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by

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**I, Modernist: Male Feminization and the Self-Construction of
Authorship in the Modern American Novel**

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**I, Modernist: Male Feminization and the Self-Construction of
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An unexplored peculiarity of the male modernist novel is the frequency with which we find some version of the author himself in its pages, speaking, thinking and experiencing. Diagnosing this tendency as a symptom of cultural strain, this dissertation analyzes literary self-constructions in the works of Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ralph Ellison. These key modernists, plagued by anxieties about manhood, race and the literary marketplace, used their works as implicit self-portraiture to suggest their own achievement of exclusive forms of masculine authorship. Central to this aim is the use of author surrogates, first-person narrators or protagonists who evoke the author himself in the act of attaining “literary manhood,” a form of masculine identity distinguished not by physical or sexual dominance, but by intellectual and emotional superiorities. Yet the surrogate attains these qualities through shocking humiliations and defeats; he is wounded and laid low by mediocrity, by women, “lesser” men, and by modern life itself. Critics have argued that so many feminized protagonists were a sign that modern men felt threatened by the rise of women in the public sphere. But male

woundedness—even to the point of castration—emerges in this study as the very condition of modern authorship. As Hemingway wrote, the true artist “impersonally” turned his feminization into art: “We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist.” Scientifically turning “damned hurts” into difficult new forms of modern knowledge, modernists redressed cultural and professional anxieties by converting trauma into intellectual mastery, agency, and social authority. To privilege certain traits, however, is to reject others. The epistemological victories modernists attained through their defeats rely on a repudiation of the “feminine,” whether portrayed in women, in male homosexuals, or in racial others. This study thus implicates highly influential concepts of modern authorship with broader cultural attitudes toward race, gender and ethnicity, investigating a crucial node of aesthetics, epistemology and identity politics at the heart of the modern novel.

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INTRODUCTION:

In James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), budding modernist Stephen Daedalus advances a theory of literary forms prizing, above all, artistic "impersonality." Lowest in Stephen's hierarchy is the lyrical form, that "simplest verbal gesture of an instant of emotion . . . such as ages ago cheered on the man who . . . dragged stones up a slope." The epic form, in which the artist "broods upon himself as the center of an epical event," represents the achievement of some intellectual distance from the lyric form, but the artist's personality is nevertheless still present, "flowing round . . . the persons and the action like a vital sea." Highest, for Stephen, is the dramatic form, achieved when "the personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood, and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak." A logic of purification ennobles this artistic achievement: "The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." ¹

Whether or not this promulgation represents the views of the more mature Joyce who created him, Stephen does articulate what has long been considered a defining tenet of "modern" literary representation, and not just in drama (Joyce was, of course, a frustrated playwright), but in narrative prose. Like the god of creation, the story goes, the

modern author no longer seems to intrude in the world he has created. This change in representation completed a 19th century shift away from impossibly omniscient narrators, the direct address to the “Gentle Reader,” and above all, heavy-handed literary moralizing. As Wayne Booth has argued in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, “showing,” was displacing “telling” as a normative mode of authorship.² Meanings were not to be explained but dramatized, left for the reader to unearth. But let us look again at this passage, for Stephen’s image of the “impersonal” artist, “paring his fingernails,” also suggests a high degree of affectation, a posture of *seeming* nonchalance disguising a deep and inevitably personal engagement and deliberation. Indeed, the very casualness of the pose calls this male loiterer to our attention. Could it be that the goal of Stephen’s modernist aesthetic is not self-effacement at all, but self-display? Might not an ethic of “impersonality” covertly function to glorify rather than suppress the authorial self?

This question is compounded by the frequency with which we find some version of the male modernist author himself in the pages of his novel, speaking, thinking and experiencing. Besides the Joycean Stephen Daedalus in *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, there is also the “Hemingwayesque” Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), labeled “Hem” even in late drafts of the novel, and like his creator, an American journalist in Paris who likes to fish and drink and watch bullfights in Pamplona. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), there is Nick Carraway, who like Fitzgerald, comes from a family of “prominent, well-to-do people” in a “middle-western city” (Fitzgerald was from St. Paul), remembers long winter trains rides to Chicago through the Wisconsin night, and displays a fascination with the affairs of the very rich, on whose lives and values he reports with penetration

and wit. The protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), however, is (at least until the end of the novel) something of a dope compared to his creator, but like Ellison attended a Southern black university with a famous assimilationist founder, migrated from the South to New York City, and passed through states of enthusiasm and disillusion with Negro education and American communism.

There might seem nothing unusual in this "writing from life," using, that is, one's own material experience as "material" for one's fiction; indeed, many authors do it. And it is true as well that Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Ellison distributed aspects of their selves and experiences to other, less favored, characters. But it is a remarkable and suspicious fact that these "author surrogates," each ostensibly the actual writer of the work in which they appear, achieve by the end of their tales a "manly" epistemological mastery that no other character can approach.³ This state of mastery—evoked through the surrogate's "impersonal" apprehension of difficult modern truths—is constructed as an exclusively masculine faculty, defined against romantic, sentimental or corrupted forms of knowledge that are associated in the novels with femininity or effeminacy. This dissertation will argue that male modernist writers, plagued by anxieties about manhood, race, and the literary marketplace, deployed such strategies of literary self-construction to suggest their own achievement of what I will call "literary manhood," a form of dominant male cultural identity distinguished not by physical or sexual attributes, but by superiorities of intellect and emotional sensibility that each author surrogate achieves by the end of his story.

Nick Carraway, for example, though sympathetic to the romantic emblemized in his neighbor, Jay Gatsby, an arriviste of mysterious means and pink couture, is the only observer in the novel to plumb the complexities of Gatsby's story and motivations, and arrive at an objective and appropriately complex evaluation of his character. This complexity is hinted at in a teasing juxtaposition in the opening pages of the novel, where we meet a "Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn," alongside another Gatsby with "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again" (6). Gatsby may have "extraordinary gifts," but as Nick finds out, he is also a naïf whose "romantic readiness" dooms him in a modern America that, contrary to its ideology of self-transformation, corrupts or destroys those who dream of romantic or economic transcendence. Nick's exclusive apprehension of this contradictory and tragic reality—he has begun knowing nothing about his strange neighbor, but ends knowing all, unlike those who once, like Jordan Baker, acted as his informants—is emphasized in the loneliness of his lyrical outburst at the end of the novel (on Gatsby's beach on Nick's last night in New York), a soliloquy shared only with the reader. Similarly emphasizing the exclusive nature of Nick's knowledge is Gatsby's abandonment, after his death, by everyone who might have been expected to take an interest in his fate—not only his business partners and party guests, but also his corrupt love interest, Daisy Buchanan, whose flight from self-knowledge (and culpability) is starkly contrasted with Nick's loyalty and insight. Showcasing his (generous) intellectual superiority over the romantic and sentimental Gatsby, over the romantic but corrupt Daisy, and over the just plain

corrupt Jordan Baker, the Fitzgeraldian Nick thus performs, as I argue in Chapter 1, Fitzgerald's own "masculine" objectivity toward a romanticism of which the author had been frequently criticized in his earlier novels—such extra-textual, self-constructive aims playing more of a role in the form and composition of the modernist novel than scholars have previously acknowledged.⁴

Perhaps this gap in our understanding of literary modernism's self-constructive textual operations has been the result of another peculiar factor connecting these author surrogates: they each attain their superior qualities through shocking humiliations and defeats; they are wounded and laid low by mediocrity, by women, lesser men, and by modern life itself. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued that so many "maimed, unmanned, [and] victimized" protagonists in the male modernist canon were a sign that male authors believed their authority threatened by the rise of women in the public sphere.⁵ But emasculation and male woundedness—sometimes to the point of physical castration—emerges in this study as the very condition of knowledge and of modern male authorship. In a letter to Fitzgerald after the publication of *Tender is the Night* in 1934, Hemingway formulates this view in urging his friend to take a more objective approach to his writing: "Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist."⁶ Though Hemingway implies, a paragraph later, that his friend is literally "bitched" in having married Zelda, "someone who was jealous of your work, wants to compete with you and ruins you," to be "bitched" here signifies more broadly that one is, in some cultural or

existential way, dogged, wounded, “from the start.” This could be a more general human problem, but the term “bitched” seems to narrow the field by half in implying that one is either under assault by a “bitch” and/or reduced to *being* a “bitch” by that assault—made, indeed, to be that bad thing: “like a woman.”

While “feminization” is not a word to be found in the writings of male modernists, the representation of men acting or being treated, as they would have it, “like a woman,” that is, adopting or being forced into states of passivity or disempowerment, is a central metaphor in some of the key works of canonical modernism. But male feminization, paradoxically, also allows the author to apprehend the difficult realities that brought him low, allows him access, that is, to hard reality—the harder and more painful, the more “real.” It is on the basis of this apprehension of difficult truths that the writers in this study staked their claims to masculine professional and cultural authority.

This strange, paradoxical relation between feminization and “dominant” forms of epistemology has thus far eluded scholars who, as a result, have been divided about whether the novels of Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Ellison are the work of gender-progressive male feminists, or of reactionary masculinists. And surprisingly, the idea that there might be a “masculine” dominance iterated in *epistemological* form seems not even to have been considered in readings of these much-studied novels, even though feminist and poststructural critics have been deconstructing associations between masculinity and knowledge, rationality, and vision for decades. Susan Bordo, for example, has traced how the “Cartesian promise of absolute epistemic objectivity and ultimate foundations for knowledge” was a philosophical “flight from the feminine,” a “‘re-birthing’ and “‘re-

imaging' of knowledge and the world as *masculine* (italics in original).⁷ And Donna Haraway's notion of "situated knowledge," a feminist form of epistemology, is based on the rejection of patriarchal claims of scientific objectivity—"a false vision promising transcendence of all limits and possibilities."⁸ This is not to suggest that the authors in this study claim absolute forms of objectivity, but that the realms of knowledge and "truth" have historically been crucial to constructions of "natural" masculine dominance, and thus would seem promising sites for exploring attitudes toward gender in a modernist work.

Thus to read the modernist novel as a self-construction is to take more seriously what is constructed as knowledge in these works, and to note who has it—and who does not. But although much scholarship has been devoted to connecting the textual to the biographical in modernist novels, and to exploring authors' and texts' investments in or against various forms of identity, few scholars have explored the *rhetorical* impact of anxieties about identity on male modernist form. That is, though scholars commonly extrapolate attitudes or ideas about gender, race, class, or sexuality from a work's characters, actions, word choices, themes, and so on—formal elements all—this kind of interpretation often follows from a presupposition that the author's choices were made either unconsciously, determined by apparently irresistible cultural biases, or, alternately, in the interest of an elevated conception of art: art that reflects, comments on, critiques or simply mirrors some reality that the author, inhabiting a purely aesthetic and intellectual realm, wishes the reader to consider.

Thus, for example, Hemingway scholars Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes, attempting to complicate conceptions of a Hemingway whose literary reputation had been diminished by feminist opprobrium, construct an artist intentionally “exploring” cultural attitudes of misogyny and homophobia. Though they offer the caveat that “we do not believe that authors are fully in control of their intentions or even fully aware of them,” Comley and Scholes nevertheless present a unified “Hemingway text” that actively, artistically, accomplishes many things: it explores, it makes linkages, it even obsesses.⁹ But what Comley and Scholes’ “Hemingway text” does not do, strangely enough, is *persuade*. It has little reason to exist except as pure expression, a generous offering from an “alert and sensitive” mind—a mind, as T.S. Eliot said about Aristotle, with no “impure desires to satisfy,” but “wholly devoted to inquiry.”¹⁰ The Hemingway responsible for this unified text admirably enters “subject positions different from his own,” “distances himself from his own views with mockery,” and has a conscious “preoccupation with gender” that makes his work retain its value for critical study.¹¹

Similarly, Thomas Strychacz, whose earlier scholarship on modernism I will consider presently, grants Hemingway the progressive intentions of a present-day gender critic in *Hemingway’s Theatres of Masculinity* (2004), which argues that the author attempted to illustrate the performativity of gender in his novels and stories through a technique of Brechtian defamiliarization. Strychacz does provide readings that suggest his subject sensed the relational, contingent and constructed workings of masculinity. But this does not mean that Hemingway refrained from constructing true or “essential” masculinity in his novels. Indeed, if we pay attention to the author surrogate *as a*

surrogate, we can understand the synecdochal role this figure plays in Hemingway's rhetorical assertion of masculine authorial mastery. That is, this "part" of the authorial "whole," created by and resembling his extra-textual creator, helps carry quite precise meanings from the novel to the worldly author outside it, whose mastery is also implied in his role of puppet master or choreographer for all the action. Finding intimations of the instability of identity in Hemingway's works indeed helps us understand the author's desire to construct stable forms of identity there, there being no place more stable—as was once thought—than a place in the literary pantheon. But the critical presupposition of an artist "impersonally" dedicated to exploring reality in his or her art is itself a *product* of modernist aesthetic practice, reflecting rhetorical strategies that exalt, and deliberately construct in the text itself, just this kind of disinterested artist as privileged observer of reality—an observer who, like Jake Barnes or Nick Carraway, sees better than those around him.

Critical celebrations of modernist writers that follow from the implicitly heroic, intentionalist model cultivated by the writers themselves are today found primarily in the fields of criticism specific to single authors, rather than in recent approaches to modernism as an encompassing or variegated aesthetic movement. But these latter approaches, when they do consider gender and race, also rarely consider American modernist novelists, focusing their attention either on poet/critics like Eliot and Pound, or on the long-needed project of recovering lost or suppressed modernisms by white women, or by racial and ethnic minority writers of both sexes. Indeed, the word "modernism" in the titles of such works is almost always understood as referring to a

small group of highly canonical poets, or to recently recovered literature, with precious few critics drawing connections between poetic and novelistic aesthetics, or between high-modernism and, for example, the African American novel. One scholar who does both is Michael North, in whose *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994), “modernism” includes novelists Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston alongside Conrad, Stein, Eliot, Pound, and William Carlos Williams. Michael Szalay considers both poet/critics and novelists in *New Deal Modernism* (2000), which places the “liberalism” of Hemingway and Stein (and Ayn Rand) in contradistinction to a “reactionary” axis of Pound, Eliot and Yeats. Yet neither of these works consider the impact of gender or masculinity in the portraits they draw of modernist authorship, even though North advances what readers of this dissertation might call a “self-constructive” reading of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) that reveals a Conrad anxious about his linguistic qualifications for authorship as a Pole looking for acceptance in English letters.¹²

Though a number of the following works attempting to theorize modernism more broadly have been extremely valuable to my own study, they also have addressed themselves to modernism chiefly as produced by American poets, or alternately, by Anglo-European novelists. For example, “modernism” in Gail McDonald’s (excellent) *Learning to be Modern* (1993) references chiefly Pound and Eliot; the players in Frank Lentricchia’s *Modernist Quartet* (1994) are poets, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Pound and Eliot; the “deviant” modernists in Colleen Lamos’ 1998 *Deviant Modernism* are Eliot, and novelists Joyce and Proust; the revisionist anthology, *Unmanning Modernism* (1997) includes a chapter on Hurston, but is largely focused on poets like H.D., Edna St.

Vincent Millay, and novelist Virginia Woolf; the modernism that fails in Andrew Ross' *The Failure of Modernism* (1986) is that of Eliot; and so on.¹³ Two other works (whose contributions I will discuss presently) are more focused on the American modernist novel, but also neglect anxieties about masculinity in their theorization of modernist writing strategies: Strychacz' *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (1993) and Mark McGurl's *The Novel Art* (2001).¹⁴

My point is not that these works *should* have broadened or shifted their focus, but that the American modernist novel has, at least since the '50s and '60s, been considered a secondary expression of modernist aesthetics, and perhaps of American literary prestige itself—with the possible exception of William Faulkner. Nina Baym's "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" identifies a nationalist impulse animating the masculinist focus of what we might call Cold War American literary criticism, especially in the work of writers like Richard Poirier, Leslie Fiedler, and Richard Chase, who sought to define a unique "American tradition" through a focus on the novel.¹⁵ But I would suggest that the modernist self-construction is a phenomenon not restricted to the novel, and understanding its integral functioning there can shed light on a range of self- and experience-foregrounding modernist aesthetic movements, including Imagism, Vorticism, literary impressionism, and pragmatism, movements which (sometimes) also valorize gifted observers through their inclusion or implication in the literary work.¹⁶

Recent feminist scholarship attempting to recover women's writing in a literary modernism long considered the primary domain of men has had little tendency to heroize male authors. Scholars including Gilbert and Gubar, Susan Stanford Friedman, Shari

Benstock, Cassandra Laity, and the authors anthologized in Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* (and Scott herself) have offered powerful descriptions of the masculinist aesthetics of male-produced modernisms, and the fears of feminization or displacement—displacement, that is, at the hands of women—that produced that aesthetic.¹⁷ In so doing these scholars have supplied this study with a literary-historical context, and a revisionist feminist hermeneutic, but it has not always been the primary project of these works to examine why male modernists wrote what and how they did.

For example, Gilbert and Gubar find “nightmarish intimations of no-manhood” and a “virulent [striking] out” against women in their necessarily brief consideration of male modernisms in “The Battle of the Sexes,” the opening chapter of *No Man's Land*.¹⁸ A passage from Hemingway's “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” suggests that Macomber's wife seeks, above all, to betray her husband. Ellison's narrator's experiences with powerful women reveal an ambivalence about rape. Fitzgerald's anxieties about the size of his penis establish the probable “root” cause of his misogyny. But these readings, while suggestive of widespread male authorial anxieties about masculinity and the place of modern women, are able to impart little sense of what the works in which these passages appear *do* rhetorically. What worldly intention, we might ask, could such representations serve besides revealing the author's weakness and fear? Were these artists simply and reflexively using their works to vent outrage? Were they engaged in pure mimesis? Could lashing out be a motive in itself? Who was the audience for such an appeal? Would writing of male woundedness, or female excesses and

triumphs, construct a solidarity with male readers and critics that might enhance a writer's literary prospects?

To view literary works as rhetoric, as persuasive speech directed from a motivated speaker to a perhaps differently motivated audience, is to attempt to answer questions like these—questions necessarily beyond the scope of projects focused on recovering female contributions to or dissents from modernism. As we will see, Ann Ardis, McDonald, and Strychacz have all argued for the importance of understanding male modernist works in a professional and professionalizing context—a *rhetorical* context that only Ardis and McDonald note was heavily laden with gendered expectations.¹⁹ Male writers not only needed to be professionally able, but they needed to be men—not so self-evident a proposition in a profession associated in numerous ways, as we will see, with “femininity”—with “scribbling women” and the female reader of novels, with a feminizing mass culture, and with such unmanly figures as the decadent “androgynous aesthete,” and the genteel “gentleman” writer of the American *fin de siècle*.²⁰

What I call self-constructive criticism, however, is not the same as biographical criticism, though biographical research is essential to making the kind of surmises about authorial intentions that I venture here. The evidence this dissertation relies on most heavily, however, is textual evidence in the works themselves, close attention to which can reveal decisions made by the author at both macro and micro levels in the process of composition. For example, the decision to employ a subtly ingratiating narrator who resembles his creator is a formal decision that militates for some specific rhetorical purpose; the decision to grant, condition, or withhold closure at the end of a novel also

serves such a purpose; hierarchies of value that seem meant to control how readers react to certain characters suggest that the promulgation of certain values over others is important to the project of the novel. Even such small matters as sentence structure and word choice can serve rhetorical purposes, a case frequently made with Hemingway, whose style, supposedly laconic, has often been described as paradigmatically “masculine.” But this is a conclusion I dispute in Chapter 2 by examining how Hemingway’s style was geared to contemporary critical expectations for the presentation of male emotion. Emotion was not to be suppressed, but stylized: what is omitted in Hemingway’s style is not words but a register of psychological description that might be taken for melodrama.

My project’s focus on the relationship between modernist aesthetics and masculine authorial identity has benefited from the recent research on issues of modernism and professionalization mentioned above. However, only McDonald and Ardis consider the role of gender in the literary manifestations of what Strychacz, in a study predating his work on Hemingway, calls the “ethos of professionalism” emerging at the end of the nineteenth century among the American middle-class. Strychacz argues that modernist writing strategies shared a “profound identity” with this ethos, at the heart of which is the “symbolic capital” accruing to expert knowledge and esoteric discourse, especially in the American academy, and in contradistinction to mass culture. For Strychacz, both modernist writing and professional discourses “emerge at the same time in response to a common historical necessity. If a body of formal knowledge underpins a professional’s power within mass society, then the idiom of modernist writing—arcane

allusion, juxtaposition, opaque writing, indeterminacy, and so on—performs precisely the same function within mass culture.”²¹ But I would argue that the “difficulty” of modernist writing is not only this esoteric character, which might take the form of a very “in-doors” form of pedantry (of the kind for which Hemingway mocked Eliot), but the suffering self onto which one focuses the kind of “scientific” attention that Hemingway recommended to Fitzgerald.²² Moreover, Strychacz’ work also leaves unconnected the way such imperatives to legitimation, symbolic capital and expert knowledge, may have arisen out of male homosocial anxieties about “proper” manhood, especially for professionals in a field often associated by its members, critics and audience with “femininity.”

McGurl’s *The Novel Art* agrees with Strychacz that the symbolic capital of the professional was crucially at stake in the rise of the modernist “art novel,” which McGurl argues “must be situated within—without being simply collapsed into—the much larger context of the expansion of the ‘new middle’ or ‘professional-managerial’ class in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.” McGurl finds that the “group identification” most pertinent to *artistic* professionalism was what Henry James called the “brotherhood of novelists,” though this dissertation finds literary critics, if unpopular with our authors, as extremely influential members of this professional group, especially in policing the gendered border between “high-,” “middle-,” and “lowbrow” literary production. The emergence of what McGurl calls the “modern art novel,” that is, is a phenomenon of upward mobility—that mobility being produced in dialectical relation to the “low.” But in tracing the mass-cultural anxieties of figures like Henry James, William Faulkner, and even Hemingway, who “kept simultaneous watch on his portfolio of

monetary and cultural capital” by writing prose that, in Hemingway’s own words, “would be praised by the highbrows and could be read by the lowbrows,” McGurl overlooks the determining role anxieties about manhood might play for male writers in their concern over each of these kinds of “portfolios.”²³ McGurl identifies the classed and intellectual forms of elitism driving the making of distinctions meant to distinguish the novel as fine art. But as I hope to show, masculinity itself functions as a form of elitism in the novels considered here—one that uses the distinctions of class and intellectual mastery identified by McGurl—along with other differences, such as race, sexuality and emotional comportment—as conditions or criteria of proper literary manhood. In grouping together male and female writers, McGurl’s study also neglects differences of motivation and career anxieties that we might find between these two groups and their vision of authorship, male writers operating under quite different burdens of opportunity and expectation than those borne by female writers, who, if they felt an equal imperative to avoid the classification of “lowbrow,” would nevertheless face different forms and intensities of social response should they be so classified. This is not to say the gender system was in any way “easier” on women, but to insist on qualitative differences in the historical and cultural pressures bearing on men and those bearing on women.

Gail McDonald’s *Learning to be Modern* and Anne Ardis’ *Modernism and Cultural Conflict* do help us understand the gendered context of professionalism in the careers of Pound and Eliot, McDonald (like Strychacz) connecting the work of the “men of 1914” to professionalizing efforts in the American academy, while Ardis details other competing “interest groups” against whom the “Joyce—Pound—Eliot strand of

modernism . . . secured its own cultural legitimacy.”²⁴ In McDonald’s view, “femininity” was how these thinkers designated everything “unserious” about the arts:

Excluding women and amateurs drew the boundary lines—a *cordon sanitaire*—around serious artists and serious scholars of the arts. Read broadly, then, ‘women’ was code for whatever stood in the way of serious, productive creation (including impediments within the poet himself), in the same way that ‘science’ was code for rigorous and important work. (87)

This formulation is close to my argument that representations of “femininity” and “homosexuality” are understood more coherently as metaphors in masculinist discourse that evoke states or threats of lapsed masculinity than as simple prejudices against women or gay men, especially when we consider “impediments in the poet himself” as feelings or impulses that were taboo in male homosocial contexts—strong emotion, transgressive desires, or forms of sentimentality or romanticism that might impede “manly” objectivity. But as the correspondence (as opposed to the literary output) of many male modernists shows, the professional deployment of such metaphors often co-existed with authors’ “simple prejudices” towards women and homosexuals, prejudices that were widely shared in the period. These different expressions of bias would be difficult, if not impossible, to disarticulate; I have thus limited my inquiry to tracing their pragmatic and rhetorical function in modernist literary forms.

Ardis uses Pound and Eliot and other early modernists’ quest for legitimacy as a backdrop for her investigations of competing discourses in the highly “unstable” literary context of the 1910s. Pound and Eliot’s prescriptions for modernism were meant to position the modernist avant-garde “within a set of gendered discourses about intellectuality, professionalism, and disciplinary (re)organization” dating back thirty

years. Their intent was to suppress literary manifestations of transgressive, Wildean sexuality and “‘New Woman’ feminism” by “privileging poetry, appropriating the discursive authority of science, and thereby reconstituting the literary field as a ‘masculine’ domain.”²⁵ I will return to these issues presently, but it should be emphasized how strongly the gendered projects of these influential poets came to shape *novelistic* discourse in numerous ways, both explicit and implicit. The novelists in this project, arriving on a somewhat more established literary scene than that described by Ardis, were equally concerned about professional legitimacy, and equally drawn to the “discursive authority” of science as a way of dramatizing that legitimacy, though that anxious impulse has been successfully hidden from critical view through the use of the paradoxical trope of feminization, which suggests masculine powerlessness as mere complaint until we consider the forms of epistemological authority secured through such experiences.

Of course, a self-constructive reading is a suspicious reading, and one that does not flatter our sense of authorship as mastery. Indeed, my approach finds the gesture of mastery highly polished and self-consciously deployed, however casual and taken-for-granted it is constructed to appear. In highlighting the connection between professional authorship and male cultural authority, this study goes to the heart of our perennial fascination with the moderns: modernist literary prestige itself. Critics have traditionally regarded prestige as a value extrinsic to literature, but a focus on authorial self-construction finds a rhetorically sophisticated appeal for masculine prestige and authority imbricated in the very form and texture of some modernist works, especially in their

famous “difficulty.” Indeed, this dissertation reveals male modernists in the act of performing their own literary importance, their suitability to be subjects of “serious” intellectual inquiry. As I will show, masculine identity, both white and black, was the vehicle for this seriousness because of these writers’ conflation of masculinity with cultural authority. Their works can be seen as performances of a “manly” intellectual and emotional autonomy that was carefully geared to shape their own critical reception.

To group Hemingway and Fitzgerald with Ralph Ellison, who wrote a generation later, and sprang from sharply different cultural contexts, however, might not seem an immediately obvious choice for this study. But Ellison’s models for literary achievement were high modernists like T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and, crucially, Hemingway himself; and in many ways, his understanding of the relationship between authorship and issues of gendered, racial and sexual identity replicates those of his literary models. Indeed, *not* to draw connections between the African American novel (with Ellison as perhaps its most ostentatiously masterful practitioner) and the modernist novel is to elide the way both traditions, with their central concern about masculine identity, come together in their symbolic repudiation of the “feminine,” whether this is (textually, metaphorically) associated with women, with “lesser” men, with male homosexuals, or with racial others.

Living in a society that radically restricted African-American opportunity, Ellison focuses, in *Invisible Man*, on the possibility of black masculine agency, adapting the modernist self-construction, and especially the trope of feminization, to dramatize his own attainment of an empowered black male authorial consciousness. His recourse to such modernist tropes and strategies might seem justified in light of the violence and

humiliation experienced by black males in American history, but it also suppresses the important role black women played in that history, as witnesses and co-sufferers of racial oppression, and as agents resisting it. Perhaps this is just the point; perhaps it is black women's role as witnesses to black male humiliation that authors like Ellison have found unbearable. In any case, to understand properly Ellison's relation to an American literary history including Hemingway and Fitzgerald is to explore how the prestige and cultural authority of modernist authorship was produced by the modernists themselves, signified through self-constructive techniques that scholars, perhaps wary of making the undergraduate mistake of conflating a narratorial voice with that of the author, or of engaging in naïve biographical criticism, have left unexplored.

That authors would use their works in such baldly self-serving ways does not accord with the Arnoldian notion of literature as "the best that has been thought and said," and reading for self-construction can make a writer seem artless indeed to the degree that the self-construction may be discerned; but the authorial self-construction can also be a point of entry to a nexus of identity politics in which categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality play important and complexly interdependent roles. My study explores the intertwining of anxieties about these different forms of identity with an evolving and highly influential model of authorship. Elucidating the self-authorizing function such attitudes serve in specific modernist texts, this dissertation investigates a crucial node of aesthetics, epistemology, and identity politics at the heart of the modern novel.

Male Authorship and Feminization

Modernist authors were not the first American writers to worry about male cultural displacement, but the specter of male disempowerment at the hands of women that is quenched with the censure of the freethinking Hester Prynne at the end of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, or with the suicide of the Margaret Fuller-inspired Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*, or with the marriage of suffragette Verena Tarrant to the patriarchal Basil Ransom in Henry James's *The Bostonians*, that specter of disempowerment, I say, emerges in some modernist representations as a virtual *fait accompli*, a new condition of modern life. As Gilbert and Gubar describe it, the American "battle of the sexes" was a conflict that by "the height of the modernist era . . . both sexes by and large agreed that women were winning" (4).

Think, for example, of *Gatsby's* Nick Carraway, repeatedly stung into lyricism by the bewitching voice of Daisy Buchanan, but settling for the less than ethereal Jordan Baker. Still an economic small-fry on the cusp of his thirtieth birthday, Nick soothes his mid-life depression and "haunting loneliness" with the "consoling proximity of millionaires," and watches helplessly as Jay Gatsby pursues then loses Daisy, a symbol of romantic fulfillment perhaps as much to Nick as to Gatsby himself. While Tom and Daisy Buchanan might seem to receive equal censure for the tragic outcome of the novel ("retreat[ing] back into their money, or their vast carelessness"[187-88]), Tom, whose hypermasculinity is undermined by a childlike intellect and by his deep anxieties about loss of dominance, is excused by his sheer stupidity. He is relieved especially of the degree of moral culpability, as Judith Fetterley pointed out in *The Resisting Reader*

(1981), reserved for the more finely sentient Daisy, who as exalted object, secret sharer, and ultimate betrayer of Gatsby's dreams, is custom-made to signify the feminizing treacherousness of "American dream"-ing.²⁶ Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, written ten years later, tells an even more explicit tale of male feminization and social impotence at the hands of women. In marrying his rich patient, Nicole Warren, Dick Diver trades the intellectual mastery and manly autonomy of his psychiatric career for a role of inglorious service to powerful heiresses. Depleted of manly vitality by his new life of leisure and dissolution, and by the demands of Nicole's psychic recovery, Diver is discarded by his female "masters" when his usefulness wanes, and he ends in professional obscurity working in small towns in upstate New York.

Or think again of Jake Barnes, impotent from his war wound, and looking on helplessly as his beloved Brett Ashley chooses one "lesser" man after another; Jake even feels compelled to help her in and out of these affairs, acting as pimp to introduce Brett to the naïve young bullfighter Pedro Romero, and as consoler when she withdraws from the relationship to avoid destroying the young matador ("I'm not going to be one of these bitches that ruin children" [243]). Nathanael West provides a particularly hopeless example of modern male feminization in the person of its powerless male protagonist, "Miss Lonelyhearts" (1934). While his drunken literary friends impotently fantasize about the rape of women authors, Miss Lonelyhearts works as newspaper advice columnist, a job that exposes him to the tormented lives of real people for whom he can do nothing in a godless, cynical world.

Though Gilbert and Gubar count Miss Lonelyhearts as a “casualty in the sex war” when he is killed after refusing the advances of the massive and sexually aggressive Mrs. Doyle, not all male feminization need be characterized as part of a “battle of the sexes.”²⁷ Sometimes it is simply an unavoidable condition of modernity. For example, women are mostly foils and reflectors for the forms of masculinity exalted in Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not* (1937), written twelve years after *The Sun Also Rises*. Harry Morgan, the novel’s hardboiled and self-reliant protagonist, is destroyed by economic and bureaucratic forces while attempting to go it alone during the Great Depression. Harry is maimed and later killed fighting to maintain his dignity as a provider and working man in a world increasingly inimical to the privileged, (and unmistakably Hemingwayesque) form of autonomous manhood he represents.

In African American novels, representations of feminization are focused on other men, specifically black men’s emasculation at the hands of white males. But what self-described modernists like Ellison and Richard Wright seem most to object to in *Invisible Man* and *Native Son* is how black masculinity is forced into the disturbing metaphorical condition of being, again, “like a woman,” “femininity” signifying what psychoanalytical theory calls “lack” in these works: humiliating social disempowerments, and/or shamed states of passivity or helplessness. Bigger Thomas considers the humiliations of his powerless state a kind of psychic or emotional “rape,” while Ellison’s novel focuses on the semiotics of social and intellectual “castration” in the serial confusions that plague his narrator.²⁸

But it was T.S. Eliot, still an undergraduate, who wrote what might be the archetypal representation of modern male feminization, especially in terms of authorship: “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock,” eventually published in 1917. Prufrock’s first-person “lovesong” attests to his sense of paralysis in the surround of genteel women, and its narrator questions the possibility of male authorship itself in such a feminine and feminizing world. Living in a world redolent of idle feminine domesticity, of “braceleted white arms,” “teacups,” and (presumably genteel) “novels,” Prufrock imagines himself more Polonious than Hamlet in this womanly realm, an “easy tool” impaled by casual “eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase.” In this penetrated, feminized position, he asks: “And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall/Then how should I begin/To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?” But we should note how Prufrock’s bewitchment is itself the occasion for a poem in which he unsparingly, “scientifically” depicts his own woundedness and loss of agency. His loss of agency becomes, that is, the means for him to regain agency, a *literary* agency he achieves as the ostensible author of his doleful “Lovesong.”

While Prufrock’s fictional “agency” does not give an impression of masculine transcendence, the volume in which it appeared, under the coolly objective title of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, made an immediate impact on Eliot’s career, introducing him, in Frank Lentricchia’s words, “as a writer of such originality that, on the basis of this single poem, he was established as the poet to watch, a tone setter.”²⁹ In advising Fitzgerald in 1934 to be as “faithful . . . as a scientist” to his “damned hurt,” Hemingway was already well aware of the way that such a “science” of the self—a

science, even of one's impotence—could secure for the “tough-minded” author willing to face and represent his sufferings, a worldly masculine authority like that of the scientist. Fitzgerald, of course, had learned that lesson with *Gatsby*, creating in Nick Carraway a figure of almost nil social or economic power, but who brought to bear a scientific objectivity and intense self-consciousness in his scrutiny of the romantic impulse—an impulse ludicrously embodied in the extravagant Gatsby, but also an important feature of Nick's yearnings and sense of impotence in New York. That objectivity, not just exercised, but dramatized by a character having more than a superficial resemblance to the author himself, had the worldly impact of at least temporarily reversing critical judgments about Fitzgerald, whose earlier works had caused him to be labeled as undisciplined, unintellectual and “romantic.”

Ellison, admiring the representation in Hemingway's work of “impossible circumstances which to the courageous and dedicated could be turned into benefits and victories,” found a similar mode of masculine transcendence in the blues, which he described as the “impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism.”³⁰ Thus, far from denying the humiliation of feminization, modernist artists learned to embrace it, Prufrock-like, as a foundation of “serious” literary artistry—an aesthetic centered on suffering and its masculine transcendence in literature.

Remaking Manhood

In embracing this aesthetic, these authors were negotiating changing norms of manhood that made male authorship an even more problematic profession than it had been for previous generations of male authors. Gail Bederman, in her study of American manhood and race at the turn of the century, describes the fading of antebellum ideals of middle-class manhood defined in terms of “honor, high-mindedness” and “self-mastery,” and the emergence of an impulse to remake manhood after 1890.³¹ “Uncomfortable with the ways their history and culture were positioning them as men, [middle-class men] experimented with a host of cultural materials in order to synthesize a manhood more powerful, more to their liking. In the process, they began to formulate new ideologies of manhood, ideologies not of ‘manliness’ but of masculinity” (16). Bederman attributes the rising use of this latter term, masculinity, and its eventual inclusion in dictionaries as a noun, to its difference from “manliness,” with all the moral dimensions freighted the latter term in Victorian usage. “Masculinity,” at first a “relatively empty, fluid adjective,” began to acquire, even by 1917, new connotations, especially of virility, aggressiveness, and male sexuality (18). Middle- and upper-class men’s cultural “experiments” included efforts not only to celebrate “all things male,” and to demonize “excessive femininity” in the form of the “New Woman,” and other strong-minded women working to secure equal rights, but also to incorporate entertainments and values of working-class manhood that had only recently been derided as “coarse and backward” (17). “During the 1890s, [men] coined the new epithets ‘sissy,’ ‘pussy-foot,’ ‘cold feet’ and ‘stuffed shirt’ to denote behavior which had once appeared self-possessed and manly, but that now seemed overcivilized and effeminate” (17).

The “rough-riding” outdoorsman and imperialist Theodore Roosevelt was the enunciator of one of the more muscular strains of these emergent forms of masculinity, though with a residual moral strain emphasizing manly integrity and work. Roosevelt was a boyhood hero to both Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald’s lifelong hero-worship of Hemingway (along with other men of action) for his physical prowess and courage also bespeaks a commitment to this ethos. Indeed, with such models, and taunted as a “fairy” by his wife, Zelda, the self-doubting and deprecating Fitzgerald worried about the state of his own manhood throughout his life. Ellison cannot be said to have been influenced directly by Roosevelt, but he did admire the Rooseveltian qualities of Hemingway’s art, with its attention to “the things of this earth which I love . . . weather, guns, dogs, horses”; and his role models, as he recalled in *Shadow and Act*, were men of integrity, jazz men, “frontiersmen” and “Renaissance” men (in the less racially segregated state of Oklahoma) who “were less torn and damaged [than were the state’s white “pillars of society”] by the moral compromises and insincerities which have so sickened the life of our country.”³²

Roosevelt’s doctrine of “the strenuous life, the life of effort, of labor and strife,” articulated in a speech in 1899, was to become a wildly influential template for proper American manhood: “we do not admire the man of timid peace. We admire the man who embodies victorious effort; the man who never wrongs his neighbor, who is prompt to help a friend, but who has those virile qualities necessary to win in the stern strife of actual life.”³³ Roosevelt’s “victories,” however, come at a steep price in labor and male suffering: the facing of “strife,” “danger . . . hardship [and] bitter toil.” The notion that a

profession in which men do not toil and suffer is unmanly and unserious posed a problem for the man of letters, who might have had a hard time convincing Roosevelt he was not leading “a life of slothful ease.”³⁴ But for modernist writers, Roosevelt’s conventional emphasis on “winning” life’s struggles may have been less influential than his honoring of toil and suffering as the essence, proof and justification of virile manhood—professional toil and suffering, being, at least arguably, conditions of the writer’s life.

But male writers faced more than the internalized voice of Teddy Roosevelt spurring on their professional anxieties; the “literary” evoked, for male authors at this time, a cluster of stigmatizing associations with “femininity,” including the ostensibly female-penned popular novel and its largely female mass cultural readership, the “excesses” of romanticism and “sentimentality” (each linked pejoratively with women’s writing), and the “decadence” of aestheticism emblemized by the figure of Oscar Wilde as both author and aesthete after the much publicized trials in which Wilde was convicted of being a “sodomite.” The first of these stigmatizing associations, between authorship and mass culture, has been much discussed among modernist critics since Andreas Huyssen influentially wrote of “mass culture as woman,” in *The Great Divide* in 1987.³⁵ Huyssen explores “the notion which gained ground in the 19th century that mass culture is somehow associated with women while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men” (47).

We can glimpse such a psychic gendering male of authentic art, and especially of the authentic (literary) artist himself, in the aesthetic assumptions of both Hemingway and Fitzgerald. In his memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, for example, Hemingway recalls

chiding Fitzgerald in the twenties for “whoring,” that is, for making a living writing stories doctored to fit the formulas demanded by mass circulation magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* or *Colliers*. Simultaneously bragging about and deprecating this highly lucrative form of income, Fitzgerald later wrote to Hemingway that “the *Post* now pays the old whore \$4000 a screw.”³⁶ Fitzgerald’s term for his professional “piece-work” gives us a sense of the painful psychic bifurcation Huysen calls the “great divide,” between Fitzgerald’s “authentic,” original art and his work for a mass market by which he feels feminized. To aspire to the highest originality of art, art to be read by an erudite literary elite, is noble and manly, while writing “to please” a mass audience—an audience who paid for the repetition of romantic formulas—was a feminizing form of prostitution, even if such “pleasing” afforded one riches and fame.³⁷

Fitzgerald, feeling ‘less a man’ as an artist, does seem to take some solace for his aesthetic unmanliness in riches and fame, attributes of a non-elite, non-aesthetic definition of masculine success. But as we will see in Fitzgerald’s own work, “true” art needed to be defined against the “female” and the formulaic—and so, in order to evade the stigma of femininity, did the “true” author. Moreover, the sufferings an author undergoes for art-for-art’s-sake can be chalked on the ledger of Rooseveltian seriousness (in the form of “toil and struggle”), along with the difficulties of originality. This is not to suggest that only men fulfilled this implicitly “manly” definition of art—many men, of course, did not fulfill it, while some women did; and there are numerous examples of collegiality, friendship, and expressions of admiration between male and female authors in the

biographies of modernists. My point is only that such notions were determining *psychic* pressures for male producers of modernist literature.

Related to the lack of seriousness of popular art and mass culture was the perhaps too-serious, and hence not *really* serious side of literary art: the romantic and sentimental.

