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Race, Gender, and Exile in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

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RACE, GENDER, AND EXILE IN HEMINGWAY'S *THE SUN ALSO RISES* AND BALDWIN'S
GIOVANNI'S ROOM

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
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**RACE, GENDER, AND EXILE IN HEMINGWAY'S *THE SUN ALSO RISES* AND BALDWIN'S
*GIOVANNI'S ROOM***

ABBY E. GOULD

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THESIS SUMMARY

This senior thesis for the South Carolina Honors College conducts a literary analysis of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. Across these two texts, I focus on expatriates, examining the psychological trauma that ensues when they are forced to define their "self" not in terms of *where* they are, but in terms of *who* they really are. These challenges to one's self, I argue, illuminate the complexity of gender and sexual identity as well as the social structures that assign values to certain forms or expressions of masculinity.

I begin by establishing unsatisfiable desire as the central problem of each of these novels. Both Hemingway and Baldwin assert the futility of chasing desire in the modern world, despite expatriates' attempts to seek it outside their home country. Each author approaches this problematic of lack through the lens of a man in crisis. Hemingway's Jake Barnes and Baldwin's David are each "othered" in some way – Jake by his emasculating war wound and David by his homosexuality. Each man seeks in Paris some desire which he cannot achieve in the United States, not recognizing the debilitating nature of searching for a desire which is inherently unattainable.

In approaching *The Sun Also Rises*, I trace the psychological dilemma that arises from shifting cultural views of masculinity after World War I. Although Jake expresses disdain for those men who apparently degrade their masculinity by indulging in romantic fantasies, I argue that he himself cannot escape the pull toward unsatisfiable desire. Jake lives with a physical reminder of the destruction of war – he has lost his penis – and thus he acts as an emblem of the shifting notions of "authentic" masculinity in the postwar era as well as the anxiety that arises when a man must refigure his own internalized gender identity. I identify the three challenges to Jake's masculinity that appear throughout the novel: Robert Cohn, who succumbs to "unmanly"

romantic notions of escape but nevertheless can satisfy desire in a way that Jake cannot; Pedro Romero, the matador who represents the ultimate macho expression of masculinity that combines power and control; and Lady Brett Ashley, whose New Woman status complicates the social structures of masculinity and femininity within a single person. As a response to these threats, the novel establishes a code of “authentic” masculinity that requires a pained resignation to the fact of unsatisfiable desire in the modern condition. I argue, however, that ultimately Jake cannot consistently live up to his own code of authentic masculinity, and the novel thus illustrates the challenge of modern desire, rather than offers a solution to its unattainability.

In turning to *Giovanni's Room*, I focus on masculinity and desire from the margins of society: David is a gay man after World War II, written by a gay black author who was essentially exiled to Europe for his scandalous writing of homosexuality and blackness. I begin by establishing the threat to masculinity in this novel not as a physical wound, but as gay desire that threatens to upset the entire social and cultural order of gender. Because this social order is so heavily internalized, Baldwin is able to present the dilemma of unsatisfiable desire as both a personal psychological struggle and a key flaw in the social construct of gender identity. I also examine the ties in the novel between homosexuality and darkness, through which Baldwin subtly but powerfully invokes the black experience – despite the fact that none of the characters in the novel are African American. In doing this, I argue that *Giovanni's Room* critiques the cultural linking of blackness and homosexuality as equally “dirty” identities. Because David has internalized this social construct in his upbringing as a white man in America, his own internal battle with his sexuality can be extended to a broader commentary on the societal prohibition of satisfiable desire for both homosexual *and* nonwhite Americans. Thus, the proper response to unsatisfiable desire is not Hemingway's pained resignation, but rather an acceptance of the

fractures and inconsistencies within one's self – an acceptance of the discord between genuine identity and the performance of a socially acceptable gender identity.

In considering these two novels side by side, I argue not that one author's form of examination is more valid than the other; rather, my goal is to illuminate the unavoidable differences in novels written from and about different places of privilege. The modern condition is one that authors often render as chaotic, troubling, and bleak; Hemingway and Baldwin certainly contribute to and develop this tradition. However, while they each demonstrate the despair and confusion of the moment of realizing unsatisfiable desire, the sources of this dissatisfaction are somewhat different. Considering these authors together is not common, but I argue that their comparison enriches our discussion of identity – especially contested identity – within the globalized context of expatriation. Hemingway and Baldwin both link physical displacement with psychological displacement, allowing us through literary analysis to examine the processes and problems of self-identification.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) examine the consequences and meanings of expatriation. Hemingway writes after World War I, as an exemplary member of the so-called "lost generation," preoccupied and tormented by the industrialized forms of destruction that the War unleashed. Baldwin, on the other hand, writes following World War II, a time of profound social change and tension between groups, even in an environment still reveling in an American victory. Although the two books' protagonists—Jake Barnes and David—share experiences of expatriation and a similar set of psychological conflicts, ultimately the two novels differ in their treatment of exile and despair. For Hemingway, as a straight white man, it is possible to fetishize the desperation and hopelessness of psychological exile and isolation as simply a condition of the modern moment – it presents as an unavoidable crisis of attempted reinvention after the chaos of a global war. Baldwin, as a gay black man, does not have the same privilege as Hemingway; he is not writing from the culturally superior – or at least secure – position. Thus, Baldwin's examination of exile is more multiple and critical. Baldwin cannot ignore the social forces that make exile attractive to Americans, nor does he shy away from the self-imposed shame and fear that amplifies the internalization of these structures. This is not to say that Hemingway is only ignorant, whereas Baldwin is completely enlightened; however, it is crucial that we consider Hemingway's straight white privilege in an analysis of his commentary on race and gender that comes from the social center rather than the margins.

Both Hemingway and Baldwin connect the issue of modern exile to gender. The stress of maintaining a conventionally masculine identity lies at the center of Jake and David's internal conflicts, although the sources and manifestations of these tensions are radically different. Each

man seeks in exile to consolidate his beleaguered masculinity: Jake in response to a phallic war wound, and David in response to what we shall see is a kind of homosexual panic. Yet each also discovers in Paris repeated “reminders” or challenges to the effort at consolidated, inviolable manhood. For Jake, this challenge comes primarily from Robert Cohn, a figure paradoxically coded as “unmanly” despite retaining the penis that Jake lacks. His gender identity is also threatened by Brett, who makes Jake’s impotence all-too-tangible a barrier to their relationship, bringing his wound uncomfortably close to full consciousness and direct acknowledgment. In addition to exacerbating his wound, Brett threatens Jake by subverting traditional ideals of femininity— she has short hair, she is promiscuous and independent, and she even has a man’s name. In other words, she undermines the stable gender binary that Jake is in part committed to retaining.

For David, the challenge arises from his relationship with Giovanni – a relationship that acts upon and exposes the part of his identity that brings him the most shame. Pursuing a relationship with Giovanni is contingent upon David relinquishing his grip on the norms of socially acceptable manhood, and recognizing those parts of his identity that do not align with his self-perception. He refuses to accept a “housewife” role in his and Giovanni’s gender dynamic, and overcompensates for his feeling of masculine inferiority by continuing to pursue a doomed heterosexual relationship with Hella. Unable to reconcile his queer desire with his performed self-image of conventional manliness, David suffers from a psychological chaos that leads him to self-destruction in an attempt at self-reinvention.

At the core of each novel is the problem of unsatisfiable desire. In Paris, Americans are always fleeing to the next locale, drowning themselves in alcohol, and hoping that in this place

they might finally achieve some level of satisfaction.¹ Jake's desire is for Brett, who would presumably, if he had a penis, enable him to have a fulfilling relationship and resolve his inner tension. However, the novel insists that desire inherently cannot be satisfied. Jake sees dissatisfaction and failure all around him: in Cohn, in Brett, and even in Romero. He renders this dissatisfaction as simply an unavoidable result of modern life after the war. David's desire is also unsatisfiable, but in this case the reasons are social (not naturalizing). His desire for Giovanni and his desire for a socially acceptable manhood are mutually exclusive – when David decides to pursue the latter (by being with Hella), he must deny and repress the former. Unlike Hemingway's analysis of unsatisfiable desire as something inevitable, Baldwin's assessment critiques the incompatibility of homosexuality and "manliness," presenting resignation and hopelessness as results of societal pressure unfairly placed on socially exiled groups.

Underlying all of this is the tension of race. Although not explicitly stated in *Giovanni's Room*, blackness is implicitly conflated with homosexuality. Joey, David's first lover, is described as having a "brown body," which is in turn linked to images of darkness and filth. Giovanni, in his first appearance, is "insolent and dark and leonine" (28). Through this connection, Baldwin exposes the shame that black men, gay men, and especially black gay men are made to feel within society. They become exiled and psychologically destroyed. In Giovanni's case, this exile and destruction are taken to the extreme through his execution, a violent enactment of societal shaming (although he is not executed for his homosexuality).

Crucially, no character in *Giovanni's Room* is actually African or African American. The reasons behind this authorial choice are complex. I read it as partly a case of self-preservation; writing a novel about homosexuality in 1956 might be difficult, but a novel about *black*

¹ See Miller (121-124) for a thorough explanation of Hemingway and Baldwin's attempt to "demythologize the American self in the European context" through their examination of expatriates. Miller articulates why foreignness – and especially Paris as a "war zone" – is a crucial and mythical setting to narratives of lost identity and integrity.

homosexuality could well be impossible.² Indeed, as Armengol (2012) points out, Baldwin's removal of the subject of race was partially a response to "both the racist sexualization of African Americans by the white community and the homophobia of the African American community" (673). By only metaphorically linking some characters to darkness, Baldwin leaves at least one element of social norm – whiteness – superficially intact.³ Furthermore, Baldwin does not want to risk conflating black experience with homosexual experience. Blackness and homosexuality each contribute to one's identity, self-image, and social marginalization differently. If Baldwin were to make his gay characters literally black, he would invite the dangerous assumption that the dilemmas of black and gay identity could be addressed equally. Instead, by only hinting at darkness as a correlation to queerness, Baldwin illustrates our own internalized parallels between otherness, filth, and shame, rather than asserting the validity of those parallels.⁴

In *The Sun Also Rises*, racial otherness is more explicit, but also more complicated. Two men who are presumably white – Cohn and Romero – are rendered as racial others. Cohn is Jewish, and Romero is a Spaniard, and Jake perceives both as embodying a masculinity from which he feels cut off. Their racial identity heightens his anxiety about his inadequacy; if racial otherness is the condition of real manliness, he has less hope of achieving a viable masculine identity. Thus, race compounds Jake's resignation to the inevitability of dissatisfaction. It is important to note, however, that this racial otherness is a fiction, articulated from the perspective

² Armengol (671) and Stephanie Li (131) each point out that Baldwin was famously told to burn the manuscript of *Giovanni's Room*, and Knopf, the publisher of Baldwin's first novel *Go Tell in on the Mountain*, refused publication.

