

THE TROUBLED ECONOMIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF NINETEEN TWENTIES
AMERICAN FICTION

by

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Reaching the end of a substantial project such as this makes one ask a few questions: Did I achieve what I set out to accomplish? Have I made a significant contribution? Will anyone ever read this? Most of all, however, I think back to the beginning of all of this, and I wonder how I reached this point.

I don't mean the beginning of writing this dissertation. That's too easy. What I am interested in now is the point way back when I first entered college as a music composition major specializing in saxophone—back before the turn of the millennium. Now I perform a different type of composition, but only after switching schools, then switching majors, then switching majors again, and so on and so forth. When I finally completed my undergraduate degree I had settled on political science as my *métier*. Then I switched again. I wanted to pursue a graduate degree, but I was woefully unprepared and naïve about the process. Burned out on politics, I chose English as a refreshing shift to a more creative mode of thinking. It seemed fun. Three years later I earned an MA, and now five years into a doctoral program, I'm approaching another degree.

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It's strangely difficult to think back to that previous millennium when I started college and then to consider the path that has led me all the way to the end of a dissertation. It's even harder to conceive of this process without the critical support of all those mentioned above—and so many more.

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Introduction

Literary Contexts: History, Economy, and Politics of the Jazz Age

The Nineteen Twenties exists in vivid detail in the popular imagination of an American audience. Some aspects of the decade persist as easily identifiable cultural icons: Babe Ruth, flappers, Louis Armstrong, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Al Capone, bootleggers, and Charles A. Lindbergh to name just a few. Even through the seedy underbelly of the Twenties—the golden age of organized crime and an ironic alcoholic response to national prohibition—a fervent exuberance of glamour still informs contemporary American perceptions of the decade. And, in reality, such colorful conceptions of the Jazz Age are largely correct. However, common trepidations persisted throughout the era often neglected today when considering the culture of the time.

D. Clayton Brown writes of the selfish nature of the decade and the ensuing effects on national progress: “Known as the Age of Disillusionment, the 1920s brought a feeling of apathy toward foreign affairs as Americans focused on the glitz and glamour of the Jazz Age. Consumerism and self-satisfaction overpowered the traditional values of sacrifice and mission. Reform became unpopular and the idea of expending energy, time, and resources for the sake of other peoples had little support” (2). The identification of “consumerism” as a key component to Twenties culture can be seen in numerous historical studies. Geoffrey Perrett concisely summarizes the darkly looming conditions of consumerism that reached an unstable volubility in this decade:

The boosterism, which to us seems so strident and naïve; the domination of the hard sell in all forms of advertising; the religious

fervor of businessmen's conclaves; the feverish worship of business success; we may smile at it now, or turn away in disgust. But somewhere in those murky recesses in the human mind where no sensible historian would dream of going, I think that millions of people heard the ice cracking. They responded in different ways, as people always will. Some took to the hills to become self-sufficient. Others did nothing. For the rest, it was spend, spend, spend. Around 1900, Americans had discovered mass production. Around 1910 they discovered mass distribution. Around 1920 they discovered mass finance. (353)

The focus on spending during this period directed nearly every phase of life. The popularization of the phonograph increased widespread distribution of recorded music and propelled New Orleans jazz music into the homes of Americans throughout the country (Britten and Mathless 63). Along with the development of musical technologies came new wealth. George Gershwin was the personification of success through his symphonic style of jazz. However, according to Britten and Mathless, "if Americans adored George Gershwin, they went absolutely (and inexplicably) mad for Paul Whiteman and his orchestra. A young violinist from Denver, Colorado, Whiteman came East in 1920 and by 1922 he could command \$25,000 for a six-night engagement, an enormous sum at the time and one that was unmatched for decades" (69).

America's pastime, baseball, also transformed into big business. The rules of economy, however, began to bleed into the rules of the game. Major League Baseball soon realized that increased batting averages and harder hit balls led to both more home runs and generally higher scoring games. In response, balls were manufactured to carry more zip, and spitballs were

disallowed. The casual baseball fan was thrilled—and Major League teams reaped the benefits of both soaring attendance and record profits during the Twenties (Perrett 209).

Money became the new national religion. The audacious and socially conscious voices of the war era that had resonated so successfully with the American people were no longer relevant. David J. Goldberg explains that “great orators all, [Woodrow] Wilson, [William Jennings] Bryan, [Robert] La Follette, and [Eugene] Debs represented different strains of American reform and radicalism. But they had shared an optimism, idealism, and naiveté poorly suited for the more materialistic world of postwar America (65).

Even roles within domestic settings were susceptible to the influence of consumerism. Perrett writes that “under the modern factory system, within a generation wives ceased to be homemakers and became mere purchasers of manufactured goods and processed foods” (348-49). Women, themselves, were commodified through the proliferation of prostitution. While sexual services had always been for sale in the United States, it was (similar to prohibition of alcohol) the spread of anti-prostitution laws that popularized the practice in lower-class and urban areas of the country (Perrett 154).

The relevance of advertising as an industry became abundantly clear during the Twenties, as “the mass-marketing revolution broke down the lingering vestiges of regional merchandising, making it possible to advertise national brands in national magazines—this with the newly added impact of full-color printing” (Britten and Mathless 84). Innovations in advertising—some of which employing questionable ethics—sprang forth as a result of both the consumer culture and the expansion of business: “The Twenties saw the rapid rise of the paid testimonial, in which famous people happily lied for money to mislead the credulous. It was the Twenties, too, that saw the phony white-coated doctors and dentists offering ‘medical’ advice to millions. People

were encouraged to brush their teeth with toothpastes heavily laced with potassium chlorate, eight grams of which would kill a human being” (Perrett 351). It is no wonder that in 1925 President Calvin Coolidge proudly announced that ““the business of America is business”” (qtd. in Britten and Mathless).

However, popular economic attitudes did fluctuate around this time period. In the Nineteen Teens, prior to American involvement in World War I, progressivism was widespread and encouraged checks against the spread of unfettered capitalism. The movement occurred largely in response to the advents of industrialization in the late Nineteenth century (Goldberg 1). The war did eventually affect American lives, though, and many of the social concerns and altruistic motivations of progressivism were quickly forgotten. To some extent progressivism experienced a resurgence in the early part of the decade since “public attention focused on the severe postwar depression, which deepened throughout 1921 and only lessened somewhat in 1922” (Goldberg 50), casting a baleful eye at an underperforming business world.

The spirits of capitalism were then buoyed in the middle of the decade by rampant consumer faith and a national addiction to spending. Trepidations still persisted on Wall Street, but a bullish new attitude toward American economy and faith in the country’s financial institutions stirred both governmental and consumer confidence. Niall Palmer writes that “Calvin Coolidge’s first priority, on succeeding to the presidency, was to calm the nerves of the American public and Wall Street” (96).

One event toward the middle of the Twenties that showcased some of the widespread issues that affected the nation was the “1924 Democratic convention, when the ethnic, social, and cultural tensions roiling the nation came to the surface” (Goldberg 60). Some of the opposing voices—just within the Democratic Party—that were heard during this time were

Catholics and Protestants, prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists, Ku Klux Klan members and racial reformers, South and North (Goldberg 61). The volatility and incongruence within this single political party was indicative of an uneasy nation. Despite the enthusiastic consumer confidence that many assumed would bolster the economy, the aforementioned “ice cracking” (Perrett) that would eventually lead, by the decade’s end, to the Great Depression was present all around. In fact, unrestrained spending and overconfidence in Wall Street is what essentially produced dangerous market instability:

The new “bull market” was unlike anything which experienced brokers and bankers had witnessed before. In the period 1925-7, stock prices had risen to reflect corporate growth and rising profits. By the summer of 1928, this area of growth had leveled out and, in some cases, had slipped slightly, but stock market prices failed to adjust accordingly. Wall Street was no longer in touch with, or was choosing to disregard, economic indicators which suggested the need for restraint. Speculators, seeking quick and effortless profits, bought and sold with increasing rapidity, pushing prices still higher. Amateur investors also threw caution to the winds after hearing or reading tales of lucky share-buyers who had seen the value of their investments double or triple overnight. (Palmer 163)

However, there were those who had already observed the “ice cracking.” Regarding the culture of the Twenties, Michael E. Parrish notes that “American intellectuals and artists . . . distrusted the institutions of mature capitalism and the nation’s dominant commercial culture” (183-84). Specifically, American Modernist writers of the Twenties recognized the ubiquity of

consumerism, materialism, and the pursuit of wealth during this period and the effects of these issues on nearly all areas of life. When Goldberg writes of “a postwar world of Bolsheviks, Babbitts, and businessmen” (49)—it is the Modernist American writers constructing the fictional “Babbitts.”

Some definition of Modernism is necessary in order to proceed with the role of writers during this decade. Lionel Trilling describes modern literature as a form of *exposé* that uncovers the unmentionable questions and boldly thrusts them in the direction of polite society (8). In general, this contention is helpful, but it does not truly address Modernism as a literary force in the Twenties. Tyrus Miller contends that “modernism is the liberation of formal innovation; the destruction of tradition; the renewal of decadent conventions or habit-encrusted perceptions; the depersonalization of art; the radical subjectivization of art. And so on” (4). While this explanation is largely beneficial, it is also myopic in its treatment. Writers of this literary period do indeed shirk Victorian modes of art and culture, and works of Modernism vaguely react against the dehumanizing effects of the Second Industrial Revolution. Such literature moves forward and advocates progress in regard to many stale social norms, including traditional rules for sexuality, race, family, and gender. What Miller omits, however, is the aspect of Modernism that is as concerned with the *avant-garde* in style, structure, and subject matter as it is attracted to the pre-modern for its values. Modernism simultaneously looks toward the future while wistfully glancing in the rearview mirror for guidance.

This is where Modernism’s consistency begins to break down. Ultimately, this literary period is highly resistant to strict ideological parameters. Attempts to designate Modernism’s political allegiance inevitably wither and fail on account of limitless examples (in either

ideological direction) of both authors and texts to the contrary. Malcolm Bradbury attempts to sort out the complexities of Twenties Modernism as follows:

The American nineteen twenties are a paradoxical decade; and part of that paradox is that a decade often defined as one of the most conservative in American history, an era of material and business expansion, was also one of the most remarkable periods of American literary experiment, of radical creative exploration and development, and (while extending much that had gone before) the great founding phase of modern American writing. . . . The nineteen twenties can in fact be neatly separated as a period of illusion between two severe political realities—the end of the First World War, which tarnished liberal idealism and was followed by the Versailles Treaty, which more or less discredited it; and the Wall Street Crash of 1929, which in turn discredited the entire social and political action of the “Jazz Age.”

(11-12)

But, the attitudes of Modernism cannot neatly be conflated to match the political ideologies of the United States during the Twenties, which already includes wholly irreconcilable social prescriptions. Authors of the time are reacting to the inescapable surrounding world of materialism, excessive spending, and zealous consumerism. Thus, many of their texts exhibit attitudes toward fiscal policy that seek to either regulate or chastise the cult of money that had overtaken popular American culture. In this regard, Modernism promotes a left-leaning ideology. However, the bleak moral despair that is present in many of the decade’s most prominent texts (such as Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The*

Great Gatsby, and Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*) results in an observable, and hopeless, pursuit of traditional values as a grounding of character. So, it would be insufficient to broadly paint Modernism as progressive. Similarly, it is hardly conservative.

Observable through a careful sampling of important American fiction of the Twenties is a keen awareness of the economic systems that shape and direct this unique historical period. It is not my objective to argue that all Modernist texts—or all of the works selected here even—fit cleanly within the moniker of some leftist economic philosophy. Such a statement suggests an ideological imperative of authorial intent that is not necessary for the purposes of this discussion. Additionally, two problematic questions emerge when attempting to categorically declare the political motivations of a literary period: First, how can any true artistic period confine itself to a single ideological voice? Second, do authors merely construct texts for explicitly pragmatic purposes that ultimately produce little more than high-functioning propaganda? Regarding the first inquiry, white, bourgeoisie writers can hardly be assumed to necessarily coalesce with the ideological intentions of those from other communities. They are, in a sense, united principally by their inability to effect change. Houston A. Baker writes that white American and British Modernists along with personae of the Harlem Renaissance share “a too optimistic faith in the potential of art” (92).

What I do claim, however, is that the texts contained herein at least elicit an acute economic consciousness through a variety of forms. Furthermore, they exhibit deeply troubled attitudes toward the overarching contemporary systems of wealth, materialism, occupation, consumerism, spending, commodification, and other inquiries into financial paradigms. In essence, they predict and comment upon the “ice cracking” that Perrett discusses above.

The ensuing chapters that follow are divided into four literary “regions” that are preceded by a discussion of the origins of Modernism located in the Nineteenth Century. The term “region” is inexact as either a geographic delineation or a marker of artistic communities. The importance of region to this discussion, however, is to establish a composite picture of Twenties American fiction. By closely examining a sampling of representative texts by major authors along regional lines, the unique contexts of history, sociology, and culture that differ wildly across the vast expanse of the United States can be viewed through independent lenses. The fragmentation that so often characterizes Modernism is relevant among the regions of the United States. While the texts of each region are loosely cohesive in their apparent uneasy treatment of financial issues, the particular angles with which they address economic concerns differ significantly—and are based, in part, on the precise circumstances of the region.

The selection of authors along regional lines is an inexact process that requires some explanation. Fundamentally, my aim is to situate authors among their contemporary writers with whom they are most likely to have a literary dialogue. Some selections are obvious and compel little justification. For example, both William Faulkner’s textual and biographical associations with the South are so firmly established that no competing region exists to claim him. On the other hand, expatriate writers Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald are in some ways equally linked with the Midwest. In such instances I take into consideration the subject matter of each author, intertextuality, and residence. Ultimately, such decisions are guided by asking to what region the author was most adjoined during the Twenties. Another stumbling block occurs through Gwendolyn Bennett and Claude McKay, who are categorized here as Harlem Renaissance writers, while both lived extensively in Paris during the Twenties. Additionally, McKay’s status as a native Jamaican further destabilizes his regional affiliation. In this situation,

my logic is to associate them with the other authors with whom they are most often critically grouped.

Other problems exist when defining the parameters of both time and space. The Midwest region presents a significant dilemma when determining the physical boundaries of the area. In American culture, “Midwest” can refer to just a few breadbasket states that are largely rural and exist outside of the influence of large urban centers’ socioeconomic structures. Or, “Midwest” can broadly label every part of the country that is situated between the two coasts—with the exception of New England and the South. I defer to the second and more expansive definition in order to avoid cumbersome biographical histories that trace exact movements by writers throughout the country.

The second issue concerns the timeline of the decade. While the most straightforward interpretation of Twenties fiction would include only those texts that were actually published during the decade, I include one notable exception. Erskine Caldwell’s *Poor Fool* was in fact published in 1930, yet I believe its inclusion in this study is purposeful. As an example of Caldwell’s early work during the Twenties, *Poor Fool* helps illuminate and contextualize his first novel, *The Bastard* (1929). As a pair, the two texts present such a profound departure from the author’s later and more widely read works, that it is helpful to read them vaguely as Caldwell’s “Twenties” novels.

Other methods of chronologically interpreting the decade according to historical markers are plausible and were duly considered. For instance, a compelling argument could be made that a literary study should focus solely on the “Jazz Age” phase of the decade and then strictly terminate with Black Tuesday in October of 1929. Going a step further, one could regard the Armistice in 1918 as an unofficial commencement of the decade since it signifies the onset of a

postwar America. Another possible historical rendering that could delineate the chronological timeline of the decade is Prohibition, which would effectively expand the era from 1920-1933.

However, to arrange a literary study in accordance with a single corresponding historical event, though interesting in some regards, would be presupposing the influential cultural factors operating beneath the production of these texts. Instead, my objective is to espouse an argument concerning the economic consciousness of American fiction during this time in relation to the complex and multitudinous factors present in this fascinating and irreducible decade. To initially grant special status to a particular historical event would constitute a different project altogether.

The first chapter steps back into the Nineteenth Century in order to explore some of the literary precursors to the Modernist fiction of the early Twentieth Century. The purpose of this chapter is to present a brief literary history and to trace the evolution of American fiction from the mid-Nineteenth Century up through Modernism. While the era of Modernism is intrinsically linked with the national and worldwide historical events of the early Twentieth Century, one can locate particular seeds of Modernist thought in the Nineteenth Century fiction of such writers as Herman Melville and Kate Chopin. Specifically, I examine Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," "Poor Man's Pudding, Rich Man's Crumbs," and "The Two Temples" in addition to Chopin's *The Awakening*. These writings do not necessarily reflect the broad scope of true Modernist fiction, but they do begin to question the role of the individual as an employee within an American culture that is beginning to transition away from a focus on sole laborers or artisans in favor of new modes of business. Through these readings, an early pattern begins to emerge, which is either not fully considered or not entirely understood by the authors. Regardless, this nameless pattern recognizes the concerns and, at times, plight of the individual worker, eschewing grander notions of a vague promise of the American Dream. These texts appear to at

least suggest an awareness of aggressive capitalist expansion, outdated notions of unregulated working conditions, and the threat of dehumanization to the American laborer.

Perhaps in contrast with their Twentieth Century counterparts, Melville and Chopin present these observations with an air of objectivity. That is not to insinuate that they have no reasoned opinions or vested interest in such subjects, but they appear even less willing to fully commit to an ideological stance than their Modernist counterparts. However, the struggles of their characters are tangibly visible and achingly clear. These toils not only reappear but grow in the fiction of a few decades later, suggesting that the visions of these earlier authors have either become more tangible or, at least, have seeped into the literary consciousness of their later colleagues.

The next chapter submits the first of four sections each highlighting a unique American region. This chapter concentrates on fiction of the American South during the Twenties by closely examining a sampling of selected works. Central to this chapter will be Erskine Caldwell's two early novels, *The Bastard* and *Poor Fool*, as well as William Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* and *The Sound and the Fury*. While these early novels by Caldwell are relatively obscure, this is advantageous when considering them in balance with *The Sound and the Fury*, a major literary achievement.

For the next chapter I return the focus squarely toward the heart of American culture by examining the Midwest. This region offers much of the American territory that was rapidly developing—both in terms of economics and population—in the early Twentieth Century. Many of the emerging urban centers that richly personify the pulse of early Twentieth Century business culture and the realities of factory life are included within this space: Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and numerous medium sized cities.

The major texts discuss in this chapter are Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* and Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*. These novels, in various ways, examine some of the most important moments of a nation in the midst of sculpting a new economic identity during a period of transition. They cover the aspirations of upward economic mobility and the struggles and costs in bringing such goals to fruition. These novels closely consider both a transition from frontier land to modern life as well as the emergence of a middle-class, suburban United States. I offer these two texts in relation to one another and seek to conceptualize Cather's lesser known novel through a unique reading that closely associates much of the Geoffrey St. Peter's discontent in *The Professor's House* to the melancholy of George Babbitt that becomes apparent in Lewis's highly influential work.

After traversing from the South and then to the geographic center of the nation, the fourth chapter travels further northbound to New York City's Harlem. In contrast to the previous two chapters, this investigation will include writers within a much closer physical proximity to one another, and in some regards this region elicits a more unified voice with common objectives. From another perspective, however, no cohesive voice emerges. Within those seemingly shared objectives are diverse artistic goals, ideologies, and social backgrounds that resist easy categorization. Even internalized within single characters are dualities and conflicted notions of self, citizenship, and purpose.

The texts I incorporate into this discussion are Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*, and Gwendolyn Bennett's "Wedding Day." As with other regions of the country, Harlem fiction writers of the Twenties present vague interrogations of socioeconomic systems. However, they plant the intellectual seeds that later blossom into, at times, unapologetic endorsements of either socialism, wholesale economic change, or other forms of

radicalism in the Nineteen Thirties. Also, David A. Shannon notes that the Thirties' "mood of democratic equality also served to give [African Americans] a boost in [the] long struggle for equality and against discrimination" (193). Thus, the economic effects of the Great Depression had at least some bearing on racial and social policy. This firm entanglement of race and economy is detectable even in Renaissance texts of the Twenties—prior to the financial collapse. Traditionalism is also visible in the works above, as Renaissance writers strive to establish their position amongst the transatlantic Modernism of their contemporaries.

While William Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* elicits his version of a postwar Lost Generation, Ernest Hemingway offers the most prolific rendition of this historical moment through *The Sun Also Rises*. Overall, the final chapter extends outward beyond the political boundaries of the United States and examines expatriate writing—focusing essentially on the Parisian intellectual circle that includes Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Besides *The Sun Also Rises*, I also inspect Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and "Winter Dreams." Although no sufficient method is possible for distilling the entire expanse of American expatriate art during the Twenties—which was spread throughout numerous major cities of Europe and beyond—the selected texts construct a cornerstone of some of the most prominent American fiction produced abroad during this era. If nothing else, they are at least apt examples of the works of these two respective authors. This chapter is critical in that it perhaps offers the most objective overview of a cultural moment in American history based upon the geographic distance separating the authors from the United States. The settings of the above texts cover a diverse territory: Paris, Spain, New York, Minnesota, and others. However, the two authors share both a literary dialogue and rivalry that is likely illuminated by their personal contact with one another in Paris. Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's literary influences during this period embody associations with artists of a variety of

nationalities along with a European residence that lingers in the background of their production of the above works. Regardless, they remain Americans and are thusly able to comment upon their native country with a degree of distance and comparative scrutiny.

The intertextuality that occurs internally within each chapter is certainly not indicative of a paucity of literary dialogues amongst the various regions. On the contrary, many implicit relationships persist across vast geographic designations. For instance, I expound upon the relationship between Gwendolyn Bennett's Paul Watson ("Wedding Day") and characterizations present in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* in Chapter Four. However, what are more interesting, perhaps, are the unmistakable similarities between McKay's Jake Brown and Hemingway's Jake Barnes that inherently lurk beneath reading of these texts. On a related note, an astute reader of Twentieth Century American fiction will most likely conceive of numerous literary associations that broadcast forward and unite these texts with future works. The Midwestern novels of Cather and Lewis, for example, anticipate the later Postmodern works, in the latter half of the century, of Indiana native Kurt Vonnegut—in so much as they comment upon the patchwork of past, present, and future renderings of the region.

In addition to establishing my central claim—that American fiction of the Twenties elicits a fundamentally anxious economic consciousness as exhibited in texts from diverse national regions—I also hope to address and facilitate discussion of the following questions: Is the literature of the Twenties as anomalous as the decade itself? Are the different literary regions discussed herein proof of a single American Modernism, or do they only serve to reinforce a fragmented national identity? Does a disillusioned economic cognizance amongst Twenties fiction suggest any ideological positioning of Modernism as a whole? What might a collective

American literary consciousness during the Twenties mean for the broader study of Twentieth Century American literature?

Chapter 1

Portrayals of Nineteenth Century Economic Inquiry: “Working” Toward the Modern

Characterized as Transcendentalism, the Baroque period, Realism, Naturalism, American Renaissance and any other number of labels, Nineteenth Century literature of the United States defies easy categorization. Omitted from the above list is “Modernism,” though the personal lives and motivations of Nineteenth Century American authors often cast them as radical eccentrics who were ready to embrace the dawning of the 1900s. Kate Chopin biographer Emily Toth reports how the daughters of Phanor and Camilla Breazeale, who were close friends of the visiting author, later recalled their first impression of this mysterious guest:

Carmen and the other girls were filled with “awe and wonderment” at the sight of Kate Chopin—whose skirt was either short or riding up, for her legs were showing and her foot was swinging jauntily in the air. Her hair was dark and bobbed, ear-length, Carmen remembered.

(323)

This depiction from 1898—shortly before the publication of *The Awakening*—presents the 48-year-old author as what can best be termed a flapper. However, this expression would not be in vogue for another two decades, and Chopin was cast as an improper woman whom a young girl should not emulate (Toth 323).

Personally, Kate Chopin was ahead of her time, and her texts confirm this assertion. Her most celebrated work, *The Awakening*, engages such topics as infidelity, women’s suffrage, gambling, and suicide. While the author espouses no particular stance regarding the most scandalous of the issues above—the marital infidelity of a woman—her mere consideration of the subject without unremitting castigation of its participants was damaging enough to the

novel's reputation. Reviews of the *The Awakening* in the months after its publication widely chastised the book and its author for both permitting the lead female character's behavior and then not rebuking her for her actions. Crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the book, however, is that Edna Pontellier's "awakening" hinges squarely on her financial independence. The novel does involve such topical issues as the women's suffrage movement, and a form of late Nineteenth-Century feminism is prominent in the text. Regardless, the way in which Edna contextualizes her liberation as, at least largely, economic—becoming acutely cognizant of her husband's ownership of the property that surrounds her—hints of the proletarian works of the early Twentieth Century. Thus, Chopin and her controversial novel offer a unique example of the strides toward Modernism that existed late in the Nineteenth Century during a period of American literature that is predominantly Realist. *The Awakening* may still embody Realism more than any other artistic movement, but Edna Pontellier seems to be the Lady Brett Ashley of the late Nineteenth Century.¹

It would be a mistake to envision Chopin's turn-of-the-century fiction as the only Nineteenth Century movement toward Modernism. On the contrary, numerous American writers clearly grapple with issues such as humanity's role in an industrializing world, new conceptions of gender, and progressive approaches to labor. For instance, Walt Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" directly interrogates the supplanting of human wonderment by the advent of scientific progress and technology. Relating to fiction, Herman Melville's tales also exhibit a keen foresight into the future concepts of Modernism. This chapter will closely examine three such short stories of Melville: "Bartleby, the Scrivener," "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," and "The Two Temples." These pieces have each been selected for

the dualities they present regarding progressive concepts of work. Concerning the binary of employer and worker, Marx and Engels write the following:

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (9)

If not “antagonisms,” at the very least awkward misunderstandings between Marx’s “Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” plainly exist within each of these three stories. While I do not contend that Melville’s texts are Marxist in nature, they do include some of the discussions that Socialist theorists of the Twentieth Century would later pursue more aggressively. Furthermore, Kate Chopin, who “had tried to follow the literary advice and literary examples of others and had learned that such dutiful efforts led only to imaginative stagnation” (Showalter 9), functions in concert with Herman Melville, for the purposes of this chapter, to unearth the Nineteenth Century beginnings of American Modernism and new concepts of labor.

The full title to “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street” must not be ignored. The first important aspect to note is that the proper name, “Bartleby,” precedes the profession. Also, Melville assigns the term “Scrivener” rather than “law-copyist,” which the narrator uses synonymously with the former label. Finally, the subtitle of the tale declares this to be “A Story of Wall-Street.”

The fact that Bartleby’s name has overtaken his profession and receives top billing suggests his humanization. While he cannot escape the designation of his employment, he has at least superseded it. Furthermore, he retains his actual proper name throughout the story, and this

point is reflected in the title. The narrator's other three employees are named Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut. Although the workers, not their employer, allegedly distributed the monikers amongst them, one cannot help feeling like they are the names of pets rather than human beings. Bartleby resists this and retains his proper name. He becomes more known by his subversive refrain, "I would prefer not to," which he repeats throughout the story, than any identifiable aspect of his work that he does perform. Each of the other three employees enjoys a nickname that relates to some observable condition or habit during the workplace. Turkey, an Englishman of nearly sixty, looks like a Turkey when he returns to work after lunch each day (15). Nippers is an agitated and nervous twenty-five-year-old (16). Ginger Nut, a twelve year old boy, was so named for fetching Ginger Nut cakes for the others (18). Bartleby, on the other hand, earns no such demeaning label because the only identity he allows himself to accrue in the office is that of his polite refusal to perform certain tasks. In other words, Bartleby does not permit the peculiarities of his workday performance to grant him an identity. Instead, he retains the exact name with which he originally arrived at the law office and nothing more.

Another relevant detail within the title is the choice of diction. The narrator equally employs the terms "scrivener" and "copyist" (or sometimes "law-copyist"), but "scrivener" is the chosen nomenclature in the title. This term implies far more than merely transcribing the written words of his employer—a fairly mindless and menial task. Instead, "scrivener" can as easily imply "writer" or even "author." This interpretation of the title lends support for the theory that Bartleby possesses some degree of agency in the story. If he is not only a working-class servant but actually the author, in a sense, of the story, then Bartleby has transcended his position and become the arbiter of his own conditions.

