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Voices in Crisis: An Exploration of Masculine Identity in Modernist Narratives

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VOICES IN CRISIS: AN EXPLORATION OF MASCULINE IDENTITY IN
MODERNIST NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

The period following World War I can be characterized in literature by the trauma and changes that promoted crises of masculinity. These crises, however, are not discussed between the men that suffer similar feelings of insecurity and anxiety; not approached as a tension in need of resolution. Exploring the narrative voices of Nick, Jake, Darl and Anse in *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *As I Lay Dying*, this thesis addresses the ways in which this unspoken phenomenon is essential to the modernist male narrative. I propose that, despite the widespread nature of this phenomenon, it is the voice of the individual – the preoccupations of his consciousness – that is the most appropriate point through which to examine these crises of masculinity.

INTRODUCTION

Crises of Masculinity: An Exploration of Modernist Anxiety

The 1920s were a bleak time for men. At least, that is the message one could take from the male narrators of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. The three novels are unified all by place among Modernism as well as in their prominent male voices. All three are similarly unassuming in action, often the plot seems to meander rather than propel forward, but in this meandering pace the consciousnesses of the narrators become the primary focus. In particular, these narrators reveal a self-consciousness consistent with the characteristic anxiety of the modernist movement. This sense of anxiety can be attributed to various causes. World War I, changing gender roles, and industrialization all contributed to a sense of insecurity that pervades the lives of the characters in these novels. Crises of masculinity, however, was an unspoken byproduct of these various causes. The conditions of this period, evident in the novels, created a perfect storm for internal turmoil. Between the insecurity of the time, and the traditionally taboo nature male emotional expression, questions of masculinity are left to fester in the minds of these male narrators. Though a central theme of all three novels, anxiety around masculinity reveals itself only through consideration of the nuances of these narrators' consciences; the internalized nature of the problem is also the solution. The subjective experience of each narrator provides the window through which what is unspoken can be given a voice. To connect these narratives I will explore central themes of Modernism as they play out in the novels, namely masculinity, subjectivity, and anxiety, and offer my framework for approaching the crises of Jake, Nick, Darl, and Anse.

I

The question of gender and gender representations is central to the discourse around Modernism and is the main access point through which I discuss the narrators' crises in each novel. The movement itself comes out of historical events that affected both genders directly, and specifically. World War I, for instance, left male veterans to return to society, trauma in tow. The 19th Amendment, on the other hand, contrasted the dehumanizing effects of the War on men by formally giving women more agency and power in society. Thus, the subsequent social implications of these historical occurrences were not isolated to one gender or the other. *The Sun Also Rises* offers a clear example of this phenomenon. Jake suffers a loss directly from combat in the war. Brett, however, is a veteran in her own right; as a nurse, her involvement in the War was considerable. Additionally, she deals with the effects of the War on men, secondhand, through the loss of her fiancé. Brett's independence on the other-hand, has very real implications for her relationships with the men in the novel.

Gerald Izenberg explores the gendered implications of the modernist period in the introduction to his book *Modernism and Masculinity*. He addresses the mutual gender implications evident in modernist literature, specifically in regards to expectations of masculinity. He first introduces the study of masculinity as a lesser discussed point in the "discourse of gender." He cites that, until recently (as of 2000), this discourse implicated only women; but the critical discussion has broadened to include both genders: "an increasing number of works have argued that masculinity is as much a social and historical construct as femininity is, and have begun to chart the vicissitudes of 'masculinities' over time" (Izenburg 4). Izenburg, and the greater context of literary

criticism he refers to, rightly recognizes the importance of discussing masculinity and femininity in conjunction with one-another. Additionally, his specification of “masculinities” as plural reflects the nature of the idea. “Masculinity” is not a stagnant set of traits that define the characteristics of an embodiment of a male state, rather, it is a shifting set of traits that change with context. Izenburg goes on to trace these changing ideals of masculinity in the years leading to, during, and following the modernist period (which he defines as late 19th and earlier 20th century).

In a similar way to Izenberg, Natalya Lusty discusses the history of masculinity around this period in her book also titled *Modernism and Masculinity*. Though she is more specific in discussing the term, her scope is relatively broad: post-war Europe. She begins her discussion of “Modernist Masculinities” with this period:

World War One has long been defined as a collective historical wound gendering modernism as a site of masculine emotional trauma and corporeal fragmentation. The historical work on masculinity during this period has been exemplary in producing nuanced accounts of the protean experiences of war that both contested and conformed to the military and civilian expectations of men of the period (Lusty 5).

The War was pervasive in its effect on modernism, as Lusty notes. This is evident in the three novels I’m examining by the fact that Jake, Nick, and Darl are all war veterans. The prevalence of their status as veterans varies in each respective novel, but that this is a most basic fact of all three speaks to the importance of the historical event to the modernist male figure. The representation of “masculine emotional trauma” as it relates to the War varies from novel to novel, but it is nonetheless there on some level for each narrator (excluding Anse). Additionally, the “corporeal fragmentation” that Lusty identifies is a theme particularly relevant in *The Sun Also Rises*. Lusty notes the importance of historical work during the period in its accounts of “protean experiences of

war”; while historical events offer a wider framing, and are relevant in understanding the historical consciousness present in the novels, the nature of the concept of masculinity reflects the importance the subjective experience in considering its definition. Though the trauma and fragmentation from the War was pervasive, it is only a piece of understanding the way in which crises of masculinity take place in these modernist narrators. For my purpose, I propose that, while useful to consider the historical context of “masculinities,” a substantive examination can only be made considering both the historical context as well as the more specific, individual perspective on masculinity.

II

Issues of gender are not the only unifying quality in these Modernist novels. While masculinity is my primary focus, criticism around the artistic climate of this movement aids in providing further framework for discussion. In Michael Levenson’s *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, the author explores how to define a movement that’s criteria are under continued critical debate. Levenson discusses the many factors that are at the heart of the movement in order to ground his framework for discussion. He uses the idea of crisis to group modernist artists, acknowledging that the many “disturbances” at hand that factored into their work, among them are: “the loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, the violence of war, and a nameless, faceless anxiety” (Levenson 5). These disturbances are central and uniting among the three novels I examine, reflecting the impression of these cultural mentalities in society’s literary counterparts. Interestingly, however, each novel takes place in geographically diverse places. From rural Mississippi, to New York, to Paris and Pamplona, the disturbances of the

modernist period unite the works. The World War, as Lusty notes, is essential to this unification, its scope and effect on an entire generation transcends geographic location. In addition to this historical event, the unifying sense of anxiety is a particularly striking quality of a generation of artists. It is elusive, as Levenson identifies, it is “nameless, faceless;” yet, in all three novels — *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *As I Lay Dying* — this anxiety can be grounded in the narrative voices. Within a critical context that acknowledges the disturbances of this period, my project examines the narratives of four characters (Jake, Nick, Darl, and Anse) to put a face and a name to the elusive anxiety that is defining of, and yet undefined within, Modernism.

