

## THE '60s MAN: Hierarchical Structures and the Articulation of Male Experience in Selected Novels of Norman Mailer, Ken Kesey and Philip Roth.

### Part Two: "Mon Semblable,--Mon Frère": Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
'Has it begun to sprout?...  
'Oh keep the dog jar hence that's friend to men,  
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!  
'You! hypocrite lecteur! mon semblable, --mon frère!'  
T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land."

#### Chapter Four: Ken Kesey, American Hierarchies and *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

*An awful disease had crept into our American society...in the thirty years since the war, practically unchecked. By the mid-sixties everyone who wasn't wearing blinders...knew that the epidemic had nearly reached Condition Terminal...It almost took over entirely . . . waged war; fostered fear; elected its own damn president was how serious it became!...Luckily...By 1964 some reputed antitoxins had been perfected and were circulating in certain nonprofessional areas.*

Ken Kesey, *The Further Inquiry*.

Ken Kesey's first novel was *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). In terms of critical attention and popular reception his second, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964) remains eclipsed by its predecessor, but either of these works is stronger in conception and execution than anything Kesey has written since. James D. Hart refers to the shared tone of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* as the "comic macabre,"<sup>1</sup> and a pendulum swing from humour to tragedy is lightly, but convincingly, portrayed by the novelist in both works. The reference to "popular" and "folk" mediums (and values) implied by the choice of titles and the modernist and experimental techniques and approaches to characterisation employed in the second novel, also recall the first. In addition, the personality of Hank Stamper and the emotional excesses of Leland Stamper in *Sometimes a Great Notion* both bear comparison with the antics of Randall Patrick McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Born in 1935 in Colorado, Kesey attended high school in Springfield, Oregon, and pursued tertiary studies at the University of Oregon, where he

found success as “a star wrestler in the 174-pound class and a star actor in college plays.”<sup>2</sup> He later studied at Stanford, in that institution's creative writing program, after a half-hearted attempt to pursue an acting career in Hollywood, marrying, and completing an unpublished sporting novel, *The End of Autumn*. In the late 1950s Kesey took part as a paid volunteer in the United States government's experiments with psychoactive drugs at the Menlo Park Veterans' Hospital, which included the ingestion of the potent hallucinogenic lysergic acid diethylamide, (L.S.D.). This experience, combined with his work as a wardman in a mental hospital, changed Kesey's outlook and ambitions. Shortly thereafter a work-in-progress entitled *Zoo* was abandoned after Kesey “discovered” a First Nation American character called “Chief Broom,” and the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* had its genesis.

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is very much concerned with American hierarchical accommodations. Set in a psychiatric institution, the ward in the novel serves as a metaphor for the power hierarchies of the wider society. Much of the novel is rendered from the perspective of McMurphy's friend and fellow-patient, Chief “Broom” Bromden, who serves as a narrator/Chorus throughout the novel. The individual in the “alpha” position in the ward is the “Big Nurse,” Ratched, an unambiguous portrait of one who is placed at the top of a hierarchy which she controls through a combination of cajoling and threatening, and who thus dictates the tenor of life in her small realm, as well as the fate of individual patients. In the novel Kesey pits a classic “American loner,” McMurphy, a male who resists distant accommodation, against those who are acquiescent or compliant with the combination of individuals and policies with whom Ratched is allied, and which runs the hospital. A great deal of the appeal of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* lies in that loner's refusal to accept the dictates of the hospital's functionaries, and to resist coercion by the source of “power” behind the ward, the hospital, and American life: the symbolic, perhaps real, hierarchy/conspiracy known to Chief Broom as “the Combine.”

McMurphy characterises the operatives of the Combine by the term “‘ball cutter.’”<sup>3</sup> A “ball cutter,” he says, is “‘a guy who wants to win by making you weaker instead of making himself stronger’”<sup>4</sup>; as a group they are “‘people who try to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line.’”<sup>5</sup> The cowed men in the ward have each been, prior to their incarceration in the hospital, overwhelmed by such individuals or by “ball-cutting” aspects of modern life; almost without exception the men's mental illnesses are

depicted as stemming more from failure to achieve meaningful place in hierarchical systems than from organic disorders.

As the novel opens McMurphy, an individual brimming with anger and resentment, with a history of drunkenness, violence and promiscuity, is sent to the ward from a prison work farm. Suspected of near-psychotic instability, McMurphy is a man whose other qualities—his vibrancy, intelligence and capacity to lead and inspire others—should have brought him greater reward and prestige from life than they have. However, if McMurphy has failed in his attempts to force close accommodation on the systems of the world-at-large he succeeds, at least temporarily, in the asylum sub-world of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. During the novel McMurphy, an archetype of the American renegade, engages in a series of "tests of strength" with the authorities; he willingly pits his vision of life, identity and self-expression against theirs in offering his alternatives to the other patients. This independence threatens the power of interpretation and delimitation of action of the doctors and the nurses, and McMurphy is branded as a disruptive personality, and eventually silenced by being lobotomised. Chief Broom, perhaps most strongly affected by McMurphy's belief in the need for individual autonomy and self-definition, mercifully ends his reduced hero's life, and escapes to the outside world.

Like Lee Stamper in *Sometimes A Great Notion*, McMurphy is self-important, and sensitive to any slight, real or imagined. The shrewd, aggressive, almost sociopathically independent McMurphy has in common with Hank Stamper in Kesey's second novel a dislike of pretension; although the former is as garrulous as the latter is taciturn, both are intolerant of the hypocrisies demanded by sociability, convention and conversation. McMurphy is as assertive as Hank, but, like him, a slave to a demanding expression of self which brooks no accommodation, relationship, or intrusion, which is not entirely desired. He "dominates...because of strength, courage and emerging manhood."<sup>6</sup> McMurphy, however, unlike Hank, has failed to force close accommodation on any of the hierarchies with which he has been involved. Whereas Hank Stamper has a point of reference in his family, and an economic and social base through which to contextualise himself, and which provides him with social "leverage," McMurphy does not. The latter does not adjust to relative impotence, to lack of control over people, events, or economic realities, and he displaces his frustrations into an aggression which leads him into serious conflict with civil and social norms. In common with many similar characters, McMurphy's strength relies on his associations with the

madness, diffusion and death which accompanies the flawed, solitary protagonist at odds with every value system but one of his own design, and his "heroic" maintenance of the illusion of the self-contained man. He is "the individual against at once an oppressive society, his own human weakness, and cosmic indifference to his wishes and welfare."<sup>7</sup> McMurphy's assertion of selfhood takes the form of a stubborn insistence on the "rights" of an individual to expression and action; his complaint emerges in a symbolic, one-person revolution against stifling conformity which illustrates the central themes of the novel. Underlying McMurphy's rebellion is an implicit appeal to "classic" or traditional American social ideals of truth, liberty and justice.

Any of the novel's characterisations or themes might be expounded upon in an examination of hierarchical accommodations. For example, Chief Broom, like most of the characters in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, as well as the majority of the cast of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, may be taken as an example of a failure to adjust to the realities of hierarchical structures. As one of the patients says of a member of the staff: " 'Doctor Spivey . . . is exactly like the rest of us, completely conscious of his inadequacy. He's a frightened, desperate, ineffectual little rabbit...and he knows it.' "<sup>8</sup> Chief Bromden's dignity is compromised by the menial function this noble, and nobly-born, First Nation American exercises, even among the insane. He is decontextualised, and has never been accorded even the vestigial respect which might have allowed him to begin the battle of competitive hierarchicisation, and forging successful accommodations. Bromden's deep sadness may not result from, but is characteristic of, one who through inactivity—represented symbolically by his silence—has become removed from, and refused access to, all hierarchical structures, by "white" civilisation.

The other characters in the novel represent the results of different types of "ball cutters" at work. The character of Harding has been utterly defeated by the accommodation required by his marriage; Pete Bancini has been crushed by losing every hierarchical encounter of his life: " 'I had so many insults I was born dead,' "<sup>9</sup> he cries; while the hesitant, deferential stutterer, Billy Bibbit, has been completely subordinated by an excessive "deficit love," to employ Maslow's term, of women, and the inverted power experiences engendered by his mother's absolutism which have stunted the growth of his own sense of self. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, as in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, the point is made that if one attempts close accommodation with a hierarchy using all one's resources and still fails, a certain self-respect

may nonetheless be retained; distant accommodation can be accepted once one has found one's "natural" place in life's hierarchies. However, if one is prevented from making the attempt, chronic and illness-inducing repression and depression might result.

After the success of his first novel, Kesey was hailed as one of the freshest and most talented stylists to emerge in America in several years. In June 1961 he returned to Oregon, began living in a town called Florence and working in his brother's dairy-products processing operation. The writer gathered "colour" from his observation of workers in local industry, and began his second novel, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, which he finished after his further remove to La Honda, California, in 1963.

As we have seen, Kesey next became an active participant in the youth movement of the 1960s. Kesey's "Pranksters" invented, and specialised in, the "Acid Test," a combination of radical street theatre and political and social proselytising. Kesey gained a reputation as a "hippie" theorist and leader which grew until an infamous Hallowe'en party at which he encouraged his followers to "'get into a responsibility bag'"<sup>10</sup> and which, as a result of his flouting one of the most basic tenets of the "counterculture" caused Ken Kesey to become "at 31...a hippie has-been."<sup>11</sup>

Despite considering his other activities as more important, more creative, and potentially more influential—"I'd rather be a lightning rod than a seismograph"<sup>12</sup> is how he framed it in an interview with Wolfe—Kesey did not, however, altogether abandon writing. Nonetheless, if *Sometimes a Great Notion* can be seen as a more ambitious experiment along not dissimilar lines to his first novel, lack of new themes or thematic development, and what amounts to stylistic atrophy, even regression, mark Kesey's subsequent literary efforts. In fact, what is tantamount to a creative silence punctuates the thirty years' interval between the publication of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and the major work of Kesey's novel, *Sailor Song* (1992). In between the "recycling" of shorter pieces, the collection of journalism and memoir material, and the publication of fiction of uncertain quality has contributed to an uneven *oeuvre*.<sup>13</sup>

However, no matter how one might view Kesey's life and writing since the early 1960s, it remains the case that the two works of fiction he produced before fame in other areas diverted him from a novelist's solitary life stand as often powerful, and frequently incisive, representations of life in America as the Eisenhower years of the 1950s gave way to the tumultuous events of the 1960s. Kesey depicts the men and women who witnessed, participated in, and were challenged by, that momentous period of transition with

sympathy and insight. There is no contradiction in the observation that something in Kesey's work seems to eloquently embody the *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s in America and at the same time is markedly conservative and traditional. It is perhaps because, not in spite, of Kesey's presentation of "traditional" virtues of self-reliance, independence, suspicion of authority and "strength of character" that he has been so successful as a writer and as a personality.

In his works Kesey sets out to question the values by which America is guiding itself, and in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* particularly he compares these with the values they have "superseded" in the national life. Kesey's heroes, particularly, despite their unconventionality, reflect the stereotypes of the assertive, competitive, hierarchical male. Kesey had at one time been an enthusiastic practitioner of traditional, assertive American masculinity; his reflections on interpersonal attitudes enabled him to capture something of the essential spirit of the rampant, individualistic American man who has populated American fiction and influenced American conceptions of masculinity. There is something "essentially American" about Kesey—something like James the Farmer as Superhero—and Kesey has closely observed in himself and his male colleagues the processes by which young American men construct and put into practice ideas of "character" and "personality" and "values." Such perceptions illuminate his best writing.

The novelist's conclusions reaffirm the most basic and traditional and conservative norms: home, hierarchy, and family. In *Sometimes a Great Notion* Lee Stamper undergoes a "rite de passage" which results in him rejecting his creative and academic aspirations to take a secondary role alongside his brother, secure and fulfilled, it appears, in the family logging firm, accepting that this is the "true" expression of self, with all its difficulties and limitations the only "place" for a "man." One is tempted to see in this reversion an analogy with radical and rebel Kesey's eventual decision to abandon political and social agendas to settle down, and with his partner raise a family and work on the land.