A third element of importance included in the title is the reference to Wall Street. This addition as a subtitle appears, at first, unnecessary. Also, the setting of the office on Wall Street seems irrelevant in the story. Thus, the inclusion of this seemingly inconsequential detail in the title suggests a commentary on the financial aspects of the story. Robert Tally maintains that the unities of the setting are highly purposeful:

Melville pointedly subtitles it “A Story of Wall Street.” That is, the tale is intended to describe a place and events proper to that place.

Wall Street, in 1852 as now, is itself a synecdochic figure for a global system of high finance, for international markets and flows of currencies for stocks and bonds—and in the twenty-first century, perhaps infamously, for credit default swaps and exotic financial derivatives. (126)

If Wall Street is to be termed a “synecdochic figure” on the scale that it is today, then in the broadest sense, Melville’s subtitle indicates that this is a tale about money. Barbara Foley contends that historical mid-Nineteenth Century labor strife exists as an obvious background to the story: “Any New York City resident aware of current political debates—as Melville certainly was—could not have been oblivious to the omnipresent language of class polarization” (91). Perhaps mirroring the workers’ strikes and protests of the 1840s, *Bartleby* represents the contemporary sentiments of unrest amongst working-class employees—and Wall Street provides the perfect setting to highlight this socioeconomic turmoil. The 1830s and 1840s marked a time of depression following a stock market crash in 1837, but it also was a time of both industrial and structural development (Gordon 71-72). Central to the cosmetic and symbolic alterations of Wall Street was the Trinity Church, which the narrator attempts to attend. John Steele Gordon

writes that “consecrated in 1846, just as the Mexican War was finally bringing an end to the depression, Trinity Church—a godly enterprise that also happens to be extremely rich—has been the somewhat ironic symbol of Wall Street ever since” (72). Epitomizing the prime financial district of the nation, Trinity Church’s inclusion in this story represents the fluctuating economy of this period and the mass launching of new industrial endeavors.

Although Bartleby may, in Melville’s eyes, epitomize some sort of peaceful protest against the abuse or dehumanization of laborers, his employer demonstrates compassion and actually becomes his only advocate throughout the story. Tally similarly argues that “there can be little doubt of the lawyer’s overall affability, good nature, and genuine concern for his employees” (127). Bartleby’s initial refusals to participate in his employer’s prescribed tasks all involve the monotonous examining of copies to verify accuracy. Though presumably tedious, the work involved is not particularly cruel or demeaning, and it seems that the employer, himself, often participates in the work as well. Also, his reactions to Bartleby reveal more awe and understanding than vindictiveness:

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him. (21)

The final statement, “I began to reason with him,” indicates not only compassion but respect since he is willing to intellectually engage his employee. Ultimately, the dilemma for the narrator throughout much of the tale is the question of how to balance Bartleby’s wishes to remain inert with the public scorn and inconvenience of having a useless man exist within his

office. Unwilling to involve the police and see Bartleby arrested merely for his quiet and polite refusal to relinquish a small corner of a law office, the narrator acquiesces to the bizarre circumstance and moves his entire business to another location:

Then something severe, something unusual must be done. What! surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done?—a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will *not* be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him *as* a vagrant. That is too absurd. (38)

Clearly, Bartleby's employer is not cast as some cruel, oppressive force. In fact, it is his respect that essentially creates the dilemma. This progressive attitude toward his unusual employee holds true toward the end when he visits Bartleby in "the Tombs" (42)—a nickname for New York's prison. He is certainly the only visitor for Bartleby, and he evinces genuine concern for the man, even paying Mr. Cutlets, "the grub-man" (43), to serve Bartleby superior meals.

Bartleby, of course, refuses these and any other meals within the prison, which sharply resembles the behavior of a confined social agitator. If Bartleby is seen as a symbol of proletarian protest, then it is obvious that he will not accept food that bourgeois associations have bought him. The uncomprehending of this fact is, perhaps, the biggest strike against the narrator, who feels for the man but never truly understands his plight. Cesare Casarino contends that "Bartleby, the Scrivener," and other Melville stories, "investigate blockages of communication, representational impasses, narrative conundrums" (56). This statement rings especially true in this tale, as the voice of the title character speaks chiefly through silence and inaction that his

employer cannot decode. Rather than acknowledge some profound mission within Bartleby, the narrator neatly assumes him to be ““a little deranged”” (44). The narrator is compassionate without entirely understanding, which means he harbors no personal ill-will toward Bartleby or any other representatives of the working-class. However, his final inability to provide comfort or relief to his employee coupled with his misunderstanding of Bartleby’s motivations offers a systemic indictment of mid-Nineteenth Century labor. Melville inserts an odd allusion toward the end of the text that confirms the fiscal consciousness of the story. Mr. Cutlets tells the narrator ““I thought that friend of yours was a gentleman forger”” (44), and he then asks him if he knows ““Monroe Edwards”” (44). Foley writes that Edwards “became something of a criminal folk hero [who] died in prison in 1847” (89). By including a well-known and respected forger—“a gentleman”—and equating him with Bartleby, Melville likens his title-character’s dealings to an economically subversive action.

Despite the narrator’s good intentions, he is unable to process Bartleby’s plight and cannot alleviate his former employee’s despair. This upper-class lack of comprehension, regarding the lower classes, along with misguided gestures toward charity, is even more apparent in Melville’s “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs.” The first section of this story, “Poor Man’s Pudding,” begins with a wealthy man named Blandmour extolling the charity that nature provides for little or no charge to even the poorest individuals. Blandmour, speaking to the narrator, proceeds through a veritable catalog of “poor man’s” imitations that, he contends, will suffice in place of the actual products. In essence, this conversation between Blandmour and the skeptical narrator represents a justification for the conditions of the disadvantaged segments of society. Blandmour’s argument appears to imply that if nature provides charity, then the wealthy should feel no responsibility to do so.

The final item on his list is “Poor Man’s Pudding,” which Blandmour asks his companion to try as an impromptu guest at the Coulter house “under the innocent pretense of craving a pedestrian’s rest and refreshment for an hour or two” (291). However, immediately upon entrance into the Coulter house it becomes obvious to the narrator that the struggles of the poor are not easily alleviated by resourceful manipulations of nature’s gifts. The house is poorly heated, which demonstrates a cruel irony since Coulter is, at that exact moment, working as a logger for Squire Teamster but only allowed to gather undesirable sticks for his own fire:

I thanked her; and sat rubbing my hands before the ineffectual low fire, and—unobservedly as I could—glancing now and then about the room, while the good woman, throwing on more sticks, said she was sorry the room was no warmer. Something more she said, too—not repiningly, however—of the fuel, as old and damp; picked-up sticks in Squire Teamster’s forest, where her husband was chopping the sappy logs of the living tree for the Squire’s fires. It needed not her remark, whatever it was, to convince me of the inferior quality of the sticks.

(292)

The narrator goes on to conclude that Blandmour would have advertised the undesirable sticks as “‘Poor Man’s Matches,’ or ‘Poor Man’s Tinder’” (292).

Next, Mrs. Coulter offers the much anticipated “Poor Man’s Pudding,” which Blandmour believes will nullify any concerns the narrator has for the condition of the poor. The class alienation between Mrs. Coulter and her sympathetic, yet still naïve, visitor emerges as he rudely announces “‘Ah, what they call “Poor Man’s Pudding,” I suppose you mean’” (292) when she describes the meal. She rebukes him for his use of the term. At this point, Mr. Coulter appears

at the door, and he is in a rush to quickly eat his meal and return to work. Coulter explains that their pork, a primary component to the meal, is his employer's unwanted leftovers from the previous year. The narrator is so disgusted by the appearance and smell of the pork that, despite the possible insult of his refusal, he cannot bear to taste it. The pudding is no more palatable: "Bitter and mouldy is the 'Poor Man's Pudding,' groaned I to myself, half choked with but one little mouthful of it, which would hardly go down" (295).

Thus, the comprehension by the wealthy of the struggles of the poor is grossly insufficient in this section of the story. Melville presents an opposition between "the body's real needs [and] the rhetoric of charity, sacrifice, romanticism, or noblesse oblige" (Davis 68). Blandmour's contention that nature will provide all the ingredients for comfortable survival now appears either uninformed or condescending. Furthermore, the Squire's meager gifts of only the most heinous and inedible meat reveals a nearly inhumane regard for his employee. Even Coulter's profession as a logger presents an inequity of economic systems, according to Melville, since his diligent labor apparently only serves the wealth of his employer and does not even result in the gift of proper kindling for the worker. In fact, Melville becomes overtly ideological at the end of this section through his conclusion, via the narrator, that "those peculiar social sensibilities nourished by our own peculiar political principles, while they enhance the true dignity of a prosperous American, do but minister to the added wretchedness of the unfortunate; first by prohibiting their acceptance of what little random relief charity may offer" (296). Essentially, the American poor can expect little in the way of charity, and they have been socially conditioned to refuse what little relief does come their way.

In the second phase of the story, "Rich Man's Crumbs," the narrator has traveled abroad to London in 1814 just as the royalty of nearly every European nation had gathered in Great

Britain to celebrate the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. Melville opens the section by explaining this historical context, which serves as an obvious nod to another form of class consciousness—the military unification of European royal families against the threat of Napoleon’s revolutionary army. The narrator’s guide, a civil servant who works with government charities, happily discusses the grandest example of his line of work:

“You remember the event of yesterday?”

“That sad fire on the river-side, you mean, unhousing so many of the poor?”

“No. The grand Guildhall Banquet to the princes. Who can forget it? Sir, the dinner was served on nothing but solid silver and gold plate, worth at least £200,000—that is, 1,000,000 of your dollars; while the mere expenditure of meats, wines, attendance and upholstery, &c., can not be footed under £25,000—125,000 dollars of your hard cash.” (297)

The narrator, more sensitive to the plight of the poor after his encounter with the Coulters, assumes “the event” to be the tragedy mentioned above while instead his companion speaks excitedly about an opulent meal for the royalty of Europe. The charity aspect of the event turns out to be the public offering of the leftovers to the poor on the following day. When the two arrive at the Guildhall, the narrator finds himself engulfed by the ravenous mass of London’s lower class: “It was just the same as if I were pressed by a mob of cannibals on some pagan beach. The beings round me roared with famine. For in this mighty London misery but maddens” (298). The scene around them is a violent whirlwind that highlights the pathetic condition of so many of London’s poor. People push, scream, and fight one another to attain the

scraps of the aristocracy. The narrator's guide, however, is blinded by the supposed charity that justifies such an event. He is struck by the grandeur of the original meal upon which this charity is based, and repeatedly considers the great leaders of Europe who possibly dined on the same food currently devoured by beggars.

This attitude encapsulates much of the misplaced energies of the wealthy in Melville's story. The man accompanying the narrator views the prestige of nibbling at royal crumbs to be the greatest gift to the poor. He also focuses on the enormity of the event on this particular day but seems unconcerned with sustained levels of support for the needy. Realistically, such an event offers no long term solutions to deep socioeconomic inequities. At best, it is a brief moment of good will, but at worst it mocks and humiliates an already downtrodden group of people. Much like Blandmour's condescending insistence that nature's provisions are all that the American poor require, the British government, in this part of the story, seems to believe their own lower class needs nothing more than the leftovers of the more fortunate. In either case, a chasm exists between the allegedly altruistic considerations of the wealthy and the actual needs of the poor.

In addition to the misguided attitudes toward charity amongst the wealthy, Melville's short fiction also examines the inability of the church to embrace the lower classes. In the "Temple First" section of "The Two Temples" the narrator is refused entry to a prestigious new church because his attire indicates that he is not of the appropriate class:

"Too bad. And how disdainful the great, fat-paunched, beadle-faced man looked, when in answer to my humble petition, he said they had no galleries. Just the same as if he'd said, they didn't entertain poor folks. But I'll wager something that had my new coat been done last

night, as the false tailor promised, and had I, arrayed therein this bright morning, tickled the fat-paunched, beadle-faced man's palm with a bank-note, then gallery or no gallery, I would have had a fine seat in this marble-buttressed, stained-glass, spic-and-span new temple.”

(303)

Unfettered by his expulsion from the church, the narrator notices a small door that he believes will lead to the tower overlooking the service. He slips in unnoticed through the unlocked door and proceeds to climb upward toward a perch at the pinnacle of the tower. Along the way he endures the cold of the unheated tower while being burned by a burst from the furnace that heats the congregation below. In a sense, his ascension toward the crest of the church and physical sacrifices along the way cast him as a Christ-like figure. Finally reaching a seat of sorts from which he can hear the priest, he assesses that he is “in a fitter place for sincere devotions, where, though [he can] see, [he] remain[s] unseen” (306). His spatial positioning above the respectable congregation, silently viewing them from afar, represents his heavenly devotion and conviction that surpasses the class-conscious church below.

However, after his descent from the tower, the narrator finds the previously unlocked door to now be locked from the inside. He desperately considers his options and finally resorts to publicly ringing the church bells in order to alert someone of his confinement. Once outside the church again, the beadle-faced man greets him with scorn and promptly turns him over to the police. The narrator is held overnight in jail and only released the next morning after submitting to a large fine and a severe chastising from a judge.

Thus, the man's intrusions into upper-class society are met with disdain, suspicion, and arrest. Although his intentions were only to legitimately worship during a Sunday service, the

church official, police, and judge are all unable to grant any leniency or view the man as anything besides an unwanted pest. His visible status as a member of a lower class appears to supersede any commonality he may have with the congregation based upon religious affiliation. Just as upper-class insults pass for charitable intensions in “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs,” the church, in this story, is also unwilling to embrace the working class.

In the second section of “The Two Temples,” “Temple Second,” the narrator finds himself in London. He is penniless and wandering the streets in hopes of avoiding his landlord when he comes upon a theatre. Desiring desperately to enter, but possessing no money, he lurks about in front of the theatre for some time until a random stranger offers his ticket: “‘Take it,’ said he, holding a plain red ticket towards me, full in the gas-light. ‘You want to go in; I know you do. Take it. I am suddenly called home. There—hope you’ll enjoy yourself. Good-bye’” (312). The narrator then deliberates upon the ethics of charity as he considers whether or not to accept the offer. Ultimately, he concludes charity to be both universal and necessary for human existence:

Charity.—Why these unvanquished scruples? All your life, nought but charity sustains you, and all others in the world. Maternal charity nursed you as a babe; paternal charity fed you as a child; friendly charity got you your profession; and to the charity of every man you meet this night in London, are you indebted for your unattempted life.

(312)

Here he expounds upon the unrecognized reliance that humans hold upon one another. In the last sentence above, he even considers the will not to cause a defenseless person harm as a form of charity. In either case, the subjection of others’ wills pervades human existence.

Upon entering the theatre, the narrator's journey through the halls and stairs closely resembles his upward climb through the church tower. This time, however, he encounters welcoming faces and accepting ushers as he makes his way up to his seat in the uppermost gallery. Once he arrives he observes that the occupants are working-class and friendly, despite the fact that he is a foreign stranger. A boy selling ale pours the narrator a mug for free upon learning that he has not a penny on him. He concludes his narration by considering the two experiences and reflecting upon his receiving "sterling charity in the one" (315), while in a foreign land, and "at home, in [his] own land, was thrust out from the other" (315). Neither national nor religious affiliation produces any charity for the narrator, while class commonality induces an altruistic act. Additionally, the charity offered at the theatre—through both the ticket and the ale—serves to sustain both his physical body and his soul. Unlike the misplaced assumptions of lower-class needs examined in "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," the narrator in "The Two Temples" receives exactly the assistance that he desires, and it does not come from the wealthy. It is important to note that the man who offers him the ticket is likely not wealthy, since he also had been seated in the uppermost—and cheapest—gallery of the theatre.

This section of the story highlights the hypocrisy and inadequacy of Melville's vision of the church in the first part of the tale. As in "Bartleby, the Scrivener," the church in this story also is ineffectual in its relations with the working class. The narrator, on his way to Trinity Church—the enormous symbol of Wall Street wealth—stops by the office and finds that Bartleby, seemingly with nowhere else to go, has made his permanent home within the office. This bizarre sight depresses, rather than annoys, the narrator, and he finds himself now unable to attend church. In this instance, the church, or perhaps more accurately the *Trinity Church*, is

incongruous to the narrator with feelings of genuine sympathetic charity for a desperate fellow person.

One vital component that these three aforementioned stories each shares is a portrayal of working-class dignity. The settings alternate from New York to London, and the type of work in question reflects both rural and urban employment. Regardless of the exact professions and specific class association, respect for the workers persists.

An apt example of Melville's working-class stateliness surfaces in "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs." The Coulter family exhibits all the traits of respectability, work-ethic, and righteousness. Neither Dame Coulter nor her husband complains about their circumstances or expects any swift gestures of relief. In place of either begging or protesting, they preserve a sense of pride. Dame Coulter promptly offers their unexpected visitor a complete meal—or as nearly as she can produce one—and merely laments her inability to meet the standards of her guest. She recognizes, by his clothing, that he is not accustomed to the accoutrements and meals of the poor, and rather than belaboring their differences or envying the narrator's advantages, she simply worries that he will not like her cooking: "I do not know how you will like our pudding. It is only rice, milk, and salt boiled together" (292). Then, the one moment of class tension in the story comes about as a result of pride rather than jealousy. As previously discussed, the narrator offends Mrs. Coulter by employing the insensitive term "Poor Man's Pudding." Her innate physical response is "a quick flush, half resentful" (292). The "flush" indicates that his comment embarrassed her, threatening her pride, but she confidently retorts with "*We* do not call it so, sir" (293) and says nothing more about the matter. Regarding their nearly inedible pork rations, neither Coulter accuses the Squire of stinginess or thoughtlessness. The two even allude to their deceased children, William and Martha, with only the slightest hint of resentment

toward their fate. Most telling, though, is the Coulters' righteousness in the face of formidable hardships:

“You see,” resumed Coulter, “wife loves to go to church; but the nighest is four miles off, over yon snowy hills. So she can't walk it; and I can't carry her in my arms, though I have carried her up-stairs before now. But, as she says, the Squire's man sometimes gives her a lift on the road; and for this cause it is that I speak of a horse I am going to have one of these fine sunny days.” (294)

The one possession for which either of the Coulters strives is a horse for the unadorned purpose of conveying Dame Coulter to church. Furthermore, they do not await the horse as a gift but rather pursue this relative luxury through work.

A second exhibition of the dignity of the working class occurs in the “Temple Second” portion of “The Two Temples.” The narrator of this story describes how he was lured abroad, and later terminated, by a wealthy woman to whom he served as both companion and physician. Once she disposes of his services, with little explanation or warning, he becomes suddenly desperately poor, having spent nearly all his income on the clothes that she required of him. Therefore, this woman, “rich as Cleopatra” (310), becomes the second representation of upper-class rejection and indifference to the narrator—the first being his unceremonious expulsion from the church. This stands in stark contrast to his reception at the end of the story when he is welcomed into the theatre and given a free drink. The crowd contained within this most economical crest of the theatre is polite and fraternal. Unlike the raucous, unseemly assembly that one might imagine to take place when comprised of the lower echelons of society, Melville presents rhetoric of warm respect:

This time I had company. Not of the first circles, and certainly not of the dress-circle; but most acceptable, right welcome, cheery company, to otherwise unaccompanied me. Quiet, well-pleased working men, and their glad wives and sisters, with here and there an aproned urchin, with all-absorbed, bright face, vermillioned by the excitement and the heated air, hovering like a painted cherub over the vast human firmament below. (313)

Once again, the narrator finds himself staring down into wealthier society below, but here he is in the company of brothers and sisters. As with the Coulters in the previous story, there exists amongst the working class no envy, anger, or frustration over their conditions or circumstances. Instead, they appear exceedingly pleased with their post high above their wealthier counterparts. The use of the word “firmament” suggests a nearly ethereal existence of the working-class audience that is heavenly and therefore beyond man’s judgment. They gaze downward to the flawed mass of human reality below them.

A third example of Melville’s portrayal of working-class dignity in these stories exists in “Bartleby, the Scrivener.” Bartleby’s protests, however vague and vexing, do occur with a certain degree of class. He never raises his voice or uses profanity. After the initial instance of Bartleby’s utterance of “I would prefer not to,” the narrator reports his demeanor as follows: “Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner . . . I should have violently dismissed him from my premises” (21). On the contrary, Bartleby actually maintains his composure far better than his befuddled boss, who admits “falling into sudden spasmodic passions” (26) toward his insubordinate employee. Furthermore, the exact wording of Bartleby’s refusals includes the word “prefer,”

which suggests a personal request with the approval ultimately based upon the needs of the supervisor. Bartleby never exceeds this degree of response, and he never alters his wording to indicate something more resolute. Additionally, the narrator perceives a stately quality in Bartleby. This is likely the reason that he never contacts the police to administer Bartleby's expulsion from the office. When the narrator discovers that Bartleby has been secretly living in the office, he not only allows the behavior to persist with no fear of this unsupervised trespass, but he actually associates his eccentric employee with dignified piety: "Bartleby was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. Besides, it was Sunday; and there was something about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the properties of the day" (27). Through this last statement, Melville's intention, as in "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" and "The Two Temples," is to elevate the working-class to a serenely righteous depiction.

At the core of these three texts is a profound concern for poverty, which was often overlooked in the Nineteenth Century, just as today, in such financial centers as New York and London. Gavin Jones writes that "the persistence of inadequate income levels and living standards in the midst of tremendous wealth continues to trouble social analysts, just as it did Henry George in the Gilded Age and Melville in the 1850s" (782). The inequities of wealth, and subsequent cultural disconnections, portrayed in Melville's short fiction, trouble the author to the extent that his writings become more pleading than didactic. Melville offers portraits of the employer-worker binary that are laced with pathos but devoid of concrete answers.

While a suspicious economic consciousness manifests itself in Herman Melville's short fiction, the maturation of Nineteenth Century fiscal awareness is discernible decades later in

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. While other themes may dominate both past and present critical discourse of the novel, monetary value is the all-encompassing force that quietly envelops all other discussions of the novel.

The Awakening is rightly construed as a feminist text regarding the main character's quest for independent identity. Reviews of the novel at the time of its publication in 1899 commonly regarded the text as erotically motivated and sexual in nature. A piece in *The Chicago Times-Herald* laments that "it was not necessary for a writer of so great refinement and poetic grace to enter the overworked field of sex fiction" (Culley 149). A sympathetic reading by Willa Cather champions the notion that "Edna Pontellier and Emma Bovary are studies in the same feminine type" (154).² Other commentaries express such revulsion at Edna's abdication of her marital and motherly duties that they categorically denounce any and all lessons from the text. For example, one such reviewer in the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* scolds Chopin as follows: "A woman of twenty-eight, a wife and twice a mother who in pondering upon her relations to the world about her, fails to perceive that the relation of a mother to her children is far more important than the gratification of a passion which experience has taught her is, by its very nature, evanescent, can hardly be said to be fully awake" (Culley 150). Once again, much of the derision of the novel ultimately stems from the "gratification of a passion" of a married woman. Even decades later, in 1956, Kenneth Eble wrote that "quite frankly, the book is about sex. Not only is it about sex, but the very texture of the writing is sensuous, if not sensual, from the first to the last" (166). Though this assessment is more sympathetic to Chopin's effective style and use of language, Eble still remains fixated on the sexual content. Like Cather's observation above, which is not intended to denigrate Chopin's work, it still myopically

considers the text through the singular lens of Edna's sexuality. While sex is central to the text, it is couched within the broad theme of identity.

Often overlooked within this novel, however, is Edna Pontellier's emerging economic consciousness within a money-obsessed male culture, which closely parallels her liberation from gender roles and the constraints of marriage. Recent criticism does investigate the relationship of Edna to her economic environment:

The female roles portrayed in *The Awakening* are rooted in an ideological system. Louis Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses" provides an ideological framework for the female roles and experiences portrayed in the novel. This framework also implicates the ideological system of nineteenth-century society as the ultimate culprit in Edna's fate. (Gray 54)

However, such assertions still speak more broadly of the various hegemonic systems subjugating Edna rather than focusing on her personal economic liberation.

During Edna's stay at Grand Isle at the start of the text, her flirtation with Robert Lebrun, which begins innocently enough, eventually leads her to both physical and romantic desires that she no longer wishes to withhold. While she pursues no adulterous relationships during her summer stay at Grand Isle, this is the setting where her desirous spark is first lit. Accompanying her blossoming relationship with Robert is a keen sense of self that extends into vocational interests. Central to Edna's development throughout the text is her artistic transformation from a bored housewife "dabbling" with brushes into a professional painter. Chopin writes that "Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it satisfaction of a kind which no other

employment afforded her” (13). Edna’s pursuit of something she simply enjoys in “an unprofessional way” is important. However, Chopin’s use of the word “employment” hints at the potential for Edna to expand her role as an artist. Furthermore, her burgeoning feelings for Robert may, in some way, relate to his genuine respect for her talents. He exclaims, “*Mais ce n’est pas mal! Elle s’y connaît, elle a de la force, oui*” (13).³ The fact that Robert says this in French indicates the authenticity of his statement, as he clearly is speaking only to Madame Ratignolle and not trying to impress Edna.

Much later in the novel, Edna harnesses her now professional painting talents and uses this, in part, as a way to flee her husband’s house and procure her own accommodations. She speaks of no ill will toward her husband when she announces to Mademoiselle Reisz her plans to move. Instead she focuses on her own economic viability and her desire to only have that which her own money has purchased:

“The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn’t that enough reason?”

“They are your husband’s,” returned Mademoiselle, with a shrug and a malicious elevation of the eyebrows.

“Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: It is a caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother’s estate, which my father sends me by driblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches.” (79)

Edna’s ability to not only adequately take in the horse races but actually profit handsomely presents one of many gender role reversals throughout the novel. This comes in sharp contrast to Madame Ratignolle—the quintessential symbol of motherhood and marital fidelity—who, after a

chance encounter with Edna's husband, weakly relays information to her friend concerning Léonce's current business affairs as involving "securities, exchanges, stocks, bonds, or something of the sort [that she] did not remember" (40). Her inability to effectively articulate Mr. Pontellier's financial dealings stresses the bifurcation of femininity in the novel. By contrast to Madame Ratignolle's separation from matters of wealth, Edna's aptitude for gambling is so advanced that Chopin explains, "there were few track men out there who knew the race horse as well as Edna, but there was certainly none who knew it better" (74). Her knowledge of the traditionally masculine practice of horse track betting bleeds from personal awakening to economic stirring when Chopin reveals that the men around her strained to overhear a tip (74). She is more than merely capable of financially supporting herself. In this scene, Edna becomes the purveyor of income for the men surrounding her.

If Madame Ratignolle is to represent one extremity of the feminine binary, then surely Mademoiselle Reisz signifies the other. Where Madame Ratignolle is equally unconcerned and unknowing of financial affairs, Mademoiselle Reisz lives alone and wholly supports herself. Edna gravitates between the two but certainly drifts far more toward Mademoiselle Reisz as the novel progresses. From Grand Isle onward, Mademoiselle Reisz's uncharacteristically inviting attitudes toward Edna strongly indicate that she identifies and respects the spark of her own independence within her younger friend. In a possible nod toward metafiction, Edna exclaims that "no one could play Chopin like Mademoiselle Reisz!" (27). Through a clever allusion to the musical composer, Kate Chopin is, perhaps, advocating the lifestyle of the pianist, Mademoiselle Reisz, over that of the housewife, Madame Ratignolle.

One key symbol throughout the novel that equates sexuality with economic identity is the phallic cigar. On one particular occasion, during the summer at Grand Isle, Edna opts to sleep

outside on a hammock in rejection of her marital bed. Despite Mr. Pontellier's urging and offering of wine, she refuses to enter their bedroom. Recognizing that her obdurate resistance is unaffected by any of his appeals for respectability, he acquiesces to the situation and begins incessantly smoking cigars: "He smoked two cigars; then he went inside and drank another glass of wine. Mrs. Pontellier again declined to accept a glass when it was offered to her. Mr. Pontellier once more seated himself with elevated feet, and after a reasonable interval of time smoked some more cigars" (32). At the end of Chapter XI, as Edna reverses the roles and now asks Léonce to come inside, he replies, "Just as soon as I have finished my cigar" (33), implying a masturbatory response to his wife's sexual rejection and flippancy toward their marital bed.