III

In addition to identifying the “disturbances” of Modernism, Levenson identifies a theme of Modernism that is inherent in examining these disturbances: subjectivity. Indeed, the question of subjectivity is essential when considering the manifestation of cultural disturbances in the narrative voice. It is what makes the nuances of tone and word choice fascinating in all of these texts. It is the power to examine a novel through the lens of the narrator, whose own experience shades the presentation of all aspects of the work: including, himself. In Pernicle Lewis’, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*, Lewis addresses similar aspects of the movement that Leveson points out; in addition, Lewis addresses the relationship of content and form as it relates to the movement. He defines the “crisis of representation” of the period as, “two fold: a crisis in what could be represented and a crisis in how it should be represented, or in other words a crisis in both the content and the form of artistic representation” (Lewis 2). While in his

argument, Lewis alludes more to the break from traditional form, in poetry for example, to express this crisis, the relationship between content and form is also essential to my project.

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* works more radically with form than the other novels, but on the whole the central aspect of these novels' form is their use of first person narration. This form reflects the centrality of subjectivity as a central concern of each author. With a first person narration, subjective experience is at the heart of this choice in form. Each narrator copes with their internal struggles, reflective of the disturbances of the time, and the authors' choice of form priorities the issue of subjectivity in the consideration of the reader. In *As I Lay Dying*, the typical experience of one subjective voice is complicated by the inclusion of many voices: in form, it is a literal collision of subjectivity, forcing the reader to make sense of a novel driven by the variances in representation.

The nature of both Levenson's and Lewis' examinations of Modernism is, appropriately, rather vague. The disturbances that Levenson discusses and Lewis' address of the "crisis of representation" are useful in considering the broader scope of unity among the novels, as well as in providing a framework through which to address the more specific unities I draw between the novels. It is the narrators' subjectivity, the self-conscious personal relationship to the changing world around them, however, that enables my project. The narrative voice reveals the very personal way in which this changing world affected men. There is no one way to characterize male anxiety, but from these novels, there is a way to explore the individual. Each individual's narration reveals the pervasiveness of male anxiety, but with insight into how this anxiety takes shape in

artistic representation. Each author's narrator(s) offer a voice through which to see the very ways in which anxiety affects the mind, and the way the mind perceives and ultimately, reproduces in narration, the world around it. Ultimately, in exploring the clues offered by each narrative, the "nameless, faceless anxiety" of Modernism can be assessed. Evaluating the phenomenon from my point of intervention—the voice—the phenomenon becomes more than simply a cultural trend. Rather, it can be considered in a way that appropriately reflects the specificity of human experience.

IV

Before pursuing the instances of crisis among the narrators I'm examining, it is necessary to establish the terms in which I consider "masculinity." A person's masculinity is, in essence, their maleness. "Maleness," however, is not concrete. Rather than physiology, masculinity and maleness suggest an ideology, a tradition of measuring manhood by a person's qualities. It is uncertain and historically fluid. At the same time, there are certain longstanding ideals that feed into a "traditional" understanding of masculinity. These are the traits prominently associated with men throughout history. Fighting in war, for instance, I would categorize as traditionally masculine. Providing for a family, sexual dominance, emotional stoicism: these are qualities that feed into a masculine tradition. Although physiology is relevant (as seen with Jake) the societal implications of sexuality and performance of manhood are more relevant than physical qualities. Thus, while there are certainly longstanding ideals, there is no certain truth in assessing masculinity.

The tension between uncertainty and tradition is evident in the crises of masculinity in all three novels. As Lusty and Levenson both address, the War, among other historical factors, had a disruptive effect on male identity. Thus, while traditional ideals of masculinity (such as those I identified above) were still present, there was immense uncertainty in navigating a changing world. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the uncertainty is based largely in sexuality. Expectations of both men and women are in flux, and because of the war, Jake is left in a particularly uncertain position to make sense of these changes. For Nick in *The Great Gatsby*, the acceleration of progress in New York disrupts his relationship with women as well as with himself. He is uncertain of his role in this progress and, as a result, his voice betrays anxiety and insecurity around time and relationships. Darl and Anse's narrations reveal a different threat of modernity. Living in a rural setting, the two are exposed to a community in their break from male tradition. Neither fit the mold of masculinity embodied by their hard working male counterparts. They struggle with their role as outcasts but in very different ways, showing the necessity of perspective in understanding masculinity.

Jake, Nick, Darl, and Anse, are all plagued with some degree of anxiety regarding their relationship with the changing world around them. Their "anxiety" is what I identify as conscious or subconscious fixations. Through the narrative structure of each of the novels, these fixations can be identified as recurring concerns in their consciousness. For Jake, for instance, his anxiety around asserting himself is evident in constant understatement and passive behavior. Darl's anxieties regarding existence and expression is evident in his internal dialogues regarding the self. Anse, meanwhile, expresses his anxiety around his failure to fulfill a patriarchal role in his family by constantly

criticizing Darl's behavior. Finally, with Nick, his rhetoric around wealth and romantic company reveals his anxious feelings toward finding a place among a modernizing New York. Anxiety and fixation, therefore, go hand-in-hand in the course of my argument.

Exploring these male anxieties support a basis on which to define "masculinity" in each of these novels. The insecurities of these narrators reveal the ways in which they feel they don't measure up their relative standards of masculinity. Thus, it is only through exploring these feelings that the issue of masculinity can be assessed. The essence of the idea is elusive and this elusive nature is central to the the Modernist criticism explored above. The sense of anxiety in this period and the uncertainty of "masculinity" had a mutually perpetuating effect. The solution to making sense of this tension, then, is to confront these instabilities in the voice of the modernist narrator; taking advantage of the self-conscious form of first person narration to ascertain what could not be articulated.

CHAPTER 1

Finding a Post-War Masculinity: Jake's Crisis in *The Sun Also Rises*

In Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, the crisis of sexual identity in the face of post-War trauma pervades the sub-text of a story of friends, drinking, and unspoken feelings. The narrator, Jake, suffers from impotence due to an injury sustained during the War. He is left to make sense of his male identity without the power of sexuality, and in the face of his love for a sexually liberated woman. Through his narration, Jake reveals that his passive behavior, his insecurity in his masculinity, and his love for Brett are deeply connected. Jake's insecurity relinquishes him to a passive position in dealing with the other men of the novel, yet he is not without any application of sexual feelings. Rather, these sexual feelings must be made sense of in the context of his anxiety of asserting himself. Through Jake's reluctance to articulate his genuine feelings and anxieties, Hemingway suggests that his crisis of masculinity is socially unspeakable, asserting the internal voice as a crucial element in understanding Jake's crisis.