*Sometimes a Great Notion* is an ambitious, although disorganised, novel, flawed by a failure of tone and artistic direction at critical moments. Kesey's judgement is revealed as deficient—and an editor worthy of him absent—as carefully developed and intriguing narrative and thematic possibilities atrophy. Kesey, in his second novel, responds to the pressure accompanying his career's much-lauded commencement with the evocation of a number

of classic American literary concerns: the struggle of man against wilderness (a struggle which takes place in a "tangle" that is internal, as much as external); the quest for place and space in a geographical and spiritual vastness; the search for individual identity; the quest for that identity and for personal independence as they conflict with definition in terms of duty to family and community; and the fraternal conflict which, ever since the carnage of the Civil War of the 1860s, has had such potent socio-historical resonances in the United States, and which also has Freudian undertones which are not lost on the principal male characters in this novel. Anchored by the central figure of Hank Stamper, we see Kesey's evocation of these traditional American themes within a scale of oppositions that sees man pitted against the environment; against self; against brother; against father; against family; against peers; and against the leaders of the social, sexual, physical, and "prestige" hierarchies he encounters. As he had done through *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest's* "alpha" male, through Hank, Kesey furthers the sub-textual proposition that "at least part [of] modern man's dilemma" can be attributed "to his relinquishment of the traditional role of the dominant male."<sup>14</sup> Kesey's work hearkens to earlier American themes, motifs, and narratives; writing of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* Michael André Bernstein could have also referred to *Sometimes a Great Notion* in expressing ironic surprise at the conservatism he finds as "Kesey's narrative succeeds in persuading its readers that it is taking the enormous risk of defying all conventions at the very moment that it is fulfilling each imperative of its own fixed tradition without the slightest deviation or self-questioning."<sup>15</sup>

In *Sometimes a Great Notion* Kesey reverses the emphasis and the direction of the conflict of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Instead of sending a traditional American on an Odysseyan venture into the realm of "The Combine," he sends "The Combine," represented by a logging union and its Machiavellian operatives, to do battle with the Keseyan version of a traditional American family on their territory; in place of McMurphy's masculinist values, juxtaposed as they were with the corporate values of the mental hospital in his first novel in Kesey's second the anachronistic rural values of the Stamper family of Oregon are contrasted with the values of "modern" American life, as embodied in various individuals identified with the union and with the town of Wakonda, near which the family lives. Kesey's examination of the lives of the Stampers provides clear examples of the four kinds of masculine hierarchies on which this thesis focuses: the familial, the social, the sexual, and the economic. Kesey's story

tells of the fraternal and familial relations within the Stamper family, and of clashes between generations, between outlooks, between conflicting desires, and between conflicting expressions of self, among the males of this family. It also tells of the clashes between the value system of the members of this family and that belonging to individuals and groups from the "outside world."

At the heart of *Sometimes a Great Notion* are the accommodations engaged in by, and between, Hank Stamper and his younger half-brother, Leland. The issues which arise out of this conflict are mirrored in all the relationships—social, sexual, physical and economic—in the novel. Kesey, like Mailer, deliberately equates the state of the individual with that of the small community, and with the state of the nation. The Stampers are thus situated in an historical, geographical, and semi-legendary continuum; this reinforces the metaphoric inter-connections which are in operation on all levels of the novel. The metaphoric manipulations of the novelist allow description, event, character and relationship to go together to define the essence of the conflict between ideologies which lies at the heart of the work. As the reader follows the battle between Hank and Lee, and between the Stampers and their community, one cannot help but notice that the same hierarchical structures typify all the organisations depicted, large and small, social and economic, and that the same values inform the conceptions of masculinity of all the men in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, by their presence or in their absence. The words and phrases Kesey associates with the family depict a clearly defined "traditional" "patriarchal" structure; the rigidity and stereotypical aspects of Stamper life adhere to individuals, who partake of identities which transcend those of subjective individuality.

The patronymic of this family of quintessential patriarchs serves as an example of Kesey's interweaving of theme and metaphoric texture: "Stamper" by name and by nature, the family embodies traditional American ideals of masculinity, self-reliance, hardiness and social reserve. In those nurtured closest to the Stamper ethos a harsh environment and the competitive, vital accommodations of the region's social structures—not the least intense of which is that engendered by intra-family rivalries—combine with an intensely independent "Stamper" spirit to illustrate a unique, extreme, near mythical and/or allegorical archetype. Kesey's concern is to tell through the "great notions" of the Stamper brothers, their family, and their community, something of the story of the European presence in America, and through his expatiation on the personalities and motivations of the leading characters make some generalisations about the



character of American masculinity, too. Kesey shows the pride, the greed, and the scrambling for prestige in which men participate as they attempt to cement or to better their place in relation to other men. Most enlighteningly, Kesey recognises and works into his narrative the central place of fear in the lives of men, and he lays bare the many forms it takes as it exerts its influence on the way men hierarchise, and on the hierarchical structures into which their accommodations shape them.

*Sometimes a Great Notion* is structured by clashes between attitudes and values which are divided into a dichotomy represented by the polarities between individuals exemplifying what might be referred to as "Stamper" and "Non-Stamper" axiological systems. Everything in the novel is ultimately divided by the binary distinction between "Stamper" and "Non-Stamper."<sup>16</sup> "Stamper" values are presented as strong, traditional, patriotic, pro-individual, based on the recognition of the rights of the most adept close accommodator to dominate and succeed, and as intrinsically "American," while "non-Stamper" values are seen as deriving from an "un-American," anti-individual, corporate or "pack" imperative which is associated with weak and debased "modern" attitudes. This is shown with clarity when, returning from service with the Marine Corps in Korea, Hank Stamper finds that his ideals are "out of step" with what have come to be the values of his fellow Americans. Hank discovers that he has "returned from a police action that had taken more lives than the First World War, to find the Dodgers in a slump, frozen apple pie just like Mom used to make in all the supermarkets, and a sour stretch in the sweet land of liberty he'd risked his life defending."<sup>17</sup>

If it is not exactly a battle of "good" versus "evil," nonetheless Kesey's sympathies clearly lie with his protagonists. The men of the Stamper family are contextualised in a system best described by a ladder of homologies which begins with the term "Stamper," and which descends through terms like: "traditional"; "masculine"; "driving"; "rugged"; "courageous"; "independent"; "strong"; and "assertive"; down to "laconic"; "stubborn"; "taciturn"; and even "surly." Stamper males are associated with conservative, patriarchal, values, and have an inherent facility for understanding the dynamics of hierarchical accommodations. "Stamper" encourages the creation of a close-accommodating personality, aggressively seeking the peak of his hierarchical structures. "Stampers" struggle for "alpha" position in the family, but fall into acquiescent place behind the current legitimate occupant of that position, and the safety of the family's combined, directed strength. The family has a simple value system which

encourages outright acceptance or outright rejection. One is either a "Stamper" or one is not; one is with them, and like them, or unlike them, and against them. Stamper hierarchical accommodations are accomplished swiftly and clearly, and through this cleanly "stamped," or marked, process, the metaphors, the homologies, and the associative fields of *Sometimes a Great Notion* are all subordinated to an aggressively definitive masculinist and hierarchical axiological system. Early in the novel Kesey indicates the essence of "Stamper-ness" even in the actions of the most un-Stamper-like Stamper, Lee. Leaving his blast-shattered student cottage on the east coast to return to the family home in Oregon in his van, Lee "tried twice for reverse gear, gave up and put it in forward, turning across the lawn and back on the driveway."<sup>18</sup> Stamper males are not inclined to waste time on the contemplation of strategies of retreat when a way forward, any way forward, is possible. "Stamper" is depicted as an impatient urgency in which the effort required by "healthy" opposition and competition—within self, with others, and with the natural world—brings out "peak performance" in individuals on all levels of its operation. Former Marine and Korean War veteran Hank articulates succinctly a Stamper's view of himself in relation to the universe when he says in response to an accusation of a lack of patriotism from one of his many antagonists, Jonathan Draeger:

"Listen . . . listen to me, Mister...I'm just as concerned as the next guy, just as loyal. If we was to get into it with Russia I'd fight for us right down to the wire. And if Oregon was to get into it with California I'd fight for Oregon. But if somebody—Biggy Newton or the Woodworker's Union or anybody—gets into it with *me*, then I'm for *me*! When the chips are down, I'm my own patriot. I don't give a goddam the other guy is my own *brother* wavin' the *American* flag and singing the friggin' 'Star Spangled Banner'!"<sup>19</sup>

The philosophy of "Stamper-ness" is encapsulated in the family's motto: "Never Give an Inch." If the Stamper way can be seen as the very epitome of the way of the close accommodator, arch individualist and the obsessively independent "loner," the Stamper male can be seen as situated in a literary continuum which begins with the Melvillian "*isolato*" or the Cooperian hero, men who remain an "island" even in the midst of home, family and community.

The non-Stamper system, which stands as antithesis to the Stamper system, is associated with values of deceit, dissemblance, hypocrisy, weakness, and cowardice. "Non-Stamper" is structured by the cold, selfish

pragmatism of the degenerate materialist vision. In the non-Stamper system a corporate agenda is instilled into individuals who become its operatives, and whose wills are subordinated to the "needs" of a cold, impersonal hierarchical organisational unit. In the non-Stamper system accommodation is used as a way of cementing place and keeping distance between those on different levels, while fear maintains the status quo in the individual's heart and within the system. The non-Stamper way retards as much as the Stamper way agitates. Fear keeps the non-Stamper male within his previously determined bounds, as much as fear to the Stamper is an enemy to be overcome, and a spur used to propel him on his quest for self-definition and advancement. In the non-Stamper system fear is a weapon employed by the fearful against the fearful in operations facilitated by the desire of individuals to avoid "pain", physical or psychological. It is a paradox on which Kesey plays that the non-Stamper system is made of selfish individuals bent on their own profit, whose greed and fear is utilised by higher order non-Stamper men for the advantage of both themselves and the system, while the Stamper system, which is more overtly insistent on obedience and allegiance, rewards its adherents with a "freedom" from fear and the ability to gain profit in the form of self-respect and relative autonomy. Thus, in the best traditions of the Protestant Work Ethic, discipline and obedience to a patriarchal structure are valorised as the way to "real" freedom, while the search for "selfish" freedom is seen as the road to the worst kind of exploitation, even slavery.

The clash between Stamper and non-Stamper values occurs both within and without the Stamper family, and within individuals as well as between hierarchical systems. For instance, a member of the non-Stamper hierarchy, Ben Newton, possesses all the fearlessness of a "Stamper" male; when the arch-Stamper, Hank, learns to overcome his fear, he is subordinating the non-Stamper side of himself; when Lee returns to Wakonda, although he is "named" Stamper, he represents the non-Stamper values of cowardice, fearfulness, and self-interest coming into conflict with the Stamper values which eventually win him over. However, the essential tension between Stamper and non-Stamper values in *Sometimes a Great Notion* is best exemplified by the conflicts and accommodations which occur between the "Town," that is, the male citizens of Wakonda, and the family.

The defeat of the logging union's strategies in *Sometimes a Great Notion* leads to ambiguity, for the triumph of Stamper ways and "old fashioned" Stamper values over the Union, and over the Town, does not really result in a triumph of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness over the forces of

an un-American polity. By the end of Kesey's second novel it seems that America itself is the enemy; it is as if there is hope for the expression of the spirit of the individualist neither confined by the materialistic vision of post-war America, nor defined against the morally restrictive and limited vision of "traditional" America. In the modern world, Kesey implies, even the strongest individual must enter into accommodations, and must be compromised by those accommodations. The best a "man" can do is force close accommodation on as many of the structures with which he must deal as possible, or make the best he can of the distant accommodation he cannot avoid being forced on him; a truly autonomous self-definition is impossible. The conflict in *Sometimes a Great Notion* is between different kinds of hierarchical, masculinist power structures, and not, as might first appear, between a group representing the forces of "America" and "good" and "right" and those representing "un-American-ness" and "evil" and "sin."

In *Sometimes a Great Notion* Kesey uses a variety of techniques, including constantly shifting perspectives of time and place and person, to tell the story of the men of the Stamper family. In 1898 Kansas feed-store owner Jonas Armand Stamper and his family leave the dusty mid-west to establish a similar business in the still-wild mountain timber country of Oregon. For several generations before his birth Jonas' rootless forebears have trekked across America, the members of each generation in turn finding themselves dissatisfied with the places their fathers have chosen to settle. The conquistadorial, masculinist nature of the Stamper clan is from the first associated with the historically culturally and symbolically significant American drive west. This impulse is so ingrained, and has become so much part of the family's psychic make-up, that when Hank returns from service with the Marine Corps. in Korea, and completes a crossing of the nation from east coast to west coast on a motorcycle, Kesey describes how he stopped at the foam's edge to wait, stopped with the cycle propped between his legs in the hard wet sand to actually wait for something to happen, for some mystic revelation to explode in his mind making all things clear forever, holding his breath like a sorcerer just finished with all the steps necessary to some world-shaking spell. He was the first of the Stampers to complete the full circle west.<sup>20</sup>

Both the source of their vitality and their curse, the drive at the heart of the Stamper character and all Stamper values is summarised by Kesey when he portrays the family metaphorically as "a clan of skinny men inclined always toward...believing in greener grass over the hill and straighter

hemlocks down the trail."<sup>21</sup> He compares them to "animals driven by a drought, by an unquenchable thirst...driven by a dream of a place where the water tastes like wine."<sup>22</sup> The metaphors which introduce livestock, natural catastrophe, and alcohol serve as a perfect introduction to this distinctive kin-group's main concerns, and sources of occupation and leisure activities; they are from the first presented as a typical, and yet distinctive, manifestation of the American character. Inheriting their forefathers' vitality, the contemporary Stamper men are physically and emotionally tough; they partake of what might be described as a modern-day version of the pioneer, or frontier, spirit. Collectively and individually they embody the kind of ideal masculine qualities discussed in the introduction: strength, self-reliance, competence, and reserve. To these they add further archetypal American expressions of masculinity: they are patriarchal, conservative—if not reactionary, and racist—materialistic, and conscious of family "values" socially, and small community, or regional values economically.