Harriet Kramer Linkin successfully explores this scene and concludes that "Chopin uses cigars and cigarettes to encode the potentiality of Edna's relationships with Creole men" (131). Although this is true, Linkin erroneously assumes cigar smoking as indicative of the victorious defense of a hegemonic patriarchy: "Lighting a cigar upon returning from Klein's signals what he believes to be the restoration of the Creole male order" (134). However, Edna is clearly defiant in this passage, and Léonce's discomfort with their present dynamic is obvious. When she finally does vacate the hammock and reenter their home, she does so of her own volition and not at his urging.

While this scene may not appear to firmly cement the subversive nature of Edna's loitering on the hammock instead of a bed, it is worthwhile to point out that the episode occurs just after a daring incident in Chapter X. Edna, an inexperienced swimmer, ventures out into the gulf far beyond her previous limits of comfort. The passage indicates her feelings of solitude and self-reliance. However, she soon fears that she has stretched out into the ocean past the

point of safety and envisions impending death. Her boldly swimming into uncharted waters—despite her immaturity as a swimmer—both symbolizes the audacious awakening that she is beginning and forecasts her death in the same waters at the end of the novel. In this scene, Edna recovers from her trepidations and reaches land, having boosted her individuality by conquering a personal fear and difficulty at a distance that left her seemingly alone to her own devices. Upon her return to safety, though, her husband greets her by stating, “‘you were not so very far, my dear; I was watching you’” (29). So, despite Edna’s symbolic attempts to separate herself from the containment of her roles as wife and mother, she does not, in actuality, escape the watchful eye of her husband. Perhaps, then, this incident provides some form of impetus for Edna’s front porch protest against retiring to her bedroom.

The cigar, however, is as much a symbol of wealth as it is sexuality. In Chapter II, Chopin writes that Robert Lebrun “smoked cigarettes because he could not afford cigars” (5). He does own one “cigar in his pocket which Mr. Pontellier had presented him with” (5). Robert’s cigarettes—cheaper and smaller than Mr. Pontellier’s cigars—are no match as a phallic symbol. Regardless, he does possess one “in his pocket” (or, in his pants) that Mr. Pontellier has given him, suggesting the loosening sexual control that Léonce holds over his wife. Another such instance of the complex dynamic and unacknowledged sexual rivalry between Mr. Pontellier and Robert Lebrun occurs after the latter has fled Grand Isle, and the two meet by chance on Carondelet Street in New Orleans. Edna presses her husband for information and learns that “they had gone ‘in’ and had a drink and a cigar together” (47). The symbol of the cigar unites the two once more, and Léonce likely covers the expenses.

Robert, after returning from his financial sojourn in Mexico now apparently has the wealth, whether he admits it or not, to not only upgrade to cigars from cigarettes but also to

purchase “a whole box” (105) of them. As with Léonce Pontellier’s cigars in Grand Isle, Robert’s become a masturbatory image in the absence of sexual contact with Edna—though in Robert’s case this appears to be by choice.

Meanwhile, male comparisons of emblematic wealth, whether through cigars and cigarettes or not, are wholly irrelevant to Edna, who is now financially secure enough to sidestep a large component of the Creole patriarchal system. Another key economic component to this novel is the precedence that financial matters take over those of a personal nature—both for Edna and the male characters. For instance, Chopin practically links Robert’s total self-aware identity to economic consciousness. Madame Lebrun tells Edna that “Robert stopped having his pictures taken when he had to pay for them himself” (47). The implication then is that Robert must *pay* to see himself—or to be seen by Edna. In the absence of a recent photograph, Edna can only view Robert in various stages of childhood. A picture of him at age five, “wearing long curls and holding a whip” (46), makes her laugh. Essentially, as a man, Robert cannot appear to Edna in a serious manner without financial means. Rather, she can only envision him as a silly child.

Even the presumed public eschewing of gender roles is less relevant in the novel than the monetary implications. One of the first critical indicators of Edna’s disconnection from traditional wifely duties is when she willfully stops her Tuesday reception of callers. Her husband’s reaction, however, solely addresses the economic ramifications of snubbing certain guests. He even encourages her absenteeism when related to less financially relevant families:

“I tell you what it is, Edna; you can’t afford to snub Mrs. Belthrop.
Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over. His business is
worth a good, round sum to me. You’d better write her a note. ‘Mrs.

James Highcamp.' Hugh! the less you have to do with Mrs. Highcamp, the better.'" (51-52)

Mr. Pontellier does not question or actually seem to notice his wife's challenge to social conventions. If he is troubled by her independence or its broader implications, he issues forth no statement to indicate such anxieties. He does, however, question the monetary value of her decision.

Similarly, when Edna forsakes her mansion on Esplanade Street, which she had shared with her husband, and moves into a small rental home, she informs him of her decision in a letter. His response is utterly unconcerned with the obvious considerations:

When Mr. Pontellier learned of his wife's intention to abandon her home and take up her residence elsewhere, he immediately wrote her a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance. . . . He was not dreaming of scandal when he uttered this warning; that was a thing which would never have entered into his mind to consider in connection with his wife's name or his own. He was simply thinking of his financial integrity. It might get noised about that the Pontelliers had met with reverses, and were forced to conduct their *ménage* on a humbler scale than heretofore. (92)

Mr. Pontellier does not even consider that his wife's departure could mark an end—or at least a difficult period—in their marriage. He is also wholly undaunted by the prospect of damages to his social reputation or that of his wife. Strangely, his first, and apparently only, anxiety involves the possible damage to his professional reputation, if the public is to believe that their personal accommodations have diminished. This could adversely affect investments.

In addition to Mr. Pontellier's curious response to Edna's obvious emotional distancing, another remarkable financial behavior is observable in the text. The two men who presumably are in love with Edna, Léonce and Robert, both desert her for the purpose of financial prospects and are glaringly absent throughout most of the novel. Her husband departs for New York, presumably related to stocks and bonds, and Robert Lebrun leaves for Veracruz under the vague notion of pursuing business prospects. The absence of each character creates a dichotomy for Edna as well as a romantic void. With Mr. Pontellier's temporary removal from her life, Edna grows in her self-awareness and becomes able, eventually to voice her feelings for Robert. However, Robert is also gone, and this leaves Edna susceptible to the wanton sexual desires that have long lived dormant within her. The outlet of Edna's sexuality, without having Robert within her reach, is Alcée Arobin. Now, the consummation of Edna's physical needs is not necessarily a problem. After all, a large portion of her personal awakening involves her pursuit of passion free from the complication of differentiating proper from improper partners. However, she does express some dismay that what she has found with Alcée is solely physical and unrelated to her newly acknowledged feelings of love for Robert. Therefore, the financial ventures of the two primary men in Edna Pontellier's life open her up to a new connection that is ultimately unable to sustain her. In a sense, both Léonce and Robert lose Edna because of their economic pursuits.

While Chopin's Realism echoes through her neutrality toward her subject matter, and she "certainly did not wish to write a didactic feminist novel" (Showalter 15), the novel does issue forth clear strides toward Modernist economic sentiments. It is the economic context of Edna Pontellier's feminism that separates her from Emma Bovary. She is not merely the product of male seduction and sexual temptation that leads to an erosion of her marriage. Rather, she actively and willfully separates herself from all marital subjugation, including wealth, property,

residence, and profession. Therefore, Chopin is not turning toward Flaubert's example from the past but is peaking forward toward the dawning of a new era that has not yet begun. Similarly, Melville's short stories mark the opening of an economic inquiry and not a definitive stance based upon Nineteenth Century ideologies. What is clear in both authors' texts, however, is an awareness of the expansive role of employment in establishing personal identity and even individual freedom—a sentiment that predicts the Twentieth Century obsession with wealth and materialism during the Modernist period.

Chapter 2

The Modernist South: Desolation and the Dollar

In 1920 H.L. Mencken published perhaps the most scathing criticism of southern consciousness in the early Twentieth Century: “The Sahara of the Bozart.”⁴ Through this piece, Mencken brands the South as a “region of worn-out farms, shoddy cities and paralyzed cerebrums” (157) that he further characterizes as “mediocrity, stupidity, lethargy, almost of dead silence” (161). This harsh portrayal hardly befits the illustrious tradition of southern literature that contemporary Twenty-First-Century readers would undoubtedly recognize, but it does acknowledge a certain mourning, an elegiac memorial to the past grandeur of the region. For instance, Mencken posits that “it is as if the Civil War stamped out every last bearer of the torch, and left only a mob of peasants on the field” (158). Certainly the effects of the Civil War on the culture of the antebellum South cannot be omitted. Mencken’s apparent theory is as follows: “The old aristocracy went down the red gullet of war; the poor white trash are now in the saddle” (159). While this direct diagnosis summarizes the epidemic of the early Twentieth Century South, Mencken further elaborates upon his assessment:

As for the cause of this unanimous torpor and doltishness, this curious and almost pathological estrangement from everything that makes for a civilized culture, I have hinted at it already and now state it again. The South has simply been drained of all its best blood. The vast hemorrhage of the Civil War half exterminated and wholly paralyzed the old aristocracy, and so left the land to the harsh mercies of the poor white trash, now its masters. The war, of course, was not a complete massacre. It spared a decent number of first-rate Southerners—perhaps

even some of the very best. Moreover, other countries, notably France and Germany, have survived far more staggering butcheries, and even showed marked progress thereafter. But the war not only cost a great many valuable lives; it also brought bankruptcy, demoralization and despair in its train—and so the majority of the first-rate Southerners that were left, broken in spirit and unable to live under the new dispensation, cleared out. (162)

Mencken is correct to the extent that his conclusions illuminate the gravity of Reconstruction as a source of all-encompassing upheaval to the southern lifestyle. Stephen A. West notes that the institution of slavery “had shaped—and its destruction thus reshaped—every aspect of the southern economy, from the plantation belt to the upcountry, from the role of towns and industry to the place of commerce and finance” (10-11). Likewise, Thomas J. Brown points to the erosion of a righteous southern identity, as “white southerners reconciled their confidence in God’s favor with their crushing defeat in the war” (210).

While Mencken is simply unable to predict the rise of southern literature during the same decade of this essay’s publication, he does accurately depict one of the critical impediments to the development of the region: cultural paralysis as a result of economic devastation. Additionally, he analogizes the effects of the Civil War on the South to the aftermath of World War I on Europe. Although an apt comparison, Mencken fails to recognize that the South, like the rest of the United States, participated in this more recent war as well. By 1920, a struggling post-Civil War South had also been baptized by the tides of modern warfare. Furthermore, southern authors of the 1920s, such as Erskine Caldwell and William Faulkner, were charged with depicting the ravages of two wars along with the ensuing economic ruin. Rather than

retreat from the dregs of their society, both authors embrace the vicious economic realities of the American South while personally disproving Mencken's assertion that "it is impossible for intelligence to flourish in such an atmosphere" (167).

This chapter will examine the economic struggles of the South during the Twenties and the apparent attempt by two of the region's most prominent fiction writers, Erskine Caldwell and William Faulkner, to expose the South's cultural degradation and ensuing reclamation through a newfound economic awareness. I will explore Caldwell's first two novels, *The Bastard* and *Poor Fool*, along with Faulkner's postwar oeuvre, *Soldiers' Pay*, and perhaps his most celebrated work, *The Sound of the Fury*. The choice of these particular texts comes because of rather than in spite of the fact that their authors were more widely known during the following decade. By isolating these authors from their more productive literary periods, a sense of their consciousness during this decade becomes easier to identify. While *Poor Fool* technically was published in 1930, its inclusion is based on its composition during the Twenties. Additionally, because of their unique early positioning within Caldwell's body of work and the scarce number of printings, these first two novels must be considered in the context of one another.

Turning first to the oldest of the selected texts, I will begin with William Faulkner's most direct treatment of World War I. Scholars, reviewers, and readers alike often envision Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* as an underdeveloped but promising work—exceptional for a debut novel yet lacking the finesse of his more famous later texts. Margaret Mitchell, in perhaps the first known review of the novel, explains that "many loose ends of the plot are left but the story, as a whole, is intensely interesting" (qtd. in Bledsoe 591). However, Faulkner intended this novel not to engage Mitchell but to open a dialogue with another one of his contemporaries: Ernest Hemingway. In many ways, Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* represents his answer to

Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. The task for Faulkner was to present a composite of the southern investment in World War I and the emotional costs that persisted upon the return of the participants. The difficulty in his charge was to share in Hemingway's bleak vision of postwar interpersonal relationships without entirely being "thrown in with a Lost Generation mentality to which he could not fully commit" (Powell 120). But the author recognizes the limitations of communicating the emotional experience of war to an unknowing audience. In "Literature and War," Faulkner writes that "mankind's emotional gamut is like his auricular gamut: there are some things which he cannot feel, as there are sounds he cannot hear. And war, taken as a whole, is one of these things" (255). Although these words would generally suggest an indescribable personal experience that one cannot satisfactorily convey, they were written by a Royal Air Force cadet whose individual anguish stemmed from his regret that the war concluded before he could see combat. Powell references John Lowe's contention that jealousy fueled some of Faulkner's actions upon returning to the South:

John Lowe has noted the "sibling rivalry" motivation underlying *Soldiers' Pay*. The author returned home from a stint in the Royal Air Force (after having been rejected by U.S. recruiters), wearing an officer's uniform complete with wings, offering the fiction that he had, during his brief aeronautical career, "crashed into a hangar upside down." At this very moment, his family feared that his brother Jack had been killed. Upon his brother's homecoming, Lowe notes, Faulkner "must have writhed inwardly with shame, but simultaneously burned with jealousy" at having both fabricated a story as to his own experience and at seeing himself "one-upped" by the brother with

whom he had formed some degree of competitive envy from youth.

(122)

Thus, the plot of *Soldiers' Pay* is as concerned with the trauma of combat veterans as with the disappointment of those who were denied the experience. In either situation, what remains for the participants of World War I upon their return is dissatisfying and best expressed in terms of monetary currency. While the ending of the novel is messy and unsettling, the incompleteness of the plot is not merely the poor output of an inexperienced writer—as was the claim of numerous dismissive reviews. Rather, this novel, like many other postwar tomes of the Nineteen Twenties, attempts to mirror the physical and psychological scars that accompany returning soldiers of World War One. Their official service has ended, but like Faulkner's novel, their military careers do not neatly resolve into a chapter of the past. Furthermore, the title of the novel hints at another nefarious reality of postwar American existence—the requisite compensation for such service. And, when the harsh combination of human solipsism and war trauma come to a head, monetary payment becomes the only concrete reality for the forlorn war veteran.

The novel opens with Julian Lowe, a flying cadet, and Private Joe Gilligan heading home via train after the war in Europe has ended. Soon, they cross paths with Mrs. Powers, who is keeping a close eye on the badly wounded Lieutenant Donald Mahon. Lowe and Gilligan boisterously celebrate their homecoming aboard the train to the dismay of their fellow passengers and are nearly forced off for their drunken antics. However, once the two meet the barely conscious Donald Mahon and Mrs. Powers, they derive some purpose for their return: Gilligan wishes to serve his superior officer and ensure his safe passage home, and Lowe resolves to transform himself, once back home, into marriageable material in order to impress the recently widowed Margaret Powers. The entire first chapter takes place en route to their

destinations, finally ending in Georgia where Joe Gilligan and Margaret Powers have accompanied Donald Mahon in order to supervise his return to his father. Although Chapter One appears to exist in isolation within the context of the rest of the novel, it does provide several indicators of the themes that will pervade the entire text. For instance, Cadet Lowe feels cheated out of the war due to its conclusion. He laments his inability to attract women, such that he imagines the injured Lieutenant Mahon to possess, based upon heroic feats during the war. Through his ill-fated attempts to woo Mrs. Powers—who wards off his advances through an insincere engagement promise—Lowe eventually scraps his strategy of impressing women through wartime accomplishments. Instead, he replaces this with the promise of returning home and accruing wealth: “I will be older soon and I’ll work like hell and make money” (40). Even though he essentially exits the text shortly after, Lowe does periodically enjoy an epistolary resurrection in which he updates Margaret Powers on his efforts at developing a career and earning money.

The rest of the novel, however, radically shifts from the dynamic opening section in which the characters exist in transit and almost entirely in a drunken haze of both postwar exuberance and disappointment. Beginning with Chapter Two, the text becomes grounded in the Georgia hometown of Donald Mahon, where Margaret Powers and Joe Gilligan assist his reunification with his father, Rector Mahon, who believes his son was killed in Flanders the previous spring (51). Lieutenant Mahon’s resurrection, however, only begets more sorrow for his father who struggles to accept the desperate health of his newly restored son. The postwar world that awaits the returning figures of the war becomes an implicit focus of the novel. And, the word “Soldiers” in the title connotes the novel’s attention to the postwar experience. The other title word, “Pay,” suggests that the compensation, figuratively or literally, for their toils is

of utmost concern to the author. While plotting the care of Donald Mahon, Mrs. Powers and Joe Gilligan discuss the monetary necessities of the situation:

“Yes. But what about money?”

“Money?”

“Well . . . for what he might need. You know. He might get sick any where.”

“Lord, I cleaned up in a poker game and I aint had time to spend it.

Money’s all right. That aint any question,” he said roughly.

“Yes, money’s all right. You know I have my husband’s insurance.”

(32)

Both of them appear to be financially sound, at least for the time being, but neither has been rewarded for his or her service. Rather, Joe has won his money in a “poker game,” and Magaret (a volunteer nurse) was compensated because of the death of her husband, Richard, during the war. Furthermore, Mrs. Powers continually struggles with the caustic irony of her failed attempt to terminate the marriage—by sending a letter that doesn’t reach Richard Powers until after his untimely death. Meanwhile, Donald Mahon returns to Charlestown, Georgia to his fiancée, Cecily Saunders, who is now engaged to George Farr.

The most profound tragedy, however, is the psychological and physical trauma that renders Lieutenant Mahon unable to even experience the loss of his fiancée or to recognize the vestiges of his prewar domestic life—his loving father and the earthy and simple Emmy, a servant with whom he had an affair prior to the war. Donald suffers from a vaguely grotesque scar across his forehead and seems to believe he is still on the warfront. His eyesight soon fails as well, and the dark reality of the war becomes the only tangible experience for Donald, as he is

entirely cognitively apart from his present setting. Communications, for Lieutenant Mahon, exist primarily through Private Gilligan, who Donald believes is a soldier under his command.

Thus, Mahon serves as a symbol for the comprehensive effects of war on the nation. His physical debilitations are immediately evident to the reader, but his internal psyche, forever entombed in the violent skies of France, presents Faulkner's most condemning portrait of war. Although Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was not fully understood during the First World War, and the term would consequently not have existed in Faulkner's vocabulary, Donald's condition hints at the awkward ambiguities many combat veterans encountered upon returning from the front.⁵ Symptoms such as Donald's created "severe ethical problems [for] army doctors during World War I" (Weisaeth 447) who "found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between cowardice and shell shock" (Weisaeth 447). While Donald's physical injuries are undeniable, and the shooting down of his plane is a certainty, the balance between neurological damage and psychological trauma is less clear. And, without a clear understanding of PTSD, Donald exists as both a hero and a virtual child who is an awkward burden for those surrounding him saddled with providing his basic needs. Cecily Saunders is ultimately too repulsed by his scar to proceed with her engagement. Emmy is deeply hurt by Donald's inability to produce any recognition of her or their past relationship. His father, though truly invested in the recovery of his son, cannot escape his own trauma of having already received notice of Donald's death. As a result, he remains in denial about the depth of Donald's injuries and becomes, himself, the main object of pity and responsibility for Joe Gilligan and Margaret Powers.

Essentially, despite achieving the prototypical heroic battle experience that Cadet Lowe had so desperately desired, Lieutenant Mahon enjoys no compensatory benefits for his accomplishments or bravery. In fact, he is rendered incapable of receiving any rewards by those

very same experiences. Private Gilligan and Mrs. Powers are compelled out of duty to protect and nurture Donald despite the inevitability of his impending death. However, their service to him is as much compulsory as it is reciprocal. Cleanth Brooks writes that “Faulkner has been careful not to make them plaster saints. Though their concern for Donald is genuine, the truth is that they have no pressing business elsewhere. If they have relatives eager for their return, we never hear of them” (77). The “Pay” from the novel’s title is a form of human compensation that Donald Mahon cannot cognitively experience and Gilligan and Powers are not offered. Joe does profess his feelings for Margaret, but due to the death of a husband for whom her feelings proved fickle, she is wholly incapable of both postwar love and disingenuous relationships. Brooks describes their dynamic as follows:

What Joe and Margaret have is their honesty. In the 1920s some seemed to feel that honesty was almost the only virtue left. It is this very virtue that keeps Joe and Margaret apart. Margaret won’t say she loves Joe when she doesn’t, and she refuses to fake it. Joe, on the other hand, will not accept her body, which, out of compassion, she offers him, for he will not accept anything less than love. In a world in which depths of emotion, including sorrow, seem a fake, they cling desperately to their emotional integrity. (81)

Margaret Powers does elicit some feelings for Donald, which allows her to marry him toward the end of the novel, but she does so only with the knowledge that he will soon be dead.

Furthermore, the impetus beneath this drastic gesture is purely meant to buoy the spirits of Reverend Mahon.

In the end, the participants of World War I in *Soldiers' Pay* remain uncompensated for their service. The glory and human connections they seek (or wish they were capable of seeking had it not been for the emotionally paralyzing effects of the war) do not exist in postwar America. The meaning of payment in the novel becomes just that—literal monetary pay. Actual compensation for Lieutenant Mahon, Private Gilligan, Mrs. Powers, and Cadet Lowe is simply the money in their pockets. Ironically, after the painfully naïve and immature Julian Lowe departs from the other characters to return to his mother in San Francisco, he apparently redirects his energy, quite successfully it seems, from love to money. He is effectively dismissed by Mrs. Powers in the first chapter of the novel but communicates with her through occasional letters. Chapter Eight opens with his final letter to her in which he informs her of his financial progress: “Just a line to let you know that I have gone into business into the banking business making money for you. To give ourselves the position in the world you deserve and a home of our own” (224). Initially, this reads as an indication of his devotion to her—though clearly unrequited. However, in the context of Chapter Nine, it becomes clear that this previous letter was more an announcement of his wealth than an expression of love. In this final chapter, Margaret, who is now Mrs. Mahon, attempts to at last respond to his series of letters and discovers that he has changed addresses without bothering to tell her. While Joe Gilligan struggles to cope with his own unresolved feelings for Margaret at the end of the novel, Julian Lowe casts his love aside in favor of the only tangible form of payment in Faulkner’s 1920s postwar vision of the United States: money.

While Erskine Caldwell does not directly tackle World War I and its implications during this decade, a similar monetary consciousness to Faulkner’s *Soldiers' Pay* is clear. Interestingly, a recent essay contends that a literary rivalry also developed between Margaret Mitchell and

Erskine Caldwell—a veritable battle for the soul of the South. Although *Gone with the Wind* may claim ownership over American popular perceptions of southern culture, “the novel was outsold for quite some time by a rival narrative of the region that has been largely forgotten: Caldwell’s *God’s Little Acre*” (Vials 70). Clearly, a literary dialogue exists amongst Margaret Mitchell, William Faulkner, and Erskine Caldwell—one that began in the Twenties.⁶

The critical reception of Erskine Caldwell’s first two novels, *The Bastard* and *Poor Fool*, has often been coldly apologetic. More often, however, it has omitted these works altogether from his lexicon. Sylvia J. Cook refers to them only in passing as novels written “before he came to [his] assured style in the 1930s” (266). In an earlier piece, Guy Owen lingers with these two novels just a bit longer but ultimately deems them to be “conventional and flawed” (254). He then condenses the novels as follows: “*The Bastard* (1929) is the story of an alienated and violent young drifter on the fringes of the underworld, and *Poor Fool* (1930) is a proletarian novel with a boxer as hero, or anti-hero. He is murdered when he opposes the men who control the fight game, which symbolizes capitalism” (254-55). While accurate, these terse descriptions unfairly strip the texts of their darkly flavored characterizations—such as the motivations behind the protagonists. Caldwell constructs a macabre world in which his primary characters are fated toward failure based upon the restrictions placed upon them. These impediments include family, environment, and genetics. However, the overarching element that binds all three of these categories together and tethers the protagonists within this dark world is the poverty that engulfs them. This socioeconomic factor, while raw, is a pure precursor to Erskine Caldwell’s later fiction.

In *The Bastard*, Caldwell delves into the disturbing origins and realities of Gene Morgan. The crude realities of Gene's conception and the monetary exchanges involved in her interactions with men construct a pitiful and hopeless outlook for his future development:

No one knew who was Gene's father. Gene did not know and he didn't care. He may possibly have traveled with the same carnival his mother was with when he was conceived—Gene didn't know. Perhaps his father was a stake-driver, maybe a barker; perhaps a hick sheriff, maybe a rednecked clodhopper; maybe a sailor, perhaps a preacher. But what was the use of thinking about it? Even his mother did not know—she was a hoochie-coochie dancer then doubling in the Forty-Nine, and she didn't keep books.

“That was for five bucks and if you wanted to you could pay another five spot and pick your choice out of three other ways—.” (11)

The profession of Gene's father is ultimately irrelevant to him because his identity has already been forged by the low socioeconomic standing of his mother.

Spanning both the North and the South, the novel explores the poverty and amorality of Gene's parentless upbringing and implicates these conditions as the underlying determinants of his despicable adulthood filled with murder, rape, and remorseless solipsism. *The Bastard* reveals Gene Morgan's formative years in the South at the start of the novel and then takes place primarily in the shadowy and vague Lewisville in a generalized part of the region. This southern setting facilitates Caldwell's thesis that regional poverty and corruption preclude peripheral inhabitants from the pursuit of morality, law, or hope. Wayne Mixon writes that “there is hardly a flicker of the social conscience that would inform Caldwell's later novels. Even so, the author hints that the protagonist is someone who has been brutalized by a hellish environment” (36). In

fact, Gene's single act of supposed selflessness is the horrifyingly misguided murder of his disabled child in order to liberate his son's mother from providing the infant's constant care. As unsettling as this concluding scene is—and as nefarious as this makes the lead character—Caldwell does expose, albeit through shock, the rigged economic conditions that will forecast his later works. The author would follow *The Bastard* with *Poor Fool*—a novel that somewhat more maturely explores similar notions and includes a generally palatable protagonist.

Central to the condition of *Poor Fool* is the commoditization of the characters and setting. Blondy Niles, as a boxer, fights for money. However, due to the greed and manipulation of his former manager, his career has been destroyed after he was unwittingly involved in a fixed match. The resurrection of his boxing career only can occur as the product of Salty Banks's organized crime machinations, as yet another fixed fight awaits Blondy in Caldwell's dark underworld of lower class desperation and depravity.

Blondy's only ally and advocate throughout the first section of the novel is a prostitute named Louise—another helpless pawn within the inner workings of an unforgiving environment governed only by one's material wealth, or lack thereof. Louise, like Blondy, markets her body as the only viable source of income in Erskine Caldwell's nearly surreal depiction of urban decay in a vaguely southern setting. Blondy's own commoditization is as physical in nature and equally inevitable. Neither character appears to ever envision alternatives to his or her lifestyle nor does the suggestion emerge to them from any other characters.

