confident and eager to prove himself the equal of his brother, Booth realizes too late that he has been hustled and picks the wrong card. As Lincoln prepares to open the tied stocking holding Booth’s money, Booth reveals that he has killed his girlfriend. Lincoln offers to return his winnings, but Booth flies into a rage and orders him to open the stocking. As Lincoln prepares to cut it open, Booth grabs him from behind and holds a gun to his neck; and after a slight hesitation, he pulls the trigger. “Ima take back my inheritance too,” Booth says as he picks up the stocking. “It was mines anyhow. Even when you stole it from me it was still mines cause she gave it to me.” He kneels beside the body of his brother and starts to sob, letting the stocking slip to the floor.

There is a close link between the phenomenon like, the present economic paradigm, masculinism and masculinity. The present economic paradigm promotes and valorizes competition, ambition and achievement. Masculinism, therefore, lends itself very nicely to

the ethos of capitalism. In the present economic paradigm it is not the biological men, but hegemonic masculinity and masculinism which are at a premium. Those men are admired and promoted who can grab power and use it for self-promotion and for the promotion of their production and ideology. In this economic religion where profit is god, the lies, false accounting, bribing and corruption are legitimate if they get you contracts, markets, investors, jobs. Corporate crimes are common place.

Even the relation of the characters with their girlfriend is maintained by the material things which are stolen in Booth's words 'boosted'. As Booth says:

Booth: I got her this ring today. Diamond. Well. Diamond-esque, but it looks just as good as the real thing. Asked her what size she wore. She say 7 so I go boost a size 6 and a half, right? So it to her and she loves it I shove it on her finger it's a tight fit right, so she cant just take it off on a whim, like she did the last one I gave her. Smooth, right? (10)

Booth had lost his girlfriend because of his economic status caused by the employment problem at the past. He reveals the past with a sad tone cursing the poverty. As Booth speaks:

Booth: [...] we was together 2 years. Then we broke up. I had my little employment difficulty and she needed time to think. (43)

Same is the condition of Lincoln though he seems to be a bit more honest than his brother Booth. In the disguise of Honest Abe he also cheats a child in the bus. As he describes:

Lincoln: [...]so Im ridng the bus home. And this kid asked me for my autograph. I pretended I didn't hear him at first. I'd had a long day. But he kept asking. Theyd just done Lincoln in history class and he knew all about

him, he'd been to the arcade but, I dunno, for some reason he was tripping cause there was Honest Abe right beside him on the bus. I wanted to tell him to go fuck himself. But then I got a look at him. A little rich kid. Born on easy street, you know the type. (11) [...] all he had was 20. so I took the 20 and told him to meet me on the bus tomorrow and Honest Abe would give him the change. (12)

Booth : whatd you do with thuh 20?

Lincoln : bought drinks at Luckys. A round for everybody. They got a kick out of the getup. (12)

By this conversation we come to know that his behaviour is compelled by his habit of drinking and playing the role of good provider.

Held in tension throughout *Topdog/Underdog* is the relationship between the personal psychodramas of the two brothers and the larger issues of economics, race, and masculinity. In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson famously articulated the split between modernism and postmodernism in Lacanian terms as the "breakdown in the signifying chain" (26); in other words, between the Symbol of money and its Real or material support. If we apply Jameson's economic diagnosis to *Topdog/Underdog*, we see how late capitalism also affects constructions of "masculinity"; if masculinity is based on economic worth and economics become unhinged from their Real value, then that notion of masculinity itself becomes increasingly difficult to maintain.

In late capitalism name of anyone has to be taken in accordance to the society and the interest of the employers, since they are to speak the name to make one work. In this drama too the same incident happens to Booth, so Lincoln suggests him to choose an easy name to pronounce:

Lincoln: you gonna call yrself something African? That be cool. Only pick something that's easy to spell and pronounce, man, cause you know, some of them Afrcan names, I mean, ok, Im down with the power to the people thing, but, no ones gonna hire you if they cant say yr name. and somme of them fellas who got they African names, no one can say they names and they cant say they names neither. I mean, you don't want yr new handle to obstruct yr employment possibilities. (14)

