The Double as Failed Masculinity in David Ely's *Seconds*

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In 1796 the popular German author Jean Paul coined the term *Doppelgänger* in his romantic narrative of self-creation and self-destruction. To gain freedom from his unhappy marriage, the eponymous hero *Siebenkäs* fakes his own death and assumes the identity of Leibgeber, a cosmopolitan libertine whose indulgences lead to near destruction. In Paul's subsequent novel *Titan* (1800 - 1803) an uncanny reversal occurs; Leibgeber encounters Siebenkäs and thinking that he has seen himself, finally goes insane (Hoffmeister, 2004, p.84). Since these first encounters with the *Doppelgänger* or 'double', tales of duality and fractured identity have been a recurring motif in Gothic fiction. According to Kelly Hurley, in the Gothic, the human body loses its claim to 'a discrete and integral identity' (2002, p.190). Occupying a liminal existence between human/beast, male/female, civilized/primitive, the double inhabits this transitional space in response to the hazardous encroachment of modernity.

Yet, underpinning Paul's eighteenth-century plot of male fantasy turned nightmare, the larger political contours of the double require exploration. In particular, this paper argues that gender dualisms structure *doppelgänger*/double narratives, that the self's 'condition of rupture, disjunction, [and] fragmentation' (Miles, 2002, p.3), is also an articulation of a recurring crisis in masculinity. Siebenkäs transgresses the boundaries of acceptable gender norms in order to achieve the ultimate desire: freedom from responsibility and commitment that conventional masculine roles preclude. This desire, in turn, leads to damaging countertypes of failed or unhealthy masculinity. Therefore, the *doppelgänger* or double narrative, from its earliest inception, imagines and constructs a masculine duality that recounts the enforcement of gender prescriptions and proscriptions.

The aim of this paper is to explore the double as a figure of failed masculinity in David Ely's Gothic novel *Seconds* (1963). The American post-war period provides a particularly salient example of the modern crisis of gender identity among men. During the Cold War, the double re-emerges as a figure of failed masculinity softened not by the lures of eighteenth-century effeminacy but by its twentieth-century corollary: totalitarianism. However, for a more complete view of how post-war culture organized experience, it is necessary to widen the discursive fields associated with Gothic representation of male duality to include political discourses of identity and destabilization. This approach necessarily evokes a different set of oppositions than those traditionally associated with the rise of the double. In post-war culture, these oppositions encompass progressive / liberal; individualism / conformity; soft / hard; manly / effeminate; and freedom/totalitarianism. Therefore, any discussion of the double in relation to the crisis of masculinity cannot occur separately from the political and sociological discourses of the era. Characteristic of these discourses is what Daniel Bell called the 'polarization of images' (1955, p.67), the reduction of political positions to stark dichotomies. I will argue that Ely's novel internalises the era's rhetorical polarities, in particular, the gendered dualisms that structure the language of American post-war politics. *Seconds* explores the inherent tensions and contradictions between these oppositions, and rather than enforcing a closure, the double tests the sustainability of masculine identity in an increasingly polarized post-war world.

A seminal work which expresses the contemporary crisis of masculine identity is Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr's. *The Vital Center* (1949). Employing the language of pluralism, Schlesinger set out to diagnose the failure of freedom in contemporary post-war life in an effort to restore the liberal tradition of 'tough-mindedness' in the age of anxiety. Eschewing the simplistic binaries of we/they; USA/USSR; Capitalism/Communism as the cause of contemporary dissatisfaction, *The Vital Center* proposed a new

liberal view built on consensus; the synthesis of Cold War liberals and corporate capitalists into a coalition of moderates which make up a bipartisan alliance of the centre. Communism did not cause the 'terrifying problem of adjustment', rather the era's anxiety stemmed from industrial organization and the post-industrial state; those gigantic corporate, government, and academic bureaucracies that dominated American life. According to Schlesinger, '[a]s organizations became more elaborate and comprehensive', they became 'the instrumentality through which moral man could indulge his natural weakness for immoral deeds' (1949, p.3). The essence of the crisis is internal; it is a conflict between the 'doers' and the 'wailers', between progressives and anti-communist liberals, between activism and sentimentality, civic duty and the flight from responsibility. It is an old fight, he adds, resulting in America's 'permanent crisis' in the fight for freedom: 'There is no more exciting time in which to live— no time more crucial or more tragic. We must recognize that this is the nature of our age: that the womb has irrevocably closed behind us, that security is a foolish dream of old men, that crisis will always be with us' (1949, p.10).