For all its usefulness in adapting to and surviving in varying circumstances, the penchant of some Stamper men for habitually seeking the "greener grass over the hill"<sup>23</sup> is seen as mere fecklessness by more "sensible" Stampers. Sober and conventional members of the clan damn this restlessness when it occurs as a mark of moral "affliction"; staid Stamper elders are aware of what they refer to as " 'the flaw in the family character.' "<sup>24</sup> Jonas Stamper, for instance, realises his eldest son, Henry, bears "*the sin. Curse of the Wanderer; curse of the Tramp; bitter curse of the Faithless; always turning their back on the lot God had granted.*"<sup>25</sup> The very ambition which drives certain Stamper men to expend their energies so intensely on often fruitless visionary endeavours isolates these men from each other and from their social context. A Stamper man fully possessed by this particular family trait becomes the subject of a tyrannical self-will, inflexible and demanding, which resides in his heart like a mixture of devilish id and starched superego. This personality, which Kesey perhaps intends to be identified as an archetype of the bifurcations of the American character, manifests in an irresistible impulse to leave hearth and home and undertake the search for some kind of "Holy Grail," some ultimate challenge which is always imminent, often immanent, but never encountered. This drive is transmitted down the generations as a recurring dream, a chimera of peace and plenty, which ever recedes toward the western horizon and which, especially when the urge is repressed or

ignored, leaves a gnawing dissatisfaction which burrows itself ever-deeper into the recesses of a man's soul.

In the struggle for supreme position within the family hierarchy which will continue throughout the novel as son wrestles with father, brother with brother, and cousin with cousin, Jonas Stamper has already found himself outmanoeuvred by young Henry: "He...catches sight of his three boys...He frowns to remind them that, while they may have been the ones that argued for this move from Kansas to the wilds of the Northwest, it is still *his* decision and no other that allows it."<sup>26</sup> However, Henry Stamper already unnerves his father to the extent that when he tries to lecture his boys on the similarity between the Wills of the Almighty God and the Almighty Father Stamper "there is something...so blatantly triumphant and blasphemous"<sup>27</sup> in Henry's gaze "that the fearless patriarch's words stop in his throat."<sup>28</sup> Later Jonas thinks to himself: "*You knew it was the family sin come back from the pit, and you knew your part in it.*"<sup>29</sup> Jonas' ominous musings will remain in the reader's mind, growing in portent as the novel progresses to focus on the life that son, Henry, builds in the northwest. Jonas leaves his family after their third winter in Oregon and returns to Kansas, but his family stays, for the "three years of rain and wilderness that had weakened the stiff, practical plainsman's starch in Jonas had nurtured a berry-vine toughness in his sons."<sup>30</sup> The desertion of his family by Jonas Stamper leaves Henry, the eldest son, its de facto head and principal breadwinner. Henry assumes his father's role, growing into a crusty and intimidating patriarch. He builds a successful, dynastic business amidst the forests and waterways of Oregon's wilderness. With little help from the townspeople, who are in jealous awe of them, the vital, feisty, and argumentative Stampers fill an economic niche as loggers and sawmillers. Henry responds to his father's abrogation of duty with a "ferocity"<sup>31</sup> which enables him "to build a small fortune and a logging operation the size of which was limited only by the number of relatives that migrated to the area to work for him."<sup>32</sup>

When, after the birth of Hank, as a christening present, Jonas sends from Kansas a plaque, accompanied by a self-pitying note engraved: " 'Blessed Are the Meek, for They Shall Inherit the Earth. Matt. 6' "<sup>33</sup> Henry covers it in yellow paint, and with a red pencil used to mark lengths on log-ends, inscribes "what to Henry was nothing more than a good rule for his son to grow up under, but what essentially was the core of that family sin...NEVER GIVE AN INCH!"<sup>34</sup> Henry's replacement of the biblical message not only points to his entirely secular philosophy but also provides a succinct

summary of his theories of masculinity, reserve, and self-reliance. This idea is also behind Hank's characterisation of Henry's handiwork as: "Just like one of them mottos you might see in a Marine sergeant's orderly office, or like something Coach Lewellyn might of drawn up to hang alongside his other hardnose signs all over the locker room. NEVER GIVE AN INCH!"<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps out of resentment and bitterness at having been forced to take on such serious responsibility in his youth, Henry instils in his eldest son an inversion of the Christian values which his father, at least nominally, claimed as his own, but which did not prevent the older man from deserting his wife and sons. The quotation on the plaque is an ironic commentary on Jonas Stamper's practice of Christianity: an echo of Psalm 37:11, it is from the fifth, not the sixth chapter, of Matthew,<sup>36</sup> as it is according to Jonas. Henry's replacement value system, which he inscribes in industrial products over his father's religious sentiments, indicates clearly the earthly, material values adopted by Jonas' descendants. If the Stampers are to be an allegory of the family of the nation, intent, content and form, medium and message, could also be said to fuse in providing an ironic, symbolic commentary on the abandonment of the "City upon a Hill" of the nation's founders and its religious values for the search for and occupation of an entirely more selfish and pragmatic kind of higher ground. The effect of this epigrammatic epigraph on Hank is considerable. This is indicated later in the novel when he says of one of his own restatements of this idea: "a body could paint that on a plaque and hang it up over his bedstead."<sup>37</sup>

In their fellow human beings, in the Wakonda Auga river, and in the stands of forest which they work for their livelihood, the Stampers find successive and interconnected physical metaphors for their propensity for seeing the world and its creations in adversarial terms. The "prehistoric land"<sup>38</sup> nurtures an indomitable spirit in those it does not wear down. The Stampers combat the natural world, the climate, the environment and the river, and fall into what is at best an uneasy armistice with the townspeople of Wakonda, who alternately envy, fear and deride them. The Stampers build their house on the banks of the Wakonda Auga, the only local home which dares the voracious river as it erodes up to six inches per annum "*as its yearly toll.*"<sup>39</sup> The Stamper homestead "protrudes out into the river on a peninsula of its own making,"<sup>40</sup> a testament to the success of the family's fight with the waterway. The Wakonda Auga River may attack them, but the Stampers hold fiercely to the land on which their home and outbuildings stand. Hank and his father share a defiant love-hate

relationship with the river; in an example of the intensity which characterises the most prominent members of the family, the head of the clan makes it his special business regularly to check the water-level and to engage in the perpetual renewal of the patches of lumber which shore up the levee. Obsessively Henry, and later Hank, check the reinforcements at the most vulnerable points of the banks of the river near the homestead. Even drunken and battered after a bar-room fight Hank stumbles to the Stampers' riverside wharf, telling his half-brother and his cousin: " 'We got to be ever on the alert, you know that. 'Ternal vigilance is the price.' "<sup>41</sup> As successive generations of Stampers combat the Wakonda Auga, the family derives an abundance of energy and focus from the challenge of this, their first and most persistent enemy. The translation of the river's name causes this unpredictable watercourse to be known as "the Shortest Big river (or Biggest Short, pick your own) in the world."<sup>42</sup> Like the Stampers, it is forever pressing against its limitations, an inherency which connects it, and them, to issues of primacy and prestige. The Wakonda Auga assumes the role of an important character in the novel; it is the Stampers' enemy, but also their unwilling sometime-ally. They build their idiosyncratic lifestyles and dwellings on its banks; they rely on it for transport and for a range of domestic and industrial purposes; and their alert, warily observant natures are honed by the need to retain eternal vigilance against its encroachments. The clan's relationship with the river represents archetypal Stamper accommodation.

This predilection for turning an enemy into a kind of ally, for turning a liability into a way of becoming stronger, is typical of the Stampers. Although in a sense relieved to be away from the town where he was raised, and the family he feels were "demons" who first terrorised and then scorned and rejected him, Lee Stamper, on revisiting Wakonda, will recall how during his absence "in the demon's place grew a terrible emptiness, a great malignant vacuum. No demons, but no teammates either. Seemed it was always like that. A person might almost think they were one and the same."<sup>43</sup>

Lee is the child of Henry Snr.'s second marriage. After his first spouse, Hank's mother, has died, in rather unlikely fashion the rambunctious middle-aged timber-man persuades an unconventional college graduate from a well-placed family to become his next wife. Now step-mother to a teenage boy, Myra Stamper also gives birth to Leland, known as Lee, on whom she dotes. Out of sexual or emotional frustration, or simply to spite her cantankerous husband, she takes her step-son to her bed on his



sixteenth birthday, and finally flees the house by the Wakonda Auga in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to find greater happiness and healthier surroundings. Myra Stamper is caught between two worlds; her eventual suicide is one of several of pathetic deaths which punctuate the history of the family. This event, and the years in Oregon which her son feels led to her ultimate despair, remain in Lee's memory, fuelling his anguish and playing a major part in shaping the immature, vacillating, self-centred hyper-sensitive young man he becomes. Old Henry has only a negative influence on the formation of Lee's character, and one has a deal of sympathy for Lee. For reasons unexplained, his father

paid little attention to this second son. Where he had insisted on raising his firstborn to be as strong and self-sufficient as himself, he was content to let this second child...spend his youth alone in a room next to his mother's, doing what-the-hell-ever it was that sort of kid does alone in his room all day.<sup>44</sup>

Jacob and Esau are recalled as, from the first, the bookish, nervous Leland is unfavourably compared with the elder, more robust, and more practical Hank. After his mother takes him with her in her flight from the house, a dozen years pass which Lee spends at school and university. In the economic climate of post-war America, however, and new arrangements and relations between labour and industry, the Stampers' family firm is notably out of step with new concepts of unionisation, and award wages and conditions. Lee, on the same morning he attempts a melodramatic and clumsy suicide, receives a postcard calling him back to the bosom of his family, sent not out of the great desire of either party for re-union, but because Lee, as a legitimate family member, represents a much-needed source of non-union labour.

Lee's cousin Joe Ben writes telling Lee of the family's predicament with the logging union over a contract for lumber due to the firm Wakonda Pacific. The Stampers have agreed to supply the shortfall caused by a strike in the region. This leads to a clash between the union and the Family which pits the Stampers against their neighbours, and eventually, in some cases, their own relatives. For all that the Stamper men fear the family milksop will only have become even further weakened by life "back East" and will have to be taught all over again Stamper ways he hardly digested first time around ("who's gonna teach this here boy to ride a motorcycle an' doodle a cousin an'...shave with a ax blade"<sup>45</sup>) Lee's are Stamper hands, available at a time when any extra labour may prove vital. For his part, the university

drop-out's soul has been ignited by Hank's pithy, evocative *postscriptum* to the "postcard,"<sup>46</sup> as Lee calls it: "You should be a big enough guy now, bub."<sup>47</sup> Lee takes this as a challenge, and decides he is ready to test himself against the figure in whose shadow he lived his earliest years. Hank, in his gruff way, has meant: "Big enough to help, to do a man's work"; it is the first of many misunderstandings between them. Lee is attentive to any remark he might construe as a slight; Hank frequently is not as articulate as he would like to be, especially at moments which call for the display of emotion. He makes do with remarks he intends to be jocular, but which Lee takes as insults, and reminders of his inferiority.

In the novel Lee must begin to find his own true "stamp," as he faces the weight of his past and the fear of inadequacy which has remained with him. Part of him eventually demands he return to Wakonda and finalise his accommodations with the hierarchies of family and community. Lee describes the idiosyncratic, Stamper-built two-story homestead and captures the attitude of the family to their aspirations, as well as indicating their world-view, and their sense of dynasty. Lee describes "mighty Stamper Hall...built sometime during the reign of Henry (Stamper) the Eighth."<sup>48</sup> "The domain," comments Leland, "is an absolute monarchy in which no one dares make a move, not even the crown prince himself, without first consulting the Great Ruler."<sup>49</sup> The Crown Prince is Hank, and the period covered by the novel includes the end of Henry's "reign" and the unwilling Regency of his eldest son as Hank, as the ascending "alpha male," succeeds his father to the position of leader and patriarch of the clan.

