

CRISIS OF MASCULINITY IN THE LITERATURE OF THE LOST GENERATION

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

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2016
ENGL
• F58

Master of Arts

In

English: Literature

by

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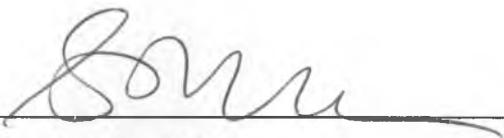
San Francisco, California

May 2016

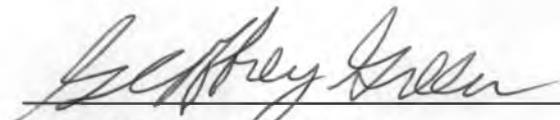
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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CRISIS OF MASCULINITY IN THE LITERATURE OF THE LOST GENERATION

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Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's works demonstrate repeatedly the expectation of ideal masculinity, a disparity between expectations and the reality of the twentieth-century world, and a visceral frustration at the inability to control this experience. This anxiety stems in part from the nineteenth-century mythos of the self-made man, which continues to prevail as a popular masculinity narrative in the twenty first century. Both Hemingway and Fitzgerald demonstrate how the nineteenth-century self-made man mythos placed pressure on men to achieve an ideal that was extremely challenging during twentieth century, causing men to confront their masculine identities with great anxiety and scrutiny. In viewing Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's works through their confrontations with the self-made man, we can better understand the evolving shape of contemporary masculinity.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

May 16, 2016

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank both Professor Loretta Stec and Professor Geoffrey Green for their guidance and mentoring while at San Francisco State University. Special thanks to my family and friends for their unwavering support, especially Spencer Goodwin, Caitlin Shufelberger, Jordan Molina, Richard Fitzpatrick, and Marrienne Williams.

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Introduction

Much has been written about Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald in the nearly one hundred years since their works were first published. Their works have been adapted into stage productions, films, television series, and have inspired literary responses in both fiction and nonfiction. The sheer breadth of social and critical response to these two authors demonstrates the ways the work of Hemingway and Fitzgerald resonates with American culture. My research in this project will focus specifically on masculinity and gender performance, with Hemingway and Fitzgerald confronting the complexities of masculine identity in the early twentieth century. Their works demonstrate repeatedly the expectations of ideal masculinity, a disparity between these expectations and the reality of the twentieth century, and a visceral frustration at the inability to control this experience.

An investigation of this kind is highly relevant to the academic and social discussions taking place in 2016, with both the rise of “Men’s Studies” and declining trends in male academic and economic achievement. According to a recent article in *The New York Times*, the twenty-first century is experiencing a crisis of masculinity where “male wages are stagnant, and among the less educated they have fallen: Median earnings for men with only a high school diploma have dropped in real terms by 28 percent since 1980” (Reeves and Sawhill). Hemingway and Fitzgerald therefore provide essential context and discussion on these issues of masculinity and identity we continue to confront today. Their works grapple with men’s changing roles in society and trace the

roots of this loss of agency to the understandings of masculinity they inherited from their fathers.

In *Angry White Men*, Michael Kimmel describes the core of American masculinity as defined by “the promise of economic freedom, of boundless opportunity, of unlimited upward mobility” (13). This narrative of hope and success rests most succinctly in masculinity’s most powerful myth, that of the “self-made man.” Americans collect and retell stories of self-made success in order to define a national identity, bonded by perseverance and achievement. Heroes like Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin stand as two of the most well-known examples of this myth. During the nineteenth century in particular, “rags to riches” stories of the self-made man were popular, with the stories of men like John Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Frederick Douglass capturing national curiosity. Children’s author Horatio Alger too profited from the interest in the narrative of male achievement in 1868 with his publication of *Ragged Dick*, a street urchin who achieves social and financial success through mental perseverance and economic prudence. Through these, and many other cultural influences, self-making and self-reliance become synonymous with American masculinity. The self-made man narrative actively creates and enforces masculinity by becoming an essential part of the private and public identity of the American male, and becomes a framework through which to understand one’s effectiveness (Catano 14).

What happens then, when the narratives and values of the self-made man are no longer achievable? This, precisely, is the tension that the American writers of the 1920’s

confront in their works. The so-called “Lost Generation” mourns a world where nineteenth-century expectations and ideals are unsustainable in a post-World War I world. The prior generation’s emphasis on male power and control, differentiated and specific gender roles, and pre-determined class status simply did not translate to these writers’ changing worlds. Scholar James Catano, in fact, identifies this moment as a moment of historical trauma, saying “if the rhetoric of gender enacts a widely accepted but faulty cultural myth, historical trauma is a moment in which these fault lines are intensified and particularly visible” (7). The early twentieth century was a period in which the established expectations for male performance and behavior were no longer fully relevant. In the works of writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, we see these cultural fault lines appearing as the characters of their works confront their anxieties over the changes of American culture in the early twentieth century. Through their works, these authors address the disparity between their contemporary lives and their inherited understanding of masculinity. They explore the repercussions of failing to reach those expectations as well as how to define success outside of the self-made man. In doing so, the men of the twentieth century seek to identify their place in the history of American masculinity.

I have separated my exploration of this topic into three parts. In the first chapter, I dive into the nuances of the self-made man narrative and its emphasis on paternal inheritance and obligation. We can see in an analysis of Hemingway’s short stories how the values of the self-made man were introduced and how they were received. In the

second chapter, I turn to the relationship of the self-made man to sex and gender using *The Sun Also Rises* as a guide. In the novel, Hemingway creates a spectrum of response to the pressures of the self-made man narrative. This includes an exploration of male failure and success, as well as the place of the modern woman in the context of the self-made man myth. Finally, in the third chapter, I explore the role of the self-made man and class mobility. Using Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, I delve into the complexity of class ambition and economic power dynamics. In my analysis of the novel I highlight the tensions between acquired and achieved class status, and the role of the self-made man in the negotiation. In mapping out the pressures and concerns that dominated discourse of masculine identity during the early twentieth century, we can see how that discussion came to construct masculinity in our modern world.

My research rests upon three framing concepts. First, the self-made man is a myth that is actively created and communicated throughout generations, and subject to evolve as the values, politics, and anxieties of a society evolve. Second, the core ideas and anxieties of a culture's identity can be explored in the self-made man myth. This history is both knowable and directly accessible in its contemporary fiction. Third, the self-made man myth evolves over time, with each generation confronting the aspects of the myth that no longer resonate for them. In critiquing and processing the mythic framework of the self-made man, Hemingway and Fitzgerald's works actively create a new understanding of the twentieth-century self.

For greater cultural context, I rely primarily on Theodore Roosevelt's arguments, political record, and personal life to represent larger cultural institutions of the nineteenth-century self-made man. Born in 1858 and president from 1901-1909, Roosevelt was arguably the most visible and influential perpetuator of the self-made man during his lifetime. Hemingway biographer Michael Reynolds argued that for men born during the late nineteenth century, "Roosevelt was in the very air . . . His ideas and attitudes had dispersed like pollen, saturating the American scene" (*Early Years* 28). Roosevelt's autobiography in particular embodies the core aspects of the self-made man myth in the nineteenth century, including self-evaluation for stronger character, the success of auto-didacticism, and expressions of strength demonstrated through withstanding physical and moral duress. In addressing Roosevelt's relentless promotion of the self-made man narrative, we can better understand the cultural context of Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's masculine identity as well as why they sought to evaluate that narrative in their works.

The self-made man narrative was particularly powerful during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because it was a time of immense cultural change for the American people. To address the uncertainty of a changing society, American ideology looks to the steadfast certainty that the self-made narrative offered. One cultural change that generated great anxiety was the changing shape of workplace culture and its greater effect on the institution of the American family. In "American Fathering in Historical Perspective," Joseph Pleck argues that the widening gap between the paternal figure and

the domestic space was primarily due to changes in the industrial workforce, as the distance between home and work increased. As a result, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the American father transitioned from the role of “moral overseer” to “distant breadwinner” (Pleck 88, 86). There was a collective fear that with the rise of industry and more men leaving the home for their labor, the mentor relationship between father and son suffered and boys spent a greater amount of time with their mothers and female teachers. During Roosevelt’s presidency, there was a marked emphasis on closing this paternal gap, and fostering an environment for male-oriented development. This includes the introduction of institutions like the YMCA and the Boy Scouts, as well as the rise in popularity of team sports and athletics.

Nineteenth-century cultural discourse demonstrates an anxiety over America’s loss of “pioneer toughness.” There was a growing concern that if American men could not physically fight, America as a nation could not defend itself physically or ideologically against the threat of outside forces. Roosevelt’s presidency responds specifically to this concern for the “softness” of the American male, and in 1909 Roosevelt passed an order requiring all military officers to demonstrate their physical ability each month by walking fifty miles or riding one-hundred miles in three days.¹ He publically shames those who have let their physical health decline in his autobiography saying: “there are plenty of officers who do not walk any more than is necessary to reach

¹ Officially known as the Navy General Order No. 6 on January 4, 1909. When this new policy was initially critiqued, he silenced his critics by famously completing the 100-mile ride himself in a single day. This requirement was later reversed in 1917 during WWI, but is considered widely to be a forerunner to the current military PRT or Physical Readiness Training.

a streetcar that will carry them from their residence to their offices...They take no exercise. They take cocktails instead and are getting beefy and 'ponchy'" (49). Roosevelt mirrored the national belief that the strength of American politics is marked by the strength of its individuals, and the strength of self-made men.

This concern for physical weakness is reflected in a similar decline in the vigor of American ideals and values. In both the political and private sphere, Roosevelt worried that the American people were not dedicated to maintaining the values of American integrity — especially against rival political ideologies. He uses masculinity and the self-made man as aspirational political rhetoric to unify American morality, calling upon Americans to rise to a high expectation of success and achievement. He writes:

There are many forms of success, many forms of triumph. But there is no other success that in any shape or way approaches that which is open to most of the many, many men and women who have the right ideals . . . They are the men and women who have the courage to strive for the happiness which comes only with labor and effort and self-sacrifice, and only to those whose joy in life springs in part from power of work and sense of duty. (347)

Roosevelt here emphasizes the potential of the American people to actively shape and improve their world, empowering his readers to aspire only to greatness. He used the self-made man myth to encompass the virility and strength of the American identity.

In addition to a changing workplace culture and concerns about the strength of American values, the nineteenth century also bears witness to immense changes in gender

politics. In 1848 the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, and following WW1 Americans witnessed the transition to more and more women working outside of the home. According to the United States Department of Labor, by 1920 women constituted twenty-one percent of the workforce. Roosevelt's autobiography bears witness to the national anxiety about these changes in the gender landscape. While he challenges women in his autobiography not to "shirk the business of wifedom and motherhood" in the name of modernity, he also includes a candid correspondence with an American homemaker on how she can resolve her identity as both a mother of nine and an active participant in society (162, 164). The inclusion of these conversations in Roosevelt's work is representative of how feminism and gender politics serves as an ever-present cultural backdrop to the discussions of gender and the role of the self-made man.