Schlesinger's defence of the vital centre begins with an assessment of the political rights' cumulative failures. Conservatism is dominated by an 'impotent' plutocracy which is 'terrified of change, lacking confidence and resolution, and subject to spasms of panic and hysteria' (1949, p.31). The plutocracy, he claims, lacks those 'combative virtues' and generates foreign policy founded on 'middle-class cowardice.' (1948, p.14). Unlike Winston Churchill, who was 'bold,' and 'vigorous,' or Theodore Roosevelt who had little time for 'pacifism, dogoodism and other forms of mollycoddle flapdoodle' (1949, p.22), American Conservatives, he complains, retreated to the 'womb-like comfort' of irresponsibility (1949, p.28).

However, if the right embodied a spent masculine potency, the progressives on the left were even more dangerous. They possessed a sentimental belief in progress born out of the Enlightenment and the

framework of human perfectibility. As children of eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century romanticism, they were overly optimistic with a 'soft and shallow' conception of human nature (1949, p.40). The contemporary 'Doughface Progressive' in Schlesinger's view, is 'soft not hard' with a 'feminine fascination with the rude and muscular power of the proletariat' (1949, p.46). He too, possesses a 'weakness for impotence [that] is related to a fear of responsibility' (1949, p.41). Equally, the crisis of masculinity links to a perceived decline of American power abroad. As America experiences a period of 'inertia' and 'sterility', wrote Schlesinger, Russia will gain 'superiority in the thrust of its missiles and in the penetration of outer space' (1964, p.86).

While often cited as a turning point for American liberalism, the sexual and corporal metaphors that organize *The Vital Center* propelled a surge of discourses on emasculation and feminized conformity that permeated the 1950s. David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William W. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), Robert Lindner's *Must You Conform?* (1956), Philip Wylie's *A Generation of Vipers* (1942, 1955), and *Look* Magazine's series on 'The Decline of the American Male' (1958) all placed conformity and masculinity under intense scrutiny. While they varied in terms of emphasis and explanation, each plotted a narrative of duality and emasculation. Whether 'other-directed' conformist made self-less by an affluent mass society (Reisman), victims of overbearing mothers or parasitic women (Wylie), or sexually distorted by puritanical norms (Lindner), each writer traced a shift in the male character from the rugged inner-directed man of yesteryear to the weak, soft, emasculated man of the mid-twentieth century (Cuordileone, 2000, p.6). William Whyte's *The Organization Man*, in particular, affixed the memorable term for the individual duped into a sense of 'belongingness' as he toils in the white-collar factory. The 'organization ethic,' according to Whyte, 'rationalizes the organization's demands for fealty and gives those who offer it wholeheartedly a sense of

dedication in doing so…it converts what would seem in other times a bill of no rights into a restatement of individualism' (1956, p.5). The central principles of this new ethic are 'a belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in 'belongingness' as the ultimate need of the individual; and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness…Man exists as a unit of society. Of himself, he is isolated, meaningless.' Man's duty is to the group, his 'obligation to the here and now' (1956, p.6). The preoccupation with generating duality signals the essential doubleness of the male experience in the early post-war years. Historians and sociologists viewed masculinity during those years as in peril. Rather than promote a remedy, their focus on opposition led to the desired contrasts over the next decade.