The skill and strength, individual and group, of the Stampers have always granted them an indisputable, if askew, local prestige. The bitterness engendered by the Stampers' legal "strike breaking," and the dissension and violence it causes drive the novel's action. Similarly aggravated over the long course of years first by Henry and then by Hank Stamper, almost the entire town has been united by the energy of the Californian union man Jonathan Bailey Draeger and a local unionist with old scores to settle with Hank, Floyd Evenwrite. The strike has been Draeger's concern since its instigation; the stubborn insistence of the Stampers on their right as a non-union family firm to fill the vacant contracts leads him into an inevitable clash with Hank, Henry, and the essential values that define "Stamper." When the Stamper "black sheep" Lee, arrives, he is also intending to help bring down "Stamper," the hierarchical structure he has rejected and which he feels has rejected him. To Lee, Draeger, and the town, Hank is the scapegoat and the symbolic enemy in whom all defeats, all frustrations, all

antagonisms, all rivalries, are embodied. Lee has begun to hate his brother in childhood, embittered by the taunts of his popular, athletic sibling. He has also witnessed his mother's sexual liaison with her step-son. Lee distils the essence of the animosity against Hank when he finds common cause with his brother's "friends" and peers in desiring Hank's downfall "simply because it was insupportable to us that he had the audacity to be *up* there—perched arrogantly on the throne, when we were not."<sup>50</sup> Eventually Lee decides that his brother's weak spot is his wife, Vivian. He cuckolds Hank, and repays one kind of sexual robbery with another. Lee finally is able to acknowledge to himself that "his whole return home had been motivated by the desire for revenge," and that he has "planned to use [Viv] as an instrument in the revenge."<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile the tension surrounding the strike, and anger toward the strike-breakers, increases. Manipulated by the devious, dissembling, honeyed arrogance of Draeger, one by one most of the Stamper-relations are "buffaloed by Evenwrite and the rest of the town,"<sup>52</sup> and fall away, removed by intimidation, by illness real or feigned, by mishap—including an horrific accident at the climax of the novel in which the endearing Joe Ben Stamper drowns, trapped by a log in a creek in a rising tide, and old Henry loses an arm—until essentially only Hank and Lee are left. Their final "accommodation," long delayed, is the climax of *Sometimes a Great Notion*. It is appropriately physical and violent, and leads to the predictable, somewhat bathetic scene implied at the end of the novel, as Viv, dissatisfied and adulterous wife, leaves her husband and brother-in-law-lover to battle together the elements in a foolhardy attempt to fulfil the on-again off-again contract with the lumber firm Wakonda Pacific and float the logs to its operatives down the swollen, tidally-stirred Wakonda Auga river.

The tale is narrated through a series of flashbacks and deliberately disorienting time-shifts. The "present" from which it emanates is situated in and around the fictional Oregon town in the year 1961. In *Sometimes a Great Notion* Kesey employs a mixture of intertwined first- and third-person, relatively formal and stream-of-consciousness-style informal, narrative perspectives to provide the story of succeeding generations of the Stamper family, and thus he places in perspective the struggles going on within the family, and between the family and the hierarchies of Wakonda. He mixes the narrative stand-point of a voice distanced from the action with a narrative stand-point present in the narrative (Genette's "heterodiegetic" and "homodiegetic") while Lee and Hank in turn are the "autodiegetic" focus of the novel. The omniscient third-person narrator at times remains

detached, but at other times he/she, like a more traditional omniscient narrator, adopts a perspective implying an intimacy with the thoughts and emotions of a particular character. This works further toward establishing empathy and identification. The rush of Kesey's material gives no doubt as to its "primacy," in several senses of the word. It is grounded in life and experience and close observation; when "realism" is evoked by Kesey's veering, zooming technique however, he achieves modernist effects by the pairing of an "objective" viewpoint with a "subjective" viewpoint, via a rapid alternation of personal and impersonal observations and details. An even greater level of intimacy is achieved through the employment of interior monologues, distinguished from the rest of the text by being set in italics. Hank, Lee, Teddy, the bartender in Wakonda's bar, "the Snag," and, less frequently, Old Henry and Hank's wife Vivian all have such first-person accounts created to convey their perspectives and their responses, which in the main are to give examples of definitive Stamper values or behaviours. Additionally, there are passages of more formal first-person narration, predominantly from the perspective of Lee or from the perspective of Hank. The result is a text in which more than one interpretation is given for most of the critical events, usually including a relatively formal view, and a participant's view. An example is provided by the striking image from the novel's opening scene, set beside the Wakonda Auga river, of "*an object...in the gusting rain eight or ten feet above the flood's current, a human arm, tied at the wrist, (just the arm; look)...an invisible dancer perform[ing] twisting pirouettes for an enthralled audience.*"<sup>53</sup> Kesey's technique is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's ability to manipulate proairetic coding in order both to sustain interest and to tantalise his audience.

Information is imparted grudgingly by Kesey. Every contextualising detail of inter-relationship and event, its order and significance, is revealed in part before it is revealed in whole. The intimate narrative tone frequently employed in his depictions of the Stampers permits some lengthy and sophisticated expositions of the nature of familial accommodations generally, and those between siblings particularly. These accommodations, especially as they relate to the central character in the novel *Sometimes a Great Notion*, are the focus of the next chapter.

#### Notes:

---

<sup>1</sup> James D. Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature* (New York: Oxford

---

UP, 1986) 208.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Bantam, 1968) 31-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (London: Picador 1973) 51.

<sup>4</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* 52.

<sup>5</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* 51.

<sup>6</sup> Terence Martin, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the High Cost of Living," *Modern Fiction Studies* 19 (1973): 43.

<sup>7</sup> M. Gilbert Porter, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Rising to Heroism* (Boston: Twayne, 1989) 14.

<sup>8</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* 53.

<sup>9</sup> Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* 47.

<sup>10</sup> Warren Hinckle, "A Social History of the Hippies," *The American Experience: A Radical Reader*, eds. Harold Jaffe and John Tytell (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 267.

<sup>11</sup> Jaffe and Tytell 267.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfe 8.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Ken Kesey, *Garage Sale* (New York: Viking, 1973); Ken Kesey, *Demon Box* (New York: Penguin, 1986); Kesey, Ken, *The Further Inquiry* (New York: Viking, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Richard D. Maxwell, "The Abdication of Masculinity," *A Casebook on Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, ed. George Searle (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1992) 143.

<sup>15</sup> Michael André Bernstein, " 'These Children that Come at You with Knives': *Ressentiment*, Mass Culture, and the Saturnalia," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 368.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix, Table 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ken Kesey, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (New York: Viking, 1964) 151.

<sup>18</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 61.

<sup>19</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 363.

<sup>20</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 158.

<sup>21</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 16.

<sup>22</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 19.

<sup>23</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 16.

<sup>24</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 18.

<sup>25</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 16.

<sup>26</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 15.

<sup>27</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 15.

<sup>28</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 15.

<sup>29</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 16.

<sup>30</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 23.

<sup>31</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 30.

<sup>32</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 30.

<sup>33</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 30.

<sup>34</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 31.

<sup>35</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 31.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

<sup>37</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.

<sup>38</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 275.

<sup>39</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 3.

<sup>40</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 4.

<sup>41</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 343.

<sup>42</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 89.

<sup>43</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 489.

<sup>44</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 35.

<sup>45</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 81.

<sup>46</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 75.

<sup>47</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 43.

<sup>48</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 78.

<sup>49</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 78.

<sup>50</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 197.

<sup>51</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 263-4.

---

<sup>52</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 492.

<sup>53</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 2.

## **THE '60s MAN: Hierarchical Structures and the Articulation of Male Experience in Selected Novels of Norman Mailer, Ken Kesey and Philip Roth.**

### **Part Two: "Mon Semblable,--Mon Frère": Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion*.**

#### **Chapter Five. "Alpha Male" Hank Stamper: "One of the Ten Toughest Hombres West of the Rockies."**

*"I always have to be goddammit working up to fighting with some-guy-or-other!" Ken Kesey, *Sometimes a Great Notion*.*

The principal hierarchical accommodations depicted in Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion* concern Hank Stamper, the most notable example of Stamper values, aggressive male hierarchicising and alpha masculinity in the novel. Both a product and an example of masculinist, hierarchical forces, Hank is the dominant "reality" in the novel, and in Wakonda; he is the axis around which all else revolves. Although in the early stages of Kesey's tale the narrative emanates from the perspective of Lee Stamper, it is Hank, not Lee, who is the focus of the novel's action, and who comes to assume centre stage thematically as well. The action of the novel charts the accommodation which is ultimately forged between Hank and his half-brother as by turns one plays antagonist to the other's protagonist; but progressively Lee recedes as the focus of interest as it becomes apparent that Hank occupies first place in Lee's obsessive mind, premier place in the family hierarchy, and also provides the standard of masculinity against which Lee and all the other men in the novel test and measure themselves. Hank's physical superiority grants him a primacy of place in his family, and in the local community, which entitles him to be referred to as an "alpha" male, that is, a male who dominates the hierarchical systems with which he is involved.<sup>1</sup>

Hank Stamper's ideas of identity, self-perception, gender definition and role assignation, like any other male's, have been drawn from a variety of sources. He has been influenced by the models he has found in his own family, by the processes of socialisation which have occurred in his home, at school, and in the wider community, and as well he has been open to the influence of books, film, television, radio, and the oral and literary traditions of the United States. The most pronounced influence on Hank's

idea of masculinity, however, has been his father. In acquiring his fortitude, his reticence, and his laconic but keen tongue, Hank has imitated his first and most detailed model of manhood. Schooled in his father's version of the Stamper mythos and Stamper praxis, Hank grows up into a strong and strong-minded youth who enacts the secularised, intensely focused "Oregon Stamper" values Henry Snr. creates as the inversion of his father, Jonas', attenuated, embattled "Kansas Stamper" piety. Hank has been lectured and hounded about personality by his father from earliest youth. He is heir to a series of roles: local hero; Stamper patriarch; head of the family business; eldest son of eldest son. Given few other choices, he creates himself according to the desired mould and emulates his father's pugnacious way of relating to others, to his work, to the land, and to the world.

It is just to acknowledge that Hank clearly worships Old Henry. When, at the height of the battle with the logging union, Hank's aging parent rejoins the Stamper work-force, and briefly recaptures something of the spirit and energy of his younger days, Hank feels he is

seeing a once-familiar but almost-forgotten man...this is the boomer I used to follow on cruising walks twenty years before, the calm, stubborn, confident rock of a man who had taught me how to tie a bowline with one hand and how to place a dutchman block in an undercut so's the tree would fall so cunthair *perfect* that he could put a stake where he aimed for it to fall, then by god drive that stake into the ground with the trunk!<sup>2</sup>

All the qualities which Henry possesses Hank possesses: both men are exceptionally vital, competent and hardy, but never boastful or prone to the unnecessary display of their strength or their abilities; the reserve of both Henry Stamper Snr. and Henry Stamper Jnr. is formidable; both have a tendency to be taciturn when not being either sarcastic or enigmatically laconic; both can be playful, but are rarely relaxed; neither is comfortable with displays of emotion in himself or others; and each realises he possesses a quality which makes other males respond, often aggressively, to him. Hank's father also bequeaths to his son the paradigmatic masculine philosophy embodied in the phrase: "Never Give an Inch." Hank is product and exemplar of a system which valorises aggressive masculinity; becoming so has involved him learning how to reify in his own body, behaviour and mind-set the national and general myths of masculine behaviour with which he is inculcated, and of which this maxim serves as summary.



Hank's more abstract and general models of masculine behaviour are derived from literary and cultural sources, some of which have considerable antiquity, as well as from sources which have more contemporary origins, such as, for example, the entertainment industry. The novel is punctuated with intertextual references to popular and folk songs, many of which celebrate directly or indirectly the working life and the rural values to which Hank Stamper adheres and which he champions, particularly against the urban values represented by Lee. On several occasions song lyrics comment on the action, or on Hank's mood: the two most important examples appearing in the lyric from which the novel derives its title, and in its ninth division, when the song on Joe-Ben's radio "Watch the Doughnut, Not the Hole," could be giving Hank advice prior to the disaster which kills his cousin and nearly kills his father.