By locating the drama in a one-bedroom apartment and focusing on only two characters - brothers Lincoln and Booth – Parks forces us to confront the vast issues of racial and economic inequalities in America through their impact on the psyches of two characters. In this way, Parks transforms the "larger" notions of postmodernity, latecapitalism, and racism into psychoanalytic and diagnostic tools for studying both her characters and society at large. *Topdog/Underdog* is both a social drama confronting the issues of racism and classism in modern America, and a psychodrama in its focus on the individual unravelling of Lincoln and Booth as well as of their relationship. And, in fact, it could be no other way. Parks suggests that, for the black man in a racist and classist society, the psychological and the social are inextricably linked. His assessment of his worth depends on his ability to identify both with the symptom of his oppression and with the symbol of recognition: money.

Parks is undoubtedly invested in a deconstruction of history and the ability to write and rewrite it, she is also aware that there is actually a material history, and although we can't necessarily define it, it has very real consequences - especially when that history is the economic and social history of blacks in the United States - for the lives of her characters. That Lincoln is a poor black man who works in a mall and dresses up as a dead white

president speaks to Parks's playing both with history and with the usual hallmarks of an aesthetic postmodernity - pastiche, parody, and so on. However, *Topdog/Underdog* is rooted first and foremost in the economic and political reality shaping their lives – in other words, the postmodernity of Lincoln's position is a result of the very real material, economic conditions in which he lives.

Lincoln's job as a three-card monte player, his employment in a mall, and his subsequent lay-off due to cheaper, mechanical labour, through Booth's attempt to move from petty thieving to card hustling, Parks gives us a powerful representation of the American de-industrialized worker. More importantly, Parks is able to move from the often overly abstract theories of Marxist postmodernism into the personal psychological, while still maintaining the complexity and specificity of her characters.

Since the work of Lincoln is mere mechanical, because of the postmodern development. He can be easily replaced by an equipment or a machine. He faces the same problem that endangered his job security:

Lincoln: [...] they all get so into it. I do my best for hem. And now they talking bout cutting me, replacing me with uh wax dummy. (50)

Even he does the work with a good manner fulfilling the given directions by the boss, he is threatened:

Lincoln: I come in there right in time like I do everyday and that motherfucker gives me some songs and dance about cutbacks and too many folks complaining. (50)

As Hutcheon argues, "Postmodernism paradoxically manages to legitimize culture (high and mass) even as it subverts it" (15), then it also subverts our notion of history, while legitimizing it. In this sense, postmodernism has a regenerative potential.

When Parks revisits the same themes of a black family's relationships to American history in *Topdog/Underdog*, the site of history is stripped of its potentially transformative or liberating character and history is transformed, reconceptualized as that which has laid the economic and social groundwork for the racism and wage-slavery in the lives of her very contemporary characters. No longer does the "postmodern absence of a Real in history" allow the previously disenfranchised to construct a history through acts of writing, representing. Instead, the job of the written word in *Topdog/Underdog* is to confront history at the site of the present. If *The America Play* conforms to Hutcheon's model of using parody to interrogate our relationship to history, then *Topdog/Underdog* marks a Jamesonian transition from a parodic postmodern aesthetic to an economically critical one. In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Jameson argues that society has "begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve" (125). In other words, Jameson is giving up the possibility of reconstructing history and thus the potential productivity of postmodernity. The unhinging of Symbolic money from its Real value is also the unhinging of Symbolic History from its content. Hutcheon has taken Jameson to task for being too narrow in his ideas of history. She complains that Jameson's "lament" of the loss of history in postmodernism is actually a lament for the loss of "Marxist *History*" (113). But what Hutcheon calls "Marxist history" is really a materialist history, and Jameson's radical break from thinkers like Hutcheon demonstrates how this is so in three specific ways. First, by locating the modern/postmodern shift in economics, he re-inscribes the need for material factors in cultural paradigms. Second, instead of trying to *prescribe* a vision of postmodernism, his writings are diagnostic; he refuses to excuse postmodernism any more than a doctor would

try to excuse bronchitis or influenza and, in this way, Jameson is able to articulate a need for change. Finally, Jameson radically abandons the hope that is found throughout Hutcheon's work. In *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, Slavoj Zizek makes the important point that the leftist rhetoric which trumpets that "another world is possible" is perhaps what is actually holding us back from radical social change, when he asks, "What if it is only full acceptance of the desperate closure of the present global situation that can push us towards actual change?" (14). In other words, the invocation of hope is a crutch that undermines our recognition of the need for change; it is only through Jameson's radical acceptance of the (fore)closure of capitalism that we can actually see the need for change. It is precisely this desperation that Parks captures so powerfully in *Topdog/Underdog*.