I

Hemingway reveals Jake's insecure nature early on in the novel. Jake starts his narration by introducing Robert Cohn, stating:

Robert Cohn was once middle-weight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn. He cared nothing for boxing, in fact he disliked it, but he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton. (Fitzgerald 11)

Jake begins his story by sharing Cohn's achievement, but clearly placing it in the past in saying Cohn "was once" this champion boxer. His condescension becomes clear in the following line when he states the fact that he is not impressed by this title, but that "it meant a lot to Cohn." Telling this story in retrospect, Jake does not hide the animosity he feels toward Cohn, though the reader does not yet know the cause. In starting the novel this way, Jake reveals that his preoccupation with masculinity is essential to his character. Boxing is a fighting sport, signifying a performance of masculinity; but Jake subtly uses Cohn's success in this sport to insult Cohn and challenge this masculinity, saying Cohn learned the sport to counteract his "feeling of inferiority and shyness" as "a Jew at Princeton." Pointing to Cohn's "inferiority," Jake reveals his insecurity in his own. Jake's treatment of Cohn in these first pages also establishes his tone as a narrator. He makes digs at Cohn in his consciousness, but never truly confronts Cohn for the cause of his anger: Cohn's affair with Brett. These feelings remain unspoken, but his consciousness is plagued by the incident. The unspoken nature of his feelings toward Cohn also applies in his relationship with Brett.

Brett first appears in the novel upon Jake's encounter with her at a bar in Paris. This evening, and Jake's descriptions of her, is significant in that it gives the first impression of the relationship between the two; or, more aptly, Jake's view of her. This encounter, similar to Jake's opening description of Cohn, shows another moment in which Jake deals with his feelings regarding Brett's association with other men. Jake narrates:

A crowd of young men, some in jerseys and some in their shirt-sleeves, got out... They came in. As they went in, under the light I saw white hands, wavy hair, white faces, grimacing, gesturing, talking. With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was

very much with them. (Hemingway 28)

Jake's description of the men here is distorted and lacking in clarity; they are hands, hair, and faces. This method of breaking them into parts alludes to Jake's own loss of wholeness from the War, evoking what Lusty describes as "corporeal fragmentation." Brett, however, clearly stands out to him. Jake fixates on the fact that she is "very much with" these men, repeating it again shortly after this passage. Though he doesn't explicitly say this is the cause, Jake becomes upset after seeing Brett with these men. His reaction, however, indicates his passive method of coping with anger:

I was very angry. Somehow they always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure. Instead, I walked down the street and had a beer at the bar at the next Bal (Hemingway 28).

These men anger Jake, and he admits to wanting to "swing on one." Instead of acting on this impulse, however, he leaves. Jake's word choice here indicates what it is about the men that makes them so angry. Jake sees them as having a "superior" and "simpling" composure. However, the lack of further interaction to reinforce these descriptions suggests that this is more of a reflection of Jake than the men. Seeing them flirting with Brett, he cannot help but become angry with his own feeling of inferiority. His impulse echoes the sense that he is threatened by these men but helpless to act on these feelings. Like his condescending attitude towards Cohn, Jake's behavior here shows his strong emotional reaction towards seeing Brett with other men, but his use of passivity to cope with these emotions. Jake's actions do not reflect his feelings, in fact, his behavior is a distinctly unreliable indication of what he is thinking. Through this, Hemingway suggests that crises of masculinity are limited to the consciousness which, for Jake, furthers the sense of inferiority and helplessness.

Like the language he uses to insult Cohn and these men, Jake's method of coping is reflective of the internalized nature of his insecurity. Jake considers punching these men which would certainly be an exaggerated show of masculinity. This fantasy of fighting harkens back to Jake's opening description of Cohn's days as a boxer, giving the sense that Jake has a preoccupation with fighting. His control of his impulse to fight however, draws an association between this act and his insecurity in his masculinity. Jake's reasons that "you should be tolerant," but this statement is vague and general. It doesn't fully satisfy the strong impulse he had to punch "any one" of the men; rather, his vagueness reflects the pressure he feels to internalize his feelings to avoid betraying his insecurity.

This conflict with confrontation is not only an essential element of Jake's character, but essential to his relationship with Brett. Jake feels particularly threatened by Cohn and these men at the bar because of their relationship with Brett. And his reluctance to act on these feelings show that his insecurity in his masculinity goes hand-in-hand with seeing other men with her. Jake's conversation with a man who has no relationship with Brett reinforces this idea. Robert Prentiss, a writer visiting from New York, is introduced to Jake only shortly after he has watched the "superior" men walk in with Brett. In a conversation unrelated to her, Jake very easily displays his anger. In response to Robert's disagreement with Jake that Paris is an "amusing city," Jake snaps, "For God's sake... yes. Don't you?" (Hemingway 29). Jake's thought process that "you should be tolerant" is no longer relevant and he is quick to display his anger. Robert's response to this anger speaks to Jake's insecurity, saying, "Oh, how charmingly you get angry." When Jake does act on his emotion, he is seen as "charming." He is feminized by a complete

stranger. Thus, Hemingway gives a voice to Jake's fear, that acting on his emotion, fighting the men that anger him, will only emasculate him further.

II

The unspoken nature in the novel of Jake's injury is reflective of Jake's avoidance of confrontation. Though it is an essential part of himself, especially his relationship with his Brett, Jake only mentions his injury at a few points in his narration. Jake and Brett breach the subject of Jake's injury, as well as their relationship, in one of their first conversations of the novel. Brett says to Jake, "When I think of the hell I've put chaps through, I'm paying for it all now," to which Jake responds, "Don't talk like a fool... Besides, what happened to me is supposed to be funny I never think about it" (34). It is unclear here if Jake is referring to "what happened" to him in his relationship with Brett, or in the war. Brett implies the latter when she says to Jake, "A friend of my brother's came home that way from Mons"; though in Jake's following narration, it seems as if his relationship with Brett and his war injury are somehow conflated:

I was pretty well through with the subject. At one time or another I had probably considered it from most of its various angles, including the one that certain injuries or imperfections are a subject of merriment while remaining quite serious for the person possessing them. "It's funny," I said. "It's very funny. And it's lots of fun, too, to be in love." (35)

Jake's exaggerated use of the word "funny" leaves the reader feeling that he does not in fact feel this way, which then leads one to question his statement that it is also "lots of fun" to be in love. Rather, this language implies the exact opposite, that his injury is not funny nor is being in love fun when he is limited in such a way. This passage reflects the way in which Jake's emasculation from the war and his relationship with Brett are

essentially connected. Neither are funny, but Jake uses the same dismissive attitude and inverted language to cope with his feelings on the matters.

Jake employs this inverted language again in Chapter XIV to talk about Brett. He narrates: “To hell with women, anyway. To hell with you, Brett Ashley. Women made such swell friends. Awfully swell. In the first place, you had to be in love with a woman to have a basis of friendship” (Hemingway 153). Jake is at first dismissive of all women, and particularly of Brett, but quickly reverts back to his feigned contentment. This switch as well as his repetition of “swell” suggest that he does not actually feel that “women make swell friends.” This description harkens back to his statement that “it’s fun to be in love,” as in both cases, he says the opposite of what he feels.