³ Additionally, Armengol identifies the historic racialization of Italians as literally nonwhite; it was only upon their immigration to the United States that they became coded as white, and even this process did not fully appear until World War II. In this context, Giovanni "as an Italian in Europe may be considered nonwhite or black" (678).

⁴ My analysis recalls Mae Henderson's understanding of the "construction of whiteness" as a freeing tool for Baldwin to "interrogate the complexities of his own identity as writer, as American, and as homosexual, outside the sexually and politically repressive climate of postwar America" (313).

of a white man. Hemingway, and by extension Jake, has the luxury of assigning otherness to antagonists, because he writes from a place of privilege. As someone whose exile is essentially voluntary, he can create reasons (such as race) to contribute to his theory that all of humanity is doomed to be dissatisfied, and possibly even that white men recognize this most of all.

This pattern takes on an added dimension from a second geographical displacement. Jake, despite his criticism of Cohn's "unmanly" romantic notions of travel, also succumbs to the illusion of escape through migrancy. When he goes to Spain, he hopes for a return to some older, more traditional time – a temporal as well as a spatial exile. Spain is a place of order and contained violence; it is a place where the bullfight still dominates the culture and reflects an ideal of gender normativity. However, the idea of Spain turns out to fail disastrously. Spain, in maintaining its old sense of order and masculinity, is placed somewhat outside the space of the modern condition; thus, it devalues Jake's Parisian methods of hiding from himself. Here, with the constant threat of *afición* and the bullfighters, Jake's illusion of satisfaction and security (that seems dimly possible in Paris) cannot be upheld. He will always be an outsider in this place, and thus cannot redefine his identity based on its culture or its environment. In France, by contrast, the constant flow of taxis and alcohol allows Jake to avoid dwelling on his inadequacy for too long; he can always go to the next bar, get a drink, and get away from Cohn.

In *Giovanni's Room*, Paris is important because it is the only setting in which David can act out those aspects of his identity which shame him. He wants to exile himself from the shame of his homosexuality and his perceived unmanliness, and only in a space of constant mobility and promiscuity can he do so. Or, so he thinks: hiding from his father and from Hella in Paris creates the illusion that he can reconcile his queer desire with his desire for normative manhood. However, this reconciliation fails, as Baldwin insists that David "see" how flight merely issues in

a confrontation with that from which he sought to flee; we know from the very first pages that going to Paris to escape his desire will merely mean rediscovering it in a new location. Ultimately, Baldwin insists that the self *is* exile, and thus David's inability to accept the complexity and strangeness of his own identity compounds his psychological tension. It is impossible for him to return to some Eden-like "home," because home is an illusion just like the idea of desire disappearing across the ocean. David's "home" would be a perfect reconciliation between desire and normative manhood – indeed much like Jake Barnes's home would seem. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the impossibility of this reconciliation, embodied in Jake's desire for Brett, ends in despair and pained resignation. However, in *Giovanni's Room* truth could arise with the acceptance of this impossibility – authentic connection is possible when one accepts the fissures between one's identity and his self-image.

The expatriate is unable to articulate his identity honestly and fully, leading to hopelessness and resignation. As D. Quentin Miller (2012) points out,

The importance of Paris for both Hemingway and Baldwin is as a place where both could remove themselves from American history, custom, and people in order to avoid a prefabricated identity. In doing so, they engage in psychological warfare, but they gradually realize that this war is between various dimensions of the individual as he struggles to form an identity rather than between that individual and his countrymen. (131)

In the case of Jake and David, however, this psychological warfare and exile is purposeful. The "joyless seas of alcohol" (21) allow them to feign satisfied desire and to feign acceptance of their identities; however, the failure at the core of each novel demonstrates that this type of acceptance of an "other" identity is ultimately impossible.

CHAPTER ONE: *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

“You are all a lost generation.”

– Gertrude Stein in conversation

So reads the fitting first epigraph of *The Sun Also Rises*. In the wake of World War I, an entire generation struggled to understand life in the new modern moment. Men coming home felt lost, stunned, and disillusioned by the global scale of mechanized horror. Expatriation was common, especially among American writers who attempted to articulate on paper those identities and relationships that no longer made sense in their minds. Modernity disrupted their previously stable understandings of the world, and they were lost without a clear-cut place in it. The modern condition portended a crisis of gender in which men felt disempowered, cut off from the previous definitions of manliness, and thus in need of inventing newly viable forms.

The Sun Also Rises explores shifting expressions of masculinity in response to the “cultural dislocation and psychological malaise” of modernity (Martin 65). The world these men live in is rapidly transforming technologically and socially, and it is difficult to respond to this change. Modernity threatens men with disempowerment, rupture, and displacement from previously normative meanings of identity. The novel establishes two main responses to this problematic, represented by Jake and Cohn. But these responses are not treated equally. The authentic response to modernity, the novel argues, is to embrace the suffering entailed by modern violence, disempowerment, and lack of fulfillment. In other words, authenticity is the acceptance of unsatisfiable desire as a given. In contrast, the inauthentic response is the nostalgic, Romantic notion of escaping this suffering through travel.

A crucial conversation regarding masculine expression and its authenticity occurs near the beginning of the novel, between Jake and Cohn. Cohn expresses a desire to travel to South

America, an adventure which he has read about in a book. In doing this, Cohn believes that he can stave off the feeling of living a life that is missing some sort of fulfillment.

“I can’t stand it to think my life is going so fast and I’m not really living it.”

“Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bull-fighters.”

“I’m not interested in bull-fighters. That’s an abnormal life. I want to go back in the country in South America. We could have a great trip.”

[Jake then suggests going to British East Africa instead]

“No; that doesn’t interest me.”

“That’s because you’ve never read a book about it. Go on and read a book all full of love affairs with the beautiful shiny black princesses.”

“I want to go to South America.”

He had a hard, Jewish stubborn streak.

...

“Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn’t make any difference. I’ve tried all that. You can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There’s nothing to that.”

“But you’ve never been to South America.”

“South America hell! If you went there the way you feel now it would be exactly the same. This is a good town. Why don’t you start living your life in Paris?”

(18-19).

This passage establishes the contrast between the novel’s two forms of masculinity. Cohn articulates his romantic dreams of travel and fulfillment; he idealizes South America as a place of possibility, where he can “really live” life. If he goes to South America, he thinks, he may live a life similar to the one he lives now, but he will not be stagnant or passive—will not let life “pass him by.” Cohn’s anxiety about immobility originates from a novel he reads, about a “perfect English gentleman in an intensely romantic land” full of marvelous, “amorous adventures” (17). When he reads this novel, he senses that his lack of present fulfillment is merely a function of his geographical immobility: fulfillment is to be had, but only *somewhere else*.

Directly in opposition to Cohn, Jake recognizes the idea that travel provides fulfillment as an illusion. According to Jake, one cannot escape oneself by traveling. Such avoidance is for Jake unmanly. It entails an inauthentic effort to circumscribe unsatisfiable desire geographically,

and thus to behave as if it has an “outside.” Jake insists that the novel’s plot – of a man’s escape to a land of romance and fulfillment – is not one to be taken literally, as a “guide-book to what life holds” (17). In taking *The Purple Land* as a literal guide, Cohn succumbs to romanticism instead of modern reality, thus precluding any “authentically masculine” response to that reality.

Coupled with these criticisms of Cohn’s inauthentic masculinity are references to his Jewishness. His “hard, Jewish stubborn streak” is what allows his romanticism to persist. By conflating unmanliness with Jewishness, the novel racially others Cohn at the same time as it degrades his gender identity. In doing so, it suggests (or at least attempts to suggest) that racial others cannot possibly fulfill the masculine ideal, because their “other” qualities preclude their acceptance of modern reality, namely its inevitable failure to produce or allow satisfaction. White men like Jake, on the other hand, have a more “realistic” understanding of the conditions of modernity and the unsatisfiable nature of desire, no matter where one travels. It is also interesting to note Jake’s reference to “beautiful shiny black princesses.” Including race in his derision of Cohn’s fantasy compounds the novel’s conflation of racial otherness with unmanliness and inadequacy.

Importantly, this inclusion also suggests inadequacy on a literary level. The image of “beautiful shiny black princesses” is a cliché. In this way the novel conflates inauthentic masculinity with literary cliché, suggesting a form of unmanliness that precludes not only authentic modern existence but also authentic modern creation. In fact, earlier Jake describes Cohn’s writing: “He wrote a novel, and it was not really such a bad novel as the critics later called it, although it was a very poor novel” (13). Cohn then brings his novel back to America, where it is published, but the mild success “goes to his head” (16) rather than stirring up any significant literary impact. These connections to the act of writing, especially writing as a

profession, carry great significance in the expatriate community. Cohn is unmanly as a writer because he believes in the false notion of escape through travel. As an idealized literary notion, Jake sees this attitude (and the novel that places this attitude in Cohn's head) as "sinister" (17) when applied to one's values because it is inauthentic. Inauthenticity is dangerous because to embrace this literary idealism as truth is to refuse the reality of suffering. Idealism and Romantic escapism are outdated in the modern moment; favoring them prevents one from being "manly." Authentic masculinity, then, entails an acceptance of suffering rather than an attempt to escape it.

The most significant emblem of modern suffering in this novel is Jake's war wound. We never explicitly read that Jake does not have a penis, so the most direct discussion of his wound – and thus a vital insight into his masculine psychology – comes while Jake is alone in his room, looking at himself in the mirror. It is vital that perhaps the novel's biggest revelation appears in a moment of literal self-reflection (later, we will see a similar and no less crucial moment in *Giovanni's Room*). The passage begins:

Undressing, I looked at myself in the mirror of the big armoire beside the bed. That was a typically French way to furnish a room. Practical, too, I suppose. Of all the ways to be wounded, I suppose it was funny.... My head started to work. The old grievance. Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian. In the Italian hospital we were going to form a society (38).

This intimate self-awareness is only possible when one is alone. Forced to look himself in the eye, Jake cannot succumb to the illusion that he is capable of sexual fulfillment. Yet even with no one around, Jake cannot name his wound outright. Hemingway reveals more information in what is *not* said than in what *is* said, assigning importance to the unspoken. Jake resorts to using joke language and imagery, even in his own mind; to take his wound too seriously, or to name it, would be to dance too closely along the border of illusion. In the novel's form of "good" masculinity, a man internally recognizes unfulfillment (in Jake's case, his wound), but does not

invite others to help or to solve the problem. In this way, there is a sufficient amount of risk, but one surmounts it by acknowledging its insurmountability. He must not name the wound outright, because to do so would be to invite the unbearable false hope of healing in some way.⁵ This would fundamentally conflict with Jake's philosophy – and the novel's argument – that suffering is inevitable and insurmountable. The passage continues:

Then [the liaison colonel] made that wonderful speech: 'You, a foreigner, an Englishman' (any foreigner was an Englishman) "have given more than your life.' What a speech! I would like to have it illuminated to hang in the office. He never laughed. He was putting himself in my place, I guess. "Che mala fortuna! Che mala fortuna!"