In *Topdog/Underdog*, the setting moves from a theme park to an urban slum and focuses on the lives of two poor black men - Booth and Lincoln - who are both economically and socially removed from the "productive" sector of society. Booth, a low level thief, decides he wants to move up in the world by following in Lincoln's footsteps as a card hustler. Lincoln, following the death of his friend, has retired from three card monte and has taken a job dressing up as the historical Lincoln at a mall, where people once again pay to pretend to shoot him. *Topdog/Underdog* uses a more traditional, linear narrative in order to change the focus from the "cultural images" of history to the economic and psychological repercussions of the past.

Whole second scene is about the characters' happiness and their celebration. How economic prosperity brings the relations together can be easily seen. Though their happiness is brought up by the stolen goods and the weekly payment of Lincoln, it is very fragile:

Booth: yeah, I boosted em. Theys stole from a big-ass department store. That store takes more money in one day than we will in our whole life. I stole and

I stole generously. I got one for me and I got one for you. Shoes, belts, shirts, ties, shocks, in the shoes and everything. Got that screen too. [...] just cause I aint good as you at cards don't mean I cant do nothing. (28)

Here Booth not only justifies his stealing but also challenges Lincoln that he is also capable of earning something.

In *Topdog/Underdog*, we can re-imagine the actual Lincoln pageant as this perpetual present, where the customers come in every week to shoot their president and the past returns not only as a farce but as a nostalgic looping of an event bearing almost no relationship to the historical instant. As Lincoln explains, "People like they historical shit in a certain way. They like it to unfold the way they folded it up. Neatly like a book. Not raggedy and bloody and screaming" (52). However, by bringing us behind the scenes of the pageant, Parks uses repetition and revision to tear history from the book. The historical pageant is now stripped to reveal what's behind it: namely, a black man - paid awful wages to dress up as the white man who "emancipated" him - who is being threatened with a mechanical replacement. The nostalgia for the present is replaced with a concrete symbol of our time. History is no longer relegated to books or theme parks but is revisioned in the current socio-economic conditions of the man who plays Lincoln. This connection is both symbolic (via their shared name) and also causal. (Parks shows the history of slavery to be directly linked to the economic slavery of black men in America, as is represented through the double signification of Lincoln.) By changing the linguistic relationship of the Lincoln of history to the Lincoln of the present, Parks radically alters our relationship to Lincoln and America at large and brutally re-inscribes history onto the perpetual present.

For Jameson, the link between economics, culture, and history is likewise a linguistic one. Our conceptions of the breakdown of form and content in economics, of past and

present in history, occur at the level of language. In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," he writes, "For Lacan, the experience of temporality, human time, past, present, memory, the persistence of personal identity over months and years - this existential or experiential feeling of time itself - is also an effect of language" (119). As with the doubling of Lincoln's name, Parks is always exploring the ways in which we use and are used by language. Motivated by disgust with Lincoln's job and a desire to have him as a business partner, Booth attempts to convince Lincoln to return to cards:

Lincoln: "I aint going back to that, bro. I aint going back"

Booth: "You play Honest Abe. You aint going back but you going all the way back. Back to way back then when folks was slaves and shit". (22)

This collapse in time plays off a linguistic inability to decipher between "back" (two months ago) and "back" (140 years ago). Language's collapse of history - its inability to extinguish past pasts and recent pasts - also collapses differences between historical slavery and modern wage slavery; and thus aligns Lincoln's job with that of the slave. When Lincoln takes the job as "Lincoln," he is told that he will "have to wear a little makeup and accept less than what they would offer a - another guy" (29). What Lincoln doesn't say, but Booth does, is that "another" guy is always white. And, indeed, there is something more than a bit ironic about a poor black man dressing up as the supposed emancipator of black slaves for an income that barely allows two men to share a bachelor suite.