Roosevelt embodies both physically and ideologically the values and motives of the self-made man narrative in the late nineteenth century. His ideas transformed the political and social landscape of his lifetime, and were one of the bases of the self-made man myth communicated to the writers of the Lost Generation during their formative years. The self-made man serves here as a lens through which to explore generational conflict and social change in America during the early twentieth century. In contextualizing Roosevelt's self-made man mythos within his contemporary concerns, we reveal the importance of the narrative as it was communicated to the Hemingway and Fitzgerald generation. In mapping the demands of masculine identity in these authors'

fiction, we can better understand current issues of masculinity within a greater evolving narrative.

Chapter 1: The Paternal Inheritance of the Self-Made Man

“There is need of a sound body, and even more of a sound mind. But above mind and above body stands character — the sum of those qualities which we mean when we speak of a man's force and courage, of his good faith and sense of honor.”

— Theodore Roosevelt “*Citizenship in a Republic*,” 1899

To begin my study of twentieth-century masculinity and the ways it shapes our current gender climate, I look first to the formation of the self-made man mythos in two of Hemingway’s short stories, “Fathers and Sons” and “Indian Camp.” In both stories, the young Nick Adams explores his complex and conflicted relationship with his father. He is extremely close to his father, both in the physical proximity of their lives and their emotional connection, so Nick looks to his father as he develops his understanding of masculine responsibility and identity. These two stories not only demonstrate the nuances of the nineteenth-century self-made man mythos, but they also powerfully illustrate how pivotal paternal responsibility and the paternal relationship are to nineteenth-century understandings of masculinity.

An essential, and perhaps obvious, tenet of the self-made man mythos during the nineteenth century is that it was intended for men. While a more contemporary understanding of the self-made man narrative can be applied across gender lines to illustrate the qualities of self-reliance and independence, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the self-made man was an explicit call to action for men by men. Roosevelt emphasized in particular the importance of empowering men by encouraging expressions of strength and aggression as patriotic (*Autobiography* 51). Roosevelt sought to rectify the potential “softening” forces of the Victorian era by

explicitly encouraging men to reclaim the importance of their role in domestic and public spaces (Testi 1521). In a speech before the Chicago Hamilton Club, for example, Roosevelt calls for men to teach their sons the value of labor and to reject the temptation of a “life of slothful ease,” saying:

Who among you would teach your boys that ease, that peace, is to be the first consideration in their eyes—to be the ultimate goal after which they strive? You men of Chicago have made this city great, you men of Illinois have done your share, and more than your share, in making America great, because you neither preach nor practice such a doctrine. You work yourselves, and you bring up your sons to work. (“The Strenuous Life” 3)

Roosevelt directs his attention to fathers, specifically encouraging the importance of strong male role models for the success of the American culture. He empowers the listeners of his speech to demonstrate their dedication to the American cause through strong parenting, saying. Roosevelt here illustrates succinctly how paternal responsibility and the intergenerational relationship rests at the core of nineteenth-century masculine rhetoric.

The importance of paternal responsibility reflects especially well in Hemingway’s short stories of the adolescent Nick Adams. “Indian Camp,” first published in 1924, is a story that explores how potentially damaging and dark the lessons of early manhood can be. It begins with a young Nick riding with his father in a canoe to assist with a difficult childbirth in a nearby Indian camp. This intimate moment of closeness between father

and son, Nick physically lying on his father as they float to the encampment, is a classic moment of homosocial bonding that we see repeated frequently in the Hemingway texts. The wild seclusion of nature facilitates an unguarded expression of male intimacy not normally possible. This moment in the story celebrates the most fundamental and enchanting aspects of the self-made man narrative: the glory of male independence, the safety of the male world without women, and the intimate relationship between men.

This introduction of Nick and his father establishes Nick's vulnerability, but the apparent safety of this moment ends as soon as Nick and his father leave the certainty of male space in the canoe and enter the dangerous unpredictability of a female domestic space. This transition between gender spaces is marked visibly in the story as Nick and his father penetrate its boundary. As they enter the periphery of the camp, Nick and his father pass a group of men smoking together on the edge of the camp, just out of earshot of the sounds of a laboring mother. This physical separation of the two genders in the camp underscores the safety of homosocial space. When they enter the tent, the men must deal with the shock and trauma of female suffering and confront a space where masculine control meets chaos. In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel cites the desire for American men to preserve a masculine space as indicative of the growing loss of control over the changing world, and he explains that the history of American masculine identity has been "based on obsessive self-control, defensive exclusion, or frightened escape" (333). That is, masculinity is defined by practicing absolute precision and control under duress, successfully dismissing or demonizing forces that threaten this control, or to

removing oneself entirely from circumstances that prevent such success. The uncertainty of the birthing scene in the tent is juxtaposed directly with the strength and certainty of the male world glimpsed in the journey over.

In the tent, Nick is given a crash course of lessons in expectations for male behavior, a living portrait of Roosevelt's ideal self-made man. Nick's father quickly asserts masculine dominance over the feminine space, suppressing emotional reactions to the point of apathy. Nick's instinctual reaction is to sympathize with the mother's pain, pleading for his father to stop her agony. His father, however, reminds Nick of the importance of a single-minded certainty under great strife, saying: "No. I haven't any anesthetic . . . but her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important" (68). Nick's father successfully controls his emotional response to the woman's pain in a way that Nick cannot, demonstrating how masculinity should be marked by absolute control. He exemplifies Roosevelt's call for American men to affirm their ability to withstand the harsh and the difficult with strength and confidence. In an 1899 letter to psychologist G. Stanley Hall, Roosevelt argues for the preservation of what he describes as "barbarian virtues," writing:

Over-sentimentality, over-softness, in fact washiness and mushiness are the great dangers of this age and of this people. Unless we keep the barbarian virtues, gaining the civilized ones will be of little avail . . . A nation that cannot fight is not worth its salt, no matter how cultivated and refined it may be. (*Roosevelt Letters 1899*)

Nick's father's insistence in addressing the harshness of the birth directly speaks to the greater cultural concern for the loss of strength under immense danger and Nick is shown that masculinity is marked by a rise to meet the challenge of the strenuous and difficult.

Nick's father's dismissal of the mother's screams also embodies Roosevelt's arguments about the importance of American men recognizing their responsibility to maintaining the physical and mental caliber of the nation. In one speech Roosevelt describes the ideal man through the metaphor of a bullfighter: "the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly . . . and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly" ("Citizenship in a Republic"). Roosevelt speaks with great admiration for men who are unafraid to risk their lives defending what they believe in, and it is fearless masculinity that he advocates all American men strive to possess. The idealization of the bullfighter as the ideal man is mirrored in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, which we will explore at length in the next chapter. Roosevelt, however, was not alone in this concern as during the late nineteenth and twentieth century there is an increased emphasis on the physical body as a proof of masculine acuity and strength, and the male body becomes the battleground for male worth in society. Kimmel cites a 1925 sales manual for example, which encouraged salesmen to exercise before a sales pitch citing that,

Combativeness functions through the shoulder and arm muscles as shown by the soldier, prizefighter, athlete, etc. And, well developed, it imparts a feeling of

enthusiasm, physical vigor, and power of *decision* that no other faculty can give.

(*Manhood in America* 193)

The birthing scene in “Indian Camp” emphasizes Nick’s father’s physical strength as he operates on and stitches up the mother with complete confidence and physical control.

The scene, though brief, emphasizes a tangible display of the masculinity that Hemingway demonstrates repeatedly in his work: physical endurance as an expression of mental strength.

Nick’s father demonstrates strength of will and self-confidence in his complete physical domination during the birth scene, with control over both his and the mother’s body. The strength of his reaction compares directly with the weakness of the Indian father’s inability to withstand the pressure of the scene. After the child is successfully delivered, it is discovered that the Indian father has quietly slit his throat sometime during the course of the delivery. Nick asks his father why the man would have done this and he answers, “I don’t know, Nick. He couldn’t stand things, I guess” (69). The Indian father is unable to cope with his wife’s agony as she labors, refusing his responsibility to rise to the brutal realities of his life. Nick therefore is taught to perceive male responses to trauma as in a stark binary: either you succeed with absolute control or you fail and remove yourself altogether. As Lisa Tyler argues, “Young Nick in this formative experience is given two options: to ignore the woman's suffering like his father or to empathize to the point of self-destruction like the Indian husband” (36). This birth scene ushers Nick into the responsibilities of adult manhood. His father demonstrates the

brutality of the world, the necessity to maintain control over that brutality, and the consequences of failing to confront those realities.

The demands of the self-made man narrative require more than just physical strength, and cultural values and expectations of the early twentieth century include specific expectations for gender roles. Roosevelt outlines the specifics of that gender code for the men and women during the nineteenth century:

The man must be glad to do a man's work, to dare and endure and to labor; to keep himself, and to keep those dependent upon him. The woman must be the housewife, the helpmeet of the homemaker, the wise and fearless mother of many healthy children... When men fear work or fear righteous war, when women fear motherhood, they tremble on the brink of doom; and well it is that they should vanish from the earth, where they are fit subjects for the scorn of all men and women who are themselves strong and brave and high minded. ("The Strenuous Life")

Roosevelt here details the traditional expectations of male and female behavior that he would like to maintain, with the male acting as the primary provider and the woman taking responsibility for the domestic space. Roosevelt predicts that changing the known roles and traditions of family life will lead to not only the destruction of American culture, but also the destruction of humanity entirely. This hyperbolic insistence on maintaining the stability of the system reveals the fear which rests at the heart of this topic for Roosevelt, with a very real concern that the American family is at risk.

Roosevelt's responds to the fear of a changing gender structure with an insistence on maintaining the established heteronormative structure.

Sexual behavior is therefore an integral aspect of correct masculine behavior, which Hemingway explores at length in his 1933 short story, "Fathers and Sons." This story also features Nick Adams as protagonist, older and reflecting on the lessons that his father taught him about manhood: "He was very grateful to him for two things: fishing and shooting. His father was as sound on those two things as he was unsound on sex" (459). Nick's full understanding of sexuality is only gleaned haphazardly through personal experience, and the limited guidance that his father does give him is focused on shame, repression, and self-control. His father warns him against sexual crimes, rejecting his son's curiosity with descriptions of the inevitable perils of sexual weakness. He warns that "masturbation produced blindness, insanity, and death, while a man who went with prostitutes would contract hideous venereal diseases and that the thing to do was to keep your hands off of people" (460). Nick's understanding of appropriate sexual behavior is communicated through lessons of fear and the importance of self-control, with sexuality as a battlefield rife with opportunity to fail. Nick's father dissuades against sexuality as a form of pleasure, advocating culture of sexual impulse above all other desire.