His relationship with Brett seems more upsetting than positive, thus his continued close contact with her is difficult to make sense of. Understanding his tendencies toward passivity however, in conjunction with his insecurity in his masculinity, it seems that his relationship with Brett fulfills a sexually significant role in his life: if only as an observer. Jake makes a remark in response to Cohn describing his sleep, stating: I could picture it. I have a rotten habit of picturing the bedroom scenes of my friends (Hemingway 21). Though he is at first responding to Cohn, the generalized nature of the remark signifies that this habit holds greater significance in the story than just this instance. As Jake later goes on to repeat that women make “swell” friends and that love is the basis for his friendship with Brett, the “friends” that he is thinking of here very likely includes her. Thus, Jake reveals his role as an observer to the sexual encounters of his friends, but particularly, Brett. His passivity serves a dual function of both protecting his uncertain sense of masculinity as well as offering some sexual fulfillment. He “pictures” bedroom

scenes in particular, as he cannot participate in them. His admittance to this behavior also builds on Jake's inability to express his feelings, adding the question of his sexuality to the equation. Jake's avoidance of the subject in conversation and in his own internal dialogue reflect the degree to which he stifles his discordance with the traditionally male sexual role.

The sexual undertones of Jake's role as an observer are especially significant in understanding his relationship with Brett. In addition to showing that he often says the opposite of what he means, the "women make such swell friends" passage also gives insight into the significance of Brett's friendship in Jake's life. He reflects on their friendship in terms of an exchange of values, narrating: "I had been having Brett for a friend. I had not been thinking about her side of it. I had been getting something for nothing" (Hemingway 153). Jake's vague language here is widely up to interpretation: what is the "something" he is getting from his relationship with Brett? It's clearly not sex, though certainly it could be friendly company. But the thought that proceeds this one - "you had to be in love with a woman to have a basis of friendship" - frames the "something" in terms of this aspect of their relationship, of the romantic feelings behind his friendship with her. The time they spend in Spain together, particularly in Jake's descriptions of the bullfighting, imply that the "something" is tied to his role as an observer as well as his anxieties around male performance.

Jake's "afición" for bull-fighting reflects his fixation on fighting and masculinity. Like boxing, bull-fighting is a traditional and hyper-masculine sport to participate in. With bull-fighting, however, Jake can have an identity in being an observer. His role as an aficionado is symbolic of his passion and fulfillment through spectatorship. The

language Jake uses to describe the bull-fighting draws a parallel between his bystander relationship to the sport as well as to Brett's sexual encounters with other men.

III

Jake and Brett observe Romero's bull-fight together and their dialogue is riddled with sexually charged imagery. This scene is arguably the most sexually suggestive encounter that Jake has with Brett. Though in other scenes they kiss and Jake suggests his strong feelings for her, he does not indicate quite the same sexual desires. As they watch, Jake narrates: "I sat beside Brett and explained to Brett what it was all about. I told her about watching the bull, not the horse, when the bulls charged the picadors, and got her to watching the picador place the point of his pic so that she saw what it was all about" (Hemingway 172). Hemingway uses alteration of the "p" consonant to mirror the phallic imagery of the "pic." Together, this language suggests strong sexual undertones to Jake's description and these sexual undertones continue as he describes Romero more explicitly. He notes that in Romero's fighting, "he never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line." Jake's admiration of this quality in Romero speaks to his insecurity in his sexual identity. Romero is an image of ideal masculinity, "straight and pure and natural." Brett's presence for this event, as well as her romantic involvement with Romero, echo Jake's habit of picturing the bedroom scenes of his friends. The scene ends with Brett saying, "I'm limp as a rag," suggesting a sense of post-coital exhaustion.

The parallel between this bull-fighting scene and a sexual encounter is arguably the climax of Jake's preoccupation and insecurity. Watching this hyper-display of

masculinity, Jake reveals a preoccupation with performance of male sexuality, and well as the subverted nature of these preoccupations. It is only through his sexually charged narrative language that Jake comes close to addressing the question of sexual desire and performance within his state of disabled masculinity. He may not be able to act on his sexual impulses, but they are there. Similarly, he may not be enraged by the men who challenge his relationship with Brett, but acting on this anger would endanger the guise of indifference he has built to protect his state of insecurity and uncertainty in his masculinity.

CONCLUSION

Jake's sexual impotence is at the center of his crisis of masculinity, and his way of dealing with this crisis is reflective of this experience. He fixates on fighting in various ways throughout the novel, yet his response to this fighting is to remain a passive observer. It is no coincidence that his own loss of manhood was a result of combat. Jake cannot vocalize his anxiety around his loss of masculine sexuality, but he does not remain indifferent to it either. He is simultaneously deeply emotionally involved with Brett and excessively passive in dealing with these emotions. Thus, Jake creates a sexual identity for himself that is reflective of his experience; an amended tradition of maleness rooted in his role as an observer.

CHAPTER 2

Collisions of Progress and Tradition: Nick's Uncertainty in *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald exemplifies crises of masculinity set in a changing landscape of values in America. The narrator, Nick, tells the story of his summer among a crowd of partying elites with a tone of fascination, self-awareness, and insecurity. Traditional ideals of masculinity are still an aspiration, such as economic success and marriage, but in Nick's world even the traditional has begun to distort in light of change. The nature of business is questionable for those like Gatsby who are trying to make up for what they weren't given by birth. While the women the men seek to obtain, or hold on to, are either independent by their own success or are married but not excluded from traditionally male temptations like drinking and having affairs. Thus, among a landscape that is modernizing but rooted in the values of the past, Nick struggles to place his faith in what's behind or what's ahead; his insecurity in both himself and the world around him prevents him from finding stability in any place or person. Through Nick's often incongruent, and defensive, narrative voice, Fitzgerald characterizes male anxiety in the modernist narrator: uncertain and self-conscious, detached but with a stake in remaining relevant. This is evident in Nick's discussion of his move from the Midwest to New York, his characterization of Jordan and Daisy, and his preoccupation with the past versus the future.

I

Nick introduces himself to the reader as an observer, confidant even, of men. He opens the novel by characterizing himself - a telling action in itself - as someone who is

“inclined to reserve all judgement.” He explains that this quality is a result of advice from his father: “all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had” (1). In this self-definition, Nick reveals a desire to remain separate, even above, those he observes, but with a veil of acceptance. Interestingly, he describes his “advantage” in terms of normality; he states that “the abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself” to this quality of reserving judgement “when it appears in a normal person.” Nick prefaces the events that have occurred with an assertion of a superior separation in his normalcy. He is normal, they are not. At the same time, Nick is asserting his role among these abnormal people that they often confide in him. Through this introduction to Nick, Fitzgerald immediately poses the question of identity in Nick’s character. His desire to define himself as one thing, but still associate with the other, speaks to Nick’s struggle to find security throughout the novel.

In introducing himself, Nick also reveals his fixation on both the past as well as status. Nick very grandly describes his lineage in Chapter 1, stating that his family have been “prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations” and that their “tradition” is that they “descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch” (3). Nick is eager to brag about his connection to royalty and the longevity of his family’s success. In romanticizing his ancestry, Nick reveals an attachment to the ideals of masculinity in the past, particularly in terms of status and success. He points out their prominence, but this prominence is based in “tradition,” in their ancestry — ideas in conflict with modern success. Thus, his readiness to exalt his family background demonstrates his insecurity in his status, as well as the conflict between the status he holds in the Midwest and the status he seeks in New York.