bell hooks, in "Reconstructing Black Masculinity," connects contemporary black masculine psychological enslavement to traditional "slavery," when she argues, "The image of black masculinity that emerges from slave narratives is one of hardworking men who longed to assume full patriarchal responsibility for families and kin" (*Black Looks* 90). In other words, emancipation from slavery and entrance into American society demanded the

internalization of white ideals of masculinity, where the man provided for the family, which the woman raised. However, as problematic as this idea is when jobs are available, it becomes all but untenable when there are no economic opportunities. And, as late capitalism has continued to devalue product-based labour (and the 1950s American, and largely suburban, ideal of respectable working-class labour, in general), conceptions of masculine power have changed from primarily economic to phallogentric. Or, as bell hooks puts it, "[The black man's] ability to use that penis in the arena of sexual conquest could bring him as much status as being a wage earner and provider" (94). However, for Booth, economics still figures in constructions of sexuality. Booth draws a direct line between Lincoln's working for a white man and impotency, when, comparing his own desire to play three-card with Lincoln's preference to keep working at the mall, he erupts and calls Lincoln, "you shiteating motherfucking pathetic limp dick uncle tom" (21). While hooks locates the change of power from pocket to penis, so to speak. Booth reminds us that, under capitalism, economics is always involved in constructions of masculinity, through its associations with power and success.

Masculinity and manhood are measured by the determination and confidence too, though they are not the only components. Lincoln's manhood comes to the crisis when he loses the hope of life while talking with Booth in scene one. While playing the guitar he sings:

Lincoln: my dear mother left me, my father gone away
 my dear mother left me and my fathers gone away
 I don't got no money, I don't got no place to stay!
 My best girl, she threw me out into the street
 My favourite horse, they ground him into meet

Im feeling cold from my head down to my feet!!

My luck was bad but now it turned to worse

My luck was bad but now it turned to worse

Don't call me up a doctor just call me up a hearse!!! (23)

His hopelessness is clearly shown with this song.

It is in the works of Fanon that we find our clearest articulation of the difficulties disempowered men have trying to grapple with the complexities of their own relationships with women while struggling to secure economic and physical freedom in times of decolonization. In her essay, "Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, The Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*," Gwen Bergner catalogues the ways in which Fanon locates women, and especially racialized women, as "objects of exchange in the homosocial, heterosexual colonial economy" (85). In other words, the ability to obtain and control women is symbolic of the ability to obtain and control money, and by extension, power. Fanon is unable to deal with the effects of colonialism on women's economic and sexual choices because he needs women's desires to come from subconscious spaces, which men's projects of decolonization attempt both to free and to define.

Relation with women is managed with the status of themselves economically:

Booth: how you gonna get a women if you don't got a phone? (31) [...] she don't call you just doing a preliminary survey of the property. Shit, Link, you don't know nothing no more. She gives you her number and she she asks for yrs. You give her yr number. The phone number of yr home. Therby telling hre three things:

- 1) you got a home, that is, you aint no smooth talking smooth dressing homeless joe;

2) that you is in possession of a telephone and a working telephone number which is to say that you got thuh cash and thuh wherewithal to acquire for yr self the worlds must revolutionary communication apparatus and you together enough to pay yr bills!

(32)

In fifth scene Parks gives a setting for the dating between Booth and Grace though she doesn't come. Booth is extremely happy to meet Grace.

Black women, then, must either align their desires with those of their black brothers or be considered neurotic victims of colonialism. The impetus behind these fears are eloquently laid out by bell hooks, who points out that "[m]uch black male anti-feminism is linked to a refusal to acknowledge that the phallogocentric power black men wield over black women is 'real' power, the assumption being that only the power white men have that black men do not have is real" (*Black Looks* 108). Once women have to be accounted for, black men confront not only issues of racial oppression but the impact their success or failure has on black women. Furthermore, what effect does this structure have on black women and what structures are black women themselves being forced into? All Fanon can reply is that, of the woman of colour, "I know nothing about her" (180). If Fanon's silence demands the question, Parks's omission provides a partial answer. Women are completely absent from this play. While they are mentioned frequently, not once do they appear. They literally are signifiers, symbols of the brothers' failed attempts to achieve a stable masculinity.