Eleven years after the publication of *The Vital Center*, Schlesinger continued to bemoan the lack of heroes in his age, men who influenced the world, men who seized and impacted history, 'gave it an imprint' or 'a direction' (1964, p.24). However, in 1960, just such a breed of man appeared, a man who, 'by affirming the obligation to act in the face of complexity and chaos…lifted his own generation out of its superficial disillusion, its transient love affair with impotence and self, and imbued it with new convictions of purpose and hope' (Schlesinger, 1964, p.xv). For anti-communist liberals John F. Kennedy was not only the incarnation of the 'virile' 'vital center' liberal Schlesinger had imagined years earlier, but represented the much needed antidote to the nation's crisis in masculinity (Cuordileone, 2000, p.20). If freedom must become 'a fighting faith', (Schlesinger, 1949, p.245) Kennedy was just the man to engage the battle.

John F. Kennedy's career was premised on an 'ideology of masculinity' which he used to justify his claim to presidential power (Dean, 1998, p.29). Invoking resonant images from America's stoic republican heritage and frontier expansiveness, Kennedy campaigned on a platform of courage and toughness. The United States, he claimed, had 'gone soft -

physically, mentally, spiritually soft' (cf. Dean, 1998, p.29). 'In the decade that lies ahead…the American Presidency will demand more than ringing manifestoes issued from the rear of the battle. It will demand that the President place himself in the very thick of the fight' (1960a). The salient image Kennedy evoked to re-invigorate the nation was of the new frontier. The founding fathers, claimed Kennedy:

> were not the captives of their own doubts, the prisoners of their own price tags. Their motto was not 'every man for himself'--but 'all for the common cause.' They were determined to make that new world strong and free, to overcome its hazards and its hardships, to conquer the enemies that threatened from without and within…Today some would say that those struggles are all over--that all the horizons have been explored--that all the battles have been won-- that there is no longer an American frontier. (1960b)

Kennedy was anxious to remind voters that the battle was not over, that, in his view, the 'increasing evidence of a lost national purpose and a soft national (1960a) will' was placing the Republic at risk. Answering Schlesinger's call for a revival in courageous leadership, Senator Kennedy told his audience that 'courage--not complacency--is our need today--leadership--not salesmanship. And the only valid test of leadership is the ability to lead, and lead vigorously' (1960b).

The political conflicts between individual autonomy and conformity have been predominantly about men and therefore, intersect and converge with the crisis of masculinity. While the shared agreement between liberals and conservatives regarding the principles of pluralism was an important product of Cold War politics, the process of inclusiveness encodes a rigid gender identity. As Dean notes, the ideology of masculinity 'organizes the "performance" of an individual's role in society and draws boundaries around the social category of manhood.' In its prescriptive form, this ideology 'imagines and constructs a narrative identity that lends coherence

to the self.' Yet, in its proscriptive form, 'it rules out certain ways of imagining and acting in the world' (1998, p.30). In the Cold War complex of gendered dualisms, those residing outside the centre assume a submissive, feminine role; they are soft, limp, possibly homosexual, and ultimately, a threat to national security. In *Seconds*, the twin panics of threatened masculinity and totalitarian style conformity intersect in the figure of the double. The novel stages a conflict between man's inner and outer self through engaging with the soft/hard, effeminate/masculine, conformity/freedom dichotomies that structure Schlesinger and Kennedy's worldview.

Seconds tells the story of an unnamed 'liberal republican' bank executive who receives a telephone call from a man claiming to be his friend Charley who had apparently committed suicide several months before. Charley convinces his friend to apply to a company offering a service vaguely described as 'rebirth.' Following Charley's instructions the banker encounters a secret organization that claims it can offer him a new life. For a fee, the company will fake his death, provide cosmetic surgery, and set him up in a new profession (in this instance as a moderately successful freelance artist). Once accepted as a client, the flabby, middle-aged banker is transformed into the young and virile Antiochus Wilson free to enjoy his bachelor existence unencumbered by family ties and professional responsibilities: 'You are relieved of economic necessity and you are free of any nagging considerations for others. You are a bachelor, the only son of deceased parents, and so forth. In short, you are alone in the world, Mr. Wilson, absolved of all responsibility except to your own interest and desires. Isn't it marvellous, sir?' (p.57). However, Wilson is unable to reconcile his past life with the freedom from responsibility that his new body affords. His inability to adjust to his new identity threatens the integrity of the organization and after several excursions into his past he is deemed a security risk and ultimately eliminated.