Despite Nick's attachment to his family's lineage and ancestral status, he leaves "this Middle Western city" for New York. His motivation to move reflects his insecurity in his social and economic status, he states: "the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe - so I decided to go East and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I supposed it could support one more single man" (3). After reveling in describing his family's great Midwestern heritage, Nick makes a striking switch to describing the region as the "ragged edge of the universe." He is ultimately motivated by remaining relevant and involved with "everybody he know." Additionally, his desire to remain relevant requires finding a place in the bond business. His family's ancestry is no longer sufficient in terms of securing his status among his own generation so he leaves the Midwest to find success in the current, urban landscape. Nick's reasoning also reveals a connection between two preoccupations of his mind: status and relationship status. He characterizes himself as a "single man" though he later reveals that he was in a serious relationship—perhaps, engagement—with a woman at home. In addition to this girlfriend, he has strong family ties to the Midwest. Thus, his statement that "everybody he knows" lives in New York reflects his interest to associate with a particular group of people. When he does finally find himself among these people, however, his loneliness persists.

Nick's life in New York is aligned with Gatsby. As evidenced by the title of the novel, Gatsby is someone who fascinates and amazes Nick, but they are not entirely dissimilar. Rather, Gatsby might be seen as an embodiment of many of the preoccupations that plague Nick's mind. Gatsby's societal relevance is exaggerated throughout the story, people know his name, go to his parties, and are fascinated by his

story. At the same time, Gatsby, like Nick is somewhat of an outcast. They are both observers, insiders while also outsiders, and their geographic location serves to physically confirm this status. The two are neighbors on West Egg, which Nick describes as “the less fashionable” of the two eggs. Nick and Gatsby are both tied to the area by the Buchanans who live on East Egg, the more fashionable of the two. This location unites the physically as well as heightens Fitzgerald’s characterization of them, joined in their desire to remain relevant among society, but nonetheless observers. Gatsby is ultimately a doomed character, however, and through his and Nick’s parallelism, Nick’s own dissatisfaction at the end of the novel is heightened. Neither can find a place in the society they wish to inhabit and, similarly, neither can find a person to be with.

Gatsby’s romantic pursuit of Daisy is marked by a hope of what’s past. He fixates on the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock, but this light stands only as a symbol of an elusive hope at recapturing his initial relationship with Daisy. Nick’s relationships with women are similarly marked by a tension between past and present, reflecting the overarching theme of his masculine crisis. Daisy and Jordan are very different in their femininity; one is more reflective of the past while the other’s persona looks toward the future. Through Nick’s reflections on each, and his ultimate status as single, Fitzgerald conveys the uncertain priorities, in terms of a significant other, of a man caught between the past and the present. He fixates on two very different women in terms of their portrayal of femininity, and through his incongruent feelings towards them, it is evident that he will never find security with a woman until he can resolve his insecurities.

II

Nick first encounters Jordan Baker at the home of Daisy and Tom Buchanan. Upon perceiving her on the couch next to Daisy, he notes that she holds her chin slightly raised, “as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall” (8). Nick fixates on this quality of Jordan’s throughout the novel. He sees Jordan as needing to balance, precariously occupying her position. This is entirely reflective of Nick’s own feelings of uncertainty, especially regarding Jordan as a New Woman.

Nick’s highlights Jordan’s androgynous qualities in his narration. He describes her body as “hard” and “jaunty,” and like Brett, she sports a short hairstyle. Unlike Jake’s relationship with Brett however, Nick does not seem particularly attracted to Jordan. Rather, he maintains a tone of indifference when discussing his feelings toward her. When describing the time he spends with Jordan, Nick attributes his initial interest in their relationship to her profession; he states, “At first I was flattered to go places with her, because she was golf champion, and everyone knew her name” (Fitzgerald 57). Jordan fulfills Nick’s desire to be among a certain circle of people, yet it is only under those terms that he admires her success as an athlete. Thus, his uncertainty is evident. Jordan’s modernity offers Nick access to the people and places he is interested in, but he does not seem particularly excited to be in a relationship with her otherwise. Nor does he appear particularly attracted to the physical qualities that reflect her modernity, like her “hard” and “jaunty” body. Nick never commits to having strong feelings for her Jordan. In fact, he always qualifies his love for her as partial in some way: he wasn’t “actually in love,” he was “half in-love with her.” Nick remains indecisive on what to make of this modern woman and, ultimately, ends up alone.

Nick's depiction of Jordan also shows his reluctance to vocalize his feelings. Like Jake, Nick struggles to assert himself; instead, he remains passive with Jordan and defensive in his retelling of the story. For instance, after discovering Jordan's "incurable dishonesty," Nick describes himself as unaffected, stating, "it made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply - I was casually sorry, and then I forgot" (Fitzgerald 58). Though Nick does not explain why he doesn't blame Jordan, and women in general, for their dishonesty, it seems from his attitude that his understanding of this flaw could be a defense mechanism. He says that he was "casually sorry, and then [he] forgot." As this story is being told retrospectively, this is clearly a lie. What Nick may intend to come off as cool indifference to Jordan's behavior instead comes off as a defensive attitude. This also could be true of his statement that women should never be blamed deeply for their dishonesty. The generalized nature of this statement suggests that dishonesty is something he has experienced with women in the past, and that maintaining indifference has become a way of coping. This attitude speaks to Nick's uncertainty in his masculinity in relationships. Fitzgerald positions Nick as a man affected by the dishonesty of women like Jordan but uncertain in vocalizing this opinion. Nick's ultimate solitude is positioned partially as an effect of his inability to communicate his true feelings.

Despite Nick's inability to communicate himself in their relationship, he ultimately finds comfort in Jordan's presence, if only for the company. In one of the few scenes of affection between the two, Nick states:

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. Her wan, scornful mouth smiled, and so I drew her up again closer, this time to my face (Fitzgerald 80).

Nick compares Daisy to Jordan in terms of one's unattainability versus the other's attainability. Daisy, like the lights and signs of the city, cannot be held or possessed by either Gatsby or Tom; she is a face in their minds. Nick describes Jordan as just the opposite; he emphasizes her physical presence, he can tighten his arms around her, draw her close, and kiss her. However, he describes her mouth as "wan" and "scornful," neither of which are particularly complimentary descriptions. Rather, it is her mere presence that he is most excited by.

In a moment when masculinity is uncertain, and behavior in romantic relationships is difficult to navigate, Nick finds women to occupy his company. But, his feelings toward that company nonetheless remain shaded by his uncertainty. With Jordan, Nick must navigate a relationship with an economically and sexually independent woman and ultimately, his insecurity is one of the most evident aspects of his narration of Jordan.

III

Daisy fascinates Nick, but like Jordan's, her characterization in the novel can be traced to Nick's insecurity. Unlike Jordan, however, Daisy is frequently described by Nick in romantic language. Before kissing Jordan, Nick thinks about Daisy, saying, "Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl [like Daisy] so I drew up the girl besides me." Though this may seem like a negative depiction of Daisy (only a floating face), Nick's lack of someone like her is the condition that leads him to taking Jordan in his arms. Although Nick may prefer the presence of Jordan vs. the illusion, or just the hope, of another woman, he nonetheless seems preoccupied with the woman in Gatsby and Tom's life. Nick prefers the presence of Jordan versus the illusion or hope of a woman like Daisy, yet it is Nick's lack of someone like Daisy leads him to taking Jordan

in his arms. Nick has the sense enough not to chase what is already gone, as Gatsby is doing, yet the reality of the present is no more enticing to him. This speaks to Nick's uncertainty in his present moment.