The Stampers' involvement in the timber business has led Hank, not unnaturally, to draw his role models from the ultra-masculine figures of legend and semi-legend which exist in the folklore of American woodsmen. Writ in terms of only slightly more fallible flesh, Hank's iron muscles and equally steely determination recall the superhuman feats of a folk-hero like Paul Bunyan. Lee, in fact, describes the brothers attending to folk tales of American and European origin, and he recalls them as boys listening "in awe, eyes agog and mouth hanging open...for the tales of the north woods' legendary denizens."<sup>3</sup> In terms of his more recent history, the adult Hank is described as an avid watcher of the television series "*Wells Fargo*,"<sup>4</sup> typical of the "Wild West" adventures which enjoyed a vogue in the early 1960s, and which were populated by sturdy, granite-jawed heroes of impeccable, imperturbable habits and black-and-white attitudes to life, and which also featured stereotypical presentations of American frontier life in the nineteenth century. One of Hank's favourite appellations for himself clearly shows the aggregate of these influences: Hank likes to refer to himself, and be known as, "one of the Ten Toughest Hombres west of the Rockies."<sup>5</sup>

Another influence derives from the medium of comic books, and is one which both Hank and Lee share (with Kesey). Lee describes one costumed superhero of the 1940s and 1950s, Captain Marvel, as standing in his estimation "head and shoulders above such late starters as Hamlet or Homer,"<sup>6</sup> while effectively noting the tradition in which this modern Titan stands by relating the qualities which he possesses and which are acronymically preserved in his magic word, "Shazam: S for Solomon and wisdom; H for Hercules and strength; and so on with Atlas, Zeus, Achilles,

and Mercury.”<sup>7</sup> The popularity of this creation for boys like the young Stampers is partly explained by Captain Marvel's “secret identity.” The Captain's alter ego was an ordinary youngster, Billy Batson, “a scrawny and ineffectual punk who could metamorphose, to the accompaniment of lightning and thunder, into a cleft-chinned behemoth capable of practically *anything*,”<sup>8</sup> through the employment of the word of power which effected the transformation from impotent child to muscled, fearless superhero.

The “Captain Marvel” character the adult Hank assumes, as Kesey portrays him, is certainly aware of how delimited he is by his history and his heritage, both in the particular and in the general instance. The combined influences of Stamper history, Stamper the Father, American societal and cultural expectations and the American presentation and valorisation of particular masculine attributes and male behaviours leads, however, to Hank being constrained and defined by himself as much as by others. Hank's personality has been formed by his family, his society, and his culture, and the most important “strategy” employed in the formation of the archetypically masculine American character is the inculcation in the individual of a mind-set which makes the super-ego the self's sternest policeman. Thus it is Hank who is his own harshest critic, and most on the alert for weakness, for “un-masculine,” “un-Stamper-like” behaviour in himself. Hank is ever-vigilant: just as he watches the river, and watches the world around him, the weather and the land, he maintains a close watch over the facades, or masks, of his own personality; just as he will not let the river take an inch of Stamper land, he will not give an inch to emotional or physical weakness in himself; less inclined still is he readily to betray to another living soul his feelings, his thoughts, or his desires.

As part of his persona as “one of the Ten Toughest Hombres west of the Rockies” the only boundaries which Hank Stamper will even begin to acknowledge are those set by physical limitations, facts of geography, and the laws of physics. His heroics, particularly in his Herculean exertions in the novel's penultimate division, when he faces trial after trial of strength and will, indicate that anything which can be changed, challenged, held at bay, or beaten —idea or object, task or territory— is liable to find itself doubly employed by Hank as enemy and as a spur against potential “weakness” within. The ethos of the Stamper male calls on him to force close accommodation on every system and individual with which he has contact, including the physical person of the Stamper male himself.

Kesey, through Lee, manages to articulate Hank's character on a number of occasions. Watching Hank striding the dock near the homestead

Lee marveled at the...muscles...at the swing of the arms and the lift of the neck...Every movement constituted open aggression against the very air through which Hank passed...He doesn't just walk; he consumes distance step by carnivorous step. Open aggression is what it is all right, he concluded.<sup>9</sup>

In the novel, and through the glimpses Kesey provides of Hank's thoughts, the reader comes to understand that Hank does question his place, and his mores. However, ultimately he has come to accept himself for what he is, in the realisation that everything he knows as Hank Stamper is bound by the obligation of paternal and societal expectations, the constant challenges of others, and his own preference for a solitary life in which he can use obstacles and problems as adversarial levers to extract a kind of perpetual peak performance from himself.

Intriguingly, Lee possesses this same quality, albeit in a much less exacting form. With his greater self-awareness and sophistication Lee has developed an objective awareness of the inner voice which he refers to as "perhaps the oldest of all my mental Board of Directors; the true arbiter of all my interior negotiations and easily distinguished from all other members of the board...by his upper-case mandates. 'WATCH OUT!'...'LOOK OUT FROM BEHIND!' "<sup>10</sup> Lee believes that this "personality" dwells in his mind, infallibly alert, guarding him against danger. His faith in it as a kind of "early warning system" is indicated by his name for it: " 'Old Reliable, The Sentry of my Besieged Psyche.' "<sup>11</sup> *Sometimes a Great Notion* charts the "awakening" within Lee of the complete "Stamper" self, akin to Hank's character, a side of himself he has long denied, and the dominance of which he forestalls until the moment he finally realises that it is embedded in his personality, and must be accepted as much as one must accept any more obvious physical characteristic or even defect.

Hank Stamper, of course, has long been as one with his warning voices. He has learned to overcome the tension between even "normal" reservations, apprehensions and self-doubts by recourse to a model of masculinity which is typified and exemplified by clichés and mottos. He articulates character to himself by an interior "dialogue" between parts of his inner being, as a confident, macho Hank "coaches" his fears into submission to his will. Hank has learned to reify his desire to be inflexible, to be a "perfect" man. The result of his upbringing, the back-breaking labour in the forest, and being nurtured on his father's gritty philosophy, is that the character Hank has created to deal with his family and to secure his place in

it and in the wider world is so efficient that it excludes any other modality, any other way of reaching accommodation. Where every act is part of a competition, one can have no colleagues, only rivals and inferiors. Through a process which is a combination of biological inheritance and upbringing working in inextricable tandem, Hank Stamper has come to be the epitome of the aggressive, hierarchicising American male. The "last of the Stampers," he is the inheritor of a stern pioneering spirit which not only shapes the individual, but which shapes the social environment in which that individual is placed, as well as those who inhabit it with him.

At the start of the second division of *Sometimes a Great Notion* Kesey relates an incident from Hank's past which typifies the latter's experience and attitude, and which demonstrates the forces which have combined to produce his adult character. The passage also demonstrates the way Kesey intertwines his presentation of the sequence of time with the development of characterisation and the exposition of his thematic concerns. In the present described in the text, Hank recalls that one of the most important things he ever learned about rivers he "didn't learn...from the old man or any of the uncles, or even Boney Stokes, but from old Floyd Evenwrite...that first time Floyd and us locked horns about the union."<sup>12</sup> Hank remembers a day when, on his way to Wakonda to see Evenwrite, his boat hits a submerged object, and he consequently takes a soaking in the river and loses a brand-new outboard motor, to arrive late to his meeting "mad as hell and sure as shooting in *no* frigging mood to talk Labor Organization."<sup>13</sup> Sitting in his still-wet clothes and listening to Evenwrite's droning, Hank drifts into a reverie of half-forgotten events from boyhood. When ten or twelve, he remembers, clad in a protective oilskin cape, and with the security of a rifle stashed nearby, he had been exploring a huge, dense thicket of thorny berry vines "up river from the Stamper house"<sup>14</sup> and found a bobcat's den. The three infant animals in the den fascinated him so much that after taking one of the cubs Hank succumbed not once but twice to the impulse to return to raid the lair. Hank risked, if discovered, being severely mauled, if not killed, by the mother bobcat, and although he had reasoned with himself that "*nobody* but a snotted moron would go *back* in that hole,"<sup>15</sup> and "his stomach [had] still heaved with fear, and the image of that mother cat's wrath still burned in his head,"<sup>16</sup> Hank realises that

it had known—it, the fear, the *being-awful-scared-of-something*—had known the boy better than he knew himself, had known all along from that first glance that he wasn't going to be satisfied until he had all three kittens. It

didn't make any difference if they were baby dragons and mama dragon was breathing fire on him every step of the way.<sup>17</sup>

This conquest of self has taught Hank to face a fear worse than any physical peril —the feeling of “being-awful-scared-of-something”— and this discovery of courage, like Rojack's moment of bravery in battle described in the first chapter of *An American Dream*, is the beginning of the differentiation of one male from his fellows, and of that male's entry into and acceptance of the myth of masculine fortitude, of “heroism.” The discovery young Hank and Rojack share is that the crippling inertia of “Being-awful-scared-of-something” involves nothing more tangible than being afraid of fear itself. Facing the source of one's fear, Stamper and Rojack would agree, will often prove to be less of an ordeal than waiting, blindly, in terror. The ability to overcome the paralysis of fear, the impulse to retreat and the impulse to never dare trial or danger, in “Stamper” values, whether practiced by Hank, Lee, Rojack, or D.J. Jethroe, is the hallmark of masculinity; it is what “makes a man a man.” In the “Stamper” system overcoming the fear of being afraid is the first step to true power, and leads to the discovery that every “enemy,” whether originating within oneself or having an objective existence, is a potential source of stimulus as much as it is an adversary. This self-directed drive to live with an attitude which treats every phenomenon one encounters as an “obstacle,” as an enemy which in some ways needs to be overcome, is the single, pulsing imperative which is both the greatest strength and the greatest liability of “Stamper” men, from Old Henry on down to his sons.

The end of the account of the bobcat incident broadens and expands the detailing of the particular adaptations that Stamper masculinity has been forced to make in the face of the vital, wild Oregon landscape, which, in Kesey, metaphorically represents the state of European Man in the vastness of the “wilderness” of America. Hank takes the animals home, where his Uncle Ben makes a cage for the kittens, and they become Hank's much-adored pets. However, after heavy rains the boy goes one morning to find that “[t]he whole bank where the cage stood is gone...as though a quick slice had been made into the earth.. with the edge of a huge moon-stropped razor.”<sup>18</sup> Hank's memories bring before his eyes the moment he beheld the bodies of his pets: “Floating in the corner behind the wire mesh are the contents of the cage—the rubber balls, the torn cloth Teddy bear, the wicker basket and sodden bedding, and the shrunken bodies of the three cats.”<sup>19</sup>

The impact of the demise of the bobcat kittens on the young Hank is considerable. He becomes surly with classmates who ask him about the cubs, about which he had boasted. He is able, however, with his new found combativeness, to find an outlet, or a displacement, for his anger. The loss of the little bobcats proves to be an emotional rite of passage as Hank's loss "is grooved into him,"<sup>20</sup> but eventually "the pain and guilt and loss are replaced by something different, something larger...by something far stronger than guilt or loss."<sup>21</sup> The incident marks a personal assumption of Hank's family's feud with the river; he develops a grim, disciplined, vendetta-style attitude to the challenge of the encroachments of the Wakonda Auga, very much of the same order and origin as the "challenge" which had issued from deep inside himself when he first caught the cubs. The sad memory of the kittens' deaths is forgotten by, as Hank phrases it, "the part of a man that remembers out loud,"<sup>22</sup> but as a direct consequence the river and he enter into "a little contract, a little grudge match."<sup>23</sup> Hank finds himself driven to leave important occurrences at critical moments — football practice and sexual intercourse with a willing girl being the examples Hank provides— "to get home and get into a slicker and corks and get a hammer and nails and lay on the timbers like a crazy man."<sup>24</sup> Hank is puzzled by his own fervour, but understands it as a reaction to the river's "murder" of his pets. The river inspires/provokes Hank into leaving softness, fond hopes and sentimental dreams behind for the hard territory of adult preparedness, self-reliance, vigilance and labour; Hank gives birth to an implacable "nature" in order to duel with an implacable "Nature."

The story of the bobcats has been recalled by the "theft" of Hank's new motor, and his boat, also by the river. For Hank this loss evokes the memory of the earlier "theft" with agonised clarity. At just that moment, in the "present," Floyd Evenwrite and a mill-owner named Syverson, arguing heatedly, "snapped [Hank] out of it, hollering back and forth at each other to beat hell."<sup>25</sup> The particular subject of the argument has eluded the Stamper firm's representative and second largest stockholder, but he hears something which connects with the emotions evoked by his reminiscences: " 'How much's it want,' " Syverson yells, " 'how much, this organisation you tell us about?' 'Dang it, Syve, all it wants is what's fair—' 'Fair! It wants advantage is what.' "<sup>26</sup> An exasperated Evenwrite replies: " 'Okay! okay!...but all it wants is its *fair* advantage!' "<sup>27</sup>

As well as the doctrine of "guilt by association" confirming his antipathy toward the union, Hank recognises something profound in the application of that utterance to his feelings toward the river. The reader may also see it

as yet another Stamper maxim, a way of ordering a view of the world requiring absolutes of commitment and dedication. The American *Weltanschauung* of the Stamper male assumes that “survival”, “balance”, and/or “equity” are not enough. The Stamper way is predicated on the assumption that the struggle with life is inherently uneven, and weighted against the individual; Stamper masculinity assumes an *a priori* enmity in man, beast and in the elements. Hank's method of ensuring his own “fair advantage” is to assume that every opponent: potential or real; corporeal or mental; animate or inanimate; animal, human or geographical, has the same attitude. He therefore strives to achieve “fair advantage” over rivals he takes for granted are similarly inclined. The best way to “never give an inch” is to take pre-emptively wherever possible “fair advantage,” on the supposition that one's opponent will do/has done exactly the same.