In essence, Blondy and Louise do not control their personal economic processes. Rather, their socioeconomic positioning renders them helpless to combat the outside economic influences that dictate their actions. By contrast, Salty Banks is brutally conscious of the power his wealth—regardless of corruption—presents in shaping the destiny of those around him for

personal gain. Salty's unabashed violence and domination is thinly veiled beneath his performance of affluence:

“Now look,” he pointed with his knife bending over the steak. “See that strip there? That’s getting hard. Like blood dries in a cut on your hand. When it dries so hard you can scrape it off with a knife it’s ready to cook. At least that part of it is. Now look at this other strip: it’s still bleeding. See? See how the blood oozes out like a knife cut in the arm? It’s still running. When it gets ready to stop bleeding the blood gets thick like molasses and then it’s time to throw it on the fire.” (21)

Implicit in such scenes is Caldwell's metaphor of bloody meat as a representation for the human body. The body, like a steak, can be bought according to the stringent specifications of anyone with appropriate purchasing power. The bodily image—even through the manifestation of a powerful boxer—is passive in its response to the nefarious world of *Poor Fool*. Natalie Wilson contends that this novel shares with much of Caldwell's short stories the presentation of the body “as a weapon, an animal, a machine, or some other object, but rarely as a complex entity able to resist the power formations that so twist it” (117). This perspective correctly departs from the general critical assumption that Caldwell's first two novels exist in isolation from his later, more prominent texts (Cook, “Modernism” 65).

Perceiving Louise as a potential threat to discover the true nature of the arranged fight, Salty orchestrates her murder while Blondy is distracted by other prostitutes that Salty has purchased for him and Knockout Harris, Blondy's scheduled opponent. Furthermore, Blondy is almost immediately arrested for Louise's slaying and is only released upon Salty's posting of

“five hundred dollars bail for his liberty” (40). Caldwell’s close attention to the economic transference from one entity to another of innocent Blondy Niles’s “liberty” highlights the deepening possession that Salty holds over him.

Prostitutes are so ubiquitous in the novel that Caldwell rarely labels them as such. Instead, they are simply “girls” and the purchase of their bodies by male customers is conducted at the complete discretion of the buyer:

Two girls walked slowly up the street waiting for somebody to stop them. An automobile with two men in it stopped and the men talked to the girls for a few minutes and then drove off again. Something was wrong. Either the girls did not like the men and would not go with them, or else the men did not like the girls. That was more like it. There were so many girls wanting to be picked up a man could take only what he wanted and let the others go. That was what usually happened. (49-50)

In some ways Mrs. Boxx, in Part Two, possesses an even more insidious control over the luckless boxer. Her wealth, as the proprietor of an illegal abortion house, provides Blondy with security and a temporary residence. However, her dominion over him appears to extend beyond pure exploitation into a bizarre psychosexual hypnosis that sadistically threatens nearly all areas of Blondy’s life. As she attempts, with near success, to castrate Blondy, he is mysteriously incapable of even resisting and only survives undergoing the procedure through the intervention of Mrs. Boxx’s daughter, Dorothy. Despite Blondy’s narrow escape, the metaphorical process of castration by the financially superior Mrs. Boxx represents a condition that already exists. Clearly, Blondy is impotent to control any aspect—positive or negative—of his own fate.

After Blondy's attempt at revenge against Salty backfires and produces his own bloody shooting death, Dorothy hurls herself out the window of the room where he had perished, plummeting to death in the river below. The two unfeeling girls observing her in the room are dumbfounded by Dorothy's emotional action:

“The poor fool didn't have any better sense, if you ask me.”

“Poor fool?” the other said derisively, going back to her room.

“You mean the damn fool. She was a damn fool. The man she called

Blondy was the poor fool. He couldn't help himself.” (131)

The emphasis, in this concluding dialogue, is the dual meaning of the word “poor.” Because Blondy certainly was poor, the girls—in accordance with the sentiment of the novel as a whole—do not recognize him as an active being capable of cultivating his own existence. In addition, the word “poor” suggests condescending sympathy for his helplessness. Alternatively, the girls attach no sympathy of any kind to Dorothy's actions because they are unable to comprehend her emotional bonds with a character they had viewed more as a wounded animal than a man. Furthermore, she possesses at least some money, which makes her choice of death incomprehensible to the two pragmatic women who simply want to go back to sleep.

This short-sighted concept of money as the only measurable indicator of self-identification is central in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* as well. In both novels, those defending any values outside of tangible dollars and cents are destroyed.

Although much of Faulkner's literary reputation blossomed decades later, arguably his best novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, was published at the end of the Nineteen Twenties. The writing style is unabashedly Modernist, but the material relies heavily upon the historical degradation of the aristocratic southern gentry by the end of the Civil War. This simultaneous

interest in both the late Nineteenth Century and the early Twentieth Century is indicative of the task of southern literature during this decade. Eric Sundquist writes that

the most perplexing thing about the novel is the discrepancy between its merits and the burdensome interpretations it has inevitably had to support. It is read as an allegory of the South, an exposition of the Oedipal complex, an ironic enactment of Christ's agony, and a sustained philosophical meditation on Time. While it engages all of these issues, it illuminates none of them very exactly; rather—and here lies part of its strange magnificence—it engages these issues, allows them to invade the domain of the novel's arcane family drama, and disavows their capacity to bring the novel out of its own self-enclosing darkness. (9)

Thus, the disparate readings that exist within the text signify the complexity of addressing both the “southern myth” from the past and a modernist present.⁷

The Compson family's sale of land was not an isolated incident in the post-Civil War South. Rather, this was symptomatic of both economic hardships and changing industries. Throughout the entire South, this phenomenon led to mass migrations from rural to urban environments (Logan 449). In *The Sound and the Fury* Benjy Compson's narration in the first section alludes to the sale of land and its effects on the family without openly revealing the precise circumstances. As Benjy wanders into their former territory, Luster explains that “He still think they own this pasture” (891). Luster is, of course, referring to the patch of land—now a golf course—that they had long ago sold. Benjy's inability to conceptualize the transference of land away from his family symbolizes the denial and psychological trauma of southern economic

hardships. Furthermore, the emblematic fact that the land is now a private business, suggests the prevalence of the commodification of what was once sacred to southern identity.

Eric Sundquist posits that *The Sound and the Fury* cannot be read in isolation outside the consideration of the vast Faulknerian oeuvre (5). If this is true, then some examination of Thomas Sutpen's childhood in *Absalom, Absalom!* is relevant as background conditioning to both novels. Sutpen's initiation into southern systems of economy and power occurs as he is refused entry to a plantation owner, Pettibone's, home by a black servant. This humiliation is possible because young Sutpen possesses no social standing, and his total deficiency of land or wealth actually places him beneath a slave. This scene is poignant because it demonstrates Faulkner's adherence to economy over all other factors—including race. That is not to suggest that racial inequities were of little concern or interest to the author, but rather they appear to exist, in the Faulknerian lexicon, as a subset of economics. Thomas Sutpen internalizes the incident and constructs his ambitions and identity based upon a revised understanding of southern economy. Pragmatism, not prejudice, motivates his actions. Throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* Sutpen embodies only those indicators of racial discord that are necessary to maintain and bequeath his agricultural fiefdom. He is, above all, interested in wealth and consequently must play by the Nineteenth Century southern rules in order to preserve it.

The aspirations of Thomas Sutpen essentially indicate a quest for vindication against the aristocrat who has insulted him. By establishing himself as economically viable, he can tangibly erect his own self-worth. This point is essential in reading *The Sound and the Fury* because its prequel, *Absalom, Absalom!*, “can be seen as a sort of fable of the entire Southern social system, despite its variations and complexities, over some two hundred years” (Chesney 149). These

southern socioeconomic systems, while more obvious through the persona of Sutpen, are just as prominent in the earlier novel.

Central to *The Sound and the Fury* is the parceling and selling of the Compson family land in order to afford Quentin's northern education at Harvard. During Quentin's narration ("June Second, 1910") Faulkner specifically articulates that the Compsons have "*sold Benjy's pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard*" (949). This shedding of land does not, however, occur in isolation. Faulkner also emphasizes the general disrepair of the house itself. The wealth and prosperity of the Antebellum South no longer existed in the Twentieth Century, and once aristocratic families were forced to abdicate their claims to the quintessential southern display of pride and wealth—land. Bruce Catton writes of the Confederacy's belief in a "leisure class, backed by ownership of land; in turn, society itself should be keyed to the land as the chief source of wealth and influence" (406). So irrevocably was the southern Nineteenth Century identity fused with the socioeconomic reliance upon land ownership that in the aftermath of this system's destruction, distribution of former properties symbolized the ultimate surrender.

Faulkner elicits the resistance of the southern psyche to acknowledge these broad shifts in economic conditions through the use of time in the novel. Quentin Compson's entire narration is intrinsically associated with time and his efforts to exist outside of its constraints. It begins with an awareness of time and its consuming effects: "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (935). To the Compsons, time represents a specifically ominous emblem of despair that suggests hopelessness within the present tense. To Quentin's father, the temporality of the past can only give way to timeless nothingness. Mr. Compson's nihilism is immediately evident during this section as Quentin reflects upon the watch: "It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me

he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your needs no better than it fitted his or his father's" (935). For Quentin's father, the acceptance of time unites all of human history, but this union is fruitless in that it can only produce an awareness of the "reducto absurdum" of existence. This sentiment elicits a fierce indictment of the soul of the South, suggesting that the post-Civil War South faces not only economic hardships in the early part of the century but is actually bereft of "hope and desire." The once burgeoning legacy of the South has decayed into a dearth of meaning. Like Benjy, the first and arguably most objective narrator of the novel, the South has been castrated.

Quentin, however, attempts feverishly and desperately to protect and honor the values of the South through a form of chivalry that is no longer relevant in the Modernist world. He ridiculously fantasizes that "Father and [him] protect women from one another from themselves our women" (950). However, his attempts to play the role of the male protector for the women around him—primarily Caddy—are repeatedly thwarted. He is unable to successfully confront either Dalton Ames or Gerald Bland for their perceived treatment of women. Rather, both men handle his aggression quite easily—the latter brutally out-boxing him. Furthermore, even his attempts to assist a young Italian girl are misconstrued by her family and the police as kidnapping and child molestation.

Thus, Quentin's suicide by drowning is an appropriate conclusion to his fate, as he represents that last remnant of the old Antebellum South. Quentin's life becomes, in essence, his own southern lost cause. He fails to preserve Caddy's virginity—or to enact revenge upon its taker. Also, he is unable to commit incest with her, which would have metaphorically ensured the purity of the South and emboldened the dying legacy of the Compson family. The mere

presence of Quentin's disturbing incestuous desires during his mad rant throughout his narration speaks of the dissolution of the old South. His vain and unbalanced attempt to unite with his sister as a form of sanctification and protection against the modern world's encroachments upon the region demonstrates the harsh realities of a period of transition. Quentin, through his subsequent suicide, shows that he has surrendered the pride of the South. Along with the last vestiges of an Antebellum consciousness, he views the women around him as a symbol of his own prestige. Likewise, during Jason Compson's narration (*April Sixth, 1928*), Quentin's mother laments the unseemly behavior of Caddy's daughter:

“Yes,” I says. “If she stayed on the streets. I dont reckon she'd be playing out of school just to do something she could do in public,” I says.

“What do you mean?” she says.

“I dont mean anything,” I says. “I just answered your question.”

Then she begun to cry again, talking about how her own flesh and blood rose up to curse her. (1015)

Jason, of the younger generation, has concern for the improprieties of his seventeen-year-old niece only to the extent that they impede her from household duties. His interests are strictly pragmatic. On the other hand, his mother, long since rendered irrelevant by her own hypochondria, bemoans Quentin's (Caddy's daughter) tarnishing of the Compson family name. By the Twenties, the representatives of the younger Compson generation have no voice other than Jason: Benjy is mentally disabled and unable to communicate, Caddy has become estranged from the family, and Quentin has taken his own life. Thus, the bitter and coarse Jason—who now works at a farm-supply store—speaks for the future of the South.

Dwindling resources, prestige, and honor are all Twentieth Century ills of the Compson family. All three of these elements appear directly related to the regional poverty of the South following the Civil War due to both the devastation of the war and the national shift from an agricultural to industrial economy. This early Twentieth Century struggle for identity is distinctly Modernist, but it is also, in this case, particularly southern. In *Soldiers' Pay* Faulkner focuses on the great showcase of modern innovation: World War I and its aftermath. The setting of *Soldiers' Pay*, Charlestown, Georgia, is relatively inconsequential to the novel. Cleanth Brooks writes that “the regional setting is given no special significance” (98). *The Sound and the Fury*, on the other hand, is set in Faulkner’s unmistakably southern concoction of Jefferson, Mississippi within Yoknapatawpha County.

In Erskine Caldwell’s early novels as well as Faulkner’s first two major works, a clear regional commentary emerges. Whether the South resides as a passive background in the case of *Poor Fool* and *Soldiers' Pay* or is an active participant such as in *The Sound and the Fury*, the difficult transitions of the region are evident, and a rapidly industrializing nation permeates the texts. Thus, the southern cult of the dollar emerges and is chronicled through fiction writers such as Caldwell and Faulkner. In lieu of the aristocratic cultural identity that had once ruled the South, perhaps southerners sought a new economic viability—or at least the modern reality of an existence witnessed through cash rather than land. Clayton Brown writes that Woodrow Wilson’s attempts to spread American systems of democracy and values throughout the globe recede after World War I as the “sense of mission went out of fashion” (2). While this statement addresses the nation as a whole, it should not be overlooked in regards to the South. As uncomfortable as Erskine Caldwell and William Faulkner were associating with Twenties “Lost Generation” literature, their texts essentially reveal a southern slant to this post-World War I

brand of Modernism. The instability of the South's psyche opens up a monetary self-consciousness in its literature. Although the region was not the intellectually empty vessel that Mencken envisions, during this decade of overindulgence and free spending across the nation, the South was no holdout against the economic realities of the modern world.

Chapter 3

The Single-Sided Coin of Midwestern Fiction and Its Portrayals of Materialism

If anything, the Midwest of the Nineteen Twenties is more known today by its emigrants than its actual culture. From F. Scott Fitzgerald to John Dos Passos to Ernest Hemingway, the Midwest is marked by authors who fled their native land and headed first to eastern seaboard cities, then on to Paris, Rome, Warsaw, and Berlin. Literary characters like Fitzgerald's eponymous Jay Gatsby follow the same eastward trajectory. Likewise, the perils of the East—whether in reference to the American Atlantic coast or across the ocean in Europe—commonly abate when one returns to the heartland. Regardless, prominent Midwestern authors did spend considerable time in their native region. For instance, the Midwestern roots of Sinclair Lewis are abundantly clear, as John Flanagan notes:

Lewis was born in Minnesota, he spent the first seventeen years of his life in the state, and he returned on frequent visits, which sometimes involved extensive stays in Minneapolis, St. Paul, or Duluth. A number of his early short stories and six of his twenty-two novels are localized wholly or in part in Minnesota. Claims in this connection might even be made for *Babbitt* and *Elmer Gantry*, although Lewis places the action for each in the fictional town of Zenith in the equally fictional state of Winnemac. In other words, Minnesota was the birthplace, for a considerable time the residence, and by his own request the burial spot of Sinclair Lewis. It was also in actuality or by imaginative projection the physical habitat of much of his fiction. (1)

Babbitt (1922) has long been associated with wealth, materialism, and the unfettered pursuit of the American dream. Less explored among critics are the particular relationships that Lewis's novel maintains with both Nineteen Twenties American culture and the Midwest region.

As a purveyor of Twenties popular culture, Sinclair Lewis skillfully chronicled the “hundreds of American expressions which passed the lips of American people during the so-called ‘roaring twenties’” (Babcock 110-11). Furthermore, these colloquial sayings that Lewis observed and reported in his writings were primarily in “vogue during the ‘jazz age’” (Babcock 111), though many persist into the Twenty-First Century. C. Merton Babcock presents a comprehensive list of such sayings in Lewis's early Twenties novels (*Arrowsmith*, *Babbitt*, and *Main Street*) along with definitions. Some now commonplace items among the list include “Banana-Split,” “Brain-Child,” “Cradle-Robber,” “Get-Up,” “Hit the Hay,” “Holier-than-Thou,” “Snooty,” “Toot One's Horn,” and “Window-Shopping” (111-15). Clearly, Lewis's influence on American culture during this decade is undeniable.

But, what exactly was the political culture of the Midwest during the Twenties? In 1927, the public library in Hannibal, Missouri “decided to ban Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* from its shelves. Book banning and abuses of authority were issues of concern to American literary radicals” (Wixson 124) during this decade. Although some assumed community standards disallowed overtly agenda-driven radical writings, such works were regularly published—and certainly perceived as serious threats. John Reed Clubs, prominent throughout the Midwest during the Nineteen Thirties, had begun in 1929 and stemmed from the editors and writers of *New Masses*, which dated back to 1926 (Marquardt 56-58). Douglas C. Wixson writes that “young worker-writers like Jack Conroy, H. H. Lewis, Ed Falkowski, and Joseph Kalar, eager to share their experiences, made contact with one another through obscure ‘little magazines’” (73).

However, the concept of “worker-writers” who engaged in some murky—if not entirely clandestine—sociopolitical agenda during the era seems, to a Twenty-First Century audience, wholly inconsistent with common perceptions of the “Roaring” Twenties. Wixson goes on to explain that “Workers in the 1920s shared little in the affluence that the ‘Jazz Age’ represents in the popular mind” (73). Thus, assumptions of wealth during this period are as cloudy as their resultant political implications.

The socioeconomic identity of the Midwest during the Twenties is complex and often misunderstood. Possessing both rural and urban laborers, working-class solidarity is prevalent—yet so is exuberant capitalism. In a study of Midwest culture during the Twenties, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd explored life in “Middletown” (Muncie, IN), publishing *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* in 1929. Nearly ten years later, they followed this study with *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts*. Interestingly, the Great Depression had not dramatically altered the thinking of Middletown’s residents:

Middletown is overwhelmingly living by the values by which it lived in 1925; and the chief additions are defensive, negative elaborations of already existing values, such as, among the business class, intense suspicion of centralizing tendencies in government, of the interference of social legislation with business, of labor troubles, and of radicalism. Among the working class, tenuous and confused new positive values are apparent in such a thing as the aroused conception of the possible role of government in bolstering the exposed position of labor by social legislation, including direct relief for the unemployed. But, aside from these, no major new symbols or ideologies of a positive

sort have developed as conspicuous rallying points. (qtd. in Jones 195)

While some economic debates may have been exacerbated by New Deal governmental policies, it is clear from the Lynds' observations above that clear conceptions of class consciousness, labor, and wealth were abundant during the Twenties prior to the Great Depression. In fact, the economic policies of the Thirties did not emerge without warning. James Chace writes that "Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 campaign anticipated the industrial and social service state that came into being under another President Roosevelt later in the century" (240). Middletown, like the rest of the Midwest, is difficult to politically identify—given polarizing visions of work. However, Howard Mumford Jones writes that both "business man and laborer tend to operate in Middletown on the assumption that the roots of living lie in money" (197). This awareness is observable in prominent Midwestern fiction of the decade as well. Perhaps of some relevance here was the popularity of a political personality who also hailed from Indiana. Eugene Debs, labor organizer and perennial Socialist Party candidate for president, finished the 1912 election with a respectable 6% of the popular vote and ended nearly as strong in 1920, despite campaigning from jail (Chace 238-39). While these results may not seem particularly noteworthy, they do present the highest totals before or after for a candidate for the Socialist Party. Such results would be unthinkable in today's political climate.

Modernism, during this decade, possesses a multivalent quality that is often miscoded as either conservatism or a split between two polemic, and competing, prescriptions for humanity. Presumptive arguments concerning the political ideology of either authors or texts during this period are often misleading—and sometimes even specious—representations of Twenties literature. The Midwest provides an apt paradigm to prove that American fiction of this decade

is not necessarily split down a major political fault line. Rather, texts from the era show more ideological similarities than differences. Furthermore, those likenesses—at least through a Twenty-First Century lens—are more liberal than conservative, regarding issues of wealth.

Willa Cather, in her introduction to *Not Under Forty*, a collection of essays, writes that “the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts” (v) and suggests that she aligns herself with the earlier group. This self-characterization appears to cast the author as a traditionalist—abhorrent of progressive thinking and resistant to any newly developing system of values. Such an interpretation of Cather’s ideologies is commonly accepted without question. Wixson writes of a two-page cartoon in the *New York World-Telegram* during the early Thirties that cleanly and definitively divided contemporary authors according to supposed political ideology: “Portrayed on the left page were [Jack] Conroy, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Erskine Caldwell, Michael Gold, Dorothy Parker, and others; on the facing page were Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Eugene O’Neill, Willa Cather, H.L. Mencken, Dorothy Canfield, and others” (293). This classification, however, is grossly insufficient. In the cartoon, “‘bourgeois’ writers were the silhouette of an urban skyline, a dollar sign, coats, tails, and top hats” (293). Such a depiction is acutely incongruous with some of the above authors’ lives and works. For example, Ernest Hemingway could hardly be considered a bourgeois arch-capitalist. Deming Brown suggests that Soviet critics were precipitously attracted to Hemingway for the very reason that the ideals espoused through his texts could neatly coincide with extreme leftist propaganda:

An even stronger effect of the war on Hemingway, the Russians felt, was the shattering of personal and social beliefs. Perceiving the senselessness of the war, he was shocked by the human degradation it

involved—the destruction of the dignity of the individual and the feeling of moral and intellectual emptiness if left with those who had experienced it. An equally important shock was his return, with heightened sensitivity, to the spiritually empty bourgeois world. The necessity of returning to life in these decadent surroundings, so the Soviet interpretation goes, solidified the feeling of moral devastation in the author. (146)

Essentially, the commercial success of the author should not be confused for bourgeois sympathies. Rather, the “decadent surroundings” witnessed by the author were one of his primary sources of disillusionment.

Mencken, also, does not cleanly fit into a right-wing ideological mold. Wixson writes that “ironically, it was a political conservative, H.L. Mencken, who provided the broadest access to this new current of fresh, vigorous writing drawn from life” (102). He goes on to note that “the *American Mercury* writers whom Mencken published—Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis—represented the mainstream in 1920s American literature” (102). While Mencken may have embodied elitist thinking in some regards, his willingness to publish unquestionably liberal writers casts doubt on his diametrical opposition to leftist thought. Additionally, his *American Language* grants recognition and validity for colloquialisms and other American embellishments upon the language that would seem uncomfortable for a staunch traditionalist.

Finally, Willa Cather’s inclusion in the above list of “bourgeois” writers is also unsatisfactory. Throughout the course of this chapter, I will dispel sweeping assumptions as to Cather’s conservative identity by comparing *The Professor’s House* (1925) to Sinclair Lewis’s

Babbitt (1922) in order to show how these Twenties novels share a common ideological stance toward issues of wealth and materialism. The selection of these two works—in addition to their Midwestern authors and settings—is based on the ubiquitous nature of Lewis’s text in the Modernist American imagination and the left-leaning politics of the author. Indeed, Andrew Yerkes characterizes Lewis as “a self-reflectively thoughtful middle-class liberal” (292). Furthermore, Cather’s novel from the same decade elicits, as I will present, similar skepticism toward the accumulation of wealth and subsequent materialism, despite her reputation of residing within the opposite ideological “page.”

Throughout *The Professor’s House* Cather saturates the text with bitter warnings against the pursuit of wealth. The protagonist, Professor Godfrey St. Peter, and Tom Outland, a famed former student, appear to exist almost outside of monetary economy altogether in the novel—and they despise those who opportunistically pursue wealth or seek upward mobility. Cather’s clear sympathies with St. Peter and his now-deceased student—whose life is romanticized throughout Book Two in a narrative shift to pastoral and idyllic New Mexico—demonstrate the novel’s designed rhetorical position against elitism and early Twentieth Century capitalism.

One key element beneath the text’s warnings against the nature of wealth is the frequent misappropriation of income. Central to the novel is the past scientific research of Tom Outland (who does not exist in the present tense of the story because he was killed in World War I), which leads to the “Outland vacuum” (121) and enormous wealth for his former fiancée, St. Peter’s daughter Rosamond, and her new husband, Louie Marsellus. At a dinner party, Marsellus explains the genesis of their wealth to a guest:

“My wife was young Outland’s fiancée—is virtually his widow.

Before he went to France he made a will in her favour; he had no

living relatives, indeed. Toward the close of the war we began to sense the importance of what Outland had been doing in his laboratory—I am an electrical engineer by profession. We called in the assistance of experts and got the idea over from the laboratory to the trade. The monetary returns have been and are, of course, large.”

(121)

Marsellus’s sudden awareness of Outland’s patented project and his affiliation to the possessor of the inventor’s will makes him appear keenly opportunistic. Rosamond similarly embodies opportunism by marrying one with such a background and ambition that he can profit handsomely from her dead fiancé’s work—and share this wealth with his new bride. Cather confirms Rosamond’s interest in money and how it has colored her expectations of affluence: “She also, now that she was Tom Outland’s heir, detested to hear sums of money mentioned, especially small sums” (123). As the novel unfolds, Rosamond and Louie indulge in stays at lavish hotels, exorbitant shopping sprees, and finally an entire summer stay overseas in France. With each increasing performance of wealth, St. Peter becomes more disengaged from his daughter, despite the Marselluses’ efforts to include him in each of the above. They exist in contrast to the professor’s work ethic. Cather writes that “he had managed to be extravagant with not a cent in the world but his professor’s salary—he didn’t, of course, touch his wife’s small income from her father” (114). He lived only by the income he personally accrued and did not profit from the work of others—even resisting his own wife’s funds. However, the months-long trip to France that Louie and Rosamond enjoy provides a final and insurmountable point of alienation for St. Peter toward his family. He declines the invitation, but his wife, Lillian, accepts, indicating her willingness to similarly profit from Tom Outland’s life and death.

Lillian's likeness to her daughter Rosamond extends beyond their superficial physical features (118). Rather, their appearances (described in the second chapter) predict the emotional emptiness that they share toward the end of the novel after wealth has conquered every area of their lives. And, at the end of the novel, as St. Peter dreads their return from Europe, Cather explains that "he didn't, on being quite honest with himself, feel any obligations toward his family" (270). He even admits his disinterest in living with his wife any longer and expresses a desire to remain in their previous house, which he has retained as a study (266). His younger daughter, Kathleen, and her husband Scott McGregor are too mired in jealousy toward the Marselluses to provide any emotional comfort or intellectual sustenance to the professor.

One overwhelming irony inherent to Louie Marsellus's opportunistic industrialism is his status as a war-profiteer. The "Outland vacuum" functions as a critical aviation innovation toward the end of the First World War, and Tom Outland, its inventor, dies during the same conflict. Then, in a parade of affluence, Louie, Rosamond, and Lillian travel throughout the same region where Outland was killed—funded by the proceeds of his invention.

While Tom Outland is dead and incapable of reaping the rewards of his own labor, one living character in the novel does have a claim. Dr. Crane, a physics professor at Hamilton College and colleague to St. Peter, certainly provided some extension of guidance, advice, and access to adequate facilities for Tom Outland. However, neither he nor his family have financially benefited from the fruits of the labor that took place in his own laboratory. St. Peter's assessment of their dynamic is as follows:

After Tom Outland graduated from the university, he and Dr. Crane worked side by side in the Physics building for several years. The older man had been of great assistance to the younger, without a doubt.

Though that kind of help, the result of criticism and suggestion, is not easily reckoned in percentages, still St. Peter thought Crane ought to get something out of the patent. (183)

Due to Dr. Crane's failing health over a number of years and the subsequent medical expenses, his wife, desperately in need of money, comes to St. Peter to ask his advice concerning legal recourse in the matter. However, as the professor concludes, there is little legal ground for the Cranes to stake a claim. Essentially, Cather highlights here the codification of a legal apparatus that does not necessarily reward those who have provided the labor. If there is a case to be made on behalf of the Cranes, they will not be able to afford a lawyer who can match whatever premium legal team Louie Marsellus assembles in his defense. In fact, it is understood that Crane's brother-in-law, Homer Bright, is the only viable option. After the visit from Mrs. Crane, St. Peter resolves to meet with Dr. Crane in person in order to persuade his colleague to avoid legal avenues. His suggestion is for Crane to simply ask Marsellus in person for a share of the money. In other words, the pity of the wealthy is the only realistic path for the Cranes to access some of the proceeds from research with which Dr. Crane assisted. St. Peter warns, "'if you're going to law about it, I hope you'll consult a sound lawyer, and you know as well as I that Homer Bright is not one'" (188). While St. Peter sympathizes with Crane and hopes to see him collect on the returns from his share of the labor, the matter is never resolved in the novel, and the narrative shift away from the question does not bode well for the legal case of the accomplished yet hapless physics professor.