Nick's depictions of and feelings toward Daisy and Jordan speak to his anxieties around rejection, loneliness, and status; but they also imply a fixation on time. Both women come with stories of their "white girlhood" together in the Midwest, an area Nick aligns with his own roots, with the past. However, both women have moved into the present in varying ways. Daisy has taken the traditional route, while Jordan embodies the figure of the New Woman. His varying relationships with both women reveal his uncertainty around the changing role of women.

Daisy's role in the novel is clearly more of a traditional woman than Jordan's. She is married, with a daughter, and has no formal occupation. She doesn't drink alcohol. Daisy doesn't perfectly fulfill this role however, a complication that Nick is aware of. After Tom and Daisy have questioned him about his engagement, Nick leaves their house disgruntled. He narrates this scene saying, "I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away. It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to rush out of the house, child in arms—but apparently there were no such intentions in her head" (Fitzgerald 20). Nick's judgement is surprising, and evokes a sense of defensiveness on the subject of marriage. Though Nick is not very transparent on the subject of his engagement, he earlier defended the invalidity of his rumored engagement saying, "It's a libel. I'm too poor." So, perhaps his engagement did not proceed because he is not in the position to start a family, as Daisy and Tom have. Considering this, his criticism of Daisy reflects his own insecurity on the subject of establishing a traditional family.

On the other hand, Nick becomes involved with a woman of progressive values. Jordan has a career, as an athlete nonetheless, and this modernity applies to her sexuality. Nick implies this through his descriptions of her, alluding to “the demands” of her “hard jaunty body.” Later in the novel, he makes a direct association between Jordan and the future:

But there was Jordan besides me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age. As we passed over the dark bridge her wan face fell lazily against my coat’s shoulder and the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand. So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight (Fitzgerald 136).

It nearly eludes Nick that it is his 30th birthday. He realizes it suddenly while out with Jordan, Tom, and Daisy, which suggests some avoidance of the future — it is not something he necessarily wants to think about but it does, inevitably, occur to him. Following Daisy’s confrontation with Gatsby and Tom, Nick is critical of her holding on to “well-forgotten dreams.” Jordan’s forward thinking attitude and her physical presence, comforts Nick in this moment. Complicating this reassurance, however, is the alignment of the future, the movement of time, with disaster — as they “drove on toward death.” Furthering the associating between Jordan, the future, and disaster, is the parallelism between this moment and the moment Nick’s describes of them kissing in a taxi. Both scenes take place in a car, which has an inherent association with modernity, and after the accident with Myrtle it takes on an association with death. Thus, although Jordan does not fixate on the past, as Daisy does, her modernity also carries negative implications for Nick’s uncertainty of the future.

IV

Nick's physical descriptions of the two women also reflect his uncertainty in his masculinity. In his narration, Nick fixates on both women's mouths. During his visit to the Buchanan's for dinner, Nick says that Daisy has "bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth." While "bright eyes" seems like a typical observation, one doesn't typically think of a mouth as being bright. His infatuation with this quality in Daisy contrast the dull, "wan" imagery he associates with Jordan. He adds in his description of Daisy that her voice has an "excitement... that men who cared about her found difficult to forget." This statement implies that he may be speaking from personal experience that he has been among these men. He goes on to say of Daisy's voice that it had a "singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen," a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour" (Fitzgerald 9). Like her "bright passionate mouth," Daisy's voice is thrilling to Nick. His interest in her voice also serves to explain why Daisy is so fascinating to men, especially at this moment in time. Daisy offers certainty; her voice is a reassurance that there have been exciting things in the past and there are exciting things to come. She embodies the remedy that men like Nick desperately seek: a sense of security in their present moment.

CONCLUSION

Nick's narration is complex and riddled with incongruent feelings toward the women of the novel. Daisy and Jordan Baker act as interesting foils to one another and through Nick's descriptions of each, he reveals his preoccupations on subjects like status,

wealth, loneliness, and time. These preoccupations are not resolved. In the end he returns home to the Midwest, alone, and on the melancholy note of contemplating his stalled position in time: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (Fitzgerald 180). This final line suggests the tension of uncertainty in Nick’s present moment. There is an image of moving forward, beating on, and yet a prevention from moving forward completely. Nick perspective on the women of the novel are very much analogous to this. He moves forward into modernity in his relationship with Jordan. She represents the future that Nick finds himself speeding to: the cars, the job in the city, and the partying, it is all a forward motion that, as evidenced by the novel, holds the potential for disastrous consequences. On the other hand, there are the glimmers of certainty, of nostalgia, in women like Daisy. She enchants men by her girlish, feminine persona, as well as in her reassuring air, but ultimately, this is an unattainable hope. Through Nick, Fitzgerald shows that life as a single man trying to find a place in a modernizing world is ultimately a story of insecurity.

CHAPTER 3

Comparing Men in Crisis: An Exploration of Difference within a Family in *As I Lay Dying*

Faulkner's narrative structure in *As I Lay Dying* provides a voice for each member of the Bundren family as they deal with the death of the family matriarch, Addie Bundren. Through each of these voices, Faulkner challenges the reader to make sense of both the action of the story as well as the subtleties of the family dynamics. The voice of Darl, perhaps the strongest narrative of the novel, is also the most strange. A cerebral character, Darl struggles to vocalize his opinions in this time of grief: grappling with existential questions and finding no solace in a family of men who fail to understand his pensive nature. On the other hand, Faulkner depicts Darl as having a particular connection to the women of the novel. He shares a telepathic connection with Dewey Dell and, according to Cora, has a similar relationship with Addie before her death. Anse, however, does not find sympathy for his break from meeting traditional expectations. He does not work, and instead relies on his sons to provide for the family. His inability, or reluctance, to work is particularly significant considering the rural setting. He is a man of working, farming class, and he refuses to sweat. Considering this extreme break from societal norms, Anse's relationship with Darl is particularly interesting. Rather than be sympathetic to his fellow outcast, Anse is highly critical of Darl. Though both united in their break from masculine tradition, Anse and Darl's perspectives are foils to one another. Darl grapples with his questions internally but explicitly, pondering the meaning of his identity, and using silence to communicate with the women in his family. He finds refuge in his mind. Anse, on the other hand, has no space to express his insecurity and anxiety. Instead, he criticizes the family member who most reminds him of his own

failure: Darl. Through Darl and Anse's respective breaks from traditional masculinity, and Anse's particularly extreme insecurity, Faulkner presents two images of changing masculinity and the varying degrees of acceptance with which a community, and the men themselves, respond. They live in the same house, in the same moment in time, but bring represent varying voices of modernist narrators. Through these characters, Faulkner argues for the power of voice, and nuance, in understanding the complexities of male identity.