I never used to realize it, I guess. I try and play along and just not make trouble for people. Probably I never would have had any trouble if I hadn't run into Brett when they shipped me to England. I suppose she only wanted what she couldn't have. Well, people were that way. To hell with people. The Catholic Church had an awfully good way of handling all that. Good advice, anyway. Not to think about it. Oh, it was swell advice. Try and take it sometime. Try and take it. (39).

This passage renders Jake's war wound as a sacrifice that is greater than his life. Notions of masculinity – as well as the need to constantly reaffirm one's masculinity – are heightened in the post-WWI moment.⁶ The Italian colonel indicates the psychological severity of Jake's war wound: to lose his manhood, in the eyes of soldiers, is a greater loss even than losing his own life. Equating masculinity with life itself makes the degradation of Jake's masculinity even more tragic.

It is tempting to take this passage at its face value; however, here the novel actually makes fun of the Italian's view, retreating into jokes as an enactment of "grace under pressure."⁷ Phrases such as "What a speech!" and "Che mala fortuna! Che mala fortuna!" are exaggerated, relayed with a sarcastic tone, making the Italian colonel a caricature of sorts. Jake's assertion that

⁵ Both the Davidsons and Tomkins (especially 751) discuss the importance of the vague terminology that surrounds Jake's wound, especially in conversation with others (not only himself).

⁶ Tomkins discusses Jake's desire for an "inaccessible past" that is correlated with the form of his body before the war – a longing that is experienced unconsciously and generationally (757).

⁷ A phrase Hemingway used in a 1926 letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, describing courage.

he would like the speech “illuminated to hang in the office” further contributes to this comic disparagement. The passage in this way extends the novel’s use of jokes as a way of disputing the *meaning* of “castration”: to empty it of all the significance the Italian attempts to give it.

Additionally, the passage’s criticism of the Catholic practice of avoidance aligns with the novel’s continual embrace of “grace under pressure” – risking enough to not ignore one’s wounds completely, but not so much as to succumb to the false romantic ideal of healing the wound by talking (or even thinking) about it directly. The Catholic Church’s “swell advice” goes along with Cohn’s illusions of escapism and avoidance; therefore, its strategy is not compatible with authentic masculinity.

Both parts of the passage – Jake looking in the mirror and his ridicule of the Italian’s speech – create a contradictory significance for Jake’s wound. On the one hand, losing his penis devalues his masculinity. Shame prevents him from talking or even thinking about the wound directly, indicating an internalization of traditional masculine identity that is conceptualized based on sexual performance and power. On the other hand, though, Jake’s wound actually *enables* him to act out authentic masculinity in the novel’s terms. As a war wound specifically, it embodies the modern possibilities for personal and global destruction that arise in the wake of WWI. The wound and the suffering it causes are the inevitable consequences of modernity. Carrying around this psychological object of suffering allows Jake to exemplify authentic masculinity, because this authenticity is defined by a particular reaction to suffering.⁸ The war wound gives Jake something to embrace — his own corporeal lack — as the emblem of unsatisfiable desire in the modern era. Without this pressure, Jake would have nothing under which to act with grace.

⁸ David Tomkins (2008) argues that the “material absence” of Jake’s penis ironically makes him a stronger example of the masculine hero by virtue of his desirability; he is a perpetually desirable object because his own desire can never be satisfied and thus never subsides.

PREMODERN AND QUEER: THREATS TO AUTHENTICITY

The novel thus elaborates two forms or expressions of modern masculinity: Jake and Cohn, the authentic and the inauthentic. Why, though, if Jake's masculinity is coded as definitively authentic, does he feel so insecure in it? Where do the threats to his gender identity come from? The most obvious answer follows from the meaning of the wound just described: precisely by severing the organ associated with male power, the war has cut Jake off from the traditional foundation of masculine identity. But masculine insecurity in this novel is more than just an internal battle; threats to authenticity come from nearly every man in the novel, coded as "types" that break down the novel's attempted superiority over inauthentic men such as Cohn. As much as the novel wants to assert Jake's masculinity as the infallible "best" type, others come along who achieve more satisfaction than he can (or at least the illusion of satisfaction) and embody even more fully the submission to suffering that Jake views as inevitable within modernity. The novel establishes a sort of spectrum of masculinity, with threats to Jake's version coming from both ends.

The hyper-masculine bullfighters function as the ideal embodiment of masculinity. From the beginning of the novel, bullfighters are described as living life "all the way up" (18). They are an ideal third type of manliness that contrasts with all forms of modern masculinity. Jake's (and the novel's) idolization of the bullfighters, that is, arises from the way they're made to represent a sense of order and stability in the social structure – in other words, a return to the pre-war, pre-modern social hierarchy that rewarded the more traditional style of manliness. Bullfighters manifest power, volition, and control. The novel suggests that these qualities can now only be found in Spain – a site of not only spatial exile, but temporal exile as well. It

represents a return to a pre-modern moment in which violence still informs social life, but is controlled and contained. In contrast with the uncontrolled violence of modernity, Spain's order and tradition bring a sense of stability to the expatriates' world – or so they hope.

Jake sees this potential for order in the bullfighters:

Aficion means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bull-fights. All the good bull-fighters stayed at Montoya's hotel; that is, those with aficion stayed there.... Those who were aficionados could always get rooms even when the hotel was full. Montoya introduced me to some of them. They were always very polite at first, and it amused them very much that I should be an American. Somehow it was taken for granted that an American could not have aficion. He might simulate it or confuse it with excitement, but he could not really have it.... Montoya could forgive anything of a bull-fighter who had aficion. He could forgive attacks of nerves, panic, bad unexplainable actions, all sorts of lapses. For one who had aficion he could forgive anything. (136-7).

Afición is the ultimate expression of authentic masculinity. It is a “passion” that signifies not only an alignment to the old order of masculinity, but also a demonstrated mastery of that construction. Even the aficionados' presence is itself enough to command respect, because their very identity exudes that crucial combination of passion and control. As Hemingway explains in this passage, *afición* is not the same as “excitement” – it is a pure embodiment of the masculine ideal of discipline, indeed of “grace under pressure” itself. A bullfighter is in control of the suffering around him; he contains it and engages in a beautiful violence with it. “Anything” is forgivable in a bullfighter, because his overarching control of his surroundings overcomes all the “lapses” that might damage his masculine credibility.⁹ Those lapses – “attacks of nerve, panic,

⁹ Jeffrey Herlihy (2010) engages in an extensive evaluation of the language in Montoya's conversation with Jake, which is almost certainly conducted in Spanish. The structure of Spanish verbs and articles creates linguistic ambiguity in the phrase “You were an American” depending on the actual verbs and articles used. One tense (*fuiste*) indicates a permanent turn away from Jake's Americanness, while the other (*eras*) leaves open the possibility for a future return to that identity (55). Herlihy argues that Jake's “disguise of his American identity within another language reveals his aspiration to shed the constraints of his previous life and to change his self-image” (53). The use of Spanish is a “marker of acceptance” (55) within the aficionado culture, but it is only a temporary acceptance and assumption of this identity.

bad unexplainable actions” – are forgivable precisely because they are exceptions to the bullfighters’ character, rather than complications or repudiations of their masculine control.

The novel most ardently connects *afición* with Pedro Romero, who artfully combines emotion, violence, and control.

I told [Brett] 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, so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less of a spectacle with unexplained horrors.... Romero’s bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time. He did not have to emphasize their closeness. Brett saw how something that was beautiful done close to the bull was ridiculous if it were done a little way off. I told her how since the death of Joselito all the bull-fighters had been developing a technic that simulated this appearance of danger in order to give a fake emotional feeling, while the bull-fighter was really safe. Romero had the old thing, the holding his purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing. (171-2).

Romero’s bullfighting represents what Jake describes as passion, but *afición* is more than an emotion. It is an essence, an identity that aligns with the novel’s philosophy of controlled risk. Bullfighters like Romero are authentic because they take charge of their environment and become the masters of it.

To achieve this control, a bullfighter must have *afición*. Interestingly, the control exhibited by the bullfighter is a performance. In the more modern style of bullfighting, the matador gives a “fake emotional feeling” because he “simulate[s] this appearance of danger.” This technique allows the bullfighter to simulate risk while maintaining enough distance from the threat to ensure his own safety. In this way, modern bullfighting very much aligns with the novel’s (and Jake’s) critique of inauthentic manhood as the avoidance of real risk.

The embrace of the bullfighters’ risk connects to the novel’s criticism of Cohn’s lack of risk. In their profession and lifestyle, bullfighters invite danger but do not succumb to it. Cohn

could never express masculinity in this way – in fact, earlier he admits that he is “not interested in bull-fighters. That’s an abnormal life” (18). Hemingway writes, “Brett saw how something that was beautiful done close to the bull was ridiculous if it were done a little way off.” This precisely echoes the difference between authentic and inauthentic forms of masculinity that the novel presents. The masculinity Romero embodies, and that Jake attempts to emulate, is doing things “close to the bull.” Cohn, on the other hand, does the same things as the other men, but does them “a little way off.” He runs in the same circle, and goes after Brett, and is an expatriate, but he doesn’t drink alcohol. Therefore, he does not risk anything, and looks ridiculous.

However, Spain’s masculinity does not embody the same “grace under pressure” that the novel idealizes in Paris. Romero’s performance of masculinity as a bullfighter is a moment of order and sense in contrast to modernity’s “spectacle of unexplained horrors.” This masculinity combines the controlled violence with risk and, crucially, successful risk. Romero is seen as succeeding in his performance because he is so close to the threat – the bull – and still makes it aware that he is its master. Phrases such as “he kept the absolute purity of his line,” “calmly let the horns pass him close,” and “dominated the bull” deliberately emphasize the agency of the bullfighter’s masculine expression. Ideal masculinity embraces violence, but controls it. It is also important to note that the violence in Spain is not *modern* violence – it is not the mustard gas, tanks, or trench warfare of WWI. It makes sense that Spain would become a site of admiration in this moment; it disavows the particular violences of modernity in favor of the old order of violence’s control, and a social order that makes sense. Bullfighting is a destructive art, carried out in the most precise and deliberate manner. There is no impulse, no visceral reaction to a threat. Instead, there is only strategy, skill, victory, and “preparation for the killing.” Bullfighters, then, remain a threat to authentic masculinity precisely because of their masculine perfection.