Before his transformation, the banker's 'grey tailored suit, his spotless shoes, and most of all his Homburg' (p.8) register his status as a professional man and the quintessential symbol of complacent masculinity in an era of unbridled consumer capitalism. Unnamed and ubiquitous, he is emblematic of the group ethos. At his initial interview with the company, he sums up his career: 'I went to business school— graduate school, you know, and then I went into banking, which was still respectable in spite of Roosevelt…I've been banking for twenty-six years…and while I've shown no extraordinary gifts for it, I've done well in every sense. I'm earning a substantial salary, I've built a home and have a summer place, I own a boat and two cars.' (p.21). This resume is important, he is told, because it is a useful reminder to the client 'of the context of their problems' (p.22). Wilson's problem is his Organization Man status and the ethic of 'belongingness' that underlines it. As Whyte describes it, it is a belief in 'the sacredness of property, the enervating effect of security, the virtues of thrift, of hard work and independence.' Yet, as Whyte also suggests, it is an ethic fraught with anxiety:

> He honestly wants to believe he follows the tenets he extols, and if he extols them so frequently it is, perhaps, to shut out a nagging suspicion that he, too, the last defender of the faith, is no longer pure. Only by using the language of individualism to describe the collective can he stave off the thought that he himself is in a collective as pervading as any ever dreamed of by the reformers, the intellectuals, and the utopian visionaries he so regularly warns against. (Whyte, pp.5-6)

The Organization Man's 'nagging suspicion' that his beliefs are corrupted is precisely what generates referrals to the company. These men are receptive to the idea of starting over, receptive to the notion of freedom from the collective and the ethic of 'belongingness'. It is an anxiety acutely felt by Wilson: 'As for reminding me of my problems…you may have a point there'. He confesses he has a 'sensation of remoteness', of 'erosion', and

tremors of 'anxiety' (p.22). By accepting the company's offer, Wilson is rejecting the cosy security of the 'breadwinner ethic' in favour of individual freedom.

The whole concept of rebirth on which the story turns, is reminiscent of the sexually charged dualisms that organize Schlesinger's worldview. Rebirth, with its *Frankenstein* suggestiveness, uses medical science to negate the role of women in the regeneration of men. However, unlike *Frankenstein,* the company's operation is solely a male concern; the goal is not to create life, but restructure and monitor representations of masculinity. The womb metaphor looms large in Ely's text; it is the place to which the anxious man retreats in his flight from anxiety. From the moment Wilson makes contact with the company, he is treated as a child in utero. In adherence to the company's clandestine requirements, Wilson is asked to wear a cap and overalls and cover his face with dust. The effect is the erasure of all surface features that signalled his prior identity. Wilson becomes a blank canvas, cleared of all social and ideological colourings. Blindfolded and locked in the back of a windowless truck, Wilson notes that 'it was not an unpleasant ride,' that for 'the first time in years,' (p.52) he experienced 'the sensation of irresponsibility. Shut up in darkness the way he was, he clearly had no control over the immediate events which affected him, and he decided, with surprising readiness, not to bother about them… With his arms folded across his chest in quiet dignity, Wilson sat in repose, waiting' (p.14). Wilson's easy abdication of responsibility, his childlike surrender to the company's authority signals the first steps toward an abandonment of the self. In the womb-like refuge of the van, Wilson is preparing to be reborn. The womb metaphor extends to the company's premises. Upon arrival at the company, Wilson is directed to a circular reception area and told that in the morning he will be moved to the company's 'delivery room.'(p.14)