Another misappropriation of wealth in the novel stems from the title. The story opens with final arrangements being made for Dr. St. Peter and his wife to relocate from a rented upstairs of a house into a newer, larger home. Toward the end of the chapter, however, Cather

describes the professor's award of "the Oxford prize for history, with its five thousand pounds, which had built him the new house into which he did not want to move" (116). His wife senses his discomfort with departing from the older house, but is either selfish in her desire to move or does not fully recognize her husband's disinterest in constructing a new residence. She asks, "is there something you would rather have done with the money than to have built a house with it?" (116). Her question implies that something material must be exchanged for the monetary reward for his research. Ultimately, she moves into the new house, and St. Peter remains in "the professor's house"—first as merely an office but eventually as a residence. He exhibits no motivation for upward social mobility, evading the pursuit of wealth, but Lillian is quick to capitalize on her husband's success. The divide between Godfrey and his wife, which parallels his growing detachment from the monetary realm, becomes quite apparent at the start of Chapter III: "St. Peter awoke the next morning with the wish that he could be transported on his mattress from the new house to the old. But it was Sunday, and on that day his wife always breakfasted with him. There was no way out; they would meet at compt" (124).

Later, in Chapter XV, Cather explains how Louie's usurpation of Outland's wealth has adversely affected the characters surrounding him and cast him as an all-powerful gatekeeper of power. The narration states that "since Rosamond's marriage to Marsellus, both she and her mother had changed bewilderingly in some respects—changed and hardened. But Louie, who had done the damage, had not been damaged himself. It was to him that one appealed,—for Augusta, for Professor Crane, for the bruised feelings of people less fortunate" (196). In some ways the novel is bifurcated into two groups; one contains the three individuals who share some responsibility for the invention of "Outland vacuum" and the other includes the benefactors of this work. In the former group are Tom Outland, Dr. Crane, and St. Peter—who mentored Tom

and provided some vague guidance with his research. The latter gathering consists of Rosamond, Louie, and Lillian. Regarding the professor's new house, a similar misdirection of wealth occurs, as St. Peter's work supplies the funds for Lillian to built a house that her husband does not want—a metaphorical house divided that evinces a looming symbol for not only their faltering relationship but also St. Peter's disconnection with a commercialized, money-driven world.

Cather also chastises the material world of early Twentieth-Century American culture. Book Two creates a substantial digression away from the present tense and location of the story, revealing instead the former life of Tom Outland in New Mexico. Tom's narrative proves to be an idealistic tale of youth and adventure in the American frontier that sharply contrasts with the urban and material pursuits of the Marselluses in Book I. Cather bases much of Book II on actual discoveries of Native American artifacts near Mesa Verde, and Tom experiences much of the same disillusion and chagrin as do the real explorers (Woidat 23). Central to understanding this section of the novel is the idea that as soon as monetary value is affixed to the artifacts, they lose their grandeur and only cause heartache for Tom.

Book Two finally divulges the specific details of Tom Outland's recent past, prior to his arriving in Hamilton. It spans from Outland's life in Pardee, New Mexico for a six month period that ends just a year before he travels to Hamilton College to locate St. Peter. More elegiac than plot-driven, Book Two does relate a few important occurrences: namely, Outland's friendship with the rugged Rodney Blake, their discovery of Mesa Verde, and his eventual disenchantment with both the socially ambitious bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. to whom he personally delivers a sample of the artifacts and his former friend. Outland, after weeks of delays in seeking the counsel of the Smithsonian Director, finally meets Dr. Ripley, a Native American expert, but

learns that economic pragmatism and self-absorbed egos will prevent any undertaking of a federal expedition into New Mexico:

But I soon found that the Director and all his staff had one interest which dwarfed every other. There was to be an International Exposition of some sort in Europe the following summer, and they were all pulling strings to get appointed on juries or sent to international congresses—appointments that would pay their expenses abroad, and give them a salary in addition. There was, indeed, a bill before Congress for appropriations for the Smithsonian; but there was also a bill for Exposition appropriations, and that was the one they were really pushing. They kept me hanging on through March and April, but in the end it came to nothing. Dr. Ripley told me he was sorry, but the sum Congress had allowed the Smithsonian wouldn't cover an expedition to the South-west. (243)

Tom's rebuke by the Smithsonian discourages him greatly, as he imagined the administrators and scientists affiliated with such a prestigious institution would share in his enthusiasm for cultural riches. Instead, they are interested only in the value such items can bring in relation to the expenditures necessary to study them. However, he is even more hurt by what he considers the ultimate betrayal when he returns, defeated, to New Mexico and discovers that Blake has sold the artifacts to a German collector. This occurrence is particularly hurtful to Outland because his collaborator has quantified the monetary value of the items and allowed them their transport out of the country. Blake, like the Washington bureaucrats, turns to judicious financial expediency in defense of his action: "Blake reminded me that I had my way to make in the world, and that I

wanted to go to school. ‘That money’s in the bank this minute, in your name, and you’re going to college on it. You’re not going to be a day-labourer like me’” (248). As was the case with the officials at the Smithsonian, economic pragmatism supersedes idealism and intrinsic value. Market value is established, and the innocent beauty of the American frontier—with few untouched vestiges remaining in the early Twentieth Century—evaporates.

The occurrence of Tom Outland’s significantly digressive narrative in the middle portion of the novel suggests Cather’s emphasis on the lessons presented—both for the professor and her readers. The importance of this section to the remainder of the text relates to the concept of home. Leon Edel writes that “There are . . . two houses of the professor, and of these the old house is the significant one. The new house is wrong for him. The Marsellus-Rosamond Norwegian manor house is also wrong. It is a product of pretension and materialism, without regard for the style of the town and the essential dignity of human dwellings” (205). The earthy ruins of the Native Americans in New Mexico, which Outland and Blake discover out of intellectual curiosity rather than professional ambition, represent the symbiotic relationship with the natural world that is lost in the flashy newer house. For St. Peter, the inescapability of acceding to the “new” house is akin to the apparent eradication and eviction of the ancient native people from their “old” homes in the Mesa Verde cliffs. Woidat claims that “Cather connected the native peoples of the Southwest to the past, maintaining a separation between their world and modern America. . . . As a fiction writer, Cather was not concerned with the twentieth-century Indians and social issues” (39). However, she does associate the spiritual purity of their environment with that of her protagonist. In *The Professor’s House*, the industrial expansion and consequent economic opportunism of the modern world has morally devastated the characters in

the East in a symbolically parallel fashion as the Anglo westward expansion into the Southwest eviscerated the populations of numerous native peoples.

Cather also expresses a loathsome attitude toward materialism through the relationship of Godfrey and his daughter Rosamond. The strains of this seemingly healthy relationship are particularly visible when he accompanies her on a shopping trip to Chicago. Interestingly, Cather omits any exposition of the actual shopping itself, opting instead for the professor's reaction to the events that apparently take place. He and Rosamond depart from Louie in order to shop and then the author curiously cuts off the action and inserts a break between the paragraphs toward the beginning of Chapter XIV. Then the narrative flashes forward to a chance encounter with Scott McGregor onboard a train back to Hamilton. Next, after another break between paragraphs, St. Peter returns home—with distaste for all thoughts of buying and spending. Inexplicably, he walks home from the train station without taking a cab, despite it being a “raw February night with a freezing wind blowing off the lake” (191). In answer to his wife's inquiries, he plainly states that it is something he ““never used to do”” (191), which suggests he is now conscious of the changes in spending habits of those around him. Lillian then points out that he is not wearing the new fur coat that she presumed him to have purchased while in Chicago. He responds curtly with ““Well, I didn't”” (191) and then adds ““Let's omit the verb “to buy” in all forms for a time”” (191). Clearly nauseated with what he deems to be overspending by his now materialistic daughter, St. Peter continues the acerbic exchange with his wife:

“I know you're tired, but tell me one thing: did you find the painted Spanish bedroom set?” [Lillian]

“Oh, dear, yes! Several of them.”

“And were they pretty?”

“Very. At least, I think I’d have found them so if I’d come upon them without so many other things. Too much is certainly worse than too little—of anything. It turned out to be an orgy of acquisition.”

“Rosamond lost her head?”

“Oh, no! Perfectly cool. I should say she had a faultless purchasing manner. Wonder where a girl who grew up in that old house of ours ever got it. She was like Napoleon looting the Italian palaces.” (191-92)

In the above dialogue, St. Peter equates his daughter’s overindulgent consumerism with aggression, power, and recklessness. Being as “Napoleon” is St. Peter’s birth name that he willfully removed earlier in his life, his use of the term in conjunction with his daughter emphasizes the widening gap between them. Toward the end of the novel, as St. Peter contemplates an irreversible fracture with his family, he once again reflects upon the above episode with his daughter: “But Rosamond, on the shopping expedition in Chicago, had shown him how painful the paternal relation could be” (270). Rather than exulting the freewheeling spending of the “Roaring” Twenties, Cather presents a bleak world—made even bleaker in the urban environment of Chicago—of soulless materialism that separates rather than unites the American family. Furthermore, by castigating the primary purveyors of spending in the novel, the Marselluses, Cather also condemns the opportunistic capitalism associated with their particular wealth.

Tom Outland, seemingly emblematic for all that remains unaffected by the modernization of the Twentieth Century—a paragon of pre-industrial values—is also subject to the temptations

of the time. In fact, Cather indicates that the corrupting force of wealth may very well have tarnished Outland in the same way it touches other characters had he not been spared this test by his death:

St. Peter sometimes wondered what would have happened to him, once the trap of worldly success had been sprung on him. . . . A hand like that, had he lived, must have been put to other uses. His fellow scientists, his wife, the town and State, would have required many duties of it. It would have had to write thousands of useless letters, frame thousands of false excuses. It would have had to “manage” a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that. He had made something new in the world—and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others. (257)

His saving grace, according to Cather, is his death. This spares him from what the author seems to consider as the pointless and corrupt machinations of industrialism. However, the wording of the passage above makes clear the inescapability of the Modernist world. One simply cannot indulge intellectual pursuits without carefully considering the free-market value of said endeavors. Had Tom Outland survived, he would have been forced to become the worldly capitalist that would have been expected of him.

Cather’s worldview in *The Professor’s House* is not wholly inconsistent with her oeuvre at large. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* she more thoroughly expounds upon the New Mexico territory and its history. However, *The Professor’s House* offers a direct treatment of the subjects of wealth and materialism, therefore shedding some light on her broader ideologies. By

highlighting some of Lewis's similar emphases in *Babbitt*, a different mode of reading Cather's text may develop.

Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* is so unmistakably a novel that critiques Midwestern materialism that little evidence is required to state this claim. Critical opinions are fairly unified in their analysis of *Babbitt*'s position in Twentieth Century American culture. Joel Fisher writes that "if you want a fictional correlative of *Middletown* you go to Lewis's *Zenith*, and vice versa" (422). James Hutchisson contends that George Babbitt is "an archetypal figure that has since remained in America's cultural consciousness—the standardized middle-class businessman carried along by the tide of consumer culture and boosterism" (95). In an older article, Thomas Hines claims that although "*Babbitt* was not the first novel to satirize the American businessman, none before it evoked as significant a reaction from the business community itself" (123). Relevant to this discussion, however, are the analogous attitudes toward wealth and materialism between this novel and *The Professor's House*.

One area in which the two novels coalesce is their presentation of materialism as a disruption to family. In Cather's work, Godfrey St. Peter becomes disillusioned with both his wife and daughter as he sees them both spiral into obsessions with wealth and possessions. The two houses of the St. Peters become emblematic of the divide between Godfrey and his wife, and the home is also a concrete symbol in *Babbitt*. In Chapter II, Lewis bluntly states that "there was but one thing wrong with the Babbitt house: It was not a home" (15). Similar to St. Peter, George F. Babbitt becomes disenchanted with his wife once he envisions her as complicit in the pursuit of materialism. Bea Knodel writes that Myra Babbitt is seen "reading in the daily paper only the headlines, the society pages (wistfully), and the department store ads" (559). Her interests are shallow, socially-aware, and related more to shopping than global events. The

social structure of Zenith, and the Babbitts' affluent neighborhood, prevents adequate intellectual engagement between the sexes: "Ordinarily the men found it hard to talk to the women; flirtation was an art unknown on Floral Heights, and the realms of offices and of kitchens had no alliances" (116). The metonymical use of the term "offices" becomes immediately apparent as an essential symbol in the novel's opening line. Lewis begins, "the towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings" (1). The skyline is dominated not by historical structures, military installations, or religious monuments but rather centers of business. Hines writes of the importance of *Babbitt's* models to the business world: "the extent to which actual businessmen accepted or rejected the Babbitt identity suggested something of their character as individuals and of the character of the American business community in general" (123-24). The heart and soul of Zenith is engaged in making money. Thus, the men of Zenith, totally absorbed in business, are as unqualified to communicate with their wives as their wives are unsuited to intellectually engage their husbands. As a result, Babbitt can only open up to a woman such as Tanis, with whom he has an affair, who exists outside of the material social structure of Zenith:

They agreed that the weather would soon turn cold. They agreed that prohibition was prohibitive. They agreed that art in the home was cultural. They agreed about everything. They even became bold. They hinted that these modern young girls, well, honestly, their short skirts were short. They were proud to find that they were not shocked by such frank speaking. Tanis ventured, "I know you'll understand—I mean—I don't quite know how to say it, but I do think that girls who

pretend they're bad by the way they dress really never go any further. They give away the fact that they haven't the instincts of a womanly woman." (323-24)

Their ability to freely converse and use "frank" language demonstrates a connection that is nonexistent in the material, social-climbing world of the Zenith boosters and clubs.

However, as is the case in *The Professor's House*, the omnipotent force of materialism and wealth is inescapable. The modern world in which Babbitt lives presents no viable alternative to its commercial center. Cather turns to history and the Native American culture that once populated the land that is now New Mexico. Lewis also points to the past, remarking that "twenty years before, the hill on which Floral Heights was spread, with the bright roofs and immaculate turf and amazing comfort, had been a wilderness of rank second-growth elms and oaks and maples" (28). In each novel exists a reluctant sense of modern ownership over a vanquished natural terrain. *The Professor's House* culminates with St. Peter's clarity in his own separation from the materialist modern world. Embittered, he takes shelter in a house that can only temporarily relieve him of the enclosing industrialization. Similarly, *Babbitt* presents no antidote to the inevitable commoditization of the land. Once Babbitt recognizes his own disillusionment, he is unable to find a permanent alternative. The development of Zenith over the past two decades personifies his struggle, as "along the precise streets were still a few wooded vacant lots, and the fragment of an old orchard" (28)—the implication being that the few holdovers of the previous landscape will soon succumb to the buying and selling of "precise" real estate plots. Although Babbitt's foray into counterculture appears, at first glance, to be a success, ultimately Babbitt finds Tanis's "Bunch" to succumb to their own social structures and orders. Babbitt is no more successful in shirking the "American Dream" than his friend Paul

Riesling, who shoots his wife, Zilla. In the end, Babbitt returns to an ailing Myra, restores social conformity, and settles for a passionless modern world. He has been changed by his experiences with the “Bunch,” but he no longer considers them as a practical remedy to the ills of materialism.

As a redeemer of lost pre-modern values, Tom Outland is the nearest that Cather provides, and the novel’s divergence into New Mexico shows its best attempt to exemplify the American experience outside of the parameters of commerce. But, it fails. The romanticism of Outland’s experience in New Mexico is checked by the institutional hypocrisy and avarice that he encounters in Washington. Thus, nothing, in reality is redeemed. George Babbitt, ventures outside of the confines of Zenith in an attempt obtain some substance to life that is missing in both his professional existence and family life. Heading to Maine without, initially, their wives, Paul Riesling and Babbitt are “free, in a man’s world, in the smoking-compartment of the Pullman” (138). However, Babbitt’s essence remains in Zenith: “They came out; Paul in an old gray suit and soft white shirt; Babbitt in khaki shirt and vast and flapping khaki trousers. It was excessively new khaki; his rimless spectacles belonged to a city office; and his face was not tanned but a city pink” (149). On the way home, Babbitt professes, unconvincingly, to be a changed man. Lewis writes that “Babbitt was certain that he was a changed man. He was converted to serenity. He was going to cease worrying about business. He was going to have more ‘interests’—theaters, public affairs, reading. And suddenly, as he finished an especially heavy cigar, he was going to stop smoking” (153). Babbitt’s childlike naiveté is evident in this passage, which foreshadows his failure to effect real change in his life. Just as Babbitt cannot simply wish away the ills of a materialistic world, he cannot suddenly declare his new interests

and cast off the old. His inability, shortly after this proclamation, to avoid smoking foretells the impermanence of his later deviation from Zenith's materially-driven society.

The Midwest exists as one of the more difficult regions of the country to artistically and culturally evaluate. It is marked by both urban metropolises and rural farmlands, industrial innovation and menial labor, wealth and poverty. The boundaries of the region are not rigidly established and seem to evolve over time. The best one can do when assessing the literature of the Midwest is to include authors with some formative roots in the middle of the country and who do not fit into any other regional category. Thus, it is nearly impossible to select a representative sampling of Nineteen Twenties Midwestern fiction. Instead, I have chosen novels by two prominent and influential writers, and my purpose is to offer a new reading of Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* in light of the commonly accepted interpretations of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*. These readings do not purport to be either exhaustive or indicative of other writings during this time period. However, they are meant to shed some light on the literary relationship between these two celebrated authors of the Twenties American Midwest. Perhaps by reconsidering the portrayals of wealth and materialism in *The Professor's House* and juxtaposing this text with *Babbitt* one may begin to more thoroughly interrogate the broad assumptions related to Cather's political ideology.

Chapter 4

Economy, Race, and Gender during the Harlem Renaissance of the Twenties

At the end of the first chapter to Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), Jake Brown, while about to depart from Europe, exclaims, "'Take me home to Harlem, Mister Ship! Take me home to the brown gals waiting for the brown boys that done show their mettle over there. Take me home, Mister Ship. Put your beak right into that water and jest move along'" (108). For Jake, home cannot be found among the nations of Europe as a soldier, and subsequent deserter, during World War I. His home is certainly across the Atlantic, yet he does not reference his native country, the United States, in his longing for a return. It is Harlem, specifically, that he misses.

The conception of "home" is of central concern to writers of the Harlem Renaissance during the Nineteen Twenties. Anthony Dawahare elucidates the competing identities and visions of home amongst the key writers and scholars comprising the Harlem Renaissance:

To be sure, black writers and activists were often at odds over just who the New Negro was. [Marcus] Garvey, for example, championed what he saw as the African character of the New Negro, while [A. Philip] Randolph welcomed the arrival of a left-leaning, working-class New Negro. More often than not, however, definitions of the New Negro asserted that black Americans belonged to a unique race of human beings whose ancestry imparted a distinctive and invaluable racial identity and culture. . . . At the heart of New Negro discourses of the 1920s lies a crucial contradiction, one with important implications for discussions of black identity today. Writers claimed that the New

Negro was shaped by modernity yet retained in some way a racial essence or character that preceded modernity. The New Negro was as old as Africa but as contemporary as a jazz club. (22-23)

While no singly discernible construction of identity and history emerges through the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, some recurrent themes do appear.

In this chapter I will survey a sampling of important works of the Twenties Harlem Renaissance, which includes Gwendolyn Bennett's "Wedding Day" (1926), Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), and Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), in order to establish that considerations of money are essential to Renaissance works in the formation of both racial and gender awareness. The two novels are seminal and representative works of the Harlem Renaissance by prominent authors. "Wedding Day," according to David Levering Lewis, creates a dialogue with *Home to Harlem* and "anticipates Claude McKay's protagonist Jake" (363). Thus, the plausible intertextuality between the two texts presents a need to evaluate both under a single umbrella. Furthermore, "Wedding Day" is exemplary of the artistic (both written and visual) productions of the first and only issue of the influential Renaissance literary journal *Fire!! a Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists* (1926).⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois elaborates upon the equivalent and related trepidations of economy and race: "Disenfranchisement is the deliberate theft and robbery of the only protection of poor against rich and black against white" (4). Specifically, the three works above each contain the following subcategories of economic evaluations of race and gender: financial exploitation, racial "payment," and racially-informed occupations.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes that "for [Alain] Locke and his fellow authors, the function of a cultural renaissance was inherently political: the production of great artworks, by blacks, in

sufficient numbers, would lead to the Negro's 'reevaluation by white and black alike.' And this reevaluation would facilitate the Negro's demand for civil rights and for social and economic equality" (4). Essentially, the efforts of writers in Twenties Harlem—though no entirely unified aim may be perceptible—are largely foci that intertwine civil rights with socioeconomic issues. I would also add to Gates's summary above that gender is equally entangled, in the consciousness of Harlem Renaissance fiction, with economy and race.

One of the most abundant economic commentaries common to all three works is the issue of financial exploitation along lines of gender and race. This is perhaps most obvious in "Wedding Day" through the romantic dynamic between Paul Watson and Mary. Paul, an African American expatriate in Paris, is a former boxer and current jazz musician.⁹ His racially-fueled tirades toward insulting white American men frame him first as a brutal misfit, but he later softens once he encounters, and consequently falls in love with, a white American woman who works as a prostitute up until the commencement of her relationship with Paul. While Paul harbors no contempt due to Mary's former occupation, she abandons him on their wedding day, suggesting veiled manipulations that commingle gender and race.

Although financial exploitation through the component of female prostitution would traditionally invoke images of a male oppressor, or at least manipulator, opposite a grotesquely objectified and victimized female counterpart, Bennett subverts this paradigm through the infusion of a racial component. First, Paul does not seek her services and only responds to her pathetic appeals out of pity. She is certainly the aggressor who propels the initial encounter between the two, and Paul is the one who acts prejudicially according to racial demarcation. Mary exclaims, "'Oh, Lordy, please don't hate me 'cause I was born white and an American. I ain't got a sou to my name and all the men pass me by cause I ain't spruced up. Now you come

along and won't look at me cause I'm white" (367). After several more attempts to shake free from her, Paul surrenders and agrees to buy her dinner, which becomes a regular occurrence. The two then begin an unusual courtship that culminates in a marriage proposal and subsequent engagement.

The marriage, of course, never materializes, as Paul receives a note from Mary that tersely dismisses him: "Wedding day today, and that damn letter from Mary. How'd she say it now, 'just couldn't go through with it,' white women just don't marry colored men, and she was a street woman, too. Why couldn't she have told him flat that she was just getting back on her feet at his expense" (369). Paul, along with the reader, comes to the plausible conclusion that Mary had been exploiting him all along for the resultant financial perks with no intention of making a commitment to him in return. However, several additional components to the above message require closer examination as well. First, the only part in quotation marks is the pithily composed "just couldn't go through with it." The rest appears to be conjecture, albeit probable, on Paul's part. Consequently, one can surmise that Mary's actual writing reveals no emotional investment and attempts no further explanation. She merely communicates the essential information, while remaining devoid of any sympathy or sense of obligation. The other parts of Paul's recounting of her note, whether Mary's voice or his implicit understanding of her manipulation, portray a clear sense of financial exploitation. It is possible that Mary regards Paul as an easy target from which to extract money since she considers him as holding a lower cultural status than herself. Despite her unsavory profession, Mary's attitude seems to maintain her whiteness, which she views as the dominant factor—even though she is essentially warding off her own desperate poverty through the money of a black man. To her, what is essential to preserve is the formulation that "white women just don't marry colored men."

Just as much as “Wedding Day” depicts a woman’s exploitation of a man, *Home to Harlem* equally reveals the reverse gender dynamic. Men, in this novel, frequently manipulate their female counterparts for the sake of financial security, and even characters who do not participate in the practice, such as Jake, are at least conscious of its prevalence. The gritty cabaret called The Congo is described as “a real throbbing little Africa in New York. It was an amusement place entirely for the unwashed of the Black Belt. Or, if they were washed, smells lingered telling the nature of their occupation. Pot-wrestlers, third cooks, W. C. attendants, scrub maids, dish-washers, stevedores” (115). Despite the working-class nature of the professions listed above, McKay goes on to explain that “‘High yallers’ were scarce there. Except for such sweetmen that lived off the low-down dark trade” (115). Through the entanglement of race and social status, the author reveals a classification of men who feed off the economic lifeline of even those women with menial jobs.

The fact that Jake denounces such a lifestyle only confirms the centrality of male financial manipulation in this novel. A few pages after the description above, Jake begins a detached relationship with The Congo’s singer, Rose, and the narration quickly notes that “he never took money from her. If he gambled away his own and was short, he borrowed from Nije Gridley, the longshoreman broker” (120). By stressing Jake’s preference to obtain funds from a dangerous thug rather than capitalizing on his relationship with Rose, McKay hints at the prevalence of men living off the generosity of women in *Home to Harlem*.

As opposed to a conscious exchange of equal services, the implication in this novel is that men get the better of their financial arrangements with women. Regarding Jake’s friend Zeddy, McKay writes that “it was true that no Black Belt beauty would ever call Zeddy ‘mah han’ some brown.’ But there were sweetmen of the Belt more repulsive than he, that women would fight

and murder each other for” (125). Thus, in McKay’s rendering of Harlem, men appear to be in greater demand, and as a result, even those with few attractions to offer women, come out financially ahead through their romantic pursuits. The narration illustrates this point shortly after the text above, as Zeddy does indeed become a “sweetman.” In Chapter VII, Zeddy endeavors an advantageous relationship with the homely Susy. Her generosity with Zeddy, and previously with numerous other men, is misplaced, as she is not independently wealthy. Rather, the reader learns that Susy has a tendency to “sink all her wages in gin and sweetmen” (133). Zeddy bleeds her dry of food, alcohol, and spending money—all the while confessing to Jake that he will soon tire of her and move out of her Brooklyn apartment and back to Harlem. In fact, it is only the lure of Harlem, and the scores of potential new women that it possesses, that sours Zeddy’s experience as a “sweetman”:

From that evening Zeddy began to discover that it wasn’t all fine and lovely to live sweet. Formerly he had always been envious when any of his pals pointed out an extravagantly-dressed dark dandy and remarked, “He was living sweet.” There was something so romantic about the sweet life. To be the adored of a Negro lady of means, or of a pseudo grass-widow whose husband worked on the railroad, or of a hard-working laundress or cook. It was much more respectable and enviable to be sweet—to belong to the exotic aristocracy of sweetmen than to be just a common tout. (135)

When Zeddy does finally get caught by Susy, he is spending her money on another woman at a Harlem cabaret. Thus, he surrenders his status as a “sweetman” with Susy, but he continues his search until he finds another woman, toward the end of the novel, who will offer him room and

board. Zeddy elicits little concern for Susy, fearing not the loss of her affections but the expulsion from her home. Ultimately, it is the social status that he, like many other men in the novel, seeks through his pursuit of and domestic life with women.

A third form of financial exploitation exists in Larsen's *Passing* that parallels that of "Wedding Day" and *Home to Harlem*. In this novel, Irene Redfield—a light-skinned black woman—learns that her former classmate, Clare Kendry, is "passing" for white and has married a white racist named John Bellew. As is the case in the two works above, a romantic relationship between a man and a woman is at the heart of an insidious exploitation. Furthermore, just as with the two texts above, issues of race permeate the novel and inextricably inform the gestures of financial manipulation.

During the first meeting in the novel between Irene and Clare, who have not spoken in many years, the former learns some previously obscured details about her friend's family history. In particular, she learns that after Clare's father's death, she went to live with her white aunts. However, the role Clare endures within the household of her white relatives is insulting and demeaning. She explains, "I had Negro blood and they belonged to the generation that had written and read long articles headed: 'Will the Blacks work?' Too, they weren't quite sure that the good god hadn't intended the sons and daughters of Ham to sweat because he had poked fun at old Man Noah once when he had taken a drop too much'" (18-19). Essentially, Clare's caretakers, who are indeed her blood relatives, take advantage of her arrival and cast her into menial servitude for their express benefit—justifying their cruel manipulation of her by their knowledge of her racial identity. This experience appears to have informed Clare's later motivations since she effectively reverses the interplay between races when marrying John Bellew.