On the other end of the novel's spectrum of masculinity is the threat of queerness. In a typical Parisian expat scene, Jake, Georgette, and his friends are in a bar. They discuss acquaintances, dance, and order round after round of wine and pernod. Then:

A crowd of young men, some in jerseys and some in their shirtsleeves, got out. I could see their hands and newly washed, wavy hair in the light from the door. The policeman standing by the door looked at me and smiled. They came in. As they went in, under the light I saw white hands, wavy hair, white faces, grimacing, gesturing, talking. With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was very much with them. . . . 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. The beer was not good and I had a worse cognac to take the taste out of my mouth. When I came back to the Bal there was a crowd on the floor and Georgette was dancing with the tall blond youth, who danced big-hippily, carrying his head on one side, his eyes lifted as he danced. As soon as the music stopped another one of them asked her to dance. She had been taken up by them. I knew then that they would all dance with her. They are like that. (28).

This passage offers another example of Hemingway's style of omission.¹⁰ Here, that critically acclaimed style expresses itself as homophobia. What is it about these men that makes Jake so angry? Their "white hands, wavy hair, [and] white faces" identify them as gay men, or at least as a stereotype of the homosexual "fairy" that also appears in *Giovanni's Room*. In the novel's terms of gender and sexuality, these men's masculinity is degraded. However, they are still "very much with" Brett – they can get close to her, dance with her, and demand her attention. In this way, the gay men become a threat to Jake and his "good" form of masculinity. Although their masculinity is coded as "lesser," they are still able to win over Brett in a way that Jake cannot. This contrast illustrates the contradiction inherent in the novel's effort to assert the value of embracing the wound and unsatisfiable desire. Because he is wounded, even gay men are in some ways more masculine than he is.

¹⁰ Arnold E. and Cathy N. Davidson (1987) explain why omission is more effective than explicit identification: "What can be left out is what is already there. Moreover, what can be left out best demonstrates what is already there; the omnipotence of the work's underlying mythos so 'goes without saying' that any 'saying' would weaken its case" (98).

The passage's homophobia is consolidated through the knowingness that Jake shares with the policeman. When the policeman looks at Jake and smiles, the two men share a knowing look, a joke, about the gay men's transgression of the law of sexuality. Once again, the action of ridicule comes into play as a negotiation of masculine sexuality. Much like the novel's joking attitude toward the liaison colonel's dramatic acknowledgement of the wound, in this moment joking becomes a simultaneous recognition of a transgression (homosexuality) and a rejection of its validity. However, it is important that neither Jake nor the policeman reacts – they are powerless in the face of that sexual transgression that they hate so much. Masculine sexuality is closely linked to the law and its transgression, conveying the rigid structures of psychological assessment of gender identity and its authenticity. Using a policeman as Jake's partner in ridicule is no accident; he is a very symbol of the law, which nevertheless allows the gay men to enter the bar and continue in their transgression of normalcy.¹¹ (In fact, a policeman is also present in the crucial final lines of the novel, when Jake ultimately diagnoses suffering and unfulfillment as inevitable). Homosexuality as a valid expression of masculinity, then, acts directly in opposition to the novel's assertion of satisfaction as unattainable. They dance with beautiful women (including Brett) and appear clean and bright, having fun and achieving a fulfillment that "authentic men" like Jake insist is illusory.

The novel's harsh treatment of these gay men is indicative of their threat both to the "authentic" masculinity in Jake and to the fabric of post-World War I patriarchal society. Jake says, "they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant," but he nevertheless reacts with profound anger and frustration when he sees them with Brett. He feels a strong desire to "shatter that superior, simpering composure." Here he refers to the desire not only to establish

¹¹ The Davidsons also note this interaction in their 1987 article.

his own superiority over them, but also the desire to violently erase any evidence that the gay men's masculinity is more authentic than his. The presence of the gay men forces him to confront his own diminished sense of masculinity – an insecurity that is revealed in his visceral response to their interaction with Brett. Instead of actually acting out in violence, however, Jake decides to leave and move to the next bar. This reaction is another example of the strategy of controlled risk – to act on a violent impulse would be to fully reveal Jake's own hostility toward the gay men, which would mean acknowledging that he is less manly than them. Again, he must act with “grace under pressure.”

We can understand Jake's discomfort as an example of what Sedgwick (1990) calls “male homosexual panic.” Here, Hemingway's style of omission aligns with the idea of homosexuality as “the love that dare not speak its name” (Douglas, “Two Loves”). In each case, silence is weighted with meaning, revealing the psychological tension of internalized homophobia. According to Sedgwick, the homosocial bonds that structure male patriarchal society are integral to a man's understanding of his own heterosexuality, even as those bonds instill doubt in that heterosexuality. In other words, male homosexual panic (such as Jake experiences here) comes not from the discovery that one is gay himself, but instead from the profound male anxiety that no man can tell with certainty that he is *not* gay. In Sedgwick's construction, the only men exempt from this anxiety are actually self-identified gay men, who escape the psychological imperative to construct and conceive their self-image along rigid heteronormative lines. Of course, they are still relegated to the social margins on the basis of their “abnormal” sexuality, but there is a certain freedom in their psychology. This freedom is what Jake senses – and feels disgustedly threatened by – when the fairies walk into the bar. Their “superior, simpering composure” fractures his own homosexual security and forces him into a

moment of homosexual panic. The fairies tap into Jake's "reservoir of potential for violence" (Sedgwick 86), ultimately sending him away in a homophobic flight.

Instead of a violent risk like "shattering" them, which would reveal his emotions too nakedly, Jake turns to a "safer" amount of risk: alcohol. His physical movement to another café is echoed in the "transport" of alcoholic inebriation. This mobility, so common in Paris, enables Jake to escape a situation that might be psychologically dangerous: directly invoking the source of his masculine inadequacy. If he were to directly acknowledge this source, he would be succumbing to the illusion that he could fix it. To honestly identify the war wound as the shame from which his masculine insecurity stems would be to open the possibility of its rectification. The novel believes that the only way to surmount one's trauma is to embrace its insurmountability; even identifying it as the cause of a problem would be to suggest that it could be solved, and fulfillment could once again be achievable.

While one must not succumb to this false ideal of fulfillment, one can still keep up the psychological illusion of satisfaction by getting drunk. Jake does so by going to "the next Bal," placing himself in the same situation, minus the gay men who are such a threat to him. If he just leaves and drinks some more, he will be able to avoid this threat (he fails to see in himself the same type of avoidance he hates in Cohn, although on a scale within the city itself). Drinking is a method of anaesthetization – it kills feeling for a time. Alcohol will not solve the problem of masculine insecurity, but it will repress the fact that there is even a problem at all. Nevertheless, the beer and the cognac are not good, and cannot really satisfy Jake – he returns to the Bal and is still angry and irritated with the gay men. Brett has been "taken up by them." Because nothing has changed when he returns, it is clear that the threat cannot be resolved by anaesthetization and repression, but it is too dangerous to risk acknowledging Jake's own diminished masculinity.

“NEW” AMBIVALENCE: THE THIRD THREAT TO MASCULINITY

All of the male threats to Jake’s masculinity – Cohn, Romero, and the gay men – are fairly clear-cut. Interestingly, though, another more ambivalent threat exists in the novel: Brett’s expressions of masculinity. Earlier, we discussed Jake’s self-reflection about his wound. That reflective passage ends:

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. (39).

When Jake places his despair about his wound alongside his thoughts about Brett, he reveals the inability to keep up the coding of his masculinity as “good.” Brett is the very thing he cannot have – the object of his unsatisfiable desire. He admits this even within the passage; he “wouldn’t have had any trouble” if she hadn’t come along and reminded him of his wound. However, he also uses Brett as the thing that makes him stop thinking about his wound – she is in this moment a tool of anaesthetization, functioning similarly to alcohol. When he thinks of her, his mind starts to move “in sort of smooth waves” instead of “jumping around” in anxiety about his manhood.

First, he acknowledges his inadequacy by crying. Then, however, the rhythms of Paris lull him to sleep, allowing him to avoid his inadequacy at least until morning. This moment reveals the impossibility of fully coding authentic masculinity (in Jake) against the inauthentic form (in Cohn), because Jake once again practices the very romantic avoidance he decries. In the modern moment, self-imposed psychological exile is possible, and is enabled by the city of motion and sense-dulling sound. Much like the taxis that carry the expatriates from bar to bar in

search of some satisfaction, the trams outside Jake's window carry him to sleep, where he can distance himself from his wound and thus his inadequacy.

Brett thus functions ambivalently here. Foremost, she is proof of Jake's authentic masculinity. Interacting with the woman he desires but cannot have is a risk that gives Jake the opportunity to take his lack of fulfillment "like a man." In this way she plays a similar role as the wound itself – she allows Jake to court risk so that he might not succumb to it. However, Brett also functions as a sentimental object that provides the soothing comfort that *ought* to be unavailable to Jake as an authentic man. The passage's sentimentality evokes romantic notions that one would expect to see in Cohn, but not in Jake. Therefore, Brett is for Jake both an enabler and a threat to authentic masculinity.

But what is so threatening about Brett? If she is simply an object of desire, and desire is inherently unsatisfiable, then in some way she should not pose a problem at all. One should simply be able to accept that he cannot have her, and move on. This is not the case, though; Jake keeps returning to Brett even as he denounces her. The reason for this is, I suggest, is that she represents the New Woman: independent, sexually promiscuous, and with a short, boyish haircut. In many ways, she acts like a man. As Wendy Martin (1987) explains, Brett "mirrors both the traditional wife and the prostitute. Yet she will be neither" (72). Jake and the other men in the novel struggle to pin her down based on Victorian notions of acceptable femininity; thus she disrupts their comfortable and familiar psychological understanding of the male-female social construction. David Tomkins (2008) further elaborates on Brett's reversal of the order of sexual exchange as she "becomes the novel's primary sexual pursuer" instead of remaining simply "the object of the male hero's sexual pursuit" (756). Even Brett's name is evocative of a disruption of the social order. She is a designated Lady, but has a man's first name. Men desire her, but they

do not know what to do with her. Brett's ambiguity and sexual freedom disrupt traditional preconceptions of gender roles, threatening not only the men themselves, but the entire social structure of clear-cut masculinity and femininity.

SPACE-TIME MOBILITY: GEOGRAPHIC CONSTRUCTS OF GENDER

The novel's evaluation of gender becomes richer when one considers the impact of movement between spatial and temporal worlds as part of the social evaluation of masculinity.¹² When the expatriates travel to Spain – the home of the bullfighters, those masters of control – they expect a more orderly environment that will return them somewhat to the old, sensible order of gender. As Jake reflects,

It felt strange to be in France again. There was a safe, suburban feeling... Everything is on such a clear financial basis in France. It is the simplest country to live in. No one makes things complicated by becoming your friend for any obscure reason. If you want people to like you you only have to spend a little money... I hated to leave France. Life was so simple in France. I felt I was a fool to be going back into Spain. In Spain you could not tell about anything. (236-7).