As Suzanne Clark, tracing the gendering (male) of intellectuality, puts it,

From the point of view of literary modernism, sentimentality was both a past to be outgrown and a present tendency to be despised. The gendered nature of this condemnation seemed natural: women writers were entangled in sensibility, were romantic and sentimental by nature, and so even the best might not altogether escape this romantic indulgence in emotion and sublimity.³⁸

But this stereotype of women's writing—which also encompasses the emerging category of the homosexual aesthete, modeled, as Cassandra Laity suggests, “after Oscar Wilde and his association with ‘leisure, privilege, and high culture’”—was not just a deprecated social category, but a powerful and minatory aesthetic taboo for male authors, who thus had to avoid (and to be safe, sometimes abjure) what Clark calls the “obscenity of the sentimental,” which modernists located in displays of intense feeling or sympathy, and in lack of form.³⁹ “The serious,” for Clark, “constitutes itself again and again . . . against a feminized ‘other’ discourse which functions like woman herself to make the binary definition possible.”⁴⁰ And indeed, we will see in the self-constructions that are the subject of this dissertation, the repeated deployment of sentimental and romantic characters *against whom* the “serious” male protagonist is “constituted,” for example, women in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, who cling deludedly to enslaving, ideological beliefs about “freedom” and “uplift” that it is the task of the (more serious) narrator ultimately to see through.

Modernist form also was an important avenue for displaying one's "unsentimental" self-control. This was especially an issue for Fitzgerald, who endured criticism of his (wildly popular) first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), as "sloppy" and "lacking intellectual control"—criticisms that police the boundary between the "slovenly" popular novel and the tightly controlled work of the "real" artist.⁴¹ Responding to H.L. Mencken's dismissive review of *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald commented that the novel's tight structure was "in protest against my own formless two novels."⁴² Van Wyck Brooks finds a lack of self-control in American letters in his 1917 jeremiad, "The Critics and Young America." Railing against an "impotent" national literature reflecting an increasingly commercialized intellectual culture, Brooks uses a language of abjection and inundation—terms that Julia Kristeva and Klaus Theweleit, respectively, have shown to carry powerfully negative early-20th century associations with femininity—to describe this crisis: "All the innate spirituality of the American nature, dammed up, stagnant from disuse, has begun to pour itself out in a vast flood of undisciplined emotionalism that goes—how often!—to waste."⁴³

Self-control was also an important aspect of the anti-romanticism of early modernists, whose critical statements were part, as Ardis argues, of a "cultural backlash" against "all things 'effeminate,'" in the wake of the trials of Wilde. Ardis identifies numerous distancings between modernists and *fin de siècle* aestheticism:

Pound's characterization of the 1890s as 'soft and muzzy,' *Blast*'s association of Wilde with Futurism's sensational sentimentalism, and its contempt for both the gentleman and the outcast bohemian; W.B. Yeats retrospective rejection of his own *fin de siècle* "womanish introspection," T.E. Hulme's, Eliot's, Pound's, and Richard Aldington's gendered rhetoric of aesthetic evaluation, which contrasts the

‘hard,’ ‘virile,’ and ‘strong’ writers they appreciate with the effete, effeminate, and/or female writers who don’t, for one reason or another, make the modernist grade. (47)

Laity concurs, observing that “Pound’s and Eliot’s reaction against the feminized gentry . . . may also be interpreted as a form of sexual panic on the part of the successors of Oscar Wilde, whose guilty verdict had unmasked the feminine, aristocratic, and insouciant pose of the Aesthete poet as sexually deviant.”⁴⁴ Indeed, perhaps what prompted Hemingway, in *Death in the Afternoon*, to lash out at “the lazy, conceited debauchery of a Wilde who betrayed a generation” is the damage he thought the Wilde trials (or perhaps Wilde’s mawkish prison writings) did to male professional authorship, associating it with an unserious and self-indulgent life of leisure and perversity that his own “generation” had to live down.

Moreover, the male aesthete was “indulgent” artistically, even though, as John Gaggin points out, at numerous points modernists like Pound and Hemingway seem to embrace the artistic goals of aestheticism—in the principle of detached observation, in the liberation of art from social or didactic goals, and in an exalting of art as a privileged or exclusive practice separating artists from other people.⁴⁵ But in rejecting his own aestheticist past in London in “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,” Ezra Pound constructs an aesthetically bemused Odysseus whose “true Penelope was Flaubert,” and who has been enchanted by Circe’s “elegance,” when he should have been sailing home, who has been indulging in “obscure reveries” and “Attic grace” when he should have been attending to modernity.⁴⁶ As Gail McDonald puts it, “[Mauberley] has considered the alternative of art for art’s sake, but finds it a masturbatory phantasmagoria.”⁴⁷

Pound's anti-romanticism (or in Frank Lentricchia's view, his most perfect fulfillment of the romantic ideal) culminates in the Spartan aesthetic of Imagism, which he formulated in 1913 in a manifesto in *Poetry*.⁴⁸ As both McDonald and Michael Kaufman suggest, the compressed lyric that comprised the "Image," a kind of poetry Pound defined as representing "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant in time," also had "feminine" aspects that concerned Pound—both its modest "acreage" (which was said to suit the lyric more for women than the ode or the epic) and its emotional content.⁴⁹ Thus Pound and fellow Imagist Richard Aldington proscribed "slop and sentimentality," and insisted on an austerity of presentation to counter the "prolix," "verbose," and "flaccid varieties [of poetry]" that preceded Imagism.⁵⁰ I would suggest that there is also a self-constructive element to the image as well, since it requires the artist to foreground his or her own subjectivity in art, but through a lens of objective observation.

Modernism, Manhood and Professionalization

We have seen some of the pressures that men faced in a period of flux and intensification in the standards by which men were judged, as well as a shift in professional and aesthetic standards that feminist critics have dubbed modernism's "masculinization." In the rest of this introduction, I will trace the formation of specific aesthetic ideals formulated by key figures registering this shift—Joseph Conrad, hero and artistic model to both Hemingway and Fitzgerald in their formative years in Paris, and Eliot, Pound and Gertrude Stein.⁵¹ Hemingway scorned Eliot, especially on grounds of

manhood, but Eliot's critical statements about impersonality, his exploring of difficulty and desolation in his art, and especially his formulation of the "objective correlative," can be found reflected in Hemingway's own aesthetic pronouncements and achievements, particularly in his treatment of emotion. Fitzgerald was a more ardent admirer of the poet, sending him a copy of *The Great Gatsby* inscribed to the "Greatest of Living Poets from his enthusiastic worshipper" [sic], and Eliot reciprocated, calling *Gatsby* "the first step American fiction has taken since Henry James."⁵² Hemingway was also a conduit to Fitzgerald (and later, as a model, to Ellison) for the prescriptions of objectivity emphasized by Pound and Stein, with whom Hemingway discussed literary and artistic matters in Paris between 1922 and 1925 as he was attempting to launch his career. Ellison fought off being grouped among black writers like Richard Wright by citing Eliot as the writer whose work started his literary quest, and by claiming, as we have seen, Pound, Stein and Hemingway as his closest literary "relatives."

But it is necessary to begin with Joseph Conrad in order to understand the emergence of the professionalizing, self-constructive ethos that, I argue, unites these influential high modernists. All three of our novelists held a strong admiration for the work and literary theories of Conrad, whose preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) Michael North calls "a preface to modernism."⁵³ The preface's famous reflection on the nobility of artistic striving and "*ars gratis*" can be read as a call for literary professionalization based on a "bringing to light the truth," but a truth of a different kind from that of "the thinker or the scientist," those esteemed seekers "whose words are heard with reverence." Seeking to demarcate a domain of expertise unique to the artist, Conrad

would have “him” plumb “that lonely region of stress and strife,” the self, to find the hard, empirical truths with which the artist might vie in seriousness with the philosopher or scientist for masculine social authority and professional prestige.⁵⁴

Moreover, Conrad’s Marlow may be the prototypical author surrogate, and in *Lord Jim* is an obvious model for Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway, whose objective but sympathetic scrutiny of Gatsby also focuses on a simultaneously admirable and ludicrous romanticism. Marlow may not be presented as a professional author in the world of the novels in which he appears, but he has earned a reputation as a deep thinker and storyteller among his listeners. Indeed, some anxiety about audience seems to motivate Conrad in *Lord Jim* to have one of Marlow’s auditors complement his faculties: “You are so subtle, Marlow.”⁵⁵ But this observation, as well as Marlow’s story, have both been written by Conrad himself, so the complement represents the author praising his own art in the very midst of creating it—a feature of the modernist self-construction that we will see in Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and that seems to have few cognates in non-literary art forms.

That male modernists needed professional affirmation so badly that they would themselves supply it in their art, seemingly as a prompt to readers, would seem to violate the doctrine of impersonality advocated by Eliot, Pound, and Stein. But that doctrine arises from the same sense of professional marginalization that seems to motivate Conrad in his preface. To strive for “impersonality” was to make a virtue of the separation, in Eliot’s words in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” between “the man who suffers and the mind which creates,” a separation that adherents to this doctrine would use to

differentiate between “real” and inauthentic art, and thus between the intellectually successful artist, and the failure. In “The Perfect Critic,” Eliot broaches the issue of literary critical professionalization through examples of “the pernicious effect of emotion” clouding the criticism of Arthur Symons and Coleridge in a way it does not for Eliot’s model of the “labour” of intelligence, Aristotle.⁵⁶ Symons is indicted for a lack of emotional control which causes his artistic ambitions to bleed into his critical writing. Indeed, Eliot describes Symons’ criticism as neither fish nor flesh, but a kind of abortive amalgam: “his reading fecundates his emotions to produce something new which is not criticism, but is not the expulsion, the ejection, the birth of creativeness.” At the end of the essay, Eliot brings these ambitions for criticism into contact with his artistic ambitions, describing the “two directions of sensibility” as “complementary”: “it is to be expected that the critic and creative artist should frequently be the same person.”⁵⁷

One woman who was not excluded by these attempts to masculinize the literary was Gertrude Stein, who in her own advocacy of impersonality, had a major role in the development and evangelization of the professionalized model of authorship we have seen evoked by Conrad and Eliot above, and by Pound, for example in “The Serious Artist”—an essay Ardis decodes in terms of literary professionalism. Stein’s (characteristically slippery) definition of the “master-piece,” delivered in a lecture devoted to distinguishing the authentic masterpiece from the inauthentic, illustrates exclusionary properties of its own. Stein’s authentic masterpiece is predicated on the artist’s ability to perform a kind of mental dissociation from the experiencing self:

And so always it is true that the master-piece has nothing to do with human nature or with identity, it has to do with the human mind and the entity that is with a thing in itself and not in relation. The moment it is in relation it is common knowledge and anybody can feel and know it and it is not a masterpiece.⁵⁸

The passage suggests that, for Stein, true art has less to do with self-expression than the achievement of a kind of objectivity through mentally transcending one's identity. As we saw with Prufrock, however, this achievement also *grants* identity, professional identity, by distinguishing the authentic, professional artist from "anybody," especially those idlers or dilettantes who lack the discipline to escape the pitfalls of "relation," of, in Gatsby's words, the "just personal."⁵⁹

Looking closer at Stein's enigmatic syntax, especially her use of the pronoun 'it,' we find a perhaps intentional confusion: does the second 'it' refer to the "entity," or to the masterpiece? Is autonomy a quality of the masterpiece, or of the artist? The autonomous thing here may equally be the work of art or the objective quality of mind needed by an artist to make a thing "not in relation." This slippage (or kinship) between artwork and artist is telling, especially as it replicates the synecdochal relationship between work and artist in the term "master-piece" itself—a relationship that Stein, in hyphenating the term, emphasizes still further. Thus instead of "autonomy," we find connection, and an implication that the work is an extension, a "piece" of the master. If "master-pieces" are "few," then masters are even fewer, though of artists pretending to that status there would seem to be no such scarcity. Indeed, Stein's distinction between "entity" and "identity," the first suggesting a kind of essential reality, the latter etymologically signifying sameness and commonality, suggests that her definitional

purpose is to exclude the lesser artist, and his or her lesser art, from the sphere of authenticity.

Michael Szalay, tracing Stein's and Hemingway's shared commitment to the autonomy of the work of art in the form of "textual integrity" and "organicism," shows Hemingway repeating the Steinian gesture of autonomy. "You make something through your invention," Hemingway asserts, "that is not a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, you give it immortality."⁶⁰ Though Hemingway would seem to be cleaving his "whole new thing" from the artist, giving it a separate, organic existence, his emphasis on artistic craft—"if you make it well enough"—belies this suggested autonomy. Indeed, Hemingway's impersonal "you," repeated four times, insistently calls our attention away from the made thing to the madeness of it, which is to say, to its maker. Thus for Hemingway as much as Stein, the "autonomous" masterpiece has an instrumental quality for its creator, even as it takes on its supposedly separate life.

The exclusive properties of this aesthetic of "impersonality" and artistic autonomy allow it to serve what I discuss in Chapter 4 as "phallic" ends, symbolizing the epistemological dominance of one represented person through the exclusion of some represented "other" in the text. For Jacques Lacan, the phallus is distinguished from the penis, and is a signifier of the subject's lost "fullness of being" upon his or her entry into the symbolic order, and also of "the cultural privileges and positive values which define male subjectivity within patriarchal society."⁶¹ But as a signifier of a redeemed or redeemable wholeness, there is nothing *intrinsically* masculine about the phallus, which,

in its dialectical functioning, works to symbolize one person's dominance over another—regardless of sex, race, or other attributes. This mechanism can be understood by examining the difference between “being” and “having” the phallus in psychoanalytic theory—“having” the phallus meaning one has power over some other who “is” the phallus. Judith Butler explains that “to ‘be’ the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through ‘being’ its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity.”⁶²

Of course, phallic power is a conventionally or stereotypically male attribute, but in this view, any empowered person can symbolically “have” the phallus in the same way that any disempowered person can symbolically confirm that power. This helps us understand not only the masculine horror that American authors like Hawthorne have displayed in reaction to “phallic women,” but also how what modernists call “femininity” or “homosexuality” are often simply (but no less offensively) metaphors for disempowerment, for the lack of the phallus, a state that is no more *necessarily* related to femininity or homosexuality than paternal power is *necessarily* a male attribute. That is, these symbolic relationships between power and gender and/or sexuality are constructed and contextual, though, like all stereotypes, they can be powerfully convincing.

Thus the work of art can be a “phallic symbol” for the lesbian and feminist Stein—whose will to power is revealed in her strong desire to distinguish exclusively between authentic and inauthentic artistry—but the phallus for Stein would not be gendered in any simple way. This is decidedly not the case with our male modernists, however, who, as the following chapters demonstrate, pointedly attach masculinity to the

phallic forms of knowing they perform through their author surrogates, and “femininity” or (male) “homosexuality” to those characters who demonstrate less potent or “penetrating” forms of knowing. The first two chapters scrutinize prototypical authorial self-constructions in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. Savaged for his “feminine” romanticism in earlier novels, Fitzgerald dramatizes his own attainment of a purely epistemological literary manhood through narrator, Nick Carraway, who makes romanticism the subject of scientific reportage in his focus on Jay Gatsby. Where Gatsby is extravagant and emotional, Nick is cool and tough-minded, traits that redeem his sense of powerlessness in elite, decadent New York City. In Chapter 2, we find Hemingway also embracing powerlessness in his literally castrated narrator, Jake Barnes. Humiliated by the sexual agency of “New Woman,” Brett Ashley, Jake’s acknowledgement of the difficult truth of male feminization differentiates him from characters that cling, like Robert Cohn and Brett herself, to unmodern illusions of romantic love. The narrators of each novel thus transform defeat into explicitly masculine forms of modern knowledge.

Chapter 3 examines a historical shift toward authorial social responsibility and the resultant self-constructions in Hemingway’s thirties novels, *To Have and Have Not* (1937) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Pressured by critics to abandon his strident individualism and embrace a rising ethos of collectivism, Hemingway used these works to demonstrate his social consciousness and commitment—while maintaining a “masculine” autonomy and agency antithetical to those collective ideals. The novel’s Robert Jordan, for example, is himself an author self-sacrificially engaged in the

collective struggle against fascism, yet this selflessness is countered by an intricate assertion of his hierarchical, Hemingwayesque superiority—a form of social authority predicated on Jordan’s mastery over his inner woundedness and fears.

Chapter 4 examines masculine agency in the dramatically different context of Ellison’s *Invisible Man*—a novel that allegorizes its creator’s pained achievement of a politically efficacious authorial consciousness. The novel’s protagonist is humiliated and impotently “kept running” through the illusions he imbibes from black advocates of social “uplift,” from duplicitous white capitalists, and from a treacherous leftist party. But these strictly epistemological impediments are ultimately transformed into an assertion of authorial agency: the narrator’s final, empowering insight into the political ensnarements secured by such illusions. In realizing his “invisibility,” that is, Ellison’s unseen seer gets the epistemological drop on his oppressors. This superiority, however, depends on contrasts with black women, who are depicted as retarding agents in the narrator’s search for intellectual agency and who evince the sincerest faith in the very illusions that he pierces.

Securing authorial status through his own subtle masculinization of intellect and agency, Ellison’s assertion of African American identity is thus potentially empowering for black males, but retrograde for women. To explore such dilemmas, common to both mainstream and ethnic American literatures, is not only to divine the implicit political content of literature, but to ask how politics, especially the politics of identity, functions as a crucial rhetorical context and formal determinant of American literary art.

Notes:

¹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 215.

² Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1983), 2-20.

³ Sally Robinson coins this term in *Marked Men*, defining the author surrogate as a character “who play[s] out, with varying degrees of literalness, the wounding of white male authority.” See Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 88.

⁴ I am indebted for many insights to Scott S. Derrick, whose *Monumental Anxieties* has been an important model for this study, though with the exception of a chapter on Fitzgerald, the book treats an earlier period of American authorship. Most important has been Derrick’s emphasis on the masculinity and the cultural authority of authorship, which he suggests “may, in fact, serve as one of the chief motives of the writing process. . . .The subject of a narrative, then, may be generated as a vehicle for a desire to achieve the imagined good of authorship and thus serve as a narrativization of this desire.” Derrick also sees a relationship between feminization and authorship in the use of what he calls “crises of mid-composition,” explorations of “wayward yearnings and marginalized states of being, including femininity and homoeroticism, but these explorations are safely disavowed in the closures of the novels in which they appear, just as the “lack” that is male feminization in the novels studied in this dissertation is made good with closures asserting epistemological mastery. See Scott S. Derrick, *Monumental Anxieties: Homoerotic Desire and Feminine Influence in 19th Century U.S. Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997), 23, 25-27.

⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land*, vol.1, *The War of the Words* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), 36.

⁶ Hemingway to Fitzgerald, 28 May, 1934, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981), 408.

⁷ Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 2-5.

⁸ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 190.

⁹ Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes, *Hemingway’s Genders: Rereading the Hemingway Text* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 10.

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, “The Perfect Critic,” *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen & Co LTD, 1969), 11-12.

¹¹ Comley and Scholes, ix, 129, 137.

¹² See Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1994) and Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham, Duke UP, 2000).

¹³ Gail McDonald, *Learning to be Modern* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993); Frank Lentricchia, *Modernist Quartet* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994); Colleen Lamos, *Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson, eds., *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-Readings* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1997); Andrew Ross, *The Failure of Modernism: Symptoms of American Poetry* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986).

¹⁴ Thomas Strychacz, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993); Mark McGurl: *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001).

¹⁵ In François Truffaut’s Cold War film, *Fahrenheit 451*(1966), a science fiction parable of a futuristic totalitarian culture bent on suppressing liberal humanism through book-burning, it is striking that the texts that the film’s heroic humanists fight to save are the very same ones that ever since have been recast, in the academy, as works of oppression, even in this dissertation.

¹⁶ To get a glimpse of the self-constructiveness of poetic modernisms, consider, for example, the emphasis on artistic perception in William Carlos Williams’ *Spring and All*, with its finely perceived leaf edges and

red wheelbarrows on which, thanks to the artist himself, “so much depends.” Or consider Ezra Pound’s “In a Paris Metro,” which stresses less the faces in the crowd, but the “*apparition* of these faces in the crowd,” which only to the eye of a poet appear as “Petals on a wet, black bough.” See Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro,” and William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow,” in Paul Lauter, ed., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 2, 4th edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 1193, 1247-48.

¹⁷ A list of these works would begin with Gilbert and Gubar, cited above; Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank, Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986); Bonnie Kime Scott, ed. *The Gender of Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) and Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995). Many more single-author works can be found devoted to some of the more prominent female authors like Stein, Virginia Woolf, Marianne Moore, Willa Cather, and especially H.D., such as Susan Stanford Friedman’s *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Indiana UP, 1981) and *Penelope’s Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.’s Fiction* (Cambridge UP, 1990), and Cassandra Laity’s, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996). Other female authors who have been more explicitly “recovered” include Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, Rebecca West, Jean Rhys, Nella Larsen, Sylvia Townsend Warner, May Sinclair, and many others. My interest in the canonical male modernists I engage with in this dissertation does not imply any evaluative standard that would exclude women authors, but simply reflects a desire to demystify the authors who most “mystified” me before I became an academic: Eliot, Pound, Williams, Stevens, Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Indeed, one intriguing future direction for this project may be a consideration of the complexly gendered authorial self-constructions to be found in works by lesbian writers such as Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Cather’s *My Ántonia*.

¹⁸ Gilbert and Gubar, 36.

¹⁹ Ann Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002).

²⁰ In her study of H.D., Laity argues that “male modernist essays proposing the virtues of aesthetic impersonality frequently burned in effigy the femme fatale and the ‘effeminate’ Aesthete. . . .socially construct[ing] the Decadent past as a ruinous form of feminine writing.” Frank Lentricchia, in *Modernist Quartet*, (with his own hostility evident) describes a forgotten generation of “genteel” American literary men who the male modernists “grew to know and despise” in the 1890s. These “aesthetes” “valued purity above all, the rigorous evacuation from poetry of sensuousness and the sensual, and of any tendency to social representation.” See Cassandra Laity, xii, and Lentricchia, ix-xiii.

²¹ Strychacz, 27.

²² In *Death and the Afternoon*, Hemingway, speaking as Hemingway, vents some animus against unnamed over-refined literati. Quoting Andrew Marvell, he looks forward to outliving these enemies, “with their quaint pamphlets gone to bust and into footnotes all their lust.” He then comments “I learned how to do that by reading T.S. Eliot.” Though what “that” refers to is not obvious, the malice toward Eliot, that famous footnoter, is. See Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 139.

²³ McGurl, 14.

²⁴ Ardis, 6.

²⁵ Ardis, 17.

²⁶ Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981).

²⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, 43.

²⁸ Rape and castration, however, as brutal historical realities of the black experience in America, are problematic metaphors for black male victimization, reifying—as do the later novels of Hemingway and Fitzgerald— notions of womanhood as passivity and victimization, and reinforcing the deep undesirability for men to be “like a woman” in the various male homosocial contexts that these works depict.

²⁹ Lentricchia, 248-9.

³⁰ Ralph Ellison, “The World and the Jug,” in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1994), 140.

³¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. (Chicago: UC Press, 1995). Subsequent references to this work will be cited in the text.

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- ³² Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1994), 140, and "Introduction," xiv.
- ³³ Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1902), 1-3.
- ³⁴ Roosevelt, 1.
- ³⁵ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986), 44.
- ³⁶ James R. Mellow, *Invented Lives: F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 345.
- ³⁷ See Charles R. Hearn, "F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Popular Magazine Formula Story of the Twenties," *Journal of American Culture* 18.3 (1995): 33-40.
- ³⁸ Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991), 2.
- ³⁹ Laity, 2; Clark 2.
- ⁴⁰ Clark, 19.
- ⁴¹ Both quoted in Jeffrey Meyers, *Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994): 60-61. Franklin P. Adams is the reviewer calling the work "sloppy"; the second formula is from Edmund Wilson.
- ⁴² Matthew Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 221.
- ⁴³ Van Wyck Brooks, "The Critics and Young America," *Criticism in America: Its Function and Status* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1924), 147. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the "abject" as that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (4). Woman for Kristeva, as Barbara Creed puts it, has a "special relationship with the abject" because of the female body's maternal functions, which disrupt the image of "the clean and proper body." See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), 4; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 11. In *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit finds a masculine horror of communism expressed through female flood imagery in the writings of numerous fascists and protofascists between the wars. See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987), 229-35, 244-49.
- ⁴⁴ Laity, 2. The point was originally made by Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men*, who noted especially the consequences of "this shift for the emergent middle-class homophobic culture of 'male bonding'" to which our American modernists, as their correspondence shows, also clearly belonged. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 94-5, 173, 216-17.
- ⁴⁵ John Gaggin, *Hemingway and Nineteenth-Century Aestheticism* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988), 2-18.
- ⁴⁶ Ezra Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" in Paul Lauter, ed., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 2, 4th edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 1196.
- ⁴⁷ McDonald, 82.
- ⁴⁸ Lentricchia argues that Pound looks back to Pater and Keats in the Image "with its stress on the poet's psychic integration" and its bringing of the poet's "entire personality into an articulated expressive act," like Coleridge's ideal poet. I would suggest, however, that what Pound may have had more in mind than this fully articulated subjectivity was the *objective* realization of the subjective in poetry—its perfect observation "impersonally" rendered in language—perhaps as "romantic" an ideal of artistry as Lentricchia suggests. Lentricchia, 190.
- ⁴⁹ Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1968), 4.
- ⁵⁰ "A Retrospect," 3. Kaufman, 60.
- ⁵¹ James Joyce was of course an important influence on all these figures as well, but I would suggest that Joyce, though in some places a writer who targeted the genteel and the feminine in his work, and whose

Stephen Daedalus is an obvious author surrogate, is, especially in the self-deprecations which mark all three of his novels, *sui generis* as a modernist. Joyce had his own foibles, but for whatever reason, his representations of feminization—in the “Circe” chapter of *Ulysses*, for example—do not perform the self-constructive, masculinizing work that I trace in this project. In my view, though Bloom does seem to receive vindication for his humane attitudes and thoughts in various places in the novel, especially in his wife’s eyes in the final chapter, neither he nor Stephen Daedalus emerge at the end of *Ulysses* with any particular degree of exclusively masculine epistemological superiority, though in emotional comportment in the face of humiliation, Bloom certainly qualifies. If Joyce were to self-construct in the phallic way I define here, Molly Bloom’s famous soliloquy would need to much more explicitly emphasize her own inferiority and dependence. This is an arguable point, of course, but I would direct the reader to compare Molly’s monologue with the Joycean female interior monologues with which Hemingway ends *To Have and Have Not*, which, though more compassionate toward female suffering than we might expect, also heavily emphasize female dependence on men, especially sexually. See James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1961).

⁵² Brucoli, 221.

⁵³ North, 37.

⁵⁴ Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), 11.

⁵⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), 58.

⁵⁶ “The Perfect Critic,” 15, 13.

⁵⁷ “The Perfect Critic,” 6, 16.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Scott, 498.

⁵⁹ There is irony to the way Gatsby’s words echo Stein’s here: just as the ultra-romantic Gatsby sees in Daisy not a human woman, but a kind of ideal form with or through which to transform himself into his “Platonic conception of himself,” so do our anti-romantic modernists cleave to absolutist aesthetic ideals in order to transform themselves into their own ideals of authorship or manhood. See F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995), 160, 104.

⁶⁰ Szalay, 96.

⁶¹ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 183.

⁶² Quoted in Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 47.

CHAPTER 1:

THE GREAT NICK: AUTHORSHIP, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND FITZGERALD AS 'RECOVERING ROMANTIC' IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

By the time he began planning *The Great Gatsby* in 1923, F. Scott Fitzgerald had already achieved wild popular success and a warm critical reception in 1920 with his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. He aimed higher in 1922 with the darker *The Beautiful and Damned*: "I do not expect in any event that I am to have the same [person-for-person] public this time that *Paradise* had. My one hope is to be endorsed by the intellectual èlite & thus be forced on people as Conrad has."¹ The result of this heightened ambition was mixed. At this time the representatives of the "intellectual èlite" whose judgment Fitzgerald most admired were, as Frances Kerr notes, H.L. Mencken and Edmund Wilson, along with the authors these critics admired, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and T.S. Eliot. Kerr argues that Wilson and Mencken were among the most prominent critical promulgators of a gendered modernist aesthetic we can only call vitriolic in its attack on the "feminine" idealisms and emotional profusions of genteel literature: "Not infrequently, the modernist avant-garde chose female images of disease, fat, ignorance, laziness, or sentimentality to signify a lack of either emotional or intellectual vigor."²

In writing his second novel, the always eager-to-please Fitzgerald was especially eager to please these critical gatekeepers to literary prestige, which might explain the naturalistic cast of *The Beautiful and Damned*, an apparent repudiation of the collegiate insouciance that marked *This Side of Paradise*, published when Fitzgerald was just twenty-three. Mencken, who favored the naturalism of Theodore Dreiser and Frank

Norris as a corrective to the prescribed idealism of literary gentility, admired the ambition of Fitzgerald's second novel, and saw an artist entering his maturity, but Wilson, Fitzgerald's friend and classmate at Princeton, and later described by the author as his "intellectual conscience," reacted by publicly questioning—and in highly gendered terms—his friend's intellectual powers.³ Quoting Edna St. Vincent Millay, who had compared Fitzgerald to "a stupid old woman with whom someone has left a diamond," Wilson also questioned his friend's objectivity: "Like a woman, [Fitzgerald] is not much given to abstract or impersonal thought."⁴ Wilson's masculinizing of "abstract and impersonal thought," implies that masculine vision achieves a kind of scientific detachment from one's own biases and experiences; to perceive truth, and to evaluate it "rightly," one must overcome such distorting factors. This was an assumption well-understood by Fitzgerald, who, a year before his death, reflected in a letter to his daughter that, though he was "not a great man," his life expressed a struggle to preserve "the objective and impersonal part of his talent," a struggle that had to it "a sort of epic grandeur."⁵ This "epic" struggle was just beginning in 1923, when Fitzgerald, though blessed with a natural wit and talent with language, and able vividly to impart life to his characters, was still, for critics like Wilson, crucially lacking in the necessary, manly ability of a modernist writer to overcome his own personal emotion so as objectively to see, and in seeing, truly apprehend the world.

Control, especially self-control, was another gendered aspect of the modernist aesthetic that Fitzgerald found held against him in 1922. *Chicago Tribune* critic Burton Rascoe, who had lauded *This Side of Paradise* as "bearing the impress . . . of genius,"

now chided the author for his ‘blubbery’ sentimentality in *The Beautiful and Damned*, suggesting that Fitzgerald had refused “to subject his spontaneous outbursts to the refining process of self-criticism.”⁶ And Wilson chided the author for his uncontrolled “looseness” of form. These criticisms hinted at, as Kerr puts it, “the precariousness of Fitzgerald’s artistic masculinity,” and surely brought home to the author the conditions for his admittance to critical esteem: the demonstration, in his work, of certain prescribed forms of modern authorial manliness.

Kerr compellingly argues that *The Great Gatsby* registers Fitzgerald’s *protest* against such prescriptions, expressing not only Nick’s sense of frustration with a modernist ethic of impersonality that would ban emotionality, but also his related sympathy for and attraction to “feminine” or feminized men. In an aside in “The Rich Boy,” a story written immediately after *Gatsby*, the narrator observes that “we are all queer fish, queerer behind our faces and voices than we want anyone to know or than we know ourselves.”⁷ With no further elaboration on this suggestive “queer”-ness—a word that even in American usages of the twenties negatively connoted male homosexuality—Fitzgerald seems to both reveal and repress it, hinting at disturbingly transgressive elements in the psyche, yet avoiding specifics, and quickly moving on.⁸ While the quote nicely exemplifies Kerr’s point that Fitzgerald chafed under the forced hypocrisy of gender-normative and heteronormative social and aesthetic influences, it also suggests, and perhaps more powerfully, his sense of danger should such private “transgressions” emerge into public view. As I will show, *Gatsby*’s formal structure and pervading aesthetic reveal Fitzgerald’s gendered sense of social vulnerability as a primary shaping

force in the novel's composition, a point supported by the interstitial and elliptical—that is, trepidatious—nature of the “protests” Kerr identifies. *Gatsby* should thus be seen not as resistance to the normative influence of this masculinist aesthetic, but as a wholesale endorsement of it that contains some revealing fissures. Fitzgerald's capitulation was total, though the strain of that capitulation does mark the text in some fascinating ways, such as the homoerotic inflections of Nick's relations with the pink-suited Gatsby and with the “pale, feminine” Mr. McKee (34). But *The Great Gatsby* is intricately structured to advertise and reinforce the ethos of authorial manhood enunciated by Wilson, as is suggested by Fitzgerald's candid remark to Maxwell Perkins that “it may hurt the book's popularity that it's *a man's book*” (Fitzgerald's italics).⁹

It is also a *white* man's book, with racial others appearing, by my count, in only three (key) places in the novel—in the person of Meyer Wolfsheim, a Jewish gangster; during a ride in Gatsby's car in which Nick beholds a group of immigrants on the way to a funeral and a carload of “modish Negroes”; and after the accident in which Myrtle Wilson is killed, when Nick worries about a “pale, well-dressed Negro” who has witnessed the accident, and whose knowledge threatens to insert itself in affairs that Nick treats as proprietarily his own (148). Overhearing a conversation not meant for his ears (a conversation reported by Nick), the man appears as a figure of paranoia in the scene, but then disappears, leaving the tragic tale for Nick—our *real* insider—to sort out. He thus helps, by contrast, to establish Nick's narratorial authority. Indeed, in each of these scenes, racial otherness is used in the construction of the implicitly white version of male authorship for which Fitzgerald's own whiteness is a necessary but not sufficient

condition.

As I will argue more fully in the next chapter, the self-constructions of masculine identity that are the subject of this dissertation are comprised of numerous forms or markers of “identity”—class, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and the moral and epistemological traits these authors constructed as specific to modern authorship. That is, the constructed male author is not just a man, but also white, (upper) middle-class, American, and so on. But such was the emphasis on masculinity for literary modernists that other traits were subsumed to or organized by gendered identity, functioning not as separate concerns, but as partial criteria for “proper” authorial manhood. This is to say that, though both Hemingway and Fitzgerald display anxieties about racial others in their novels, these concerns appear in the text *not* as a threat of racial eclipse to whiteness—a concern Tom Buchanan is mocked for in *Gatsby*—but as threats to authorial masculinity, as the “pale well-dressed Negro” seems to threaten the authorial mastery of Nick. The “inferiority” of blackness is thus given in *epistemological*, not sexual or physical terms. As we will see, Jewishness is similarly dismissed as inadequate to authorship, Meyer Wolfsheim suggesting the negation of the kind of ethereal matters that concern Nick in the novel. This is not to minimize the manifest racism or anti-semitism of novels like *The Great Gatsby*, but to suggest the important role anxieties about manhood play in such antagonisms.

The Great Nick

Fitzgerald’s response to critics of his literary manhood was an eager self-policing,

a representational crackdown on what he would later describe as his “half-feminine” creative mind.¹⁰ He wanted *Gatsby* to register his revised modernist masculinity in the strongest terms, terms that would especially resonate with the audience of critics he saw as the key to intellectual acceptance, wide readerships and a place in literary posterity. The novel dramatizes precisely this revision in the trajectory of its narrator, Nick Carraway, toward an ever more complete apprehension of truth. The novel is thus a sort of epistemological *kunstlerroman*, with Nick’s ultimate mastery demonstrated in the epiphanic mode that he achieves in the closing pages. If *The Great Gatsby*’s critical success and endurance is related to Fitzgerald’s conscious effort to masculinize his art, then we are remiss if we fail to inquire into how this masculinization shaped the work itself—indeed, how such strategies cultivate *us* as readers of the work. Nick Carraway, the novel’s first-person narrator, is the key to that inquiry. Nick has drawn his share of critical attention over the decades, but few critics have been able to dislodge the idea, as Wayne Booth puts it, that Nick’s function is to be a “lucid reflector” for the story’s action, providing mainly, “thoroughly reliable guidance”; and such at least seems Nick’s manifest function in the novel.¹¹

We read a wholly different text if we assume, however, that not Jay Gatsby, but Nick himself is at the “center” of the novel. To take such a position is to find Nick’s increasingly authoritative authorial vision, developing out of his sense of social disempowerment, as the compelling telos of the narrative. Scott Derrick takes this view in arguing that *Gatsby* functions merely as a sort of homoerotically charged plot device for Nick, a “male muse” whose “gorgeous” romanticism inspires Nick’s “passionate

identification.” For Derrick, with Judith Fetterley, one of the novel’s more hostile readers, Gatsby is thus the trigger for Fitzgerald’s “flights of purple prose.”¹² While I agree fundamentally with Derrick’s insight about Nick, I will later draw more specific conclusions about the ideological uses to which Fitzgerald puts Gatsby’s character. As for Fitzgerald’s “flights of purple prose,” I would say it is important as well to speak of *Nick’s* prose, for in the world of the novel, Nick is its author, explicitly mentioning the book *as a book* in the opening paragraphs, and in the third chapter as well: “Reading over what I have written so far I see I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that absorbed me.”¹³

This is crucial because, in the sense that Nick is an author, he is an obvious surrogate for Fitzgerald himself, and there are many other connections between the two. Fitzgerald tended to distribute parts of his experiences and inner life to multiple characters, and in *The Great Gatsby*, it is undeniable that Gatsby portrays a recognizably Fitzgeraldian romanticism. Indeed, Fitzgerald told his secretary, Laura Guthrie, in 1935 that “My characters are all Scott Fitzgerald. Even my feminine characters are feminine Scott Fitzgeralds”; but as I hope to show, some of the author’s characters are more “Scott Fitzgerald” than others.¹⁴ This is suggested by the fact that the naïve Gatsby is unequal to a real world peopled by powerful Tom Buchanans, and dies a tragic, even pathetic figure. Nick Carraway, however, lives to rhapsodize about this tragedy, and indeed, masters its ethical nuances in literary form.¹⁵ Moreover, in background, diction, affect and orientation, Nick is a naked fictionalization of his creator. Like Fitzgerald, Nick’s origins are both middle class and Middle West; he is articulate beyond our expectations for any

aspiring bond man, and is given to displays of sardony and descriptive verbal brilliance. Far from downplaying this self-evoking similarity, Fitzgerald makes the most of it, using his narrator's ultimate achievements to stand for his own, both in Nick's morally upright apprehension of truth, and in his mastery of the romantic impulse. What Nick knows, Fitzgerald must know as well—their likeness is one of a number of mechanisms by which Nick dramatizes achievements that can ultimately be chalked up to Fitzgerald's ledger as both an author and a man.

No yokel from the pages of Thomas Wolfe encountering the big city for the first time, the Yale-educated Nick arrives in New York in the beginning of the novel already a wise, ethically probing, and super-alert observer of mankind. His superior knowingness is established with a flurry of ostentatiously wry reflections in the first pages—on the “plagiaristic” nature of young male discourse, on the “delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War”—but he is quickly faced with a mystery, his paladin of a Long Island neighbor, Mr. Gatsby. Though Nick immediately asserts for us his tendency to reserve judgment, in actuality he judges everything he sees, and often harshly. Gatsby, however, is too elusive and secretive for Nick to judge; he thus fascinates, an unmasterable quantity—at least for now.

Nick's centrality as a character and his critical powers of observation are first spotlighted in the splendid house of Daisy and Tom Buchanan, where Nick also meets someone who will challenge his epistemological supremacy: the athlete and socialite, Jordan Baker, whose role we will discuss more fully presently. Arriving at the estate, it seems that Nick's goal in life is to be an omniscient narrator; with a covetous eye he sees

all, appraising his host's possessions—from the Homerically wine colored carpet to the “corky but impressive” claret—even as he plumbs the Buchanans' psychological depths. Like Gatsby, the Buchanans are objects of observation and judgment for Nick, but are miserable failures in exercising that capacity themselves; they thus function in a fundamental way—to set off Nick's penetration. Tom Buchanan, all physicality and aggression, is almost excused for his stupidity. When he makes a fool of himself trying to articulate ideas he has encountered in a racial tract, Nick takes advantage: “There was something almost pathetic in his concentration as if his complacency, more acute than of old, was not enough for him anymore”(16). In a fell sentence, Nick *ranks* Tom, pins him like a specimen, diagnosing both his moral failure and his unreflexive anxiety—his wealth is no just dessert, but an ironic accident of birth. Despite Nick's lower class status, he can look down both morally and intellectually on this scion of the American aristocracy; Tom, indeed, presents no challenge at all.

Daisy, however, displays a seemingly brilliant ironical gift, yet her perception is quickly shown to be lacking as well. Daisy especially fails—or refuses—to perceive the truth about herself, pithy self-consciousness being Nick's continually demonstrated forte. Unhappy in her marriage to the philandering Tom, Daisy describes the birth of her daughter with what '60s feminists might have called a “raised consciousness” about woman's place in the world: “Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. ‘All right,’ I said, ‘I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—

that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (21). Daisy's attitude suggests that she feels a kinship with oppressed women everywhere. But as she ends her story, Nick zooms in: "The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I immediately felt the basic insincerity of what she had said" (22). Nick sees that she is merely performing, her "despair" a designer's touch, embellishing her "membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged" (22). The novel thus wastes no time in "exposing" Daisy's duplicity, though its cause remains to be found out. Unable to tell the "impersonal" truth about her situation, she is eliminated as a "lucid reflector" because of this secret guilt or complicity. Yet Daisy's feminine not-to-be-trustedness functions not simply to discount women, but to help establish Nick's own masculine trustworthiness.

Nick's perception is also demonstrably central to the scene in its showy, allegorical Homericisms; if Daisy is a siren, then Nick is Odysseus, tied to the mast by his proud sense of his own middle-class rectitude.¹⁶ Where Gatsby will be blinded by naiveté and love, Nick not only demonstrates the moral strength to withstand the "singing compulsion" of Daisy's dangerous allure, but also his ability to penetrate her "sophisticated" screens of deception and self-deception, diagnosing, in the scene, her subtly monstrous nature. Thus what is most important about the scene is not this truth about Daisy, but a truth about Nick instead: like the "wise Odysseus," he sees, even where seeing is difficult.