Competitiveness and preparedness are qualities the Stampers cultivate generally, and which Hank hones to a fierce new edge in his very personal working out of his desire to conquer—this difficult to define, but recognisably very “American” drive. While Hank might deny the metaphorical impact of the series of events which includes the death of the kittens, and his adoption of his father's fight with the river, his very denial of its importance embodies the no-nonsense pragmatism that finds no time for his brother Lee's or his wife Vivian's often-impractical “dreams” and aspirations in what is perceived as the life-and-death struggle of everyday life. Hank comments:

I could tell you a hundred stories, probably, give you a hundred reasons showing *why* I got to fight that river. Oh, *fine* reasons; because...if you want to play this way, you can make the river stand for all *sorts* of other things. But doing that it seems to me is taking your eye off the ball; making it more than what it is lessens it. Just to see it clear is plenty...[a]nd the best way to see it is not looking behind it but dead at it.

And to remember that all it wants is its fair advantage.<sup>28</sup>

Hank will further define his “accommodation” with the forces of nature, in what at times seems like an ongoing, Sisyphean search for a rock which eventually he will prove unable to bear, as being a matter of doing his “best to *hinder* it.”<sup>29</sup>

And as far as I was concerned, hindering something meant—had always meant—going after it with everything you got, fighting and kicking, stomping and gouging, and

cussing it when everything else went sour. And being just as strong in the hassle as you got it in you to be. Now that's real logical, don't you think? That's real simple. If You Wants to Win, You Does Your Best. Why, a body could paint that on a plaque and hang it up over his bedstead."<sup>30</sup>

Intense commitment, total concentration and a never-ceasing alertness are needed merely to survive in, let alone to make inroads into, the primal Oregon forests. A "nature" even more relentless, even more indomitable, even more patient, than "Nature" is needed, and to Hank this is achieved by being constantly ready to defend each and every "inch" of territory, whether it concerns his land, his reputation, or the life he has chosen to lead. "A little grudge match" is what every Stamper man has with his own "weakness," his natural inclinations and desires, his friends, his enemies, as well as with the totality of his environment; every aspect of his life is governed by this pugnacious self-assertion. "Stamper" values emerge as true "pioneer" values; the novel's evocation of classic woodsman and plainsman archetypes, American hunting and military tradition, and metaphors involving life-as-combat-and-football are in no way accidental. Yet if these define Hank, several of his particular adaptations to these exemplars, and to the masculine values he learns from his father and from his culture, particularly his reserve, his taciturn nature, and his aggressiveness, are worth closer inspection, as they not only inform the characterisation of Hank, but the themes of the novel *Sometimes a Great Notion* as well.

"Reserve" is one of the defining qualities of traditional masculinity. All the Stamper men depicted in *Sometimes a Great Notion* exhibit this quality in a number of ways, particularly socially and emotionally. With outsiders, the males of the Stamper family are not usually gregarious, at least when sober. They visit Wakonda only to drink at the Snag, or to purchase provisions. In the Snag they might engage in the inebriated rituals of good fellowship, but rarely do they engage in the more persiflagous aspects of social intercourse, even at home, or among themselves. Boisterous horseplay, hunting, and fisticuffs are their favoured recreations, whether after work or during drinking bouts. Stamper men are adept at keeping their innermost emotions and opinions hidden from friends and relatives as much as from strangers or acquaintances. A consequence of the "Stamper" character is the disinclination of the Stampers to admit weakness or sentiment even to those who would be close to them. A deep sense of emotional restraint certainly characterises Hank Stamper's preference for



keeping his thoughts and feelings to himself. Hank is unable and unwilling to extend compassion to himself or to any body else, and this aspect of his habitual reserve, carried to extremes, causes him difficulties in all his relationships. Within his marriage it prevents Hank and Vivian from sharing their lives as fully as Vivian, particularly, but often Hank too, might wish. Hank's is typical of the stoicism of "real men"; as a way of keeping such feelings at bay he will not admit to feeling physical pain or fatigue. Despite Viv Stamper's love for Hank "the only quirk in her husband's personality that ever seemed to cause her remorse was Hank's teeth-gritting stoicism in the face of pain."<sup>31</sup> Remorse is a strange word for Kesey to have employed in this context; its usage becomes clearer when one reflects how before she meets Hank, Viv has dreamed of "the finer things in life," and of marriage to a man of sensitivity and depth, only to find herself wed to a person who may not totally lack these qualities, but who can, regardless of the impact on his own well-being; or others' appetites, lose two fingers in a work accident and not mention it until he is forced by his wife to remove his heavy gloves for dinner to reveal "a claw...mangled and clotted with blood and cable rust."<sup>32</sup> In the latter part of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, at the climax of the confrontation between the Stampers and the union, an influenza outbreak depletes the family's work-force, and even the fittest and toughest men in the clan are affected. However, Hank keeps "chugging along day after day without signs of a let-up. Like a machine."<sup>33</sup> Viv cannot "help wondering sometimes whether he [is] made out of flesh and blood and bones, like the rest of them, or out of workboot leather and Diesel fuel, and blackjack oak dipped in creosote."<sup>34</sup>

The same trait of reservedness which constrains Hank's closest interpersonal relationships sometimes emerges as inarticulateness when he engages in social intercourse. When his half-brother returns to Wakonda there is a struggle in Hank between his own masculine reticence and what will emerge during the novel as a considerable fund of goodwill and fraternal affection. Hank's actions consistently show he wants to make Lee feel as welcome, and as needed, as undoubtedly he is. However Hank, like his father, has a sarcastic, abbreviated approach to communication which results in his conversation comprising aggressive criticisms, sharp observations and "wisecracks." Although Hank later admits that when his brother arrives his impulse is "to go shake his hand and tell him how glad I am that he's come,"<sup>35</sup> Hank knows

it's something I can't pull off. I couldn't do that no more than I could kiss the old man's whiskery chin and tell him

how bad I feel about him getting busted up. Or no more than the old man could pat my back and tell me what a goddam good job I been doing since he got busted up and I been handling the work of two. It just ain't our style.<sup>36</sup>

An example of what does constitute the Stamper style emerges in the greeting Hank provides. It marks the renewal of the conflict and the misunderstandings which punctuate the association of the half-brothers. Lee Stamper returns to the family home just as the Stampers are "escorting" union man Evenwrite from their land with well-aimed charges of dynamite, after he has engaged them in one last, fruitless discussion about the family's failure to support the local strikers, and the decision to "scab" to Wakonda Pacific. In his hurry to escape across the river, Evenwrite takes the Stampers' boat, which he leaves on the opposite bank after he has fled. Hank takes to the water, to recover the craft, but, as Lee arrives at that moment on the opposite bank, the latter takes the boat, and, rather clumsily, fetches Hank from the river. Hank's inarticulateness overcomes his desire to communicate his pleasure at seeing his brother once again, and an ineffective strategy, reminiscent of his father's acidity at its worst, is the result. Despite his most strenuous efforts and most earnest wish that it might be a more welcoming speech, the first words Hank speaks to Lee on the latter's arrival back home after a decade's absence serve to remind Lee of his inadequacy when compared with his brother's competence: " 'You had three tries, bub,' he observed wryly, 'and missed me every time; now don't that frost you?' "<sup>37</sup> Later Hank remembers only that he has "said some dumb thing or other,"<sup>38</sup> but ruefully notes: "it hits him wrong...got to him a lot more than I'd intended."<sup>39</sup> Hank is concerned at the lack of effective communication between the siblings: "It's hard to talk to somebody you ain't seen in a long time," he confides in the reader, "and it's hard not to. And it's especially hard when you got a lot to say and no notion how to say it."<sup>40</sup>

Hank's difficulties and frustrations are exacerbated by the ease with which others seem able to achieve a level of intimacy with their newly-arrived relative. Each day on their way to the site of the day's logging operations Hank picks up various Stamper-clan members. Even a lowly-rated misfit, the alcoholic misanthrope Cousin John, Hank notes with annoyance, is able to get a lot more going with [Lee] than me...Even [their cousin] Orland's three boys do better than me. When I wake them up from the rear end of the crummy truck and introduce them to Lee they're able to shoot the bull a few

minutes, asking him questions about New York and what's it like, before they go back to sleep. Even them lugs.<sup>41</sup>

Hank begins "to wonder if it's possible at all to talk with him...if maybe what a man learns over twelve years in a world so different is like a foreign language that uses some of the words from our world but not enough to be familiar to us, not enough so we can talk."<sup>42</sup> On later occasions, usually when the Stamper approach to work or to the Stamper lifestyle are concerned, Hank's physical superiority will find verbal expression as he lectures Lee, "intending to kind of kid him but...sounding just exactly like old Henry doing some first-rate ass-chewing."<sup>43</sup> Hank perceives this fault, and even at the time admits to himself: "I couldn't pick a worse way to talk to Lee. But I'm damned if I can stop it."<sup>44</sup> Hank, however, enjoys harping at his brother, even though he claims on one occasion that he does not intend any "real meanness...I guess I said what I did because I was uneasy and wanted to devil him some, the way I devil Viv when she starts getting soapy and makes me uneasy."<sup>45</sup>

The qualities that aid Hank in his show of strength also serve to isolate him. The awkwardness caused by his lack of communication skills only confirms to Hank the "benefits" of silence; his habit of taciturnity is reinforced, and the isolation of the "Crown Prince of the Stammers" is heightened. Silence carries with it the advantage of protecting a male from the risks and difficulties inherent in honest, open communication. The association between male strength and reserve is increased, as silence proves to be an effective strategy for preserving the emotional distance seen as assisting an authoritative presence.

Hank's emotional independence, as well as aggravating the problems caused by his reticent nature, also creates difficulties in other ways. Uncertainty between *isotimoi* in social hierarchies needs to be resolved, and whereas most people desire to correct misunderstandings which occur in their relationships with others, "alpha" male Hank does not feel the same need to explain his words or actions when they are misconstrued; or, if he does, he rarely surrenders to the impulse, preferring to shrug off mistakes, misprisonings and misconstructions. Hank is inured to the tension which can arise from such errors and failures of communication. The relationship between Hank and Lee is plagued by them, both unfortunate and wilful. It is instructive to look at Hank's accounts of the contretemps between the brothers and compare them with Lee's. Hank's reportage features language less coarse than that which Lee attributes to him, and the former's remarks seem much more ambiguous than they are when related by the latter. One

is more inclined to believe Hank's veracity and accuracy in these instances: Lee, it is to be remembered, has cast Hank in the role of the villain of his early life; it is Lee who is always rehearsing arguments with Hank in his mind, and assuming his brother's attitudes and responses before Hank has had the chance to make them clear; Lee who has a predilection for precipitate recrimination and vituperative interpretation; and Lee who is ultimately bent on vengeance against Hank for wounds and slights, past and present, real and illusory. In Lee's mind, Hank's combination of attitudes and responses does not produce the often-unhappy personality trapped by an inflexible, restrictive self-hood which is Hank's experience of himself, but instead a blithe colossus: physically impressive; "a grinning giant...in a sweatshirt"<sup>46</sup>; extremely tall and preternaturally strong; and with a "long, sinewy body...hard as a peeled tree."<sup>47</sup> Hank, according to Lee's characterisation of him, is smug, arrogant, and entirely self-referential, someone the latter describes as a man who is "crass, bigoted, wrongheaded, hypocritical...and [who] confuse[s] his balls with his brains."<sup>48</sup> To Lee, nevertheless, Hank remains "the titleholder,"<sup>49</sup> and Lee recalls in conversation with his sister in law that "'all my time at home—Brother Hank [was] always held up to me as the man to measure up to—and it's been that way ever since. In a psychologically symbolic way, of course.'"<sup>50</sup> He later tells her that as a boy he thought Hank was "'the biggest thing created...he knew everything, was everything, *had* everything.'"<sup>51</sup> Living with a sense of inferiority, Lee has never been able to adjust to his subsidiary status, and what was once adoration of the strength, reliability, competency and ability of his "big brother" has turned to hatred, resentment and jealousy.

The reason for the excessiveness of Lee's emotions, and the reason he focuses the majority of his bitterness on his brother and not on the father who might be seen as having rejected him, and having driven mother and son away, is revealed when the reader realises that Lee has been a clandestine witness to his mother's incestuous liaison with her eldest stepson. The effect of observing his mother take his unbeatable "rival" to her bed caps Lee's feelings of inadequacy and leaves him feeling he has been robbed of "an abstract thing, like a feeling of importance or sense of self."<sup>52</sup> Hoping to enlist Viv to his cause through eliciting her sympathies, Lee explains to Hank's wife: "'I couldn't . . . ever take his place...And never being big enough to take his place left me no place of my own, left me no one to *be*. I wanted to be someone, Viv, and there seemed only one way to do it.'"<sup>53</sup> Thinking of his past as a clinging memory he must escape, Lee

believes that he must, in a sense, undo the damage of childhood by taking revenge on somebody or something which represents his childhood, and on whose malevolent influence he can blame subsequent lost opportunities and failures. Hank, his mother's lover, is a perfect target for compensatory revenge; Hank can be father and sibling rival at once.