In Spain, volatile emotional relationships dominate the social sphere, precluding a fulfillment of that masterful control of violence. The group cannot “tell about anything” – they do not understand the complexity of these emotional interactions because they simply do not experience them in France. France allows for a containment of emotional complexity because intimacy is reduced to monetary transaction. Money cements one's relationship to another. It prevents someone from “becom[ing] your friend for any obscure reason.”

¹² D. Quentin Miller (2012) connects this geographic movement with the psychological trauma of displacement that arises through expatriation: “Both Baldwin and Hemingway, as artists who expatriated and repatriated throughout their lives, were keenly aware of the challenges raised by this sensibility: to be aware of the fluidity of geographic boundaries is also to be homeless. The intellectual satisfaction of the former is hardly enough to counterbalance the psychological insecurity of the latter” (126).

In addition, Jake's confusion and not being able to "tell about anything" stems from the disruption of the ideals of authentic masculinity.¹³ When the novel moves to Spain, it is unable to fully maintain its previous construction of Jake's masculinity as "authentic" and Cohn's as "inauthentic." As discussed earlier, despite Jake's wound, his masculinity is coded as good because it rejects romantic illusions of escape and subsequent satisfaction. Therefore, the expectation of Spain includes a restoration of order wherein the rest of society will reinforce this notion of good masculinity. However, even in this space, Cohn's supposedly inauthentic masculinity still prevails over Jake's, because in spite of his shortcomings Cohn retains forms of conventional masculine prowess.

In Spain, Cohn becomes the object of increased violence, and is more openly figured as a racial other, and yet he still gets closer to satisfying his desire than Jake does. Of course, Spain is also home to Romero, the other racially "dark" figure in the novel. He is more authentically masculine than Cohn, but still a threat to Jake's equilibrium. Spain's social environment functions as an intensifying space. For instance, although Jake cannot stand Cohn in France, he is only able to act violently toward him in Spain. Jake's visceral outbursts are evidence of the novel's inability to reconcile authentic masculinity with complex social and emotional relationships. The illusion of security in this masculinity is only able to prevail in France, where there is a "safe, suburban feeling." Suburbia is traditional, calm, and plays by the rules – a far cry from the hotbed of desire and violence that is Spain.

Spain's temporal location is disturbing because it is too threatening, but France's temporal location is also disturbing because it is too safe. A conflict then arises between the two spaces: should one live in a more orderly space of controlled violence like Spain, under constant

¹³ Additionally, Wendy Martin interestingly notes that Brett acknowledges the mobility of urbanity that allows the New Woman more choices and control – perhaps this is why, ultimately, she cannot stay in Spain with Pedro Romero. This construction parallels my analysis of the geographic movements between France and Spain.

threat to his masculinity; or should he embrace the chaos of the modern moment in order to sustain the illusion of masculine security, even if it means accepting that one's desire can never be satisfied?

Ultimately, authentically living as a man in modernity *does* entail this diagnosis of desire as inherently unsatisfiable. Unfulfillment is unavoidable, and an authentically masculine response to this disappointment can only be pained resignation. The famed final moments of the novel definitively reiterate its core argument:

“Oh, Jake,” Brett said, “we could have had such a damned good time together.”
Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.
“Yes,” I said. “Isn't it pretty to think so?” (251).

Brett mourns the “damned good time together” that she and Jake never had; she believes that this good time would have been possible, if only Jake still had a penis. If only his wound had not happened, if only his manhood were intact, then they could have satisfied that ever-elusive desire they have been chasing. Jake refuses this illusion, rejecting the notion that unsatisfiable desire is a personal issue. Instead, it is the very essence of the modern condition. Even if he were not wounded, he and Brett would not be able to be together. The futility of imagining some situation in which their desire could be fulfilled reflects the utter despair of the post-WWI generation.

In this scene, a policeman is once again present in a moment of transgression of social law. As discussed earlier, the policeman at the door of the club recognizes the gay men's transgression of the masculine order, but he is powerless in the face of this transgression. Here, *Jake* is the man subject to the policeman's law, and the one transgressing it. The car's motion, directed by the officer, presses the couple together in an attempt to bring Jake into the traditional method of expressing masculinity – having a sexual relationship with a woman. However, his rejection of Brett's advances (not only because of his war wound, but also because of his

philosophy) places him in transgression of this social order. In one sense, Jake is still acting in line with authentic masculinity, by accepting the suffering entailed by modernity. However, he also must accept that as a wounded man, he is still in transgression of the social order of masculinity. Can he truly be authentic as a man if this is the case?

Despite Brett and Jake's physical closeness in these final moments, the barrier between them is clear. It is interesting that a sudden motion brings them together – not a deliberate action by either of them. This relationship has arisen from the motion of the modern city, not from a volitional connection that might have been turned into something meaningful. By removing the agency from their final touching, the novel further disrupts the idea that if only something had gone differently (i.e., if only Jake's masculinity were intact), a real relationship would have been possible. The incidental nature of their closeness is especially poignant – it suggests that even the few meaningful, rewarding parts of their affair were not purposeful, but accidental. Therefore, they cannot indicate any real kind of possibility of a satisfying relationship. The best anyone can do is to imagine that in some other world, in some other pretty timeline, in some other version of the universe outside modernity, their desires would be fulfilled. This is either hopeful or very cynical, and each of these interpretations are present in the car (one by Brett and the other by Jake). Ending the novel with this scene of lament definitively presents the unavoidable fact of unsatisfiable desire.

CHAPTER TWO: *GIOVANNI'S ROOM*

Like Hemingway, James Baldwin examines exile as a condition irrevocably tied to gender. However, *Giovanni's Room* considers a version of threatened masculinity that is marked not by a war wound, but by gay desire. This desire is threatening because it becomes the object of what Bersani (2009) calls the “malignant aversion” to sex. This aversion to gay sex, linked to promiscuity, does not prevent David from acting on his desires. However, it does manifest as an internalized aversion, threatening his own gender identity from within. As Bersani elaborates, the social problematics of sex and power often preclude a positive self-image for gay Americans, because their homosexuality can never be “culturally neutral.” Their desire for other men cannot be understood as merely an admiration of the physical male body; rather, homosexual desire between men must necessarily be tied up in the socially constructed categorization of what a “real man” looks like and acts like. It follows, then, that David’s queer desire cripples his own psychological self-image, even as he continues to act upon it. His frequent attempts to embody outward “manliness” – including pursuing a heterosexual marriage – is a way of embodying that form of masculinity from which he will always be socially excluded by virtue of his homosexuality. Thus, he enables his own psychology of inferiority and judgment when he is unable to adequately perform that masculinity.

Compellingly, Bersani’s argument also explicitly ties the experiences of gay Americans with black Americans, insisting that the psycho-cultural logic of social power disturbs their self-image similarly. Along this analytical line, *Giovanni's Room* is able to portray the psychological and social exile of blackness, despite assuming every character in it to be white. David never openly states that he is homosexual, and in that silence there is profound psychological significance. Similarly, Baldwin never openly assigns a character a race that is not white.

However, there are metaphorical and symbolic ties between several gay characters and darkness, imbuing their racial identity with ambiguity that compels us to critically examine our own automatic social ties between racial darkness, sexuality, and social proscription. With this racial element, Baldwin emulates Hemingway's style of importance by omission, bringing another facet to the novel's already nuanced and complex questions of homosexuality and masculinity.

SELF-REFLECTION AND SELF-EXILE

Giovanni's Room echoes *The Sun Also Rises* in a crucial revelatory moment. When David reveals his homosexuality, he does so while looking at his reflection in a darkened window – a situation eerily similar to Jake's memory sequence while looking at his own Parisian reflection.

Describing his first sexual encounter with a man, David remembers:

We were both naked and the sheet we had used as a cover was tangled around our feet. Joey's body was brown, was sweaty, the most beautiful creation I had ever seen. I would have touched him to wake him up but something stopped me. I was suddenly afraid. Perhaps it was because he looked so innocent lying there, with such perfect trust; perhaps it was because he was so much smaller than me; my own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising in me seemed monstrous. But, above all, I was suddenly afraid. It was borne in on me: *But Joey is a boy*. I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood. Precisely, I wanted to know that mystery and feel that power and have that promise fulfilled through me. The sweat on my back grew cold. I was ashamed. The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness. I wondered what Joey's mother would say when she saw the sheets. Then I thought of my father, who had no one in the world but me, my mother having died when I was little. A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how this could have happened *in* me....

I began, perhaps, to be lonely that summer and began, that summer, the flight which has brought me to this darkening window.

And yet – when one begins to search for the crucial, the definitive moment, the moment which changed all others, one finds oneself pressing, in great pain, through a maze of false signals and abruptly locking doors. My flight may, indeed, have begun that

summer – which does not tell me where to find the germ of the dilemma which resolved itself, that summer, into flight. Of course, it is somewhere before me, locked in that reflection I am watching in the window as the night comes down outside. It is trapped in the room with me, always has been, and always will be, and it is yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside. (8-10).

The deliberate and precise imagery in this scene illustrates David's profound sense of shame that will carry him to Paris and stay with him during his affair with Giovanni. Joey's body is "brown," paralleling the later introductory description of Giovanni as "dark." David, by contrast, has blond hair, which he sees in his reflection in the "darkening window." Coding his partners as dark and himself as light illustrates David's reluctance to accept his homosexuality – he wishes to relieve himself of shame by setting himself apart from these dark figures. As Stephanie Li (2015) argues, "David cannot allow Joey to be his brother, to be white like himself, because their sexual encounter so terrifies him" (140). Joey's body becomes a stand-in for the shame black men are made to feel toward their own race.¹⁴

In addition to the dark imagery assigned to Joey, the "black cavern" that opens in David's mind, dirty and terrifying, correlates homosexuality and filth. In contrast to the mysterious cavern, full of things unknown, a heteronormative life would bring a clean security. This connection between homosexuality and dirt codes homosexuality as shameful, and it is from this shame that David takes flight. However, there is another important layer to this shame: darkness. Race is a complex structure in this novel, especially because all of the characters are (presumably) white. Despite this superficial blanching, the novel enters into a subtle and sophisticated analysis of shame and race, through David's expression of shame at his homosexuality. Conflating blackness and homosexuality compounds the sense of shame from both internal and external sources.

¹⁴ Li also convincingly argues that David "manufactures an Africanist presence that comes to define all that he most fears and rejects in himself" (137).