One final aspect of the scene suggests Nick's centrality. In a notebook for *The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald reminded himself in capital letters, "ACTION IS

CHARACTER.,” a succinct formulization of the modernist valorization of showing over telling, dramatization over explicit narration. Certainly, Nick *narrates* this revelation about Daisy, which would seem to be a violation of that modernist narrative aesthetic, yet in the sense I am investigating in this project, this narration is itself a dramatization. For whose character is really in “action” here? If the answer to that question is Daisy, then we might expect to see her moral debasement dramatized in acts sufficient to suggest it; yet what we see of her character in action—Daisy brightly performing—is opaque to us until Nick intervenes to interpret. Let us examine his statement again, italics added: “The *instant* her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, *I immediately felt* the basic insincerity of what she had said” Daisy’s character is not “recollected in tranquility,” but in a modernist update of Wordsworth’s formula, it is seized in action. The character thus dramatized is not Daisy’s but Nick’s, for what is dramatized is the action which occurs *after* Daisy ceases talking: Nick’s intellectually penetrative thrust. The scene thus uses Daisy instrumentally to exposition what is of more central interest to Fitzgerald here, Nick’s moral and intellectual acuity.

Yet for all his powers of perception, Nick is a marginalized character in his own narrative. Unlike Gatsby, he is neither rich nor mysterious, and whereas both Tom and Gatsby “get the girl” (albeit the same girl), Nick’s girlfriend, Jordan Baker, clearly lacks the universal desirability foregrounded in the characterization of her friend, Daisy. Moreover, depressed about his upcoming thirtieth birthday, and with almost nothing to his name, Nick feels his lack of status acutely in New York; he is lonely, pushed around by Tom Buchanan, and lives in a cottage surrounded by mansions in an otherwise exclusive neighborhood. Nick brags of his bloodline,

but his whiteness, midwestern pedigree, and Yale connections do little to enhance his lowly status on Wall Street. Indeed, his only agency is in observation. As Kerr puts it with regard to Nick's relations with other men, "Nick acts like a man, but—sometimes—feels like a woman": he feels feminized.

In her 1978 book, *The Resisting Reader*, Judith Fetterley cogently argued that *The Great Gatsby* was "another American 'love' story centered in hostility to women and the concomitant strategy of the scapegoat."¹⁷ Hostility to be sure, describes the work's representations of female characters; yet this hostility answered a specific rhetorical need left unarticulated in Fetterley's otherwise acute reading, Fitzgerald's need to demonstrate for his critics his precious and precarious "literary masculinity." Interestingly, however, Fetterley attributes this hostility to Fitzgerald's own sense of economic disadvantage in early manhood:

The sense of disadvantage, of being outside the rich house and the rich life into which the rich girl has vanished and of realizing the need to get that rich girl if one is going to get that house and that life, has, however, undercurrents of hostility. Yet this hostility never surfaces in *Gatsby*. It is Nick who registers the emotions implicit in *Gatsby's* experience and psychology.¹⁸

For Fetterley, Nick's character is informed by a statement Fitzgerald made about his own courtship, as a man without means, of the "rich girl," Zelda Sayres, daughter of an Alabama Supreme Court justice: "I have never been able to stop wondering where my friends' money came from, nor to stop thinking that at one time a sort of *droit de seigneur* might have been exercised to give one of them my girl."¹⁹ Nick's sense of himself, that is, is of the "disadvantaged outsider," and it is this sense of feminization, which he shares with *Gatsby*, that both causes his animus toward Daisy and allows him to

make the critique of the romantic imagination that I will argue was constructed to delink the author from his own reputation for literary romanticism. Thus Fitzgerald's assertion of authorial masculinity proceeds from—and makes good—his sense of social feminization both as a deprecated (and thrice-parodied) author of bestselling novels, and as a man born outside the circles of the rich and powerful—the powerful who in feudal times could demand to sleep with any newly married woman before her husband did.

To construct the advantage of authorial manhood that might help him transcend his sense of disempowerment, Fitzgerald thus uses a strategy in addition to that which Fetterley calls the “strategy of the scapegoat,” that is, the strategy of the foil. As a literary device, the foil does not suggest high modernist sophistication, yet perhaps for this reason this central self-constructive technique, heavily in use in all the works considered in this dissertation, has remained so little discussed by modernist scholars. For jewelers, of course, the term “foil” describes a thin sheet of reflective metal that underlies a gem in its setting, sending light that passes through the stone back out again, giving the jewel the effect of maximum brilliance. And as I have begun to show, so it is with Nick, whose own effect of “maximum brilliance” throughout *Gatsby* is achieved through the “reflective” properties of other characters with whom he is juxtaposed.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the juxtaposition, foil/jewel, is a powerfully gendered one. Foils are either female, or inferior, feminized male characters, and all are marked by traits the novel defines as feminine, including avarice, hypocrisy, sentimentality, and excessive self-interest, implying the character's unsteadfastness, moral confusion, or outright duplicity. Most gravely, due to a lack of rigor in self-examination, these characters

practice *self*-deceit. And in letting themselves off the hook, they ideologically set off the desirability of the “jewel,” its facets being that particular set of moral and intellectual qualities that the novel defines as masculine, and exemplifies in Nick: mental and sensory alertness, integrity, and moral and intellectual rigor—especially the penetrative “objectivity” in observation and self-examination that underlies Nick’s accretion of narratorial authority.

The most heavily determined of these juxtapositions in Fitzgerald’s fiction is the one that draws a line between socially prized versions of masculinity and socially devalued versions of femininity. This continuum turns out not to be as simple as it appears, however, once we begin trying to plot Fitzgerald’s ideological constructs on this line. Tom Buchanan, for example, might seem to signify the ultimate limit of masculinity, yet in Fitzgerald’s scheme, he is, on the contrary, a feminized male, “pathetically” unsure of his dominance. This is suggested not only by the “effeminate swank” of his riding gear, which suggests womanly to-be-looked-at-ness, but also by the degree to which his aggression and brutal physicality express his intense insecurities about power. Compared to Tom, Nick is much more comfortable “as a man”; though he lacks worldly power, he performs a relatively serene version of epistemological dominance through his modernist forms of seeing and telling. With his weak intellect, and his animalistic defensiveness, Tom is clearly inadequate to knowledge in the new conditions of modernity. Indeed, in a representational economy based not on crass capital, but on aesthetic sensibility and intellectual mastery, Tom is, in contrast to his class position, “cash-poor.”

Daisy's place in the continuum, however, can be more straightforwardly determined. Daisy epitomizes femininity as set of simultaneously dangerous and attractive qualities; she is spectacle and desirability, but also instability and mendacity—a classic stereotype of female untrustworthiness inflected, in her sexuality and outspokenness, with aspects of the '20s' version of the "New Woman."²⁰ Ultimately, Nick is the character who profits from these careful juxtapositions, which emphasize the ostentatious pith of Nick's commentary, and all the more for the stylistic and biographical resemblances Nick exhibits with his already famous creator. Nick's voice, indeed, as many commentators have suggested, is virtually indistinguishable from Fitzgerald's style elsewhere. This likeness performs a specific service—to make sure that the constructed authority of Nick's vision, and his modernist mastering of the difficult truths of Gatsby's tale, accrue to Fitzgerald himself, who thus attempts to write, in a sense, his own masculine and literary canonicity.

Fetterley notes the effect of discrediting Daisy—"the effect of this elaborate unmasking of Daisy is to discount her reliability as an interpreter of her own experience and to ensure that she will have no claims on our sympathy"—but does not ask what Nick specifically gains from it.²¹ If we put Nick at the center of the novel, however, he gains masculine narrative authority through this "discount": Nick sees and reports what Daisy does not, and rightly, honestly judges where she dissembles. Yet for all the perceptual success of Nick's first foray into New York society, his apprehension is still incomplete—and will continue to be so until the conclusion of the novel. But while Nick is clearly not the master of this early scene at the Buchanans', he is, however, a

dangerous quantity; alert, acute, and quick to “strike home” with his insights. We see this potentiality in his fragmentary yet sure diagnosis of Daisy. Nick cannot explain precisely what is at the heart of Daisy’s disingenuousness, but he knows *of* it, and with alacrity. This insight, indeed, is Nick’s first step in his carefully plotted teleological progress toward the synoptic view he will achieve at the end of the novel, where he reveals the cosmic significance of the narrative and the value of each of its ciphers.

Yet for now he must learn. We thus return to Jordan Baker, in whom Nick meets both a mentor and rival for the modernist acumen that is of such interest in the novel. But Jordan might more properly seem a foil for Daisy, for while Daisy, with her coquetry and “thrilling” voice suggests to Nick womanly sexuality and romantic allure, the “slender, small-breasted” Jordan is boyish and refractory. Where Daisy opens invitingly like a flower, Jordan is almost phallically rigid, accentuating her erect carriage by “throwing back her shoulders like a young cadet.” Where Daisy attracts with her voice and charm, Jordan is “contemptuous,” her face, if charming, also “wan” and “discontented” (15). Yet Jordan, like Nick—and unlike Daisy, who is clearly more used to being the center of attention than a bestower of it—is also an avid spectator of society, shushing Nick better to hear the particulars of the Buchanan’s argument in the next room, and looking on with “contemptuous interest” as she becomes Nick’s escort in his first attendance at one of Gatsby’s extravagant parties.

At the party, Gatsby’s mysterious past excites his guests to wild speculation about his origins and the source of his wealth, setting up the key to that mystery as privileged knowledge to be vied for by his acquaintances. As Nick and Jordan explore the property

looking to introduce Nick to their host, they come across another “seer,” a man with “enormous owl-eyed spectacles” who seems to have glimpsed or guessed, in a fragmentary, unsteady way, Gatsby’s fraud. Drunk and excited, the owl-eyed man pulls down books in Gatsby’s showy library surprised to find that they are real books instead of cardboard imitations. The man rightly feels Gatsby himself is just such an imitation, a “regular Belasco,” whose life is an elaborate stage setting for some as yet unknown significant meaning (50). Jordan, however, with a gaze that tends to insolence in its directness, is a steadier observer, and takes in the man’s suggestion silently, “looking at him alertly, cheerfully without answering,” her cool reliability dramatized in the juxtaposition (50). Importantly, however, when Nick finally meets the mysterious Gatsby, Jordan is not involved; Nick is free to form his own first impression alone—his first step toward solving the mystery posed by this “elegant roughneck” is untainted by Jordan’s mediation.

Fetterley describes Nick’s relation to Jordan as one of “divestment,” a contest for advantage in which Nick wins by revealing her “incurable” dishonesty. Casually hinting at and then later remembering the details of a golf scandal in which Jordan had cheated, then lied about it, Nick can evince his own honesty in representation while “generously” asserting that Jordan’s duplicity “made no difference to [him.] Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply—I was casually sorry, and then I forgot” (63). This ostentatious casualness should put us on alert. Again, Fetterley’s reading does not examine the exact nature of the advantage that Nick takes, which is not just as a man, but as a trustworthy authorial guide. Like Daisy, the mendacious Jordan is eliminated as an

authoritative seer (and potential narrator) of this tale not only through this specific dishonesty, but later, through a more fundamental dishonesty implied (if not evidenced) by her class alliance with the Buchanans. Thus the important contrast of Nick's insisting, on the heels of these revelations about Jordan, that he was "one of the few honest people he has ever known." As Fitzgerald's authorial proxy, Nick must see and his seeing must be believed for him—and with him, his creator—to achieve authorial mastery. If Jordan's function in the novel is as an epistemic rival and foil to Nick, then the fact that she sees well is only acceptable if, eventually, Nick sees better.²²

In her role of knowing insider, Jordan has her greatest advantage at this point of the novel, while Nick remains but an alert outsider. As the party winds down, Gatsby takes Jordan aside and shares with her the incredible story of his love for Daisy, the love that has driven him to buy this parvenu mansion in West Egg in hopes of attracting his now-married ex-lover's attention. Jordan comes out from the meeting the possessor of Gatsby's great secret, which she seems almost to taunt Nick with: "'It was—simply amazing,' she repeated abstractedly. 'But I swore I wouldn't tell and here I am tantalizing you.' She yawned gracefully in my face" (57). Nick will avenge. Jordan keeps her advantage until she is allowed to narrate, in first person, a flashback of Daisy's affair with Gatsby before her marriage to Tom. The tale is a revelation for Nick: Gatsby "came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his useless splendor" (83). But from that moment on, Jordan is allowed no more narrative midwifery, handing over the narrative to Nick in announcing that Gatsby wants to arrange his long-awaited meeting with Daisy at Nick's house.

From this point, Nick, fully launched, if not fully formed, will “deliver” his own tale, relying on his own first-hand investigations even as he begins his consolation prize romance with Jordan, “this clean, hard, limited person” (84).²³ His sense of romantic disappointment is explicit: “For unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms”—disappointed yearnings which form the foundation of Nick’s identification with Gatsby, and to which we will return. Now his own informant and agent in the narrative, Nick can increasingly dismiss Jordan and her “universal skepticism.” And indeed, near the novel’s end, after Gatsby’s final humiliation at the hands of Tom in New York, and after Myrtle Wilson’s death, Nick completes the kiss-off: “I’d had enough of all of them for one day, and suddenly that included Jordan too” (150). In a gesture of moral repudiation, Nick re-aligns himself with his own origins, rejecting Jordan as a member of the class exemplified by the Buchanans’ monied corruption and carelessness. As Hawthorne’s Hawthornian Kenyon in *The Marble Faun* gains in moral probity in juxtaposition with the discredited artist Miriam, so does Fitzgerald’s Nick gain moral authority in eliminating Jordan, the most serious threat to Nick’s authorial ascendancy.

Difficult Truths: Apprehending Gatsby

I have tried to suggest the way that Fitzgerald establishes, through a careful web of character juxtapositions, a hierarchy of value that privileges a certain improved version of himself in the figure of Nick Carraway, who performs the version of masculine artistic

vision prescribed for Fitzgerald through the agency of (though not necessarily originating with) the men he regarded as the aesthetic arbiters of his time. The Nick of the first half of the novel has barely begun this transformation, though he has displayed a certain aptitude and trustworthiness. He is now positioned to observe and report the truth about Gatsby firsthand, and his performance of this difficult reportage is the subject of the rest of the book. That Nick somehow both admires and scorns Gatsby is suggested by a showily enigmatic sentence from the first pages of the novel: “Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” (6). Nick mysteriously exempts from judgment the man who represents something he claims to scorn. This must be reconciled with the rhapsodic description that immediately follows:

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life. . . .it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again.
(6)

We should note in this definition of personality Fitzgerald’s seemingly Butlerian sense of identity as not a core of being, but a continual performance, something Gatsby also understands well. Nick’s seemingly irreconcilable double vision, of something shameful about Gatsby combined with something uniquely admirable, is integral to Fitzgerald’s own performance. The contradiction is set up to be the problem of the book, and demands resolution.

But perhaps not. In his confessional 1936 essay “The Crack Up,” Fitzgerald observed that “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas

in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.”²⁴ In this definition, distinction belongs to the artist who can somehow master paradox. Yet this mastering is not to resolve the paradox, but to *hold it*, presumably in some difficult state of oscillation, while fully apprehending each pole of the antithesis. The situation suggests a supremely challenging confrontation with something wild, like a man wrestling a bear, or an encounter with some transient phenomenon of physics, averse to the grasp. Though Fitzgerald claimed to be a Marxist, in this intellectual dialectic he envisions no hopeful synthesis of dialectical opposites, but would “hold” the antithesis in a moment of almost sublime, cognitive dissonance—a moment that we will see is dramatized in the text as transcendence. This idea of intelligence is more than reminiscent of the way John Keats, another Fitzgerald hero, defined “negative capability”: “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”²⁵ Both are forms of calm intellectual mastery seeming to transcend rationality. As such, this capability is in fact a proprietary mastery of the artist, who is confronted, as Conrad suggests in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), with the same contradictory realities as the thinker or the scientist, but who must find the “terms of his appeal” within himself, “in that lonely region of stress and strife”—an image of masculine intellectual enclosure or encompassment to which I will shortly return.²⁶

Conrad’s apologetics in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* suggest what is really at stake, professional legitimacy, especially as this is expressed in the professional production of truth. Male writers of “poesy” and imaginative fictions needed to delineate approaches to truth in their works that could rival the authoritative truth

claims of their brothers in philosophy and especially their brothers in the sciences. Thus the masculinizing aesthetic of many modernists reflected a desire to project a tougher, more empirical mode of artistry in rivalry with these definitively male professions and what they produced: incontrovertibility. It is thus not surprising to find such professional anxieties suffusing Fitzgerald's works and discourse, though these anxieties are visible only in reverse image, as buried determinants of his aggressive thematizing of male epistemological supremacy.

Marianne DeKoven identifies the “unsynthesized dialectic” as a formal paradigm deeply characteristic of both male and female produced modernisms, marking the work of Conrad, Eliot, Yeats, Proust, Stevens, Williams and Fitzgerald as well as Gilman, Chopin, Stein and Woolf. To designate this distinctive feature, DeKoven borrows Jacques Derrida's term, *sous-rature*, or “under erasure,” a term that, most simply, describes a word that's visible but crossed out. For DeKoven, modernist aesthetics are constituted by this gesture of irresolvability, which, in her words, “enacts in the realm of form an alternative to culture's hegemonic hierarchical dualisms.”²⁷ I disagree, however, with DeKoven's argument for the politically progressive nature of this formal gesture, which looks much more manipulative and politically retrograde when regarded as performance. While *sous-rature* can indeed reflect a more sophisticated approach to complex realities, it can also have a more covert functionality in male modernist works—even Conrad's: to demonstrate sophistication or “negative capability” as a proprietarily male faculty. DeKoven does acknowledge a certain gestural and dialogic (that is, performative) utility in *sous-rature* when she describes the way it is deployed to set off modernist writings

from their realist or naturalist literary antecedents. In the service of that goal, *sous-rature* performs a modernist rejection of the “epistemological determinacy” of a realist practice portrayed as no longer adequate to modernity.

For Fitzgerald, the undecidability of *sous-rature* demonstrates a form of cognitive mastery distinguishing male modernist authorship. In pointedly not resolving contradictory realities, the male modernist displays a kind of intellectual wherewithal allowing him to leave antithetical truths, as we might say, in their “natural state.” To be realer than the realists, then, is to abandon habits of representation that imposed closure, and to own the unresolvable *as such*. This move allows the modernist to claim a kind of masculine “open closure” on even the most refractory of representational problems in that the claim of mastery has for its warrant the “manly” ability to acknowledge, not suppress irresolvability. Thus even the unknowable could be marshaled in service of epistemological certainty. Though the antithetical terms of *sous-rature* are pointedly not resolved, a third term *is* ultimately “synthesized” by this operation: the fully “authorized” male modernist, his claim to cultural authority and professional standing resting on the basis of this specific form of epistemological mastery—the author’s demonstrated apprehension of even the most difficult of truths.

In *Gatsby* the figure of that synthesis is of course Nick, who comes to “apprehend” or “comprehend” these opposites—both in the first term’s sense of a literal grasping, and in the second term’s sense of spanning or enclosing. Romanticism is the general subject of *sous-rature* in *The Great Gatsby*—a concept that’s movingly “visible” but just as visibly “crossed out” as impossible or delusive. Nick’s “comprehending”

posture straddles both Gatsby's crass but beautifully human romanticism *and* a mournful skepticism about the tragic impossibility of such dreams, a posture that allows Nick to dramatize Fitzgerald's own status as what Keats would call a "Man of Achievement," a crucial effect of the novel that becomes visible only if we shift our attention from Gatsby to Nick.

To notice such self-constructive industry in these texts is to shift the way we view their ostensible "meanings." As Scott Derrick argues, the desire for cultural authority that motivates such constructions should be seen as having a "consequent priority over the overt content of the narrative."²⁸ This suggests that Gatsby's meanings, however profound or banal they may be in themselves, are less important than in what they allow Fitzgerald to dramatize about his own properly modernist masculinity. Specifically, Gatsby's greatest usefulness is in providing a certain kind of difficulty to be encountered and mastered by Nick—a problem *not* to be solved, but in Fitzgerald's Keatsian way, to be "comprehended." As this performance is all Nick's, then the greatest interpretive leverage should result from looking not at the pink-suited (or red-flagged) Gatsby, but at Nick looking at Gatsby.

As we rejoin him in mid-novel, Nick does begin to have some privileged glimpses of his own. One of the most important of these takes the form of a "disconcerting ride" Nick takes with Gatsby into town in the latter's magnificent car (68). Anxious to impress, Gatsby narrates his improbably concocted life story as his new friend listens incredulously—"it was like skimming hastily through a dozen magazines" (71). I will return to the gendered subject of magazines shortly, but for now note the reference in this

context of Gatsby's ideological naiveté. Guide Jordan has scoffingly described Gatsby's pretension to have attended Oxford; Nick now sees this claim for himself, not buying it for an instant, and noting telling minutiae: "He hurried the phrase 'educated at Oxford,' or swallowed it or choked on it as though it had bothered him before. And with this doubt his whole statement fell to pieces and I wondered if there wasn't something a little sinister about him after all" (69). Yet Nick switches from this incredulity to sudden belief as Gatsby produces tokens—a snapshot from Oxford, a medal from Montenegro—suggesting his authenticity: "Then it was all true" (71).

Nick's belief is important because it enables him passionately to identify with Gatsby, if only transiently. For what "disconcerts" Nick about this ride is not his own alternations of belief and unbelief, but a loftier, yet seductive quality that Gatsby, for now a perfect romantic signifier of white masculine transcendence, evokes as he drives through impoverished Astoria. Nick's repressed romantic desires, already suggested in his reflections on lonely "young clerks in the dusk" in Chapter III, and his rapt attention to Daisy, who signifies the ultimate prize of romantic aspiration, gain sway in this ride, revived by the contrast between the unimpeded power and progress of the car and the severely earthbound regions it slices through and leaves in its wake (62). After speeding "along a cobbled slum lined with the dark, undeserted saloons," they pass through the "valley of ashes" where they glimpse, in all her impoverished immobility, the ravenously (upwardly) mobile Myrtle Wilson, Tom Buchanan's crass, classed mistress, "straining at the garage pump" (72).

The valley of ashes, like Hemingway's Boulevard Raspail in *The Sun Also Rises*,

is a rich site of specifically modernist significations. Indeed, we might see it as a sort of proving ground, an American wasteland to impress even Eliot, whose own wasteland many critics have associated with this section of the novel. Literally “the pits,” this industrial interstice between New York and Long Island represents the grittiest of gritty reality, but also the special, Eliot-ian faculty of vision necessary unflinchingly to see this stark real. In the enervated despair of George Wilson, and in Myrtle’s vain hopes, the valley of ashes is waste, vain hopes, discouragement, and class war, but it is also the great staring spectacles of Dr. T.J. Ekleburg, which “brood on over the somber dumping ground” (28). This faded billboard image is later associated with George Wilson’s statement that “God sees everything,” though the real figure of omniscience will ultimately be not God but Nick. Though this wasteland motif may have an obligatory air, evoking a Fitzgerald in sedulous pursuit of that most coveted of modernist merit badges, the Vision of Desolation, in an important sense, the valley of ashes acknowledges the suffering and class strife that underlie and undermine the American dream. Yet this critique of capitalism is vexed in several ways, most notably in the way it is subsumed to Fitzgerald’s own American dream, his own Gatsby-like desire, in writing *Gatsby*, to crash the upper stratas of manly literary repute, a quest that proceeds at the cultural expense of women and “feminized” men. An example of the latter is the novel’s working class “victim” of capitalism, George Wilson, an apathetic character represented with a marked lack of sympathy—indeed, seemingly blamed for his own class status due to his dejected lack of vigor.

Fitzgerald’s own famous romantic desires are thematized—and revised—in the

elevation in the novel of Nick over Gatsby, especially as the latter serves as a vessel for unreflective romanticism. Nick's (limited) identification with and attraction to Jay Gatsby as a paragon of white male romantic aspiration and desire emerges dramatically as the car passes through the valley's industrial desolation, replacing its significations of failure with triumph. Gatsby's "mobility" is emphasized. When Nick first passes through the valley of ashes with Tom Buchanan, he complains that, due to the drawbridge that spans the wasteland's "small foul river," there is always a halt there: one is forced to stop and contemplate its dismal meanings. Yet in Gatsby's car, as opposed to Tom's, Nick speeds through. Even when stopped by a policeman, Gatsby waves a card that secures the patrolman's instant apology—they fly angelically on "with fenders like wings [scattering] light through half Astoria" (72).

As of yet Nick cannot hold the opposed significations of American nightmare and American dream in his mind at the same time; here he chooses the dream, seduced by the purely material form of transcendence that literally "moves" him now—Gatsby's phallic, utopian car, "swollen" and "monstrous," and "terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns"—a magnificence Nick will learn was illicitly acquired. In this instant, however, Gatsby seems to Nick utterly free, free to move, to dream, to master. The approaching city of New York is itself transformed into "white heaps and sugar lumps," built, in the terms of Nick's vision, with impossibly guiltless "non-olfactory" money. In this sudden romance, all indeed is white, and whiteness is supreme. In his access of transcendence, Nick looks down on death, poverty, and the racially other competitors for American social mobility that the car passes—a funeral procession of

immigrants, with their “tragic eyes and short upper-lips of south-eastern Europe,” and a limousine full of “modish negroes” driven by a white chauffeur. But even this threatening reversal, a vision of the white master “enslaved,” is powerless in Gatsby’s car: embued with a heady sense of supremacy, Nick laughs “aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry” (73).²⁹ His experience of transcendence is marked by and excludes the dreams of both immigrant and ex-slave, a seemingly gratuitous and casual but actually crucial “whitening” of the knowledge that it is Nick’s role in the novel to acquire.

If Nick here experiences romance as a kind of euphoric transcendence, it is also as a denial of everything he sensibly knows about American life and society, even as, in the midst of his vision, he continues to register signs of suffering, division and conflict—the industrial waste, the poor white woman, police officer, immigrants, upwardly mobile Negroes. Gatsby is at this point still a shadowy, unknown figure, so Nick, lacking some particulars and suppressing some others, can still see in his neighbor a certain kind of masculine glamour, perhaps equivalent to Daisy’s romantic allure. At least for the duration of this ride, Gatsby’s wealth cuts a wide swath in the (material) world. Yet this triumphant vision, which forms the foundation of his identification with and advocacy for Jay Gatsby, is inadequate and Nick knows it. Gatsby’s version of romance constitutes a series of violent repressions, as the scene suggests with the image of the phallic car racing past signifiers of American social divisions of class, sex and race. Nick’s laugh is the climax of his fantasy of transcendence—he may, like Gatsby, desire this moneyed triumph and glamour, but, “slow thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on

[his] desires,” he has based his narrative authority on his ethical powers of restraint. (63-4). Romance, in other words, is just one of the “opposed ideas” that Nick must hold in opposition at the end of the novel, so his commitment to it must be incomplete.

Nick does not wait long, however, to encounter a representative of the opposed term, as he sits down to lunch with Gatsby’s underworld friend, Meyer Wolfsheim, a Jewish gangster portrayed with alarming anti-Semitic flare. If Gatsby stands for the desiring subject, before whose eyes appear prismatic dreams of self-transformation and transcendence, the predatorial Wolfsheim, with his physicality and disregard for ideals, is a figure for intrusive materiality and material corruption, suggesting the inevitable debasement of romantic ideals—the corruption of the Gatsbyan fantasy of transcendence. While Gatsby lives in his world of dreams, Wolfsheim punctures dreams, infamously having fixed the 1919 World Series. Nick finds the placid venality of the man hard to comprehend, especially as that venality mocks naïve American idealism: “It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people” (78).

Fitzgerald draws on anti-Semitic stereotypes to bring out the Wolfsheim’s significations of materiality and predation. He is not merely a fixer, but in his dual characterization as avaricious Jew and seeming gangster, represents an insatiable, and undifferentiating fidelity to the materiality of the physical—especially the physical coin. His bodily materiality is itself intrusive, as Nick’s fascination with the “two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril” illustrates. Physicality is also emphasized by the animal nature of this “Wolf”-man, who gorges himself “with ferocious delicacy,” and

uses human molars for cufflinks (75). As Gatsby's business partner, Wolfsheim has, through some shady means, facilitated the younger man's rapid accumulation of wealth, thus suggesting the literal dirtiness of "filthy lucre"—the opposite of the "non-olfactory" money that built New York City in Nick's vision. Wolfsheim functions, that is, instrumentally, to set off Nick's understanding of the impossibility of romance, an understanding crucial to Fitzgerald's construction of authorship in the novel.

The idea that *Gatsby* is "about" the corruption of the American dream, or more generally, in David Parker's words, about "the experience of a strong idealism . . . terminated by the failure of actuality," is a classic and powerful way of interpreting the novel.³⁰ It is equally conventional biographically to extrapolate these themes as keys to Fitzgerald's own life and romantic aspirations. Such readings suggest that *Gatsby*'s "themes" express Fitzgerald's disinterestedly humanistic desire to contribute to the store of human wisdom, or, more narrowly, they shed light on the biographical particulars of a celebrated literary figure. But these approaches fail to provide us with an understanding of modernist form as rhetoric, as a performance driven by and rhetorically, dialogically geared to the normative aesthetic expectations of a small group of influential authors and critics. If the ride in Gatsby's car allows Fitzgerald to perform his sense of the seminal or generative importance of an almost childlike dreaming to the rise of human or American civilization (visualized in the distant cargo ships and the white city), Nick's understanding of Wolfsheim, and, later and more importantly, of Daisy and of Gatsby himself, allows him to perform a *seeing past* these material surfaces to the fundamentally delusory quality of such dreams.

In this “seeing past” we have a particularly modernist adaptation of masculine transcendence—distinguished not through material signs, as Gatsby would use Daisy, or as Tom Buchanan uses his wealth, but by epistemological mastery—meaning not just knowledge, but a whole complex of inward, intellectual phenomena expressing the author’s simultaneously penetrative and holistic apprehension of reality: a vigorous perspicacity, finely attentive sensory powers, “impersonal” and “rigorous” intellectuality, and considered and discerning moral and ethical sensibilities. And in *sous-rature*, a certain distinguishing largeness of vision is added to this (dematerializing) modernist grocery list. In their corruptibility and their substitutability, romantic ideals, though they move men to the achievement of impossible deeds, nevertheless always disappoint, though most men lack the faculties to even notice the substitutions, much less lament them. In his treatment of the opposed meanings of romance Nick/Fitzgerald thus performs mastery not as a resolution of these antithetical ideas, but as a sort of literal “capacity” to encompass them as truths in juxtaposition. This masculine capaciousness allows Nick to appear as the (as we shall see) sole, sad “apprehendent” of a dynamic double truth; in the novel’s closing pages, reflecting alone on the beach in front of Gatsby’s house, Nick is the only character who can “have it both ways,” who transcends those truths so as to look at them, as it were, from above.

Biography is not, however, irrelevant here. Fitzgerald’s own romantic desire for transcendence underlies this choice of “material,” which allows Nick to perform a literary mastering of what in life might be said to have defeated Fitzgerald. As inveterate a dreamer as the outlandish Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald was

famously inclined to disappointment when his dreams came true. Dreaming brashly of literary glory, he was to find that his early success virtually crippled him as an artist; dreaming of winning the prize girl, he was to find in marrying Zelda an early ecstasy that swiftly degenerated into rivalry, alcoholism and (her) madness. Nick's *artistic* transcendence in *The Great Gatsby* thus represents Fitzgerald's attempt to thematize and overcome his own experience of the invincible contradiction between states of desire and states of realization—a bridging of that gap through the “impersonal” intellect that may be as “romantic” in its way as the dreams of Gatsby himself.

Dividing Miss Daisy

Judith Fetterley identifies another, more central pairing of desire and disappointment, of ideal and real in the novel, centering around Daisy Buchanan as a “symbolic counter” of the “twin emotional impulses of romanticism and moral indignation.” Daisy is both “invested” in and “divested” of male romantic desire, an operation “in which romance is finally but a strategy for male victory”: she inspires desires that she cannot possibly fulfill due to her moral unworthiness.³¹ But the “male victory” Fetterley notes is not just a moral one, but epistemological, and thus specific to Fitzgerald's masculinist modernist ambitions. Simply put, Daisy also embodies both poles of the antithesis that Nick must master as a “first-class intelligence”: ideality and materiality. Where Nick carefully differentiates between these two poles, observing both Daisy's ideal appeal and her embodied unworthiness, Gatsby naively confuses his dream with Daisy as a material object: “He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed

his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. . . .Then he kissed her. At his lips touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete” (117). Gatsby here exchanges his ideal vision for an “incarnated” physical reality—woman in her most stereotypically bodily, Eve-like mode, a bane of paradisaal masculine idealism.

Aware of his friend’s confusion, Nick, proves “incorruptible”: though he is susceptible to Daisy’s appeal, he is equal to the test, and thus can wisely and sadly report every step of Gatsby’s fatal progress. Whereas Gatsby is doomed by his dedication to only one of romance’s contradictory meanings, the survivor and chronicler Nick “comprehends” both. This “comprehension,” with its spatial implications of psychical enclosure, suggests that what is constructed here is a kind of masculine interiority, a space articulated by intellectual transcendence. Properly, there can be no “closure” of a paradox, since a paradox is precisely that which cannot be resolved. Transcendence, however, as a kind of passing beyond or above limits, creates an outside to these limits, thus substituting for “closure” a kind of *en*-closure, a space associated in Fitzgerald’s discourse with “true” artistic masculinity. Narratively, then, Nick’s trick is a double one: he “achieves closure” not only in “comprehending” antipodes, but in the way this operation articulates an integral authorial masculine identity able to “comprehend” the incomprehensible. In what follows I trace Nick’s final ascent to this attainment, launched as he facilitates and observes the resumption of romance between Gatsby and Daisy in Chapter V.

In this strange triangle, Nick not only identifies with Gatsby, but also desires

Daisy quite as much as her lover, as we see in his impressionistic attention to the details of her appeal. When she arrives at Nick's house to meet Gatsby, beneath her "three-cornered" hat, he is transfixed by her voice and physical presence: "The exhilarating ripple of her voice was a wild tonic in the rain. I had to follow the sound of it for a moment, up and down, with my ear alone before any words came through. A damp streak of hair lay like a dash of blue paint across her cheek and her hand was wet with glistening drops as I took it to help her from the car." With these fragments of perception, Nick's focus emphasizes less Daisy than his own (desiring) cognitive and emotional experience of her, snatched—as Conrad would say, "from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life."³² The comic success of the scene at Nick's house, where he plays host for Gatsby's planned reunion with Daisy, is perhaps equally due to its impressionism, as Nick minutely relates the social discomfort the three experience due to Gatsby's immense awkwardness in finally coming face to face with his beloved object.

Nick makes an excuse to leave the two lovers alone, so the exact details of how they resume their romance is unnarrated. But if our "protagonist" is not Gatsby but Nick, such details are unimportant, falling outside the circle of Nick's perception; we only need to know that, upon his return, Gatsby is exultant and Daisy overwhelmed. Nick, meanwhile, has stood outside "in the rain," gazing at Gatsby's house, and musing on Kant and thatched roofs. Though this rain—glistening on the hand of the romantic object herself—connotes Nick's sense of exclusion from the romantic possibilities Daisy evokes, his exclusion, a hard thing for an aging romantic, is a necessary thing for the would-be modernist author. In his role of observer, rather than ardently aspiring lover, the

hyperconscious Nick can note the disarray in the consciousness of Gatsby, who upon meeting Daisy leans his head so far back in his “strained counterfeit of perfect ease” that he knocks over the mantel clock. Nick is himself a kind of counterfeit—of a lover, a posture that enables both engagement *and* detachment. He can thus note with lyric intensity Daisy’s voice “full of aching, grieving beauty, [telling] only of her unexpected joy,” while not jeopardizing his stance of super-awareness and objectivity (94).

Indeed, Nick takes the role of ironic scientist, precisely and “impersonally” dissecting Gatsby’s overburdened emotions: “he had passed through two states and was entering upon a third. After his embarrassment and his unreasoning joy he was consumed with wonder at her presence. . . .He was running down like an overwound clock” (97). Specifically, Nick dissects the romantic’s encounter with his idealized object, an encounter Nick views as inevitably disappointing, as one whom experience has made wise. When Gatsby directs Daisy’s attention to the green light of her dock across the bay, the light that has symbolized her ideality to him in the state of desire, Nick comments, “Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished. . . .His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one” (98). Nick recognizes the situation—his sadness is the sadness of experience, and also of renunciation, an emotion accentuated when, at the end of the scene, Nick leaves the absorbed lovers to themselves in Gatsby’s house. As he moves away, they look at him, “remotely, possessed by intense life,” from the very precincts of romance, while he descends the funereal “marble steps into the rain, leaving them there together” (102).³³

This renunciation is strategic and limited—for Nick it is “just personal,” since the

operation of *sous-rature* necessitates that both the beautiful necessity and the attendant fatality of romantic aspiration stand in equipoise at the end of the novel. Nick here performs a turning of his back on the illusions of romance, yet does not deny the importance of romance for others, for mankind in general. Why is this renunciation necessary? The answer is in the way romance was disparagingly gendered in modernist discourse. Fitzgerald defines romance in his description of Gatsby's "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life"; yet this is less to say that Gatsby is a great desirer, or that certain objects are fabulously desirable, than that he imaginatively *responds* to those objects in life which occasion desire (6). Indeed, a belief in the "promises of life" suggests some way of looking at the world that not only is defined by desire, but also by the belief that such desires can and will be fulfilled—or in other words, an ideology. To be "responsive," to be emotional, to be imaginative—these were traits, as Kerr shows, that modernists and modernist critics abjured as feminine.³⁴ Consider Mencken's vituperatively gendered assessment of Gatsby himself—a "clown," with "the simple sentimentality of a somewhat sclerotic fat woman."³⁵ To be male and "romantic" is to be sentimental, to be feminized, not master but mastered by an ideology of desire, hope and faith. No protagonist, the doomed Gatsby rather exemplifies a form of misprision from which Fitzgerald must distance himself through the more properly skeptical judgments performed by Nick.

Nick thus suggests Fitzgerald's achievement of critical distance as a *fait accompli*—a public rewriting of Fitzgerald's own "literary masculinity" in modernist terms. Due to the success of his autobiographical first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in

which the hero, the self-indulgent Amory Blaine, was separated from the author himself by little more than a thin layer of retrospective irony, and a slightly thicker one of self-aggrandizing exaggeration, Fitzgerald was a proud if ironical romantic to his readers, if not to Gatsby's degree. Fitzgerald's meteoric rise and lavish celebrity lifestyle added to his demotic identification with all things romantic. But through Nick he now labels this attitude subjection, a deluded ideological faith in aspiration, destiny, feeling, romantic "promise," outlandish dreaming—while still affirming the (impossible) beauty of such idealisms. Of course, this ostensible disavowal, this trade-off of (puerile) romantic fulfillments for manly modernist prestige itself abets a "romantic" dream of fulfillment, indeed, an even more exclusive one: the achievement of literary renown and the esteem of posterity.

The "Old Whore"

Strikingly, as one of the most popular and highly paid magazine fiction writers of his time, the same year he was writing *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald wrote stories that performed quite different attitudes toward romance, and for a female audience. Charles R. Hearn, surveying the varieties of formulas that Fitzgerald employed in this lucrative venue, describes the prevalence of the rags-to-riches formula in Fitzgerald's magazine fiction, complete with the materialistic happy ending: "By far the most common kind of happy ending in the stories is one in which the hero is rewarded with material success." Bruccoli reports that in 1924, deeply in debt, Fitzgerald wrote ten stories for *Hearst International* and *The Saturday Evening Post* that financed the writing of *Gatsby* later that year. In

some of these, for example, “Rags Martin-Jones and the Prince of Wales,” and “The Sensible Thing,” the ideological critique of the American dream that so many critics have noted in *The Great Gatsby* finds its propagandic reverse image.³⁶ Hearn notes that, “In a substantial majority of the popular stories, the fulfillment of the dream of success is simply a necessary condition for happiness, and the values clustered around the myth of success—ambition, hard work, money, mobility—are taken for granted.”³⁷ The 1924 stories, indeed, represent Fitzgerald’s first efforts to capitalize on promulgating this “myth of success: ‘My whole heart was in my first trash. . . . I never really ‘wrote down’ until after the failure of [his 1923 play,] the *Vegetable*.’”³⁸ As the word “trash” suggests, the author felt that this wildly remunerative writing cheapened and indeed feminized him as an artist. In a 1929 letter to Hemingway, Fitzgerald expressed his sense of his “feminine” economic dependency on his magazine writing, even while bragging of its rewards: “the *Post* now pays the old whore \$4000 a screw. But now its because she has mastered the 40 positions—in her youth one was enough.”³⁹

Perhaps even more feminizing than this lucrative “piecework” was Fitzgerald’s sense of forced ideological servitude. Indeed his targeting of Gatsbyan belief in the novel may well represent a deliberate attempt to counter his public association with this feminizing ideology and its organs of dissemination in mass culture. Andreas Huysmann has famously described mass culture as modernism’s threatening “other,” an extension of the 19th century association of mass cultural productions with woman while “real, authentic [high] culture remain[ed] the prerogative of men.”⁴⁰ Though Fitzgerald tries to submerge his own elitism by repeatedly praising Myrtle Wilson’s “vitality,” that

unpleasant character, with her tasteless penchant for magazine reading and relentless, indiscriminating consumerism, suggests Fitzgerald's sense of ignominy—not to say resentment—in “servicing” his mass magazine-reading audience.

According interpretive centrality to Nick over Gatsby helps us understand how the novel both honors “feminine” creativity, sensitivity and emotion in Gatsby, but repudiates these traits as unmasculine in Nick. With his masses of shirts of all colors and textures, and the gauche baroque of his house, Gatsby is the very figure of the emotional, undisciplined, and undereducated “romantic artist” that critics accused Fitzgerald of being. Nick describes Gatsby's character in just such terms: “He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way.” Gatsby is a nice fellow, but a gaudy, indiscriminating creator. As Myrtle's lack of aesthetic discrimination damns her character in juxtaposition with Nick, who can report her gaffes for comic effect, so does Gatsby's lack of taste suggest Nick's aesthetic discrimination. As we saw earlier, Gatsby is also associated with the superficiality of the magazine aesthetic: after the character narrates his implausibly romantic life story, Nick compares it to “skimming hastily through a dozen magazines” (71). Taken together, we can see a powerful gendering of what we might call “modernist taste” as an exclusively masculine phenomenon. This hierarchical principle not only separates men from women, but men from other men.