If Hank remains to Lee "my Achilles like brother,"<sup>54</sup> Lee has thought only of finding the vulnerable "undipped heel"<sup>55</sup> he believes he discovers personified in his brother's dissatisfied wife. He spies on Vivian, "the wildwoods flower wife of my sworn-destroyed brother,"<sup>56</sup> through the same peephole in the wall of his bedroom through which he had seen the sexual encounter between his mother and her step-son. The psycho-sexual implications of his feelings toward Hank are not lost on Lee. In his room at night, after his return to Wakonda, a dreamy Lee watches as "Goya's painting 'Kronos Devouring His Children' flashed across my ceiling along with all the obvious oedipal implications."<sup>57</sup> This he may rationalise to himself as "second-rate psychological symbolism"<sup>58</sup> but he does admit that:

Certainly there were all the run-of-the-mill Freudian reasons beneath my animosity toward my dear brother, all the castration-complex reasons, all the mother-son-father reasons—and all especially deep-seated and strong within me because the usual abysmal longing of the sulky son wishing to do in the guy who had been diddling Mom were in me compounded by the malevolent memories of a psychotic sibling.<sup>59</sup>

Such is the place Hank has come to fill in Lee's symbolic universe that he yearns to take "part in the dethronement"<sup>60</sup> of Hank Stamper. "I needed," Lee insists,

the catharsis of being part of his overthrow. I needed to wield the torch, hold the knife. I needed the stain of his actual blood on my conscience as a poultice to draw out the pus of long cowardice. I needed the nourishment of victory to give me the strength I had been cheated of by years of starvation. I needed to fell the tree that had been hogging my sunshine before I even germinated.<sup>61</sup>

Extreme as this seems, Lee becomes "certain...that no other elixir would heal me; no potion but victory would stem the curse...My whole future keened silently with suffocated need for that victory...over my brother."<sup>62</sup> The reader knows that Lee has returned to Wakonda to take care of unfinished business, and that the past is somehow for him the key to the

future. As it becomes clear what that business is, and the reasons for its existence and long deferment, the reader sees more and more that the successful attainment of that future does indeed centre on Hank.

Hank and Lee nearly come to blows on a number of occasions: over jazz records; over Lee's feeling that he is given the dirtiest, most tedious, most exhausting jobs involved with the logging work; and over other trivialities. However a "final" or "settling" accommodation is long delayed. Lee swallows his anger, his complaints, and they never actually "fly any fur,"<sup>63</sup> as Hank terms it, when he wonders if "that right there is the bone that sticks in both our craws...the real thing that always keeps us from hitting it off...That we *didn't* fight. That he *won't*, and I know it and he knows it."<sup>64</sup> Cousin Joe Ben Stamper proffers the suggestion " [t]hat back East livin' is made a coward out of him,"<sup>65</sup> but Hank's reply is: " 'It ain't that he's a coward . . . even though he might think he is. He's big enough he knows he ain't gonna get too bad a lickin' even if he was whipped...He acts like . . .he don't have any reason, ever any reason, to fight.' "<sup>66</sup>

Hank misses the point that although his brother is one of the number of men in subservient hierarchical positions who on that count alone harbour deep-seated grudges against him, Lee has realised the futility of trying "to wage open physical battle against my work-hardened brother."<sup>67</sup> His strategy will be more subtle, and involve subterfuge and treachery to slowly undermine what is on initial scrutiny the unassailable confidence of the "crown prince"<sup>68</sup> of Wakonda before doing "his older half-brother some unconceived but horrible harm for diddling young Leland's mama,"<sup>69</sup> as Lee phrases it in a letter to a friend. Lee is careful at first to mask his antipathy, having realised that "the clever assassin doesn't worm his way into the king's castle only to blow his chance of success by telling the king what he thinks of him. Certainly not. Quite the opposite. He is charming, witty, fawning, and he applauds the king's tales of triumph, however paltry they may be."<sup>70</sup>

Lee begins to insinuate himself into his sister-in-law's affections; basic politeness and the ability to carry on a conversation not related to lumber-jacking are all he requires to seem sophisticated in comparison to the other members of his family. Lee's need to test himself against Hank becomes only too apparent as the former plots and connives, becoming alternately argumentative and then deferential, finding excuses to be alone with Vivian, feigning illness, and hiding beneath a cloak of friendliness. Lee, however, warms too well to his task, finding himself genuinely attracted to Vivian and temporarily disarmed by his involvement in the domestic

routines of Stamper life. He finds he is charmed by “the whole diabolical houseful...being warm and sweet and treacherous, from my serpent brother down to the littlest snake-in-the-weeds infant. I was beginning to care for them.”<sup>71</sup> Much to his annoyance, Lee finds himself “infected” by “coronary care, complicated by galloping fear,”<sup>72</sup> which he later refers to as “a bad case of Benevolence...Fondness and Distended Sympathy.”<sup>73</sup> Lee also reveals that he has been more permanently influenced by his early exposure to “Stamper” values than he might care to admit when he characterises this “condition” as “[t]he go-away-closer disease. Starving for contact and calling it poison when it is offered.”<sup>74</sup> The gloss Lee provides to his experience of this illness is additionally significant in terms of Stamper attitudes to masculinity:

We learn young to be leery of contact: Never open up, we learn . . . you want somebody running their dirty old fingers over your soul's privates?...And above all, never care, never never *never* care. Because it is caring that lulls you into letting down your guard and leaving up your shades . . . you want some fink knowing what you are *really* like down inside?<sup>75</sup>

However, after an evening's hunting and drinking, an argument with Hank over the relative merits of different kinds of jazz music causes Lee once more to see what he regards as his sibling rival's true self, a Hank “skinned out of his tinfoil wrapper,”<sup>76</sup> a “beast ...[and] barroom brawler with commando training” and “a grade-school bully...[who] pulls rank of muscle.”<sup>77</sup> Although their dispute amounts to little more than a brief verbal altercation, soon forgotten by Hank, the incident reverses the waning of Lee's desire for revenge, and he renews the execution of his devious itinerary.

Hank begins to suspect his brother's intentions, and, much to Lee's gratification, alters his plans on several occasions to prevent his wife and half-brother from being alone. Earlier in her marriage to Hank, Viv has suffered a miscarriage, and this “failure” has caused her to doubt her place in the Stamper system, where weakness and failure are not admitted, much less accepted, condoned and consoled. Viv's dissatisfaction with the unemotional Hank and a sense that the foetus' death has left “*the hollow of something gone*”<sup>78</sup> from the childless union—a loss which, like Lee's, is placed somewhat unreasonably at Hank's door—plagues her. Eventually Lee and Viv do join in exacting retribution from Hank through a brief, adulterous liaison, coming together on the same day which sees the accident

which kills Joe Ben and critically injures Old Henry. After working at a furious, almost superhuman pace for hours on end, with only his father and brother to assist him, Hank is helpless to prevent his cousin from drowning, watches his father, arm severed, come near to death, is assaulted by thugs in the street of Wakonda, and finally swims across the Wakonda Auga to get home to find his wife and brother in each other's arms. Hank's lack of immediate response disappoints Lee mightily; he does not realise until later that Hank's apparent indifference to the treachery is due to intense physical and emotional exhaustion rather than sangfroid.

Even later, however, the imperturbable "alpha" of the Stamper clan chooses to live with a set of facts about which he can do nothing rather than rail pointlessly about the ingratitude and callous disregard meted out to him by his nearest kin. If he registers anger or a sense of betrayal he does not communicate this to Lee; neither is what passes between husband and wife revealed by Kesey, and the gravity of the other events of that day overshadows the sexual encounter between Viv and Lee. The principal outcome is, however, the train of thought which begins in Hank's mind, prompted by the sum of the singular and dramatic events of that short period. Hank has long been inured to being assailed from all sides. His life's course has always involved him living up to somebody else's image of him: first to his father's restless expressions of masculinity, ruggedness and reliability; next to the hero-status foisted on him by his cousin, Joe Ben; then to the role of "handsome stranger," "strong silent type," and lover-provider for Vivian, a "romantic lead" he has played for so long that neither knows where Hank leaves off and the image begins; finally, and most recently, Hank has been required to prematurely succeed his injured father as foreman of the Stamper logging operation, in addition to having for some time already handled the business affairs his crotchety lack of diplomacy renders the elder Henry Stamper unfit to undertake. Hank Stamper is, then, the sometimes reluctant "alpha" in a number of systems: he is Head of the Family; dependable father and macho Husband and Lover; Elder Brother; Eldest Son; Hero-Cousin; "Tough Hombre" bar-room brawler; and *de facto* head of the day-to-day operations of the family logging firm. For reasons which have as much to do with others' expectations of him as his own, Hank Stamper has become locked into the role of the Man who can Never Give an Inch.

It is only when he finally discovers how little his ready adoption of responsibility, rank and role model status has profited him that Hank acknowledges the part that others have played in forming his character:



particularly his father and his cousin Joe Ben, who idolises Hank, but whose adoration constrains Hank with its constant expectations of perfection and competence. After what is undoubtedly, and in more ways than one, the toughest day of his life, Hank muses that if he himself is his harshest critic and hardest taskmaster, neither is he ever allowed by others, especially members of his own family, to forget who and what he is.

As he lies on his bed after a tortuous day capped by the culmination of Lee's plan to "dethrone" him, Hank decides that, paradoxically, he is in his brother's debt. It is at this moment his decision to resign his opposition to the logging dispute is made. The irony embedded in Lee's "revenge" and the events that follow will deepen, however. Lee has several times used the comic-book hero, Captain Marvel, as a metaphor for his desire to be transformed into a person made along the lines of his titanic sibling. Just as Kesey and his Pranksters would exploit the power of the appeal of the superhero archetype to American minds, the mythical function of such figures "provide[s] one of the primary symbol patterns in *Sometimes a Great Notion*."<sup>79</sup> Lee has returned to Wakonda in anticipation of an event for which he has long yearned: "I always used to try to figure out," he tells the reader, on discovering an old pile of comic books, "what *my* word was, *my* magic phrase that would turn me instantly enormous and invulnerable."<sup>80</sup> When finally his plans come to fruition and Hank seems humiliated and defeated, Lee fears that "instead of turning myself into a Captain Marvel, as the ritual and words were supposed to do according to all the little-guy-beats-big-guy tradition . . . I had merely created another Billy Batson."<sup>81</sup>

Abused, beaten, taunted, and tormented both by accident and by design, Hank does not react with anger or violence. Instead he steps out of his "alpha" persona, and becomes, temporarily, a quiet, affable, dreamy character with neither strong opinions nor drives. Hank decides simply that he is excessively tired of being a hero, everybody's hero, and tired of "*always* hav[ing] to be goddammit working up to *fighting* with some-guy-or-other!"<sup>82</sup> He concludes that he has felt this way "[s]ince Joby [Joe Ben] *first got me out for football and made me his hero. Since he first jumped into the ocean that time to make me outswim him. Since the old man nailed that plaque on my wall.*"<sup>83</sup> Hank is exhausted by the effort of maintaining his facade of toughness and endurance, and of being strength and stubbornness personified. Like the clichéd professional gunfighter of stock Hollywood "westerns," Hank understands that being open to competition and assault on his position are his "lot" in life, but it is of little comfort to him to acknowledge that it is his primacy of place rather than actual dislike

of him which motivates the near-constant attempts to undermine him and bring about his downfall.

Being shunned by the other townsfolk during the strike has also made Hank aware of the fact that he has long been denied the commonplaces of human intercourse. As Hank's thoughts frame it: " 'A guy gets fed up...Fed up to his ears. Forever going down the street and hearing the locks snap shut in front of him like he was some kind of bogey man. Real *tired*, you know what I mean?' "84 In Hank's ideal world his competence and abilities would not be a source of envy. At night he "dreams that he is at the top of his class and nobody is trying to pull him down, nobody is trying to push him off, nobody but himself even knows that he is up there."<sup>85</sup> However, in waking life, the constant hierarchicising, and the constant need to force close accommodation on those near him in the hierarchical structures which dominate his life leave him only "*tired...tired of being the villain.*"<sup>86</sup> Although Hank might wish for a world in which he is at the top of a number of masculine hierarchies while the world remains oblivious to the fact, and while he might wish to reach out to his wife, or to reach a more equal accommodation with his brother and other males, and while Hank might desire to be his own man and not the man his father has made, it ultimately has become clear to him the extent to which other people's self-definition, as well as his own, depends on his maintenance of the facade, or the reality, of Stamper might.