This cavern discussed above is only one cavern in play in this passage; the other is perhaps more crucial. Joey's body itself is described as "the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood." This is another correlation of blackness and homosexuality, this time with the added explicit elements of madness and lost masculinity. The physicality of David's descriptions reveals shame to be a visceral response.¹⁵ The "power and the promise and the mystery" of Joey's body strikes fear in David, precisely because he is a man. Having an intimate relationship with a man means submitting oneself – letting things happen within him. Giving up this power and autonomy, allowing himself to be the powerless one, corresponds to a loss of manhood. It is this threatened masculinity that is the root of shame – the problem is not the love itself, not the sexual act, but the internalized shame that arises when a man allows himself to be vulnerable and to submit to powerlessness. Vulnerability is coded as torture. The result is that David comes to view his own body with disgust. He says, "my own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising in me seemed monstrous." This description indicates a degree of self-hatred that is almost violent, and that serves as the foundation for shame and psychological distress.

It is important to note that David's experience of shame at his homosexuality is a shame imposed on him by society, rather than something that organically arises within him. Here, David's self-disgust emulates Bersani's outline of the "hygienics of social power" that disapprove of homosexual desire. The aversion to homosexual sex arises not from the act itself, but rather from the roles embodied during the act that disrupt one's internalized understanding of the male as the penetrator and the female as the penetrated. In this gender construct, to be

¹⁵ Josep M. Armengol (2012) explains David's disgust as an interweaving of several unconscious factors: "David establishes a literal association between homosexuality and blackness, which stands for the anus and the racialized body... David's unconscious association derives from his specific racial, religious, and gender background, which defines interracial homosexuality as doubly immoral, shameful, and dirty" (680).

penetrated is to relinquish male power. What society neglects in this construction, however – and what David fails to realize – is that a certain power arises from *choosing* to relinquish that evolutionary masculine power. Thus, gay men like David internalize the problematic social logic as self-hatred that conflates sexual positioning with social positioning.

This entire contemplative scene occurs while David is looking at his reflection in the window. Crucially, David expresses feeling “trapped” by his reflection, and the “germ” of his dilemma being locked in his reflection. The reflection both mirrors the self and imprisons it within a set boundary, defining its image and – as David interprets it – its interiority. David knows that he is fleeing this self, this interiority of which he is so ashamed, and he knows his flight began in this moment in Joey’s bed. However, he does not have the courage to acknowledge the true root of his psychological dilemma; he exiles it. He says, “It is trapped in the room with me, always has been, and always will be, and it is yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside.” This is the self that is trapped in David’s room, that he refuses to face. Shame prevents him from accepting his own queer desire, because conventional manliness inherently disavows that desire. To truthfully accept his identity, Baldwin argues, one must acknowledge those “shameful” parts of one’s identity that conflict with his pre-conceived self-image. Instead, David attempts (and fails) to suppress that socially shameful queer desire, not allowing it to penetrate his self-image. Baldwin suggests that the self itself *is* exile, and the only way to survive in that exile is to recognize and combat the divergence between the authentic self and the performed self-image.¹⁶ Although David is geographically exiled in a foreign country, his psychological being is even more foreign to him. In this way, the novel presents a profound

¹⁶ Armengol articulates the inevitable crossing of the “boundaries between self and other” that lead to an amalgamation of whiteness and blackness, heterosexuality and homosexuality, within one identity. David’s attempt to avoid this border crossing – by reaffirming his own whiteness and heterosexuality – is precisely what catalyzes its occurrence and is, I suggest, the source of the psychological trauma of rejecting Baldwin’s construction of the true self as exile and fracture.

form of psychological exile, which internalizes and emphasizes the societal forces that deem homosexuality and darkness as unacceptable.

Coding homosexuality as darkness continues throughout the novel, even outside of David's actual relationships. When David is in Paris, he experiences shame that comes from an external rather than an internal source. A sailor passes David on the street, making him acutely aware of his sexual transgression and his diminished masculinity. He explains:

I was staring at him, though I did not know it, and wishing I were he. He seemed – somehow – younger than I had ever been, and blonder and more beautiful, and he wore his masculinity as unequivocally as he wore his skin. He made me think of home – perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition. I knew how he drank and how he was with his friends and how pain and women baffled him. I wondered if my father had ever been like that, if I had ever been like that – though it was hard to imagine, for this boy, striding across the avenue like light itself, any antecedents, any connections at all. We came abreast and, as though he had seen some all-revealing panic in my eyes, he gave me a look contemptuously lewd and knowing; just such a look as he might have given, but a few hours ago, to the desperately well-dressed nymphomaniac or trollop who was trying to make him believe she was a lady. And in another second, had our contact lasted, I was certain that there would erupt into speech, out of all that light and beauty, some brutal variation of *Look, baby, I know you...* I got to the other side of the boulevard, not daring to look back, and I wondered what he had seen in me to elicit such instantaneous contempt. I was too old to suppose that it had anything to do with my walk, or the way I held my hands, or my voice – which, anyway, he has not heard. It was something else and I would never see it. I would never dare to see it. It would be like looking at the naked sun. But, hurrying, and not daring now to look at anyone, male or female, who passed me on the wide sidewalks. I knew that what the sailor had seen in my unguarded eyes was envy and desire: I had seen it often in Jacques' eyes and my reaction and the sailor's had been the same. But if I were still able to feel affection and if he had seen it in my eyes, it would not have helped, for affection, for the boys I was doomed to look at, was vastly more frightening than lust. (92-3).

The light imagery in this passage is even stronger than the lightness that David uses for himself during his self-reflection. The sailor is “blonder” and walks “like light itself.” Whereas David *assigns* lightness to himself, the sailor, in his “unequivocal masculinity,” embodies it. David is then in the sailor's shadow, the darker of the pair. In this moment, it only takes a look from a heterosexual stranger to reveal David's shame. Nevertheless, David does not want to directly

acknowledge the reason the sailor gives him “a look contemptuously lewd and knowing”. He does not dare to look inside himself and identify the intrinsic split within his self – that non-identity between his true essence and his performed self. To do so would be “like looking at the naked sun.” Admitting shame at one’s homosexuality would be to admit that it cannot be changed or even repressed. The problem is that we *deny* that the self is multiple and conflicting; when David continually insists that he can outwardly perform conventional masculinity authentically, he compounds his own psychological tension by refusing the splits within his very self. He tries to fit together his desire to perform manliness with his queer desire, which proves impossible. Even in this passage, we see the irrevocability of sexuality; no matter how hard David has tried to suppress his queerness, just by looking in his direction a stranger is able to identify him and shame him.

Such an encounter demonstrates the depth at which homophobia is embedded within the social structure of masculinity. The sailor is the ultimate picture of masculinity (plus, he is a military figure, an essential hero in the post-WWII moment). Masculinity is the object of both envy and desire. Crucially, though, this ideal form of masculinity is one that both incites desire and rejects it from another man. As Sedgwick argues in her evaluation of the male homosexual panic, the homosocial bonds inherent to patriarchal society establish male-male relationships as both the most and least desirable bond. Inciting desire as the sailor does makes men powerful – it provides them with social and sexual capital. However, inciting this desire in another man becomes psychologically problematic; women are supposed to be dominated by this desire, not men. The sailor’s disgusted response to a glance that only hints as desire illustrates perfectly the structure of male homosexual panic. As the unwilling object of a gaze of queer desire, the sailor experiences anxiety about his *own* heterosexuality (not that he now believes that he is gay, but

that he must now confront the psychologically troubling notion that he cannot know for sure that he is *not* gay). Moreover, Sedgwick makes an important note of the remarkable prominence of this homophobic structure within the military. In this moment soon after World War II, military pride and its aggressive masculinity were heightened. Imbuing a sailor with such homophobia is deliberate on Baldwin's part; his profession entails a strict adherence to the patriarchal society and its defense, though it is far from exempt from male homosexual panic. As Sedgwick explains, "In [the armed services], where both men's manipulability and their potential for violence are at the highest possible premium, the *prescription* of the most intimate male bonding and the *proscription* of (the remarkably cognate) 'homosexuality' are both stronger than in civilian society – are, in fact, close to absolute" (186).

Thus, the sailor functions as a psychological threat to David's gender security; he is made to feel hated, powerless, and utterly ashamed. The sailor also embodies the social construct of masculinity itself. Men are in some way willing to accept homosexual encounters if they are only about the sex. In some cases this is about power, and in others it is acceptable in times of desperate loneliness (like, perhaps, during a deployment on a ship). However, to remain within the limits of social acceptability, gay sex must *never* be about true connection. As David says, "affection" is "vastly more frightening than lust." This attitude is actually internalized within gay men as well, and their transgression of this social rule causes them shame. For instance, David runs from his relationships when too much affection enters (Giovanni will later say that he is afraid to get himself dirty). In fact, he has internalized this attitude so deeply that he says he can no longer feel affection; as a sacrifice against shaming himself even more, David has become numb to all affection. To convince oneself that sex is only about power or pure lust is to reduce it to an instinct, an impulse. However, when affection – or even love – enters, the resulting sense of

powerlessness makes it impossible to deny the social ascription of degradation. Desire, then, can never truly be satisfied because it cannot be revealed. This is not an evaluation of desire as inherently unachievable – heterosexual desire can certainly be fulfilling in the terms of this novel. Instead, unfulfillment is the direct result of the social prohibition of certain types of desire, and the subsequent prohibition of emotional and psychological stability for both queer and non-white individuals.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between this passage and Jake's encounter with the "fairies" in *The Sun Also Rises*. Each figures a brief glance between a gay man and a straight man, although they are narrated from opposite perspectives. One can imagine that the "contemptuously lewd and knowing" look could come from Jake himself and be directed toward the gay men in the bar. Policemen and sailors are both, in some way, enforcers of the law, so the element of transgression is emphasized again. The similarities in content among these two scenes are clear. The key difference, and the most compelling point of comparison, lies in their tone and their authorial perspective. David is a whole, complex person. We see in this scene and throughout the novel that he lacks that "superior, simpering composure" (Hemingway 28) carried by the gay men at the Bal; he is not the stereotypical fairy of Hemingway's world. As a gay man, Baldwin is able to write credibly and thoroughly about the queer experience. He describes the nuances and the psychological consequences of internalized shame and homophobia, as we see here in David's thorough internal analysis of the briefest shared glance. This analysis increases in nuance and significance when we also consider its racial implications – the passage above makes David a dark figure as he experiences and examines shame. Hemingway, on the other hand, writes from a place of privilege. A white heterosexual man is privileged to write with irritation toward the socially oppressed, without feeling compelled to reach into their interiority

beyond a stereotype. Hemingway is able to code ideal masculinity as heterosexual, in alignment with the general social structure. For Baldwin to do this, however, would be to both betray the sophistication of queerness and to reject the validity of his own masculine expression.