Clare's prompt marriage appears much more as a strategic maneuver than an expression of love. The timing of the marriage suggests that she was actively responding to her aunts and their treatment of her. Clare explains that they were immediately married on the exact day that she turned eighteen. It seems likely that Clare envisions John Bellew as an option for financial security outside of her family's grasp, once she reaches legal adulthood. Additionally, she may take some pride in using a bigoted representative of the white race to compensate for her virtual servitude under her white aunts. Jennifer De Vere Brody asserts that "although Clare has been passing for a number of years, she has managed to keep abreast of Negro culture. She appropriates white power and uses it to her advantage" (397). Clare explains to Irene the chicanery and planning involved in both her brisk courtship with Bellew and resultant liberty from her white relatives: "When the chance to get away came, that omission [of her racial identity] was of great value to me. When Jack, a schoolboy acquaintance of some people in the neighborhood, turned up from South America with untold gold, there was no one to tell him that I was coloured" (19). Not only is the timing of the wedding important but also the occasion of her relationship's commencement. Swiftly marrying closely after his accrual of "untold gold" suggests the careful crafting of her marital plans. His racism is abundantly obvious, as he unwittingly professes his hatred to a room of African American women (Irene, Gertrude, and Clare): "I don't dislike them, I hate them. And so does Nig, for all she's trying to turn into one. She wouldn't have a nigger maid around her for love nor money. Not that I'd want her to. They give me the creeps. The black scrimy devils" (29-30). "Nig" is the supposedly playful term with which John addresses Clare, on account of her slightly dark, and darkening, skin complexion.¹⁰ The depth and conviction of Bellew's loathing would likely preclude Clare from genuinely loving the man. Instead, her entire role within their relationship is one of playacting,

maintaining an entirely fictional persona. As a result of her efforts and deception, she is financially compensated. Thus, Clare does, in a sense, exploit John Bellew. However, a question persists as to whether she is a racial traitor or simply avenging injustice on behalf of her race.

Judith Butler espouses the idea that Irene's derision toward Clare is really a manifestation of jealousy due to Clare's successful implementation of socioeconomic achievement through "passing." Furthermore, Butler contends that Clare's blatant sexuality also exacerbates Irene's disgust toward her:

And though Irene voices a moral objection to Clare's passing as white, it is clear that Irene engages many of the same social conventions of passing as Clare. Indeed, when they both meet after a long separation, they are both in a rooftop café passing as white. And yet, according to Irene, Clare goes too far, passes as white not merely on occasion, but in her life, and in her marriage. Clare embodies a certain kind of sexual daring that Irene defends herself against. . . . (410)

While Butler's presentation of Clare as both a sexual threat and object of desire for Irene is plausible, especially given Clare's eventual linkage to Irene's husband, the preceding statement is not entirely fair to Irene. She does muse to herself, in impassioned fashion, about Clare's intentions toward race: "And it wasn't, as Irene knew, that Clare cared at all about the race or what was to become of it. She didn't. . . . Nor could it be said that she had even the slight artistic or sociological interest in the race that some members of other races displayed. She hadn't. No, Clare Kendry cared nothing for the race. She only belonged to it" (36). The reference to "some members of other races" who evince at least "slight artistic or sociological interest" in African

Americans could constitute Larsen's nod to Carl Van Vechten—to whom the novel is dedicated (3).

Another form of economic consciousness common to all three works is the payment involved in the construction of racial identity. In *Passing*, Clare, during her initial meeting with Irene, asks the other if she has ever considered “passing.” Irene is visibly offended by the mere suggestion that she could stand to gain through a racial transmutation and responds with ““You see, Clare, I’ve everything I want. Except perhaps a little more money’” (20). Her invocation of money suggests that she associates race with economy and assumes wealth to be a primary advantage for those electing to “pass.” Clare continues with the motif of money in her own retort, saying that ““money’s awfully nice to have. In fact, all things considered, I think, ’Rene, that it’s even worth the price’” (20). In this statement, however, Clare reverses the essential meaning of pay and implies that the surrendering of her native racial identity is a payment of sorts for her present wealth. To Clare, money is more important than her racial self, which she considers as a fluctuating bargaining chip. Several pages later Clare continues her tract of payment for race while discussing skin color with Irene and another light-skinned friend, Gertrude: ““As my inestimable dad used to say, “Everything must be paid for.” Now, please one of you tell me what ever happened to Claude Jones’” (27). The conversation, shifting then to Claude Jones, involves an African American man who had converted to Judaism. Clare immediately considers the pragmatism of such a conversion, while Irene broaches the possibility of Claude’s conviction, rather than strategy, behind the move. After laughing at the premise of converting to Judaism, Clare then considers, ““Still, it’s his own business. If he gets along better by turning—’” (27), before Irene interrupts her. Addressing her two acquaintances, Irene then interjects, ““It evidently doesn’t occur to either you or Gertrude that he might possibly be sincere

in changing his religion. Surely everyone doesn't do everything for gain'" (27). But "gain" is the primary motivation for Clare, who cannot possibly love her racist husband, John Bellew. Furthermore, as the novel progresses, she expands her precarious and uncomfortable racial positioning that straddles the line between black and white. When Irene recommends that Clare abstain from a "Negro Welfare League" (49) dance, the latter confesses a deep desire to revive her kinship with others of her own race: "But Clare, it was plain, had shut away reason as well as caution. She shook her head. 'I can't, I can't,' she said. 'I would if I could, but I can't. You don't know, you can't realize how I want to see Negroes, to be with them again, to talk with them, to hear them laugh'" (51). Her statement confirms the stratagem behind her actions. Clare seeks the company and respect of her fellow African Americans while enjoying the monetary benefits of her wealthy, prejudicial husband. Despite her earlier admission that one must "pay" for such actions, Clare pursues a path of nonpayment. In essence, this course produces her own death at the end of the novel, as her time spent among black friends leads to Bellew's discovery of her true race, which provides the distraction that allows Irene to possibly (the exact circumstances of the scene are markedly ambiguous) push her out a window.

Dawahare writes that Larsen's novel depicts money as "not just a means of and imaginary escape from commodification but also shapes the most fetishistic form of black identity—the passer for white" (32). However, the racial "payments" that occur reflect both transfer fees for the acquisition of a new racial identity and pay through the sacrifice of retaining one's native race. Irene is apparently conscious of a price affixed to the retention of one's race since, as quoted above, she suggests that "passing" could potentially provide her "a little more money." Irene's allusion to money in this context is bizarre because it reveals a sensitive awareness to financial compensation, despite the fact that her lifestyle indicates that the

Redfields are quite socioeconomically successful. In Chapter Two of Part Two, it becomes apparent that Irene and her husband, Brian, employ two servants, are charged with organizing a charitable event, and are intimate acquaintances of Hugh Wentworth—a respected white author. All aspects of the Redfields' lifestyle bespeak wealth, comfort, power, and gentility. Thus, it is odd that Irene solely professes a desire for “a little more money” when posed with the question of “passing.” The implication by Larsen, then, through this seemingly offhand statement, may be that Brian Redfield, though clearly a successful physician, would stand to make even more income if he were white. In any event, the significance of Irene's utterance is that it elicits an immediate monetary consciousness that trumps all other issues—even though the Redfields appear to be solidly financially secure.

So, in *Passing*, professional success is no protection against the trepidations of money and wealth as long as racial identification remains in play. Therefore, Irene makes a type of “payment” by resisting the financial security that her acquiescence to whiteness could potentially bring. Furthermore, the instability of her marriage that results from Clare's possible affair with Brian suggests that Irene may exist in an even more precarious economic position than at first recognizable. Brian's likely infidelity with Clare indicates that Irene's racial identification in regards to her marriage, though evading the risk of exposure that Clare endures, is still susceptible to the external conditions that could jeopardize Irene's economic station.

Similar to the racially motivated payments in *Passing*, in “Wedding Day” Paul Watson literally pays for his violent defense of his own race when challenged by the derogatory remarks of white men. In one particular incident, Paul reacts to the racism of a “drunken Kentuckian” (364) through a whirlwind rage—the specifics of which the narrator is not even entirely certain—that apparently involves numerous fights and possible wielding of either bottles or

chairs. This is representative of Paul's usual response to white bigotry that insults his racial sense of self. However, Paul must pay an explicit monetary fee for his actions, however provoked they may be. Bennett writes that "the last syllable of the word, nigger, never passed the lips of a white man without the quick reflex action of Paul's arm and fist to the speaker's jaw. He paid for more glassware and café furnishings in the course of the next few years than is easily imaginable" (364). Paul is also frequently made to pay "a small fine" (364) when his aggressive responses constitute criminal acts.

When Paul finally surpasses even his own formidable brand of physical violence and shoots two Americans, he pays the abstract price of his liberty. Ironically, World War I is the only force that can both redeem Paul and establish a form of racial equality. Mark Whalan writes that "the Great War in France afforded African American men opportunities many had not experienced before" (776). Paul, along with other French prisoners, is pardoned in order to fight in the war. The equalizing effect of the War, though, occurs on several fronts. The narrator summarizes that "there has never been such equality before or since such as that which the World War brought. Rich men fought by the side of paupers; poets swapped yarns with dry-goods salesmen, while Jews and Christians ate corned beef out of the same tin" (365). It takes a world war to cover the cost of Paul's most recent demonstration of racial defiance, and Bennett parallels this erasure of a felonious criminal act to both socioeconomic and religious equality.

Returning, at present, to McKay's novel, the circulation of money throughout Harlem in relation to the economic efficacy of the area is central to understanding *Home to Harlem*. In one essential capacity, Harlem exists as a place of commerce in the novel. McKay provides extensive descriptions of the cost of products and services, the economic viability of particular establishments, and the financial relationship of Harlem to the rest of New York. Chapter II

begins, “Jake was paid off. He changed a pound note he had brought with him. He had fifty-nine dollars. From South Ferry he took an express subway train for Harlem” (108). His jaunt back to Harlem begins with a Hemingwayesque exact recording of how much money he possesses. The next paragraph relates that “Jake drank three Martini cocktails with cherries in them. The price, he noticed, had gone up from ten to twenty-five cents” (108). The opening scene through which McKay introduces the reader to Harlem explains Jake’s ability to participate as an agent of economic means and his subsequent awareness of the financial exchanges surrounding him. Jake’s cognizance of the increased price highlights the extent to which Harlem proprietors plan to capitalize on both returning veterans and the newfound popularity of the area.

Almost immediately, Jake exchanges the cash in his pocket for the services of a prostitute. Inside a cabaret, he encounters “a little brown girl” (108) who remains nameless—both to the reader and Jake—until near the end of the novel. After tipping the singer exactly fifty cents, Jake then begins negotiating an equitable rate for a sexual encounter with the girl. Rebuking the paltry sum of five dollars, the girl then demands fifty—nearly all the money Jake has brought back from Europe. To this he happily agrees. However, the flow of currency between the two takes one more turn as the girl surreptitiously sneaks the fifty dollars back into his pocket before he leaves in the morning. With the returned money is a note that reads, “‘Just a little gift from a baby girl to a honey boy!’” (110). Her use of the term “honey boy” is reminiscent of the expression “sweet man,” which is discussed above. In a sense, she is “buying” him back and reversing the assumed gender dynamic that would uphold her as the prostitute whose services are purchased by a man. Instead, she buys his services, and he, in

effect, becomes the prostitute. Interestingly, her note does not elucidate any discernible concrete reasoning for her decision to return the money.

Besides the interpersonal cash flow in the novel, the financial success, or lack thereof, in regards to the businesses of Harlem is a common topic of scrutiny throughout *Home to Harlem*. Specifically, the economic strength of the various cabarets and nightclubs is a critical topic in several scenes—most notably at the onset of Chapter IV:

All the old cabarets were going still. Connor's was losing ground.

The bed of roses that used to glow in the ceiling was almost dim now.

The big handsome black girl that always sang in a red frock was no longer there. What a place Connor's was from 1914 to 1916 when that girl was singing and kicking and showing her bright green panties there! And the little ebony drummer, beloved of every cabaret lover in Harlem, was a fiend for rattling the drum!

Barron's was still Barron's, depending on its downtown white trade.

Leroy's, the big common rendezvous shop for everybody. Edmond's still in the running. A fine new place that was opened in Brooklyn was freezing to death. Brooklyn never could support anything. (114-15)

Beyond a simple litany of entertainment options, the preceding passage reveals a barometer, of sorts, of the capitalist achievements of each establishment. Furthermore, this discussion of economic gains and losses is peppered with racially coded diction that suggests an inextricable merging between the two. Also, as a section of New York, Harlem symbolizes the concentrated heart of the African American community and consciousness, and in this novel Harlem equals business success. The last sentence above implies that entrepreneurial enterprises outside of

Harlem, in this case Brooklyn, are unable to succeed—at least in terms of popularity among the black community.

A third important categorization that unites all three works is the topic of occupation. In each case, race is irreducibly fused with conceptions of occupation and the requisite socioeconomic ramifications of vocation. While conceptions of wealth and work fluctuate among these three Renaissance works, what they all share is the notion that racial constructions of identity signify some predictors of occupation or professional success. Gary Holcomb contends that McKay enacts a dialogue with Ernest Hemingway and reverses the marginality of black characters in *The Sun Also Rises*: “The act of appropriating and inverting Hemingway’s stimulating bohemian novel of existential hopelessness ultimately makes it possible for McKay to overturn the race hierarchy built into the white modernist blackface minstrel literary act, revolutionizing the modern novel by seizing the stage without makeup” (70). *Home to Harlem* does wrest control of the conversation of African American occupational roles. However, McKay actually paints an equally bleak picture of the limitations of black employment as of that constructed by white authors such as the aforementioned Hemingway.

In *Home to Harlem*, three key scenes highlight the stratifications of race and their effect on one’s occupation. At the start of the novel, Jake is working aboard a ship in order to pay for his transatlantic voyage back to the United States—and specifically Harlem. In describing Jake’s experience working on the vessel, the first few paragraphs of the novel all invoke racial identifiers. The first paragraph notes, “he was working with a dirty Arab crew. The captain signed him on at Cardiff because one of the Arabs had quit the ship” (105). The next paragraph begins, “the white sailors who washed the ship would not wash the stokers’ water-closet, because they despised the Arabs. And the Arabs themselves made no effort to keep the place clean,

although it adjoined their sleeping berth” (105). The following two paragraphs further elaborate on the tensions between the whites and Arabs and explain the latter’s refusal of pork as one critical sticking point. By opening the novel in this fashion, McKay enacts a paradigm of racial identity as inextricable from occupation. However, he also suggests possible misunderstandings of cultural difference as relevant throughout the text, and he hints at racial complexities involving Jake’s social position that extend beyond the binary of black and white.

Jake’s role in this occupational—and racially segregated—hierarchy exists within a liminal state. A white sailor tells Jake, “‘you’re the same like us chaps. You ain’t like them dirty jabbering coolies.’ But Jake smiled and shook his head in a non-committal way. He knew that if he was just like the white sailors, he might have signed on as a deckhand and not as a stoker” (105-06). The sailor effectively offers Jake a normative white identity aboard the ship, but Jake perceptively concludes that his station aboard the freight has already been established along racial lines, despite any empty attempts at solidarity by the man.

McKay elaborates upon the correlation between race and work in a brief passage explaining Jake’s prewar occupation: “When America declared war upon Germany in 1917 he was a longshoreman. He was working on a Brooklyn pier, with a score of men under him. He was a little boss and a very good friend of his big boss, who was Irish” (106). Jake’s work ethic likely accounts for his status as a “boss.” In Chapter V, the narration discusses Jake’s willingness to work and refusal to accept money from Rose. He returns, in this chapter, to a position as a longshoreman, but he “didn’t have a little-boss job this time” (120). McKay continues, “But that didn’t worry him. He was one blackamoor that nourished a perfect contempt for place” (120). Thus, as a diligent and humble worker, Jake likely earned his

previous status as a “little boss.” Yet, the recognition of the “big boss” as “Irish” still delicately suggests a system that caps upward social mobility along racial lines.

Then, in this same chapter, Zeddy tips off Jake to a new and more lucrative position working on the docks unloading boxes of pineapples. On the first day, Jake notices that the crew is “a group of Negroes and a few white men” (121) and that “the men ate inside and were not allowed outside the gates for lunch” (121). During the course of the next day, Jake violates this policy and wanders outside. Once out on the street Jake encounters a man who explains to him that the current workers are “scabbing” (121). Upon this knowledge, Jake assures the man that he has never “scabbed” and has no intention of beginning now. As was the case in the novel’s opening scene, the labor organizer then extends an offer of white status, in a sense, to Jake, claiming that his organization is ““the only one in the country for a red-blooded worker, no matter what race or nation he belongs to”” (121). Jake’s response, however, demonstrates both honor and a recognition of the veiled racial influences on occupation:

“Nope, I won’t scab, but I ain’t a joiner kind of a fellah,” said Jake.
 I ain’t no white folks’ nigger and I ain’t no poah white’s fool. When I
 longshored in Philly I was a good union man. But when I made New
 York I done finds out that they gived the colored mens the worser
 piers and holds the bes’n a’ them foh the Irishmen. No, pardner, keep
 you’ card. I take the best I k’n get as I goes mah way. But I tells you,
 things ain’t none at all lovely between white and black in this heah
 Gawd’s own country.” (121-22)

Through this dialogue Jake reveals what he considers to be hypocrisy within such organizations that profess to unite the races. He exhibits solidarity for his fellow workers but skepticism that

workplace discrimination will subside through labor organizing. Since Jake specifically notices that the workers at the pier are “a group of Negroes and a few white men,” it is plausible that the striking laborers are white and that black workers from Harlem are being used only as a desperate replacement. The essential racial components of this chapter, though somewhat ambiguous, are certainly perceptible to Jake.

A third section of the novel that stresses the racial association to occupation occurs when Jake is employed aboard a train. The delineations of race and their implications become even more refined in Chapter X: “The two grades, cooks and waiters, never chummed together, except for gambling. Some of the waiters were very haughty. There were certain light-skinned ones who went walking with pals of their complexion only in the stop-over cities” (154). The implication in this passage is twofold. First, it suggests that waiters enjoy a privileged or more respected position along the professional hierarchy in comparison to cooks. Second, the suggestion here is that lighter-skinned employees are more likely to be chosen as waiters. However, Jake does cross the unofficial line between the two categories of workers when he commences a conversation concerning history with Raymond, a Haitian student and current waiter. Not only do the two become good friends but also their initial conversation stresses diasporic unification, as Raymond teaches Jake about Toussaint L’Overture and the Haitian revolution. The didactic tale deeply affects Jake, who “was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. . . . But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world” (157). Interestingly, Jake’s revised worldview and newfound cultural identification with the African diaspora begins when he violates the social stricture of occupational segregation.

In “Wedding Day” the nature of work and occupational identity takes a subtle but unique tone. Throughout the story a portrait of black musicians and wait staff serving white patrons emerges. The first sentence points out that “when the first Negro jazz band played in a tiny Parisian café Paul was among them playing the banjo” (363). All forms of work by black employees appear to take place within the confines of cafés and bars. When Paul then goes to work “in a larger café with a larger band, patronized almost solely by Americans” (364), the suggestion is that white Americans are the primary customers. This dynamic is what fuels much of Paul’s anger toward the white patrons whom he continually encounters in such settings. One of the difficulties of Paul locating a comfortable occupational space is explained by Alain Locke’s argument in “The New Negro” that African Americans, during this time, experienced “only a hard choice between the alternatives of supine and humiliating submission and stimulating but hurtful counter-prejudice” (49). The next paragraph discusses Paul’s episode attacking a racist white man from Kentucky, which is discussed above. Later, Bennett’s description of Rue Pigalle further establishes the link between service occupations and race within the story:

Rue Pigalle in the early evening has a somber beauty—gray as are most Paris streets and other-worldish. To those who know the district it is the Harlem of Paris and rue Pigalle is its dusky Seventh Avenue. Most of the colored musicians that furnish Parisians and their visitors with entertainment live somewhere in the neighborhood of rue Pigalle.

(365)

The tone in this passage, as in the entire story, is one of segregation. Furthermore, within the predominantly black corridors of the city is a virtual assumption of one’s occupation being that

of a performer or some other profession within the service industry. The presumed recipients of these services are white patrons.

Regarding occupation, the issue in play throughout this story is not the quality or social status of the professions mentioned above. A jazz musician, such as Paul, clearly does not exist at the bottom of any social stratum. Nevertheless, Mary, a prostitute, still sees herself as socially superior to Paul. Thus, occupations for whites, in this story, are not measured by the same standard of employment as for blacks. Interestingly, the final two paragraphs of the story—after Paul becomes cognizant of Mary’s jilting—mirror a jazz style. It begins with a sentence fragment: “Mud on his nice gray suit that the English tailor had made for him” (369). The word “gray” is then repeated three times in the next two sentences, creating a musical repetition.

Another form of fragmentation appears in the bizarrely inconclusive final sentence to the second to last paragraph: “What was that thought he was trying to get ahold of—bumping around in his head—something he started to think about but couldn’t remember it somehow” (369).

Essentially this sections functions as a jazz improvisation that begins with fragmented musical phrases that repeat until they meld into a thematic climax. Eventually, the section culminates in the refrain of “first class ticket in a second class coach” (369), which is stated three times in various forms. As the story concludes, the reader is left with these frenetic and seemingly spontaneous lines that carry a flashy musicality—and parallel the genre of Paul’s profession.

Joel A. Rogers explains the simultaneously subversive and cathartic role of jazz to culture:

“Moreover, jazz with its mocking disregard for formality is a leveler and makes for democracy.

The jazz spirit, being primitive, demands more frankness and sincerity. Just as it already has done in art and music, so eventually in human relations and social manners, it will no doubt have the effect of putting more reality in life by taking some of the needless artificiality out” (57).

Jazz, according to Rogers, makes democratic and comprehensible order out of formerly confounding chaos. As it relates to “Wedding Day,” the chorus line above is the dominant image in the story’s final paragraph, and it suggests Paul’s understanding of not only Mary’s racism but the overall socioeconomic systems within which he operates. The explicit displays of offensive language that Paul has a reputation of brutally answering are actually minor in comparison to the lesson he learns from Mary.

Occupation also plays a unique role in the racial constructions in *Passing*. At first glance, the novel appears optimistic toward the potentiality of upward social mobility. Brian Redfield is a physician and seemingly successful. He and Irene are involved, along with other prosperous Harlem families and white benefactors, in charitable organizations that are dedicated to the advancement of disadvantaged African Americans. Thus, both the American Dream and mutually beneficial racial integration appear to be active in Harlem in *Passing*. To truly understand the relationship between race and occupation in this novel, though, one must closely examine a comparison between the two male characters romantically related to Clare: John Bellew and Brian Redfield.

John is racist, rich, and white. Brian is progressive, wealthy, and black. Where Brian has clearly earned his academic and professional credentials, John’s success is more shadowy. The concept that he merely “turned up from South America with untold gold” (19) suggests ease and immediacy in his own accumulation of wealth. Brian, despite his own achievements, is unhappy and frustrated with his career. Regarding his practice, Brian bitterly states, “‘Lord! how I hate sick people, and their stupid, meddling families, and smelly, dirty rooms, and climbing filthy steps in dark hallways’” (39). In his case, even impressive occupational accomplishments provide no contentment or enjoyment. Irene, befuddled, thinks to herself, “hadn’t his success

proved that she'd been right in insisting that he stick to his profession right there in New York?" (40). Brian's true desire, the reader soon learns, is to move to Brazil, where he believes genuine equality exists (40). In other words, his discontent stems from his conviction that one must flee the country in order to experience racial harmony, and no amount of professional success offers a remedy to his embittered thought process.

The wildcard that operates in the background of this novel is Bob Kendry, Clare's father. Although Irene knows that Kendry had been a janitor before his death, much of his background is obscured to both her and the reader:

Besides, Clare had never been exactly one of the group, just as she'd never been merely the janitor's daughter, but the daughter of Mr. Bob Kendry, who, it was true, was a janitor, but who also, it seemed, had been in college with some of their fathers. Just how or why he happened to be a janitor, and a very inefficient one at that, they none of them quite knew. One of Irene's brothers, who had put the question to their father, had been told: "That's something that doesn't concern you," and given him the advice to be careful not to end in the same manner as "poor Bob." (14)

Kendry, the reader learns, was of mixed race and had a light complexion. Although he had been to college and maintained friendships, he apparently descended into alcoholism and consequently worked, ineffectively, as a janitor most of his life. Kendry's vague story serves as a cautionary tale for his daughter, Clare. It is likely that he could have "passed" himself, considering his background and the description of his "pasty-white face" (6). Thus, Clare, also light-skinned, envisions one's racial construction as a choice and possibly associates her father's dismal life on

the Southside of Chicago with black identity. Therefore, she marries John Bellew, knowing that she can effectively exchange her socioeconomic status as the “janitor’s daughter” for a permanent upgrade into white, leisure-class existence.

However, differing critical conceptions of Clare’s actions complicate a reading of the text. Brody reads Clare as “simultaneously complicit with and subversive to . . . middle-class values” (397), but she assesses that Irene “desperately desires to be free of the burden of race-consciousness and to join those who reside in the rising towers of capitalist American society” (397). Both statements are valid, but Irene is also limited and frustrated by her husband’s melancholy due to overwhelming societal racial forces. Mark J. Madigan regards Clare as a victim for whom “escape is realized only in death” (392). Other critics, such as Emily J. Orlando, accuse Irene of casting an “objectifying gaze . . . that titillates and pleases the eye” (79), when considering Clare. Deborah E. McDowell envisions both Irene and Clare as ultimately seeking the same end, which is “marriage to a man in a prestigious profession, the accouterments of middle-class existence—children, material comfort, and social respectability” (373). However, any defense or redemption of Clare is, ultimately antithetical to the direct narration at the beginning of the novel: “There had been, even in those days, nothing sacrificial in Clare Kendry’s idea of life, no allegiance beyond her own immediate desire. She was selfish, and cold, and hard” (6). I contend that Clare does, indeed, serve as a dissident agent against traditional racial and gender roles—perhaps inspired by the negative model of her father. However, any reclamation of Clare’s character must acknowledge the self-interested motivations to her actions, whether relating to her pursuit of wealth through exploitation or pleasure via another woman’s husband. There is no suggestion in the text that she operates on behalf of any social movement or sentiment toward race or gender that exists outside of her own solipsistic experience.

Economy functions as a multi-faceted variable throughout this sampling of works from the Harlem Renaissance. Each of these three texts shows an acute consciousness of socioeconomic realities while trying to make sense of the conceptions of racial and gender identity. While racial considerations may, to many readers, appear to be the dominant theme in Twenties Harlem Renaissance literature, this is not necessarily the case. In *Home to Harlem*, McKay writes that “women were so realistic and straight-going. *They* were the real controlling force of life” (131). The lively dynamics between men and women play as important a role in Renaissance texts as the more explicit treatments of race. In either case, identities are formulated, questioned, and reassembled. And, in both cases, the all-encompassing force of economic considerations becomes the most powerful agent, as is seen through the example of the above texts.

Chapter 5

Wealth and Women: The Expatriate Performance of Affluence

The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won. The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force.

(Miller 7)

The quote above, from Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man," allows for one to treat F. Scott Fitzgerald's legendary Jay Gatsby as a tragic hero whose noble pathos strives hopelessly but valiantly against overwhelming and nefarious conditions. If this is the case, then what exactly is the "superior force" that he battles? Miller specifically addresses an American audience, writing that "we who are without kings" (7) should celebrate the "heart and spirit of the average man" (7). What Gatsby crusades against—and perhaps what all Americans encounter—are the economic hegemonies and social structures from which he cannot wrest control. Embedded within Gatsby's notorious pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, is a class struggle and social commentary. While this point may be easily recognizable, what is less noticeable is the relationship between Jay Gatsby and Ernest Hemingway's Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. Both Jake and Gatsby have a fundamental and complex relationship with money in their respective texts, and the vehicle that exposes this relationship is each character's romantic liaison with a woman. In addition to examining the most seminal literary achievements of the Twenties from these two prominent American authors—*The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*—this chapter will also investigate

Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" and its significance when considering the production of his later novel.