Unclosed Closure

One crucial aspect of modernist form clarified by a self-constructive reading is the

cultural work of closure, especially as we understand closure as the accomplishment of identity, rather than some climactic statement of theme. I would argue that a kind of closure is exactly what Fitzgerald seeks to construct in the novel, some kind of closed and impenetrable boundary between “true” masculinity and that complex of traits and desires modernists called “femininity.” As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests with regard to male homosexuality, the very murkiness of boundaries between the culturally sanctioned and the abjured is threatening and encourages extremes of self-regulation—encourages, indeed, masculine performativity in its most hyperbolic forms.⁴¹ As such, the boundary Fitzgerald constructs in *Gatsby* represents a kind of closing off of threatening possibilities—masculinity as circumscription, a circling of the wagons. But what is inside this circle? Butler’s theory of performativity suggests it might be empty—a potentiality, a performance space. The deployment of *sous-rature* constructs precisely this kind of masculine interiority in *Gatsby*, a (strangely womblike) epistemological space capable of enclosing contradictory modern truths. The end of the novel finishes the circle, providing the literal “closure” to this constructed version of masculine integrity, in the form of Nick’s final epiphanic observations on romance and human and American history. A process of increasing isolation marks Nick’s final progress to this crowning moment, while at the same time, the holes in *Gatsby*’s backstory are satisfactorily filled in. No longer quizzical, Nick takes complete control of the narrative, omnisciently narrating *Gatsby*’s early psychological career as a romantic idealist. Disavowing his class origins as the son of “shiftless” farming people, the young James Gatz, we find, sprung “from his Platonic conception of himself,” inventing “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” (104). Privy now to all details, Nick identifies this invention as an expression of a grandiose puerility, though marked by a certain saving purity of belief.

This increasing narrative coherence contributes to the relief that Nick assumes against the backdrop of Gatsby’s downfall. When the latter’s romantic designs and class pretensions are deflated by the violent reality of the literally “conservative” Tom Buchanan, Nick begins to accord to Gatsby an underdog sympathy. Drawing Nick even closer is his identification with Gatsby’s passionate but essentially narcissistic desire to recapture the past. Nick analyzes this desire as a confused yearning to recover not a lost object, but the chimerical self that had desired that object: “He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. . . .” (117). Nick feels obscurely hailed by this desire: “Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I heard somewhere a long time ago” (118). He opens his mouth to speak this lost phrase, but what he almost remembers disappears in the air, “incommunicable forever.”

This is an important passage in at least two ways. Nick’s hazy recollection suggests his identification with the essence of Gatsby’s longing, while he rearticulates his disassociation with those expressions of that longing that mark Gatsby as callow or feminine. Thus instead of simply repudiating the “appalling sentimentality” of Gatsby’s

romanticism, which would amount to a simple resolution of the opposition between romance and worldly fatalism, Nick shows again that he may in fact share it, though in a “higher,” or more sophisticated form. Whereas Nick was (temporarily) swayed to actual identification with his romantic friend during the ride in Gatsby’s car, he now shows that his identification may take place at some different, perhaps even universal, level—a suggestion that opens up the question of transcendence answered, I argue, in the closing epiphany.

Secondly, this ostentatious incommunicability is itself a form of *sous-rature*, juxtaposing certainty with unknowability. While Nick’s vague meditation has a fascinating content in itself, suggesting a lost origin to desire, and subsequent displacements ala Lacan’s account of desire, this content is subsumed to Fitzgerald’s performance ethic. What is performed is a masterfully simultaneous knowing and unknowing, with the unknowable, in this case, an absent presence that is encircled by narration. Nick is master enough to own, in other words, the unknowability of this mysteriously determining psychic structure at the heart of desire. His “negative capability” is a manly intellectual equanimity in the face of the unknowable, and this epistemological sufficiency *refrains* from grasping after truth. This “new” sufficiency is suggested by the knowing and unapologetic way in which Nick acknowledges what he *does not know*, securely, forthrightly. But this seeming anti-positivist mode in modernist symbolic practice is itself covertly positivist in its gesture of incontrovertibility. It is, to quote a recent newsmaker, to claim a “known unknown” rather than pretending to total knowledge, and this stance claims an almost unlimited complexity and indeterminacy as

components of masculine intellectuality.⁴²

Gatsby has closed down his house to accommodate secret meetings with Daisy, and, in a showdown in a New York hotel, has been discredited in her eyes by Tom Buchanan as an illegitimate “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (137). His “presumptuous little flirtation” thus ended, the “holocaust” is completed when Daisy, forced by the victorious Tom to drive home from the New York altercation with her now-ex-lover, runs over Myrtle Wilson in Gatsby’s car. Mistaking the identity of the driver on a hint from Tom, George Wilson subsequently blames and murders Gatsby, but not before Nick allies himself with his friend against the Buchanans and their moneyed legitimacy: “‘They’re a rotten crowd,’ I shouted [to Gatsby], across the lawn. ‘You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.’” Yet immediately, Nick reasserts his critical distance: “I’ve always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end” (162). Finally, Nick himself presides over Gatsby’s posthumous affairs, the once lavish host now abandoned by all his former guests, as well as “business” associates like Meyer Wolfsheim. Nick’s steadfast integrity is brought into sharp focus by this abandonment, while blame for the unsteadfast Daisy steadily accumulates, thanks to Nick’s reminders in the text. Daisy’s betrayal of her lover after his death is thus an absence that looms increasingly large throughout chapter IX, culminating at Gatsby’s barely attended, rain soaked funeral. There, Nick recriminates, “I could only remember, without resentment, that Daisy hadn’t sent a message or a flower” (183). For the third time in the novel, Nick makes a protestation of detachment even as he damns a female character for moral failure, “impersonality” guaranteeing a certain moral serenity

in judgments of the bearer.

Daisy thus takes the brunt of the moral fall for Gatsby's destruction while Tom, whom Nick subsequently meets on a New York street, is too childlike for Nick to even refuse to shake his hand—even with Tom's probable culpability in Gatsby's murder. The split with Jordan is also completed, and Nick's discredited epistemological rival quickly becomes engaged after the breakup, presumably to a member of the same class that Nick repudiates in the Buchanans. In the end, Nick emerges as sole witness and judge of Gatsby's history. Before he retreats from the east in moral revulsion, Nick pays a last visit to the Long Island beachfront where he first saw Gatsby's trembling silhouette in the night. Meditating on the “inner” meaning of Gatsby's life, he now penetrates from aspect to essence, and in so doing, closing the outline of the authoritative, authorial, masculine identity traced in the narrative. As with another kind of romancer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, moonlight facilitates this visionary move, which here begins to “melt away” the “inessential” (that is, phenomenal) houses to yield to Nick a vision of human history moved by Gatsbyan desire:

I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees . . . had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human desires; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of . . . something commensurate with his capacity for wonder. (189)

This “pandering” of the New World is thus a sort of lie of the object, one that sets in motion, for Fitzgerald, all “human desire”—by which he means male desire, as the novel's gendering of subject and object relations makes clear. As Daisy is blamed for her inability to deliver the romantic fulfillments expected of her by idealizing men like

Gatsby and Nick, so does the New World fatally lure desiring men to similar dooms of corruption and disappointment. This displacement of moral compromise from the desirer onto the desired is in an important sense the “essence” of Gatsby’s story. The fault, it seems, is not in our selves, but in the impure object, a dangerous but necessary “first cause” of the kind of corruption that Nick excuses in separating Gatsby from what “preyed” on him, the “foul dust [that] floated in the wake of his dreams” (6). Yet despite this suggestion of male blamelessness, the “universal” longings that Gatsby (in comparison to Daisy or Tom) rather benignly represents, are, in this final epiphany, indistinguishable from a lust for conquest, or even rape, as is suggested by the New World’s enticing “fresh green breast” and Gatsby’s own initial plundering of Daisy, where “he took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously” (156).

The “pandering” object of desire thus literally “asks for it,” exculpating the violence and selfishness of this desire, which ultimately focuses not on the object itself, but on what Lionel Trilling calls an “ideal of self,” a longed-for transformation of the desirer the object can only facilitate. In this critique, Nick transcends both romance and its attendant corruption, and is himself romantically transformed, as we see in the lyricism of his suddenly universalizing, epiphanic mode, which opens out from Gatsby to an all-inclusive “man.” The fatality of romance is also figured in Nick’s continuation of his meditation on the determinative pastness of all desire, that absent presence which drives the will to conquest, but whose real object, the masterful (and implicitly white male) unitary self, nostalgically unabridged by the castrating disappointments and repressions of the social, is always-already in the past, “somewhere back in that vast

obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night” (189). Nick simultaneously debunks and makes good this nostalgic notion of lost wholeness, revealing it as a fiction, while, fictionally, achieving it in his construction of his own authorial mastery.

As for the nation that raveningly availed itself of that “fresh green breast,” Nick offers a moral, evoking in the gaping of those Dutch sailors the prehistory of a morally bankrupt modernity, before America’s dreams were sidetracked from transcendence to dirty cash. Money, that most blameworthy of objects, allows the murderously careless Buchanans to rule with their immense, idea-less wealth. Thus is the romanticism of the American dream shown to be an always-already foreclosed or betrayed possibility, a crossed-out term, yet movingly, seductively visible and productive in human affairs. Uniquely wise to this contradiction, only modernist Nick stands intact at the end, acknowledging and enclosing both terms of a paradoxical equation: mankind’s unfettered capacity for dreaming, and the doom of disappointment and corruption accruing to all such dreams. In modernist terms, he stands there finally a man, visionary, transcendent, authorial.

Notes:

¹ Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 129.

² Frances Kerr, “Feeling ‘Half Feminine’: Modernism and the Politics of Emotion in *The Great Gatsby*,” *American Literature* 68.2 (1996): 405-31. 405.

³ Matthew Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 51.

⁴ Edmund Wilson, "F. Scott Fitzgerald," in *Modern Critical Views: F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985) 7, 10. Always a wildly self-deprecating egotist, Fitzgerald was later to echo Millay's view, commenting in "The Crack-up" that he "had always been only a mediocre caretaker of most of the things left in my hands, even of my own talent." Wilson was later to revise this pre-*Gatsby* judgment, and, after Fitzgerald's death, became his classmate's posthumous editor. See F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-up*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1996). 71.

⁵ Fitzgerald to Frances Scott Fitzgerald, 31 October, 1939, *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Matthew Bruccoli (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 62.

⁶ Rascoe's first comment is quoted in Bruccoli, *Grandeur*, 120. His second comment is quoted in Kerr, 407.

⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Babylon Revisited and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 152.

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "queer," (accessed June 7, 2005).

⁹ Quoted in Bruccoli, *Grandeur*, 216.

¹⁰ Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald*, 259.

¹¹ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1983), 176. Kenneth Eble, for example, has *Gatsby* at the center and Nick "at the side—too cool, too reasonable, too moral, too much the realist and the observer to do more than touch the center. Matthew Bruccoli describes Nick as "partially involved," and "reluctantly compelled to judgment." Milton R. Stern argues for Nick's moral reliability—indeed it is clear that for Stern, Nick is so admirable that he stands as proof Fitzgerald's own moral vision. Stern's judgment here attests to Nick's successful functioning as authorial stand-in for Fitzgerald in the novel. See Kenneth Eble, *F. Scott Fitzgerald Revised Edition*, (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1977), 95; Bruccoli, *Grandeur*, 223; Milton R. Stern, *The Golden Moment: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1970), 192-198.

¹² Scott S. Derrick, *Monumental Anxieties: Homoerotic Desire and Feminine influence in 19th Century U.S. Literature*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997), 201.

¹³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995), 60. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

¹⁴ Turnbull, 259.

¹⁵ According to Fitzgerald himself, both Mencken and Wilson commented on the incompleteness of *Gatsby*'s characterization, a reaction from the book's seeming primary audience that was perhaps at some level intended. If for this audience, the novel itself brings the centrality of its title character into question, then we need to consider other candidates. In a 1925 letter to Wilson, Fitzgerald comments "You are right about *Gatsby* being blurred and patchy. I never at any 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." Where *Gatsby* is an amalgam, and incomplete, Nick is finely articulated and authorially articulate, further suggesting his centrality to Fitzgerald's aims for the novel. Alternately, in apologizing about this missing account to his most influential critic, Fitzgerald may have been attempting to deflect Wilson's notice of perhaps intentional operations in the novel which prejudicially equate Nick with Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald to Wilson, Spring 1925, *Letters*, 341-42.

¹⁶ Derrick finds "intellectual muscle-flexing" in Fitzgerald's comment, in a letter to Thomas Boyd, that he was reading Homer during the comp. of *Gatsby*: "I'm going to read nothing but Homer + Homeric literature—and history 540-1200 A.D. until I finish my novel." Derrick, 194.

¹⁷ Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981), 72.

¹⁸ Fetterley, 81.

¹⁹ Fetterley, 83.

²⁰ For a view of Daisy as created by a more sympathetic, feminist-leaning Fitzgerald, see Sarah Beebe Fryer's intriguing, *Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).

²¹ Fetterley, 85.

²² Interestingly, the story that Fitzgerald wrote just after composing *Gatsby*, "The Rich Boy," begins with a warning against trusting just such self-declarations, as if the author wished to counsel readers to look more

deeply into Nick: “When I hear a man proclaim himself an ‘average, honest, open fellow,’ I feel pretty sure that he has some definite and perhaps terrible abnormality which he has agreed to conceal—and his protestation of being average and honest and open is his way of reminding himself of his misprision.” More unanswerable than arguments about Nick’s contradictory narratorial “unreliability,” this passage, if it does indeed bear on the just-finished *Gatsby*, may bespeak Fitzgerald’s repressed sense that feelings and desires that were indeed component in his personality must be banished if he was to obviate certain criticisms of his work. Perhaps what Fitzgerald felt to be his own “terrible abnormalities” were precisely those abjected “feminine” traits and homoerotic impulses that were banished in the modernist aesthetic, but that Kerr traces as emerging (if obscurely) in Nick’s narrative.

²³ Nick’s description of Jordan as not a woman but as a “person” here raises fascinating questions. With her “jauntiness,” her “wan, charming face,” the “thin moustache of sweat on her upper lip,” and her spare, athletic and boyish body, Jordan Baker displays an amalgam of gender traits that is intriguing and complex. A programmatic reading might take Jordan’s “mannishness” to be explicable by the degree to which she possesses “masculine” faculties of intellectual penetration. Yet I would suggest several less reductive alternatives. First, Jordan is a sexual foil for Daisy, setting off, in the scene at the Buchanans’ home, Daisy’s transcendent womanliness and desirability. With Nick and Jordan’s romance commencing at the same time as Nick and Gatsby’s relationship, Jordan may also be a sort of “beard,” a disavowal for Nick of his closeted homoerotic attraction for another man. Frances Kerr takes Nick’s attraction for this mannish woman to be of a piece with his attraction to feminine men like Gatsby and Mr. McKee—homoerotic feelings that register Fitzgerald’s transgressive desire to resist the divisions of the masculinist modernist ethos. Yet considering the trajectory and ending of the novel, which so thoroughly fulfills the demands of that ethic, such feelings may only serve to make visible the human cost of those compulsory repressions. Whatever it cost him, Fitzgerald bowed deeply to the modernist aesthetic in *Gatsby*, a sort of deal with the devil that, if it did not increase his happiness during his lifetime, certainly positively impacted his bid for a place in literary posterity.

²⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-up*, 69.

²⁵ Keats to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December, 1817, *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1899), 277.

²⁶ Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1973), 11.

²⁷ Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 4

²⁸ Derrick, 1.

²⁹ As Walter Benn Michaels argues in *Our America*, a nativist inclination did mark Fitzgerald’s fiction, though as Alan Margolies points out, Fitzgerald also satirized then-current theories of Nordicism, but not only by Lothrop Stoddard, the theorist who critics have believed the buffoonish Tom Buchanan means when he discusses “The Rise of the Coloured Empires’ by this man Goddard” (17). There actually was a racist and eugenicist named Henry Herbert Goddard who worried about a cumulative drop in the national IQ as an effect of immigration. Stoddard also believed in restricting immigration and white solidarity. For a thorough, if non-rhetorically focused overview of how Fitzgerald deployed race and ethnicity in his works, see Alan Margolies, “The Maturing of F. Scott Fitzgerald,” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 43.1 (1997): 75-93.

³⁰ See, for example, Marius Bewley, “Scott Fitzgerald and the Collapse of the American Dream” and David Parker, “*The Great Gatsby*: Two Versions of the Hero,” in *Modern Critical Views: F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985).

³¹ *Resisting Reader*, 73.

³² Conrad, 13.

³³ As with the end of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, rain here conjures sympathy for the protagonist as he suffers a (professionally) *welcome* exclusion. Both authors exploit pathos for losses they themselves arguably orchestrate for self-serving reasons. Nick is sad though his renunciation of romance might earn Fitzgerald a place in literary posterity. Hemingway’s Frederic Henry, walking into the rain a sudden widower at the conclusion of *A Farewell to Arms*, is free from the domestic “bliss” of wife and child that would have impinged on his soulful (and professionally self-authorizing) existential suffering.

³⁴ Also see Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991).

³⁵ Quoted in Kerr, 405.

³⁶ Brucoli notes that “The Sensible Thing” presaged *Gatsby* in its message of loss. Yet the story nevertheless describes a rags to riches story very similar to Scott’s own marital history—a young man winning a girl thanks to his acquisition of “money and a promising future.” See Brucoli, *Grandeur*, 190.

³⁷ “F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Popular Magazine Formula Story of the Twenties.” Charles M. Hearn. *Journal of American Culture*, 18.3 (1995): 33-40, 35.

³⁸ Quoted in Brucoli, *Grandeur*, 191.

³⁹ James R. Mellow, *Invented Lives: F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 345.

⁴⁰ Huyssen, 47.

⁴¹ Sedgwick’s account of the social workings of male homosexual panic can be found in *Between Men*, particularly chapter five, “Toward the Gothic: Terrorism and Homosexual Panic.” See *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

⁴² In a press conference in February 2002, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld explained, more lucidly than this quote was received, “There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns--the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones. “‘Foot in Mouth’ Prize Goes to Rumsfeld,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 2 December 2003, 15(A).

CHAPTER 2:

“BITCHED”: FEMINIZATION, IDENTITY AND THE “HEMINGWAYESQUE” IN *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

In comparison with *The Great Gatsby*, where narratorial irony modulates the pain of Nick Carraway’s initial sense of feminization, it is puzzling to consider the intensity of Hemingway’s representation of male feminization in *The Sun Also Rises*. With its seeming focus on “bulls, balls and booze,” the novel might be said to have initiated the cult of *cojones* that is Hemingway’s popular legacy; yet the novel itself, full of male humiliation and tender homosocial intimacies, repeatedly transgresses this image.¹

Though narrator Jake Barnes, like his creator, served on the Italian front in the war, and is also a journalist, outdoorsman, tennis amateur, and bullfighting aficionado, Jake is not only impotent from a wound sustained during his military service, but faces intense humiliations at the hands of the sexually peripatetic “New Woman,” Lady Brett Ashley, and even receives a beating over her at the hands of the much-deprecated Robert Cohn. Like Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, or Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Jake is a patently “Hemingwayesque” figure; yet how do we square this sensitive, socially passive observer, given to tears and quiet resignation, with the public and private legend of machismo that was already developing around Hemingway at this time?²

To understand these contradictions we should start, as I discussed in the introduction, with the notion of male authorship Hemingway exhorts to Fitzgerald, which demands a male subject who must first be wounded in order to “write seriously”: “Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be

hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist."³ With this paradigmatic modernist emphasis on a discipline of "scientific" impersonality in the face of male defeats and humiliations, it is perhaps less shocking to find Hemingway—who was, after all, aesthetic acolyte to both Stein and Pound in Paris before writing *The Sun Also Rises*, and who wrote reverentially of spotting "Mr. Joyce" in cafes there—depicting the enabling and ennobling possibilities of the experience of male feminization, at least for himself. Yet, though Hemingway embraced many aspects of high modernist aesthetics, his biographies document a man who had little interest being 'one of many' in any situation. In the boxing metaphors he often used to discuss writing, Hemingway imagined "fighting" authors like James, Turgenev, Maupassant, Stendhal, and Tolstoy for a kind of literary championship of the world; he thus needed to separate his own form of authorial vision from that of other artists and writers (though he freely admitted that, of dead writers, "Mr. Shakespeare" was "The Champion").⁴ Thus for Hemingway, feminization can enable only the special artist, the *Hemingwayesque* artist, who alone is able to wrest truth and literary meaning from his humiliation. To this end, Hemingway employs in his first novel a technique of authorial self-construction to imply his own exclusive possession of just this faculty. Jake is what Sally Robinson in *Marked Men* terms an "author surrogate," a character "who play[s] out, with varying degrees of literalness, the wounding of white male authority."⁵ The author surrogate, that is, metonymically evokes the material author himself as victim of wrongs done to masculine superiority—as part of a bid rhetorically to restore it. In this way, Jake evokes his creator in the paradoxical

posture of victimhood and superiority. Thus, though Jake lingers long in the discursive position of hapless victim, his feminization ultimately elevates him as one of the novel's only true men. This is possible in the sense that, both epistemologically and morally, Jake *masters* his own feminization, not only in the objective report he provides of its devastations, but as we will see, in the resigned dignity with which—despite exquisite vulnerabilities—he endures it. If, as I will argue in this chapter, Hemingway frames feminization as a universal condition for men, he also suggests that the shame of that condition is *not to know it*, shifting the basis for evaluating manhood and authorship to matters of epistemology and comportment—making how one *reacts* to feminization the central issue to authorial masculinity. For example, when Brett rejects Robert Cohn as a lover after a brief tryst in San Sebastian, for weeks afterward, Cohn is in denial about his loss of agency in the relationship; Jake, however, takes the historical reversal represented by Brett's sexual agency in stride, though it pains him terribly; and he displays a philosophical, fatalistic dignity which contrasts sharply with Cohn's romantic delusions and ignoble violence.

Thus if we take operations of “Hemingwayesque” self-construction seriously, operations that instruct us, that is, to be more like Jake than Cohn, they prove a normative construct for men, a vehicle for Hemingway carefully to asseverate his own identity as the template for all masculine identity—a self-constructive practice, I would add, that shapes all his subsequent novels. In paradoxically transforming a vanquished masculine identity into authorial mastery, Hemingway performs through the feminized Jake a recuperation of masculine authority exclusive to himself, even as he depicts the shattering

of that authority for men in general. It is in this sense of performance that Jake accomplishes what I would call the central aim of this famous first novel: to set Hemingway symbolically above his literary competitors, to dramatize his creator's exclusive apprehension of difficult truths, and to suggest a form of professional identity in which authorship and manliness were not mutually exclusive.

But the very self-referentiality of what I am here calling the “Hemingwayesque,” a set of traits subtly exalted in the novel, raises a difficult question. For if what or who Hemingway advocates for in his novels is not some particular group to which he belongs—say, men, or white men, or even white male authors—but his own anxious, aspiring, biographical self, how do we reconcile this author's manifest anxieties about gender with the many *other* normative emphases signified by the “Hemingwayesque,” whether we read for race or class, or even for the subtly prescriptive stands his work takes on ethics, politics, aesthetics, or morality? A “Hemingwayesque” protagonist, that is, necessarily comprehends many forms of “identity” besides his mere biological maleness and attendant social masculinity: he is also typically white, American, and of the better-off, better-educated class; he desires certain objects, and follows demanding “codes” of behavior; he respects certain books and scorns others; he has distinct sensitivities and affective capacities; and he has certain (if sometimes shifting) political and philosophical affinities. Isolating any one of these traits, it is not difficult to find, for example, a casually virulent white supremism in Hemingway's work, as Toni Morrison, reading *To Have and Have Not*, asserts in *Playing in the Dark*; or a nativist impulse, as Walter Benn Michaels, in *Our America*, finds in *The Sun Also Rises*; or any number of

other “agendas”—of class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion—for which Hemingway’s works might provide strong textual support.⁶ Yet as some critics have begun to point out, it may be insufficient to analyze such agendas independent of the whole complex of social, professional, civic, and familial identities that we all so transiently inhabit, even in the course of a single hour or day.

The observation that gendered difference has been naively overvalued over other, interrelated forms of identity is a foundational tenet of the burgeoning field of whiteness studies. For whiteness scholars, to blandly discuss what “men” do, or what defines “masculinity,” as if this word named a singular, “monolithic” category, is not only to ignore such specificities as race, class or ethnicity that differently “inflect” how masculinity is lived by real, embodied men, but it is also to ignore the specificity of the category of white masculinity itself. Left unspecified, that is, white masculinity has tended to function as a sort of normative, originary “master brand” against which all other differences are measured. To mark white masculinity is to acknowledge it as one condition among many, and not the preferred or original category from which all other forms of identity differ. Taking this argument one step further, Thomas DiPiero’s recent *White Men Aren’t* questions the *necessary* importance of gender as an analytical category at all:

It certainly seems true, as Freud claimed, that fundamental antagonisms pertaining to the way we live our bodies inform the organization of our psyches at the most basic level. But what I am contesting is the contention that such a psychic organization needs to take place strictly or even largely along gender lines.⁷

DiPiero's exemplar of this overvaluation is, naturally enough, Freud himself, whose selection of sexual difference, the difference between males and females, as the primary "antagonism" of psychological development, DiPiero argues functioned to repress, even in Freud's own case studies, the influences of other social registers of difference. The result is improperly to read gender into—and over—those other differences.

DiPiero's notion of identity as multiple, contingent, and even situational suggests that the heavy emphasis by feminist critics on the binary of sexual difference is merely arbitrary, a repetition of Freud's—and culture's—mistake. Yet gender may not be so easily "disarticulated" from other determinants of identity, especially in the case of masculinity. Indeed, it might be more productive to consider this less as a "mistake" than as a *clue*, a way to observe how sexual difference works with other forms of difference in the forming and maintenance of social identities. It may be that the heavy critical emphasis on this point reflects how gender sometimes functions, by *itself* subsuming and appropriating other forms of identity to its own imperatives. This is not to make out of gender what Frederic Jameson calls an "untranscendable horizon," recentering it as the only framework that matters, but rather to inquire into the complex and varied ways gendered difference interacts—often forcefully—with other forms of difference.

DiPiero's gender seems at times almost a secondary effect, not only "inflected *by*" other forms of identity, but "largely comprised *of* these things" (DiPiero's italics).⁸ This last formulation is telling. If what we understand as gender is an accumulation of effects in other registers of difference, then it might be that we are not overvaluing gender's influence, but *undervaluing* it. In theorizing sexual difference as subject to "inflection,"

DiPiero overlooks the perhaps more primary ways that gender, and masculinity in particular, *itself* inflects—and may even drive other forms of difference, especially in periods of historical stress and change.

Yet if modes of identity, of difference, are inseparable from each other, in particular historical and biographical contexts, some forms of identity can take precedence over others, even driving and co-opting them. Indeed, there are certainly many contexts in which race, class, or sexuality eclipse or outweigh concerns about gender. In *The Sun Also Rises* we find a veritable buffet of hierarchized identities—not only the novel’s harshly devalued women, “niggers,” “faggots” and Jews, but aristocrats, romantics, alcoholics—and crucially, a few aspirants to literary fame, notably Robert Cohn and his fiancé, Frances. Yet as I will show, the novel’s handling and ranking of these differences does more than attest to one man’s or even one group’s misogyny, anti-Semitism or homophobia; rather, it serves an imperative of more intense concern to this particular author: to define the qualities of the proper man—the “Hemingwayesque” author—that Hemingway wished to privilege and project in his debut as a modern novelist.

At the heart of my argument is the observation that, in *The Sun Also Rises*, sexual difference is the driving force behind the novel’s other iterations of difference. Class, religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, aesthetics, epistemology—these differences are used instrumentally to establish the superiority of one version of gender: modern authorial masculinity, which Hemingway performs through Jake Barnes. Moreover, the difference between men and women is also invoked, improbably as it might seem, to differentiate

between males. This may seem strange because, at least biologically, sexual difference would seem to be eliminated when all concerned parties are, normatively speaking, “properly” equipped with penises. Yet in Hemingway’s depiction of male homosocial relations, hierarchical differences between men are gendered to accord with the division, male/inauthentic male, where to be “*less male*” in any sense is to be “like a woman.” This “to have and have not” standard of masculinity requires Hemingway to redefine manhood in some startling ways—especially in light of his public image of cultivated machismo. This chapter will thus examine Hemingway’s deployment of the trope of male feminization, and his performance of exemplary mental and moral “masculinities” as part of his influential construction of culturally authoritative modern authorship. But because of the very multiplicity and interdependence of different elements in identity itself, I begin by interrogating how one form of identity, in Hemingway’s case, gender, can become a sort of master difference, one that uses other forms of identity as *criteria* for manhood.

Marshalling Identities

If there is widespread agreement that masculine identity is a central concern in Hemingway’s work, there is anything but a consensus about *how* it functions there. For many reasons, not least his aggressively manly public posture, Hemingway’s representations of masculinity have divided scholars interested in how gender and sexuality figure in his work. For some, like Frederick Crews and biographer Kenneth Lynn, Hemingway is the anxious patriarch, paragon of a kind of masculinity so unstable

as to require constant, painful proofs; for others, like Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes, or more recently, Thomas Strychacz, he is the modernist hero reclaimed, a tough-minded explorer even of the ambiguities of gender and sexuality seemingly foreclosed by his famous obsession with manhood.⁹ Taken together, however, these approaches suggest a kind of stalemate that has not advanced our understanding of this surprisingly complex figure. In response, I would argue the deep interrelation of these demystified and heroized Hemingways, and the necessity for an explanatory framework encompassing both the normative and transgressive expressions of masculinity that give rise to them.

Such a framework would require acknowledging the fundamental *strangeness* of the man. Indeed, perhaps no major American writer has exhibited a more contradictory combination of machismo and hypersensitivity, of heteronormative and homoerotic impulses, of laconicism and expressiveness. Recent scholarship has given us an admittedly more complex Hemingway, “interested” in homoeroticism and sexual role exchange, and even gender performativity. But this figure has tended to be advanced as a sexual progressive, his “androgyny” suggesting, as Crews puts it, “that Hemingway entertained broader sympathies than his manly code implied.”¹⁰ But must our Hemingway be filleted into such a divided figure? Might not both impulses, that of Hemingway’s “manly code” and of his transgressive “sympathies,” spring from the same root?

I argue that a sense of male feminization is at the heart of both Hemingway’s sexual orthodoxy and his transgressions, since his proper modern artist, pressured, as we have seen, both culturally and professionally to demonstrate manly authority, must yet

abandon many traditional markers of that authority precisely due to the changing conditions of modernity. “Hemingwayesque” identity is key to this paradox in the way it articulates, not, as we would expect, traditionally physical or socially dominant forms of masculinity—forms of masculinity which Hemingway represents as no longer adequate to a feminizing modernity—but moral and intellectual faculties that allow the author, as opposed to the common man, subtly to overcome his disempowerment by acknowledging it in his art, “scientifically” turning “damned hurts” into new forms of modern knowledge. For Hemingway to assert masculine authority, that is, he must disavow dominance itself—especially physical and sexual dominance—in favor of traits he suggests are more epistemologically adequate to modern conditions. He does this by relentlessly, prejudicially contrasting Jake with the novel’s racial, sexual and literary others, a kind of solipsistic foil system much like that employed by Fitzgerald, that limns out the superior epistemological profile of the Hemingwayesque author.¹¹

To see this system in action we begin with the novel’s preeminent foil, Robert Cohn, a character whose main function is arguably to embody or enact difference itself. I have said that Hemingway makes sexual difference into a kind of master difference in the novel, one that uses other forms of difference as criteria for manhood. Robert Cohn illustrates this phenomenon in the way that each of his distinguishing characteristics—his literary aspirations, his Jewishness, even his niceness—are framed as *sexual* differences, differences, that is, from the normative Jake. A novelist who, despite his mediocrities, physically overmasters and sleeps with Jake’s apparent ‘true love,’ Cohn yet helps to establish the feminized Jake’s claim to authorial masculinity. Cohn is crucial to this

definitional project because, if the baseline of modern masculinity is, as I will show Hemingway suggesting, a state of feminization, then other differences must be mobilized to distinguish between men. Eschewing weaker arguments that could be made about differing *degrees* of feminization, Hemingway chooses the route of difference—or, as with Cohn, multiple differences—to define his category of authentic authorial manhood. This means that Cohn’s differences, his Jewishness, niceness, and impercipience, are all *gendered* traits in Hemingway’s representation, traits that suggest Cohn’s lack of the very kind of epistemological masculinity that distinguishes Jake among the characters in the novel. Cohn belongs, in other words, to another sexual category entirely than Jake, despite Cohn’s *physical* advantages over him as both a real (not would-be) lover to Brett, and as a trained boxer—capacities we might expect to find celebrated by Hemingway based on the author’s own later womanizing and his amateur passion for boxing. If, in his life and letters, Hemingway emphasized these traits as markers of manhood, in his art, manhood is signified primarily as epistemological superiority.

Jake’s own feminization emerges in the revelation that the undeserving Cohn has rated a weeklong tryst with Jake’s adored Brett. Yet Jake pre-empts this humiliation in the novel’s opening by implying his own artistic and epistemological advantages over Cohn. For a young author seeking professional legitimacy as a modernist, an imposing physical presence like that of Hemingway—a contingent attribute anyway—is of little use in claiming literary authority. Hemingway must thus redefine normative manhood, excluding assimilable or accidental physical characteristics in favor of inner qualities, inner masculinities, both of character and of mind. To this end, we see Jake, although a

reporter, demonstrating the same *literary* faculties, of objective observation, analysis and transcription, that Hemingway will later advocate to Fitzgerald. This appeal to authorial objectivity, even toward one's own suffering, finds its fulfillment in Jake's empiricism and literary anti-romanticism, rigorous "mental masculinities" that are contrasted with Cohn's softheaded literary approach. Thus, though Jake works in Paris as a reporter, he is also a literary man, allowing Hemingway to perform his own literary-critical bona-fides through the Hemingwayesque Jake.

For example, Jake exhibits a tough-minded literary sophistication in being able to mock, or damn with faint praise, a book that Cohn admires, W.H. Hudson's *The Purple Land*, "a very sinister book if encountered late in life. It recounts splendid imaginary amorous adventures of a perfect English gentleman in an intensely romantic land, the scenery of which is very well described."¹² This critique punctures Cohn's genteel anglophilia and moony romanticism, forms of epistemological distortion characterizing the dilettante and the aesthete, those effeminate bogies of high modernism. Jake allows that Cohn's own book had been "not really such a bad novel as the critics later called it," but adds, deflatingly, "although it was a very poor novel" (5-6). In passing such judgments, Jake thus demonstrates his freedom from the kind of *gendered* weakness signified by Cohn's sentimentality and lack of critical rigor. Enamored with a middlebrow novel that Jake views as if from above, Cohn cannot see the modern world without delusion—precisely the ability highlighted in Jake through his *critique* of Cohn.

Despite this gendering, such a difference in literary tastes would seem to have little to do, necessarily, with physical, *sexual* difference. Yet to borrow some terms of

rhetoric, Hemingway is not interested in making an evaluative claim about Cohn, an *intra*-category distinction, but wants to make, instead, a *definitional* claim, one that makes distinctions *between* categories. To say Hemingway evokes the terms of sexual difference to distinguish between persons of the same sex is to note how his identity category of the inauthentic man—which is to say, the non-Hemingwayesque man—approximates the category of woman herself. Indeed, as we will see, the same weakness that eliminates Cohn from the category of epistemological manhood—his romanticism—returns at the end of the novel to discredit Brett Ashley. What seems to drive Hemingway in creating this category of male inauthenticity is a fear of taxonomical confusion: how does one tell the real man from the counterfeit? Though Brett may dress and sometimes talk like a man, with her “hull”-like curves, there is little doubt she *is* a woman (22). Cohn, however, is disturbingly like Jake, at least outwardly—disturbing in that, unlike the generally visible distinctions between men and women, differences between men are more of a subjective affair. Indeed, so concerned is Hemingway with the taxonomic instability between man and “not-man,” that almost any difference is retooled and mobilized as an adjunct of “sexual difference,” that is, a difference that mimes or replicates between men the *hierarchical* division between men and women. Thus do we find Hemingway making much of differences both large and small, manipulating them to support that one crucial, engrossing difference—between the “real man” and the imitation.

Consider, for example, Cohn’s accentuated Jewishness, which I would argue functions here less as a denigrated racial category than as evidence of gender

inauthenticity—and thus as a counter of Jake’s authenticity. Cohn’s racial difference from Jake, that is, is used in this instance as a criterion of masculinity. To suggest that Cohn does not belong in the category of proper manhood, Jake narrates his friend’s life as a series of lame approximations—Cohn the Jew, the alien, can only imitate the behavior of a “real” American man. His family’s money buys him entrance into Princeton, where he “painfully” learns boxing—painful that is, in that he does not acquire this skill with the ease of a “natural” or authentic man (4). In the world of literature Cohn is equally “unnatural.” His money buys him influence with a literary review, but his engagement is not with the aesthetic or intellectual questions of *belles lettres*, but the crude “authority of editing” (5). Indeed, Cohn is almost clownish as an aspirant to Hemingway’s new norms of masculinity, falling ridiculously, romantically in love with the sexually itinerant Brett, and missing every cue of “proper” male behavior as a member of the “herd” of men surrounding her. But these cues, as well as these judgments, are given us by Jake, however, so that what we might otherwise be tempted to interpret as signs of Cohn’s civility and humanity—his distaste for boxing, his disgust for the barbarity of the bullfight—become instead signs of his categorical exclusion.

Moral Masculinities

If Hemingway’s mobilization of racial and other differences in constructing a newer, truer masculine identity suggests a kind of authorial desperation, Jake himself practices only a quiet, ironic dignity. Indeed, by extension, dignity in the face of feminization is crucial to the novel’s ideological project. Though Hemingway’s

representation of the “lost generation” suggests a modern world in which *everyone* is dominated by *something*, this universal or existential “castration” has poignancy for only a few men. Such men—and I would include the matador, Pedro Romero, and the arrow-scarred, non-artist, Count Mippipopolous in this category—display a “right” notion of male social comportment, a kind of resigned “moral masculinity” that takes feminization as a strangely enabling condition. Though these men too fall short of Hemingwayesque authorship, Romero lacking the modern sophistication of that status, the Count its vocational dedication to seriousness, they are nevertheless portrayed with a level of pathos that is denied to other characters. They thus reinforce Jake’s norm-setting function, which is predicated not only on epistemological mastery, but on his fine sense of emotional restraint.

Not coincidentally, Hemingway’s prose style is famous for this very quality, but with the unfortunate result that his prose has been tautologically gendered masculine—and indeed according to a monolithic conception of masculinity—by many critics. Even if crafting a distinctively “male” prose style was Hemingway’s intent, his construction need not be ours. When Hemingway’s prose is admiringly described as “terse,” “tough,” “hard,” “hardboiled,” “muscular” or “lean,” depending for its power on “short declarative sentences,” we accept too readily the premise that expressiveness truly is a womanish thing, and the best a male writer can do—short of bemused silence—is to whittle back his words to avoid crossing into some prolix “feminine.” But I would even contest the descriptive accuracy of such adjectives in reference to Hemingway’s work. Though his style does achieve an effect of simplicity, many of his sentences are ambitiously, artily

long and complex, even sprawling. Moreover, while he does treat of some matters in an ostentatiously “hardboiled” way, the scope of Hemingway’s content includes psychological, sexual, and emotional revelations—the topics of fear and sexual role exchange, for example, appear in almost all of his novels—that might seem better avoided by aspirants to masculine iconicity. What has been whittled back in Hemingway’s style is a certain order of psychological *explanation*, and this is where the author’s famous “iceberg” analogy comes in to provide explanatory help, although—in another paradox—it evokes both a conventionally gendered *and* a gender-transgressive modernist literary practice.

Hemingway describes his art of omission in *Death in the Afternoon*: “The dignity of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water” (192). “Dignity” seems strange as an attribute of an iceberg, suggesting that Hemingway is less concerned with writing about external realities than *inner* ones—especially those unruly things, emotions. Hemingway’s reserve in psychological description, examples of which we will presently consider, would thus seem to be attuned with such masculinizing modernist prescriptions as Imagist Richard Aldington’s, “No slop, no sentimentality,” or Pound’s anti-romantic proscription of ornamentation and excess adjectives.¹³ This ethic of restraint is given voice (if not clearly endorsed) in various places in Hemingway’s work, as in “The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber,” where Robert Wilson counsels: “Doesn’t do to talk too much about all this. Talk the whole thing away. No pleasure in anything if you mouth it up too much.”¹⁴ Yet Hemingway, himself, by writing “Macomber,” a story explicitly about male feminization, violates Wilson’s advice by “mouthing up” such fears. Strictly

speaking, Wilson's attitude would proscribe male authorship itself. Hemingway's answer is to balance these conflicting impulses in a way that allows him to underline male stoicism and expressive restraint while simultaneously indexing a melodramatically suffering male subject that pleads—always implicitly—for sympathy and respect.¹⁵

“Iceberg theory” is crucial to this narrative feat in that the burden of discovering and analyzing male emotion is shifted to the reader, sparing the Hemingwayesque narrator the indignity of having to discourse too directly on his own suffering. Thus the technique does not seek to banish male emotion, but only to stylize its expression. Indeed, this suppression has the rhetorical effect of intensification. If Hemingway's proper man is like his iceberg, then the metaphor simultaneously suggests repression *and* a kind of portentous, veiled expression: though 7/8ths of his emotional being may be moving in tearful riot below the surface, an embodiment of iceberg masculinity presents a “dignified,” dry-eyed mien to observers above the surface—all the while encouraging sympathetic speculation about what is happening in those roiling depths. The technique is thus a form of male masochism, as male suffering is pleurably indulged and exhibited by the very restraint that ostensibly “hides” it.