As much as the self-made man narrative in the nineteenth century emphasized the importance of control, it also designates the outdoors as the space where men are free to express themselves without societal pressures. Roosevelt himself waxes at length on the freedom of nature in his autobiography, devoting an entire chapter to wildlife and natural

wonders he observed in his travels. With anecdotes like his personal tour of Yosemite Valley with John Muir and swimming across the Potomac with a French Ambassador on a tour Washington D.C., we continually see Roosevelt asserting the outdoors as a space of male commune (322, 45). Nature facilitates freedom of male expression, without social repression or consequence. It is significant, therefore, that Nick's first sexual experience in "Fathers and Sons" occurs on the forest floor with a local Indian girl. While Nick's father's lessons on sexuality encouraged repression, in the natural world Nick is able to escape those strictures and explore his sexual identity freely.

Nick's first sexual encounter is also marked by themes of violence and brutality, the freedom of the natural world encouraging Nick's animalistic instincts. As Trudy stimulates Nick, he describes aloud in vivid detail how he would scalp and kill her brother Eddie if he ever tried to pursue his sister:

"He's big bluff," Trudy was exploring her hand in Nick's pocket. "But don't you kill him, you get plenty trouble."

"I'd kill him like that," Nick said. Eddie Gilby lay on the ground with all his chest shot away. Nick put his foot on him proudly. "I'd scalp him and send it to his mother." (462)

In his imagination Nick lingers over the details, picturing scalping the "half-breed renegade" and releasing his body to the dogs to tear the corpse apart, while Trudy pleads for Nick to spare her brother from his hypothetical death. Nick's sexual arousal is therefore intertwined with the language and fantasies of violence and dominance. After

achieving a hypothetical control over Trudy and her brother, Nick concludes that he has fulfilled the masculine requirements: “Nick had killed Eddie Gilby, then pardoned him his life, and he was a man now” (463). He and Trudy then proceed to have sex, confirming the rite of passage into manhood. Nick’s confidence rests in his control over his enemies, his body, and Trudy’s body. This scene mirrors the birth scene in “Indian Camp”, where male heroism rises from the ability to physically control the female body. While the young Nick is disturbed by his father’s dominance in “Indian Camp,” the narrator has a detached and clinical perspective in describing Nick’s gruesome and disturbing dominance fantasy. Any discomfort with selfish domination of the female body is unremarked, and he instead emphasizes his mastery over control in the scene.

"Fathers and Sons" also explores ways that Nick resists his father’s values, illustrating the difficulty for fathers to encourage independence and empowerment while demanding obedience and adherence to a prescribed code. James Catano argues that, “The deep irony of masculine self-making lies in its claim to offer the ultimate in freely formed, self-created individualism, while it actually serves to establish a social subject, a set of behavioral patterns and expectations that are already prescribed, as it were” (3). This irony feeds the central conflict between Nick and his father, and Nick’s reactions oscillate between grateful and resentful towards his father. As an adult, Nick looks back upon the memories of his adolescent relationship with his father as fraught with cycles of violent impulse followed by guilt. “Fathers and Sons” illustrates the complexity of this in an anecdote about a pair of long underwear that his father gives him secondhand:

Nick loved his father but hated the smell of him and once when he had to wear a suit of his father's underwear that had gotten too small for his father it made him feel sick and he took it off and put it under two stones in the creek and said that he had lost it. He had told his father how it was when his father had made him put it on but his father had said it was freshly washed. It had been, too. (464)

Nick is physically repulsed by his father's perpetual proximity and the intimacy of his father's scent so close to his skin. Nick feels ill-suited and uncomfortable with the clothing and the burden of his father's inheritance. He attempts to shed the obligations of his father just as he sheds the garment on his skin, but is forced to acknowledge his father's persistent influence. After this incident, Nick contemplates killing his father with a rifle his father has given him, fantasizing about wielding control over the man to whom he is so greatly indebted. His thoughts race wildly between feverish fury and shame as he thinks, "I can blow him to hell. I can kill him" and then, "Finally he felt his anger go out of him and he felt a little sick about it being the gun that his father had given him" (465). This illustrates the competing impulses to reject or accept his father. Though he actively resents his father and the values he imposes upon him, Nick still holds himself responsible to his father.

Many critics, including biographer Michael Reynolds, argue that Nick's difficult relationship with his father was inspired by Hemingway's real-life relationship with his father, Clarence Hemingway. According to Reynolds, Clarence placed great pressure on his children to meet his high expectations while wrestling with his own unstable mental

health. Clarence and Ernest's relationship was strained throughout the course of the writer's life as a result. Reynolds argues that Hemingway's early about dysfunctional father-son relationships reflect Hemingway's own struggle to meet his father's demands for his life (*Early Years* 58). Regardless of whether this biographical lens offers a fair analysis, it is clear through Hemingway's works that the complexities of the paternal relationship resonated with him. Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes affirm the importance of the theme of filial debt and guilt in Hemingway's work, and argue that "Indian Camp" and "Fathers and Sons" be interpreted together. She writes, "Nick, who once contemplated killing his father but went to the Indian camp instead, encounters, in the story called 'Indian Camp' a baby boy whose birth has just caused the death of his father" (16). Both stories confront the tensions between fathers and sons during the twentieth century and the anxiety in transitioning values across a generation gap.

The difficulties of Nick's relationship with his father are illustrated in the story when the physical closeness explored in the beginning of "Fathers and Sons" is juxtaposed with the vast distance time has placed between Nick and his father at the end of the story. Nick notes the disconnected adult relationship he had with his father saying, "The towns he lived in were not towns his father knew. After he was fifteen he had shared nothing with him" (464). Nick's relationship with his father transitions from intimate, near claustrophobic, closeness to a vast separation in adulthood. Throughout "Fathers and Sons," Nick confronts the difficulty in honoring the values and inheritance of his father's generation while creating an adult identity that is uniquely his own. As

Comley and Scholes argue, this story confronts “how one can cease to be a boy and become a man without become a father like one’s own father” (19). Nick himself seems conflicted about addressing these questions, wrestling with his adolescent resentment and adult appreciation of the lessons of his father. Both destructive and constructive, his father has for better or worse shaped his understanding of his identity as a man, his place in the world, and expectations for his success.

“Fathers and Sons” and “Indian Camp” are intriguing case studies to introduce the pressures of the self-made man narrative, because the course of the stories spans Nick’s entire lifetime. In Indian Camp, we see the introduction of what it means to be masculine and the ideal version of that performance. Nick’s father emphasizes masculinity as defined aggression and self-control; these same values persist as Nick grows older, influencing his understanding of sexuality. As Nick enters adolescence, he becomes resistant to the increasing pressure to meet his father’s expectations. The self-made man narrative encourages both fierce independence and strict obedience to authority, which Nick finds incredibly difficult to reconcile. Through these two stories Hemingway explores the complexity and darkness nineteenth-century masculinity, and seeks to illustrate the burden of paternal expectations his generation must confront as they attempt define masculinity on their own terms.

Chapter 2: Sex, Gender, and the Self-Made Man

“Masculine Women! Feminine Men!
 Which is the rooster, which is the hen?
 It's hard to tell 'em apart today
 And Sister is busy learning to shave
 Brother just loves his permanent wave
 It's hard to tell 'em apart today”
 —Savoy Havana Band, “Masculine Woman! Feminine Men!” 1926

While Hemingway’s short stories “Indian Camp” and “Fathers and Sons” demonstrate the ideal masculinity as defined by control, his 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises* explores the loss of that control. In the changing political and gender climate of the 1920s, men were forced to confront the instability of their understandings of sex and gender in relation to the self-made man narrative. Without the assumption of male entitlement and control, American men needed to redefine masculinity outside these bounds. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that negotiations of sex and gender dominated Hemingway’s generation: “To many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century men, women seemed to be agents of an alien world that evoked anger and anguish, while to women in those years men appeared as aggrieved defenders of an indefensible order” (*No Man’s Land* 4). In this way, the twentieth century challenged men by removing the certainty of the self-made man as a narrative of masculine strength, and the literature of this time reflects the anxiety of that loss of control.²

² I am greatly indebted in my analysis and critical position to the thorough and thoughtful history of Hemingway criticism, particularly the work of Susan Beegel, Rose Marie Burwell, Leslie Fiedler, as well as Michael Reynold’s excellent biographies.

Sherwood Anderson's 1923 short story "The Man Who Became a Woman" is a perfect example of the kinds of vulnerabilities and fears which consumed men during this time of immense gender change. In the story, a man awakes to find that he has turned into a woman in his sleep and is terrified to face the world without the guise of dominance and power afforded by his sex. Stripped of masculine power, he faces the threat of his physical weaknesses as he runs naked in the night from the violence of two men chasing him. The narrator's experience is marked by frantic agony as she is without male power: "There was a new terror now that seemed to go down to the very bottom of me, to the bottom of the inside of me, I mean. It shook me like I have seen a rat in a barn shaken by a dog. It was a terror like a big wave that hits you when you are walking on a seashore" (225). Without the certainty and dominance of his masculinity, the protagonist in "The Man Who Became a Woman" confronts the panic, vulnerability, and uncertainty caused by the loss of masculine power and control. Anderson's begs his readers to consider the question: what are men if they cannot act like men?

The Sun Also Rises continues the exploration of this same question, with characters attempting to salvage the self-made man mythos in the modern world. The certainty and confidence of Roosevelt's nineteenth-century missives is replaced with an air of confusion and damage. The character Bill maps the anxieties of his generation best, saying:

You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You got precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become

obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafes . . . You don't work. One group claims women support you. Another group claims you are impotent. (120)

Bill's description of the expatriate stereotype is particularly important because Hemingway and Fitzgerald were so integral to the culture of expatriate art and expression during the early twentieth-century. Critic Bill Pizer describes works like *The Sun Also Rises* as "mythic expression of American self-exile," with Hemingway using the separation from American culture and pressures to explore new expressions of identity. (Pizer xxii). Pizer connects Jake's movements through Paris as illustrative Hemingway's experience as an expatriate: "As Jake goes from distinctive place to distinctive place, the three days form themselves in a rich image of the expatriate experience — its emptiness and futility and yet its potential to refresh and renew (Pizer 78). This tension between aimlessness and purposefulness repeats throughout the novel, indicative of the challenges in understanding one's place in a rapidly changing gender world.

In the passage above, Bill specifically highlights an anxiety that the men of the early twentieth century have been rendered sexually impotent by modernization. Masculinity is explicitly linked with sexuality, and it is through this frame that each individual man is assessed and measured. Each male character in the novel fails to reach this ideal in different ways, and in confronting those failures and managing their self-expectations, they explore alternative forms of gender expression. Concurrently, the men also confront female sexual agency, processing the potential for women to embody the

qualities of the self-made man. In this way *The Sun Also Rises* provides a roadmap of the pitfalls and complexities of gender the climate in the 1920's, and the changing shape of the self-made man myth in that time.