I

Darl might be considered the protagonist or central narrator of the novel. A number of the narrations are his, and he drives what is arguably the climax of the novel: burning down the Gillespie's barn in attempt to stop his family from burying Addie in Jefferson. Darl is not a character of many words. Rather, his narrations reflect his cerebral and internally preoccupied nature. He is preoccupied with questions of self, existence, and expression. This quiet and thoughtful nature garners varying reactions from those around him. He is met with acceptance from major female characters, and criticism from male.

While Addie is on her deathbed, Pa, Darl, and Jewel leave on an errand — to get “one last load in” — to make three dollars. Darl comes to Addie's bedside to say goodbye, and Cora's observation of his silence provides a contrast, as do his silent relationships with all the female characters, for how the men in the novel perceive his silence. Cora narrates:

It was Darl, the one folks say is queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse...It was Darl. He come to the door and stood there, looking at his dying mother. He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again and His mercy. I saw that with Jewel she had just been pretending, but that it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the true love was.... He just stood and looked at his

dying mother, his heart too full for words” (Faulkner 25).

Cora’s perception of Darl’s silence starkly contrasts the way that other characters, Anse, for instance, react to it. With the varying narrations, Cora’s perception can only be taken for what it is: her take. However, her perspective is one of the few that doesn’t criticize Darl for his silence. Rather, Cora perceived that it was between Addie and Darl that the “understanding and the true love was.” Cora notes that all Darl did was, “look at Addie,” which certainly has an element of unreliability to it. This is her subjective opinion on the significance of a silent encounter, suggesting there could be any number of other meanings behind the silence, however Darl’s other silent encounters with women in the novel suggests Cora may be accurate.

Darl and Dewey Dell are linked beyond the phonic similarity of their names. Though there is little spoken dialogue between the two, they share a mental connection that enables them to silently exchange dialogue. In Dewey Dell’s explanation of this relationship— which is in the context of Darl knowing about her sexual relationship with Lefe — she focuses on the lack of “words” in their communication, narrating: “It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us” (Faulkner 27). Dewey Dell’s description of this instance shows a level of complexity and understanding that occurs within their silence, much like the silent moment Cora describes between Darl and Addie. Dewey Dell’s emphasis on the “without the words” aspect of the conversation also parallels her mother’s narration on the subject of words, that “words are no good; that words dont ever fit ever what they are trying to say at” (Faulkner 171). There is a connection between Addie, Dewey Dell, and Darl in their

approach to “words”: an understanding that words do not properly reflect the experience they’re intended to represent. Though Darl deviates from male norms, he is not met with total rejection. Rather, Darl’s deviance positions him a place of communicative power with the women in his family.

II

Unlike his wife, Tull sees Darl’s silence as problematic by nature: reinforcing the gendered acceptance of a thoughtful disposition in the novel. In regards to Darl he narrates, “I have said and I say again, that’s ever the living thing the matter with Darl: he just thinks by himself too much.” Tull sees Darl’s thinking “by himself” as a destructive behavior. This remark is prefaced by a more generalized statement by Tull that contextualizes behavioral expectations in terms of gender: “Now and then a fellow gets to thinking about it. Not often, though. Which is a good thing. For the Lord aimed for him to do and not to spend too much time thinking, because his brain it’s like a piece of machinery: it wont stand a whole lot of racking. It’s best when it all runs along the same, doing the day’s work” (Faulkner 71). Darl acts as an antithesis of this mentality, his narrative voice is rooted in the act of thinking. Because Tull understands masculinity in terms of “machinery”— practical and without reflection— Darl’s behavior is troubling.

Darl narrative voice reinforces what Tull observes. Darl’s tone is thoughtful, to the point of poetic, and he is deeply troubled by existential questions. For instance, in the narration following Tull’s, Darl describes the scene in which Cash is working: “The lantern sits on a stump. Rusted, grease-fouled, its cracked chimney smeared on one side with a soaring smudge of soot, it sheds a feeble and sultry glare upon the trestles and the boards and the adjacent earth” (75). Cash is working away on the coffin, very much in

line with Tull's description of man's mind as a "machine." The narration of Darl describing this scene however offers a striking juxtaposition. A man who did little thinking would not describe a lantern in such terms. He moves from observing, "the lantern sits on a stump," a statement that highlights the scene as typical, quotidian, to giving this lantern anthropomorphic power: "it sheds a feeble and sultry glare." Following Tull's assertion that men are not meant to think, Darl's poetic narrative voice challenges the way in which "man" can be defined. Men are, according to Tull, meant to run like a machine, and yet Darl's mind shows a poetic voice incapable of being produced by a machine. Through this contrast, Faulkner presents the question of existence within a structure of ideologies. Darl challenges the ideologies that men like Tull hold on to, but he exists as a man nonetheless.

Faulkner highlights this existential question in Darl's voice. Darl's awareness of what makes him different comes through, appropriately, in his questions regarding the self. He narrates, "I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not" (Faulkner 80). Darl is aware that men like Jewel know who they are because they don't ask questions; while he is in a position of uncertainty because of his heightened awareness to questions of existence. Darl's existential questions also speak to the tension within Tull's statement regarding men and thinking. That is, if men aren't supposed to think too much, what does that mean for a man who does? For Darl, this leads to deeply questioning the self. However, it also leads to a deeper connection to the women in his family.

III

The dissonance between male and female reactions to Darl's qualities raises a question regarding traditions of masculinity. Tull's argument for the male mind running

like a machine suggests that this expectation of men is deeply rooted in the very existence of men (the Lord created them this way). Yet, Dewey Dell, Cora, and Addie do not chastise Darl for breaking from this tradition. Faulkner's use of multiple narrations is at the crux of understanding this tension. From the female perspectives on Darl, it is clear that Darl's deviance is something that they can relate to, thus be empathetic to. From the male perspectives on Darl, however, it is evident that Darl's presence has a more threatening effect. Particularly, in the way he incites insecurity.

Tull articulates this effect Darl has; he asserts that in Darl's stare, there is a quality that makes the other person feel exposed:

He is looking at me. He dont say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes (Faulkner 125).

Darl's strangeness is considered unorthodox for a male character; but further threatening normalcy, it also forces the people around him to confront their own insecurities and anxieties. The effect of Darl looking at Tull is that, "somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings," and though not explicitly stated, this effect can be seen in Anse's relationship with Darl.

Anse is concerned about Darl for the sake of appearances, for what his behavior leads to in terms of judgement from other people. Anse repeats that qualities in Darl "make people talk," though he himself is also subject of talk. Anse, like Darl, does not fulfill a typical male or, in Anse's case patriarchal, role in the family. Though his family is of working class, living off their farm and the extra work their children take on, Anse himself does not do any physical labor. He does not pull his weight in a family that relies heavily on each member to do so. Darl, appropriately, explains Anse's aversion to labor

(something others only allude to): “I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it” (Faulkner 17). Darl is perceptive in judging Anse’s “inability” to work. This is something Anse “tells people,” and Darl seems skeptical but unbothered, pitying even. He acknowledges that this is something Anse “believes” to be true, though in saying this Darl asserts his own disbelief in the claim. Nonetheless, Darl reveals to the reader why it is Anse does not work, making a connection between Darl’s observant personality and this aspect of Anse’s character. This instance also fuels the argument that Darl has a threatening effect on the men, and further explains the disconnect between the male and female reactions to Darl. It is Tull and Anse who feel uneasy confronting their own selves, thus they are the most critical of Darl.