But before we take a view of one such embodiment of iceberg masculinity in action (Jake), we must first ask, of what, precisely, is Jake a victim? In an important sense, Brett—and by extension, modern female sexuality—*is* Jake's wound, and this is true for the other male characters as well. Though Jake's genital wound pre-dates his romantic involvement with Brett, she makes it consequential and humiliating, and she inflicts similar pain on Robert Cohn, Pedro Romero, and Mike Campbell. Indeed,

Hemingway accords to women a frighteningly *personal* power to wound, despite their lack of real social power. In this way he directs attention away from women's political powerlessness (Brett is broke, and relies on men and marriage to support her hedonistic lifestyle) to the capacity of individual women to rend individual men—as if this were political power. This is a strategic substitution. As Sally Robinson argues, “Representations of wounded white men most often work to *personalize* the crisis of white masculinity and, thus, to erase its social and political causes and effects”¹⁶ (Robinson's italics). Though Jake was wounded in the war, the trauma of that wound is much more potently linked to the “battle of the sexes” identified by Gilbert and Gubar. In Hemingway's version of this representational “war,” women have the power to feminize men even when they are themselves disempowered, a construction that shifts the focus from women's collective grievances to individual male ones.¹⁷

To adopt woman as a signifier of male suffering is to erase the structural causes of female suffering almost completely. Brett's castrating sexuality—the keynote of her characterization—is central to this objective. Brett “turn[s] all to jelly” to be with Jake, goes off with Cohn for a sexual tryst in San Sebastian, and finally lays libidinous eyes on the virile young bullfighter, Pedro Romero (26). Brett herself worries her actions are those of a “bitch,” though she ultimately reins in her ruinous desires to spare Romero from destruction: “I'm thirty-four, you know. I'm not going to be one of these bitches that ruins children” (242). This moral recovery, however, may have more to do with confirming Brett's sexual destructiveness than redeeming it in any lasting way. Though her reformation, if credible, does seem to illustrate one conventional interpretation of the

novel—Hemingway’s desire to offer an ethical response to the lostness of the “lost generation,” aligning Brett and Jake with values that “abideth forever”—we are in fact given little reason to suspect that Brett will be able to control her alcohol-fueled sexual voracity in the future. Jake suggests as much at the end, when, to her comment, “We could have had such a good time together,” he responds, “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (247). Though Brett is a highly sympathetic character, and regrets her role in this particular iteration of sexual agency, Jake’s gendered “pretty” suggests that it would be feminine naiveté to expect, in the future, anything less than more of the same.

Grace Under Feminization

We will return to Jake’s final retort—and its larger function as a sort of crowning epistemological *coup de grace*—in more depth, but the relationship between Brett’s genial “bitchery” and Jake’s wound needs closer attention. Despite the novel’s suggestion that female sexuality afflicts all men and male relations, Jake’s own wound—the wound, that is, of a Hemingwayesque author—ultimately differentiates him from the novel’s other characters in a way calculated to suggest Hemingway’s own artistic mastery. To trace the path from feminization to triumphant artistry we must further examine Jake’s behavior under the blows of some intolerable humiliations.

Jake and Brett have an oblique conversation about “proper” masculine comportment in the early days of the fiesta. Jake notes that Cohn, who has refused to relinquish his romantic aspirations toward Brett despite her clear lack of interest, has “behaved very badly” (181). Brett agrees, “Damned badly. He had a chance to behave so

well.” The exchange restates our now-familiar paradox: that male feminization can be a sort of opportunity for men, a chance to prove themselves by “behaving well”—that is, by resigning themselves to the inevitability of female sexual agency, and thus their own new powerlessness. Brett compliments Jake: “You wouldn’t behave badly” (181). And Jake behaves very properly indeed, maintaining his public passivity and iceberg emotionality (albeit with several private lapses) in the face of an astonishing series of mortifications.

Notably, Jake’s gets his opportunity to “behave well” as soon as Brett makes her first appearance. Brett is castrating to men if only in her all-desirableness, which necessarily pits men competitively against other men—yet she also feminizes the men she sleeps with. Surrounded by admirers, Brett can take her pick of willing partners, exercising a full sexual agency that the men desiring her are, if only numerically, denied. The boon of being chosen is short-lived, however, as men quickly discover the capricious and temporary nature of their selection—which only intensifies their competitiveness. Jake’s Hemingwayesque qualities seem to win him her love, but no man can possess her body with any permanence.

Jake feels the mockery of this situation at the *bal musette* when Brett drunkenly enters the club with a group of effeminate, apparently gay men. She laughs, “When one is with the crowd I’m with, one can drink with such safety, too” (22). This is ironic, since Brett is “safe” with *all* men since it is she, not they, who chooses. Jake is intensely angry to see Brett in the company of such men, whose mere presence associates her with a sort of sexual anarchy, a refusal to respect the bounds of sexual propriety and “proper” object

choice.¹⁸ “With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was very much with them” (20). A moment later, he repeats it—a sticking point: “And with them was Brett.” Brett is not just with the men, but *with* them, *allied* with them in transgressing traditional sexual boundaries. Though Hemingway often represents sexual role exchange in intimate, heterosexual contexts, in this public context Brett’s embrace of male homosexuality suggests a sort of pathology by association. But Jake’s anger with the homosexuals, in contrast to his muted reaction to more intense humiliations ahead, is significant for a more crucial reason: these men challenge Jake’s face-saving performance ethic. To borrow David Savran’s phrase, Jake can “take it like a man” when some other feminized man sleeps with his beloved, but that suffering, and the high dignity with which it is invested, is mocked when Brett is “with” these particular men.

Play and parody are key, since Brett’s friends take gender roles as opportunities for jest and impersonation, as when one affects the idiom of a southern belle: “I do declare. There is an actual harlot” (20). With their campy refusal to take seriously the gendered dicta through which Jake negotiates his powerlessness, they make a mockery of his predicament, revealing him, indeed, as something of a drama queen. If Jake’s manhood is defined as a certain order and manner of suffering at the hands of woman, this masochistic tableau is dangerously queered by any suggestion of the artificiality of gender categories. In their play, the men reveal their amusement to inhabit a social space that is to Jake a hell—to be a man in a supplementary position to a woman. Laughing and “simpering,” the men offer a view of that unhegemonic position deprived of its (iceberglike) submerged majesty, deprived especially of its “dignifying” trauma, as if to

be unmanned were simply a lark. Thus, rather than parodying masculinity, the men parody male *feminization*, depriving it of its ennobling potential—ennobling, that is, when properly indexed under the tenets of “iceberg” aesthetics.

Later in the evening, however, we see this aesthetic properly, seriously performed, as if to recuperate it from the contamination of the *bal musette* scene. After an evening in Paris with Jake and Brett, we still know nothing specific about what is ailing our narrator. When Brett takes up with another suitor, Jake excuses himself with a “rotten headache” and returns without evident emotion to his apartment, where he methodically reads his mail and newspapers. Even when the story of his wounding comes out—“The old grievance. Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian”—his affect is grimly humorous. Yet Jake is distraught, has been, it seems, distraught all along, as we find out in the following (flatly delivered) reportage:

I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn't keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away. I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth waves. 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 then I went to sleep.

Even in revealing his trauma, Jake keeps a tight grip on “it.” Repeated three times, this “it” each time indexes—without articulating—a different stage of his suffering. The first “it,” keeping Jake’s mind jumping, would seem to be the existential kernel of feminization itself—the humiliation of Jake’s “bitched” modern existence, including his blighted love for Brett. The second “it” abstracts the existential pain from Jake’s suffering: thinking of Brett, all the rest of “it”—his generalized angst—goes away. After

he cries, shocking in the context of his dispassionate narration, “it” suddenly gets better. Jake backs away from his encounter with these unnamed reals, which tell us not only of his lonely condition of disempowerment, but of his seemingly comportsment under that curse, his adherence—notwithstanding these austerely described tears—to proper iceberg masculinity. Yet Jake has given us few specifics about his suffering; “it” has guaranteed Jake’s dignity by remaining submerged, however much we as readers are enjoined to theorize about the invisible depths of his crisis.

At Brett’s side in Paris and Pamplona, Jake is pathetically unprotected from the blows of his apparently vast “cuckoldry”—if such a term can describe transgressions in an extra-marital love relationship with a woman who is grieving for a dead fiancé, embroiled in simultaneous processes of divorce and engagement with two other men, about to sleep with another (Cohn) and fall madly in love with and sleep with still another (Romero). Jake’s feminization at Brett’s hands is thus neither minimized nor ironicized, though at one point, it is strangely eroticized. When Brett stops in with the Count Mippipopolous, Jake lies face down on his bed in the other room listening to their voices and feeling “rotten”—an iceberg-related adjective that, like “sore,” names a feeling without indulging in untoward emotional analysis. When Brett comes in to comfort him, he gushes, “Oh, Brett, I love you so much” (54). She comforts him richly, maternally: “Poor old darling,” stroking his head as he lies facing away from her—a classically melodramatic pose suggesting a crying child or a ‘woman spurned.’ Yet in this lapse from stoicism, Jake has less *lost* control than *ceded* it—to Brett. He thus “behaves well”

by surrendering to Brett's will, reminding us not only of his hurt, but his resignation, a vital preliminary to facing (or facing down) the hard fact of modern male feminization.

Later at Zelli's, Brett's promiscuity seems to have extended to miscegenation, and here again we encounter racial difference converted into a kind of gender inauthenticity. Hemingway disposes of this racial threat just as he did with Cohn, by using racial difference to assert the superiority *not* of whiteness as such, but of Jake's Hemingwayesque masculinity, an ideal for which whiteness is, as it was for Fitzgerald, a necessary but not sufficient condition. Jake is dancing with Brett near the stage when she greets the "nigger drummer," explaining, "he's a great friend of mine. . . .Damn good drummer too" (62). Conscious only of his new rival's bodily difference—"He was all lips and teeth"—Jake cannot escape the man's invasive shouts, chants and smiles, an intimation of black male sexuality that is above all *physical*, and that may—by the delicate mode of implication required of the period's fiction—have worked the same sweaty magic on Brett that now moves the dancers ecstatically about the floor.

Physical too is the novel's other black male, a boxer whom Bill Gorton has rescued from an angry crowd in Vienna. Bill drunkenly narrates:

Wonderful nigger. Looked like Tiger Flores, only four times as big. All of a sudden everybody started to throw things. Not me. Nigger'd just knocked local boy down. Nigger put up his glove. Wanted to make a speech. . . .Then local white boy hit him. Then he knocked white boy cold. Then everybody commenced to throw chairs.

Bill's "local boy" interestingly becomes "white boy" when he is overmatched by his black opponent. And indeed, the "punchline" of Bill's story turns out to be the vast physical superiority of the black boxer: "'My God, Mr. Gorton,' said the nigger, 'I didn't

do nothing in there for forty minutes but try and let him stay. That white boy musta ruptured himself swinging at me. I never did hit him” (71). Though Bill’s anecdote may seem a mere flourish, Jake himself is a “white boy” who, in a sense, “ruptured himself swinging” at an enemy. And Hemingway’s association of blackness with physical and sexual mastery reminds us of Jake’s pointed *disassociation* with such measures of manhood—starting with the penis itself, which Jake (as Hemingway later insisted in clarifying the nature of Jake’s wound) is missing. A black man may claim superiority in the ring or in bed, but Hemingway evokes such traditional proofs of masculinity in order to devalue them in favor of Jake’s moral and intellectual exclusivity. Indeed, both of the novel’s incidental black men display a childish simplicity that contrasts sharply with Jake’s highly sentient, world-weary suffering.

The novel’s heavy reliance on such contrasts suggests the importance of exclusivity to Hemingway’s self-constructions, though this tendency was not just articulated in his fiction. In his jibes, in other genres, at writers like Poe (“skillful . . . dead”), Hawthorne, Emerson and Whittier (“very good men with the small, dried, and excellent wisdom of Unitarians”), Henry James (his [fictional] men . . . all talked like fairies”), T.S. Eliot (“you cannot couple T.S. Eliot and Joseph Conrad in a sentence seriously and not laugh”), Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and others, Hemingway suggested the exclusivity of his own modernist aesthetic—despite its orthodoxy in the context of the doctrine of impersonality we examined in the introduction.¹⁹ Presented in *The Sun Also Rises* less as a series of artistic choices than as criteria for manhood, that aesthetic seems to have exclusion as its primary function.

Perhaps jealousy and anxiety motivated these literary criticisms, but that is just the point: Hemingway used *The Sun Also Rises* to define masculinity in a way that would exalt himself and exclude most of those peers who were, in 1925, regarded as his professional betters.

If Hemingway's representation of feminization frames a kind of miserable domitability as the human condition, it also casts his apprehension of that fact as evidence of his own epistemological supremacy, saying in effect, in the land of the blind, a one-eyed man is king. The novel's roster of the disempowered also includes Brett, who, though she has power over men, is less than free in all other ways—in her alcoholism and libido, in her economic thralldom to men, and in the romantic delusions that cause her to seek out, as she does with Romero, “true love.” This fact, that the novel's most powerful character is herself “dominated,” suggests that Hemingway wants to call into question almost all claims of cultural authority besides his own. The fatuity of such claims is contrasted with the dignified suffering and enlightened epistemological stance of the Hemingwayesque modernist author indexed outside the text, a man who is willing—and intellectually and emotionally able—to confront the basic facts of modern existence. In effect, acknowledging feminization and rightly behaving in response to it creates a kind of exemption from some its most damning ramifications. Thus does Hemingway wrest cultural authority from his very sense (or fear) of disempowerment.

Nadir/Apex

Jake arrives at this paradoxical place of mastery—coextensive with the emotional space of resignation which is its precondition—late in the novel, the better pleurably and complainingly to sound the depths of feminization in the first eighteen chapters. That trajectory reaches its nadir (or, in terms of authorship, its apex) when Brett finally goes off with Romero. Their affair has led to a climactic bullfight in which the matador, beaten up badly by Cohn the night before, triumphs over a series of bulls the next day despite his hurts. As Romero is carried off on the shoulders of the crowd, Jake aches with the young bullfighter: “They were all around him trying to lift him and put him on their shoulders. He fought and twisted away, and started running . . . toward the exit. He did not want to be carried on people’s shoulders. But they held him and lifted him. It was uncomfortable and his legs were spraddled and his body was very sore” (221). Imaginatively entering into Romero’s pain, Jake reminds us of its cause—the beating by Cohn. Thus even in the midst of Romero’s triumph, we are directed to remember the higher order of reality—the matador’s feminization. Though this defeat ironically allows the bullfighter to “behave well”—he rises again and again to fight Cohn despite clearly being overmatched, and admirably fulfils his professional responsibilities the next day despite his condition—his “heroism,” if made more poignant by his wounding and domination at the hands of Cohn, is also circumscribed by it.

Hemingway, however, standing ‘above’ his creation while also working through Jake’s characterization, can achieve what Romero cannot: an *artistic* heroism that allows him symbolically, rhetorically to transcend feminization. Though Romero’s bullfighting metaphorically evokes the art of a Hemingwayesque writer—in action he is “straight and

pure and natural in line,” and a producer of “real emotion” as opposed to the “fake emotional feeling” produced by most bullfighters—this implicit metaphor cuts only one way (167-8). A writer, that is, may do as a bullfighter does, achieving “purity of line” and “real emotion,” but the bullfighter can never approach the (true) writer’s art, especially if he believes, as Romero does, in the masculine dominance ritualized by the bullfight. Compared to that of Jake, Romero’s response to feminization is unreflective and self-destructive—in a word, unmodern. His Old World belief in masculine indomitability—evidenced in his response to Brett, whom he would “tame” through marriage and by making her grow out her hair—appears childishly ineffectual beside Jake’s mature resignation, which clearly enjoys Hemingway’s endorsement. Romero fails to recognize the hard modern reality at the center of the novel: the emergent supremacy of female sexual agency—a fact confirmed when Brett not only leaves him, but leaves him for his own good.

Jake, however, has a devastating appreciation of this reality, as when Brett telegraphs him to fetch her from Madrid after she has left Romero. Signing the return cable, “Love Jake,” he reflects, “That seemed to handle it. 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 cable with love. That was it all right. I went in to lunch” (239). Another series of “its” tips us off to the importance of what Jake is encountering—the realest real of his own feminization at the hands of modern woman. But what has happened that Jake can so casually end this momentous reflection by going to lunch? His attitude suggests a new state of detachment, a condition at once despairing and coolly accepting.

With Hemingway's iceberg emphasis on hidden depths, it should not surprise us that Jake achieves this state while underwater, shortly before he receives Brett's cable. Jake has traveled alone to San Sebastian, the site of Cohn and Brett's dalliance just weeks before, and a city named after the much-painted saint who met his death bound to a column, pierced from every side with arrows.²⁰ San Sebastian is thus a sort of symbolic epicenter of feminization, evoking not only Brett's sexual agency, but its result: masculinity beset—immobilized, wounded, penetrated from all sides. Though critics have sensed the importance of this chapter, most have tended to frame its action in the simple terms of disappointed romance—Jake finally accepting the impossibility of his love relationship with Brett.²¹ Yet what Jake comes to terms with is a harder and more surprising fact—a doom of modern male powerlessness ending what had seemed to be a timeless patriarchal supremacy.

This realization begins atop a raft for swimmers where Jake sits with a paradigmatic pair of young lovers, blissfully, casually absorbed in each other, and isolated by the sea. The planks of the raft are comfortingly hot in contrast to the cold water around it, and the "girl" has undone the top of her suit and is "browning her back" in the sun. As her male friend talks to her, the girl laughs and turns this "brown back in the sun," a repetition that emphasizes the sexual glamour and romantic allure from which Jake is physically—and now, epistemologically—estranged. Leaving that primal heterosexual scene, Jake touches epiphanic bottom when he dives "deep once, swimming down to the bottom. I swam with my eyes open and it was green and dark." Above him the raft, with its pair of lovers—who at this late point in the novel we know are probably

doomed romantics—“made a dark shadow” (235). Almost nothing, of course, has happened, yet we are by now trained to recognize the moment as one of fairly plain assertion. Baldly put, Jake has taken his “departure” from the site of doomed, islanded happiness suggested by the raft, and literally opened his eyes to “dark” reality: the estrangement, male disempowerment and benighted romanticism within modern heterosexual relations.

Jake’s epiphany even has a punchline. Brett’s telegram signals that Jake will have to cancel his vacation to join her in Madrid. He deadpans, “Well that meant San Sebastian all shot to hell” (239). Painting the last arrow in his portrait of the artist as woman-martyred modern man, Jake is just as “shot to hell”—bound, dominated, penetrated—as the good saint he jokingly evokes. Yet at this point, penetration may be less relevant than *beatification*—the process by which a wounded, vanquished man becomes elevated by and revered for his suffering. Saint Sebastian is often figured with eyes cast towards heaven, suggesting, even in his agony, the serenity of divine sanction. Jake’s decision to go to lunch suggests a similar, if seriocomic serenity—indeed one might argue that a connection between healthy appetite and inward serenity is a constant in Hemingway’s oeuvre, a congenial “objective correlative” for an author obsessed with eating, drinking and living fully (239).

When Jake arrives in Madrid, his elevation seems to coincide with Brett’s diminution. Noting the disarray of her hotel room, he tells us, “She kissed me, and while she kissed me I could feel she was thinking of something else. She was trembling in my arms. She felt very small” (241). Jake seems to re-evaluate the devastated Brett, who in

her romantic thralldom has proven just as subject to disempowerment as the men she unmans. Though in leaving Romero, Brett seems to have overcome her profligate tendencies—and is trying to feel good about it—it is Jake that is sanguine, drinking and dining not in despair, but in a sort of muted triumph and sense of return. Jake signals this return by insisting on his pleasures, telling the barman (as one issuing a declaration), “I like an olive in my martini,” and taking Brett to eat not in some despair-evoking dive, but at Botin’s, “one of the best restaurants in the world” (245-6). There, Jake partakes lustily, downing most of three bottles of wine before ordering two more. Appetite-less herself, Brett notes Jake’s returned vigor: “You like to eat, don’t you?” “Yes,” he answers, “I like to do a lot of things” (246).

Later they drive down Madrid’s Gran Via. With Brett “sitting against [him] comfortably,” Jake is set up for his epistemological *coup de grace*: “Oh, Jake, we could have had such a damned good time together.” Jake meanwhile notes ahead a mounted traffic cop, his raised baton evoking law and consequence (247). And indeed, law is precisely what Jake has come to terms with—a bleak modern law of male feminization that he has long suffered under, but now owns as a kind of exclusive and elevating knowledge. The car slows, pressing Brett even closer against him, but Jake sees this apparent unity for the radical separation it really is. Gently rebuking Brett’s belief from a point of view beyond all such comely illusions, he replies calmly, agreeably: “Yes, isn’t it pretty to think so?”

Notes:

¹ John William Crowley, *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 1994), 43.

² John Raeburn reports that press accounts of Hemingway's life in the early twenties frequently embroidered his manly exploits, though Raeburn also suggests that Hemingway may have started some of these legends. See John Raeburn, *Fame Became of Him: Hemingway as Public Writer* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), 23-25. From childhood an admirer of Teddy Roosevelt and the Strenuous Life, Hemingway was noted among his Parisian acquaintances—and also in early press accounts—for his boxing skills, for amateur bullfighting, and for his (voluble) devotion to all and any forms of athletic prowess. In addition, Hemingway was at this time, according to Robert McAlmon, “talking a great deal about courage, and how a man needs to test himself to prove to himself he can take it.” Reynolds comments, “With Roosevelt as role model, Hemingway was never completely satisfied with being merely a writer. . . . All his life he was in search of America's mythical west . . . where a man stood alone, physical, and self-reliant.” Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway: The Paris Years* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwood, 1990), 214, 25. As I will argue, this ideal had a heavy, if paradoxical, formal impact on Hemingway's art, where unease at being “merely a writer” is assuaged through an emphasis on “manly” epistemological mastery.

³ Hemingway to Fitzgerald, 28 May, 1934, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 408.

⁴ See, for example, a letter written to William Faulkner in 1947 in which Hemingway discussed the literary “ring”-prospects of John Dos Passos (“a 2nd rate writer on acct. no ear. 2nd rate boxer has no left hand, same as ear to writer, and so gets his brains knocked out”), Turgenev (“beat Turgenev, which we both did soundly,” and De Maupassant (“still dangerous for three rounds”). Indeed, this ‘knock’ on the famous French short story-writer's seeming lack of ‘staying power’ hints to us about Hemingway's idea of the novel as a more challenging and decisive form, requiring the writer to stay in the ‘ring’ for the duration. This might explain why Hemingway's novels, as I argue, are so much more manipulatively self-constructive and fraught with authorial anxieties than his stories. Hemingway used the same metaphor in a letter to Charles Scribner two years later, boasting of being a “man without ambition except to be champion of the world.” In his ‘bout’ with Henry James, he would “hit him where he had no balls and ask the referee to stop it.” See Hemingway to William Faulkner, 23 July 1947 and Hemingway to Charles Scribner, 6 and 7 September 1949, *Selected Letters*, 622, 673.

⁵ Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 88.

⁶ See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), and Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995).

⁷ Thomas DiPiero, *White Men Aren't* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002), 46.

⁸ DiPiero, 50.

⁹ Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes, *Hemingway's Genders: Rereading the Hemingway Text* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 137. “Androgyny” theories accounting for Hemingway's simultaneous hypermasculinity and obsession with sexual role exchange begin with the posthumous release of *The Garden of Eden* in 1986 and Kenneth's Lynn's 1987 biography, *Hemingway*, though Mark Spilka complicated the picture with his 1990 study, *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny*, which argued that androgyny was an “Edenic” state Hemingway felt he must repudiate throughout his career. Thomas Strychacz makes a more recent case for Hemingway's sexual progressivism in *Hemingway's Theatres of Masculinity* (2003), which argues that Hemingway's work “predicts the formidable critique of masculinity raised by feminist studies.” See Thomas Strychacz, *Hemingway's Theatres of Masculinity* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2003), 10; Frederick Crews, *The Critics Bear It Away: American Fiction and the Academy*. New York: Random House, 1992; Ernest Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* (London: Grafton Books, 1988); Kenneth Lynn, *Hemingway* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Mark Spilka, *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Crews, 91.

¹¹ John Raeburn suggests that Hemingway used his non-fiction and magazine writing as a sort of autobiographical countercanon in which he made a case for a broad, middlebrow acceptance not dependent on his literary endeavors. But Raeburn discounts the way the novels and stories perform the same task for a “highbrow” audience—as *The Sun Also Rises* shows with its elevation of Jake’s vocationally-specific intellectual and moral “masculinities.”

¹² Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Collier Books, 1986), 9. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

¹³ Quoted in Michael Kaufman, “H.D., Imagism, and Masculinist Aesthetics,” in *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-readings*. Eds. Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1997), 60.

¹⁴ Ernest Hemingway, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” *Ernest Hemingway: The Short Stories* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995), 33.

¹⁵ For an alternate account of Hemingway’s style and handling of emotion, see Thomas Strychacz’ “The Sort of Thing You Should Not Admit’: Ernest Hemingway’s Aesthetic of Emotional Restraint.” in *Boys Don’t Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.*, eds. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis (New York: Columbia UP, 2002).

¹⁶ Robinson, 8.

¹⁷ Cohn’s fiancée, Frances Cline, also illustrates this phenomenon, her wounding viciousness representationally outweighing the wrongs being done to her by Cohn.

¹⁸ My reading of this scene departs from a similarly “performative” view of Jake’s behavior advanced by Ira Elliot. See Ira Elliot, “Performance Art: Jake Barnes and “Masculine” Signification in *The Sun Also Rises*,” *American Literature* 67.1 (1995): 77-94.

¹⁹ Hemingway’s comments on Poe and the “Unitarians” can be found in *The Green Hills of Africa*; his dismissal of James is from a 1927 letter; his dismissal of Eliot is quoted in Reynolds, 226. See Ernest Hemingway, *The Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), 20-21, and Hemingway to Waldo Pierce, 13 December 1927, *Selected Letters*, 189.

²⁰ Hemingway’s representation of feminization shares the erotic masochism found in some Renaissance representations of the saint, yet I take Hemingway’s implied identification with this “homoerotic icon” as a “hardboiled” joke on his own male disempowerment. The issue is complicated by the author’s frequent representations of (heterosexual) sexual role reversal and moments of emerging homoeroticism in his works, as well as his own suggestion, in *The Garden of Eden* and elsewhere, that he may have enjoyed being sodomized by his wives; yet these “clues” no more connote “homosexuality” than any number of sexual proclivities. Still, though I have no stake in “protecting” Hemingway from suggestions of homosexuality, and would be unsurprised by any future revelations of same, I understand such fantasies in his work in the context of Hemingway’s implicit complaints about the *burdensomeness* of normative masculinity—even as he himself worked to naturalize it. That is, homoeroticism (as in the sexually suggestive “male idyll” scene in *The Sun Also Rises*) and episodes of sexual role reversal, allow Hemingway’s male characters to escape the angst and competition between men that is occasioned by female sexuality.

²¹ I am indebted to Ellen Andrews Knodt for pointing out this minimalist “epiphany,” though I assign it a broader set of significations. See Ellen Andrews Knodt, “Diving Deep: Jake’s Moment of Truth at San Sebastian,” *The Hemingway Review* 17.1 (1997): 28-37.

CHAPTER 3:

“ONE MAN ALONE”: AGENCY AND COLLECTIVISM IN *TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT* AND *FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS*

One conventional interpretation of *To Have and Have Not* (1937) is that the novel marked the emergence, as *Time* magazine put it at the time, of a “hitherto well-hidden social consciousness” in Hemingway’s art. This presumption seems amply borne out by the novel’s sympathetic treatment of working-class themes and its heavily marked moral, gasped out by its dying protagonist, Harry Morgan: “One man alone. . . ain’t got no bloody fucking chance.

¹ Though the novel was generally panned—the ’30s were a dismal decade for Hemingway’s reputation as a novelist—critics did applaud this seeming call for collective action. Writing for the *New Republic*, Malcolm Cowley thought Hemingway’s new direction politically “promising,” and was not alone in believing that the author was turning from the isolationism, social alienation, and despair that had permeated his 1920s novels. Reviewers thought they saw this promise fulfilled in Hemingway’s next novel, the acclaimed *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940)—a work whose epigraph begins with another negatively phrased avowal of human solidarity, “No Man is an Island.”² The novel’s depiction of a hero self-sacrificially “involved in *Mankind*” (in John Donne’s words) impressed readers like Edmund Wilson and Clifton Fadiman. A harsh critic of *To Have and Have Not*, Fadiman proclaimed *For Whom the Bell Tolls* the work of “a better man, a man in whom works the principle of growth, so rare among American writers,”

suggesting that, in moving away from the self-centered gloom of his earlier novels, Hemingway had literally grown up, achieved a kind of literary manhood.³

Yet another form of literary manhood is constructed in the two works, one that I would argue undermines their ostensibly progressive and collectivist impulses. This chapter will examine *To Have and Have Not* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as novels that responded to pressure from the “literary left” that Hemingway *himself* become more “involved in mankind” in his art. But Hemingway did not respond, as it might seem, in a spirit of fraternité and égalité, but rather used the works to reaffirm the ideals of individualism and masculine agency that had animated his prior novels, though in a way that suggested his adoption of the artistic social engagement emphasized by his critics. In the previous chapter we saw how Hemingway, through an emphasis on moral and epistemological superiorities, preserved an ideal of masculine dominance in a feminized modernity. These authorial superiorities, in his twenties novels, allowed Hemingway himself to evade the stigma of feminization that he depicted as a modern inevitability for men. Hemingway’s novels of the thirties again thematize a modern condition of feminization, but now intensified by an emerging ethos of collectivism that itself threatened masculine agency and authority.

To Have and Have Not and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* thus reflect Hemingway’s struggle to reconcile what might rather quaintly be called the contradictory imperatives of self and society. While the first of the novels might be thought of as a kind of protest against collectivism couched as an embrace of it, the latter shows Hemingway resolving that conflict in favor of limited, local and personal expressions of masculine authority,

thus preserving an equation of masculinity and social mastery within a social and literary context that now demanded of men self-sacrifice and a subordination of self to the “greater good.” But I argue that, despite the unliterary settings of these works, the social context with which Hemingway is most concerned is *not* that of the working man, the soldier, or even of men in general, but of his own authorship, as evidenced by the implicit mechanisms of authorial self-construction that drive both works. The personal and professional specificity of these self-constructions suggest that Hemingway was less concerned with abstract questions about self and society than with the perception of his increasing artistic irrelevance among literary elites—despite (or perhaps because of) his growing “middlebrow” fame as a pleasure seeker and “man’s man” in the pages of the new *Esquire* magazine.⁴ We thus find the writer again constructing and elevating a distinctly self-referential brand of authorial masculinity that I have called in the previous chapter the “Hemingwayesque,” a construction that exchanges a frank admission of male feminization for an implicit claim of “manly” authorial mastery. Yet Hemingway’s assertions of unique, hierarchically superior masculine identity were clearly antithetical to the collective causes in which both the author and his Hemingwayesque protagonists were embedded, and thus are veiled by the more “responsible” thematics of social engagement foregrounded in each work.

The key to understanding Hemingway’s implicit quarrel with collectivism is an evolving counterthematics of masculine authorial agency and autonomy in these works, evolving that is, from the comparatively crude and pathos-driven protest of *To Have and Have Not* to the more complexly wrought construction of masculine agency and authority

in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Both novels claim, however, that the *real* man—which in this preeminently literary context means the real *author*—is a kind of “iland,” whether intellectually, emotionally or ideologically. Authors must be fully “autonomous” individual agents in order faithfully to see and represent reality—and thus fulfill the normative conditions of Hemingwayesque authorship delineated in each novel. This form of authorship is itself an ideal of manhood, though it is not, despite its idiosyncrasies, purely Hemingway’s invention. Rather, as I have already begun to suggest with Hemingway’s left-leaning critics, shifting social and critical orthodoxies played a powerful role in shaping Hemingway’s definition of authorship, pushing him to embrace a collective ethos he had inveighed against in the early thirties as profoundly threatening to artistic autonomy.

A crucial indicator of Hemingway’s self-constructive aims in these works is the way characters are hierarchized according to their possession of certain traits, traits that mark the evolving form of Hemingwayesque authorship in the mid-thirties. Though female characters like Marie Morgan, Dorothy Hollis, and Pilar are portrayed with insight and an often moving sympathy, they also fulfill a more critical function: marking and bearing witness to the condign authority of the Hemingwayesque protagonist, the character beneath whom they are demonstrably “ranked.” Tellingly, only the Hemingwayesque protagonist can meet the conditions of literary manhood that these works exalt. And as I have argued in previous chapters, the achieved authorial manhood that Hemingway showcases through author surrogates functions metonymically to attest to the same qualities in the author himself. But what I call self-construction is not limited

to qualities exhibited by these protagonists. Hemingway also calibrates for critical consumption a carefully implied author who is responsible for the insights and values propounded in the texts, an author that both bows to and (counter-)thematically challenges critical consensus.

In arguing that Hemingway used his art to insist on his own masculine cultural authority, I thus question recent attempts (yet again) to frame the author as a critic and skeptic about the stable forms of masculine identity that his protagonists strive for in his fiction.⁵ It is true that Hemingway's work can and should be read as registering the fluidity, performativity, and contradictions of gendered identity, and it may be equally true that the author sensed the transience and perhaps the impossibility of achieving such ideal forms of manhood; but as I hope to show, Hemingway's closely observed but complexly inchoate sense of such phenomena does not comprise a critique of them. On the contrary, these persistent self-constructions of achieved authorial manhood should suggest to us a kind of frustration motivating Hemingway's authorship; thus his delineation of ideal men that, though physically maimed and psychically wounded, are intellectually, ideologically and emotionally complete unto themselves—an ethos deeply antithetical to the humble sense of commonality that Donne expounded in the meditation on affliction from which Hemingway drew his title. Yet for my purposes, the issue might be less one of humility than of Hemingway's own "affliction," an aggravated sense of anxiety and authorial impotence that might be described with Sally Robinson's term, "white masculinity in crisis."

Of course, “masculinity in crisis” might be advanced to explain the better part of world history; but for Robinson, “crisis” has a more specific valence, naming not the events in some chronological process of male disempowerment, but a response to *fears* of such a disempowerment, a *literary* response. In other words, “crisis,” and the condition of feminization it names, might be more usefully read as a *trope*, rhetorically deployed by authors in response to anxieties about their own cultural displacement. But far from revealing any actual fissure in white male power, Robinson suggests such “crises” might be instrumental to its consolidation and maintenance, arguing, “there is much symbolic power from occupying the discursive position of subject-in-crisis.”⁶ Thus the term connects what is dramatized in a given literary work—its themes, characterizations and plot crises—to the sense of crisis which conditions, or even directly occasions, the work’s production.

With pained “Hemingwayesque” protagonists like Nick Adams, Jake Barnes, and Frederick Henry, Hemingway was clearly aware of the rhetorical power of crisis early in his career, using it in literary self-constructions that defined and asserted his own shifting forms of (alienated) literary manhood. I would suggest that the anxieties behind these assertions were most significant when this master of the short story turned his attention to the novel—as he bitterly called it, referring to his critical detractors, “that thing the pricks all love.” For Hemingway as much as for his critics, the novel was the ultimate guarantor of “serious” authorship, and thus was the form in which his self-constructive impulse was most intense.⁷ In what follows I demonstrate how anxieties about masculine literary production shaped *To Have and Have Not* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and the particular

forms of crises depicted therein. I will also show how the fraternal themes in these later novels veil a heightened impulse toward hierarchy, and how, particularly in *To Have and Have Not*, non-hierarchized relationships are shamed as emasculating forms of dependence. This shaming, however, is not limited to larger, political expressions of collective action, but also works against the humbler interdependencies of marriage, family, and friendship

Novel Anxieties

Despite writing some of his finest stories in the first half of the decade, as well as two full-length works of what might be called experimental non-fiction, it was his *novelistic* production that worried Hemingway and his critics in the mid-thirties. A leftward cultural turn of American intellectuals during the Great Depression was causing influential readers increasingly to identify limitations in Hemingway's artistry and moral outlook. Aggravating this trend, the combative, hardboiled, and critic-baiting authorial persona projected in the works of this period, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), and *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935), did little to convince his critics that Hemingway shared their intensifying concern for human suffering and social justice. As critics like Cowley and Edmund Wilson were agitating for communist candidates in the 1932 presidential elections, for example, Hemingway had just published *Death in the Afternoon*, that paean to Spain and to the lonely art of bullfighting, and was planning an African safari that would provide the material for the autobiographical hunting narrative, *The Green Hills of Africa*.⁸ Even critics not identified with the left,

such as *The New Yorker*'s Fadiman, could see nothing but social insularity in such occupations, however much that same insularity had appealed to readers of *A Farewell to Arms* only three years earlier. Bridling at the moralistic tenor of these criticisms, Hemingway scorned his detractors for their shifting views:

I do not follow the fashions in politics, letters, religion etc. If the boys swing to the left in literature you may make a small bet the next swing will be to the right and some of the yellow bastards will swing both ways. There is no left and right in writing. There is only good and bad writing. . . .I'm no goddamned patriot nor will I swing to left or right.⁹

Hemingway's manifestly phallic aversion to the flaccid "swinging" of critics might also be described as a principle of immovability—or in other words, of artistic autonomy. Long persuaded of the depravity of the world, Hemingway was not to be "moved" by what he regarded as naïve fantasies about the redeemability of mankind, nor was he, in his own estimation, to be influenced by changes in literary fashions. By his own definition of "good writing," Hemingway wrote "absolutely truly—absolutely with no faking or cheating of any kind."¹⁰

As the repetition suggests, Hemingway's artist, unmoved by fashion, expediency, or the venality of "yellow bastards," seems himself a kind of absolute, an unmoved mover or pure sensibility that had as its first duty to resist the social or personal corruptions that lead to false vision. And because altruism, to Hemingway, had its own subtly corrupting rewards, this artistic absolutism also precluded the influence of personal conscience, of "doing good," which Hemingway derided in other writers as a selfish attempt to "save [one's] soul."¹¹ This is not to say Hemingway saw authorship as simple reporting, but that causes and emotions endangered the purely impersonal modernist

aesthetic that Hemingway claimed to be achieving in his art. “[A writer] can be class conscious” he wrote, “only if his talent is limited. If he has enough talent, all classes are his province”; but reviews of *The Green Hills of Africa* suggested that it was Hemingway who was limited: the book was “unimportant,” and his preoccupations were “sophomoric.”¹²

And as the decade drew on, critics pointed out that Hemingway had not produced a “real” novel since *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929; a literary legacy that had seemed assured was evaporating in the hostile glare of a critical estate that now saw Hemingway’s artistic concerns either as a kind of pathology, or as immaturity. Ivan Kashkeen, a Soviet essayist and Hemingway correspondent, suggested in 1934 that Hemingway was afflicted with “*mens morbida in corpore sano*,”—a sick mind in a healthy body. The author, and by extension, his art, were joylessly, morbidly, self-obsessed. Hemingway was also being found unmanly in the “juvenile” violence of his early- to mid-thirties works. Similar criticisms were echoed in review after review; some focusing on Hemingway’s defensiveness, others identifying an adolescent posturing that suggested that manhood was an attribute the author had yet to achieve.¹³

A 1933 review by critic Max Eastman exemplifies this thirties mode of “gender criticism,” which Hemingway publicly responded to—perhaps not unjustly—as a literal assault on his manhood. For indeed, a certain kind of mature, manly, authorial mastery was the standard against which Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon* was found, in Eastman’s review, “juvenile, romantic, and sentimentalizing.”¹⁴ Shocked by Hemingway’s interest in the violent killing of bulls and horses in the bullfights,

Eastman's assertion that Hemingway "lacked the serene confidence that he is a full-sized man," suggests normatively that such confidence was to be expected in a proper male author. Thus if we identify Hemingway with an exaggerated emphasis on masculinity, it might seem exaggerated—reading his reviews—only in relation to an already demanding standard of "literary masculinity" adjudicated by critics. Indeed what Eastman seems to object to in noting Hemingway's "literary style of wearing false hair on the chest" is not the hair, but the falseness, the anxious and *unmanly* need to display a form of masculinity that the author was apparently not sure he possessed. In this light, Hemingway's response to Eastman's essay, an open letter to *The New Republic* asking the critic to elaborate his "hopeful doubts as to my potency" and his "speculations on my sexual incapacity" did not completely miss the issue, since the "serene" possession of masculinity *was* a basis by which Eastman evaluated Hemingway's authorship, which he suggested had been stunted by the horrors of death the author witnessed in the Great War.

Taking this argument a step further, we might also say that these critical expectations reify an ideal of manhood not only "potent," but autonomous, that is uncompromised by personal anxieties about one's own masculinity. Hemingway was thus caught in kind of trap. Should he change his artistic focus and represent the class struggle that was playing out even where he lived in sleepy Key West, or the Rooseveltian "social and economic revolution" that, as he told Irving Stone, was not "his kind of material," he risked abandoning the ethic of alienation and impersonality with which he had made his critical reputation.¹⁵ But more importantly, such a leftward "swing" would publicly evidence his own lack of autonomy.