Jake Barnes, the narrator of the novel, fails to achieve the expected ideal of sexual behavior as a result of a castrating war wound. Jake perceives his wound as a barrier to sexual intimacy, limiting him from actively participating in heteronormative male culture. His inability to prove sexual potency is a great source of anxiety for Jake, mentally removing himself from the male cultural structure. His feelings of incompetence and isolation are triggered particularly as observes the woman he desires, Brett, happily pursue relationships with other men. Jake is consumed by depressive thoughts when considering his inability to maintain a relationship with Brett: "I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth eaves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. Then after a while it was better and I lay in bed and listened to the heavy trams go by and way down the street, and I went to sleep" (39).

Jake perceives his inability to control his body as preventing him from upholding society's expectations and demands; he feels castrated both physically and socially from the modern world. Jake is obsessively pre-occupied with his sexual limitation, his neurosis and anxiety preventing him from pursuing sexual intimacy. He is ashamed and burdened by his lack of control over his physical body, and its inability to respond to his sexual desires. Gilbert and Gubar emphasize the importance of themes of impotence and castration in literature at this time, and press that we cannot underemphasize the source of

Jake's insecurity as centered in his genitalia. They write, "it is significant that these modernist formulations of societal breakdown consistently employed imagery of male impotence and female potency" (36). Gilbert and Gubar argue here that potency is translated as power, so discussions of changes in gendered power dynamics are often translated through the language of sexual and reproductive performance. As we saw with Nick in "Fathers and Sons," sex can be an opportunity for male expression of control, over both their body and their partner's body. Jake is keenly aware of his inability to participate in this ritual, bitterly lamenting the burden of his sexually incapacitated body: "Of all the way to be wounded. I suppose it was funny...I try and play it along and just not make trouble for people. Probably I never would have had any trouble if I hadn't run into Brett when they shipped me to England" (38, 39). Jake's body is a physical reminder of the disparity between the expectations and reality of his life.

Jake's physical inability to participate in sexual relationships does not remove his desire for physical and emotional intimacy, and throughout the novel he struggles through a series of unresolved romantic encounters. In the opening of the novel, Jake hires a prostitute who leaves with another man at the end of the evening. Even when hiring a companion, Jake's monetary agency cannot replace his inability to wield physical control. It is with the enchanting Lady Brett Ashley, however, that Jake sustains the most frustratingly incomplete romantic relationship. Both parties repeatedly repress their love and affection for each other, but Brett insists that she cannot commit herself to a relationship without penetrative sexual intimacy. As with the prostitute, Jake finds

himself facilitating another man's sexual fulfillment in lieu of his own when he assists Brett in her affair with the bullfighter Pedro Romero. The narrative of self-made man rests in the confidence that a man deserves the spoils and acclaim of his own effort, so the arrangement of arranging Brett's romantic conquest with another man is emasculating.

The nineteenth century placed an immense amount of cultural power in the institution of marriage, with Roosevelt writing "the relationship of man and woman is the fundamental relationship that stands at the base of the whole social structure" (*Autobiography* 161). In facilitating Brett's sexual relationships with other men, Jake forgoes his claim to sexual conquest. This is not an arrangement that he enjoys, and he bitterly laments his role after Brett summons Jake to her side after her breaking her affair with Romero, saying: "That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the wire with love. That was it alright" (243). Jake feels trapped by the lack of control over his physical body and his platonic fate with Brett. If the ideal image of a man is marked by virile strength, what happens when forces beyond his control remove the ability to meet that expectation? In the post-WWI period and when faced with a distinctly changed world, "men often felt as assaulted on the Homefront as they were on the military front itself" (Gilbert and Gubar 34). Jake's struggles illustrate that an emphasis on virility and physical heroism limits the self-made man, and the twentieth century encouraged men to expand expectations of masculinity to accommodate a new world.

While Jake's wound is a source of great angst, Robert Cohn provides the most antagonistic representation of male failure. Unlike Jake who is forced to decline his participation in the normal rituals of masculinity, Cohn is completely capable of maintaining the performance of the self-made man and fails to do so. In the face of masculine expectations, Cohn assumes a role of submission in his relationships with women. Cohn allows himself to be publically admonished in front of Jake by his fiancée Frances, who icily embarrasses both Jake and Cohn with the details of Cohn's indiscretions. Frances uses Jake's presence as punishment for Cohn, carefully revealing the mortifying personal details of his intimate relationships:

Listen, Robert, dear. Let me tell you something. You won't mind, will you? Don't have scene with your young ladies. Try not to. Because you can't have scenes without crying, and then pity yourself so much that you can't remember what the other person's said. (57)

Cohn does nothing to stop Frances' assault, causing Jake to leave in embarrassment and wondering: "Why did he sit there? Why did he keep taking it like that?" (58). In icily berating Cohn in a public space in front of an acquaintance, Frances demonstrates her fiancé's lack of control and dominance.

Cohn also seems reluctant to bond with the other men and declines to drink during the majority of the group's social outings. In doing so, he denies a ritual of homosocial bonding and of accepted social behavior. Within the cultural language of his peers, this refusal to imbibe demonstrates a refusal to participate normally in society and is in direct

offense to Roosevelt's encouragement of gender solidarity for male empowerment. When Cohn does agree to drink in Pamplona, he confirms his outlier status again by losing control of his alcohol consumption and falling asleep at dinner. His peers then physically remove him from the social scene to a storage room, a physical separation demonstrating his social and emotional distance from the majority of the group.

None of these qualities, however, is as detestable to Jake as Cohn's lingering and inappropriate attachment to Brett. Jake's personal investment in this relationship stems from his own jealous feelings towards Cohn's ability to complete a sexual relationship with the object of his affection, after Brett takes him to San Fermin. Jake is forced to confront how even Cohn, who continually demonstrates his masculine incompetence, can facilitate a sexual relationship successfully while Jake himself cannot. After their brief affair, Cohn endows Brett with all of the power and follows Brett from city to city in hopeless pursuit of her affection. Cohn even abandons a planned fishing trip with Bill and Jake in favor of finding Brett, refusing to participate in the ritual of male bonding in an environment excluded from women.

It is Cohn's complete lack of self-control, however, which Jake finds most damning. This is illustrated by Mike's and Jake's very public confrontation of Cohn when Mike yells: "Tell me, Robert. Why do you follow Brett around like a poor bloody steer? Don't you know you're not wanted? You came down to San Sebastian where you weren't wanted, and followed Brett around like a bloody steer. Do you think that's right?" (146). In allowing Brett to determine the limits of their relationship, Cohn has rendered

himself as powerless to his peers, as malleable as cattle. Mike places the responsibility of adherence to a male code on Cohn's shoulder in his confrontation by reminding Cohn that there is an expectation, demanding: "Do you think that's right?" This scene demonstrates a common theme in *The Sun Also Rises*: peer policing of gender performance. Men constantly assess and address inappropriate male behavior throughout the novel. In this confrontation Mike seems less upset that Cohn has slept with his fiancée, and angrier at the inappropriateness of his public displays of submission.

While Cohn and Jake are the primary representations of failure to the self-made man narrative, Hemingway also provides a third deviation from the masculine ideal through the fleeting inclusion of the homosexual men Jake sees in a Paris bar. Unlike Jake, the gay men are physically capable of participating in the sexual rituals of the self-made man but refuse to do so. Jake describes the men as they enter the bar with Brett:

A crowd of young men, some in jerseys and some in their shirtsleeves, got out. I could see their hands and newly washed wavy hair in the light from the door. The policeman standing by the door looked at me and smiled. They came in. As they went in, under the light I saw white hands, wavy hair, white faces, grimacing, gesturing, talking. (28)

This excerpt reveals much about America's general cultural perception of deviating sexualities during the 1920s, as well as Jake's own fraught relationship with sex. There is a clear delineation between acceptable masculine behavior and unacceptable. Both Jake

and the policeman instantly recognize the coded representations of their sexuality, seeking each other's gaze to confirm their solidarity against these outliers.

The irony of this scene, of course, is that Jake's outward expression of adherence to the self-made man ideal does not match his ability to conform to those expectations. Jake is particularly attuned to note the gay men's outward manifestations of "otherness" because of his own desperate battle to assimilate, instantly noting their soft hands and quaffed hair. Comley and Scholes affirm this interpretation, and argue that in the broken and isolated aspects of the gay men Jake sees his own deficiencies: "The sexually fragmented Jake is thus linked to men he perceived in fragments as unmanly because he himself has been unmanned" (44). Jake is anxious about his own gender performance and role in heteronormative society, and therefore threatened by a group of men who actively dismiss that set of expectations.

Jake is not only threatened by the gay men's refusal of the self-made man ideal, but also their mocking success in pursuing Jake's intended sexual objects. They dance with both Brett and Jake's prostitute, while Jake nurses his jealousy from afar, thinking: "She had been taken up by them. I knew then they would all dance with her. They are like that" (28). Jake's resentment here is palpable, but also reveals a sense of pre-existing expectation of the gay men's prowess with women. The gay men effortlessly engage and charm Brett in a way that Jake cannot bring himself to do, despite their lack of legitimate interest. As Todd Onderdonk argues, "in [the gay men's] campy refusal to take seriously the gendered dicta through which Jake negotiates his powerlessness, they make a

mockery of his predicament” (78). In this scene, Jake is overwhelmed by his own anger and shame, fighting to control violent impulse. The gay men, more than Robert Cohn, are the most threatening to Jake because they decline to participate in heteronormative society and instead negotiate an alternative narrative for their public sexual identities. While Jake hides his sexual deficiencies, the gay men publically display their sexual difference.

The most dangerous group who fails to honor the self-made man mythos in the twentieth century was women. *The Sun Also Rises* personifies this conflict through Brett, who seizes the power of the self-made man and reinterprets it through a female lens. She is undoubtedly the most powerful character in the novel, the center of its intrigue and consistently wielding the most authority. Our first indication that Brett is not traditionally feminine is evidenced by her rejection of traditional expectations for female appearance. Her outward appearance is repeatedly associated with traditional expectations for male appearance, with short hair and a preference for athletic clothing. Hair, Comley and Scholes argue, is a common representation of sexual transgression in Hemingway’s work, and acts as “a public challenge to public notions of sexual propriety that are both fragile and dangerously powerful” (63). Although Brett does not conform to expected conventions of female appearance, she does not deny or suppress her femininity. As Jake notes, “Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boys. She started all that. She was built with curves like the hull of a racing yacht, and you missed none of it with that wool jersey”

(30). Brett therefore creates an alternative space of identity and gender expression, restricted by neither male nor female demands. We see here the roots of what Judith Halberstam identifies as “female masculinity,” an independent gender free from derivative definitions or emulation of other genders,³ Brett’s unique aesthetic becomes an assertion of her power to free herself from gender and identity binaries.

Not all who interact with Brett are as accepting and supportive as Jake and his cohort, and we see visceral cultural resistance to her appearance, especially outside of Paris. In Pamplona in particular, Brett’s appearance inspires great curiosity and her unique gender expression causes a spectacle. Jake describes the reactions of the Spanish women as Brett walks down the street: “The women standing in the door of the wine shop looked at us as we passed. She called to someone in the house and three girls came to the window and stared. They were staring at Brett” (142). This dramatic reaction demonstrates the novelty of Brett’s physical transgression in a more conservative space; her mere appearance inspires strangers gape openly. While progressive urban centers like Paris would be more familiar with the changing expressions of femininity, Brett’s short hair and boyish fashion would have differed greatly from the cultural norm in rural Spain.