Thus, when Booth talks about his "fuck books," he explains that it's out of a need "for unresolved sexual release. I'm a hot man. I aint apologizing for it" (45). He compares himself with Lincoln: "[w]hen you don't got a woman you just sit there. Letting yr shit fester" (45). His insistent comparisons of his own virility with Lincoln's impotence are

nothing less than an often desperate assertion of his manhood. When he claims that the woman he is trying to get back together with, Grace, "[L]et me do her how I wanted. And no rubber" (41), when Lincoln and Booth both swear they use Magnum condoms for "the larger man"(42), and when Booth gets stood up and claims the next day that it was all a misunderstanding and "Grace got down on her knees"(86). What we are seeing, as hooks explains, is the compensatory substitution of one form of masculine power for another. In lieu of being a man in the economic sense, Booth tries to assert his manliness through sex. This is especially poignant if we consider the doubling of Grace, as "Grace," the person Booth desires, and "grace," the synonym for salvation; for Booth, the two are actually conflated. As Shawn-Marie Garnett points out, Parks insists that all her plays "share one vital quality: 'the yearning for salvation'" (134). Booth's desire for Grace is at once sexual and symbolic: he wants to have sex with Grace, but that sexual act represents the salvation of his masculinity. The absence of Grace from this play, then, signifies both Booth's failure sexually and also the failure of his sense of self. In fact, all of Booth's stories about Grace's coming back to him are a lie, a lie he uses to cover up, on the symbolic level, his failed masculinity and, on the literal level, his murdering her in response to her rejecting him. Booth, by killing Grace, by silencing his black sister, sinks deeper into the traps of racist society, further reducing the possibility that grace will enter his life.

This doubling (and even tripling) of names occurs throughout *Topdog/Underdog*. If Grace is "named" by the desiring male gaze (in this case, the desire for sex and salvation), then Lincoln and Booth are "named" by their economic roles (in a joke by their father). However, in discussing the importance of names in *Topdog/Underdog*, it is crucial to recognize Parks's insistence that this is a story about two brothers who are incidentally named after the president of the United States and his assassin. While we have to take these

words at least slightly tongue-in-cheek, it is important to heed her warning that Lincoln and Booth are not stereotypes or archetypes; they are brothers, workers, fighters, lovers - they are complete characters and need to be treated as such. But perhaps we can reconcile this with our own desires to construct meaning if we thread our study through Žižek's observation that "[n]aming is necessary but it is, so to speak, necessary afterwards, retroactively, once we are already 'in it'". In this sense, then, Parks's characters are not as they are as a result of their names; rather, as a result of their actions, their names are imbued with meaning and in *Topdog/Underdog*, the importance of naming resurfaces time and again. While Booth is contemplating a name change, Lincoln warns him not to change his name to "something they can't say... I mean you don't want your new handle to obstruct your employment possibilities" (14), an extremely ironic comment, considering that Booth chooses the name three-card, a name that *is* his new-found employment; furthermore, it is positively uncanny that Lincoln is named (one might even say predestined) for the paid job he takes on. In a world where even our names - our symbolic identities - are formed through the economic, it is unsurprising that the rest of our lives and relationships are also formed and altered by class.

In *where we stand: class matters*, hooks takes up the psychological implications of a society where people are valued through money. She writes that:

Our nation is full of young people, especially teenagers, who deny the reality of class, even as they identify solely with the values and mores of a predatory ruling class. Children from poor backgrounds are isolated and self-isolated because being poor is always and only a cause for shame. (84)