These were the particular conditions of Hemingway's 1930s novelistic "crisis," though I would grant that throughout his long career, there were many such moments. Yet for my purposes, what is important is the *productive* dimension of masculinity in crisis, its literary manifestations and results. In the face of demands for manly "maturity," authorial potency and autonomy, it seems less surprising that Hemingway's response to this professional nadir was to (attempt to) construct himself as a mature, potent and autonomous author in *To Have and Have Not*. This demanded that Hemingway, *a la mode*, display precisely the kind of acute class consciousness he had sworn was beneath him even in 1935, while covertly—or perhaps defiantly—insisting on the same individualistic and socially alienated forms of authorship he had exalted in his earlier novels. Thus an author who began the decade truculently defending his isolationism, individualism, and high-minded opposition to the didactic in art was by 1940, in John Dos Passos' words, "the left's new fair-haired boy," especially in his highly public anti-fascism.¹⁶

While I do not question the sincerity of his hatred of fascism, in Hemingway's own definition, "a lie told by bullies," I would argue that, for this author, fascism represented a threat remarkably similar to that posed by leftist notions of brotherhood.¹⁷ That is, both of these forms of "collectivism" pose the threat of a loss or merging of individual identity in a larger mass. *To Have and Have Not's* individualistic but doomed Harry Morgan is paradigmatic of this fear. Indeed, for all of its populism, the "moral" that novel communicates most powerfully is not, as it might seem, the tragedy of "one man alone," but the *beauty* of it—providing that the "one man" is, as the novel labors to

suggest, Hemingway himself. But Hemingway does not just advertise his own superior qualities in the work; he makes those qualities normative, as in *The Sun Also Rises*; they are part of a definition of ideal manhood that only he attains. In assuming that professional anxieties had the upper hand over artistic concerns in this author's novels, I do not mean to suggest that artistic ambitions were lacking—in fact, one of the least acknowledged elements of the novel is its Joycean experimentalism—but that in the process of composition, Hemingway's artistic ambitions merged with or were subordinated to his desire to project “Hemingwayesque authorship” as a form of authoritative masculinity.

I have previously discussed how Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald deployed “author surrogates” in their works, narrators or protagonists who embodied professionally valued traits that the authors wished to project for their most influential readers. In *To Have and Have Not*, the closest thing to an author surrogate is Harry Morgan, who, though he embodies many normatively “Hemingwayesque” qualities, is not himself an author or an intellectual. Thus for Hemingway to claim proper '30s authorial manhood, he must emphasize not only his identification with, but also his own aesthetic *appreciation* of Harry's virtues, including the protagonist's all-important working-class status, his noirish, worldly penetration, and the moral seriousness that glitters like a diamond in the dark rock of his jaded worldview.

Harry Morgan might seem ill-suited as a vehicle for Hemingwayesque authorial self-construction; if, like his creator, he loves boats, drinking, and deep-sea fishing, he is also uncultured, working-class and blonde, an ex-cop, bootlegger and tough-guy bent on

supporting his family by whatever means necessary during the Great Depression. Yet Harry is most “Hemingwayesque” in the epistemological ease with which he sees through cant and delusion, through official lies and romantic distortions. And with his stump of an arm, and increasingly desperate financial plight, Harry fulfills the Hemingwayesque condition of woundedness and male feminization—though as befits the times, that feminization is economic. As a self-constructive gesture, this seems interesting in light of Hemingway’s defensive comments about the rich yacht owners and tourists with whom he frequently associated in Key West. As he explained to *Esquire*-founder, Arnold Gingrich, Hemingway was “always for exploited working people against absentee landlords even if I drink around with the landlords and shoot pigeons with them.” He would, he bragged disingenuously, “as soon shoot [the landlords] as the pigeons.”¹⁸

Hemingway disavows his elite associates in two ways, not only by portraying their decadence and serene obliviousness to economic hardship in a series of short (Dos Passos-like) narratives at the end of the novel, but also by connecting Harry’s plight to the perfidy of the very rich, who cause the protagonist to lose his arm, his charter fishing boat, and finally, his life in a desperate, extralegal attempt to support his family. Yet, what is ultimately more important than this defeat is Harry’s manly superiority: like the job candidate who answers the question, what is your greatest fault? by saying “I work too hard,” Harry’s “fault” is being *too* daring, *too* independent. That is, though Harry seems to learn the lesson that he should not have “gone it alone” but relied on the power of brotherhood and collective action, what the novel really wants us to see are his rare and admirable qualities of independence and clear-sightedness—qualities that the novel

explicitly associates with Hemingwayesque authorship, the superiority of which is established through a web of contrasts among the characters.

This covert drive for self-authorization suggests that a perception of “masculinity in crisis” can be an antidemocratic, authoritarian force since it works to obtain and legitimize an ideal of dominance and hierarchy over ideals of equality and fraternity. To join with other men in common cause, the novel suggests, is to submerge one’s individuality, one’s masculine agency, in an alarming way. In *To Have and Have Not*, Hemingway’s progressive intentions are thus undermined by his need to elevate himself as the novel’s “real man”—which means, in the context of left political activism to which he was responding as he wrote the novel, the “real leftist author.” Hemingway does this in two ways, by advocating for and identifying with the working-class Harry as a paragon of a kind of doomed masculine autonomy, and by performing his own class-conscious, autonomous and penetrative authorial vision—his own *unique* ability to see and rightly value Harry’s working-class integrity. Thus what I call the Hemingwayesque in *To Have and Have Not* is performed both by Harry and by the implied (leftist) author behind the novel’s multiple narrating voices. Hemingway’s typical self-constructive technique is to exalt a Hemingwayesque character or narrator through a sort of foil system, a series of contrasts with characters who, in their shortcomings and mediocrities, emphasize the protagonist’s or narrator’s superior qualities. But here, Hemingway also self-constructs through an implied contrast between the narratorial voice and the novel’s straw-leftist author, Richard Gordon—either a very mischievous or very mean depiction of Hemingway’s close friend, the much more left-identified, John Dos Passos.

When Hemingway wants to show that he's the "real thing" in some area, we know it because he represents a *faux* variety of that article, as in *The Sun Also Rises* where the second-rate literary man, Robert Cohn helps us distinguish the real one, Jake Barnes, a literary narrator who is free of the gendered romanticism represented by Cohn. To show that he is the author with the real concern for the masses, Hemingway offers in Richard Gordon a fatuous and self-absorbed New York intellectual who fashionably idealizes the working class, though he can barely see the real people of that class through the thick presuppositions that cloud his perception. Gordon's observations, that is, are based on his dogmatic sense of people as "types"—just the tendency Hemingway warned Dos Passos himself about in responding (for the most part, warmly) to his friend's well-received 1932 novel, *1919*—the second installment of what was to become the trilogy, *U.S.A.*. Gordon is thus just another "tourist" in Key West.

Gordon's obscured vision is made jarringly clear when, in a Key West crossing of paths ostentatiously recalling Joyce's Dublin in *Ulysses*, he spots the bereaved Marie Morgan, Harry's wife, a character we know has been a tender support to her husband. Gordon thinks, "Look at that big ox," and meditates "artistically"—and wrongly—on the burden she must be to her man:

He was going to use the big woman with the tear-reddened eyes he had just seen on the way home. Her husband when he came home at night hated her, hated the way she had coarsened and grown heavy, was repelled by her bleached hair, her too big breasts, her lack of sympathy with his work as an organizer. He would compare her to the young, firm-breasted little Jewess that had spoken at the meeting that evening. It was good. It was, it could be easily, terrific, and it was true. He had seen, in a flash of perception, the whole inner life of that type of woman. (177)

Gordon's sin here is not just to loathe Marie for being a member of the very working-class he fantasizes about saving. His fantasy about the "young Jewess" reveals him to be guilty, ironically, of *authorial self-construction*, and a highly romantic one: he is writing himself into his work as a brave leftist organizer, and is about to reward himself, through authorial magic, with the prize girl. To make sure we don't miss the emptiness of Gordon's "flash of perception," the narrating voice—*Hemingway's voice*—returns us to reality: "The woman he had seen was Harry Morgan's wife, Marie, on her way home from the sheriff's office" (177).

At this point, the reader knows that Marie has just learned of her husband's imminent death, so we can't miss who has full possession of this fictional woman's "real" tragic story, who respects her suffering and dignity, and who is undeceived by mere appearances. For it is ultimately Hemingway himself who has taught us about Marie's worshipful attitude to her husband, about the couple's tender reciprocities in bed, as well as the story behind Marie's bleached hair—she did it for the expressly erotic (and biographically Hemingwayesque) purpose of pleasing her husband. This implied contrast between Gordon and Hemingway seems meant to suggest that, unlike Gordon, Hemingway has no "dog" in this hunt: he is unblinkered by the egoism and political dogmas that distort Gordon's view. Hemingway thus constructs himself as an objective, even omniscient observer, and his objectivity—his moral and intellectual access, that is, to the hard reality of working-class suffering—is the source of his compassion for this soon-to-be-widowed mother. Yet the stage management of the scene actually suggests the

opposite conclusion, that Hemingway does indeed have a “dog in the hunt”—his desire to be seen as the “real” authorial friend and truthful observer of the working class.

Gordon has another useful fault as well—he is needy, and dependent on women, whereas Harry Morgan is purely a lone wolf outside the domestic sphere, where he is admittedly allowed some reliance. Gordon, however, victimizes his wife with his neediness. In their breakup scene, she accuses him not only of being “selfish and conceited as a barnyard rooster, always crowing, ‘Look what I have done,’” but of having forced her to have an abortion to maintain their globetrotting lifestyle, even as he needily cheated on her with other women. She compares him to her father, a good union man and dutiful provider and husband who, if *he* committed adultery, didn’t do it out of “barnyard pride” but from simply being “a man.” This implies that a *real* man is not only familiarly duty-bound, but a master of his own needs—he might himself cheat, but only from an *excess* of masculinity, not to prove himself a man in bed. In other words, in addition to his lack of intellectual autonomy, Gordon also lacks *emotional* autonomy—he is a slave to his needs, which thus unfit him as an objective observer of others. As a man, as an author, he is less the autonomous “island” than a sort of peninsula, unable to free himself from his emotional and intellectual dependencies.

In contrast to this shamed, “peninsular” masculinity, the novel offers Harry Morgan and his lovingly described boat—a boat that Hemingway situates in a larger “boat tropology” that evokes the American class system. Boats of all kinds fill the novel—working boats, pleasure boats, tankers, yachts, dinghies, skiffs, cutters, each “laden” with gendered economic significations. Harry’s own boat allows him to be his

own boss, actually putting him in a sort of precarious, nautical middle-class, though this status also involves him in humiliating transactions with the rich who charter his boat—and thus his person—for marlin fishing. Yet in these transactions, Harry has more agency and dignity than the hapless, boatless Key West “conchs” who are forced to dig ditches on government relief programs. One of those locals, Albert Tracy, describes Harry’s relationship to his boat as a kind of oneness that Albert equates with integrity or emotional health: “When [Harry] was in a boat he always felt good and without his boat he felt plenty bad” (97). The event that causes Harry to lose his boat—an officious New Deal high official on vacation reports Harry as a bootlegger—also causes Harry to lose an arm, a conflation of man and boat that equates Harry’s economic disenfranchisement with an actual, physical maiming.

Harry’s manhood is itself a kind of boat, a craft in which to breast, if you will, the flood of economic hardships that threaten to sink him. Both boat and man must maintain a tight physical integrity in order to be seaworthy. Both involve a kind of hard shell that encloses and protects a vulnerable inner space—itsself a good description of the Hemingwayesque in general: hard on the outside, exquisitely vulnerable on the inside. Yet the brittleness of its shell renders this inner space lamentably easy to perforate, as when Harry himself is fatally perforated by the bullets of a band of Cuban revolutionaries (more inauthentic leftists, who murder and rob banks “for the people”). Moreover, like a boat, surrounded on all sides by water, Hemingway’s ideal of authorial manhood is similarly detached, islanded, autonomous, though of course this is just a construction. The reality of Hemingway’s life was one of connection, of embeddedness in familial,

institutional and intellectual contexts. But this apparently compromising embeddedness seems to have prompted him to *fantasize* about autonomy in his works. This fantasy of autonomy, of independence, is behind the depiction of Richard Gordon, Albert Tracy, and indeed of Marie Morgan as *relatively* inferior, dependent creatures. Hemingway's need to create and justify hierarchies causes his work to discredit structures of human interdependence and collective interest, including the homely interdependencies of marriage and even male friendship, as seems apparent in his skewering of Dos Passos.

For Whom the Bell Tolls

Three years later, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway more complexly works through his resistance to collectivism, again couching a defense of individualism and hierarchy in an avowal of human solidarity. In Robert Jordan, both a literary man and a man of action, Hemingway attempts to resolve the opposition between self and society that in *To Have and Have Not* could only be answered gesturally, in the pathos-laden act, that is, of Harry Morgan's doomed male agency. In contrast to Morgan, Jordan is both a humble participant in the collective struggle, and, at least in the smaller circle in which he participates, an authoritative individual agent. That is, Hemingway commits his protagonist to the human struggle with the caveat of Jordan's *local* authority among the Spanish peasants with whom he joins in common cause, though masculine agency is claimed in Jordan's inner struggles as well—struggles that help him satisfy both the demands of the social order and Hemingway's intractable individualism and masculine hierarchicalism. Thus a major concern of the novel is what Thomas Strychacz calls the

“cave theatre” of Jordan’s performance of authoritative masculinity, in a cave from which a band of guerillas stage raids for the Republic. But that audience—a group of Spanish peasants—is itself instrumental in another performance, and for an extra-textual audience: those elite readers in whose hands rested Hemingway’s bid for literary authority.¹⁹ Hemingway doesn’t just perform that authority, but helpfully includes a set of characters who themselves witness its achievement and confirm it for us. As with his “author surrogates,” Hemingway also provides what we might call audience surrogates, who thus act as coercive guides to interpretation, sluicing all manner of information about Jordan into the desired channel: the masculine authority of Hemingwayesque authorship.

In his recent, *Hemingway’s Theatres of Masculinity*, Strychacz makes the opposite case, however, arguing that the consensus view that “secure and inviolable forms of manhood are . . . to be found in Hemingway’s work” is a result of rampant critical presupposition. Strychacz argues for a Hemingway whose close attention to the “theatrics” of masculinity gives the lie to decades of (essentialist) criticism that has taken for granted that this famously masculinity-obsessed author would himself naturally essentialize masculinity:

Hemingway’s narrative art constantly represents masculinity as temporary and subject to change rather than stable and permanent; as relational and contingent rather than self-determined; as the function of insubstantial codes and evaluating audiences rather than constitutive of an essential identity.²⁰

While I share Strychacz’s desire to wrest progressive meanings from Hemingway’s work, close attention to the *attempted* construction of stable authorial masculinities in his novels calls into question any notion of literary progressivism. Hemingway’s fiction does indeed

illustrate the contingency and performativity of gender—not least in the changing definitions of authorial masculinity that are highlighted in this chapter—and he may even have sensed the transient and performative dimensions of masculinity, but this does not mean that essential notions of identity are necessarily foresworn or critiqued in his work. On the contrary, Hemingway's fervor in defining and hierarchizing forms of masculinity in his representations suggests that a drive toward essential, ideal masculine identity motivates even self-conscious performances of it. Such performances are indeed rhetorical, but not necessarily transparent. That is, to self-consciously be driven by unattainable masculine ideals is not necessarily to renounce those ideals, nor should such a self-conscious performance of masculinity necessarily be regarded, as Strychacz would have it, as a Brechtian defamiliarization.

Rather, as the example of Jordan particularly suggests, Hemingway's masculinities are both essential *and* performed in the sense that successful performances of masculinity *suggest* its essence. For Judith Butler, this is performativity itself, the approximation—through performance—of what is assumed to be a timeless ideal, but that finds expression only in reiterations. The venue of fiction offers unusually powerful performance opportunities, since representations are not bound by the same restraints that hamper performances by persons. Strychacz's view may even give us a more disingenuous Hemingway, one more conscious of the literary manipulations and exaggerations necessary to avow the forms of masculinity he felt demanded of him in his particular professional and aesthetic context.

One of the most important of these manipulations is couched in the challenging fact that Robert Jordan is not the only performer of Hemingwayesque authorship in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; that honor is shared by a woman, Pilar, the wife of a guerilla leader of crumbling resolve (Pablo) and the character Hemingway once claimed he was most proud to have created. But as opposed to the childlike, animal, Maria, Jordan's sexually idealized "rabbit"—femininity almost completely emptied of content—Pilar's "femininity" is constructed of the traits Hemingway most admires about masculinity. "Almost as wide as she was tall" and with "a brown face like a model for a granite monument," Pilar is (like Gertrude Stein, to whom she has often been compared) indomitable, analytical, and physically masculine. But unlike the lesbian and feminist Stein, Pilar is also a connoisseur of cojones, and a Hemingwayesque reporter and storyteller on such topics as food, alcohol, war, Spain, the bullfight, fear—and masculinity. Recounting a time in Valencia with her bullfighter lover, Finito, she transforms the wine into literary art, "cold, light, and good at thirty centimes the bottle," and tells of oxen as if reciting a lost vignette from *In Our Time*: "Driven to the water until they must swim; then harnessed to the boats, and, when they found their feet, staggering up the sand. Ten yokes of oxen dragging a boat with sails out of the sea in the morning with the small waves breaking on the beach" (85).

To Pilar, indeed, is given some of the novel's most powerful storytelling, as when she narrates, at length, the wrenching story of Pablo's extermination of local fascists on the first day of the revolution. After, Jordan reflects,

Pilar had made him see it in the town. If that woman could only write. He would try to write it and if he had luck and could remember it perhaps he could get it down as she told it. God, how she could tell a story. She's better than Quevado, he thought. (134)

For Pilar to achieve the Conradian goal of “ma[king] him see” the reality of the revolution, Jordan is also admiring a Hemingwayesque achievement: she has made in her representation a “whole new thing truer than anything true.”²¹ Such a Steinian “entity” (as Stein and Hemingway both defined the masterpiece) has a life and autonomy of its own, as signified by Jordan’s ability to “see” what has been presented to him only in the vanishing cadences of her narrative.²² But, of course, Jordan’s humility is Hemingway’s false modesty since it is Hemingway himself who has written both Pilar’s story and Jordan’s praise of it. And Jordan is himself an author—he has written a little-read work on Spain, and hopes to take up writing again after the war. Jordan often meditates in a recognizably Hemingwayesque literary-critical mode, and is praised by one reader of his work in terms that might seem familiar to us: “I think you write *absolutely truly* and that is very rare” (248, my emphasis).

While we thus find Hemingway using his characters to praise his own authorship—in this case praising part of the book we are reading *as* we read it—these moments serve a subtler function as well: defining the hierarchy of values in which Jordan, and metonymically Hemingway himself, will ultimately emerge as models of ideal literary manhood, of the kind of disciplined, socially engaged and morally serious authorship that might count as signs of “growth” to the likes of Malcolm Cowley or Edmund Wilson. Yet as I will show, Hemingway frames his metonymic protagonist’s

social engagement in a way that preserves Jordan's unique manly agency and authority even as he subordinates himself to the collective cause for which he gives his life. As both a high-minded Republican and a cultist of masculinity, Pilar is fashioned to attest to Jordan's successful balancing of precisely these qualities. But if Pilar can exemplify "manly" authorial ideals as well as a man, how does the Hemingwayesque signify anything so specific as literary manhood? The answer is that Pilar is *temporarily* authorized so that she may herself authorize Jordan; at the end of the novel, however, she cedes that authority to both Jordan and Pablo, (authoritatively) judging both men rightful leaders. That Pablo then finally submits himself to Jordan's mission and leadership completes the hierarchy of masculinity defined in the novel. Thus Pilar's most important reportage is of Jordan himself; it is in the magic mirror of her authorial eye that we read the heroic, external counternarrative to Jordan's inner struggle—the inner woundedness and vulnerability he masters in his devotion to his duty.

In this sense Pilar, for all her formidability and seeming agency, is a more sophisticatedly constructed Marie Morgan, a more impressive and complex foil, that is, more impressively and complexly to tutor the reader about Jordan's superior qualities. Her reflective and amplifying function is evident as soon as Jordan arrives in the mountains. There he must win the support of a loose band of guerillas led by Pablo (a once-formidable leader and fighter who has lapsed into what Pilar calls cowardice, but which is really a dangerous and perhaps contagious despair). When Jordan first meets Pilar, she looks probingly at her new counterpart, and he takes no time in deciding they are true comrades:

She was looking into his face and smiling and he noticed she had fine gray eyes.
“Do you come for us to do another train?”
“No,” said Robert Jordan, trusting her instantly. “For a bridge.” (31)

In her turn, Pilar trusts Jordan immediately with an assessment of her own husband’s corruption. She explains, “I speak to you as though I have known you for a long time.” Jordan replies, “It is like that . . . when people understand each other” (32). The instantaneity of these mutual appraisals signifies a kind of knowledge deeper than rationality, implicitly to be trusted—or in other words, authoritative. In this sense, both characters’ “masculine” authority—and Pilar’s “female masculinity,” to borrow Judith Halberstam’s term, is nothing if not phallic—is an essential trait, a kind of presence signified by epistemological penetration and certainty, and itself ascertainable by those with eyes to see.²³ Yet essential presence is no guarantee of successful performance, as Jordan must continually establish his authority with the band, and even with himself. The greatest (external) threat to that authority (and to Jordan’s mission) is Pablo, who, despite his lapsed condition, is dangerous due to his own quality of indomitability. That is, though Pablo fails properly and responsibly to *perform* masculinity, he nevertheless continues to possess it—a fact that will have ideologically useful consequences for Hemingway’s representation of masculine agency.²⁴

A contradictory definition of masculinity, as both acts and essence, is evident in the novel’s early confrontations between Jordan and Pablo. As Jordan has instantly judged the (essential) soundness of Pilar, he also plumbs Pablo’s character, immediately apprehending the latter’s malaise. As they meet for the first time, Jordan smiles pleasantly but “he did not like the look of this man and inside himself he was not smiling

at all” (9). Jordan knows with certainty that a man in Pablo’s state is dangerous in wartime: “‘I don’t like that sadness,’ he thought. ‘That sadness is bad. That’s the sadness they get before they quit out or betray’” (12). Like Freud with his subjects, Jordan is a psychoanalyst of both certainty and sudden (penetrative) leaps of insight, though for the sake of realism he makes some missteps—which he acknowledges with the same certainty.²⁵ Jordan thus sees signs that all is not lost with Pablo, that in the man is a masculine essence that might allow him to “perform” more responsibly in the future. When the guerilla leader shows the newcomer some horses he has seized in action against the fascists, Jordan sees that Pablo’s struggle is not over: “‘All these I have taken,’ Pablo said, and Robert Jordan was pleased to hear him speak proudly.’” (13)

Later, Jordan enters the cave prepared to shoot Pablo, who opposes the demolitionist’s official mission to blow a key bridge in anticipation of a Republican offensive. Jordan maneuvers the discussion so as to provoke his rival and justify the shooting, but Pablo cannily refuses the bait, pressing his case that destroying the bridge will attract the fascists to their position in the mountains—an argument, that is, for choosing self over the greater good. When Pilar intervenes in favor of the Republic and Jordan’s more altruistic mission, the other guerillas fall in behind her against Pablo; but even then, even when displaced and publicly taunted for cowardice by his own wife, Pablo remains impassive, refusing the implication of feminization:

“All right. You command,” he said. “And if you want he can command too. And the two of you can go to hell.” He was looking the woman straight in the face and he was neither dominated by her nor seemed to be much affected by her” (57).

Seeing Pablo *seemingly* unmanned before the watching eyes of the band, we might well conclude, as Strychacz does, that masculinity is represented here as “a function of insubstantial codes and evaluating audiences”; but Pablo’s easy refusal of the verdict of feminization, and, as we will see, Jordan’s similar attitude, suggests a new stage in Hemingway’s thinking about male feminization. No longer willing to let his Hemingwayesque protagonist be destroyed Harry Morgan-style by modern conditions, Hemingway seems to insist on an essential masculine identity that, to be sure, must be expressed in acts and judged in performance, but that holds within itself a quality that cannot be destroyed, and that thus makes possible Pablo’s redemption. As Pilar puts it, “I suppose if a man has something once, always something of it remains” (391). This “something” is also suggested by Jordan and Pilar’s displays of instinctual knowledge, and in the novel’s thematizing of masculine integrity or “soundness,” a state that might be used to *predict* good or bad performances of manhood, but of which acts are but the outer signs or symptoms.

The concept of a hidden but ascertainable soundness or unsoundness is further explored after Pablo’s defeat before his fighters. Drunk and defiant, he goes to check on his prized horses, the acquisition of which, we understand, has turned this peasant into a corrupt capitalist no longer willing to take risks for the common cause. Earlier, Pablo has tested Jordan on the basis of the latter’s knowledge of horses, which knowledge both men understand as a sign of innate integrity or “horse-sense.” Indeed, it is a remnant of this innate quality that Jordan sees in Pablo’s pride in displaying the animals. Of course, Jordan passes Pablo’s test with veterinarian aplomb, noting injuries both significant and

not, and quickly identifying the best of the horses (13).²⁶ Yet the creatures have their own “horse-sense,” their own (innate) way to measure (innate) soundness, which is thematically useful when Jordan secretly follows the drunken Pablo to the meadow where the animals are picketed. Hemingway’s devotion to hierarchy applies even in the animal world; thus it is the best horse—the one appraised as such by Jordan—who passes judgment on the soundness of Pablo: “The horse understood nothing that [Pablo] said; only, from the tone of the voice, that they were endearments and he had been in the corral all day and was hungry now, grazing impatiently at the limits of his picket rope, and the man annoyed him” (64). Sensing Pablo’s irrelevance (at least in his current condition), the horse’s lack of affection for the man is framed as an implicit form of moral condemnation, and a sign of Pablo’s corruption.

Meanwhile Pilar, herself morally authorized before the confrontation in the cave, has used that authority to vouch for *Jordan’s* soundness with the band. She has indeed backed a foreigner against her husband, standing “proudly and confidently,” holding her spoon “as authoritatively as if it was a baton” (56). With this phallic but explicitly distaff implement, Pilar is herself hierarchized; she claims control of the group, but commands only in support of Jordan, whose expertise, discipline and phenomenologically described moral probity comprise the greater part of the novel. Both for us and for the band of fighters, Jordan is thus authorized less by his official sanction from General Golz in Madrid, than by Pilar, whose Hemingwayesque eye and explicit, repeated approval of his person and character support Jordan’s place at the top of the *local* hierarchy of persons in the novel, a seeming compensation for Jordan’s near-religious submission to the cause

and military hierarchy, and the sense of human responsibility to which his voluntary enlistment in a foreign war attests.

The novel's mutual authorization society (which includes, to a limited degree, Jordan's guide, Anselmo) also steers the reader in assessing the moral worth of other characters, from the amiable but sensual Rafael, declared "corrupt" by Pilar, to the stolid Fernando, the savvy El Sordo, and the pure and childlike Maria. Outside this circle of soundness is Jordan's late predecessor, Karkov, a spooked dynamiter who undermined morale with his "windiness" and fears of capture and torture, and Pablo, disgraced early, but finding it within him to step back into the charmed circle at the end of the novel.

Discipline and Feminization

Jordan's soundness, however, is not always signified by masterful acts, and need not be, at least not before the novel's closure. Indeed at many points we find a less than masterful Jordan, subject to Pilar's barbs as much as her praise, struggling with the inscrutable and indomitable Pablo, and assailed by a quiet but unceasing torrent of doubts and fears that threaten—as he worries to the end—to debilitate him. The examples of Karkov and Pablo thus demonstrate the dangers to masculinity of a loss of discipline, though this is as much an internal as an external imperative. Discipline indeed, is what we are allowed to see with our access to Jordan's thoughts. The primary action of his internal monologues is a steady working through and mastering of those impulses that might impede him from doing his duty: fear, romance, doubt, scruples, pride, ideology,

even reason itself, though reason is also Jordan's main weapon against these thoughts.

Pilar gets the lowdown on Jordan's Hemingwayesque value system in an early exchange:

“And you have no fear?”
“Not to die,” he said truly.
“But other fears?”
“Only of not doing my duty as I should.”
“Not of capture, as the other had?”
“No, he said truly. “Fearing that, one would be so preoccupied as to be useless.”
“You are a very cold boy.”
“No,” he said. “I do not think so.”
“No. In the head you are very cold.”
“It is that I am very preoccupied with my work.”
“But you like the other things of life?”
“Yes. Very Much. But not to interfere with my work.”
“You like to drink. I know. I have seen.”
“Yes. Very Much. But not to interfere with my work.”
“And women?”
“I like them very much, but I have not given them much importance” (91)

If we read the character of Robert Jordan as a motivated, authorial self-construction, this inescapably Hemingwayesque philosophy—already declaimed in remarkably similar form in *Death in the Afternoon* (and in Hemingway's own authorial own voice)—has two extratextual virtues: of asserting the author's work ethic and moral seriousness, and of explaining how such seriousness could co-exist with Hemingway's famous pleasure-seeking and devotion to drink, those aspects of his public image most discordant with a desired image of “social responsibility.”²⁷

But beyond drink and women, in which matters we see Jordan exert the most rigorous self-control, the grossest impediment to our protagonist doing his duty is a familiar kind of Hemingwayesque woundedness, which seems to be the fear of suicide, but as we will see, might more accurately be described as the threat of feminization. It is

this threat that Jordan checks with discipline, but which makes his vulnerability a condition of successfully fulfilling the terms of his “work,” that activity which will metaphorically signify Hemingway’s own contribution to the common good, and yet provide the social distinction and masculine specialness the author continued to insist on even in “joining up” under the banner of human solidarity, as he did in real life in reporting on the Spanish Civil War. The night before a colloquy between Jordan, Maria, and Pilar, the gypsy sings, “*I had an inheritance from my father, it was the moon and the sun*” (59). We soon find that Jordan too has a paternal inheritance, but one that haunts him. Questioned about his revolutionary bona fides, Jordan dryly reveals that his father, back in America, was also a “Republican”:

“And is thy father still active in the Republic,” Pilar asked.

“Can one ask how he died?”

“He shot himself.”

“To avoid being tortured?” the woman asked.

“Yes,” Robert Jordan said. “To avoid being tortured.”

Maria observes that, compared to her father, who “could not obtain a weapon,” Jordan’s father had “good fortune” to find one; Jordan replies, “Yes, it was pretty lucky. . . .Should we talk about something else?” (67). Just as the term “Republican” has another, ironic meaning when applied to Jordan’s father, so does the explanation that the man shot himself “to avoid being tortured.” We learn more about this (now highlighted) primal scene later in the novel. The father, we find, killed himself with his own father’s civil war pistol, a gun Jordan later drops—after seeing his own reflection in the water below—in a lake reputed to be 800 feet deep. His companion comments, “I know why you did that

with that old gun, Bob”; echoing his reply to Maria, Jordan replies, “Well, then we don’t have to talk about it.” (337).

Jordan’s repression, however, is an artist of omission’s exposition. When he is later pressured by growing fears about the wisdom of his almost certainly-doomed mission, Jordan thinks yearningly of his grandfather, a man who “dominated” his fear in the Civil and Indian wars. Jordan remembers his first “sickening” realization of his father’s cowardice, and then bitterly remembers a woman’s role in the tragedy, presumably a mother much like Hemingway’s own, Grace Hall Hemingway, who also “bullied” a husband who subsequently killed himself:

He was just a coward and that was the worst luck any man could have. Because if he wasn’t a coward he would have stood up to that woman and not let her bully him. I wonder what I would have been like if he had married a different woman? (339)

In these thoughts, Jordan rapidly oscillates between ontological and performative notions of masculinity. That his father “was” a coward suggests an original state of feminization that determined his father’s inability to master his wife (and more than any other Hemingway protagonist, Jordan masters Maria, however sexually interchangeable the pair strive to be in the separate sphere—to be precise, Jordan’s sleeping bag—of their sexual intimacy). Yet pondering how he himself might have been had he not been raised by a feminized father, Jordan implies that his own manhood was comprised of acts performed so as not to be like his father—masculinity as performance. Thinking about his revered grandfather, however, has caused Jordan to wonder how he happened to receive

the grandfather's "good juice," as opposed to the weak broth of his suicidal father—another ontological definition of masculinity, this time, genetic.

Does Jordan not *know* if he got the "good juice"? Is manhood an essence or a series of performances? It seems that Jordan can only be sure he is a man by interpreting the signs of his own manly acts. Manhood thus seems in this novel a sort of Pascal's wager. Unable to decide the existence of God, Pascal weighed risk and reward to conclude that the wisest course was to act *as if* He existed (thereby winning salvation and avoiding hell's torments). Similarly dubious, Jordan must act *as if* he was a man, and thus is constantly monitoring his performance for signs that he is or is not one of the elect. Hemingway, however, seems to hedge his bet, having authorized characters to judge his Hemingwayesque protagonist essentially "sound" (that is, innately, properly manly), while simultaneously depicting that protagonist *performing* masculinity as a form of intensely careful, self-surveilling agency.

Thus Jordan immediately checks the prideful thought that he is one of the elect: "Don't get to referring to the good juice and such other things until you are through tomorrow. Don't be too snotty too soon" (339). The oscillation suggests that having the right stuff is both his essential nature, and of his own doing. In effect, Jordan can claim (contradictorily) that he *acts like* a man because he has always been a man, and that his always having been a man is a result of his constantly, carefully acting *like* a man. Through the Hemingwayesque Jordan, then, Hemingway himself metonymically claims responsibility for his possession of a form of manhood that was always/already his—the ultimate gesture of self-made manhood. But this is a different self-made man than we

have previously seen. With the word “snotty,” we recall Harry Morgan, whose defiant attitude was admiringly described with the same term in Marie Morgan’s final soliloquy; now, however, snottiness is overconfidence, and thus a threat to successful performance. Should Jordan’s overconfidence (or fear, or sense of the futility of his mission, or desire for a future with Maria) cause him to fail, the edifice of his elected status will crumble just as it did for Karkov, and as it seems to be doing for Pablo. Thus, though Jordan can claim credit for his own essential manliness, he is in constant fear that he “is” *not* a man, and any serious lapse remains perilous.

In this way Hemingway, pressed to demonstrate an efficacious, socially useful authorial masculinity, reconstructs Harry Morgan’s anarchic individualism in a way that supports the social order, yet that maintains a near-absolute *inner* agency and hard-won autonomy to accompany the local authority he wins with Pablo’s band. Jordan is thus completely responsible for his authority and manly usefulness to others, a fact that seems meant to ameliorate his—and Hemingway’s—loss of agency to the collective cause he embraces. And though Jordan also dies at the end of the novel, his death comes only after having successfully accomplished his duty, the duty with which he metonymically attests to Hemingway’s authorial social engagement. Thus it is only ironic that the Republican offensive has failed, or that Jordan’s sacrifice is rendered meaningless in practical terms. What matters is the victorious accomplishment of manhood that his death confirms and makes permanent. In contrast to Harry’s death, which completed a portrait of manly independence doomed by modernity, Jordan’s is framed as a toll of “la guerre,” denying, just as Pablo did, the verdict of male feminization. Indeed, the meaninglessness of his

death only augments the local, personal significance of Jordan's manhood-making self-discipline—discipline that allows him to maintain a form of ideological autonomy and skepticism similar to Hemingway's own views, even as he commits his very life for the good of others.

Hemingway thus depicts his first novelistic protagonist able to master his woundedness and deny feminization, not just epistemologically, as with Jake Barnes, but in practical terms as well. But as the recollection of Jordan's bullying mother suggests, what is equally mastered in the novel is the threat of feminization at the hands of women. In contrast to Jake Barnes' decidedly modern submission to the sexual agency of Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*, Jordan instantly assumes a Victorian relationship of male dominance with Maria that recapitulates the doctrine of separate spheres—when the two are not in Jordan's androgyny-inducing sleeping bag. Herself wounded beyond all utility by her rape and torture by fascists (who also killed her parents before her eyes), Maria takes the role of primary victim that had been reserved for Hemingwayesque protagonists in previous novels. A willing fantasy of female submission, Maria is only too glad to cede all practical authority to her lover. Though in bed the pair fantasize erotically about their interchangeability—as Maria puts it, “I am thee and thou art me and all of one is the other”—this iteration of Hemingway's obsession with sexual role exchange is the most purely sexual, since Jordan's dedication to his work relegates her to the realm of the “just personal” and thus, the unserious. After even the most soulful sexual intimacies, Jordan snaps back to his explicitly manly sphere of duty and hard objective fact, a shift that is narrated as a literal disappearance: “Because now he was not there. He was walking

beside her but his mind was thinking of the problem of the bridge now and it was all clear and hard and sharp as when a camera lens is brought into focus” (161). The importance of Jordan’s private, inviolable work—its importance for Jordan’s integrity, that is, less than for the war effort, which is implied to be noble but hopeless—justifies this reactionary turn. And as we have seen, Pilar too, is representationally eliminated as a feminizing threat: in the presence of “authentic” masculinity, she is well disposed to defer, approving Jordan’s judgment and behavior throughout the narrative, and taking Pablo back into the band as leader even after he has sabotaged Jordan’s mission.

The novel’s refusal of feminization does come with an acceptance on Hemingway’s part of some circumscription of manly agency in the cause of “humanity”; yet the sum of that loss seems reclaimed or re-exacted in the representational subordination of Maria, Pilar, Pablo, and the peasants to Jordan’s supremacy. Moreover, the novel’s wild critical and financial success restored Hemingway himself to a position of preeminence in American letters that would culminate in a 1954 Nobel Prize for *The Old Man and the Sea*. We might imagine such a prize would go a long way to alleviating the performance pressures that Hemingway responded to with such specificity in his novels written in the thirties; yet not long after receiving the award, Hemingway was hard at work on a memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, that was at pains to discredit the author’s deceased friend, Scott Fitzgerald, who had died in 1940, and whose literary stature after his death was in rapid ascendance.

Like Robert Jordan, pressured into manly performance by his agonizing unbelief, Hemingway never achieved the masculine stability and peace in life that he imaged in

Jordan's death. Such an achievement is itself a fiction, and one that Hemingway's self-constructions, so focused on the judgment of literary posterity, have since legitimized for generations of readers. Yet as we have seen, Hemingway was no more the origin of such myths of masculinity—of unfettered agency and purely empirical knowledge—than the elite audiences for whom he shaped his novels; he was himself responding to intense and contradictory cultural pressures in his own intense and contradictory way. It is in this sense that Hemingway's individualism and empirical bent can serve progressive ends, even in spite of their self-constructive genesis. Read self-constructively, that is, the author's peculiarly sentient treatment of the paradoxical workings of gender and power can also be used to open them to analysis—allowing at least the possibility that even the most refractive individualism might ultimately serve collective ends.

Notes:

¹ Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not* (New York: Scribner's Paperback Fiction, 1996), 225.

² Robert O. Stephens, ed., *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Reception* (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1977), 280.

³ Stephens, *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Reception*, 234.

⁴ As opposed to the artist constructed in his fiction, Hemingway was, in this venue, the prototypical *Esquire* man of action, and his involvement with the magazine was a key to its early success. A close friend of *Esquire* founder, Arnold Gingrich, Hemingway contributed regularly with dispatches from far-flung parts of the world and normative advice for men on how to live the Hemingwayesque lifestyle. John Raeburn emphasizes the “middlebrow” audience cultivated by Hemingway in such magazines as *Esquire* and *Life*, but does not note the cultivation of more elite, critical audiences in the novels themselves. See John Raeburn, *Fame Became of Him: Hemingway as Public Writer* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

⁵ In the introduction, I discussed Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes' attempt to rehabilitate Hemingway as a 'person of interest' to post-second wave feminist criticism. More recently, Susan del Gizzo has positioned Hemingway as a hermeneut of identity with her reading of the posthumous *True at First Light*. Del Gizzo suggests that Hemingway, during a final trip to Africa in 1953-54, used primitivism to “articulate a profound self-critique. His self-conscious attempt to become a member of the Kamba tribe through a ritualistic initiation and his decision to assume or perform a new identity as Kamba (however imperfectly), created a space of critique from which he reconsidered not only his public image, but also arguably

Western notions of essential, unified selfhood as well.” But I would note especially the unpublished nature of this manuscript, known to scholars as the “African Journal,” to suggest the large difference between what Hemingway, as a caretaker, in rhetoric, of the “authentic” self he created in his fictions, considered publishable and what he did not. Having said that, however, del Gizzo’s exploration is fascinating in the way it contrasts the disparate attitudes toward identity characterizing the public as opposed to the private Hemingway. See Suzanne del Gizzo, “Going Home: Hemingway, Primitivism, and Identity,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.3 (2003): 496-523. 498. Thomas Strychacz importantly emphasizes the “rich . . . rhetoricity” of masculinity in Hemingway’s work, and its performance ethic, but does not specify, as a rhetorician should insist, the audience *outside the text* that rhetoric was deployed to persuade. See Thomas Strychacz, *Hemingway’s Theatres of Masculinity* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2003), 8.

⁶ Robinson, who is paraphrasing Tania Modleski in this argument, feels the gesture of victimization is a two-edged sword for men since it embodies the previously “unmarked” white male who so complains, while at the same time depriving him of the privileges of “unmarkedness.” See Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*, (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 9.

⁷ In focusing only on the novels of two generally acknowledged masters of the American short story, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, I suggest the way the novel for these men, more than the short story, functioned as a marker of literary seriousness and interest to posterity. For each of these writers, the novel was a supremely challenging form. Not including the novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway published only five novels in a career of four decades, and wrestled tortuously with others in manuscript until the end of his life. Fitzgerald took nine wretched, doubt-filled years to produce *Tender is the Night* after the success of *Gatsby*, and never completed *The Last Tycoon*, his final attempt at the longer form. I would suggest it is in the short story form where each author felt most free of the kind of gendered constraints I detail in this dissertation. It is in the stories we find these authors at their most polysemic, reflexive best.

⁸ Wilson and Cowley, along with Sherwood Anderson, John Dos Passos and Granville Hicks were all signatories of the communist pamphlet. See Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years*, (Urbana: Illini books, 1998, 1973), 77.

⁹ Hemingway to Paul Romaine, 6 July, 1932, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981), 363.

¹⁰ Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 189.

¹¹ Hemingway to Paul Romaine, May 1932, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters*, 363.

¹² The first quote is from Baker, *Ernest Hemingway, A Life Story*, 277. The second quote, “unimportant,” is from a review by Bernard DeVoto; the scathing “sophomoric” is from *Newsweek* magazine. For each, see Stephens, 153 and 151.