Roosevelt too writes in his autobiography of his concern and surprise at the seemingly rapid change of women’s roles and appearance coming into the twentieth century, warning that “the woman must realize that she has no more right to shirk the business of wifehood and motherhood than the man has to shirk his business as

³ Halberstam argues for female masculinity as a new gender designation separate from both male and female, with its own cultural history. She explains that female masculinity is not merely women looking to emulate masculinity and is a distinct expression of gender identity unto itself. (Halberstam 2)

breadwinner for the household” (162). Each gender has a role to play for the good of their family economy and the good of the solvency of the American economy as a whole, and Roosevelt is adamant that this expectation cannot be ignored in the name of politics. For Brett, however, the rebellion of her appearance is aimed not at removing her participation in mainstream society, but in reclaiming her own sense of agency. Through a more outwardly masculine appearance, Brett refuses the assumption that she is an object prepared for the male eye, and is instead in control of an outward expression of independence and self-sufficiency.

This struggle for power is a constant theme in the course of the novel, with Brett repeatedly asserting her role as an assertive woman against a resistant cultural majority. This is demonstrated vividly in a scene where the group is thrust into a dance circle. As the Spaniards dance and chant, Brett attempts to remove herself as the focal point and join the collective group: “Brett wanted to dance but they did not want her to. They wanted her as an image to dance around” (159). Brett resists being the object of devotion and a sexual gaze, and continually seeks to control the gaze for herself, transitioning from object to voyeur herself. Despite her best efforts to communicate her refusal to play female muse, Brett finds that how she is perceived continues to be out of her control. Her attempts to recapture the power of the self-made man are not always accepted.

Brett’s departure from traditional conceptions of femininity is also reflected in her public expression of sexuality. Brett considers her sexuality not as connected to maternal responsibility, but as a source of personal pleasure. Already divorced, Brett happily

collects and discards sexual partners with little consequence throughout the course of the novel. She repeatedly talks about bathing in the novel, the image of nudity and water emphasizing her likeness to a siren, taunting sailors to their doom with her sexual promises. Brett is also surprisingly candid and upfront about her sexual life and desires, telling Jake that she invited Cohn to spend the holiday in San Sebastian with her because “I rather thought it would be good for him” (89). This brief sexual relationship does not prevent her from continuing to pursue her own desires however, and later in the novel Brett admits her passion for Romero to Jake and she expresses interest in beginning a sexual relationship with the handsome bullfighter. Her satisfaction in fulfilling this desire is marked by the next morning, when Jake notes “Brett was radiant. She was happy. The sun was out and the day was bright” (211). Brett’s sexuality is markedly different from the sexual lives of her male companions, who suffer sexual lives marked by failure, angst, and obligation. She is concerned only for the acquisition of her own interests, and unconcerned with societal obligation. In doing so, Brett rejects Roosevelt's notion of a gendered responsibility to promote stability in culture through marriage.

Brett’s perspective on sex and intimacy is not shared by her partners, and the men in the novel struggle to fit their affair with Brett inside a traditional understanding of heteronormative romance. Both Romero and Cohn, for example, try to “make an honest woman” out of Brett and ask her to legitimize their affairs through marriage. In refusing their marriage offers, Brett refuses their claims to control:

Brett is castrating to men if only in her all desirableness, which necessarily puts men competitively against other men— yet she also feminizes the victors, the men she sleeps with. The boon of being chosen is short-lived, as men quickly discover the capriciousness and temporary nature of their selection. (Onderdonk 77)

Brett's sexuality therefore prevents men from fulfilling the ideal requirements prescribed by the self-made man mythos, as she removes the ability of men to express their power through sustained sexual ownership. Brett herself controls the nature and duration of her sexual relationships, and wields her power carefully.

Despite Brett's clear control over her own sexuality and agency, much of the novel addresses what Comley and Scholes refer to as "the bitch question." That is, the novel considers the questions of whether Brett's treatment of men is unethical— does her sexual agency make her a bitch? Brett repeatedly expresses her own concern at being perceived in that way, telling Jake "Oh I do feel such a bitch" before she begins her affair with Romero and later that "I won't be one of those bitches who ruins children" when she ends the affair (188, 247). The root of Brett's concern is whether her sexual agency is an expression of her own power or a cruel torture to her partners, or whether she can reconcile it being both. The consensus amongst the men in the novel seems to be that Brett's behavior is inappropriate but unavoidable, as they repeatedly find themselves helpless against her allure. Cohn calls Brett "Circe" and tells her fiancé Mike that she "turns men into swine," therefore connecting Brett with mythic narratives of female

power and strength over men (148). Despite this scathing portrait, he and Mike both remain loyal to Brett and compete for her affections.

While the men in her life try to fit Brett into the ideals of the self-made man, Brett herself rarely entertains their projections. She never attempts to conceal her intentions from her potential partners, and is consistently forthright about her sexuality throughout the novel. The scene in which Jake asks Brett to live with him illustrates this particularly well:

“Couldn’t we live together, Brett? Couldn’t we just live together?”

“I don’t think so. I’d just *tromper* you with everybody. You couldn’t stand it.’

“I stand it now.”

“That would be different. It’s my fault, Jake. It’s the way I’m made.” (62)

Brett’s communication of her independence is consistent and clear, never denying or suppressing her behaviors. Jake is filled simultaneously with anguish that he cannot be with the woman he love and frustration that he cannot force Brett to dismiss her sexuality. He struggles to shed the traditional gender frame of a dominant man and a submissive female partner, wrestling with the frustration of trying to maintain control:

Women made such swell friends. Awfully swell. In the first place, you had to be in love with a woman to have a basis of friendship. I had been having Brett for a friend. I had not been thinking about her side of it. I had been getting something for nothing. That only delayed the presentation of the bill. The bill always came.

(152)

Jake describes their dynamic in terms of transactional power, with one person profiting and the other at a loss. He feels tricked, that Brett has manipulated him out of the position of control in the relationship under the guise of friendship. His comments possess a lingering sense of entitlement, that he deserves a certain kind of relationship with Brett for his actions, is representative of the anxiety men in the twentieth century faced — confronting the their expectations of what they thought they deserved.

Hemingway spends a good deal of time illustrating the ways in which the men in *The Sun Also Rises* confront their inability to meet their father's expectations. One common coping method which emerges is to simply exclude threatening or undermining sources, with exclusion as "a strategy to protect their ability to sustain themselves as men" (Kimmel *Angry White Men* 51). Kimmel links historical trends such as anti-feminism, anti-immigration, and racism as attempts to preserve power in spaces in which white men had traditionally maintained dominance. In creating cultural moments of male isolation, the men in the novel release themselves from the burden of cultural performance. In *The Sun Also Rises* the urge to escape is illustrated best during Jake's and Bill's fishing trip to Spain. These chapters celebrate nature and gender solidarity as a salve against the social pressures of everyday life. In removing themselves from society and from women, Bill and Jake experience a fleeting vision of homosocial utopia. These chapters of Hemingway's novel are described with a pastoral calm that is an abrupt shift from the anxiety and restlessness Jake describes while in Paris and Pamplona. The ease of isolation encourages a kind of intimacy that the men cannot normally acknowledge or

express, which Bill notes, saying: "Listen. You're a hell of a good guy, and I'm fonder of you than anybody on earth. I couldn't tell you that in New York. It'd mean I was a faggot" (121). The safety of the moment allows Bill to acknowledge his relationship with Jake in a way that would normally be interpreted as weak or digressive.⁴ In the competitive and fluctuating world of early twentieth century, it is only when separated from general society that men feel safe revealing emotional vulnerabilities.

Feminist scholar bell hooks cites this emotional repression as a ritual part of American masculinity during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, arguing:

The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem. (*The Will to Change* 66)

hooks observes that repression is encouraged as an appropriate expression of male identity, and it is this cultural context which prevents Mike from claiming the anguish of Brett's affair with Romero. After Brett has moved from Mike's room into caring full-time for Romero in his room, Mike explains that "I think I'll stay rather drunk. This is all awfully amusing, but it's not too pleasant. It's not too pleasant for me" (207). Mike is

⁴ For more on homosocial relationships and homoeroticism, see Leslie Fiedler's "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!"

overwhelmed by his failure to meet the expectations of ideal masculinity and seeks alcohol as an outlet of escape from those pressures.

By the expectations of the self-made man, Mike's failures are extensive. He is financially unstable, relying on loans from family and friends to support himself and Brett. His social role as Brett's fiancé is equally unstable as although they call themselves engaged, she is not formally divorced from her first husband, Lord Ashley. Without financial and social stability, Mike's role and position in life is suspended in uncertainty. Brett exacerbates this sense of uncertainty by continually disregarding her role as Mike's fiancée and pursuing new romantic partners. Through Cohn's lingering presence in their group of friends, for example, Mike is forced to socialize and accommodate the needs of another of Brett's lovers. This is emasculating and distressing for Mike; by Brett's refusal to participate in the traditional social structures of sexual fidelity and marriage she destabilizes the institutions Mike would use to understand his social and personal identity. Like Jake, Mike feels castrated and powerless as a result of Brett's behavior.

While *The Sun Also Rises* focuses primarily on exploring the ways in which ideal masculine expression is no longer possible, popular culture remembers Hemingway best in his celebration of ideal masculine performance and the spaces where the self-made man flourishes. Hemingway was notorious for his interest in hyper-masculinity, his love of dangerous and aggressive sports like boxing and hunting. In a private letter to Hemingway, Fitzgerald teases Hemingway for the caricature-like reputation he has created, writing:

I hear you were seen running through Portugal in used BVD⁵'s chewing ground glass and collecting material for a story about boules players; that you were a publicity man for Lindberg, that you have finished a novel of a hundred thousand words long consisting entirely of the word 'balls' used in new groupings . . . I hope I have been misinformed but, alas!, it has all too true a ring. (*Fitzgerald Letters*, 303)

In *The Sun Also Rises* Hemingway indulges his infamous appreciation of aggressive masculine expression through Jake's interest in the bullfights of Pamplona.

Jake is enchanted by the romance of bullfighting, watching in awe as men publically confront and defeat the challenge of the bull. One bullfighter in particular, Pedro Romero, attracts the attention of Jake and his group. Romero is young and virile, "the best looking boy I have ever seen" Jake says, and a personification of the confident control that Jake himself longs to possess (167). Jake waxes at length on Romero's talent in the bullring, particularly his ability to physically control situations of violence without fear, and maintain dominance in moments of high stress. Romero embodies Jake's platonic ideal of himself, easily mastering challenges which plague him. While Jake's body prevents him from attempting any kind of intimate relationship, it is Romero's physical prowess which seduces Brett.