As Wilson becomes more committed to the idea of starting over, it becomes clear that every company employee has a particular role to play in selling him the concept of rebirth. As Wilson himself observes, the company resembles one of those 'over modernized…advertising agencies' (p.18), peopled by what Vance Packard called the 'Hidden Persuaders' (1957) those public relations and advertising executives who use depth psychology to sell products and services. Characteristic of post war suspicion of brainwashing techniques, Packard's book explores what he regards as an endemic system of manipulation beyond the level of our consciousness. 'Large scale efforts are being made,' he claims, 'to channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences…so the appeals which move us are often, in a sense, "hidden"' (1957, p.11). Once assessed for his suitability and loyalty, Wilson is placed in the hands of nurses, doctors, and guidance advisors who speak the language of the 'depth manipulator':

> I think the creative wish-pattern there is pretty self-evident, and without going into any of the technical assumptions underlying my analysis, I should think you'd agree that…your obsessive motivations strongly indicate artistic pursuits as being basically responsive to your particular development as an integrated human being. (p.55)

When Wilson continues to exhibit signs of anxiety, the company uses sex as the final means to sell him rebirth. The night before his surgery, Wilson is sedated and willingly submits to feelings of childlike dependency:

> before he was quite asleep, he was aware that a pair of hands was quietly unbuttoning the jacket of his pajamas and, more remarkable still, was also pulling loose the drawstring of his trousers. In his somnolent condition, he half-imagined that he was a child, being changed in the middle of the night, and so he lazily wriggled, to help the unseen parental figure slip his pajamas off. (p.46)

However, Wilson soon realizes that the individual removing his clothes is not a parental figure but a female company employee whose role is to help him relax by having sex with him. 'I frequently find this necessary with our more sensitive clients' she tells him. 'Not that I mind, really…it's part of the job' (p.46). When Wilson ejaculates prematurely, the woman resumes her maternal role:

> 'You just cuddle up and forget about everything,' she went on, drawing his head down so that his face nestled into the warmth of her bosom, and clasping him close with a faint rocking motion of her arms…'That's the boy. That's the good boy.' She continued the rocking motion and at the same time began to hum softly what sounded like a little nursery tune, which sent a purr flowing from her body to his. He seemed to be sinking deliciously into a fragrant sea of tenderness, lulled by her faraway voice….the sea received him entirely. It was warm, protective, and wholly his, and it caressed him sweetly with the vibrations of her lullaby. (p.49)

Wilson harbours no guilt for his transgression because the 'whole framework of the operation was businesslike and efficient…and superficially quite familiar' (p.48). The company, the female employee tells him, is 'very up to date…the whole idea is to treat the client as a complete person and make him feel at home…the difference is that we *care*…really' (p.48).

With the process of emasculation complete, Wilson willingly sells his mediocre existence for a chance at personal freedom. However, the Faustian exchange is superficial, enacted only on the surface of Wilson's body, and the act of rejuvenation ultimately divides Wilson against himself. Initially, Wilson is pleased with the results. Examining his reflection, he is confronted not by a 'craven creature' but by a 'handsome and self-possessed man of the world' (p.75). He sees a 'stamp of real character in that rugged, masculine face, which, the longer he studied it, seemed to suggest that here was a man who might have performed feats of courage and daring' (p.65). Evidence of his prior weakness and timidity is absent and he feels confident

enough to 'rush out of the house and commit the Lord knew what act of libertinism' (p.75). Cloaked in his new identity, Wilson claims 'he owes it to himself to act like a man' (p.75). Yet, he also recognizes a deep disparity between his own emotions and those reflected in the features of his new image. The irregularity is unsettling. Moments of assurance are undercut by awkward interactions with others. His attempts to act out his new role cannot resolve the fact that he is, at heart, 'impotent' and 'soft,' 'a sheep in wolf's clothing' (p.77). Wilson faces the stark realization that his manufactured self has no core, that the change in his physical body has not transformed his inner being. Rather than lending coherence to the self, Wilson's metamorphosis has merely created a disjointed and fragmented identity.