¹³ See, for example, reviews by Granville Hicks, T.S. Matthews, William Troy, *Time* magazine, and Isabel Ackerman in Stephens, 119, 145, 146, and 157.

¹⁴ Stephens, 130-32.

¹⁵ Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, 268.

¹⁶ After *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, not all left-leaning critics subscribed to the view of Hemingway as comrade. For example, Mike Gold attacked Hemingway in *The Daily Worker* as “mutilated by his class egotism . . . and the poverty of his mind.” An open letter in *The New Masses* suggested Hemingway “had yet to dive deep into the lives of others, and there to find his own.” See Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, 356.

¹⁷ Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, 300.

¹⁸ Hemingway to Harry Sylvester, 5 February, 1937. *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters*, 456.

¹⁹ Financial pressures also might have played a part in this bid, as Robert W. Trogon argues in “Money and Marriage: Hemingway’s Self-Censorship in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,” *The Hemingway Review* 22.2 (2003): 6-18.

²⁰ Strychacz, 8.

²¹ Quoted in Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham, Duke UP, 2000), 96. In the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad calls the highest

goal of art “to make you *see*. That and no more, and it is everything.” Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1973), 13.

²² Expounding in a prescriptive, Steinian mode throughout *Death In The Afternoon*, Hemingway uses the terms, “novel,” “entity,” and “whole,” just as Stein herself would describe the proper work of art in her talk, “What Are Masterpieces and Why are there So Few of Them?” See Bonnie Kime, Scott, ed., *The Gender of Modernism*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 498.

²³ Pilar is of course a construction of Hemingway’s, and can thus “have” neither masculinity nor femininity, though we may seek to decipher how her representation fits within or without the gender-definitional projects in which Hemingway’s work so often engages. Complicating her representation is also her physical and behavioral affinities with the famously peremptory and certain Gertrude Stein, Hemingway’s erstwhile mentor who had by the early thirties become one of his caustic critics. In this sense Pilar seems a kind of recuperative fantasy of that relationship, though I would not presume to access the psychosexual dynamics that many have suggested informed their relationship. Yet Pilar does perform the same role for Jordan that Stein played for Hemingway, providing both needling and encouragement. But more importantly, like Pilar, Stein had an authorizing function for the young Hemingway, providing him with, in her pronouncements and approval, literary authority.

²⁴ This form of soundness is what is implied by what Thomas Strychacz calls Pablo’s “good hand in the dark,” that is, the signification, communicated by purely tactile means, that Pablo may have been restored to manhood at the end of the novel. But as Strychacz suggests, this “good hand in the dark” might also imply Pablo’s continued treacherousness. Though I take the expression to signify Pablo’s return to “sound” manhood, Strychacz posits an undecidability that “forecloses the difference between the authentic and the performed self,” which suggests Hemingway’s intention to complicate essential manhood. But what Strychacz sees as undecidable, I see as a “both/and” representation of the simultaneously constructed *and* essential masculinity I have been discussing in my reading. See Strychacz, 120.

²⁵ A good example is a misstep Jordan makes in suggesting what Pilar and El Sordo should do after the attack. Though he acknowledges his mistake, he brazenly out Pilar’s rage, even repeating his suggestion, and then thinks how he may have helpfully shamed the guerillas into taking a more productive role in the war. Thus though Jordan is fallible, he is also right, and is willing to pay the consequences for his mistakes. It is worth noting that part of the advice Hemingway delivered to John Dos Passos in critiquing the latter’s *1919* was that characters should never be idealized, but should always retain flaws. Jordan’s “flaws,” which do not significantly erode the portrait of responsible, epistemologically piercing authorial manhood which he delineates, thus seem purposeful defects of this kind.

²⁶ Stein’s remark that Hemingway “smelled of the museums” in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* seems both refuted and confirmed in this scene which has Jordan displaying both rude “horse-sense” and a sophisticated familiarity with high art: “[The horse] looked as though he had come out of a painting by Velasquez.” The class implications here include Hemingway’s desire to claim both high modern intellectuality, and innate common sense, dichotomizing the two forms in a way calculated to distinguish his own epistemological style over the presumably more aesthetical and distant forms of knowledge of his critics and colleagues. See Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 216.

²⁷ In *The Green Hills of Africa*, Hemingway asserted this same work ethic but without the sense of duty to others, an omission might be said to have later necessitated the “revision” that is Robert Jordan. See *The Green Hills of Africa*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935.

CHAPTER 4:

THE UNSEEN SEER: VISION, KNOWLEDGE AND PHALLIC REVERSALS IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

My goal was not to escape, or hold back, but to work through; to transcend, as the blues transcend the painful conditions which with they deal. The protest is there, not because I was helpless before my racial condition, but because I *put* it there.

(Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," 137; Ellison's emphasis)

"Because at a price I now see that which I couldn't see" (*Invisible Man*, 569)

In the opening of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the eponymous protagonist is secreted in a basement where he confesses to the seeming disadvantage of being "invisible." Although he finds that state somewhat "wearing on the nerves," it does offer certain advantages, such as the element of surprise when one wishes to, as our narrator does, "carry on a fight against them without their realizing it."

¹ Them, of course, refers to "the sleeping ones," those white Americans who are unable to see the reality of black masculinity even when—as our narrator aggressively does to a passerby—it literally knocks them down (5). Invisible Man is engaged in a literal power struggle with his oppressors, draining off electricity from Monopolated Power & Light to run the 1369 light bulbs he has installed in his basement as an act of sabotage. "The truth is the light," he explains of this unseen revenge, and "light is the truth" (7). By such light, indeed, has the narrator painfully arrived at the truth of his social invisibility—a disadvantage that, as I hope to show, helps Invisible Man ultimately get the epistemological drop on his oppressors.

In this zero-sum battle for light, in which one man's illumination is necessarily another's darkness, we find an exclusionary technique which we have seen repeatedly in this dissertation, as when Hemingway uses Robert Cohn's intellectual darkness to illustrate surrogate Jake Barnes' relative enlightenment, or when Fitzgerald deploys the timorous intellectuality of the otherwise dominant Tom Buchanan to highlight the cool penetration of Fitzgeraldian surrogate, Nick Carraway. Ellison has flatly said his novel was not autobiographical; certainly Ellison was never as comically naïve as his protagonist is at various points of the novel, and the events of their lives differ in many respects. But the trajectory toward political awareness and self-knowledge that defines the narrator's identity by the end of the novel was pointedly one, I would argue, that Ellison himself traveled in his formation as a novelist.² In this sense *Invisible Man* self-constructively dramatizes Ellison's own attainment of authorial manhood. As I have argued with the self-constructions of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, such textually iterated, authoritative male identities emerge from a process of assemblage: the novels evoke a fictive coherence via a series of contrasts between the author surrogate and other characters. Identity construction, however, should not be understood as a separable quality in the modernist novel, but one inextricably interwoven with its "content," form, and literary artistry. And difference, otherness, is key to these modes of male modernist identity: to suit their particular professional and personal needs, Hemingway and Fitzgerald constructed their own authorial masculinity by deploying differences of race, class, and sexuality alongside what I have called "mental masculinities": differences in emotional comportment, in perception and apperception, and in what is claimed as "modern" knowledge. Each of these differences are enlisted as criteria for a

definitional argument of somewhat more permanence than most: the would-be canonical status of modern male authorship, a difference achieved by writing novels attaining to, as Joseph Conrad would have it, “the condition of art.”³

In this process of masculine identity construction, difference is not just “different,” but differential; that is, each difference is weighted to distinguish, not by degree, but categorically, particular attributes in the author surrogate that are lacking in his various others, and that exclude the other from the exclusive category of manhood defined by the surrogate himself. These weighted differences include valuations of male over female, for example, white over black or Jew, “hetero-” over “homo-,” and aesthetic and intellectual qualities such as artistic “impersonality” over unself-conscious or romantically distorted forms of knowing. In this way the identity constructed gives the impression of a large coherence through an accumulation of small differences—what I have called “Hemingwayesque” identity being the prototype of this kind of self construction. Modernist scholarship has not been blind to the normative work of these differences but has tended to isolate (or pair) them in the form of “isms” like racism, sexism, heterosexism, or classism. To read for masculine self-construction, however, is to find these attitudes less as expressions of bias against their ostensible objects—the racial, sexual, homosexual other—than as purposeful demonstrations of these figures’ inferiority in comparison to the authorial, epistemological masculinity of the author surrogate, and by extension, of the author himself. The key to understanding the functioning of these “isms,” however, and their relation to each other, might be another “ism”: *modernism* itself, the growing sense at beginning of the twentieth century that writers needed to find new ways of representing complex and bleak

new realities. As we have seen, this imperative was often expressed as a need to “masculinize” and professionalize the art of letters; such politically disparate literary critics and reformers as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, H. L. Mencken, Edmund Wilson and Van Wyck Brooks (to name a few) called on writers to differentiate their profession from impotent or unmanly aesthetic antecedents, whether the over-refined, domesticated “genteel,” the benighted romanticism of popular (read female) taste, or the aesthetic “decadence” and dilettantism of the Wildean dandy.

A thoroughgoing and self-professed modernist, Ellison answers these literary antecedents with his own version of authorial identity, his own set of “isms,” recapitulating or even intensifying certain differences that defined white male modernist authorship—especially misogyny and homophobia—but also revising and reversing formulas that structured whiteness by projecting inferiority onto blackness. The arena and instrument for this phallic contestation is, as it was for our white modernists, epistemology, specifically the paradoxically authorizing, man-making relationship between male feminization and vision, knowledge. Though early in his career he had been critical of Hemingway’s moral blindness about race, as well as the older author’s individualism and political disengagement, Ellison later volubly admired Hemingway as an artist, and claimed him as one of his closest literary influences. Indeed, not wishing to be limited to that subset of the literary elite, “black authors,” Ellison bristled when critic Irving Howe reflexively grouped him with writers like Richard Wright and James Baldwin. To Ellison, Wright was a “relative,” as was Langston Hughes, but modernists like Pound, Eliot, Stein, Faulkner, and Hemingway (and, later, Malraux) were “ancestors”⁴ Among this set were some of the most influential promulgators

of what I discussed in the introduction as implicitly “phallic,” self-aggrandizing aesthetic notions of art—notions such as “autonomy” and “impersonality” that have the non-trivial side-effect of metonymically transferring the exalted status of the work of art to its creator. Ellison appears most wholeheartedly “modernist” in this aesthetic lineage, where the art object signifies the mastery and agency of the artist himself—a “phallic symbol,” as I have suggested, perhaps even for the lesbian and feminist Stein.

In the concept of impersonality we find one of the most important epistemological moves or mechanisms by which modernists sought to claim transcendence in their art, since it was in the putatively impersonal regard with which they represented their own sufferings and humiliations that many high modernists grounded their claims to authoritative knowledge, and thus to elite authorial identity. This move seems to be indexed in Ellison’s description of Hemingway’s influence on him as a writer:

Do you still ask why Hemingway was more important to me than Wright? Not because he was white, or more “accepted.” But because he appreciated the things of this earth which I love and which Wright was too driven or deprived to know: weather, guns, dogs, horses, love and hate *and impossible circumstances which to the courageous and dedicated could be turned into benefits and victories.*⁵

Putting aside the Hemingwayesque catalogue of “manly” arts and loves that precedes the italicized passage, Ellison seems most to admire the transcendence that Hemingway achieved in finding “victories” in “impossible circumstances”—not *almost* impossible circumstances, but real defeats. This is just the kind of “ju-jitsu” by which an artist’s most painful life experiences are mastered or redeemed in being turned into art.⁶ In his essay, “Richard Wright’s Blues,” where Ellison defines destiny as a kind of impotence—“that combination of forces before which a man feels powerless”—he writes that art was “a ship in which man

conquers life's crushing formlessness." Quoting Malraux, he continues, the "[the organized significance of art] enables man to control chaos and conquer destiny."⁷ In the last chapter, I discussed some of the implications of manly autonomy and identity embedded in the use of boats as metaphors in Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*.⁸ Here Ellison sets sail in a similar ship, islanded and self-contained, and "conquering" a dangerous immensity. Highlighted in this metaphor is the *creator* of art, its masterful navigator who guides the "ship" through the shallows and profundities that threaten the work of art with mediocrity or failure.

Ellison's pervasive use of the gendered "man" for mankind in his deliberations is no accident, for, with the exception of Gertrude Stein, women have no place in Ellison's thinking about art. His avatars of admirable artistic practice are almost uniformly male, and manly, too, is the ideal of literary mastery that animates his literary criticism. For what is mastered in Ellison's art is not just life's "formlessness" but its "crushing" force, or in other words, that which masters—or feminizes—"man." Thus in Hemingway's transcendental quality of turning "impossible circumstances" into "benefits and victories," there is a quality comparable to Ellison's definition of the blues, the "impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism."⁹ This description might well define the relationship between male woundedness and artistry that I have been exploring in this dissertation, though only in the word "victory" can we glimpse the exclusionary ends to which Ellison's white artistic "ancestors" put their fresh-squeezed masculine lyricism.¹⁰

Ellison, however, has more explicitly political ends for his artistic “transcendence,” though he too relies on exclusions to accomplish those ends. On the one hand, he attempts to articulate and model the (painful) acquisition of a form of politically and artistically empowered black male identity that is neither separatist nor assimilationist, but aspires to partake in and reform an American democracy discriminating against an African American population making up, when Ellison composed his novel, ten percent of the nation’s citizenry. On the other hand, in his representations of women and male homosexuality, Ellison’s self-constructive method recapitulates some of the very exclusionary strategies he himself identifies in the scathing analyses of the psychology of white racism contained in the essays and interviews of *Shadow and Act*, and thematized in *Invisible Man* itself.

Black Manhood and the “Homoerotic Critique”

This paradox in the work of one of American literature’s most incisive critics of racism poses a problem for contemporary left critics seeking to build bridges among feminist, anti-homophobic, and anti-racist critiques, as Daniel Y. Kim comments in “Invisible Desires.” Kim suggests that *Invisible Man* mounts a “homoerotic critique” of racism that itself relies on a homophobic logic.¹¹ That is, the novel demonstrates the “libidinal quality of white male racism” by showing how “white men consistently force black men to play a ‘feminine’ role”; but for Ellison to ascribe to repressed “homosexuality” the white male’s “gratification from subordinating black men”—especially those whites who, in Kim’s words, “see [themselves] as racially enlightened, and who nonetheless [hold] a denigrating and feminizing view of the black race”—is to construct male homosexuality as a

vicious and victimizing kind of pathology (309). Ellison is more explicit about this point in his essays in *Shadow and Act*, where he groups homosexuality with such “profoundly personal problem[s]” as incest, fratricide, or parricide.¹² But as Kim himself correctly argues, what concerns Ellison the most about homosexuality has less to do with sexual object choice than black male feminization, the alignment of subordinated black men with *femininity* inasmuch as white men use black men “much as men are inclined to use women: as objects to satisfy a whole spectrum of repressed erotic desires” (312). Thus Ellison’s rejection of male homosexuality has the same status as his rejection of femininity in that both gestures are less concerned with actual gay men or actual women, than with the shaming metaphorical and symbolic affiliations between these cultural identities and states of forced black male passivity and subordination. Again, this is not in any way to excuse such attitudes, but to suggest the way they function in a masculinity-obsessed self-constructive literary work.

I recount Kim’s argument to broach what will be the main focus of this chapter, Ellison’s linked metaphors of mastery and “castration,” and the way, as a modernist, he considered the issue of castration not as a threat posed by women, but as a struggle for power “between men,” a dispute in which he might prevail by mobilizing the aesthetic resources of a literary modernist practice itself “inclined to use women”—and male homosexuality—as instruments for defining and constructing literary manhood. This is not to exclude latent homoeroticism, or other forms of eroticism, as determinants of white racism, but to insist on what I would suggest are more primary questions in examining this *literary* work: questions of symbolization and power, of how and why and for whom Ellison creates meaning, and what kinds of meaning he creates.

Douglas Steward notes the narrator's continual failure to "acquire the sorts of instrumentalities of power associated with directly political forms of speech that are articulated in phallic terms," but interprets this as Ellison ultimately rejecting "the phallus' usual presumption of authority and agency," and of "the hetero- and phallogentric formation of agency that symbolic castration subtends."¹³ But if the narrator does "fail" to acquire a directly political form of speech, he does not fail of "authority and agency" if we include the *symbolization* of an authoritative and exclusive knowledge or vision as a kind of phallic agency—by which I mean the agency of successful authorship itself, not always "directly" political, but carrying with it a vastly greater degree of social authority and political compass—even for a black man in 1952, as Ellison's own meteoric rise suggests—than that of a failed or an aspiring author, or most persons in private life. Ellison was a friend and admirer of Kenneth Burke, and frequently invoked Burke's idea of "language as symbolic action" in discussing the transformational possibilities of language. Analyzing Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," Ellison identifies in Bartleby's refusals, "that capability of language which Kenneth Burke has identified as a symbolic agency through which man has separated himself from nature."¹⁴ Discussing *Invisible Man* itself in the passage I used as epigraph to this chapter, Ellison uses italics to emphasize the political agency he achieved in writing the novel: "The protest is there, not because I was helpless before my racial condition, but because I *put* it there." He continues, "If there is anything "miraculous" about the book it is a result of hard work undertaken in the belief that the work of art is important in itself, that it is a social action in itself."¹⁵

But Ellison himself acknowledges how such forms of agency might work for good or ill, noting how “it is through the symbolic action, the symbolic capabilities of language, that we seek simultaneously to maintain and evade our commitments as social beings.”¹⁶ I would suggest that “simultaneous” but opposed symbolic actions are precisely what critics must reckon with in *Invisible Man*, a novel that analyzes and protests racial hierarchies even as it constructs sexual ones. As I hope to show, the cause of this simultaneity is the deployment of “phallic” forms of symbolic agency, which I would identify as forms of agency that rely on the denial of agency to some represented Other in the text, as, for example, Hemingway’s Robert Jordan achieves agency through the surrender of agency by Pilar. Agency and authorial identity thus become synonymous terms since the signified for “literary manhood” is the worldly, manly efficacy of the author *outside* the literary work. This notion of a literary, representational agency—and the phallus, as I hope will become clear, exists solely as an effect of representation—can help us better understand the novel’s knotted figurations of gender, race, and sexuality, which are best disentangled by re-placing them in the starkly agonistic American racial context in which Ellison grew up and conceived his novel, a decidedly male homosocial medium that must be considered in interpreting *Invisible Man*.

“Feminization,” “Homosexuality,” “Castration.”

Kim’s reading, which delves productively into an anecdote that Ellison relates in the introduction to *Shadow and Act*, can help illustrate my point. Still fuming almost three decades later, Ellison tells of encountering, as an undergraduate at Tuskegee, a sociology text written by one-time Booker T. Washington assistant (and ex-Tuskegee instructor) Robert E.

Park. A prominent and well-meaning white progressive, Park theorized that, due to a “disposition for expression rather than enterprise and action,” the Negro “represented the lady of the races.” Though the instructor teaching the course made no mention of literature, Ellison’s comment is revealing: “Well, I had no intention of being bound by any such humiliating definition of my relationship to American literature.”¹⁷ Unambiguously tying literary production to manhood, Ellison makes clear that, in Kim’s words, “one of his primary responsibilities as a writer was to project a more virile image of African American aesthetic agency” (312). Ellison’s reaction, however, has less to do with actual women than with woman as metaphor, femininity here signifying a social position of disempowerment or a set of shamed traits that “real” men must proudly reject.

But there might be a problem with Kim’s formula of “virile aesthetic agency,” for few works seem to portray a *less* virile image of black male agency than *Invisible Man*, the protagonist of which undergoes an intolerable series of humiliations and emasculations, including, in a dream, his own graphic castration. If Kim is right to identify the projection of a “virile” African American aesthetic agency as a primary goal of Ellison’s book, and I think he is, what agency could possibly emerge from a tale which climaxes in a representation of the bloody castration of its hero by his enemies? The answer becomes more legible if we view castration not only as the symbolic unmaning it represents in the novel, but as part of the distinctively modernist trope by which male writers transformed their worldly humiliations and disempowerments into modern knowledge, and used that knowledge as the basis for claims to the exclusive and culturally authoritative identity of masculine authorship.

For Ellison, “castration” is not just male disempowerment and shame, but also the road to transcendence, and thus, paradoxically, back to “virile” manhood. But as I have shown even in the work of Hemingway, the “virility” necessary safely to participate and ultimately prevail in this male-male “intercourse” is not physical or sexual, but intellectual, a “potent” form of knowing and seeing that *Invisible Man* suggests is available only to a few gnostic, underground figures: Invisible Man himself and a few other black men he meets on his journey—a blues singer, a street cleaner, a veteran, and the soon-to-be-lapsed socialist, Tod Clifton. While these figures suggest other possible subject positions for black male transcendence, and even a sort of secret homosocial community, the agency Invisible Man himself achieves is that of an author; it is in this sense that he functions as a sort of screen on which Ellison can project his own achieved authorial agency—even in the process of achieving it in composing *Invisible Man*. For like first-person narrators Nick Carraway and Jake Barnes, Ellison’s narrator is, in the world of the novel in which he appears, the author of that novel, often commenting directly to the reader about the tale he is relating—his own tale, which by the end has produced profound changes in his understanding of identity and power.¹⁸

We can thus regard *Invisible Man* as a kind of performance in which Ellison dramatizes, in the intellectual pilgrim’s progress of his narrator, the attainment of a consciousness or identity “virile” or penetrating enough to produce the novel that he himself wrote. This is where issues of feminization and castration are most crucial—and why Ellison makes no attempt to minimize or downplay his narrator’s mortifications. For to bend T.S. Eliot’s analogy in “Tradition and The Individual Talent,” feminization is the experiential

“transforming catalyst” that drives the formation of authorial consciousness.¹⁹ What is most paradoxical about this epistemological definition of manhood is the centrality, indeed the necessity, of emasculation by the other, feminization and castration signifying, in this phallic economy, the same state of disempowered manhood of such concern to our male modernists. The give and take of this economy literalizes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of homosociality as a kind of male-male “coupling,” a struggle for power with dangerous connotative parallels to sexual union. These include not only the tight, if antagonistic, bond between the competitors, but precisely the kind of eroticism in the conflict that Kim identifies in his reading of *Invisible Man*, an eroticism reminiscent of that ur-struggle for black manhood, between Frederick Douglass and Covey in Douglass’ *Narrative*. As with heterosexual lovemaking, this homosocial transaction involves the necessary physical, psychological and psychosexual engagement of the “partners,” but in *Invisible Man*, this engagement is compounded and queered with the partners’ trading of “active” and “passive” roles, “top” and “bottom”—a trade-off that can be ambiguous even in consensual heterosexual union.²⁰ This is not to minimize the violent, overwhelmingly assaultive nature of white supremacy in American culture, but to explore how *representations* of black victimization and resistance partake fantasmatically in the normative sexual economy of what Judith Butler calls the “heterosexual matrix,” complete with the regulating force of abjection that looms for the symbolic “bottom” or “loser” in these power relationships.

But it is at this point that I depart from Kim’s diagnosis of what he calls Ellison’s “homoerotic critique.” In Kim’s focus on the erotic implications of domination, he de-emphasizes the way that both homophobia and misogyny are, in psychoanalytic terms, forms

in which one's own lack is projected onto the other. This is significant because if we interpret the novel less as an exploration or critique of power than as an epistemological power-play, a performance with specific rhetorical aims, we can trace the way that Ellison himself uses images of feminization and homosexuality to reverse significations that—like that of the good Dr. Park—attached “lack” to black males in the form of “natural” intellectual inferiority. This reversal is possible because in the Hemingwayesque modernist tradition to which Ellison was so attracted, lack has the potential to *empower*, since male epistemological mastery can be attained through right attitudes toward, and close observation of, one's own emasculation. This struggle seems to get the better of our narrator throughout the novel, but is finally resolved in his favor in the epilogue; in this sense, to win the war, Invisible Man must lose every battle.

The second chapter of Lee Edelman's *Homographesis*, “The Part for The (W)hole,” begins with an epigraph by bell hooks that is central to my “metaphorical” or perhaps even (considering the broad gestures I will identify in Ellison's signifying scheme) “semaphorical” reading of *Invisible Man*:

The discourse of black resistance has almost always equated freedom with manhood, the economic and material domination of black men with castration, emasculation. Accepting these sexual metaphors forged a bond between oppressed black men and their white male oppressors. They shared the patriarchal belief that revolutionary struggle was really about the erect phallus.²¹

This pervasive use of sexual metaphors for conditions of domination and subordination prompts Edelman's desire to disentangle tropes of homosexuality and emasculation in the work of black writers including James Baldwin, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Dubois, Richard Wright, Franz Fanon, Toni Morrison, and others. Edelman begins with another bell hooks'

observation, that “racism and sexism are interlocking systems of power,” to investigate how these systems,

generate a ‘racial’ discourse suffused with homophobia insofar as it plays out the incoherences of a heterosexual masculinity that cannot afford to acknowledge, as it cannot afford to deny, the centrality of its narcissistic involvement in, and hence the intensity of its desire for, the institutionalized authority of the phallus. (48)

The singular “heterosexual masculinity” that hooks and Edelman both refer to, however, encompasses both black and white male competitors for “phallic” authority in racial discourse, despite the way the institution of slavery systematically “den[ied] slaves access to the symbolic order of sexual meaning under patriarchy” (48). That is, although the “real authority” that patriarchy conferred on white men was denied to the male slave, that authority “remained on prominent display for African-American women and men alike, coming, indeed, to instantiate [...] the very economy of power into which emancipation would lead” (49).

In this gendered economy, the male slave, and later the disempowered black male, were, by virtue of the very visibility of patriarchal white male privilege, especially subject to that maimed self-regard that Dubois called “double-consciousness,” the painful dissonance between how one is perceived by one’s white “masters” and how one perceives oneself away from that self-alienating gaze. The asymmetrical racial divide discursively and imaginatively recapitulates the asymmetrical sexual divide to the degree that white and black males are also a kind of heterogenous “couple,” bound in relation to each other with one partner subject to the will of the other. And of course the dominated “partner” is not only abjected by his forced association with “femininity,” but also with male homosexuality, a condition Edelman

calls “inherently emasculating” “insofar as [it] connotes, to the straight imagination, a submission [...] to the desire *for or of* another man” (56, italics in original). As Kim shows with Ellison, and Edelman with Baldwin, Morrison and Fanon, black writers have responded to the humiliating sexual semiotics of racism by suggesting that the dominant, white “partner” was himself acting out “homosexual” desires in the power relation, as when white guards in *Beloved*, for example, terrorize Paul D and his fellow prisoners with a morning ritual of oral rape. But I would argue, with Edelman, that although the projection onto white men of a stigmatized “homosexuality” is certainly a powerful aspect of the revulsion that writers like Ellison display in response to such social mortifications, it is a mistake to call the relationship between black and white racial “partners” a sexual one in fact; such homologies only further entrench the patriarchal connections between “the institutionalized authority of the phallus” and masculinity by abjecting any form of identity not perceived to accord with whatever contemporary masculine norms happen to prevail at a given historical and cultural moment.

Indeed, this too-easy transposition of sexual politics onto racial politics suggests more clearly how both systems naturalize and obscure the way that articulations of difference undergird not only constructions of whiteness and white male social power, but black male social power as well. Thus it might be more helpful to read the novel not in terms of erotics, but of use, possession and instrumentality, since the represented consequence of not possessing social power in *Invisible Man* is to be the instrument of another—a condition that Ellison indeed inflects in sexual ways, but which I hope to show is sexual only metaphorically. For Ellison to accomplish the feat of re-masculinization that he announces

in resolving never to be bound by any “feminine” definition of his relationship to American literature is to cease to be the instrument of another, but representationally to make the other one’s *own* instrument. Edelman himself explains this fantasy of phallic possession and dispossession in sexual terms, but these terms themselves partake in a discourse of use, possession, and instrumentality:

Thus as viewed through the racist gaze of a culture that privileges straight white men, the African-American male [. . .] must *be* the “part,” (i.e., the “tool”) that stands for the “hole” (the stripping away, the absence, of ‘all that constitutes manhood’) in order that the white male subject, through his fetishistic deployment of the gaze, can “have” the “part” that the black man, in racist fantasy, both *is* and *lacks*. (53)

Like woman for Lacan, the black male, in this exegesis, *is* the phallus, the living figure of potency or potentiality *the control of which* allows the white male to “have” the phallus.

Edelman quotes Judith Butler: “For women, to ‘be’ the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through ‘being’ its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity” (47). In this gloss, sexual difference and racial difference collapse, since each seems to work by the same symbiotic mechanism in which the other is a “tool” of “dialectical confirmation” for the possessor of the phallus. Or, perhaps we might say, racial difference *becomes* a sexual difference, or at least is understood or felt as one by both parties in the transaction.

Thus Ellison, writing his first novel, must reverse a process that transformed his proud sense of racial identity into a humiliatingly *useful* signifier of “femininity.” In what follows I would like to illustrate how Ellison does indeed participate in a “homophobic logic” in his representations of the American racial scene, but only to the degree that, as

Edelman argues, “homosexuality” is one of several terms that both black and white males, in a paradigmatic patriarchal confusion, give to “castration.” As we will see, castration never appears in the novel but in the zero-sum, dialectical symbolic economy that insists that power in the hands of one man necessitates the disempowerment of another. Empowering himself by symbolically disempowering his enemies is precisely what Ellison’s narrator manages to do at the end of the novel. Thus we should pay close attention to the symbolic means by which the phallus is exchanged and claimed in the novel.

The Epistemological Phallus

Invisible Man is structured as what can only be called an accumulation of humiliations, though these experiences are punctuated by demonstrations, by more experienced black males whom the narrator encounters, of how such humiliations might be transmuted into vision and knowledge, that is, into the *epistemological* advantage the construction of which I argue is a central aim of the work. The narrator physically accumulates souvenirs of these experiences in the form of the objects and papers in his briefcase, itself a reminder of perhaps the most wrenching and vivid of his humiliations: the battle royal scene of the first chapter. Kim’s reading of the scene, as Ellison’s critique of a secret homoeroticism driving white supremism, draws out an undeniable eroticism in the spectacle staged by the town’s most powerful white men, who watch as a group of black high school boys first are made to behold a “magnificent [nude] blonde,” then are forced to box each other *en masse* and while blindfolded. The drunken town fathers command the boys to both look and not look at the perspiring dancer, who mirrors their powerlessness as well as their only slightly less complete

state of undress. As both the boys and the dancer “have been made to offer up their bodies for the visual enjoyment of white men,” Kim argues that the “black male body achieves its value within the libidinal economy of racism, however, because that body serves as a catalyst for the release of white male impulses that are ordinarily repressed” (316).

What Kim calls the “libidinal economy of racism” suggests that what Ellison objects to and wants to reveal in the battle royal is this “ordinarily repressed” sexual pleasure derived by the white men, for which gratification the event is staged. Drawing on Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Kim traces the scopical and identificatory pleasures that the white men take from this “spectacle.” Mulvey explicitly identifies her project as a political one aimed at the “destruction of [the visual] pleasure” conjured in classic cinema through a coding of the erotic in the “language of the dominant, patriarchal order.”²² Thus while Mulvey’s terminology, like Kim’s, focuses on pleasure and eroticism, she announces her intention to disrupt the viewer’s unthinking acceptance of the asymmetrical power relationships between men and women that define that order, especially as the relations are mirrored in representation, in cinema. Yet Kim’s reading (of Ellison’s “reading” of racial relations), while similarly announcing a political, anti-homophobic intent, stops at erotic pleasure, seeming to take that gratification as the desired telos of such spectacles, their endpoint. This holds true even though the language of Kim’s readings shows a sensitivity to the attendant power relations in the battle royal—for example, the narrator’s sense of his “castration” mirrored in the “anatomical lack” of the dancer as he gazes at the “capital V” formed by her thighs: after all, “the identification of black men with femininity [...] is the hallmark of the racial view of the black man [Ellison] wishes to challenge” (316).

But I understand Ellison's umbrage at being identified with "femininity" as having less to do with actual women, or with the erotic pleasure white men may indeed take from such orchestrations, than with black male subordination, which he suggests is accomplished, in America, through just such ritual, symbolic means as that staged by the white males in the battle royal. Kim's own diction, evoking control and instrumentality, suggests that what motivates the scene's white male "power players" is less a "libidinal economy" than a symbolic one, to be sure, expressed in erotic terms, but with the white men's desired signification of phallic power as the primary motivating factor. For example, Kim suggests that the boys' bodies—one of them has developed a hard-to-conceal erection—"serve" as a "corporeal screen" for the projection of a more "ideal image of [the white men's] own arousal" (314). Indeed, Kim argues that the black male penis is used almost as a "prosthetic device" to enhance the white males' sexual arousal (314). What Kim himself refers to as the "instrumental use of black male bodies" reminds us of the language of instrumentality used by Edelman and Butler above, where having and being the phallus are opposed conditions, with "having" the privileged term (316).

As Lacan insisted and Kaja Silverman reminds us, the phallus, unlike the penis, is not material, but semiotic, a signifier alternately, of lost wholeness occasioned by the subject's entry into the symbolic order, and of "paternal power and potency."²³ Keeping the *discursive* status of this signifier in mind, let us look again at Butler's gloss of Lacan: "to 'be' the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through 'being' its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity." The phallus is itself a sort of tool, here, one that, it

seems, would be far preferable to “have” than to “be.” But the phallus is only a “tool” in the realm of signification, where it is also in need of another, that is, an Other, whose exclusion confirms it, makes it signify. Thus in the battle royal, the white males stage a kind of orgy of otherness, of exclusion, that creates not only the “visual pleasure” identified by Ellison and highlighted by Kim, but more importantly, creates meaning—specifically, *phallic* meaning. The nude woman in this elaborate staging is thus a kind of prop to help create that meaning through juxtaposition with the black boys. And this production of meaning is safeguarded by some of the more sober men at the smoker, who, in reining in the violent impulses of their more drunken townfellows, preserve its power to signify, to produce the reassuring signification the men most desire: white male potency, which is achieved through the spectacle of black male impotence: physical, sexual, and cultural.

The notion that white males use black male “castrations” for just this sense of reassurance, that is, to achieve a symbolic sense of their wholeness and superiority *as men*, is a central argument of the novel. But we should not understand this merely as a critique of power, for what Ellison wishes to accomplish is not just to reveal this ritual dynamic, but to *reverse* it, making white “power males” *his* instruments of “dialectical confirmation” (though at one self-constructive remove, through his author surrogate). To understand how such symbolic phallic contestations work, we must note how, in the battle royal, black male physicality and sexuality, qualities stereotypically reckoned to “have” a dangerous phallic potency, are reduced to “being” signs of potency for the town’s white men. This is achieved through the boys’ forced parallel status with the naked female dancer as objects of the white men’s gaze, which reveals not only their near-naked vulnerability (contrasted with the

dressed state of the watching men), but also their naked emotions of fear and desire, as with the largest boxer's baffled erection—in this tableau, a “threat” to no one.

Black male physicality and the boys' own potential to master through violence are similarly baffled when they are told to box each other blindfolded, and all at once. The gazeless boys' strength and prowess can now hurt only other black males, and is thus made to signify a reassuringly self-canceling potency—a suggestive signification if we contemplate media attention to the literally “ghettoized” black-on-black violence prevalent in any American city today. In the battle royal, the white men clearly have their day in humiliating the narrator and his peers, but as a representation of an ugly and cynical ritual of white racist power, the post-invisibility narrator, who is retrospectively presenting to us this scene, makes the white men instruments for the confirmation of *his own* symbolic, phallic superiority as author, though this reversal is not made explicit until the very final pages.

In the Trueblood episode, the narrator finds himself again in the role of instrument for the “symbolic fulfillment” of white males, but his experience is juxtaposed with that of Jim Trueblood himself, who is one of several role models pointing the narrator toward the feat of transcendent reversal that Invisible Man will himself achieve at the end of the novel. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Victor Turner, Houston Baker admirably identifies the blues-singing sharecropper, Trueblood, as a “phallic trickster,” a figure “symbolic of a type of royal paternity, an aristocratic procreativity.”²⁴ Overlooking the possibility that this phallic father has raped his daughter, Baker's influential reading finds in Trueblood's sly artistry as taleteller and blues singer an example of a transcendent black artistic mastering of experience. In his conversion of oppression and travail into art and economic gain,

Trueblood offers “a resounding no to all the castrating tight spots of his existence as a poor black farmer in the undemocratic South” (335). The character’s transformation of the abjection associated with his manifest incest—the whole region knows he is responsible for the simultaneous pregnancies of both his daughter and wife—into “near-comic, near-tragic lyricism” clearly fits Ellison’s definition of the blues, but to isolate the episode from the larger goals of the novel, especially as these revolve around the political education and expressive empowerment of its narrator, is to overlook the central, rhetorical function of self-construction in Ellison’s aesthetic—though Baker’s challenging, closely reasoned essay will presently help us better understand that rhetorical functioning. While the Ellisonian narrator in this early episode seems a peripheral, comical Parsifal, his is the presence for whom the scene is enacted, although he misprizes its import—as he will almost every such scene until the end of the novel.

The Trueblood episode centers around the equivocal concept of Booker T. Washington-style “uplift,” an ideal of (limited) black self-improvement, political quietism, and assimilation with which the narrator identifies absolutely, even when it demands the kind of self-abasement he faces in and after the battle royal. His snobbish identification with the values of the Tuskegee-like college he attends results in his sense of shame about the poor Southern blacks who live near the school. Chaperoning one of the school’s rich Northern benefactors about the countryside, however, he haplessly precipitates an encounter between this man and the sharecropper, Trueblood, a man whose scandalous behavior and uneducated country ways the narrator feels cast a shadow on the efforts of Southern blacks to rise above their “peasant” status. Looking back from his final state of enlightened

invisibility, however, the narrator remembers a statue of the College's Founder seeming to remove a veil from a kneeling slave, but wonders if the veil is really being lowered rather than lifted. Like other examples of Washingtonian assimilation in the novel—as with the Tuskegee Institute, Invisible Man's college produces mechanics, chefs, teachers, and “skilled farmers”—this suggests that white-funded strategies of “uplift” might be political approaches closer to oppression than liberation. This is to extend and specify W.E.B. Dubois' critique of Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk*, which takes issue with the “emasculating” submission to caste distinctions prescribed by Washington's educational program, and especially its willingness to sacrifice the “higher individualism” possible through the cultivation of the black male intellect.²⁵

Supporting Ellison's Duboisian suspicions about intellectual castration are the strange motives of Mr. Norton, who takes such personal credit for “advancing” the black race.²⁶ For example, Mr. Norton points out the narrator's individual importance in helping Norton learn “his,” that is, Norton's “fate”: “*You* are important because if you fail *I* have failed by one individual, one defective cog” (45). To be a cog in this white man's uplift machine is also to be a “living memorial” to Mr. Norton's deceased daughter, a figure “too good and too pure and too beautiful” for life (43). This idealization is also suspicious, as when Norton rhapsodizes, “She was rare, a perfect creation, a work of purest art. A delicate flower that bloomed in the liquid light of the moon” (42). The incestual import of Mr. Norton's aestheticized grief emerges in his fascination with Trueblood's story, which seems to impress the philanthropist less as a moral outrage than a tale of improbable survival, of *getting away* with incest: “You have looked upon chaos and are not destroyed!” (51). Thus to

receive Mr. Norton's largesse is not to be granted political agency, but to become an instrument, both "cog" and "memorial" in the perverse mechanics of the rich man's psychosexual obsessions. The phallicism of the philanthropist's motives is striking: he is erecting a kind of monument to himself made up of subaltern uplift narratives, and his seeming desire to both wed and bed his deceased daughter has been sublimated into a weird fertility rite of black industrial education. With his emphasis on fruits, he seems to have a "seminal" role in mind in his efforts to advance the black race, seeking to observe "in terms of living personalities to what extent my money, my time and my hopes have been fruitfully invested," and professing pleasure in seeing "the fruits produced by the land that your great Founder has transformed from barren clay to fertile soil."

Here, Kim is more explicit about the relations of power that underlie this eroticism: the pleasure of phallic power, symbolically attained, a reassuring signification of phallic dominance that Norton engineers through his philanthropy. As Kim reads the scene, "the project of uplift allows Norton to play out a narcissistic paternal fantasy in which blacks play an instrumental role" (318). Kim argues that the "psychic gains Norton enjoys through his philanthropic work are largely egoic. Norton takes egoic pleasure in the feeling of mastery he experiences through the 'first-hand organizing of human life' that his work on behalf of the College entails" (318). This is to say that until he meets Trueblood, and later, the loquacious Vet at the Golden Day, Norton achieves a symbolic sense of phallic mastery through the staging and performance of his philanthropic project, which has at its heart the subordination of others. The pleasure of this "egoic" gain, whether private or performed, is only possible through elaborate signification, and elaborate significations on the part of

Trueblood and the Vet are how Norton's gain becomes his loss—a loss, that is, of the (immaterial) phallus, which stuns and discomposes this powerful and condescending man used to absolute racial deference.

Baker agrees that the episode represents Ellison's "pejorative commentary on the castrating effects of white philanthropy" (327). But Trueblood's paradigmatic artistic reversal of this power asymmetry is not just disinterested Ellisonian commentary, but an aesthetic example for our narrator. As with many modernist writers, male woundedness is at the heart of Trueblood's artistic practice, and he still bears a raw wound on his face around which gnats swarm as he narrates his tale "with no trace of hesitancy or shame" (53). Another suggestively male modernist aspect of Trueblood's artistry is the extremity of the suffering he endures and reports, extremity marking and augmenting the authority of the artist who can impersonally turn such "wasteland" experiences into art. Indeed, authority marks the farmer from the start, as when we first meet him walking in the yard of what was once a slave cabin "with a familiarity that would have allowed him to walk in the blackest darkness with the same certainty" (50). Certainty within "blackness," both in racial and existential terms, seems to be Trueblood's distinguishing characteristic as an artist, and as he begins masterfully to relate his tale, his voice takes on a shamanic "deep incantatory quality," and the flies and gnats "swarm around his wound" (54).