The primary focus of Jake's admiration, however, is the quiet control with which Romero demonstrates his dominance. He watches Romero in reverence, describing how

⁵ Bradley, Voorhees & Day, popular brand of male underwear during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

he never wastes a move or moment: "It was all so slow and controlled. It was as though he were rocking the bull to sleep" (221). Romero attracts Brett with this same method, avoiding obvious expressions of outright desire or desperation, but maintaining absolute awareness of her when he is in her presence. Jake describes Romero's performance in the bullring as without bravado: "Never once did he look up. He made it stronger that way, and did it for himself, too, as well as for her" (220). Jake's awareness of Brett and Romero's affair places himself as a third member of their romance, a silent voyeur without his own romantic prospects. In comparison to Jake's effusive pleadings, Cohn's constant shadowing presence, or Mike's drunken brawls, Romero's conscious control of Brett's gaze sets him apart as a man of considerable power. Romero naturally exudes the self-control so explicitly valued in the mythos of the self-made man, the same control that Jake so desperately admires.

Jake's admiration of the bullfighters is shared by Montoya, the owner of Pamplona hotel and Jake's surrogate father figure. Jake and Montoya discuss the art of bullfighting and the relative strengths of each of the bullfighters at length, facilitating an amiable intimacy between the two men. Jake describes their shared enthusiasm with great reverence, noting that after their conversations Montoya "always smiled as though there were something lewd about the secret to outsiders, but it was something that we understood" (136). Not only does Montoya act as gatekeeper to the bullfighters, evaluating and housing only the best, but Montoya also serves as gatekeeper to those who claim to be bullfighting enthusiasts; it is with much pride that Jake his position in the fold

of the elite few whom Montoya trusts. Montoya is largely suspicious of Americans, doubting that Americans will understand or value the controlled masculinity that bullfighting represents. Jake's cautious admiration of Montoya is reminiscent of Nick's relationship with his father in "Indian Camp" and "Fathers and Sons," with both figures standing as guardians of traditional masculine values.

In this way, Montoya represents the paternal reminder of the inheritance of values that the characters of *The Sun Also Rises* have betrayed. Jake feels deeply indebted to and honored by Montoya's perception of him as a man dedicated to the traditional values, and it is to Montoya that he feels most responsible when Romero begins his affair with Brett. Montoya asks Jake to protect Romero from Brett's modern influence, worried that he will join ranks of castrated men controlled by a modern masculine woman. He holds Jake responsible for preserving Romero, and therefore maintaining his dedication to the purer values of the self-made man saying: "He's such a fine boy . . . He ought to stay with his own people. He shouldn't mix in that stuff" (176). When Jake fails to preserve Romero fall under the seductive influences of Brett, he regrets Montoya's disappointment more than any other reaction. As his surrogate father and proponent of the self-made man narrative, Montoya represents the enduring guilt of paternal debt which Jake must confront.

The Sun Also Rises provides an expansive look at how the generation of the early twentieth century processed and confronted their inheritance of the nineteenth-century ideal of the self-made man. We have looked to characters who blatantly fail to meet those

expectations, like Cohn and Jake, women who seize outlets of male expression for themselves, like Brett, and the coping methods the characters use to address the failure of the self-made man. Hemingway also provides a glimpse into outlets through which ideal masculinity still reigns powerful, through the brave bullfighters in Pamplona. What results is a complex web of characters and relationships, which becomes increasingly tangled as they seek to establish their power. The characters of *The Sun Also Rises* are connected by a distinct sense of loss, mourning the certainty of the self-made man narrative in a changing world. At one point in the novel, Mike regales the group with the promise of an amusing anecdote: the story of the time he borrowed some war medals to wear to an event, and then drunkenly gave them away. The symbols of bravery, selflessness, and masculine achievement are meaningless to Mike outside the context of war, and he discards them without fanfare. This poignant anecdote is characteristic of the novel, with men and women confronting a world where the symbols and values of the father's generation are meaningless in their modern lives. That pervasive myth of self-making and ideal masculinity looms over the novel, an echo of the old establishment in the ears of a generation searching for their own voice.

Chapter 3: Social Mobility and the Self-Made Man

“A phrase began to beat in my ears with a sort of heady excitement; ‘There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired’”

— F.Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

In *The Sun Also Rises* Hemingway focuses a great deal of the novel on assessing value, with Jake constantly aware of the financial state of each of his male peers as well as obsessively tracking his own spending and debts. In this way Jake is able to map and monitor the relative value and power of the men in his social sphere, and determine the social and economic value he wields in their group. While Hemingway’s inclusion of this theme is peripheral, in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* it is the primary topic of interest. Class and income mobility are explicit themes from the very first line of the novel, where Nick recalls his father’s advice that “whenever you feel like criticizing anyone... just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had” (1). Economic and social value is therefore the primary frame through which Nick learned his place in the world.

In *So We Read On*, Maureen Corrigan argues that one of the reasons *The Great Gatsby* endures as one of the most widely read and adapted pieces of literature is that it speaks so directly to the core of American identity: the unlimited potential for social mobility in the self-made man.⁶ This narrative is rooted in the belief that social and economic advancement is literally limitless when faced with the spirit of American

⁶ Although Maureen Corrigan's *So We Read On* features heavily in my critical lens of *Great Gatsby*, I am indebted to many others. These include Matthew Bruccoli's *Scott and Ernest: The Authority of Failure and the Authority of Success* and Arthur Mizener's *The Far Side of Paradise*. John Cawelti, Jackson R. Bryer, and Morris Dickstein and the continued work of the F. Scott Fitzgerald society.

determination, and this novel illustrates better than any other how ambition and class advancement are just as important to nineteenth-century masculinity as sex and paternal obligation. In the character of Jay Gatsby, readers find pure dedication in the pursuit of the self-made man and an unwavering optimism in the ability to transcend economic and social barriers. Gatsby's tragic death stands in direct conflict with his hopefulness, and through the course of the novel Fitzgerald uses Gatsby's trajectory to scrutinize the certainty of the self-made narrative in the twentieth century. Ultimately, this novel shows, pure ambition is simply not enough to achieve great heights and ultimately life shows us that we are not in control. Neither the optimism of the self-made man nor the establishment of traditional economic classes provides the control and assurance men of the twentieth century craved.

One of the reasons the difficulties of class mobility ring so true in *The Great Gatsby* is because Fitzgerald captures a moment when the already lofty myth of the self-made man was becoming more and more impossible. During the 1920's in America, changes such as mass transit, immigration, and unequal economic development created a climate in which income mobility decreased rapidly. The sudden and noticeable volatility in the rates of social mobility during this time was historically remarkable, and in 2012 the Chairman of the US Council of Economic Advisers Alan Krueger coined the "Great Gatsby Curve" to describe the relationship between greater income inequality and social mobility. Krueger's observation noted, in effect, "America is both especially unequal

and has especially low mobility” (Krugman).⁷ As the economic circumstances of the country changed in the twentieth-century, so did our cultural narratives. Men during this time were forced to compromise the optimism of their father’s masculinity narratives with the realities of their contemporary lives, and the narrative of *The Great Gatsby* reflects that change.

To best explore this novel as evidence of the struggle with the myth of unlimited social mobility, we must first look to the novel’s enigmatic title character. In the beginning of the novel Gatsby embodies all of the optimism and potential of the nineteenth-century self-made man narrative, believing with absolute certainty that if he tries hard enough everything he works for is within his reach. As scholar John Cawelti observes, Gatsby is both rewarded and destroyed by this aggressive and unrelenting ambition, “an agency which he himself has brought into being” (230). Like a character in a Horatio Alger novel, Jay Gatsby’s rise from the lowly origins of James Gatz is an unstoppable climb. Nick himself describes Gatsby within this fictional frame, commenting as they drove over the Brooklyn Bridge that he had a feeling that in New York “Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge . . . Even Gatsby could happen” (69). Nick also describes Gatsby in dreamy and non-specific terms, a “gorgeous” character and in possession of “some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life”

⁷ The Great Gatsby Curve is determined by measuring the relationship between “intergenerational elasticity of income” and the possibility for income mobility overall. As Krueger explains, “*Higher* income inequality would be less of a concern if low-income earners became high-income earners at some point in their career, or if children of low-income parents had a good chance of climbing up the income scales when they grow up.” (Krueger)

(2). Fitzgerald himself is cognizant that in writing *Gatsby* as a pure manifestation of self-made ambition he sacrificed some amount of the character's own humanity. Fitzgerald wrote to poet John Peale Bishop after the novel's publication that *Gatsby* was always "blurred and patchy" in his mind, saying "I never at one time saw him clear myself— for he started as one man I knew and then changed into myself— the amalgam was never complete in my mind" (*Fitzgerald Letters* 358).

It is useful then for our purposes to think of *Gatsby* not as a rounded human character, but as an embodiment of late nineteenth-century masculine optimism — ambition personified. This is the same optimism we see throughout Roosevelt's autobiography, filled with inspirational rhetoric of America's ability to resolve any issue — personal or political— through resilience. *Gatsby*, in all his fantastical glory, embodies the hopefulness and potential of Fitzgerald's generation. In a 1938 letter to his daughter Scottie, Fitzgerald reflects this idealism writing: "When I was your age I lived with a great dream, the dream grew and I learned how to speak of it and make people listen" (*Fitzgerald Letters* 34). Fitzgerald therefore endows *Gatsby* with the burden of his generation's expectation.

The glorious hopefulness of *Gatsby*'s ambition is matched only by his glorious and dramatic demise, murdered in a case of mistaken revenge and alone in a home which encapsulated the best of his gaudy ambition. Fitzgerald builds to *Gatsby*'s death with a sense of inevitability, writing "he had been full of the ideas so long, dreamed it right through to the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of

intensity. Now, in the reaction, he was running down like an overwound clock” (92).⁸

Gatsby’s fall seems inevitable, like the boats on the tide or a clock slowly unwinding. In a world as economically unstable and changing as twentieth-century America, even the hopefulness of the self-made man is ultimately accountable to reality. Gatsby has to die because he symbolizes for Fitzgerald the end of a culture of careless optimism.

Gatsby’s blindness to his own limitations is typical of the brazen self-confidence necessary to pursue the nineteenth-century masculine ideal. Gatsby has absolute certainty that with effort he not only can increase his social standing, but also convince Daisy to deny her past with Tom. In erasing the decades they spent apart, Gatsby hopes to fully claim Daisy and her social position as his own. When Nick questions his plan, Gatsby is aghast that he would have doubts:

“I wouldn’t ask too much of her,” I ventured. “You can’t repeat the past.”