GROUNDING FLIGHT: PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF HETERONORMATIVITY

Shame itself is, in fact, what initially drives David to become an expatriate. It is the driving force behind his flight to France, after other tactics (like simply pretending that he does not have homosexual desires) fail to hide this shame. One strategy is to project to his father the vision of his life as the typical young American man's, surrounded by beautiful women and working his way up some corporate ladder. He explains:

We got on quite well, really, for the vision I gave my father of my life was exactly the vision in which I myself most desperately needed to believe. For I am – or I was – one of those people who pride themselves on their willpower, on their ability to make a decision and carry it through. This virtue, like most virtues, is ambiguity itself. People who believe that they are strong-willed and the masters of their destiny can only continue to believe this by becoming specialists in self-deception. Their decisions are not really decisions at all – a real decision makes one humble, one knows that it is at the mercy of more things than can be named – but elaborate systems of evasion, of illusion, designed to make themselves and the world appear to be what they and the world are not. This is certainly what my decision, made so long ago in Joey's bed, came to. I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well – by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion. (20).

Here, a father-son relationship functions as an attempt to reconcile one's self-image with "shameful" internal desire. By performing an acceptable version of masculinity to his father – one of the ultimate figures of approval – David performs the "vision" of himself in which he "most desperately need[s] to believe." Performance of traditional, socially acceptable masculinity is a psychological coping mechanism that temporarily allows one to repress the shameful parts of his identity. However, as David indicates, this superficial adherence to the

social norm is simply an elaborate form of “self-deception,” “evasion,” and “illusion.” In order to avoid the shame of his homosexual desires, David must remain in constant motion, always running to or from something to avoid existing fully in his psychological and emotional present. He “decides” to reject the source of his shame, but this attempt is futile. He fails to realize that we cannot pretend that we are unequivocally attached to one facet of identity, and thus he continues to flee from the strangeness within his own self. He continues:

What happened was that, all unconscious of what this ennui meant, I wearied of the motion, wearied of the joyless seas of alcohol, wearied of the blunt, bluff, hearty, and totally meaningless friendships, wearied of wandering through the forests of desperate women, wearied of the work, which fed me only in the most brutally literal sense. Perhaps, as we say in America, I wanted to find myself. This is an interesting phrase, not current as far as I know in the language of any other people, which certainly does not mean what it says but betrays a nagging suspicion that something has been misplaced. I think now that if I had had any intimation that the self I was going to find would turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight, I would have stayed at home. But, again, I think I knew, at the very bottom of my heart, exactly what I was doing when I took the boat for France. (20-1).

Mobility and “joyless seas of alcohol” are mechanisms of anaesthetization (similarly to their function in *The Sun Also Rises*). Here, anaesthetization fails, and David decides to escape to Paris. This moment – the present of the recollection, not the narrative itself – renders Paris as an environment that will enable a further “self-deception.” In the moment of the decision, David tells himself that he believes everything will be okay if he just goes somewhere else. However, the present of the narrative reveals something deeper: that David unconsciously understands that Paris would reveal his *true* identity, rather than conceal the one of which he is so ashamed – the “same self” from which he flees is the one he encounters in Paris. Thus, attempting to escape from the fracture and strangeness of one’s identity is ultimately futile.¹⁷

¹⁷ Interestingly, Stephanie Li also reads David’s flight as a rejection of his own whiteness (143).

Even after David has come face to face with his queer desire and its inevitability in Paris (though he is far from its acceptance), he continues to perform traditional masculinity within his father-son relationship. He writes to his father asking for money, never saying a word about his relationship with Giovanni. It is only when he announces an engagement to Hella that his father expresses approval – in the form of wired cash, of course. The version of himself in which David “most desperately need[s] to believe” exists only within paper envelopes to his father, and finds monetary fulfillment only when he conforms to the heteronormative structure of marriage. All complexities of gender are absent from this relationship; manliness is expressed only through the confirmation of one’s power and influence over a woman. When that manliness is rewarded, intimacy – this time father-son intimacy – is once again reduced to a transaction.

“MORTAL AND UNAVOIDABLE DANGER”: NAVIGATING THE ROOM

While in Paris, Giovanni’s room itself carries profound weight in David’s negotiation of his sexuality. The room functions as a space within which Giovanni and David’s relationship can exist; however, it is not without its terrors. This space is no utopian escape from social norms. David’s own internalized homophobia, supported by the social culture of heteronormativity, colors his perception of the room and its significance. He describes the first time he woke up there:

I stealthily lit a cigarette, for I did not want to wake Giovanni. I did not yet know how I would face his eyes....

“Look at the garbage of this city,” he said, finally, and his fingers indicated the flying street, “all of the garbage of this city? Where do they take it? I don’t know where they take it – but it might very well be my room.” ...

But I sensed, when I woke up and looked around the room, the bravado and the cowardice of his figure of speech. This was not the garbage of Paris, which would have been anonymous: this was Giovanni’s regurgitated life.... But it was not the room’s disorder which was frightening; it was the fact that when one began searching for the key to this disorder, one realized that it was not to be found in any of the usual places. For

this was not a matter of habit or circumstance or temperament; it was a matter of punishment and grief. I do not know how I knew this, but I knew it at once; perhaps I knew it because I wanted to live. And I stared at the room with the same, nervous, calculating extension of the intelligence and of all one's forces which occurs when gauging a mortal and unavoidable danger: at the silent walls of the room with its distant, archaic lovers trapped in an interminable rose garden, and the staring windows, staring like two great eyes of ice and fire, and the ceiling which lowered like those clouds out of which fiends have sometimes spoken and which obscured but failed to soften its malevolence behind the yellow light which hung like a diseased and undefinable sex in its center. Under this blunted arrow, this smashed flower of light lay the terrors which encompassed Giovanni's soul. I understood why Giovanni had wanted me and had brought me to his last retreat. I was to destroy the room and give to Giovanni a new and better life. This life could only be my own, which in order to transform Giovanni's, must first become a part of Giovanni's room. (86-8).

The passage opens with an image of shame; after the most intimate act, David cannot bring himself to "face" Giovanni. As in his first encounter with Joey, David feels a compulsion to look away from this shameful part of himself. The room, then, becomes a space onto which he can project some of this shame.

A key image in this passage is that of the garbage as "Giovanni's regurgitated life." Throughout the passage, the room is described in terms of filth and terror – David engages in a similar description after his first encounter with Joey, as is discussed earlier. Regurgitation evokes a set of specific bodily conditions, and the word is deliberately used here. Regurgitation is a form of self-rejection; one's body refuses something that has been partially incorporated into it. It is a physical enactment of shame, ridding oneself of something that does not belong there: something "diseased and undefinable." Regurgitation is also an involuntary biological reaction that cannot be controlled by psychological efforts. All of these connotations combine to emphasize the deep shame inherent in this relationship, and David's inability to reconcile homosexuality as a part of his identity. What he views as "Giovanni's regurgitated life" in fact becomes his *own* regurgitated life – he, after all, becomes "a part of Giovanni's room."

As a symbol of their homosexual relationship, Giovanni's room functions as a spatial emblem of the shame that lives within David. This room becomes so intense for David that other rooms transform into mirrors of it. He even reflects, "It became, in a way, every room I had ever been in and every room I find myself in hereafter will remind me of Giovanni's room" (85). David is constantly fleeing from room to room, hoping to forget his shame, and hoping to change what the room means to him. However, we see in the intensity and the persistence of the room in David's consciousness that this flight is futile.¹⁸ As he says earlier, the self he eventually "finds" is the same self from which he has been running. He encounters the fracture between those parts of himself that are coded as shameful and those that are coded as acceptable. David's inability to escape what Giovanni will describe as the "stink of love" (141) embodied in the room proves that his shame is inescapable. This is not because of any inherent filth in the act of love; rather, the filth arises from the heteronormative social structure that America inhabits in this moment.

Furthermore, traditional masculine and feminine relationship roles are so heavily internalized that they disturb the foundations of an otherwise solid partnership. David reflects on the conflict between idealized gender roles and actuality:

In the beginning, because the motives which led me to Giovanni's room were so mixed, had so little to do with his hopes and desires, and were so deeply a part of my own desperation, I invented in myself a kind of pleasure in playing the housewife after Giovanni had gone to work. I threw out the paper, the bottles, the fantastic accumulation of trash... But I am not a housewife – men never can be housewives. And the pleasure was never real or deep, though Giovanni smiled his humble, grateful smile and told me in as many ways as he could find how wonderful it was to have me there, how I stood, with my love and my ingenuity, between him and the dark... I was in a terrible confusion. Sometimes I thought, but this *is* your life. Stop fighting it. Stop fighting. Or I thought, but I am happy. And he loves me. I am safe. Sometimes, when he was not near me, I thought, I will never let him touch me again. Then, when he touched me, I thought, it doesn't matter, it's only the body, it will soon be over. When it was over, I lay in the dark and listened to his breathing and dreamed of the touch of hands, of Giovanni's hands, or

¹⁸ Mae Henderson (2000) connects the room and its claustrophobia with David's sense of self-entrapment, which in turn connects to the self-reflexive images that bookend the novel (319-320).

anybody's hands, hands which would have the power to crush me and make me whole again. (88).

At first, he explains, David is able to convince himself that he is acting according to an acceptable level of social transgression. That is, although he is engaging in a homosexual relationship, "hopes and desires" are not involved – only lust and "desperation." This view aligns with that discussed in terms of the sailor as well. In this beginning stage, David is fine "playing the housewife," because he is still *playing*. He is performing a feminine role temporarily, rather than inhabiting it. When he enters deeper into the relationship, this performance becomes unacceptable as it becomes more permanent. David begins to say that "the pleasure was never real or deep," suggesting that his desire cannot be fulfilled. The disruption of masculine and feminine roles is so disturbing that it prevents satisfaction of desire. Social conditioning dictates that a real sexual relationship is between a man and a woman. Therefore, David cannot conceptualize what his role should be in relation to the other man. He attempts to displace the pleasure he feels with Giovanni onto a general desire for "anybody's hands," an image that recalls the only somewhat acceptable form of homosexual contact at this time. When he continues to say that this hands would have "the power to crush [him] and make [him] whole again," the implications of internalized social structure become much darker. Here, we see the profound consequences of queer shame. What disturbs David is the breakdown of the active and passive structures of sex, and his supposedly forced entry into the passive or feminine role. As Bersani suggests (and as I discussed earlier), the social structure to which David in fact adheres does not provide for the sense of power that arises from the *choice* to be submissive or take on the sexual "housewife" role. David subscribes to the notion that "to be penetrated is to abdicate power." Because he cannot accept any new conceptualization of masculine power, he continues to avoid confronting the stress within his own self. If David were to reject the "hygienics of

social power,” he perhaps would approach a degree of acceptance of his desire. Instead, the only way David can rid himself of the disgust he feels at both his relationship and his “housewife” role is to destroy himself and become realigned (although still inauthentically) with heteronormative strata.