It is the constancy, rather than the intensity, the accumulation rather than any single instance, of competition which wears Hank down. The ceaseless effort of maintaining the facade of invulnerability eventually pushes Hank to the point that the drive of his inner demons is temporarily stilled, and he finds brief respite when he abandons his attempts to compete with Lee, play the totality of the roles which have fallen to him, and to organise the work routines which will see the economically vital contract with the logging firm Wakonda Pacific filled. The climax of *Sometimes a Great Notion* proves that no physical strain would ever have broken Hank Stamper. Neither Draeger, Evenwrite, near-endless physical stress, the death of Joe Ben nor the near-fatal accident his father experiences, not even the adultery between Lee and Viv, proves able to break Hank Stamper's iron control over himself until Hank decides to abdicate his "throne" as "alpha male," and voluntarily abrogate his responsibility to the near-legendary image he has created, and which has become, to his chagrin, virtually his only reality.

Hank has been on the verge of final victory. With even his brother, at least superficially, having fallen into step behind him, and with all

opposition at least temporarily overcome, all that stands before Hank is the steady maintenance of a daily work schedule in order to fill the contract with Wakonda Pacific. The town has thrown, almost literally, everything it can at him: economic sanctions, social isolation, even, through the fists of Benjamin "Big" Newton and Floyd Everwrite's abortive night-time raid on the Stamper mill, physical threat. Jonathan Draeger's campaign had been designed to maliciously apply "pressure...[l]ike a squeeze play,"<sup>87</sup> to the man at the centre of the independent Stamper operation, and by rumour and implied slight the campaign succeeds, as Hank discovers, in finding "a way to make me look more the villain than before, even to my own folks."<sup>88</sup>

However, the accommodations with his family, and with other Stamper relatives, and the endless accommodations with Wakonda townsfolk, and the union representatives, and all those involved with the strike, may have contributed to the erosion of Hank's patience, and the depletion of his energies, but eventually it is nothing more terrible than ennui which defeats Hank Stamper. If Hank learns strength from his father and from the traditional, cultural and psycho-symbolic representations of American masculinity, it is from Lee, as a result of his half-brother's sly and vindictive challenge, that he learns the "value" of surrendering to weakness. For the first time, through his brother's malignity, Hank perceives the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of his enemies. Hank begins to understand that it is his ability to face his fears, and to refuse to succumb to an opponent until the last of his strength is expended, which not only sets him apart, but which stimulates the jealousy of those who would rather live with their limits untested, happier with the illusion of strength rather than the reality of a truth which declares weakness. Hank decides that his strength and confidence is an illusion, too, a way of "fooling himself" into exertion, and for the first time he understands why a man would, as Lee has done all his life, prefer to feign weakness. Hank's strength has placed him at the apex of the hierarchical structures with which he is accommodated. However, he knows he is not an "absolute alpha": there are men stronger, richer, and more courageous than he is. He is not, for example, President of the United States, General Manager of Wakonda Pacific, or heavyweight champion of the world. Hank may be "top dog" locally, but he knows, and can accept, his place. He understands, too, that privilege implies duty, and place carries responsibility. A man who does not test his limits at all, however, can believe that any attainment is not beyond him, and satisfy himself with sniping at those who do take the real risks of close accommodation, and

who find, for better or for worse, their hierarchical position relative to other men. *"But if the strength ain't real." Hank decides, thinking of Lee, then the weakness sure enough is. Weakness is true and real. I used to accuse the kid of faking his weakness. But faking proves the weakness is real. Or you wouldn't be so weak as to fake it. No, you can't ever fake being weak. You can only fake being strong.*<sup>86</sup>

Later Hank concludes: *"And if you can only fake being strong, not being weak, then the kid has done to me what I set off to do to him! He's shaped me up. He's made me to quit faking. He's straightened me out."*<sup>90</sup> Although all the logs they need have finally been cut, and await only delivery, Hank calls off the strike-breaking work schedule of the three remaining Stampers —Lee, Hank and the shadowy figure of their last-remaining loyal relative, cousin Andy— accepts the obsequious, simpering protestations of good fellowship of the town, ignores the triumphant, gloating visages of Draeger and his supporters, and settles back to recover his energies in the now-quiet expanses of the Stamper house.

In terms of the hierarchical accommodations in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, a final paradox is provided by the reader's realisation that if Lee, at the novel's beginning, has acknowledged that the journey back to Wakonda holds the key to the renewal of his "life-energy," the effort of Lee to face the demons of his past at the end of the novel provides the key to Hank's renewal as well. It is the insistercy of Lee's challenge, re-assumed when it seems that the stalemate with the union and within the family is at last broken after the accident in which Joe Ben dies and Old Henry's Herculean efforts toward fulfilling the contract ends, which spurs Hank to one mighty final effort. In a convincing proof of the power of his conditioning, of the deeply ingrained nature of the practice of masculine hierarchical accommodation, and of the appeal of "alpha" position despite all its drawbacks, it takes only a few words from Lee to reverse Hank's abdication, and spur him afresh to the competitions which surround him.

When Lee asks him why, so close to the fulfilment of the contract with Wakonda Pacific, when there seems no real need for him to do so, Hank has surrendered to the Town's and the Union's pressure the latter mutters: " '...it just seems like nobody wanted them goddam logs delivered.' "<sup>91</sup> Lee's response is: " 'Except...old Henry.' "<sup>92</sup> "I hadn't meant it as a cut," Lee remarks in an aside, explaining that he had nearly said "Joe Ben," but refrained out of an otherwise lit le-evidenced delicacy of feeling, "but I saw him flinch."<sup>93</sup> Lee's gibe, however unintentional, in his invocation of the

name of the father, hits one of Hank's weakest points, and the reader also notes it as the ironic retort of the "cut" Hank has inflicted on Lee near the start of the novel.<sup>94</sup> Hank, for his part, sees only supreme cunning, and not accident, in Lee's words, and finally understands that his half-brother's enmity is just one more challenge, just one more obstacle, to be overcome in a life which consists of little else.

Then it all come over me; I mean for the first time *really come over me*, just how nigger slick he's got it all balanced out. He's got it near perfect. He's built it like the hanging nooses we useta build as kids, that can't get any way but tighter; he's built it to where I can't advance any direction but what I'm bound to lose ground. He's arranged it so's I'm stuck in a place where I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't, whipped if I fight and whipped if I don't.<sup>95</sup>

Hank's soul is as stirred by the conjuring of family demons as Lee's was at the beginning of *Sometimes a Great Notion* by the message appended to the postcard which has called him home. Anger replaces resignation as Hank's internal dialogue, his driving argument with himself, resumes:

And seeing that, I think to myself, bub, right here is where your genius outfoxes you; because you've got it arranged better than you know...Because he'd got the balance heavier on one side than he knew, the noose tighter than he realised. "Because there's too much salt, bub, rubbed in, to stop now...there's too much rubbed in to leave now"...Because he'd finally made standing pat tougher than advancing, and losing ground easier than standing pat.<sup>96</sup>

The realisations at which both the brothers arrive during the novel's climactic scenes evolve from Lee's animosity and Lee's and Hank's mutual incomprehension. Lee's accidental insult eventually results in the brothers' finally engaging in the fisticuffs which have threatened for much of the course of the novel. Lee describes the building tension in the penultimate scene of the book, as at last the brothers

*wholeheartedly* embraced for our first and last and oh so long overdue dance of Hate and Hurt and Love. Finally, we quit fooling around and fought, as Andy kept time with his foot. It kept reminding me of a dance. Clinging to each other in a paroxysm of overripe passion we spun the fight fantastic, reeled to the melodious fiddle-cry of rain through the firs, and the accelerating tempo of feet...and the high

whirling skirl of adrenalin that always accompanies this dance...And for never having danced together before, we came on passing fair if I say so myself.<sup>97</sup>

Recognising that their mutually interdependent place in the Stamper system renders them very like terpsichorean partners, Hank and Lee reach final accommodation and recognise that their brotherhood is not a matter of birth as much as it is a matter of their shared maleness. The loyalty Hank and Lee owe to "Stamper," however each interprets its claims, surpasses their rivalry, and thus it is, in many ways, the same kind of loyalty which motivates their enemies; that is, just like their antagonists, they are "servants" of a system whose needs are more important than theirs as individuals, and whose claims must always outweigh their own. As Hank and Lee fight, a homoerotic, macho pride and a peculiar, but genuine, tenderness emerge between the brothers; as they "wrestle" each other into a new understanding of themselves as men and as part of a larger order, the price for Stamper men of understanding and acceptance themselves seems to be immersion in a life of perpetual challenge and struggle against difficulty and physical and emotional discomfort which, like the Oregon drizzle, never ceases.

Finally the values of "Stamper" force close accommodation on Lee, as they long ago had on Hank. For a man to be the best he can be, or merely to survive, in many instances, he needs the competition of other men to bring out his latent strength, and to gain an understanding of the true nature of his weaknesses. Lee learns to love his brother as they fight, and Hank's most potent expression of the same emotion is that he deigns to punch Lee, finally acknowledging him as "a threat." Lee becomes not an equal, but a possible replacement for his lost side-kick and comrade-provocateur Joe Ben. For the Stamper "alpha" challengers, mates, partners, and opponents have come and gone; he loses his wife, and his cousin, and his last chance to choose to refuse the succession to the throne now definitely vacated by the incapacitated Old Henry. Hank realises that these things count for little in the face of his acceptance of who he is, what he is, and where he is: in living in a real world, a world of real potential. If there is any satisfaction for him it is to be derived from the fact that the men of the Town finally come to understand that, much as they may resent the fact, they could as little do without him as leader and enemy as he can do without them. American hierarchies of power have both Stamper and non-Stamper systems locked into place in the one dynamic order of competition and trial.

Notes:

- 
- <sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Fig. 1.
  - <sup>2</sup> Ken Kesey, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (New York: Viking, 1964) 489.
  - <sup>3</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 168.
  - <sup>4</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 468.
  - <sup>5</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.
  - <sup>6</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 142.
  - <sup>7</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 142.
  - <sup>8</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 142.
  - <sup>9</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 121.
  - <sup>10</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 67.
  - <sup>11</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 427.
  - <sup>12</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 100.
  - <sup>13</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 100.
  - <sup>14</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 101.
  - <sup>15</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 103.
  - <sup>16</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 103-4.
  - <sup>17</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 104.
  - <sup>18</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 107.
  - <sup>19</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 107.
  - <sup>20</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 108.
  - <sup>21</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 108.
  - <sup>22</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 109.
  - <sup>23</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 109.
  - <sup>24</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 110.
  - <sup>25</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 107.
  - <sup>26</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 107-8.
  - <sup>27</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 108.
  - <sup>28</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 110.
  - <sup>29</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.
  - <sup>30</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.
  - <sup>31</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 161.
  - <sup>32</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 162.
  - <sup>33</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 446.
  - <sup>34</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 446.
  - <sup>35</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 119.
  - <sup>36</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 119.
  - <sup>37</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 97.
  - <sup>38</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.
  - <sup>39</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.
  - <sup>40</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 172-3.
  - <sup>41</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 176.
  - <sup>42</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 178.
  - <sup>43</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 178-9.
  - <sup>44</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 179.
  - <sup>45</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.
  - <sup>46</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 76.
  - <sup>47</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 69.
  - <sup>48</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 195.
  - <sup>49</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 197.
  - <sup>50</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 69.
  - <sup>51</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 263.
  - <sup>52</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 263.
  - <sup>53</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 263.
  - <sup>54</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 275.
  - <sup>55</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 275.

- 
- <sup>56</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 275.  
<sup>57</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 194-5.  
<sup>58</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 195.  
<sup>59</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 195.  
<sup>60</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 197.  
<sup>61</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 197-8.  
<sup>62</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 198-9.  
<sup>63</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 271.  
<sup>64</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 271.  
<sup>65</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 271.  
<sup>66</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 271.  
<sup>67</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 197.  
<sup>68</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 78.  
<sup>69</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 275.  
<sup>70</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 205.  
<sup>71</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 210.  
<sup>72</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 210.  
<sup>73</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 275.  
<sup>74</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 211.  
<sup>75</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 211.  
<sup>76</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 281.  
<sup>77</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 281.  
<sup>78</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 263.  
<sup>79</sup> Barry H. Leeds, *Ken Kesey* (New York: Ungar, 1981) 5.  
<sup>80</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 142.  
<sup>81</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 527-8.  
<sup>82</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 330.  
<sup>83</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 512.  
<sup>84</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 460.  
<sup>85</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 345.  
<sup>86</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 550.  
<sup>87</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 417.  
<sup>88</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 417.  
<sup>89</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 527.  
<sup>90</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 528.  
<sup>91</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 599.  
<sup>92</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 599.  
<sup>93</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 599.  
<sup>94</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 111.  
<sup>95</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 610.  
<sup>96</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 610-1.  
<sup>97</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 613-4.