American expatriate writers of the Nineteen Twenties lived amongst a world of transatlantic affluence. Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, in particular, lived among a Parisian circle of writers and artists such as Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Pablo Picasso. Remembering the struggles of their early careers yet enjoying eventual success during this decade, Hemingway and Fitzgerald straddled the worlds of the wealthy and the working. They are part of a postwar world of spending, excess, and amorality. At the same time, however, they are both highly critical of the individuals who populate such a society. By closely examining scenes from Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" and *The Great Gatsby*—and the relationship between the latter two texts—I will explore the role that women play in developing the economic consciousness of the male protagonists in each work.

In Chapter IV of *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes departs from Lady Brett Ashley and Count Mippipolous after a night of food and drink and returns home to his apartment. From the concierge, he receives two letters from the United States. The first is a bank statement, and Jake recites his exact state of financial affairs: "It showed a balance of \$2432.60. I got out my check-book and deducted four checks drawn since the first of the month, and discovered that I had a balance of \$1832.60. I wrote this on the back of the statement" (38). While contemporary readers may, at first, interpret this scene as Jake's awareness of the finite quality of his resources, Jacob Leland points out that "the 600 dollars Jake Barnes spends (twice Robert Cohn's extravagant maternal allowance, to keep the novel's own economic score) in 1926 was worth \$6271.19 in 2003. Moreover, it was relatively cheap to live in Paris in the 1920s" (39). Rather than minding his finances with dogmatic precision, Jake is posturing in his narration. In this

scene, timing is important. Jake has just departed from Brett and a potential new romantic interest. Given Jake's inability to perform sexually, his performance is instead financial—made more poignant by the fact that the Count is, himself, quite wealthy and bears war wounds of his own. However, it is unproductive to myopically evaluate Jake's flaunting of his bank account as a surrogate for sexual utility. Several critics point out that the possibility for a sexual relationship between Jake and Brett does still exist. Dana Fore refers to the first private moment for the couple, which occurs in a Paris taxi, as hinting toward the potentiality of nontraditional forms of sexuality between them (80). Fore writes that Brett “affirms a capacity to experience intense physical sensation from simple stimulation—which may translate into an ability to derive satisfaction from nontraditional sex” (80-81). The possibility for “nontraditional sex,” according to Fore, stems from Brett's admission to Jake: ““I simply turn all to jelly when you touch me”” (34). Other critics, such as Chaman Nahal contend that the scene when Brett and Jake are alone together in his apartment presents the best opportunity for some unnamed sex act to have taken place during a mysterious and glaring gap in the narration (44). During this scene, Brett sends off the Count, suddenly leaving her and Jake alone in his bedroom. When Jake inquires about the Count, she responds, ““Sent him for champagne. He loves to go for champagne”” (62). Jake, however, does not appear to answer her. Instead, the next line reads, “Then later” (62). Since Hemingway (via Jake) does not supply an explanation for the missing time, it is certainly possible that a form of sex act does take place, which Jake is uncomfortable narrating. In either case, the point remains that some form of sexual congress between the two characters is possible in the novel, which suggests that Jake's financial performances extend beyond singularly compensating for his sexual inadequacy.

The role of Count Mippipopulous in the scene above is an interesting and contentious question. Jake knows little about the man and his young and ineffectual protégé, Zizi, but they soon are able to speak to one another during the Count's second appearance in the novel. Some verisimilitudes between Jake and the Count appear to surface during their conversation with Brett, yet the vague and possibly coded language of the three hinders any definitive reading of the scene:

“My dear, I am sure Mr. Barnes has seen a lot. Don't think I don't think so, sir. I have seen a lot, too.”

“Of course you have, my dear,” Brett said. “I was only ragging.”

“I have been in seven wars and four revolutions,” the count said.

“Soldiering?” Brett asked.

“Sometimes, my dear. And I have got arrow wounds. Have you ever seen arrow wounds?”

“Let's have a look at them.”

The count stood up, unbuttoned his vest, and opened his shirt. He pulled up the undershirt onto his chest and stood, his chest black, and big stomach muscles bulging under the light.

“You see them?”

Below the line where the ribs stopped were two raised white welts.

“See on the back where they come out.” Above the small of the back were the same two scars, raised as thick as a finger. (66-67)

The Count's assertion that he and “Mr. Barnes” have each “seen a lot” implies some common experiences and supports Brett's exclamation that he is “one of us” (67). Wolfgang Rudat

contends that the Count's wounds were the result of his "fighting as a mercenary for the Italians" (10). At first glance, fighting as a mercenary suffices as an easy explanation for the Count's participation in "seven wars and four revolutions," and his wounded veteran status links him intrinsically with Jake. Additionally, a few sentences after reading his bank account statement, Jake strangely thinks of the Count, stating "the count was funny" (38)—employing the same word ("funny") that he repeatedly associates with his own groin injury.

Upon closer reading, however, Jake and the Count are not of the same ilk, and Jake recognizes this fact. William Kerrigan was the first critic to point out that the Count and Jake possess the same sexual impairment (87). Like most other scholars, though, Kerrigan assumes the Count to share an *injury* with Jake. This is a possibility, considering the scars he exhibits in the dialogue above. The problem here is that the "arrow wounds"—the only injuries to which the reader is privy—were acquired in Abyssinia when the Count was twenty-one (67). Since the Count claims to "have been around a very great deal" (66), it seems unlikely that he has been rendered impotent since the age of twenty-one. Also, the wounds do not appear to be particularly near the groin. If this incident did not cause the "funny" injury, then it is possible that another physiological explanation accounts for the Count's impotence that may not relate to combat. The Count's involvement in the Italo-Abyssinian War at age twenty-one places his present age at around fifty. Also, upon first encountering the Count, Jake describes him as "a fat man" (36). Although the Count may be intentionally directing the conversation—with Jake's injury as the unspoken elephant in the room—toward his external scars, it is possible that his impotence is merely the product of age and weight.

The nature of the Count's involvement in "seven wars and four revolutions" also must be examined. Unlike Rudat's assertion that the Count is a lifelong mercenary soldier, William

Adair contends that “the Count may be a negative character: a war profiteer and purveyor of a false philosophy” (92). This is a far cry from the claim of most critics, such as Rudat, who writes that “The Count has become so much one of them” (9). Adair casts him as something altogether quite different: “The imagery surrounding the Count suggests that he made his big money in the Great War. He fits the popular wartime image of the profiteer: fat, cigar-smoking, champagne-drinking, using a walking stick, given to sumptuous meals and young mistresses. The only thing he lacks is a top hat” (92). Unlike the assumption that the Count shares some battlefield solidarity with Jake, the text appears to lend more support to Adair’s contention. When Brett asks the Count if he was in the army, he responds, ““I was on a business trip, my dear”” (67). While a ““business trip”” could refer to either mercenary soldiering or war-profiteering—and his involvement in so many conflicts could support either possibility—it seems more likely that this wealthy noble would be involved in the latter rather than the former.

The Count also subtly violates an important stricture of both Barnes and Hemingway. He extends beyond permissive epicurean indulgence in food and drink when he orders ““the oldest brandy [they] have”” (68), which turns out to be from 1811, at a restaurant near the Bois. The significance of the year 1811 corresponds to a comet that was discovered that year by French astronomer Honoré Flaugergues. Brandy from this year was dubbed “Comet Vintage” and is, to this day, considered some of the finest of the last several hundred years (Harding 45-47). Though Jake hardly exists in a state of penury, he is never seen ordering “the finest” or “the oldest.” His concern is a direct and fair exchange, and he meticulously records his purchases and the prices he pays. Jake’s spending habits are far from frugal, as he continuously partakes in the splendors of food and drink throughout the novel. Also, he informs the reader of the tips he leaves, and he does reveal his financial assistance to other characters—such as the poverty-

stricken Harvey Stone and, of course, Brett. He does not, however, openly deal in extravagances, which the Count does with his purchase of an 1811 Brandy. Immediately, Brett rebukes the Count for his bombastic display and appeals to Jake's sense of modesty: "I say. Don't be ostentatious. Call him off, Jake" (68). Jake's silence indicates that by verbally acknowledging a misstep on the part of the Count he would be violating yet another Hemingway code of conduct. By contrast to the Count's spending, Jake narrates the functional elements of his purchase: price, tip, and quality of the product. In this scene, there is no mention of the Brandy or if it was worthy of its historic designation. They change the subject, and then Jake's narration simply dismisses the dinner altogether. As opposed to "ostentatious" displays, Jake subscribes to Bill Gorton's philosophy, which he espouses in Chapter VIII after encountering a taxidermist's shop: "Simple exchange of values. You give them money. They give you a stuffed dog" (78). Essentially, one only pays for what an item is worth.

The Count, on the other hand, asserts his own system of values prior to their dinner at the Bois. "Values" in this scene take on a dual meaning as both a measure of monetary worth and a moral code. To the Count, however, the two are indistinguishable. He explains to Jake his system as follows:

"You see, Mr. Barnes, it is because I have lived very much that now I can enjoy everything so well. Don't you find it like that?"

"Yes. Absolutely."

"I know," said the count. "That is the secret. You must get to know the values."

"Doesn't anything ever happen to your values?" Brett asked.

"No. Not any more."

“Never fall in love?”

“Always,” said the count. “I am always in love.” (67)

First, the Count directs his explanation squarely at Jake, which emphasizes the competition between the two. His claim that having “lived very much” provides for his ability to “enjoy everything so well” makes no sense without decoding “lived very much” as “making lots of money.” Within the context of this novel, “lived very much” cannot innocently read as “life experience.” Jake’s formative “life experience” has only rendered him unable to enjoy sexual pleasure. Consequently, if the Count’s value of enjoyment is read as a fetishistic cult of money, then the remainder of the above dialogue characterizes him as an arrogant and stubborn noble. After tersely stating ““Yes. Absolutely.”” Jake drops out entirely from a conversation that had initially been directed toward him. His silence throughout the remainder of the scene indicates his subtle but important disagreement with the Count’s system of wealth as values. To Brett’s question of love, the Count lamely replies that he is ““always in love.”” This ambiguously impersonal and public broadcasting of emotion is antithetical to Jake’s own values—including his smoldering, yet safely concealed, love for Brett.

Another point to consider when comparing Jake’s spending habits to those of the Count is that Jake avoids publicly displaying his wealth. He repeatedly catalogues painstaking records of his spending for the reader but never to other characters. Jake reads alone at home his bank account statement and the tremendous amount of money that he recently, and mysteriously, spent.

The point in calling attention to the incongruities that exist between Jake and the Count is to dispel common critical assumptions that Count Mippipopolous is, in fact, “one of us.” If he is to be read as a contrasting persona or even a foil to Jake, then the narrator’s reading of his

precise bank account balance is a posture in response to the exhibition of wealth by a rival. Leland writes that “Jake Barnes depends upon earning and spending practices to establish an American, male, expatriate identity in Paris” (37). Certainly an emphasis on gender identity and financial potency exists for Jake. The narration reveals an acute obsession with the minute details surrounding his financial transactions, and this is even more prevalent in scenes involving Brett. Leland also states that “Jake Barnes exercises spending power. To make money and to circulate it, rather than to possess a valued object, allows Jake to imagine himself as a fully realized male and an agent of U.S. economic power, in control of the modernizing marketplaces he inhabits” (38). While this is largely true, it is important to understand that Jake’s spending and financial cognition do not necessarily result from a desire to become a “fully realized male.” Jake sounds off to the reader about his substantial amount of money in the bank and precipitous spending after encountering the Count, who likely is also impotent. Thus, any rivalry that exists between the two men stems more for their respective interests in Brett, rather than Jake’s desperate attempts to compensate for physiological damage to his genitals. In other words, the “economy of masculinity” (37) that Leland describes does not only function as Jake’s reaction to his own sexual disability but also is present even when he encounters a character with the same physical ailment. While the concept of spending is made more poignant by Jake’s injury, it would still remain as a critical thrust of the text even if the narrator were sexually functional. This foreshadows the final moment in the novel when Jake, for perhaps the first time, demonstrates recognition that his injury is not the only factor keeping him and Brett apart:

“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)

If Jake could “[raise] his baton” while Brett is “pressing” up against him, he still would be impotent to combat the forces of the modern world that truly blockade relationships in this novel: psychological war trauma, chaotic new gender role reversals (evidenced by their respective word choices in the above passage), a generation that has—at least temporarily—lost its moral compass, and a deflection from emotional distress to superficial spending.

One obstacle to any close reading of *The Sun Also Rises* is the out of focus lens through which Jake narrates the story. As a result of misleading, veiled, or omitted narration, the reader sees only the world Jake chooses to present—and his emotional investment in the plot severely compromises his objectivity. In a novel based primarily on characterizations, Jake—as important a character as anyone—clouds the portrayals of the people in his life. Brett, in particular, may not receive a fair treatment by Jake, which leads to misreading by critics. Lorie Watkins Fulton writes, “such misinterpretations stem from the fact that we as readers see Brett as Jake sees her, and his ideas about Brett seem conflicted at best” (62). Jake’s “conflicted” attitudes toward Brett do not singularly influence his presentation of her character. Instead, the heightened emotions that color passages involving Brett also emerge when he describes her various suitors—his romantic, if not sexual, rivals. As was the case above involving Count Mippipopolous, Jake responds cleverly in his narrative performance once a foil appears in the novel.

The one character who arguably receives an even worse treatment by Jake than Brett is Robert Cohn. Robert’s Jewish identification immediately becomes evident through Jake’s

portrayal, and as the depictions of Robert become progressively worse throughout the novel, the narration descends into apparent anti-Semitism, which many critics associate not only with the narrator but also Hemingway himself. For instance, Linda Wagner-Martin claims that “Hemingway presented Robert Cohn’s Jewish qualities with consistent, and insistent, derogation throughout the novel” (39). Such statements wrongfully shift the burden of narration onto the author and ignore the crucial purposes behind Jake’s unique, though uncomfortable, characterization. Wagner-Martin goes on to assert that “anti-Semitism . . . mars the text far beyond narrative need” (39). Other critics spare Hemingway from an outing as an anti-Semite, but they nonetheless make assumptions about Cohn’s inferiority in the novel. Lee Thorn remarks that “Robert Cohn and Pedro Romero represent the opposite extremes of the code/etiquette/aesthetic” (44) and that “we learn that Cohn is ugly and a bad artist in the first chapter” (44). Yes, Robert’s characterization in the text differs wildly from Pedro, but critical studies often gloss over the reasons, assuming any negative portraits of the former to be reflexive of either the anti-Semitism of the narrator, author, or both. When Jewish stereotypes coalesce neatly with Robert’s violation of presumed masculine codes in the novel, then scholarly inquiries into this character and his complex relationship with Jake tend to fall short. It is my contention that Jake admires Robert for the same reasons that he feels threatened by his presence. Rather than admitting his own weakness in the face of a worthy romantic foe, Jake’s narration attempts to obscure Robert’s strengths as it descends into petty stereotypes and gross mischaracterization. Furthermore, Robert is not altogether antithetical to Pedro. Actually, the two share quite a few similarities, which Jake downplays. Since Pedro is also a formidable romantic rival, an obvious question emerges: If the two are more alike than different, then why does Jake openly marvel at

the one and scorn the other? I assert that the opposing socioeconomic backgrounds of the two characters clouds Jake's narration.

Jake, and Hemingway, begins the novel with a description of Robert, immediately stressing the importance of this character to both the narration and narrator.¹¹ After announcing that "Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton" (11) in the first sentence, Jake immediately counters with "do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title" (11). If Jake were truly as unimpressed as he professes, then he likely would not have opened his narration by listing this accomplishment. Then, Jake mentions that "he was so good that Spider promptly overmatched him and got his nose permanently flattened. This increased Cohn's distaste for boxing, but it gave him a certain satisfaction of some strange sort, and it certainly improved his nose" (11). What comes across as merely a tasteless stereotype of the Jewish nose actually contains hidden flattery. First, Jake acknowledges that the reason Robert's nose was broken was that he had been matched up against a boxer from a higher weight class because his coach, Spider Kelly, had been duly impressed with him. Second, by facing the dangers of stepping into the ring against a larger fighter and then sustaining a significant injury, Robert has proven that he is no coward—and like Jake and Pedro, he persists despite his outward wounds. Although Jake pretends that this incident "increased Cohn's distaste for boxing," the textual evidence suggests otherwise. Later on in Jake's biography of Robert, he mentions that, once in Paris, Robert "boxed at a local gymnasium" (13). Jake also reveals that Robert "played a very good end on the football team" (12) in prep school. The chapter concludes with Jake admitting that he "rather liked him" (15). Regarding Thorn's comment that Robert is "ugly," Jake only mentions that he had been "hardened into a rather unattractive mould under domestic unhappiness with a rich wife" (12). This comment could as easily apply to a temporary

disposition as to physical features. Considering the immediacy with which Brett invites him to San Sebastian and begins a sexual relationship, coupled with Jake's own statement that Robert "realized that he was an attractive quantity to women" (16), it is plausible that Jake never really considered him "ugly." Additionally, Robert is a novelist, which Jake aspires to become, and although Jake first decried his novel as "very poor" (13), he later states that "the publishers had praised his novel pretty highly" (16). In the first two chapters, Jake essentially praises several important areas of Robert's life—all of which cause envy in the narrator. Jake's narration is conflicted because he both admires and fears his subject. Jeremy Kaye writes that "Cohn is not the weak and sickly caricature of anti-Semitic fantasy. Rather, he embodies Max Nordau's idea of the 'Muscle Jew'" (50). Robert, it turns out, is exactly the type of man to whom Brett is viscerally attracted, so Jake pretends that he is not, though moments of praise continually seep their way into the novel.

Overall, Robert possesses the athleticism, artistic ability, and sexual vitality that Jake desires for himself. Brett selects him over Jake for her trip to San Sebastian, and Robert easily defeats both Jake and Pedro in a physical altercation. Intimidated by Robert's successes, Jake skews his narration in Book II to characterize Robert as whiny, effeminate, and utterly ineffectual.¹² None of these characteristics are consistent with the depictions of Robert in the first chapter. Then, after Robert is effectively expunged from the novel as a result of his fighting, his absence is significant. Kaye argues that Robert's "Jewishness becomes most important to the novel at exactly this juncture. After Cohn's departure, everything falls apart for Jake" (53). While Jake is threatened by Robert, he and Pedro are the characters Jake most admires, and both become tarnished by their obsessions with Brett, who doesn't appreciate the way either of them tries to effeminize her. Both Robert and Pedro, however, possess the passion

that the other characters lack. Their respective failures reflect Hemingway's disillusion with a superficial and meaningless modern world—a world in which neither Robert nor Pedro fits.

Whether or not Robert and Pedro suffer similar textual expulsions by the end of the novel, there is an undeniable difference in the way their characters are described and treated by Jake. Both are passionate athletes, both achieve public notoriety for their professional successes, and both sleep with Brett. However, Jake not only tolerates Pedro's affair with Brett but actually facilitates its occurrence. The unacknowledged point of disparity between the two characters that, perhaps, contributes to Jake's wildly divergent treatment of them is their respective socioeconomic backgrounds. Kaye points out that "Cohn is a member of one of the richest and oldest families in New York, whereas Jake, the rootless expatriate, must work and does not have a family, or at least never mentions one" (52). While we know very little about Pedro's background, it is likely that he comes from more humble origins than Robert and has had to establish himself. In *Bullfighting, Sport, and Industry*, Hemingway explains the typical circumstances of a young bullfighter:

Poor boys, without any financial protection, follow the bullfights as bootblacks, eager to get into the ring in any kind of an amateur fight no matter how dangerous; practicing the various passes on each other, a passing waiter, a cab horse; riding under the seats of trains with their fighting capes rolled up as pillows; going for days without food when they have been put off a train somewhere by a conductor who catches them without a ticket; going through all the hell of the *capeas* or village fights where an old, experienced, criminal of a bull is let loose in the barricaded square of a country town and all the aspirant

bullfighters may practice with it or be practiced on by the bull. There was one such bull that was used in the province of Valencia which killed sixteen amateurs and crippled badly more than thirty others before the law forbidding *capeas* was enforced and the bull was finally sent to the slaughterhouse. Boys following this method of learning to bullfight get the worst of it first, but they do not have to worry about having their confidence suddenly destroyed by their first wound or by some bull that may have other ideas than to follow the cape. (42-43)

Prior to this passage, Hemingway only briefly discusses the path for aspiring bullfighters hailing from affluent families, but he quickly dismisses this route, suggesting that financially privileged young matadors will likely “lose their courage and usefulness” (41). Clearly, Hemingway’s sympathies rest with the “poor boys” who work their way through the ranks, against tremendous odds, continuing purely for love of the artistry and athleticism. And, it is also obvious that the vast majority of Twentieth Century matadors emerged from the ranks of the poor.

What this means for the novel is that Jake’s narration relates a form of class consciousness and identification that classifies the characters. Just as Count Mippipopolous functions as a foil to Jake, Pedro does the same for Robert. All four of these characters are in love with Brett, and they can be neatly bisected into two parallel rich/not-rich class binaries. Despite the similarities between Robert and Pedro, Jake has an easier time relating to the success of Pedro, perhaps ignoring Robert’s personal triumphs. In a sense, Jake must awkwardly select a phallic surrogate for Brett, and his implicit jealousy of Robert’s socioeconomic background may skew his characterizations and influence his odd acquiescence toward Pedro and Brett’s sexual

relationship. Beneath it all, Jake evinces respect and envy toward both of the above men—though he strives mightily to feign contempt for the “Jew.”

In *The Sun Also Rises* Jake’s economic awareness affects his performance of wealth, his relationships with other characters, and his narrative voice—and all of these occur within the particular context of his unfulfilling love for Brett. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “Winter Dreams” a woman once again serves as a catalyst for class consciousness. However, unlike *The Sun Also Rises*, this story concerns upward mobility and the “American dream.” Fitzgerald’s protagonist, Dexter Green, conceives of wealth and class in relation to his romantic pursuit of the affluent Judy Jones. “Winter Dreams” presents women as mirages that inspire false hope in the concept of upward socioeconomic advancement. In this story, Judy Jones becomes a symbol for the leisure class—a representation that will wholly dictate the course of Dexter Green’s life.

The first angle with which to consider Dexter’s pursuit of Judy is her influence on his life in regard to education and work. The story begins with the following opening line concerning Dexter’s boyhood employment: “Some of the caddies were poor as sin and lived in one-room houses with a neurasthenic cow in the front yard, but Dexter Green’s father owned the second best grocery-store in Black Bear—the best one was ‘The Hub,’ patronized by the wealthy people from Sherry Island—and Dexter caddied only for pocket-money” (217). Fitzgerald’s first sentence immediately creates a societal stratification of “wealthy,” “poor,” and then Dexter, who exists in an unarticulated middle-class through which he simultaneously resides in both of the previous classifications. He caddies for the affluent patrons of the Sherry Island Golf Club, but he is not of either the poor or working classes. This is important, as it insinuates that Dexter is conscious of the role of the leisure class and its separation from those, like himself, who must work for a living. However, Dexter exists in easy circumstances compared to some of his

colleagues since he “caddied only for pocket-money.” Sociologist Brian Starks explains that “whites, the well-educated, men, dominant class members, and those with higher incomes are all more likely to believe in the American Dream than ‘underdogs’ with the opposite characteristics” (207). Thus, Dexter serves the wealthy, but he is far enough removed from the desperation of the poor to concretely envision upward social mobility, which directly relates to his first encounter with a young Judy Jones.

One day the fourteen-year-old Dexter suddenly quits his job as a caddy, claiming to be “too old” (218). The impetus for the immediate cessation of his employment is directly related to his socioeconomic awareness once he witnesses the haughty behavior of Judy Jones as a young girl:

The little girl who had done this was eleven—beautifully ugly as little girls are apt to be who are destined after a few years to be inexpressibly lovely and bring no end of misery to a great number of men. The spark, however, was perceptible. There was a general ungodliness in the way her lips twisted down at the corners when she smiled, and in the—Heaven help us!—in the almost passionate quality of her eyes. Vitality is born early in such women. It was utterly in evidence now, shining through her thin frame in a sort of glow. (218)

The narrative voice in the passage above employs such diction as “ugly,” “misery,” and “ungodliness,” but then balances these with “beautifully,” “lovely,” “passionate,” and “vitality.” The complicated and competing connotations of these word choices hint at the concurrent outward beauty and hidden flaws of Judy. Certainly Dexter is uncontrollably drawn to her physical features, but he is even more attracted to the lifestyle she represents. A scene develops

between the eleven-year-old Judy and her nurse that demonstrates the supercilious nature of the young girl. After angrily pounding the ground with her club, Judy “raised it again and was about to bring it down smartly upon the nurse’s bosom, when the nurse seized the club and twisted it from her hands” (220). Then, she yells, ““you damn little mean old *thing!*”” (220) at the nurse, obviously implying that Judy treats her family’s hired help as an object that she can physically or verbally abuse at her own discretion. Once the caddy-master orders Dexter to pick up Judy’s clubs, he promptly declines—and quits. Judy’s leisure-class lifestyle inspires Dexter to abandon his own work because he now seeks acceptance by the wealthy rather than to serve them. The fact that Dexter is attracted to Judy despite her disdainful behavior suggests that he is drawn not toward the girl but to the social class she represents.

So, after unwittingly influencing one of Dexter’s early employment decisions, Judy will unknowingly affect several more. First, though, Dexter bases his choice of college on his desire for “glittering things” (221). Fitzgerald writes that “the quality and seasonability of these winter dreams varied, but the stuff of them remained. They persuaded Dexter several years later to pass up a business course at the State university . . . for the precarious advantage of attending an older and more famous university in the East” (220). The “winter” aspect of Dexter’s dreams implies that they will ultimately fade and die. Unaware, Dexter begins his lofty pursuit of the American dream at what is likely an Ivy League university. Fitzgerald summarizes Dexter’s post-college success:

He made money. It was rather amazing. After college he went to the city from which Black Bear Lake draws its wealthy patrons. When he was only twenty-three and had been there not quite two years, there were already people who liked to say: “Now *there’s* a boy—” All

about him rich men's sons were peddling bonds precariously, or investing patrimonies precariously, or plodding through the two dozen volumes of the "George Washington Commercial Course," but Dexter borrowed a thousand dollars on his college degree and his confident mouth, and bought a partnership in a laundry. (221)

Although he once again serves the wealthy, Dexter's business spreads and catapults him into their lot. Accepting an invitation to play at the Sherry Island Golf Club, Dexter once again encounters Judy, and again her ill-manners are on display. She wildly launches a ball into the stomach of Dexter's golfing companion, Mr. T.A. Hedrick. Unencumbered by the adult Judy's rudeness, Dexter continues to be smitten with her and embarks upon a rocky courtship to which she never fully commits. During their first meeting, Dexter's recent social advancement comes into play as Judy probes his background. Point blank, Judy asks, "Are you poor?" (226), to which he replies, "I'm probably making more money than any man my age in the Northwest" (226). Their dialogue occurs in response to Judy's admission that she had left a man earlier in the afternoon after learning that he was poor.

At this point in the story Dexter appears to have fulfilled the "winter dreams" of his boyhood fantasies. By all objective measures he is a success—not only regarding his own specific undertakings but as a symbol of American capitalism. Although not quite a Horatio Alger character, he does embody the work ethic and economic expansion of a quintessential model for the American Dream. However, being as the dreams of this tale belong to winter, something is wrong. Inexplicably, the relationship between Dexter and Judy never does solidify, and as the story progresses his frustrations only grow. Eventually, after Dexter becomes engaged to another woman, Judy lures him into an affair that only lasts a month. Once it ends, Dexter

plans to return permanently to New York. However, World War I comes, and “he was one of those young thousands who greeted the war with a certain amount of relief, welcoming the liberation from the webs of tangled emotion” (233). Toward the end of the story, “dreams” takes on several different meanings. Dexter’s dreams at the beginning of the story involve aspirations of socioeconomic upward mobility. However, the thrust behind this movement is his desire for Judy, whom he ultimately fails to have. Thus, “dreams,” near the end, take on the meaning of illusion.