Anse, unintentionally, reveals the power Darl has over him in terms of forced self-confrontation. In a hilariously ironic explanation of his aversion to the newly built road outside the Bundren home, Anse explains that, although he is not a religious man, the Lord makes something “up-and-down ways” if he wants it to stay put (like “a tree or a man”). Things intended to “be always a-moving,” however, the Lord made long ways. Anse then proceeds to give two man-made examples to prove this point: roads and wagons (Faulkner 36). Through this explanation, though applied to the bad-luck of living next to a road, Anse attempts to justify his aversion to work. Though he makes this argument in terms of what the Lord intended, the reality is that the arrival of the road in front of their home meant that Anse would have to pay taxes. Further challenging his laziness by increasing the family living costs. Speaking on the road, Anse evokes Tull’s sentiments regarding Darl: “[Darl] was alright at first, with his eyes full of the land... it

wasn't till that ere road come and switched the land around longways and his eyes still full of the land, that they begun to threaten me out of him, trying to short-hand me with the law" (Faulkner 37). With the addition of the road, Darl's eyes become reflective of Anse's anxieties around supporting his family. Anse sees the encroaching "longways" around him, and the "law" that comes with it, thus Darl acts a threat — in only in self-reflection — to Anse's ability to avoid these truths.

Anse also reveals his insecurity around how people view him through his complaints about Darl. Though Anse distances himself from Darl, Cora highlights what Anse does not say: that Darl isn't the only Bundren who is talked about. She narrates:

It was Darl, the one that folks say is queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse, with Cash a good carpenter and always building more than he can get around to, and Jewel always doing something that made him some money or got him talked about... (Faulkner 24).

Cora frames both Darl and Anse as the outcast male figures of the family in terms of people noting the strangeness of their behavior, revealing that people talk about Darl "pottering about the place no better than Anse." Additionally, like Tull, she identifies the qualities that are valued in men (that Anse and Darl don't have): building, doing, making money. And, while Cora sees beyond the abnormality of Darl's behavior (his love for his mother that cannot be expressed in words), she does not show Anse the same sympathy. In fact, few characters show Anse any sympathy, and though he does not explicitly reveal a vulnerability in being disliked, his concern for people judging him is evident in the way he talks about Darl.

Anse frequently criticizes Darl's behavior in terms of how other people react to it. Aboard the wagon with Addie's coffin in tow, the family is exposed to the ridicule and judgment of onlookers. Anse, however, cites Darl's behavior as embarrassing, though he is reluctant to admit that it is he who feels embarrassed by it; Anse narrates:

...we hadn't no more than passed Tull's lane when Darl begun to laugh. Setting back there on the plank seat with Cash, with his dead ma laying in her coffin at his feet, laughing. How many times I told him it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him, I don't know (Faulkner 105).

Darl's sudden laughter is certainly odd, especially considering the setting: "his dead ma laying in her coffin at his feet." Yet Anse seems more fixated on other people taking note of it, than the cause for Darl's behavior. In fact, despite Addie's death, Anse speaks about this scenario as one of many, saying, "How many times I told him it's doing such things as that make folks talk about him." This scenario is highly irregular, the Bundren's carting Addie's body around, and yet Anse is more concerned about how often Darl's behavior draws negative attention. This concern, in light of his wife's death, speaks to the powerful role that Anse's insecurity plays in his relationship with Darl.

Despite Anse's iteration of Darl's behavior making "folks talk," he tries to deflect the implication that it is his own reputation he is concerned for. Following his comments on Darl's laughter, Anse defends his own sensitivity, saying:

... it's a reflection on your ma, I says, not me: I am a man and I can stand it; it's on your womenfolks, your ma and sister that you should care for, and I turned and looked back at him and him setting there, laughing. "I don't expect you to have no respect for me," I says. "But with your own ma not cold I her coffin yet (Faulkner 106).

Anse readiness to defend the fact that as a man, he can "stand" the judgements of others, betrays his concern on the matter. Neither Addie nor Dewey Dell express concern for how other people perceive Darl's behavior. Thus, Anse shows an unwillingness to admit that, as a man, he would be sensitive to such things by specifying that it is a reflection "on your womanfolks." Anse's defensiveness reveals his insecurity in how Darl's behavior is both a reflection on him as a parent, as well as on his own insecurity in his unorthodox patriarchal role.

CONCLUSION

The Bundren family is undoubtedly a bizarre group. Faulkner's use of multiple narrations forces the reader to confront the many voices that can come out of one family, one story. This form alone acts as an argument for the importance of subjectivity when considering the question of expectations of gender. Anse and Darl have vastly different voices. Darl is thoughtful and sensitive, interested in questions of self and existence, and this nature aligns him more with the women of the novel. Anse, however, is reluctant to question himself. Rather, his deviance from traditional masculinity results in an insecurity that he is unwilling to confront. Instead, this insecurity puts him at odds with Darl and promotes a sensitivity to the talk of other people. Despite existing in the same family, Anse and Darl are two different characterizations of crises of masculinity. One is met with insecurity while the other is met with uncertainty of existence. Through these varying experiences, Faulkner shows the complexity and importance of individual perspective around questions of masculine identity.

CONCLUSION

Sensitivity to Voice: A Case for Approaching Crises in Masculinity

The Sun Also Rises, *The Great Gatsby*, and *As I Lay Dying* each provide a different voice(s) to the figure of the modernist male narrator. These voices reveal the anxiety, the uncertainty, and the silence that characterize the male experience at this moment in history. The values of traditional masculinity are not lost, but they do not appropriately reflect the current male state. Between the trauma of the War and evolving roles of women, there was nothing certain about what masculinity could, or should, look like.

This uncertainty, however, is not a conversation to be taken up in the public sphere. Instead, the narrators must approach this conversation internally or, for some, subconsciously. Anse, for instance, does not reach the point of explicitly addressing the

insecurity that comes with his failure to perform his masculine role. Instead, the insecurity is wrapped up in his judgement of Darl and in the subtext of his language. Similarly, Jake does not consciously address the relationship between his war injury and his current state of mind regarding sex. He avoids addressing the subject of his sexuality, but his language reveals that it is an essential aspect of understanding his passive behavior. Nick, on the other hand, reveals his uncertainty in his masculinity in his characterization of Daisy and Jordan. The manner in which he describes them ultimately reflects on his insecurity in his identity at a moment in time when tradition is not irrelevant but progress is becoming an increasingly threatening reality. Finally, there is the voice most reflective of just how destabilizing expectations of masculinity can be to those who fail to meet them. Darl's questions of existence encompass the paralyzing uncertainty that all of these narrators suffer.

Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway provide the narrative form through which crises of masculinity are best explored. The nature of traditional expectations of masculinity promotes an internalized struggle with this crisis; thus, it is in the internal space that these narrators provide the most telling insight into their experience. And, it is from this internal space that the reader must work to understand the unspoken struggle of self that plagues the modernist male narrator.

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