“Can’t repeat the past?” he cried incredulously, “Why of course you can!” (110)

Gatsby’s endless faith in his own control over his fate again speaks to his embodiment of the self-made man. In denying Gatsby’s potential to redefine his social place without limitation, Nick denies the self-made man myth of unlimited social mobility. The earnestness of this myth, unlimited gains through honest effort, simplifies a world with complex and competing social, moral, and political cultures. As Maureen Corrigan writes, Gatsby’s drowned body becomes a symbol of the limits of social mobility and

⁸ Fitzgerald here alludes to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, when Marlow says: “I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more” (Conrad 112). Conrad’s work, and *Heart of Darkness* specifically, was highly influential for Fitzgerald in writing *The Great Gatsby*. He mentions Conrad throughout his letters as a source of inspiration, shown rather effusively in a 1925 letter to H.L. Mencken where Fitzgerald writes: “God! I’ve learned a lot from him” (Fitzgerald Letters 482).

advancement during the twentieth century, forcing the reader to “consider the question of how far a nobody in America can swim before he sinks” (*So We Read On* 44).

Gatsby’s obsession with the past is evidence of his dedication to the nineteenth-century masculine myth — the myth he discovered and fostered in his adolescence. Nick articulates this particularly when describing James Gatz’ transformation into Jay Gatsby, saying: “the truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself . . . he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end” (98). Like Nick Adams in “Indian Camp” and “Fathers and Sons,” Gatsby’s identity formation was influenced greatly by the prominent paternal figures in his life: his hero Dan Cody and his father Henry Gatz. Fitzgerald echoes Hemingway’s assertions of masculinity and the self-made man as inextricably linked with paternal inheritance and responsibility. While Gatsby is extremely vocal about this dedication to Cody, displaying a picture of his mentor on his dresser, his connection to his father is only revealed after his death. Cody represented the successful and daring life Gatsby strived to live, and his father reminded him of the truth of the origins he fought so strongly to leave behind. By denying his true origins, Gatsby believed he could free himself from the class limitations of his modest upbringing. These two father figures loom silently and ever present in Gatsby’s identity formation, influencing every decision he makes as he works towards his adolescent ideal.

One of the primary ways that Gatsby reveals his dedication to the self-made man narrative is in his explicit and visible effort to create a “best self”— a self that can ascend class levels and find acceptance amongst more affluent and powerful peers. Gatsby mirrors the example of the infamously self-made Benjamin Franklin in his tradition of conscious and meticulous self-improvement regimen. Gatsby’s childhood diary notes the efforts of a young James Gatz’s resolve to improve his hygiene, mind, and self-control through specific goals (173). Roosevelt himself articulates how a careful and conscious effort towards self-improvement was essential to his own development as a self-made man, writing:

I never won anything without hard labor and the exercise of my best judgement and careful planning and working long in advance. Having been a rather sickly and awkward boy, I was as a young man at first both nervous and distrustful of my own prowess. I had to train myself painfully and laboriously not merely as regards my body but as regards my soul and spirit. (*Autobiography* 52)

Roosevelt describes his transformation from a weak child to President in detail, from his work with his boxing instructor and his rigorous study schedule at Harvard. This obsessive dedication to overcoming one's weaknesses is established as an integral step in the self-made journey, demonstrating how conscious effort guarantees personal results. Even Gatsby's casual mannerisms and verbal cadences are curated towards his goal, with Nick commenting that “he was picking his words with care” and “he had probably discovered that people liked him when he smiled” (48, 100). Fitzgerald lingers on the

thoroughness of Gatsby's performance throughout the novel to demonstrate the immensity of his efforts to transform himself and control others' perceptions.

The primary way Gatsby seeks to curate his class expression is in collecting and displaying physical signs of his wealth. He carries with him his war medals and old pictures from Oxford, showing them as evidence to Nick on a drive to New York as assurance that he wasn't "just some nobody" (67). By connecting himself with traditionally male institutions of power like the military and Oxford, Gatsby attempts to affirm his class legitimacy. This constant process of self-creation through class props emphasizes the theatricality of the characters' lives, and observation and surveillance are integral to the characters as they each watch the other's performances to affirm or deny their own. Nick watches Gatsby, Gatsby watches Daisy, and the large, painted eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckelberg watch them all. Fitzgerald emphasizes the persistence of social monitoring as essential to the self-making process. In acquiring the correct things and saying the right words, Gatsby believes that he can maintain a consistent and appropriate social performance — proving he belongs.

Some of the most important props of Gatsby's class performance are his home with its belongings. Fitzgerald lingers at length on these descriptions, as Nick lists the many indulgences and materials that surround Gatsby. With seemingly endless rooms and furniture set in gold, Gatsby attempts to articulate his power and wealth in the physical possessions of his property. Key to Gatsby's seduction of Daisy is her experience in this home, as his material objects are essential representations of his class transformation.

After an awkward tea at Nick's home next door, Daisy's reluctance towards Gatsby shifts after he prompts her to take a tour of his home. Daisy is astonished by the lavish presentation, and overwhelmed with emotion at the sight of Gatsby's collection of expensive shirts:

While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher — shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, and monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily. "They're such beautiful shirts," she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. "It makes me sad because I've never seen such — such beautiful shirts before." (92)

Fitzgerald is certainly aware of the comedy of Daisy's seduction by the romance of Gatsby's closet, as she succumbs to the temptation of indulging her feelings for Gatsby as much as she succumbs to the temptation of his wealth. Gatsby uses his home as a physical manifestation of his ideal self, and in the opulence of his shirts Daisy projects an image of the kind of man Gatsby must be.

Just as Daisy is entranced by Gatsby after touring his elaborate home, so does Gatsby's obsession with Daisy begin some decades before while touring her home. Even before he meets Daisy herself Gatsby is swept away by the potential of the life lived amongst such luxury. As he wanders the rooms of her childhood home, each more sumptuous than the next, he is captivated: "Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes,

and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, sage and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (150). This association of Daisy with wealth repeats throughout the novel, with Fitzgerald emphasizing her luxurious clothing, golden hair, and “voice full of money” (120). Daisy acts as a living symbol of Gatsby’s ambition, a physical manifestation of the life of security and prosperity he hopes to acquire. Fitzgerald writes that Gatsby, “knew that when he kissed this girl, he forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath,” (110). In obsessing over what Daisy represents, rather than the woman herself, Gatsby demonstrates that his central conflict is not a man’s undying devotion to a woman but a man’s undying devotion to his own class ambition.

When considering *The Great Gatsby* in conversation with *The Sun Also Rises*, it is natural to notice first the differences between the primary female characters. While Brett is assertive and independent, Daisy is pliant and submissive. Although these two social performances seem contradictory, they are both calculated efforts to maintain their social positions. Daisy carefully crafts her image of angelic and affable domesticity, admitting to Nick that she hopes her daughter will do the same saying: “that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool” (17). In the male-dominated world of twentieth-century American society, Daisy has survived by positioning herself as an empty vessel in the reflection of which men mirror their own importance. While Brett emphasizes her masculinity as a source of power, Daisy uses her femininity to ensure the certainty of her social position. Nick notes in particular how Daisy’s voice seems designed to attract and engage the listener, saying: “there was an excitement in her voice

that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered ‘listen’” (9). In this way Daisy crafts a social performance which allows her to maintain her position without threatening the existing power dynamics.

Despite their different performances, both Brett and Daisy share the burden of the gendered power dynamic of the early twentieth century and are reliant on the men for social security. Brett is briefly tempted by an affair with the bullfighter Romero to abandon her independence for a life of happiness with him. Brett is ultimately unwilling to relinquish her class position to become a bullfighter’s wife, and returns back to untraditional relationship with Mike. Daisy too is briefly tempted to abandon the security of her life in an affair with Gatsby, but ultimately returns to her husband in order to maintain the certainty of her reputation as the wife of Tom Buchanan. Both women demonstrate the importance of social position in their lives, reliant on the currency of their social standing and unable to relinquish what power and independence it grants them.

The nature of class itself, whether it can be created or is only an intrinsic quality distributed by luck of birth, is of great concern to the characters in *The Great Gatsby*. Sociologist Ralph Linton, who was also born in the late nineteenth century, described this debate in his 1936 work *The Study of Man* as that between “achieved” and “ascribed” status. During the 1920s, we see a greater shift towards prioritizing achieved status over the ascribed status of birthright. Although Nick actively benefits from ascribed privilege of his class and upbringing, he supports Gatsby’s thirst for legitimacy in high society

saying, “conduct may be founded on hard rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on” (2). Tom, however, is deeply skeptical of the legitimacy of Gatsby's class standing and wealth, and continually expresses his suspicions throughout the novel. The physical evidence of Gatsby's wealth and home does not persuade Tom, and even with these symbols he marks Gatsby as an outsider. Although Gatsby is able to achieve material success, he faces difficulty translating his economic capital into social capital with Tom accusing him of being “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (130). While the self-made man myth perpetuates the potential for unlimited self-creation, Gatsby faces the challenge of a class identity that continues to careen out of his control.

Despite his efforts, Gatsby's class performance is routinely ignored and rejected by his peers. Gatsby is focused specifically on expressions that Pierre Bourdieu articulated as “cultural capital,” or individual objects and interests which communicate a specific social and economic value.⁹ These include his elaborate home and possessions, carefully constructed speech patterns, and collection of influential acquaintances. This cumulative display, though an impressive spectacle, does not persuade his party guests to part with their deep-seated mistrust of Gatsby's character. They share whispered rumors of his life as a murderer, Germany spy, or “second cousin to the devil” (61). However fantastical these origin stories may seem, no one believes the story Gatsby himself perpetuates of his wealthy family in the West. The nineteenth-century narrative of the

⁹ For more on Bourdieu and his work on cultural capital see *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979) and “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction” (1977).

self-made man purports that if you try hard enough and acquire wealth, you will assimilate naturally into the life you always dreamed of. Everything, the myth suggests, is within your control. *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates the fickleness of this narrative, as Gatsby finds that even if you have the good fortune to increase your economic circumstances, social and identity circumstances are out of your control.

Gatsby is therefore unable to gain the full acceptance of his peers and they continue to see Gatsby as an interloper. During one of his elaborate parties for example, Nick stumbles into the library to find another guest drunkenly thumbing the pages of Gatsby's library. The guest is shocked not at the quantity of the collection, but that the books are indeed real, commenting: "Absolutely real — have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real" (45). He is surprised at the extent of Gatsby's efforts, insinuating that he assumed that the books would be as fake as Gatsby's backstory. This attention to detail illustrates Gatsby's obsession with controlling his public perception and gaining acceptance. Gatsby collects his guests' presence like his objects, evidence that he belongs. This collection is impressive and Nick can list the names of party guests for two pages, each with backgrounds more impressive than the next (61-63). After his death, however, what flimsy social power Gatsby had is gone and his own funeral is attended by only Nick, Gatsby's father, and a single guest. The party crowds have disappeared, showing that Gatsby was never successfully able to earn the social acceptance for which he longed.