Out of this admixture of feminised imagery and psychological manipulation emerge the reborns and their Kennedyesque dream of a new frontier. When Wilson voices his dissatisfaction, he receives a call from Charley who reminds him of the unique opportunity the company has offered him:

> 'You've got what almost every middle-aged man in America would like to have. Freedom. Real freedom…You're a pioneer, old boy. That's literally true. The old frontier, you know what that was? That was a dream, too…But there's a different frontier now - the frontier of personal freedom, and I mean *real* freedom - and there are different pioneers, too. You're one of 'em, Wilson, and all I can say is that pioneering is no easy trick in any man's language, but the rewards are tremendous. Tremendous'. (p.82)

As the company's success stories, the reborns position themselves as the wave of the future, the radical 'doers' that achieved freedom from mediocre and conformity.

> 'What I'm trying to say is that the company has broken through the last important barrier to true mobility, and I suppose if you had to give that barrier a name, you'd call it identity. Most people can

> change a lot of things— their church, their political party— but they can't change their identity. Well, we did. That's the difference…I think you can make a darned good case for the idea that we represent a future America'. (p.83)

Despite Charley's rhetoric of freedom and mobility, Wilson's masculine identity remains unfixed: 'I've been thrown suddenly from one kind of world into another, quite different, and I'm having to discover myself as a person, as a man, all over again' (p.73). His ability to act as a man is frustrated by his real self, which repeatedly manifests itself in a composite of assertions, actions, and references. When individuals from his past enter his new life, he feels 'exposed' and is almost 'betrayed…into making a terrible gaffe' (p.89).

> he caught a calculating glance from one of the men, as if his exchange…had violated some secret code of behavior which had been immediately sensed by the brotherhood. It did not bother him; rather, he was suddenly struck by the amusing notion that he was present at a masquerade whose social façade, ostensibly so proper and ordinary, would at any moment be thrown into confusion with the ripping off of masks and the beginning of wild dancing.
> (pp.90-91)

Wilson's unstable identity is a menace to the company and its reborns. Yet, it is not Wilson's social presentation that is being policed by the brotherhood; in the high social stakes of gender politics, it is his masculine performance that is threatened and any slippage of the mask would make visible his unhealthy or excluded masculinity.

After his near exposure, it becomes increasingly apparent to Wilson that in choosing freedom, he is merely sublimating himself in another group. The choice he is given is a bleak one; it is the choice between what Norman Mailer called a 'quick death by the state' or 'slow death by conformity' (cf. McClay, 1994, p.3). The moment Wilson is reborn, the process of physical and existential degeneration begins. The deference with which he was

initially treated vanishes and Wilson is forced to confront the reality of the company's operation. Life and death are mere commodities produced with assembly line efficiency. 'You think you're the only one today? Not on your life' (p.52). The company's 'flesh mechanics' (p.52), Wilson is told, produce three thousand men a year. 'All I know is, I'd hate to be in the cadaver procurement section in the busy season. If business expands any more, they'll have to start making 'em out of plastic to fill their orders' (p.52). The sinister cadaver procurement section relies on a steady influx of bodies to meet the requirements of the living that want to be reborn. It is a cynical never-ending cycle of death and rebirth: '[t]hey handed you all that crap about love and rebirth, and now you find out it's just a butcher shop, like everything else' (p.53). Wilson's transformation is not a rebirth but a stillbirth; Wilson is reborn dead. As the dreadful nature of the company's operation is confirmed, Wilson sees nothing but vast expanses of emptiness and corruption. The resident doctor is dressed 'not in a surgeon's smock but in a black suit, like a clergyman's [and] his face bore the scars of some terrible accident, which gave him an impressive expression of spiritual agony' (p.51). The personal assistant, assigned to help Wilson through his 'initial period of adjustment' resembles a 'mortician's assistant maintaining a discreet composure for the sake of the bereaved, while at the same time covertly sniffing for the taint of physical corruption' (p.64). Everyone and everything around him signals incompleteness, remoteness and death. From the 'empty frames' and 'blank canvases' in his fake studio, to the empty and lifeless landscape beyond the window, Wilson is 'exposed to nothingness' (p.73). Eventually, even his physical integrity is vapid:

> The figure in the glass had the appearance of reality, of being a living man, and yet was without substance…a fleshless apparition, this reflection of himself. He stepped closer to it; obediently, the image advanced to meet him. He wondered whether it would not be possible for him to merge with it finally, so that he might become

> forever fixed in the coldness of the shining glass, a two-dimensional representation of a man. (p.110)

When Wilson realizes that there is no second chance at rebirth, his sense of corporeal existence disintegrates further. Wilson's body is handed over to the over-burdened cadaver procurement section; in a macabre reversal, Wilson is given a second chance at death.