In the course of this tale, Trueblood convincingly argues that he committed incest unintentionally (in a dream), suffered an axe attack by his crazed wife, and was kicked penniless out of his home and disgraced in his community. This leads to a crisis state in which the despondent farmer spontaneously sings a blues that, in his words, "ain't never

been sung before.” The moment becomes one of revelation, identity: “while I’m singin’ them blues I makes up my mind that I ain’t nobody but myself and ain’t nothin’ I can do but let whatever is gonna happen happen” (66). In Trueblood’s eminently difficult transmutation of his suffering into original artistic form, and securing *through* that form a powerful sense of what Kimberly Benston calls “achieved selfhood”—identity, that is, not dictated from without, but actively chosen—we see the importance of what Kim calls “virile [...] African American aesthetic agency” to Ellison’s understanding and literary construction of identity.²⁷ Note, however, that Trueblood’s “virility” is conventional only in the male modernist context in which a feminizing woundedness can lead to epistemological superiority. The form of achieved selfhood that Trueblood arrives at, however, is still denied to the narrator, who, ignoring this prefiguration of his own ultimate achievement, will continue to take his cues about selfhood from white patrons until the novel’s epilogue.

After his trauma, however, Trueblood is called upon to narrate his tale over and over for local whites, who are apparently delighted with this confirmation of stereotypes of “primitive” black male sexuality, and who thus lavish on him offers of work and outright gifts of cash. When it is revealed that representatives from the school have attempted to intimidate Trueblood into leaving the area, it becomes clear that the farmer is a semiotic pawn in a kind of public relations battle between those who would assert even the attenuated version of black self-determination taught at the school, and Southern whites worried about black education. Yet Trueblood’s artistry does not just reverse his emotional and economic plight, but specifically responds to the kind of castrating white liberalism represented by Norton. Baker’s reading of Trueblood’s dream explicitly connects the theme of incest to

white philanthropy in the figure of “Mr. Broadnax,” to whom the dreaming Trueblood goes looking for “fat meat.” There, however, he finds only the scantily clad Mrs. Broadnax seeking to violate another taboo—that of miscegenation. It is significant that Trueblood is the intended victim, not the perpetrator, in this taboo encounter, and that his flight from Mrs. Broadnax (into a tunnel) occurs at the exact moment he penetrates his daughter. This reversal of taboo roles (as the farmer becomes the victim of transgression rather than its perpetrator) seems designed roguishly to shift the culpability for Trueblood’s own act to the slate of corrupt white benefaction.

Both the black violator (Trueblood) and white would-be violator (Norton) of the incest taboo desire, as Baker approvingly says of Trueblood, “to turn inward to ensure the royalty (the truth, legitimacy, or authenticity) of an enduring [...] line of descent.”²⁸ Thus we are presented with two representations of narcissistic and transgressive patriarchal identity, black and white, the first of which seems valorized by both Ellison and one of his major critics, the other heavily critiqued by both.²⁹ But the positions of Norton and Trueblood are not cognate. Whereas Norton would reproduce or pass on a purer essence of himself undiluted by the extra-familial intervention of his wife, he is inhibited by the force of propriety, and fails to secure that purity before the death of his daughter. The expressive artist, Trueblood, however, whether cunningly or innocently, subverts the incest taboo through his art. He has either cold-bloodedly taken his daughter and successfully excused it with his engaging tale, or, if we take him at his word, has simply parlayed the “misfortune” of the incident into prosperity by taking sly advantage of his semiotic function in the racial PR battle between local whites and the representatives of the school. Both of these

possibilities, however, must be seen as representing dramatic reversals of fortune that directly result from, reward, and distinguish the sharecropper-cum-artist's "virile [...] African American aesthetic agency"—an agency achieved through symbolic means.

Baker's reading concludes by suggesting that, through his art, Trueblood also expressively transcends his commodified status as a producer of narrative for white audiences, an insight that can help us see the epistemological stakes of Trueblood's reversal. Baker's pointedly economic reading of the scene, however, itself hinges on the symbolization of power, and as such cannot be understood in purely economic terms—a point discernible, but less than explicit in his reading. Arguing that "the angst assumed to accompany commodity status is greatly alleviated when the status constitutes a sole means of securing power in a hegemonic system," Baker acknowledges that, economically, the commodified artist can never prevail, but only "alleviate" the angst of oppression (342). The victory, that is, is symbolic, expressive: for Baker, Ellison has staged a tableau in which the white philanthropist, that phallic user of black males, himself becomes the instrument for Trueblood's own symbolic phallic fulfillment. Baker describes the upwardly mobile inhabitants of the College and the agrarian Trueblood as constituents "of a single underclass," and concludes that, "for those in this underclass, Ellison's episode implies, expressive representation is the only means of prevailing" (342). Thus Baker senses Ellison achieving a kind of "victory in impossible circumstances" that passes unseen by the industrialist, Norton. This victory is not the \$100 given to Trueblood by the rich man, which barely lightens his exquisite Moroccan wallet, nor is it the money from white hearers that has allowed the farmer to re-shingle his house, clothe his family and buy eyeglasses for his wife.

Rather the victory is epistemological, it is to *know* something that one's oppressor does not, to don a gulling "expressive mask" beneath which the black artist may, in full and *exclusive* possession of the truth of the mutual situation, evade, humiliate or manipulate the oppressor. Indeed one might find identity beneath that mask, since for Baker, "the 'economics of slavery' gives valuable and specifically black resonance to Afro-American works of art" (344).³⁰ The relationship between "Afro-American works of art" and the distinctive form of knowledge that Ellison's narrator achieves in the novel is that such art as Trueblood makes expresses or performs the *possession* of that exclusive knowledge through symbolic means—the possession, that is, of the phallus, the phallus being, as Lacan describes it in "The Signification of the Phallus," neither organ nor object, but a signifier or "signifying function."³¹

The scene concludes with Norton stunned and overcome, no longer master of the situation save through patronage, and even this agency—the opening of his wallet—seems to have been skillfully elicited by the knowing artistry of the farmer. Embarrassed, Trueblood notes Norton's crumbling intellectual command by alluding to the sounds the children are making playing "London Bridge is Falling Down," but the narrator admits, "something was going on which I didn't get" (68).³² He admits the same shortly afterwards, when he takes Norton to the Golden Day, where a group of "shellshocked" black World War I veterans are having their day at the brothel. There the prostrated philanthropist is subjected to further epistemological humiliations as the "butt" of many jokes made by the Golden Day's employees and patrons. Foremost among these patrons is a droll Vet, once a doctor, who tends to Norton and, like Trueblood, engages the white man's interest. As he

speaks to the older man, however, he also cultivates the narrator, and offers an epistemological critique of the blunted vision of reality common to each:

You both fail to understand what is happening to you. You cannot see or hear or smell the truth of what you see—and you, looking for destiny! It’s classic! And this boy, this automaton, he was made of the very mud of the region and he sees far less than you. Poor stumblers. Neither one of you can see the other. To you he is a mark on the scorecard of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less—a black amorphous thing. [...] He believes in the great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right. I can tell you *his* destiny. He’ll do your bidding, and for that his blindness is his chief asset. (95)

Not only is Mr. Norton blinded by the ideology of white supremacy, but more damningly, so is the narrator, who, after his expulsion from the College, is counseled by the Vet to “Come out of the fog,” and “Play the game, but don’t believe in it—that much you owe yourself” (153). Invisible Man must himself don that gulling mask which his grandfather spoke of on his deathbed, and which the Vet suggests here is an essential prop of “playing the game.” Knowledge, of reality and of the self, are the crucial elements of this strategy of resistance, which requires one to “learn how [the game] operates, learn how *you* operate. . . .You might even beat the game” (153-4). But as with Trueblood’s “victory,” black males may prevail in the racial “game” only through seeing its chutes and ladders for what they really are, and by developing an accurate sense of one’s own self and role in the system’s rule-bound, agonistic—and male homosocial—structures. Such forms of knowledge enable the bearer to enjoy a symbolic mode of “prevailing” in a pervasively oppressive system that cannot be overcome in literal terms. Even more satisfying, as we have seen in Trueblood’s case, is the ability to symbolize that superiority for others through expressive means. Thus the jocular, ironic Vet describes himself as “more clown than fool,” a distinction that emphasizes the expressive agency of his role as a “compulsive talker” and joker at the

expense of apparent social superiors like Norton. The Vet's symbolic mastery is performed through his particular form of artistry—an oral virtuosity of humorous, enigmatic and epigrammatic patter not unlike that of Ellison's own prose style.

The Vet finally exhorts the narrator to “Be [his] own father,” a “paternal” injunction that suggests the unmistakably masculine tenor of this epistemological form of identity (156). Having himself undergone and overcome the indoctrination process of the College, the Vet's advice to the younger man also suggests that bearers of such forms of consciousness might comprise a kind of community, though these gnostics would each have to be painfully “self-fathered” rather than formed by any kind of school or dogma—an individualistic version of “community” reminiscent of Hemingway's grudging participation in the communalism of the 1930s. And despite Ellison's clear sense of belonging to the “community” of Western high culture, that participation would seem similarly cramped by the notion of autonomous manhood that this normative autodidacticism bespeaks. Invisible Man's flight to New York brings him in contact with another form of communalism—the socialistic organization called the Brotherhood that recruits our narrator when he reveals his talent for populist public speaking. Like the College, the Brotherhood robs black males of identity and agency through epistemological distortions presented as truth—in the movement's denial of racial difference, its “scientific” (materialist) analysis of history as (only) class conflict, and its corrupt philosophy of the greater good, for which Harlem blacks are sacrificial instruments in an international revolutionary agenda. The symbolic expression of the epistemological dominance that the Brotherhood claims over black males is visible not only in the asymmetrical personal interactions of party ideologists with members like the

narrator, but in the national and international political significations the organization engineers through manipulation—even to the point of fomenting a race riot—of the Harlem community.

The Seer and the Seen

Thus in the narrator's experience with the Brotherhood, we find another racial contest over agency and knowledge in which the winner "has the phallus," and the loser *is* "the phallus"—is, that is, symbolically "castrated." For most of this lengthy section of the novel, the narrator is the latter, and his loss of agency is symbolized by the Sambo puppet of Tod Clifton, whose defection from the Brotherhood is a signal for our slower-on-the-uptake narrator ultimately to follow suit.³³ In this period the narrator actually comes into possession of what Douglas Steward (borrowing Ellison's phrase) calls an "instrumentality of power," Invisible Man's ability to reach the black masses through oratory; yet throughout his interactions with the Brotherhood, this power remains a "tool" in the hands of his revolutionary puppetmasters, who are willing to sell out the Brotherhood's Harlem adherents to advance their greater aims.

The narrator's conflict with the Brotherhood and its ideology is personified in his subtly antagonistic relationship with Brother Jack, a "very certain white man" who recruits Invisible Man for operations in the Harlem district (292). Their first meeting involves a kind of intellectual sparring in which the white man casually displays his sense of epistemological superiority: "There was something mysterious and smug in the way he spoke, as though he had everything figured out—whatever he was talking about" (292). Moreover, Jack seems to

have a typological and dismissive “knowledge” about the black community that conflicts with the narrator’s experience, as well as with his invested and emotional sense of racial relation to that community. When Invisible Man refers to an old black couple (whose eviction was the occasion for his first speech) as “relatives” because they were “burned in the same oven,” Jack snaps, “Why do you fellows always talk in terms of race?” Though Ellison took pains to avoid having readers narrowly equate the Brotherhood with the American Communist movement, which he was to embrace and later reject in the late thirties, Jack’s impatience here echoes the Marxist insistence on class struggle above all else as the moving force of history. During this meeting, the narrator admits that Jack “was too complicated” for him and excuses himself, but in his penniless state, later takes up Jack’s offer to join the organization.

After a period of study and indoctrination in the Brotherhood’s vaunted (but largely unelaborated) “scientific” analysis of history, the narrator accompanies Jack to the “El Toro Bar” in Harlem, where their relationship seems reflected in a picture of a bullfight “in the panel where the mirror is usually placed” and in which the matador gracefully controls the bull “in one swirl of calm pure motion” (358). As they converse, the narrator spots another scene further down the bar “in which the matador was being swept skyward” on the horns of what is now a “black bull,” a reversal suggestive not only of what will emerge as the repressed racial antagonism of their relationship, but also of Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon*, a work Ellison cited as a powerful influence on his development as a writer, and in which the writer’s craft is insistently analogized in terms of the bullfight (359). Though the action here seems more concerned with an ideological struggle between persons rather than,

as Hemingway was in *Death in the Afternoon*, the struggle of a writer with the difficulty of his art, we might consider that, for Ellison, the “difficulty” of writing *Invisible Man* was precisely the struggle to prevail against such white antagonists as Jack, whose phallic power over black masculinity *Invisible Man* suggests is epistemological in nature. In the introduction to *Shadow and Act*, Ellison describes the lesson he took from *Death in the Afternoon* as the necessity, in Hemingway’s words, “of knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel.” Ellison explains, “I found the greatest difficulty for a Negro writer was the problem of revealing what he truly felt, rather than serving up what Negroes were supposed to feel, and were encouraged to feel”³⁴ Indeed, when the narrator becomes disillusioned with the Brotherhood near the end of the novel, he sees “Jack and Norton and Emerson merge into one single white figure [...] each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me. I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used” (508).

The “picture of reality” that Jack and the Brotherhood force upon the narrator is one in which, as Ellison was to write about the Communist party in “Remembering Richard Wright,” “an organized political group . . . possessed a concept of social hierarchy that was a conscious negation of our racially biased social system.”³⁵ This negation constituted a form of “intellectual racism” not based on an ideology of black inferiority, as on the American scene, but a denial of independent thought and insistence on “blind discipline and a constant pressure to follow unthinkingly a political ‘line.’”³⁶ Discipline is certainly the complaint that the Brotherhood raises against our narrator, who organizes so effectively and without regard to purities of the party line that he is taken away from his organizing work in Harlem and

given what seems to him the humiliating task of lecturing on the “woman question,” an assignment he suspects is an “outrageous joke” (407). And discipline is behind what will begin Invisible Man’s final rupture with the party, in a scene in which Jack lectures him about misguidedly taking “personal responsibility” in publicly eulogizing the slain Tod Clifton, an apostate from the Brotherhood whose role I will consider more fully presently. Jack provides a graphic example of what “discipline” involves when, during the angry showdown, he leaps to his feet placing himself “between [the narrator] and the light,” and his eye, a glass eye attesting to past heroic sacrifice, appears to “erupt out of his face” (474). “So that is the meaning of discipline,” thinks Invisible Man, “yes, and blindness; he doesn’t see me. He doesn’t even see me. Am I about to strangle him? I do not know. He cannot possibly” (475).

This realization about “blind” and blinding discipline is a step toward the state of epistemological advantage the narrator will ultimately assume as an “invisible man”—one who can see his opponent’s blindness but himself remain unseen. In the phallic logic we have been exploring, such an exclusive faculty of vision is itself an “instrumentality of power,” not in any “directly political” way, but symbolically: it signifies the narrator’s, and thus Ellison’s, apprehension of a singular truth—*the* truth—the possession of which forms the basis for his claim of authorial manhood, and belonging in the high literary fraternity of modernists whom he admired and emulated. It is in this sense that the narrator begins the task of sweeping Jack the matador “skyward” on his epistemological “horns,” though the reversal is not yet concluded. Ellison images another form of blindness in the ideological, theoretical notion of “history” that dominates the Brotherhood’s discourse, and it is in the

exposition of this similarly blinding concept that Tod Clifton plays his most important role, as our narrator's final gnostic mentor and guide.

The "very black and very handsome" Clifton enters the story when the narrator is given his first assignment leading the Harlem district. At his approach the narrator embarks on a long, physical description that is worth quoting in full for its strangely sexual lyricism:

He wore a heavy sweater and slacks, and as the others looked up I heard the quick intake of a woman's pleasurable sigh. Then the young man was moving with an easy Negro stride out of the shadows and into the light, and I saw that he was very black and very handsome, and as he advanced mid-distance into the room, that he possessed the chiseled, black-marble features sometimes found on statues in northern museums and alive in southern towns in which the white offspring of house children and the black offspring of yard children bear names, features and character traits as identical as the rifling of bullets fired from a common barrel. And now close up, leaning tall and relaxed, his arms outstretched stiffly upon the table, I saw the taut, broad span of his knuckles upon the dark grain of the wood, the muscular, sweated arms, the curving line of the chest rising to the easy pulsing of his throat, to the square, smooth chin, and saw a small X-shaped patch of adhesive upon the subtly blended, velvet-over-stone, granite-over-bone, Afro-Anglo-Saxon contour of his cheek. (363)

I would juxtapose this passage with Houston Baker's argument that,

Insofar as Jim Crow social laws and the desperate mob exorcism of lynchings (with their attendant castrations) describe a formal pattern of Anglo-American behavior toward black men, this pattern offers an instance of ritual in which the black phallus gathers an extraordinary burden of disparate connotations, both sensuous and ideological. It should come as no surprise that an artist as perceptive as Ellison recognizes the black phallus as a dominant symbol of the sometimes bizarre social rituals of America and incorporates it into the text of a novel. (330)

In calling the phallus a "dominant symbol," however, Baker does not mean to designate it as a "symbol of dominance," as I have used the term, but a key or leading symbol in a culture's symbolic system, following the work of symbolic anthropologists, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz. Baker contends that *Invisible Man* enacts ritual meanings in the same way as

does, for example, the Balinese cockfight as described by Geertz. And indeed, Ellison himself referred to the novel (in general) as a raising of “the rituals of social forms” to the level of art.³⁷

The black phallus, in the “bizarre social rituals of America” that constitutes racial interactions as they are portrayed in *Invisible Man*, is that which must itself be symbolically negated by white society, as in Ellison’s own interpretation of his “battle royal” scene as a “ritual in the preservation of caste lines”—meaning the line between black and white empowerment that is drawn, signified, in the symbolic ritual in which the boys take part.³⁸ Indeed a great part of the novel’s usefulness for understanding intersections of race and gender might be precisely its exploration of this phallic symbolic register, in which “ritual” notions of manhood and racial humiliation achieve such painful fullness of meaning. This happens to be the symbolic register in which Tod Clifton operates, as Baker might say, “sensuously phallic” in his imposingly “taut,” “pulsing,” and “velvet-over-stone” physical impressiveness, but ultimately vanquished, negated, when Clifton reverts to physical force as a form of resistance to white superiority. Physical potency is also emphasized in Clifton’s boxing skills, a formidability admired both by the narrator during a violent encounter with Ras the Exhorter, and later by a boy with “Slavic eyes” when Clifton knocks down the policeman who will subsequently murder him. Like the Eastern Europeans who gaze dolefully at Gatsby’s symbolically phallic car in a key moment of racial convergence in Fitzgerald’s novel, racial difference seems deployed here to illustrate Clifton’s phallic dominance over the policeman, who reveals his inferiority in relying on what female

masculinities scholar Judith Halberstam would call a “prosthetic” phallus, his gun, in shooting the unarmed black man.³⁹

Clifton seems to be revealed as what Baker would call “ideologically” phallic here as well, not only as a kind of black superman juxtaposed with white and perhaps also Slavic racial “inferiors,” but also in his “very black” skin, which suggests some sort of genetic triumph over the white master’s essence—the white master who has raped and impregnated both the “house” and “yard” female slaves in Clifton’s ancestry. An innate black superiority is also suggested in several other ways—when Ras the Exhorter spares Clifton’s life because he appears to Ras as a kind of “African King,” and at Clifton’s funeral, where the narrator eulogizes him as a black martyr, and where the crowd holds signs that read “Our Hope Shot Down.” Yet the character’s futile death, perhaps more a symbolic “suicide-by-cop” enacted for the benefit of the narrator than a true act of resistance, contradicts any notion that he functions to suggest there is political hope in racial “superiority.” Moreover, Clifton’s bi-racial features belie any reading of his racial purity. In a novel that rejects essentialist descriptions of race, it is hard to believe that Ellison meant to attribute any part of Clifton’s nobility either to the “white blood” of some past aristocratic master, or to some atavistic African “kingliness” in his blood. Indeed, the novel clearly rejects such racist views in the person of the “madman” Ras, for whom color is an absolute line dividing good and evil. Ras’ objection to the Brotherhood is based on a simple racism that the narrator and Clifton, committed to the raceless “science” of the Brotherhood, feel they must reject—though in the actual event, Ras proves right in warning Clifton and the narrator of the likelihood of white treachery.

But if only in his choice of white literary models, Ellison himself rejected race as a basis for fundamental judgments about persons, though as Catherine Saunders points out, he was less successful evading the “shorthand of symbols” that resulted in his reduction of women to “bearers” rather than “makers” of meaning—their reduction, that is, to stereotypes in which sex forms the basis for similar, fundamental judgments.⁴⁰ Clifton himself may be such a bearer of meaning in the instructive, expressive role his life and death play in the education of our narrator, whom Clifton thus leads out of ideological bondage. By the time the organization discovers our narrator, Clifton has already spent three years in the Brotherhood, and harbors princely doubts about his work there. Though he mocks Ras’ Marcus Garvey-like appeals to race, he also seems moved by these appeals, pensively conceding that Ras’ message of separatism from the “white Satans” might be the only solution: “I don’t know,” he reflects, “I suppose sometimes a man *has* to plunge outside historyplunge outside, turn his back Otherwise he might kill somebody, go nuts” (377, italics in original). In the context in which this is being discussed, that of Ras’ separatist political project, to “plunge outside of history” is to start one’s *own* history, presumably a black one, without reference either to the double consciousness-inducing narrative of American racial relations, or to the positivist, dialectical, Hegelian “spiral” at the heart of the Brotherhood’s class-based and raceless narrative of history. This is a frightening, desolating suggestion to the narrator at this early point in his activism, and one that makes him “suddenly glad [he] had found the Brotherhood” (377). Indeed, he compares himself to Frederick Douglass, a “great man” whose portrait hangs in his office, and the contemplation of whom makes the narrator feel “a sudden piety.” However, this also makes him remember

and refuse echoes of his grandfather's voice—the grandfather who counseled a secret and warlike subversion of white society, “overcom[ing] ‘em with yeses . . . agree[ing] them to death and destruction” (16).

In this light, Douglass represents the narrator's desire not to undermine, but to be an important player, a “race leader,” in a democratic history he presumes is shared by black and white Americans, though he will soon be disabused of this fatuity. Clifton's growing disaffection and final break with the organization, and his illustration—using the Sambo puppet with “invisible strings”—of the unseen political manipulation of African Americans, helps Invisible Man himself to escape manipulation by the Brotherhood. Like Nick Carraway, who plays the role of sole witness to the widening ironies of Gatsby's tale, the narrator is the sole beneficiary of the lesson of Clifton's life and death: “Clifton had chosen to plunge out of history and, except for the picture it made in my mind's eye, only the plunge was recorded, and that was the important thing” (447). Like the sharply dressed young men on the subway platform that the narrator watches “living outside the realm of history” with “no one to applaud their value,” the narrator begins, after Clifton's death, to see himself in a separate history, one that lacks the comforting intellectual confirmation of the white “partners” supposedly sharing “reality” with him—the white partners, that is, whose fathers formulated the democratic ideals that launched that history.

It is in this disconcerting step into a bleak, black, separate vision of history (and American democracy) that Invisible Man, and thus Ellison, most powerfully stakes his claim to epistemological superiority, for in leaving behind the illusion that he was at all a “visible” player in the shared history of American democracy, the narrator can see it for what it is: an

empty story of sheer, ugly domination, mechanistic and inhuman like the “iron man” that the narrator sees, in the castration dream that ends the narrative section of the novel, “striding like a robot . . . whose legs clanged doomfully as it moved” (570). Thus like the narrator’s grandfather, and unlike Frederick Douglass, Tod Clifton’s example of “running and dodging the force of history instead of making a dominating stand” with the Brotherhood will ultimately become the position of Invisible Man himself, though in renouncing a “dominant” place in history, he does not renounce the exclusive, phallic forms of knowledge that he himself experienced, in his struggles, as a loss of self (441). To be sure, the narrator’s “victory” over white purveyors of illusion is a pragmatic and pacific one—but only if we discount the ideological “violence” inherent in his definition of knowledge and vision as male prerogatives—such knowledge and vision being the golden prize of an exclusively male homosocial struggle. Ellison has said that the book does not constitute “an attack on white society,” but represents the narrator learning how to “assert and achieve his own humanity”⁴¹ Yet the degree to which this assertion of “humanity” is conflated and confused with an achievement of manhood—manhood defined in terms of any form of dominance—is the degree to which Ellison’s novel remains trapped by the logic which it itself critiques in the closing scenes.

“Your Sun . . . And Your Moon”

The final showdown in our narrator’s quest for phallic reversal occurs in a dream. Here, gathered as a mob, (some of) the characters Douglas Steward would call Invisible Man’s “hetero-phallic” epistemological antagonists—those who would attempt to “force

their picture of reality” on the narrator—Jack, Old Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton and Ras—inflict on him the final violence of physical castration, though its occurrence in a dream heightens the act’s gestural, symbolic importance. The narrator has fled from the Harlem riot and ended up falling into a manhole where he lays “in the black dark upon the black coal” taunting the baseball bat-wielding whites who were chasing him. “What’s in that briefcase?” they call. The narrator laughs and answers, “You. . . .All of you.” When they ask him what did he steal, he laughs, “Can’t you see?I’ve had you in my briefcase all the time and you didn’t know me then and can’t see me now” (566). This taunt is the first articulation of the narrator’s social invisibility become social advantage. Indeed, as he lays in the dark of the hole, he “needs light” and realizes that the only fuel he can use are the paper contents of his briefcase, which comprise souvenirs of his past illusions: his uplift-inspiring high school diploma, the Sambo doll with which Tod Clifton signified the narrator’s manipulation by the Brotherhood, and a slip on which Jack (or Emma) had written his Brotherhood name, and thus his white-imposed identity in the organization. By this “light” he sees all his deceptions, and in outrage collapses, realizing that he “was through with them at last.”

Then commences the dream in which he is prisoner of “all . . . [who] had run me.” He declares to his captors, “I’m through with your illusions and lies” (568). Upon this refusal,

They came forward with a knife, holding me; and I felt the bright red pain and they took the two bloody blobs and cast them over the bridge, and out of my anguish I saw them curve up and catch beneath the apex of the curving arch of the bridge, to hang there, dripping down through the sunlight into the dark red water. And while the others laughed, before my pain-sharpened eyes the whole world was slowly turning red.

“Now you’re free of illusions,” Jack said, pointing to my seed wasting upon the air. “How does it feel to be free of one’s illusions?”

[...] I gave a Bledsoe laugh, startling them. And Jack came forward, curious.

“Why do you laugh?” he said. [...]

“Because at a price I now see that which I couldn’t see,”

“See what?” they said. [...]

“That there hang not only my generations wasting on the water [...] But your sun [...] And your moon [...] There’s your universe, and that drip-drop upon the water you hear is all the history you’ve made, all you’re going to make. Now laugh you scientists. Let’s hear you laugh!” (570)

Here we find the contest over illusion, castration, and manhood writ large, with the narrator’s realization that the power of his oppressors is only possible through his castration by them. With his castrated, “pain-sharpened eyes,” however, he penetrates to the heart of their epistemology to find a history and patriarchal cosmos “revolving” around a pair of removed, bloody, subaltern testicles—bare of generative beauty, meaning and community, a worldview and sense of historical importance based crudely on dominance. As this revelatory scenario occurs only in the narrator’s dream, it would seem that his “last laugh” is private, his knowledge secret, and his invisibility intact. But of course it also occurs in a book written for a reading public, and in which the narrator’s new knowledge—a costly mastery to be sure, but in the context of his unceasing humiliations, clearly meant to transcend his losses—is juxtaposed with the blank incomprehension of his captors, who in taunting Invisible Man about his illusions, are suddenly shown their own, though in dismissing him as “crazy,” it is clear that they lack eyes to see what has happened.

It is in this dramatized exclusion that Ellison reclaims those figurative testicles, becoming the one who no longer “is” but “has” the phallus, the one who uses the Other—in the exposition of the sexualized nature of racism that constitutes the novel we have been reading—for the symbolic “dialectical confirmation” of his own authorial, epistemological superiority. In the context of African Americans’ long suffering in the New World order, and in the way that, for black men, that suffering was magnified through the humiliating “bizarre social rituals” of symbolic castration depicted in the novel, it gives no me no satisfaction to criticize this final, dreamt, symbolic reversal, this claim to a long-denied humanity and identity through vision and authorship. Yet by conceding to his oppressors the sexual terms in which they have framed the argument over racial superiority, Ellison himself is drawn into the phallic struggle, that “doomful” battle royal of iron-men which has the exclusion of the “feminine” at the heart of its machinery. “Hurt to the point of abysmal pain, hurt to the point of invisibility,” the narrator concludes by telling us his “hibernation” is over: he will emerge from his hole to find some “socially responsible role,” however limited by his invisibility that role might be. In this way Ellison rids himself of his narrator, whose hibernation has been “a covert preparation for more overt action” (13). But overt “action” has already occurred in the production of the novel itself, a “symbolic action” with persuasion as its telos.

Looking back on his accomplishment in an introduction to the novel written in 1981, well after the influence of feminism had become widespread, Ellison still did not see the sexual asymmetries of his “personal vision of possibility,” which, omitting the sexual divide altogether, answered the challenge of “communicating across our barriers of race and

religion, class, color and region—barriers which consist of the many strategies of division that were designed [...] to prevent what would otherwise have been a more or less natural recognition of the reality of black and white fraternity” (xxii). Ellison’s privileging here of “fraternity” over humanity would seem a mere anachronism but for the strategies of sexual division, of “feminine” exclusion and the homosocial struggle for the phallus, that operate so integrally in the architecture and incidents of this “self-generating novel.”

Notes:

¹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 3. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

² The arc of the novel has led many commentators to interpret it as a story of the achievement of various forms of vision and/or identity, whether “American,” “universal,” “authorial,” or racial. And of course Ellison himself described the novel as such an achievement in describing it as the story of the narrator’s learning to “assert and achieve his own humanity.” I will argue, however, that the gendered, phallic logic of exclusion that underpins the represented “achievement” of both identity and vision must be reckoned with in readings of this kind. Valerie Smith, for example, compellingly traces the epistemological and authorial self-making in the novel without touching on the gendered implications of that self-construction. John Callahan, in *New Essays on Invisible Man*, frames the narrative as a quest for “heroic eloquence,” an ungendered artistic identity defined by voice. See Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997); and John Callahan, “Frequencies of Eloquence: The Performance and Composition of *Invisible Man*,” in *New Essays on Invisible Man*, ed. Robert O’Meally (New York: Cambridge UP, 1988). A sampling of other such readings might include: Charles I. Glicksberg, “The Symbolization of Vision,” in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Invisible Man*, ed. John M. Reilly (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970); Tony Tanner, “The Music of Invisibility,” in *Ralph Ellison: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Hersey (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1974), 80-94; Kenneth Burke, “Ralph Ellison’s Trueblooded Bildungsroman” in *Speaking For You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison*, ed. Kimberly W. Benston (Washington D.C.: Howard UP, 1987) 349-359. For Ellison’s quote, see Ralph Ellison, “The Art of Fiction: An Interview,” in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1994) 179.

³ Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1973) 11.

⁴ Ellison, “The World and the Jug,” *Shadow and Act*, 116, 140.

⁵ “The World and the Jug,” 140.

⁶ Though its meaning might be somewhat forgotten today, Ellison used the term ju-jitsu to refer to that martial arts discipline’s philosophy of turning one’s opponent’s strength and momentum into offensive advantage, a reversal metaphorically suggestive of the modernist’s relation to his own feminization, especially in his perception that he is a victim of some (culturally diffuse) form of “aggression,” whether from women, racial others, or from modernity itself.

⁷ Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues,” *Shadow and Act*, 83.

⁸ Hemingway’s later works, such as the *The Old Man and the Sea*, and the posthumous *Islands in the Stream* both present variants on this kind of solitary, islanded and autonomous ideal masculinity, though

Hemingway developed a number of other tropes to express the fundamental sense of alienation that pervades his writing. And just as Hemingway wrote of literary creation in terms of the bullfight, a similar literary metaphoric is operative in Conrad's maritime writing, especially as personified in the sea captain/narrator Marlow, our navigator through the difficulties of modernity we traverse in reading Conrad's work. Indeed, Conrad employed the metaphor of "the great navigators" to describe the authors who most impressed him in his sailing youth. Quoted in Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 53.

⁹ "Richard Wright's Blues," 78.

¹⁰ "Richard Wright's Blues," 78-9.

¹¹ Daniel Y. Kim, "Invisible Desires: Homoerotic Racism and its Homophobic Critique in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 30.3 (1997): 309-328. Subsequent references to this article will be parenthetically cited in the text.

¹² Ellison, "Twentieth Century Fiction," *Shadow and Act*, 39. Also see "The World and the Jug," 130.

¹³ Douglas Steward. "The Illusions of Phallic Agency: *Invisible Man*, *Totem and Taboo*, and the Santa Claus Surprise." *Callaloo*, 26.2 (2003): 522-535. 521-22.

¹⁴ Ralph Ellison, "Perspective of Literature," *Going to the Territory* (New York: Vintage Book, 1986), 328.

¹⁵ "The World and the Jug," 137.

¹⁶ "Perspective of Literature," 329.

¹⁷ Ellison, "Introduction," *Shadow and Act*, xx. In *American Anatomies*, Robyn Wiegman describes a similar analogizing of "blacks and women" in the development of the human sciences in the 19th century. Charting the centrality of race to the epistemic shift described by Foucault between "classical" and "modern" scientific knowledge regimes, Wiegman shows how the development of disciplines like comparative anatomy and biology, fields that took "Man" as their object of study, were predicated on hierarchical explanations of racial difference—a break from earlier views that held race to be a product of environment. As scientists began to conceive of race as a biological category, their craniometers and calipers established supposedly empirical, but actually *analogic* relations between women and black males based on various measurable differences between these groups and white males, whose heavier brains, larger cranial capacities or steeper facial angles supposedly accounted for Western male cultural and intellectual superiority. See "Visual Modernity," pages 23-35 in Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995). In making this argument, Wiegman relies primarily on Nancy Stepan, "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science" in *The Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990) 38-57; and Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken, 1995) 217-218.

¹⁸ Never breaking the frame, however, the author surrogate does not relate the *actual* writing of the novel, but only narrates the diegetic, fictional or fictionalized events therein. Critics of Conrad and his prototypical author-surrogate, Marlow, complained that the notion of a storyteller sitting down to relate a novel-length tale was "not credible." Thus one might argue that the author surrogate obscures the actual author or "author function" by naturalizing the narrative act, making the creation of complex and multilayered art appear effortless, a process not requiring long thought or painful revision. Yet I would suggest that first-person author surrogates like Marlow or *Invisible Man* highlight the actual author precisely through this admirable ease of narration, this telling that *seems like* showing. For if, as I have argued, the core of the male-modernist aesthetic was the attempt "impersonally" to represent one's own experience, then how better to advertise this aesthetic accomplishment than to cede the task to another? This is merely to point out, as I have in the introduction, the fallacy of what Joyce described as the artist "refine[d] out of existence," a state in which authors cease to "tell" and instead become "invisible" but nevertheless always-present dramatists, staging (the staging of) their own modern dramas. See Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968) 1; and James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985) 215.

¹⁹ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen & Co LTD), 54.

²⁰ By ambiguous I mean common sexual activities that have traditionally been disclaimed by men as “unmanly” due to a symbolism of male passivity or inferiority: cunnilingus, female-superior positions, stimulation or penetration of the male anus, or, as Hemingway’s fiction illustrates, any of a host of kinks and fetishes playing on sexual role reversal.

²¹ Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 42. Subsequent references to this chapter will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²² Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

²³ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 186.

²⁴ Houston Baker, “To Move Without Moving: An Analysis of Creativity and Commerce in Ralph Ellison’s Trueblood Episode” in *Speaking For You*, 322-348, 19. Subsequent references to this essay will be parenthetically cited in the text.

²⁵ See W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (NY: Bantam Books, 1989), 42 and 76, but also all of Chapter 3 and 4: 62-76 and 30-42 respectively. Invisible Man attends a school that, in Mr. Norton's words, might help him become "a good farmer, a chef, a preacher, doctor, singer, mechanic" (43). Though the career of doctor might seem incongruous with Tuskegee’s famous Washingtonian mission of industrial education, the school was still resolute in its dedication to the founder’s principles when Ellison arrived there in 1933, principles which did not exclude the study of medicine. In “Industrial Education for the Negro” Washington himself grouped the practice of medicine with other practical and remunerative career options for blacks: “One farm bought, one house built, one home sweetly and intelligently kept, one man who is the largest tax payer or has the largest bank account, one school or church maintained, one factory running successfully, one truck garden profitably cultivated, one patient cured by a Negro doctor, one sermon well preached, one office well filled, one life cleanly lived — these will tell more in our favor than all the abstract eloquence that can be summoned to plead our cause.” Another aspect of Ellison’s fictionalized Tuskegee that might seem to mar autobiographical readings is the liberal humanist education in literature that the narrator reports receiving there, a program that includes not only “Greek plays,” but modernist heavyweights (and Irish subaltern writers) Joyce, Yeats, and Sean O’Casey. But Lawrence Jackson reports in his biography of Ellison that the author did indeed receive instruction in such “abstract eloquence,” and that, despite a lingering split in its attitudes toward vocational training and liberal arts curricula, Tuskegee did devote “a great deal of attention to its English department” which “boasted a well-trained faculty,” including the Howard-trained Morteza Drexel Sprague, a student of Alain Locke and Sterling Brown to whom Ellison was later to dedicate *Shadow and Act* (107). See Booker T. Washington, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903) 9-29; and Lawrence Jackson, *Ralph Ellison: Emergence of Genius* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2002) 84-87 and 104-107.

²⁶ It is fascinating that both Dubois and Washington framed the cause of black progress in terms of education, and that both saw this issue primarily as a recuperation of manhood, yet their ideas of how that manhood should be attained were so bitterly disparate.

²⁷ Benston, “Introduction: The Masks of Ralph Ellison,” *Speaking for You*. 3.

²⁸ In *Our America*, Walter Benn Michaels argues for the “structural intimacy” between modernist writers commitment to the autonomous sign—a sign not reliant, that is, on “syntactic and semantic conventions,” and a nativist modernism Michaels locates in figurations of incest, a family relation not reliant on legal conventions. Both of these figures of autonomy, whether of the sign or of the family, demonstrate what Michaels calls the modernist “commitment to identity,” a commitment known pejoratively in the humanities today as “essentialism.” As Michaels suggests, this attitude involves a kind of purism that excludes the Other in the interest of maintaining some form of group identity; in its linguistic manifestation, this essentialist attitude is, paradoxically, performative, since “essential” identity is invoked through language. Both of these attitudes indeed suffuse the works considered in this dissertation, which examines attempts to invoke or perform masculine authorial identity through linguistic means (the novel), and through processes of exclusion (the comparative method by which the surrogate is constructed as the “real” thing). Michaels’ paradigm, though unconcerned with matters of gender, can nevertheless help us understand the (paradoxical) structural logic through which modernists negotiated identity and loss. Yet by

focusing on forms of group identity, particularly, national, cultural, racial, classed or familial identities, and, in his emphasis on pluralism, refusing notions of hierarchy, Michaels neglects the strategies by which male modernists claimed and constructed personal, manly superiority *within* and *among* those groups, and the effect such strategies had on formal features of works like *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*. See Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995).

²⁹ For a reading that compares Norton and Trueblood's version of incest and, like Baker, understands Trueblood's incest as a form of artistic triumph, see Selma Fraiberg, "Two Modern Incest Heroes" in *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, 73-79.

³⁰ In his "memoiristic" *Turning South Again* (2001), Baker movingly acknowledges the masculine authorial anxieties that drove his *own* reading of the Trueblood incident 14 years before. Baker reveals that his readings of the Trueblood incident and of Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech (in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*), constituted an "alliance" that was "geographical, gendered, and psychologically overdetermined. In a word, all involved the South, black men, and a certain species of performance anxiety" implicated with modernism and with finding a "black voice" with which to "ameliorate, accommodate and critique the past." A sense of alliance with Ellison himself, especially with Ellison's use of Trueblood to expressively "prevail" over white superordinates, certainly emerges in that famous reading, the phallic "overdeterminations" of which I am trying to trace here. See Houston Baker, *Turning South Again*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), 14. Baker's treatment of Washington's speech can be found in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: U of C Press, 1989).

³¹ See Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus" in *Ecrits: A Selection*, Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, Inc., 1977) 285.

³² The song itself also alludes to Eliot's use of it in the final lines of "The Wasteland."

³³ As Kimberly Lamm puts it, "Clifton's dance with the dolls mocks the manipulation of Invisible Man by the Brotherhood." Lamm argues that "Clifton's visibility makes him a destabilizing mirror of Invisible Man." More broadly, in complicating the "rigid definitions of race, masculinity, and activism enforced by the Brotherhood," Clifton is used by Ellison to "register moments of destabilizing fluidity, subversion, and innovation as black masculinity makes and remakes itself within the collaged canvas of American visual culture" (15). In my reading, however, Clifton's "destabilizing" effects are lessened by the exclusive, phallic logic of Ellison's self-making. See Kimberly Lamm, "Visuality and Black Masculinity in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Romare Bearden's Photomontages" *Callaloo* 26.3 (2003): 813-835, 11.

³⁴ Ellison, "Introduction," *Shadow and Act*, xxi.

³⁵ Ellison, "Remembering Richard Wright," *Going to the Territory*, 206.

³⁶ "Remembering Richard Wright," 209.

³⁷ "The Art of Fiction," 174.

³⁸ "The Art of Fiction," 174.

³⁹ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 4.

⁴⁰ Catherine Saunders, "Makers or Bearers of Meaning? Sex and the Struggle for Self-Definition in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." *Critical Matrix* 5, (1998): 1-29, 24.

⁴¹ "The Art of Fiction," 179.

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