As Maureen Corrigan argues in *So We Read On*, it is easy to romanticize Gatsby's character for his earnestness and ambition and ignore the criminal means by which he pursues this goal. While Gatsby is desperate for mainstream and visible social legitimacy, he pursues it via illegitimate means on the black market. Gatsby's criminal behavior, as critics like Jeffrey Decker have observed, is therefore at odds with the honesty of the straightforward narrative he perpetuates. Gatsby belongs to an alternative class space that was gaining significant interest in the twentieth century fiction—the morally ambiguous hero.¹⁰ In a world where the path of self-made success is not abundantly available, individuals who create their own successes through alternative means became a more alluring fantasy. We can therefore consider Gatsby with other protagonists of detective fiction, an increasingly popular genre after WWI. Writers depicted men like Gatsby with criminal backgrounds as “individuals looking to move into the mainstream and into the seats of power” rather than dangerous outsiders (Brauer 51). When economic and social rigidity make it near impossible to achieve the self-made dream, a twentieth-century audience is more willing to identify with characters using unconventional (or criminal) means to achieve their goals.

In this way, Gatsby can be most closely aligned with another *Great Gatsby* character with a similar single-minded hunger for class advancement, Myrtle Wilson. Both Myrtle and Gatsby are the only characters of the novel who are not born with the advantages of wealth and class and who actively work to change those circumstances. In

¹⁰ These include well known “hard-boiled” detective fiction like Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* and Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*.

the small room above her husband's gas station, Myrtle is without power. In Tom's lavish New York apartment as his mistress, Myrtle sheds the dreariness of her life and dons a new persona. In claiming a new social class in the secrecy of the apartment, Nick writes that Myrtle becomes a new person "Her personality had undergone a change. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment" (30). Myrtle, like Gatsby, hopes to use the power of physical signs to endow herself with an intrinsic sense of power and wealth.

These two characters are also connected in that they both perish in their pursuits of class advancement. In a novel that is marked by two public and tragic deaths, it is significant that the characters who die are Gatsby and Myrtle. Both are victims of their own ambition, destroyed by the reckless desire to change their class circumstances at any cost. Both deaths are also a direct result of careless aggression from the Buchanans — Daisy's driving and Tom's false accusations. The characters who expressed the most certainty over their ability to create their own fate are just as certainly destroyed. Fitzgerald mourns the emptiness and betrayal of the American dream, with Gatsby and Myrtle as martyrs of that hope.

Destroying the hopefulness of Gatsby and Myrtle's ambition are Tom and Daisy Buchanan, with wealth so vast that they "drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together" (6). While Gatsby's life is filled with a single-minded sense of urgency and purpose, Tom's and Daisy's class position allows them the

luxury to indulge an aimless search for pleasure. While Gatsby's life and motivation emphasize the importance of the individual and his specific contributions to his life, the lives of the established wealthy are marked by a comfortable anonymity, certain that they will be accepted and understood wherever they choose to go. Throughout the novel Fitzgerald emphasizes that Tom, unlike Gatsby, is fluent in the kind of cultural capital that is appropriate for a man of his rank. He has the right wife, the right house, emphasizing the historical wealth he wields by bragging that he is "the first man who ever made a stable out of a garage" (119). While Gatsby and Myrtle are enthusiastic about hurtling towards the future, rushing towards the benefits that their ambitions may bring, Tom shields his life from the march of time and preserves his family's historical success.

Tom's masculinity and class identity are marked by an emphasis on brutality and cruelty. Fitzgerald's editor Max Perkins wrote to the author that Tom Buchanan was a character that was unpleasantly familiar to him, saying "I would know Tom Buchanan if I met him on the street and would avoid him" (Corrigan 99). Nick's introductory portrait of Tom emphasizes his aggressive masculine performance, demanding respect and obedience with every inch of his physical projection. Nick details: "Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward" and a cadence that suggested "Now, don't think my opinion on these matters is final . . . just because I am stronger and more of a man than you are" (7). While Gatsby carefully curates his mannerisms and appearance in order to

charm and seduce all whom he encounters, Tom strategizes an appearance that will affirm the security and permanence of his social dominance. Tom is quick to anger and filled with a righteous certainty of his power, which manifests in flares of violent aggression –breaking Myrtle’s nose and bruising Daisy’s finger.

If Gatsby is motivated by a relentless hope for self-improvement, Tom is motivated by fear that the power structures that have afforded him his sustained dominance are crumbling around him. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the early twentieth century is marked by dramatic fluctuation in the roles of women, creating new spaces of expression and agency. Kimmel discusses the effect of a culture of fluctuating power dynamics on masculine identity in *Angry White Men* and describes that “when threatened, that sense of entitlement, of proprietorship, can be manipulated into an enraged protectionism, a sense that the threat to “us” is eternal, those undeserving others who want to take for themselves what we have rightfully earned” (Kimmel 35). For Tom, expansion of the power franchise is threatened most by African Americans and other racial minorities, those whose success confronts a privilege that he has long regarded as intrinsic to his class position. He expresses a deep concern that he must defend the last vestiges of white masculine power. Tom quotes openly from a book called *Rise of the Colored Empires*¹¹, arguing that “It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things” (13). The narrative of the self-made man,

¹¹ Although both title and article Fitzgerald includes are fictional, critics including Hua Hsu and Peter Gregg Slater believe he based Tom's choice of literature on fear-based times like Lothrop Stoddard's 1920 *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* and Oswald Spengler's 1919 *Decline of the West*. Fitzgerald mentions in a 1940 letter to Maxwell Perkins that he read Spengler's work while he wrote *The Great Gatsby*. (*Fitzgerald Letters* 289)

which affirms that our lives are accountable only to the limits of our ambition, is an extremely dangerous and threatening message to men like Tom who hope to maintain established frames of power.

It is for this reason that the certainty and strength that Tom expresses in the beginning of the novel slowly erodes, and Tom begins to appear more reactive and defensive towards the end of the novel. This manifests itself not only in careless violence, the aforementioned broken nose and bruised finger, but also in his obsession that his world is growing out of his control. While appearing to maintain the image of a consistent and assured power, Tom continually reminds us of this insecurity: “Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white” (130). Fitzgerald connects Tom’s defensive and reactionary politics directly back to his masculine identity, as Nick notes “Something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart” (20). In Tom we see how the changing social landscape of America in the twentieth century caused white American men to reevaluate their understanding of white men as the primary voices of power and authority.

In writing the novel Fitzgerald debated whether to place Gatsby or Tom at the emotional core of his novel, weighing the effectiveness of Jay Gatsby’s hopefulness versus Tom Buchanan’s resentment. In working on the final drafts of the novel, Fitzgerald wrote to his editor Max Perkins that: “My first instinct after your letter was to

let Gatsby go and have Tom Buchanan dominate the book...but Gatsby sticks in my heart” (Corrigan 99). This very reaction indicates the pull that these two characters have, one the aggressive defender of the reigning elite and the other the optimistic new-comer hoping for inclusion. Both the hopefulness of the self-made man and the traditions of the old-money elite are unable to provide men with a certainty that they expect. *The Great Gatsby* illustrates the destabilized class structure created by the fluctuations and power shifts of the twentieth century, and the insecurity and loss of control the men of that generation confronted. For all parties, the American dream of certainty and entitlement is broken.

Conclusion

“The old economy and the old model of masculinity are obsolete. Women have learned to become more like men. Now men need to learn to become more like women”

—Richard Reeves and Isabel Sawhill, *New York Times*, November 14, 2015

In 2016 we are directly confronting and mourning the loss of a masculine identity that began to wane a century ago. It is essential, therefore, to understand the inheritance of ideas and perceptions that Hemingway and Fitzgerald provide to best understand our current cultural conversation. As anxious and fraught as masculinity was during the early twentieth century, the gender climate in the twenty-first century presents a far grimmer reality. While women have greater representation and success in academic and professional worlds, fewer and fewer men are attending college and pursuing academic ambitions. A 2015 study at Princeton found that increased deaths in middle-aged white men had reached a point “comparable to lives lost in the US AIDS epidemic through mid-2015” (Case and Deaton 15078). This is attributed most predominantly to suicides and drug overdose, indicating a trend of untreated mental health struggles. Arguably the most divisive marker of a crisis of masculine identity in the 2016 is the popularity of reality-show pundit Donald Trump as potential Republican candidate for the next presidential election. While many Americans find Trump’s immense support base as perplexing and absurd, we can see the anger of his supporters as a direct response to the history of male frustration and loss of control explored in the works of Hemingway and Fitzgerald a century earlier.

Throughout his campaign, we see Trump centering this rhetoric on the self-made man and masculine entitlement, prompting a thunderous response of applause and yells of appreciation at an October 2015 rally after declaring: “The American Dream is dead but I’m going to make it bigger and stronger!” (Trump). Trump promises to empower and engage the masses of men who feel betrayed by the failure of the self-made man mythos, an alluring although empty claim. Much of his success, therefore, is rooted in his effectiveness as a voice for the frustrated and angry masses of primarily white American men. As we have discussed throughout this paper, American identity includes a significant emphasis on the inherent potential for success that rests in every man and his entitlement to pursue that potential. The self-made man is the primary myth through which we articulate this belief, and frames how American men understand their place in world. This persists despite the fact that since the early twentieth century the social structures for absolute male dominance have been slowly disassembled.

Kimmel himself predicted the potential popularity of a leader like Trump writing that:

There are still many in this generation of men who feel cheated by the end of entitlement. They still feel entitled, and thus they identify socially and politically with those above them, even as they have economically joined the ranks of those who have historically been below them. (*Angry White Men* xiv)

As perplexing as a thrice-married reality show billionaire may be as a legitimate Republican nominee, we would be remiss to dismiss the emotional core to which his

rhetoric appeals. The cornerstone of the effectiveness of Trump's campaign is in this effectiveness at validating the expressions of anger and entitlement of his demographic. He legitimizes their concerns, and promises a return to a world where the self-made man and that myth of opportunity are once again possible. The core of the Trump rhetoric mirrors the same anxieties and concerns that we have explored in "Fathers and Sons," "Indian Camp," *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*: an expectation of ideal masculinity, a disparity between expectations and the reality of the twentieth century world, and a visceral frustration at the inability to control this experience. Instead of Theodore Roosevelt, Trump uses the words and legacy of Ronald Reagan as a glorified representative of the paternal ideal he admires. The political disruption Trump has caused is a direct inheritance of the anxiety and concern over masculinity raised by writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and in order to understand the nuances of his supporters' concerns we need to consider their place within the long view of masculinity as an evolving narrative.

So where do we go from here? If the fiction of Hemingway and Fitzgerald have taught us anything, it is that attempts to reclaim the past are largely fruitless, and the march of time cannot be reversed. Trump himself is evidence of the changing shape of political demographics, as Republicans seek to define a unified understanding of what it means to be an American conservative in 2016. Social and academic trends indicate a move towards confronting and redefining masculinity outside of the context of the self-made man. Just as women carved out a new space of expression and identity in the years

since World War I, so must men seek to create new outlets of expression and success that do not rely upon a mythos that is no longer possible. In drawing these connections, and in understanding the history of identity narratives like the self-made man, we ultimately seek to understand with greater sympathy and nuance the state of contemporary American gendered culture.

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