Lincoln and Booth both see poverty as a source of shame and are also without class allegiance. Lincoln muses that, while playing three-card, not only did they "take" tourists,

but they also "took a father for the money he was gonna get his new kids a bike with and he cried in the street when we vanished. We took a mother's welfare check" (55). Even within the family, solidarity is contingent on economics. Every Thursday, Booth tells Lincoln, "Yr lucky I let you stay" (15); and every Friday, Lincoln is welcome because "[e]very Friday you come home with yr paycheck" (15). This lack of allegiance is even more disturbing because the entire system of economics that circulates throughout this text is a metaphor for, and an extension of, violence. As a hustler who "plays" welfare mothers, Lincoln is engaging in economic violence against his community, a violence that is finally returned physically when his partner, Sonny, is shot. This literal act of violence makes Lincoln change jobs to one where he is the object both of the symbolic violence of being "shot" at all day and of economic violence: he is penalized with a wage deduction for his skin colour and he lives under the threat that his job will be outsourced to a wax dummy. Eventually Lincoln is laid off, and he returns to three-card for one last game. This time, the customer isn't someone on the street; it's his brother, and when the game back-fires and Booth finds himself played, he kills Lincoln.

This collapse of symbolic into economic and literal violence is, Jameson argues, the foundation of late capitalism, and it is only through the materiality of violence that the immateriality of our economic system can be supported: "this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror" (5). If the symbolic violence of Lincoln's jobs (Lincoln as both target and hustler who targets) represents this postmodern culture of money that is separated from the material, then it

expresses not only the "blood, torture, death, and terror" of American foreign policy but also that of America's domestic policy.

Indeed, when Lincoln quits the economically profitable business of hustling and fails to make money working legitimately, his failure is filtered through metaphors of sex and violence. Lincoln's mall job is based on guns that don't shoot, and, throughout the play. Booth tells Lincoln that Cookie left him because he "couldn't get it up" (93). Considering that both Lincoln and Booth claim to use "Magnum" condoms "for the larger man" (42), Booth is effectively telling Lincoln his magnum won't shoot, or, to take it one step further, that it won't even cock. However, there is one place where Lincoln is not impotent. Lincoln tells Booth that "the customer is actually called the 'Mark'" (71), and when Lincoln wins money off Booth at the climax of the play, his magnum fires, and he hits his mark. Lincoln argues that his role as Lincoln is different from his role in street hustling because "[when people know the real deal it aint a hustle" (22). But Booth doesn't know the real deal, and Lincoln hustles Booth out of his money. This act of hustling not only takes \$500 from Booth but also transfers "manhood" back from Booth to Lincoln. This play on phalluses and guns is furthered through both Booth's claim that he slept with Lincoln's wife and his actual shooting of Lincoln. Both of Booth's magnums work, and through the metaphor of the penis as gun, sex too becomes a violent act.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon claims that the "Oedipus complex is far from coming into being among Negroes" (151-52). This is a world where a brother will play a brother for money, and, in the very use of the word "brother," we see the further entanglement of economics and race and family trauma. On the one hand, instead of Booth's taking out his anger on the system that is oppressing him, he, instead, plays another ghettoized black "brother," who is as poor and trapped as Booth himself. David Marriott, in

his study of psychoanalysis and race, points out that "not only did [Fanon] choose to question the universality of oedipal neuroses, but he also refused the rigid connection between the family and social consciousness. These two refusals, consisted in an acknowledgement of the colonial influence on kinship and social ties" (110). From the "predestined" tragedy in their names to their sexual/economic power relations, Lincoln and Booth act out a sort of Oedipal psychodrama and one that rigidly connects the family and social consciousness, but, as in Fanon, the connection between social and familial crisis is one not of analogy but of cause and effect. While we are not shown social consciousness, that consciousness is the unconscious of the brothers. It is social consciousness that creates the conditions within which the whole family reacts (and here, I think, we can assume that this also explains the absence of the parents); it is the rage of disempowerment and loss, that moves Booth to kill his brother, and, in this way, the burden of responsibility for Lincoln's death lies at least as much on the shoulders of systemic and economic racism as it does on Booth.