Underlying the inherent sociological discourse surrounding conformity and masculinity are the sinister echoes of Cold War weaponry that forged a nexus between social and political life. The company drugs, blackmails, and psychologically manipulates Wilson in the bid to sell him freedom. In addition, all company employees and their manufactured reborns assume Orwellian dimensions, no longer functioning as helpful experts, but as spies and inquisitors. Away from the auspices of the company, Wilson is subject to an elaborate system of surveillance. Moreover, despite his insistence that their change in identity represents the final barrier to freedom, Charley has been held prisoner for over a year. As a previous failure, his body was destined for reuse, but because he referred Wilson, he is allowed to remain alive as his sponsor. Charley, in effect, had named names, and his constant rallying calls were not the exhilaration of freedom, but the cries of a desperate man trying to avoid destruction. The Faustian bargain offered to Wilson is a cynical double cross; rebirth does not lead to freedom; for the timid and frightened like Wilson, the burden of freedom offers only a 'nightmare filled with nameless horrors' (Schlesinger, 1964, p.242).

After his spectacular failure as a free man, Wilson returns to the womb-like expanse of the group. This time however, the woman who had so effectively mothered him into submission no longer recognizes him, and instead of the circular waiting area, Wilson is directed to a room full of tranquillized middle-aged men in identical uniforms. Stripped of their individuality, this 'collection of misfits and failures' (p.138) live out an

existence of useless activities until their bodies are required for another fake death. The fraternal *esprit de corps* that initially defined their experience is gone and their dénouement signals the final stage of failed masculinity at the hands of totalitarian control. Even the company president is disillusioned about creating a utopian community of free men. His dream, he tells Wilson was built on a fallacy. 'My clients were men who were ready to abandon their original identities…because, for one reason or another, they had made a botch of things…and I can't imagine what possessed me to think that these gentlemen would be likely to do much better just because I gave them a new face and a new name' (p.156). Like Frankenstein, he no longer controls the creatures he has created. The men rebel by rejecting their superficial identities while the company itself morphs into a 'modern concern,' an unwieldy corporate machine that endlessly churns out fragmented failures.

As a product of post-war culture, the political ambiguity of the text reflects the unique underlying tensions of the period. On the one hand, *Seconds* can be read as a liberal cautionary tale against the feminine lure of totalitarianism. Wilson is targeted for rebirth because he is weak and vulnerable to utopian promises. His desire for social and political irresponsibility places him outside the centre and undermines the cult of masculine toughness deemed necessary to defeat the cold war enemy. In effect, Wilson's new body becomes a subversive replica, an expression of the failed, unadjusted polity of pluralism. However, the novel's bleak dystopian vision also suggests an unveiling of the strategies of repression used to police masculine identity. Despite its utopian ideal of personal freedom, the company's methods to control errant individuals are analogous to the liberal paradox that condoned totalitarian methods in the fight against communism. The manipulation, surveillance and ultimate death of Wilson reflect the extreme subjugation of difference required for the maintenance of conformity and normative masculinity.

Like Siebenkäs, Wilson's readiness to fake his own death and assume a new identity marks the initial steps in satisfying the male desire for freedom from all social obligations and traditional forms of power. However, as in most narratives of duality, this desire is unsustainable and inevitably leads to destruction. In post-war culture, the double reflects the inherent tensions at the heart of political culture. *Seconds* does not offer any closure on the issue but merely confirms man's essential alienation in a polarized political world. The individual and the group, the text suggests, are irrevocably at odds. The inability to resolve the tensions between totalitarian conformity and individual freedom suggest that the difficulty for modern man is that these concepts are not unified narratives but a compendium of fictions generated by a culture of suspicion and rigid gender proscriptions.

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