When David returns to Giovanni’s room to end their affair, heteronormativity is again exposed as a source of tension, this time coming to a head and destroying any possibility of fulfillment within Giovanni’s room. Baldwin writes:

“You do not,” cried Giovanni, sitting up, “love anyone! You never have loved anyone, I am sure you never will! You love your purity, you love your mirror – you are just like a little virgin, you walk around with your hands in front of you as though you had some precious metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe *diamonds* between your legs! You will never give it to anybody, you will never let anybody *touch it* – man *or* woman. You want to be *clean*. You think you came here covered with soap and you think you will go out covered in soap – and you do not want to *stink*, not even for five minutes, in the meantime.... You want to leave Giovanni because he makes you stink. You want to despise Giovanni because he is not afraid of the stink of love. You want to *kill* him in the name of all your lying little moralities. And you – you are *immoral*. You are, by far, the most immoral man I have met in all my life. Look, *look* what you have done to me. Do you think you could have done this if I did not love you? *Is this* what you should do to love?”...

“Yes,” I said, wearily, “I can have a life with her.” I stood up. I was shaking. “What kind of life can we have in this room? – this filthy little room. What kind of life can two men have together, anyway? All this love you talk about – isn’t that just that you want to be made to feel strong? You want to go out and be the big laborer and bring home the money, and you want me to stay here and wash the dishes and cook the food and clean this miserable closet of a room and kiss you when you come in through that door and lie with you at night and be your little *girl*. That’s what you want. That’s what you mean and that’s *all* you mean when you say you love me. You say I want to kill *you*. What do you think you’ve been doing to me?” (141-2).

This passage continues to elaborate on the anxiety of disrupting heavily ingrained gender roles.

David’s question “What kind of life can two men have together anyway?” reveals the utter impossibility of fulfillment of desire. This is not the same inherent and unavoidable dissatisfaction that Hemingway explores. Rather, this novel presents through Giovanni and David’s failed relationship a condition of unsatisfiable desire that results almost completely from

social discrimination and intolerance. David attacks Giovanni for wanting David to be his “little girl.” This phrase demonstrates the degree of powerlessness and helplessness David feels in his homosexuality – he does not want to belong to any man, and he does not want to play any kind of feminine role (especially a sexual one).

Giovanni, though, breaks down David’s defense slightly.¹⁹ He insists that David’s inability to fulfill his desire through Giovanni comes from his sense of moral superiority. He loves his “purity” and he wants to be clean; he is afraid of the “stink of love.” Filth, again, is correlated with homosexuality. However, when the term is thrown at David in this way, it gains a more psychological connotation. Dirt is something that is out of place, that does not belong. David thinks he “came here covered in soap” – he is under the illusion that he arrived in France from a morally superior standpoint, on a pedestal, and he will leave without any stink of shame upon him. However, this is fundamentally impossible because of the constructions of homosexuality and belonging. David does not belong within the social order of masculinity – his masculinity is degraded based on his sexuality alone, and now he sees it as lesser still because of his feminine performance. Because he is, then, out of place in the social structure, he must be filthy. In these terms, masculinity and homosexuality are nearly mutually exclusive. This is why David ultimately chooses himself over Giovanni – he cannot handle the shame of not being a man. David insists that he *can* have a life with Hella, even though he does not love her. This is because it is not love that is important, but security in one’s masculinity. This argument suggests that satisfaction is indeed possible in this world, but only if one is straight.

Crucially, the novel does not endorse this view, but rather criticizes it. Yes, it allows for the possibility of satisfied desire for some people. However, David cannot be one of those people

¹⁹ My analysis here echoes Armengol (2012)’s treatment of this passage as an indictment of David’s attempt to “recover the privileges of whiteness and heterosexuality and, in so doing, preserve his manhood” (683).

because by marrying Hella, he would only be *performing* social conformity rather than authentically living it. Therefore, it follows that homosexuality is a mitigating desire for satisfaction. Another, less explicit factor is race. Just before he arrives in Giovanni's room for the last time, David has the following conversation with Hella:

“I’m beginning to see,” I said, carefully, “that kids like Giovanni are in a difficult position. This isn’t, you know, the land of opportunity – there’s no provision made for them. Giovanni’s poor, I mean he comes from poor folks, and there isn’t really much that he can do. And for what he *can* do, there’s terrific competition. And, at that, very little money, not enough for them to be able to think of building any kind of future. That’s why so many of them wander the streets and turn into gigolos and gangsters and God knows what.”

“It’s cold,” she said, “out here in the Old World.”

“Well, it’s pretty cold out there in the New One, too,” I said. “It’s cold out here, period.” (134).

David’s language presents Giovanni as coming from “poor folks,” describing him in similar terms as those used to patronize and demean black people. Constantly referring to “them” implies a morally and socially superior “us” from which the speaker preaches. This moral pedestal allows one to stereotype and generalize all “poor folks” as contemptible “gigolos and gangsters,” rather than addressing the real problems at the root of social stratification and class hatred. This passage in particular evokes racist rhetoric, which often casts aside blacks as having no future based on where they come from – rather than looking for an opportunity to help them reach that future. Additionally, the “land of opportunity” reference makes American-ness into a weapon of morality, revealing David as the very thing Giovanni accuses him of being: someone who “came here covered with soap and [thinks he] will go out covered in soap.”

Hella is susceptible to this moral superiority – she refers to France as the “Old World,” suggesting that it has moral distance to make up. Attributing coldness to the lack of opportunity that David presents offers up the possibility that there *is* somewhere with opportunity, where one

can escape from the cold. However, David says that the New World is just as cold. He knows that social discrimination exists everywhere, because he is on its receiving end. Hella, at this point, does not know this. She can only speak with pity, as someone who has not experienced poverty or racism or homophobia personally. David, though, is becoming cold himself. It is after this conversation that he breaks off his affair. It may be cold in the New World, but straight people in it can be slightly warmer.

When David acts based on the assumption that a heterosexual relationship is the road to desire, he destroys any chance he may have had at actual satisfaction. Because he is “unable to accept the contradictions of his identity, David finds that the cost of social acceptance is the inability to achieve personal fulfillment” (Henderson 322). When he chooses himself, Hella still leaves him; he cannot repress his homosexuality because it is a fundamental part of his identity,²⁰ and she leaves him. Moreover, after the breakup, Giovanni turns to self-destructive behavior. He becomes one of the stereotypical fairies who hang out under bridges, get into drugs, and run with the wrong crowd. Ultimately, Giovanni turns to murder, and is executed himself.

Hella’s embarrassment, Giovanni’s death, and David’s lifetime of guilt are all consequences of the rigid heteronormative social order. Because of the internalized shame this order creates, David constantly runs from his identity and from his true desires. All of these results constitute a criticism – a subtle but heartbreaking one – of the hetero-centric and white-centric culture that ignores its own culpability in the destruction of the socially oppressed. Thus, the impossibility of fulfilled desire is a consequence of a discriminatory culture, rather than an indiscriminate force of disillusionment. Unfulfillment is a condition relegated to those viewed as

²⁰ Armengol (2012) views David’s failure to “pass” as a reversal of blackface minstrelsy: he is not a white man wearing the black mask, but rather a metaphorically black man attempting to pass as white (685).

“lesser” in American society, sending them lower on not only the social order, but the psychological one.

CONCLUSION

Although Hemingway and Baldwin at first seem to be unlikely companions for literary analysis, a deeper gaze into their bodies of work reveals common threads of threatened identity and unsatisfiable desire. In many ways, *Giovanni's Room* serves as a queer, black rewriting of *The Sun Also Rises* – a rewriting that expands upon and enriches Hemingway's evaluation of unsatisfiable desire. My reading of these two texts as comingled and interactive is necessarily tempered by authorial differences in racial and sexual identity; nevertheless, reading Baldwin's novel as a response to the white American literary tradition embodied by Hemingway allows us to complicate the canonical approach to internalizations of identity, and the various facets of the self.

The Sun Also Rises examines masculinity as either authentic or inauthentic, with very little room in between. Authentic masculinity, Hemingway asserts, entails a resigned response to the dissatisfaction and disappointment of the modern condition. This attitude was certainly popular among Americans following World War I – a tumultuous period in which new forms of mechanized destruction illuminated the possibility of large-scale destruction of the very social order. In this sense, Hemingway addresses the anxieties of the modern condition. Jake Barnes's masculinity endures (perceived) threats from both the "pansy" romantic masculinity of Robert Cohn and the hypermasculinity of Pedro Romero. His inability to either avoid the inauthentic completely or to embody the authentic fully prevents him from satisfying his masculine desire and, by extension, by achieving any sort of postwar satisfaction. Hemingway illustrates masculine panic in the face of sexual and racial conflict, ultimately responding to the chaos and confusion of modernity by resigning himself to a new present inherently incapable of fulfilling desire.

Although James Baldwin also paints a picture of unsatisfiable desire, he does so in *Giovanni's Room* by approaching modernity through a more socially critical lens. Writing about the homosexual expatriate experience, Baldwin attributes unsatisfiable desire not to the modern condition itself, but to its social strictures. Even outside of America, David cannot escape the internalized shame of his homosexuality – a shame that arises not organically, but from the long history of indoctrination of heteronormativity within American culture. The lack of fulfillment in *Giovanni's Room* – and indeed the destructive results of an attempt to satisfy a socially-unacceptable form of desire – makes clear the impossibility of satisfaction for certain groups of Americans. Thus, Baldwin comes to a similar conclusion as Hemingway, about the impossibility of satisfaction in the modern world. However, his conclusion is explicitly correlated with the stigma of homosexuality, and implicitly (but powerfully) correlated with the stigma and shame of blackness. It is in this social commentary, I argue, that Baldwin develops Hemingway's disillusion with the modern world from a national disillusion to a cultural and social one, asserting the chasm between the white heterosexual experience and the black queer experience of masculinity and desire.

Each of these novels imagines Paris as a place in which these crises of identity can be addressed. What is it, exactly, about Paris that is so revealing of *American* identity? It is the social, cultural, and physical mobility; it is the endless flow of alcohol; it is the freedom to reinvent oneself outside of the preconceived qualities of "home." As I argue, however, that freedom is an illusion. The stress of re-identification can be paralyzing, as we see with both Jake Barnes and David. Each man is to some extent crippled by the pressure to reconcile the fissures between his self-image and his self-performance, between his internal and external identities. One would hope that in Paris, the City of Light, one could illuminate some of the dark portions

of his “self” so that he might look at them honestly. In terms of these novels, though, those darkneses are terrifying and impossible to face. Perhaps, with these additions to the modern literary spectrum, we can address psychological traumas of identity in more complex terms than masculine or feminine – perhaps we can chip away at the cracked foundations of heteronormativity and hypermasculinity inherent in American society. It certainly is pretty to think so.

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