However, even the notion of brothers is called into question. As Lincoln points out, at precisely the point when Booth puts his money on the table, "I know we *brothers*, but is we really brothers, you know, blood brothers or not...?" (103). This is a world without known or stable fathers, and thus the Oedipus complex, instead of conforming to the traditional paternal paradigm of the white, Freudian psychodrama, is acted out between the maybe-brothers. It is also a world without mothers, and it is incredibly important that, when both parents vanished, they gave their kids money, literally putting monetary signifiers in place of their family roles; the entire Oedipus complex in *Topdog/Underdog* is acted out through economic signifiers. At first, Lincoln is connected to his father through his involvement in his father's affairs - he tells Booth that "one of his ladies liked me so I would

do her after he'd done her" (90). But when the father leaves, he gives Lincoln \$50, changing the link from sexual to economic and, in this sense, Lincoln's spending the money symbolizes his getting rid of, and perhaps even identifying with, and the role of the father. If Lincoln is associated with the father, then Booth is associated with the mother through the \$500 inheritance their mother gave him before she left - money Booth does not spend in order symbolically to maintain his maternal connection. When Lincoln wins Booth's inheritance, he both reasserts his claim to manhood and usurps Booth's connection to their mother. Booth does the only thing he can to regain his money, his link to his mother, and his manhood - he shoots Lincoln. And at the risk of further arguing for Oedipal predestination. I would say that Lincoln appears to spend the entire play preparing to die. His refusal to go back to cards is based on the connection he makes, through Sonny, between cards and violence. In his song, Lincoln sings, "My luck was bad but now it turned to worse/Don't call me up a doctor, just call me up a hearse" (23).

The first time we see Lincoln is when he enters the room and Booth pulls a gun on him; Booth asks Lincoln, "You ever wonder if someones gonna come in there with a real gun? A real gun with real slugs?" (48). And when Lincoln practises getting shot, Booth is terrified because "it was looking too real" (52). So, what do we make of this? Is this a Greek foreshadowing of the tragic Oedipal drama? Perhaps - but I want to conclude this essay by arguing that his death is also part of something far more complex: the complete collapse of the Symbolic and the Real - the annihilation of the symptom.

Right before Booth shoots Lincoln, Lincoln complains that he is unable to open the stocking of money, which apparently never has been opened. He taunts Booth, "She coulda been jiving you, bro. Jiving you that there really *was* money in this thing" (106). Booth replies, "We know what's in it. Don't open it" (106). But Lincoln keeps trying, and this

makes Booth crazy. Why? It has nothing to do with the actual money - after all. Booth has never opened the stocking. Rather, for Booth, the money in the stocking is, to return to Zizek, a symbol *with* Imaginary and Real support - it is Booth's symptom, and when Lincoln attempts to cut open the money, he threatens the symptom by threatening to collapse the tension among the Symbolic/Imaginary/Real. This causes Booth himself to collapse. He tells Lincoln, "I popped her. Grace" (107), collapsing the distinction between sex and violence, between the Symbolic Magnum condoms and the Real magnum gun. He also tells Lincoln, "That Booth shit is over. 3-Cards thuh man now" (108), collapsing the distinction between the Real of his own personal content and his Symbolic economic form. Furthermore, does not this collision between Booth and the stocking mirror the collision Fanon talks about when the black man encounters himself through the white man? Is not that tearing off of the white mask analogous to the tearing open of the stocking - an item that is also doubled in its meaning if we consider the proliferation of pop-culture images of black men wearing stockings as masks in hold-ups. In *Enjoy Your Symptom*, Zizek writes that "wearing a mask actually *makes us* what we feign to be" (34). To pull off a mask, then, is to reveal not a truth but the abyss, and so Booth shoots Lincoln before he can open the stocking, in a desperate attempt to preserve the mask, the symptom.

Lincoln realizes that no mimicry will make one difference. One remains the same even he wears different cloths and speaks differently:

Lincoln: I said to myself that's exactly wht I would do: wear it out and then leave it hanging there and not come back. But until then, I would make a living at it. But it don't make me. Worn suit coat, not even worn by the fool that im supposed to be playing, but making fools out of all those folks who come crowding in for they chance to play at something great. Fake beard.

Top hat. Don't make me into no Lincoln I was Lincoln on my own. Before any of that. (30)

Yet, in this desperate attempt to ward off total psychic annihilation, Booth implicitly acknowledges that the stocking has already lost its meaning. Even if he prevents the opening of the stocking, in his panic, in his willing ties to shoot Lincoln, Booth faces the disjunction between the Symbolic object (money) and its Real value (his connection with his mother), and in doing so, empties the money of its Real value, collapses it into pure Symbol, In this last shot. Booth loses his symptom, his brother, and, indeed, his ability to use language. Language fails. All he can do at the end is let out a helpless wail.

It is not predestination that has led to this tragedy but the confluence of economic degradation, systemic racism, and definitions of masculinity inscribed from without. In the speech, "What America Would Be Like without Blacks," Ralph Ellison asserted that "whatever else the true American is, he is also somehow black. Materially, psychologically and culturally, part of the nation's heritage is Negro American and whatever it becomes will be shaped in part by the Negro's presence." The moment the shot leaves Booth's gun, Parks's social diagnosis is complete, and it is a diagnosis not of what is black but of what is American. The end of *Topdog/ Underdog* is a failure - the game fails, language fails, performativity fails. This is not to say that the words, the text, do not matter, but rather that their transformative power can't exist beyond the pressures of material, social, and economic conditions. In *Topdog/ Underdog*, Parks comes up against the limits of language and the limits of performance but, in doing so, begins the necessary project of rebuilding the relationship between literature and politics, between histories and the Real.

IV. Conclusion

Parks is one of the most highly acclaimed African-American woman playwrights in contemporary theater. Her use of repetition and revision to re-examine and reconfigure Eurocentric historical episodes is lauded for providing an Afro-centric history and identity—elements that are largely missing from the Eurocentric historical record. Parks uses language reminiscent of African-American dialects and vernacular to give multiple meanings to the spoken word and expose the hidden message behind the dialogue of her characters. Often depicting and exaggerating black stereotypes, Parks draws attention to their invalidity and the ignorance upon which they are based. Parks's plays are noted for their originality, non-linear progression of time, poetic dialogue, political and social agendas, and depiction of the search for identity

The Protagonist of the play, *Topdog/Underdog*, Lincoln, though a previously married and relatively prosperous hustler, has been left by his wife Cookie and is now working in a mall, dressing up as the historical Lincoln. Booth, brother to Lincoln has likewise been abandoned by his girlfriend, Grace, because of some economic problem and is wholly dependent on Lincoln for money other than what he can make pawning stolen goods. Both characters are in crisis - economically and with respect to their masculinity.

As I have already mentioned that, there is a close link between the phenomenon like, the present economic paradigm and masculinity. The present economic paradigm promotes and valorizes competition, ambition and achievement. Masculinism, therefore, lends itself very nicely to the ethos of capitalism. In the present economic hegemonic masculinity and masculinism which are at a premium paradigm rather than the biological men. Those men are admired and promoted who can grab power and use it for self-promotion and for the promotion of their production and ideology.

Lincoln and Booth both see poverty as a source of shame and are also without class allegiance. Lincoln muses that, while playing three-card, not only did they "take" tourists, but they also "took a father for the money he was gonna get his new kids a bike with and he cried in the street when we vanished. We took a mother's welfare check" (55). Even within the family, solidarity is contingent on economy. Every Thursday, Booth tells Lincoln, "Yr lucky I let you stay" (15); and every Friday, Lincoln is welcome because "[e]very Friday you come home with yr paycheck" (15). This lack of allegiance is even more disturbing because the entire system of economy that circulates throughout this text is a metaphor for, and an extension of, violence. As a hustler who "plays" welfare mothers, Lincoln is engaging in economic violence against his community, a violence that is finally returned physically when his partner, Sonny, is shot. This literal act of violence makes Lincoln change jobs to one where he is the object both of the symbolic violence of being "shot" at all day and of economic violence: he is penalized with a wage deduction for his skin colour and he lives under the threat that his job will be outsourced to a wax dummy. Eventually Lincoln is laid off, and he returns to three-card for one last game. This time, the customer isn't someone on the street; it's his brother, and when the game back-fires and Booth finds himself played, he kills Lincoln.

As they lack their access to the economic power relation because of their poverty, both characters Lincoln and Booth often pretend to be rich and involve into mimesis of rich people. Such activities of these characters show a nexus between economic power and masculinity in Late Capitalism. In Late Capitalism, economic power as a definitive term has replaced the old notions of body-located masculinity which was based on the notion of muscular body and courage. It reveals the shifting notions of masculinity that make masculinity an arbitrary social construct.

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