The illusory quality to Dexter’s tale is twofold. First, Judy proves to be little more than a fiction—a girl with only a trifling resemblance to the symbol of upper-class perfection that Dexter makes her out to be. In the final section of the story, Dexter, after avoiding Minnesota for the past seven years, encounters a man, Devlin, who has recent knowledge of Judy. His depiction of present-day Judy angers and confuses Dexter:

“I’m not trying to start a row,” he said. “I think Judy’s a nice girl and I like her. I can’t understand how a man like Lud Simms could fall madly in love with her, but he did.” Then he added: “Most of the women like her.”

Dexter looked closely at Devlin, thinking wildly that there must be a reason for this, some insensitivity in the man or some private malice.

(235)

This description makes no sense to Dexter, who has fashioned his life, from age fourteen forward, around seeking the education and employment necessary to attain this personification of feminine beauty. He is reticent to even accept this latest portrayal, assuming that some “insensitivity” or “private malice” must be in play. Essentially, Dexter cannot conceive of the

temporality of beauty because beauty metaphorically represents a manifestation of the fruits of capitalism. It is also possible that Judy never possessed the physical attractiveness that Dexter remembers and that he has simply mythologized her, seeing in her not a person but the “glittering things” (221) that are synonymous with her.

In either case, the second disillusion that Dexter experiences through these recent revelations of Judy relates to his faith in upward mobility. While his economic validation appears to be fully realized through his entrepreneurial endeavors, Judy has, since Dexter’s childhood, served as a symbol of the American Dream—the Holy Grail of male economic achievement in the story and a confirmation of Dexter’s graduation into the leisure class. Not only does Dexter fail to attain her, but he also learns that the object of his pursuits either was only desirable for a fleeting moment in time or never was what he perceived her to be. His realization, seven years later, of this predicament is what causes the most trauma to Dexter at the end of the story:

He wanted to care, and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more. The gates were closed, the sun was gone down, and there was no beauty but the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time. Even the grief he could have borne behind in the country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.

“Long ago,” he said, “long ago, there was something in me, but now that thing is gone. Now that thing is gone, that thing is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more.” (235-36)

He understands that his toils have been misdirected in seeking such a girl as Judy. As noted above, Fitzgerald's earliest descriptions of her as a child explicitly identify her personality flaws. However, Dexter deifies this girl who is as known for her cold cruelty as her beauty.

In the final lines of the story above, Fitzgerald presents an interesting, and characteristically pessimistic, vision of the Modernist world. The narration states that "there was no beauty but the gray beauty of steel that withstands all time." What fails Dexter is the American Dream. There is no personal reward for the victor in this paradigm.¹³ Instead, one's labor will only lead to the "gray beauty of steel" that is industrialization. Faith in the beauty of all else is misplaced and can only produce impermanent results.

The model that exists in "Winter Dreams" is a well-known motif to readers of Fitzgerald. Commonly, such tales involve a young man whose interest in an upper-class woman intersects with his drive for socioeconomic advancement. Such stories are equally saturated with ambition and disillusionment, and they simultaneously represent American success and failure in the early Twentieth Century. It is nearly impossible to consider "Winter Dreams" without examining the story within the context of Fitzgerald's most famous work, *The Great Gatsby*. Gerald Pike explains that Fitzgerald considered "Winter Dreams" as an early version of *The Great Gatsby* (315).¹⁴ The similarities are unmistakable.

In 1925, the same year as *Gatsby*'s publication, Edmund Wilson wrote that "Fitzgerald is a dazzling extemporizer but his stories have a way of petering out: he seems never to have planned them thoroughly or to have thought them out from the beginning" (82-83).¹⁵ Such criticisms are common of Fitzgerald's early work.¹⁶ *The Great Gatsby*, then, can be viewed as the culmination of an extant idea in his lexicon—a more mature variation on his previous work. Besides admittedly revisiting "Winter Dreams" in an improved novel form, other examples of

Fitzgerald's meticulous and calculated efforts in *The Great Gatsby* prove the well-considered nature of the text. In a letter to his longtime Scribner editor, Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald writes from Italy of his final revisions:

After six weeks of uninterrupted work the proof is finished and the last of it goes to you this afternoon. On the whole it's been very successful labor.

- (1) I've brought Gatsby to life.
- (2) I've accounted for his money.
- (3) I've fixed up the two weak chapters (VI and VII).
- (4) I've improved his first party.
- (5) I've broken up his long narrative in Chapter VIII.

This morning I wired you to hold up the galley of Chapter X. The correction—and God! it's important because in my other revision I made Gatsby look too mean—is enclosed herewith. Also some corrections for the page proof.

We're moving to Capri. We hate Rome. I'm behind financially and have to write three short stories. (177)

Two crucial ideas emerge from this letter. First and foremost, Fitzgerald has carefully studied and analyzed his subject-matter, and what results is not only a well-crafted novel but a realistically developed title character; Jay Gatsby is a more gritty and convincing manifestation of Dexter Green. The second issue at hand is the personal economic conditions of the author that factor into the production of his works. Studies of the biographical association between Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby* are obvious and abundant and need not be discussed in any

great detail for the purposes of this examination. Suffice it to say that economic realities forced their way into the author's life during the writing of this novel and likely are consciously reflected in the text.

Regarding the first of the two issues above, the focal point of this discussion is the evolution of Dexter, a character who obtains wealth through legal and noble enterprises, into Jay Gatsby, who resorts to illicit methods. Roger Lewis comments on the relationship of the two characters, noting that "Gatsby is abstemious and careful—a man aware of his own doubleness. Both dreamer and vulgarian at the same time, he is, like Dexter Green, a money maker and a romantic; unlike Dexter Green, he seems to balance the two" (43-44). However, Gatsby's supposed "balance" and temperance undercuts some of the seedy realities of his character. He is a murky persona and ultimately deceitful to those around him. Gatsby also conducts an adulterous affair, and above all he is a criminal—a fact he conceals not for fear of prosecution but because he knows it would expose him as an unfashionable member of the new rich. Scott Donaldson writes that "Gatsby's clothes, his car, his house, his parties all brand him as newly rich, unschooled in the social graces and sense of superiority ingrained not only in Tom Buchanan but also in Nick Carraway" (77). Thus, social exposure is a legitimate and continuous problem regardless of the amount of wealth Gatsby accumulates. All of his faults are, in some ways, excusable because they are couched within his ultimate drive at winning back Daisy, who is married to Tom Buchanan. Thus, Gatsby is not Fitzgerald's primary object of scorn. Nick Carraway, as narrator, explains that "no—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men" (2). Nick confirms his opinions of Gatsby at the end of the novel by chastising the representatives of the old aristocracy:

“They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together” (180-81). In other words, Gatsby is a victim of society, which subverts the natural order of the criminal as predator. Furthermore, it is Gatsby, rather than Tom or Daisy, who elicits the pathos that Arthur Miller discusses in “Tragedy and the Common Man.”

The implication, then, is that Jay Gatsby is a criminalized version of Dexter Green. Gatsby, and his lifestyle, are the product of a more sophisticated and scrupulous author. Like “Winter Dreams” “it tells a cautionary tale about the debilitating effects of money and social class on American society and those who seek fulfillment within its confines” (Donaldson 97). But, in this novel Fitzgerald raises the stakes, because the “money and social class” that he had previously chastised for their superficial and fleeting nature in “Winter Dreams” now also propels men into organized crime. The idealistic ascent into grand entrepreneurial and capitalistic successes that Dexter manages as a young man is amended in Fitzgerald’s retelling of the story. Following a more realistic path for the decade of the Twenties, Jay Gatsby, or James Gatz of North Dakota, who cannot reasonably expect to quickly accrue the wealth necessary to entice a woman such as Daisy, turns to organized crime. Regarding the hazy nature of Gatsby’s exact operations, Michael Millgate writes that “the precise methods by which Gatsby makes his money are irrelevant. What is not irrelevant, however, is the element of illegality involved: this is why Fitzgerald makes such use of an otherwise peripheral character, Meyer Wolfsheim” (336). Seizing the particular historical moment of the Twenties, Gatsby becomes involved in bootlegging, gambling, and other schemes. Tom angrily reveals that ““He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That’s one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him,

and I wasn't far wrong'" (134). Tom is referencing an earlier moment when, in speculation of the source of Gatsby's wealth, he explains, "'a lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers, you know'" (109). Tom is correct, but what is important is that he can essentially assume that "newly rich people" likely had to resort to illegal means.

If Jay Gatsby is to be considered a hero, he is a distinctly American version. His father shows to Nick a daily schedule that Gatsby, as a boy, had drawn for himself in order to improve himself. It is almost certainly based upon the routine that Benjamin Franklin advocated in his *Autobiography* (174).¹⁷ Mr. Gatz explains that "'Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that'" (175). As a young man, the precocious Gatsby left home and went to sea with Dan Cody, experiencing for the first time the flashy lifestyle of the wealthy (99-101). He later served in the military. Eventually, Gatsby managed to accumulate a tremendous amount of wealth through his own crafty ingenuity—all for the love of a beautiful woman. Theoretically, Gatsby embodies the traditional qualities of the hero of the American Dream. Fitzgerald molds Gatsby after Dexter, but no longer considers legal economic systems as a viable option for his character's social mobility. Fitzgerald even takes Dexter's last name (Green) and inserts it as a recurrent symbol of hope, and money, throughout the novel. At the end of Nick's narration, he makes a final mention of the profoundly symbolic green light at the end of the Buchanans' dock: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—" (182). For Dexter and Gatsby, however, "it is not money alone that matters, but money combined with secure social position" (Donaldson 83). In other words, the new rich are fated for failure in Fitzgerald's vision of Modernist America.

Gatsby cannot, in the end, win Daisy any more than Dexter can win Judy. While Dexter's efforts result in disillusionment, Gatsby ends up dead.

In all three of the texts discussed within this chapter, male characters struggle with their own economic identity. Jake Barnes, Dexter Green, and Jay Gatsby each carve their own financial niche and achieve some form of success despite indeterminate or unimpressive familial connections. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, women are indelibly linked with the economic consciousness of all three characters. For Jake, the awkward proposition of a romantic relationship with Lady Brett Ashley is further complicated by money. Jake is obsessed with exact enumerations of wealth, and his narrative voice reflects interpretations of other characters based upon class. In "Winter Dreams" the concepts of feminine beauty and affluence are indissoluble from one another, and Dexter's attainment of upper class status can only symbolically be capped by winning the most gorgeous rich girl in sight. As for Gatsby, Donaldson writes that "Daisy represents the most desirable object of all. She is invariably associated with the things that surround her, her car and her house and, most of all, her voice" (87). None of the above men winds up with the girl. Despite their various financial achievements and clear demarcations of economic success, they all meet heartache, misery, and a bleak ending.

Starks writes that "whereas the American Dream of the mid-1800s involved the move westward and the ability to start fresh on a new homestead and farm, the post-WWII American Dream involved the move to the suburbs and the ability to own a home, raise a family, send one's children to college, and support oneself in old age" (206). The problem, then, is to define the American Dream as it relates to the points in between. For the American expatriate writers living and working in Europe during the Nineteen Twenties, their native land was a paradox.

They label it the Jazz Age but seem to lament the end of Victorian order. Living in Europe during the early to mid-Twenties, especially Paris, neither author prominently features French characters in his writing. In the case of Hemingway, whose novel is largely set in Paris, the paucity of French figures is perhaps a reflection of World War I's catastrophic ravaging of nearly an entire generation of young Frenchmen. Fitzgerald, on the other hand, did not employ a European setting in any of his three novels published during the Twenties. Both authors likely saw firsthand the devastating effects of World War I on the Parisian society surrounding them, though neither man was technically a veteran of the war. Fitzgerald enlisted but never saw combat, and Hemingway served as a volunteer for the Red Cross but was actually near the frontlines.¹⁸ Abroad, they were citizens of the world, enjoying cosmopolitan lifestyles, while Midwesterners at home. In defiance of the American mythology of the West as an Edenic paradise of hope, personal and national growth, and prosperity, these authors send their characters eastward into a realm of supposed leisure where women legitimize the victors of an implied economic contest. Perhaps this accounts for the iniquities they encounter among the upper-classes and the superficialities of the women they love. However, Hemingway and Fitzgerald offer no viable alternative, and traveling west will not improve their stock. As Jake Barnes says, ““you can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another”” (19). But, these authors did move away from their native land, though their writings continued to focus primarily on Americans. During the Twenties, Hemingway and Fitzgerald kept a safe distance from their Midwestern roots—but they maintained a critical eye toward their homeland and questioned the ethics of the entire transatlantic world.

Conclusion

Looking Forward: From the Modern to the Postmodern

The interwar decade of the 1920s presents a unique crossroads in the annals of American history. While some urban centers were beginning to embrace the revelry of the Jazz Age, most of the nation remained rural, agricultural, and beholden to the social values of the past. In a purely historical context, the United States perilously existed, during the Twenties, between two world wars, just beyond the *fin de siècle* period of rapid industrialization, and immediately prior to the Great Depression. Thus, the decade epitomized change, unease, hopefulness, modernization, and vapid avarice. It was an era that defied singular definition—or rather one that must continually be redefined through varied historical lenses.

As multidimensional as the Twenties were as an American historical era, the literature of the period is equally inexpressible. The term “Modernism” is far too expansive and contradictory to be of much serious use when closely examining the texts of this transitional period because it does not extend far enough into the historical phenomena that specifically apply to the American consciousness of the decade. Thus by including these historical factors, a clearer picture of American Twenties fiction emerges that depicts a commonality among the writers of seemingly disparate regions of the United States. The unifying factor is an acute, uncomfortable awareness and predominating focus upon the socioeconomic conditions of the time.

“I know myself . . . but that is all” (260), proclaims Amory Blaine, the lost young protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s debut novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), in the closing scene of the text. Published at the onset of this turbulent decade, Amory’s assessment of self and station serves as a battle cry for the remainder of the Twenties. Although born of wealthy stock

and Princeton educated, Amory eventually succumbs to the vagaries of the time. After serving in World War I, he returns to a nation that is full of promise, and like any ambitious young man, he gets a job in New York City. However, his family's old-money fortune withers away, victimized by mismanagement of investments—the result of misplaced faith in declining, outdated industries and the failure to economically adapt to modernity. Personally, Amory cannot experience the artistic and individual achievement in the working world that he had been taught at Princeton to pursue. With his parents and former mentors now dead, Amory, jobless and broke, wanders aimlessly on foot at the close of the novel, as he attempts to make some sense of his purpose within the surrounding world.

Amory's downward journey predicts and parallels much of the economic and social instability that will occur throughout the decade. And, his final declaration of solipsism is poignant when considering the tone of much Twenties literature. With no guides left—no relevant luminaries of a past generation from which to garner wisdom—and a vague sense of disenfranchisement, Amory struggles to make sense of the postwar world around him. Seemingly declaring socialism as his solution to the unforgiving economic practicalities of consumerism, Amory then softens his allegiance, announcing instead that he only knows himself. His inward quest mirrors the quest of Twenties Modernism.

But Twenties fiction does not exist in isolation within the lexicon of American literature. The Great Depression during the Thirties presented ample opportunities for authors to amplify and sharpen the vague economic trepidations of the previous decade into proletarian rants. Langston Hughes's "Park Bench" (1934) is a fiery example of such articulations of financial disparity and unrest:

I live on a park bench.

You, Park Avenue.

Hell of a distance

Between us two.

I beg a dime for dinner—

You got a butler and maid.

But I'm wakin' up!

Say, ain't you afraid (1-8)

Economic worries that were vaguely youthful during the Twenties came of age during the turbulence of the Great Depression. Other social issues that were already subservient to wealth and materialism during the Twenties completely vanished in the Thirties. In Hughes's poem above, the subjects of race and Harlem are replaced by the ethnically-neutral dichotomy of homelessness and privilege in Manhattan.

While the Marxist tonality of Depression literature may have peaked during the Thirties, the dominance of monetary themes persists throughout the century and beyond. Specifically, the economic thrust of the Modernist texts presented here continues to mature and fester in the Postmodernist works of the latter half of the Twentieth Century. This phenomenon is visible along all four regional lines.

The complex criticisms of southern morality that are present in the works of William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell are extant in such later writers as Flannery O'Connor. For instance, in her oft-anthologized "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1955), the amoral beliefs of The Misfit triumph over the convenient brand of Christianity that the grandmother professes.

His adherence to lawlessness—the aggressive seizing of others’ wealth through robbery—proves superior, as an ethic, to the grandmother’s protestation that he is “‘one of [her] babies’” (132).

In the Midwest region Cather and Lewis present works that sullenly disclose the all-encompassing commodification of the surrounding American terrain. This prefigures the late Twentieth Century epic *Infinite Jest* (1996) by Illinoisan David Foster Wallace. Wallace extends the country’s dependence on privatization by presenting calendar years that shamelessly advertise products. This overbearing consumer culture is equally visible in the works of Don DeLillo, a contemporary of Wallace. In his novel *White Noise* (1985), narrator Jack Gladney and his wife, Babette, affirm their faith in the supernatural potency of socioeconomic status. Babette reflects upon the air of wealth exuded by the parents of students who attend the College on the Hill—where her husband is a professor of Hitler studies: “‘I have trouble imagining death at that income level’” (6). She believes, or wants to believe, that money can secure one against even the threat of death. Dr. Gladney makes a similar determination while evaluating his own prospects of surviving crises:

“These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it’s the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters. People in low-lying areas get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornados. I’m a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? We live in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name. These things don’t happen in places like Blacksmith.”

(114)

As evidenced through authors such as Wallace and DeLillo, the Postmodern pastiche is replete with characters whose consumerism is rampant and unapologetic. But this manifestation of a popular American culture inundated by advertising, spending, and social climbing does not exist in a vacuum. Cather and Lewis predict the eventual saturation of consumerism on the American landscape, and authors like Wallace and DeLillo confirm their suspicions: Babbitt becomes Babette.

The texts examined herein from the Twenties Harlem Renaissance also extend outward and lurk in the imaginations of later authors. Regarding Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Felipe Smith writes that she has "iterated a theory of textual production that follows the process of incorporation, reemodiment, and reincarnation of anterior texts in the newly (re)created text. . . . The process involves much more than acknowledging Zora Neale Hurston, to cite one example, as a literary 'foremother'; it suggests instead a determined effort 'literally' to reincarnate and redeem her text" (438-39). Besides the reincarnation and redemption of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), an important thematic similarity fusing race and gender is shared between *The Color Purple* and Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929). The title of Walker's novel also conveys a sense of economy through the color imagery of purple, which, amongst other ideas, symbolizes royalty, wealth, and bourgeoisie culture.

Another important intertextuality binding Twenties Renaissance works to the later Twentieth Century is evident in Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976). The novel retells the Civil War through absurdist anachronism and constructs a North American reality that prizes corporate boundaries over national delineations. As with the Twenties texts, in *Flight to Canada* race cannot be conceived outside of the bounds of financial profit. Reed imagines a seemingly severed Civil War nation that in actuality is led by politicians on either side who are in cahoots

with one another for profit. For instance, to secure funds for the Union war effort Abraham Lincoln plans a cordial visit to the South in order to borrow money from the slave-owning Arthur Swille. As for Quickskill, one of Swille's slaves in Virginia, the hope for freedom in Canada is mere myth, as he encounters ineffectual political borders that are superseded by the far-reaching influence of multinational corporations. Peter Nazareth points out Quickskill's discouraging revelation that "Canada belongs to the Swilles" (140). In other words, *Flight to Canada* presents crucial questions of race, nation, and war as ultimately being subservient to economic structures.

Across the Atlantic, associations between the Twenties expatriate texts of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald and post-World War II American writings are abundant. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) contains the following dialogue during a scene in San Francisco:

"Yeah, Jake?" I said.

"Sam," he said, "I think I'll get up and conk him."

"No, Jake," I said, carrying on with the Hemingway imitation. "Just aim from here and see what happens." We ended up swaying on a street corner. (70-71)

Extending upon Chuck Palahniuk's own admissions of *Fight Club's* (1996) debt to *The Great Gatsby*, Suzanne Del Gizzo writes that "*Fight Club* represents not just a rewriting of *Gatsby* but an intensification of its themes and narrative strategies. This intensification highlights the development of commodity culture across the century and its deleterious impact on the individual with particular attention to how romance and reality are destabilized in the process" (216). But *Fight Club* is only one of a collection of contemporary texts that appears to borrow, update, and rewrite *The Great Gatsby*. For instance, Benjamin Szumskyj argues that Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) draws directly from Fitzgerald's novel: "On the surface,

both texts imply that people focus more on materialism rather than human values. . . . Jay Gatsby is a self-invented millionaire who lives by the American Dream, whose inevitable fall from grace is meant to both educate and clarify the corruption of morality by pseudomorality. Just like Patrick Bateman” (5).

Ultimately, the Postmodern quest for self—the individualistic search for spirituality and personal fulfillment in a culturally eroding world—is still governed by the rules of economy. In that sense, the Postmodern mirrors and extends the Modern. The relevance of a dominating economic consciousness in Twenties fiction to American popular culture decades later is visible in genres such as music. A verse in Bob Dylan’s “Ballad of a Thin Man” not only references Fitzgerald but also associates his writing with wealthy liberal intelligentsia:

You have many contacts
 Among the lumberjacks
 To get you facts
 When someone attacks your imagination
 But nobody has any respect
 Anyway they already expect you
 To all give a check
 To tax-deductible charity organizations.
 You've been with the professors
 And they've all liked your looks
 With great lawyers you have
 Discussed lepers and crooks
 You've been through all of

F. Scott Fitzgerald's books

You're very well read

It's well known. (34-49)

The verse begins by mockingly validating the addressee's relationship with the working class. Then, the speaker unveils the true distance between the "You" persona and the actual gritty realities of the American proletariat. "F. Scott Fitzgerald's books" are catalogued among the indicators of upper-middle class professions—"professors" and "lawyers." For the "You" in the song, as well as for the "professors" and "lawyers," confirmation of liberality occurs through the process of naively and generically "giv[ing] a check." The reader of "all of F. Scott Fitzgerald's books," according to the speaker, is characterized by elitism, wealth, and education—one who can only employ "imagination" when conceiving of lower socioeconomic classes.

Similarly, Twenty-First Century hip-hop professes a deep awareness of social distinction according to markers of wealth. The pursuit of materialistic success, which echoes and updates the George F. Babbitt ethics of the Twenties, emerges in countless examples of hip-hop lyrics. New Orleans rap group Big Tymers reached number one on *Billboard's* top 200 list in 2002 with the album *Hood Rich*—released by Cash Money Records. In 2003, rapper 50 Cent's *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* debuted at number one on the American *Billboard* charts. Three years later, the rapper starred in a movie of the same name.

The popular success of wealth-obsessed hip-hop music confirms that not only the artists but also the American consumers are inundated with and enchanted by visions of tangible riches. Rather than recede after the historically anomalous decade of the Twenties, the intoxicating lure of wealth has virtually exploded in American culture in the past few decades. Apparent in the diverse and unique literary consciousnesses of each region within this study, the anxious

attitudes toward wealth and materialism that American fiction of the Twenties espouses predicts both the economic upheaval of the Thirties and the deepening fixation with money in the popular imagination of the Twenty-First Century—an almost manic clinging to concrete symbols of wealth.

If, in fact, the noteworthy writers of the Jazz Age are “pessimistic and alienated” (147), as Geoffrey Perrett claims, their sentiments are, at least, not amorphous criticisms of the era, nor are they stagnant observations of an isolated decade. They offer pointed commentaries of the voracious economic systems that engulf them while painting with broad strokes a prophetic canvas of future American art and culture. As accessed through the particular social, cultural, and historical conditions that separately affect each region, disparities among these various sectors of the nation do, of course, exist. But, an overarching consciousness is present that unites these diverse groups as fundamentally American. They are all painfully aware of the Godlike status of wealth in relation to nearly every aspect of American life. The new religion of Twenties culture is characterized by a zealous worship of the almighty dollar—the great purveyor of all dreams and nightmares.

Notes

Notes to Chapter One

¹ Lady Brett Ashley appears in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

² This refers to the title character of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

³ "Not bad! She knows what she's doing, she has talent."

Notes to Chapter Two

⁴ An earlier, shorter version was first published in 1917 (Mencken 157).

⁵ Doctors typically opted for the diagnosis of "Shell Shock."

⁶ Both Caldwell's and Faulkner's earliest novels were published in the Twenties.

Furthermore, early drafts of *Gone with the Wind* were composed during the decade as well (Vial 91).

⁷ Irving Howe explains that the South, still sulking from its defeat and unable to embrace modern optimism, "nurtured in them a generous and often obsessive sense of the past" (357).

Notes to Chapter Four

⁸ Wallace Thurman served as principal editor for *Fire!!* The sole issue contained works by such influential writers as Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes—in addition to Bennett and Thurman.

⁹ Mark Whalan explains that Paul was "loosely based on the famous airman, drummer, and nightclub owner Eugene Jacques Bullard" (787).

¹⁰ "Nig" was Larsen's original title of the novel (Kaplan xxxi).

Notes to Chapter Five

¹¹ Wagner-Martin, among many other critics, points out that Hemingway deleted the original “first chapter and a half, removing essential information about both Lady Brett and Jake Barnes” (39).

¹² Despite the fact that Jake plainly reveals that Robert knocked down Pedro “about fifteen times” (206) during their fight in Pamplona, Jake also mentions twice that “Cohn was crying” (206).

¹³ Interestingly, the epigraph to *The Beautiful and Damned* states, “The victor belongs to the spoils.”

¹⁴ “Winter Dreams” was published in 1922—three years before *The Great Gatsby*.

¹⁵ Edmund Wilson was a college classmate of F. Scott Fitzgerald at Princeton.

¹⁶ This is especially true of Fitzgerald’s first two novels, *This Side of Paradise* (published in 1920) and *The Beautiful and Damned* (published in 1922).

¹⁷ This highly influential text was not published until 1868 and includes his “13 Virtues” (68) for success and personal fulfillment.

¹⁸ Hemingway was badly wounded in the leg while serving as an ambulance driver on the Italian front.

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VITA

Matthew Richard Koch was born May 1, 1980, in Canton, Ohio. He is the son of David and Louise Koch and brother to Charles Koch and Evan Koch. Graduating in 1998 from Plano Senior High School in Plano, Texas, he attended Baylor University and the University of North Texas, where he completed a Bachelor of Arts with a major in political science in 2002 and a Master of Arts in English in 2005. In the fall of 2006 he enrolled in the doctoral program in English at Texas Christian University.

At the University of North Texas he served as an Academic Assistant (2002-2003), Teaching Fellow (2004-2005), and Adjunct Faculty member (2005-2006). While attending Texas Christian University he worked as a Graduate Instructor (2006-2010), Departmental Assistant (2010), and Teaching Assistant (2011). He has also taught as an Associate Faculty member at Collin College in Plano, Texas (2005-2006), an Adjunct Instructor at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth, Texas (2007-2011), and an Adjunct Instructor at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX (2008).

He is a member of the Modern Language Association, American Studies Association, and Modernist Studies Association. His publications and conference presentations are in the areas of Twentieth Century and contemporary American literature, Modernism, composition studies, and ethnic literature.

ABSTRACT

THE TROUBLED ECONOMIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF NINETEEN TWENTIES AMERICAN FICTION

By Matthew Richard Koch, Ph.D., 2011
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That Americans are driven by wealth and the pursuit of material markers of financial achievement is anything but new. “We who are without kings”—as Arthur Miller famously termed Americans in “Tragedy and the Common Man” (1949)—have always granted *de facto* status of nobility to those with the means to show it off. However, this study harmonizes apparently dissonant American notes by dissecting the nation in order to establish a unified voice in Nineteen Twenties Fiction.

By juxtaposing the canonical with the obscure, the seemingly conservative with the assumed liberal, the minority with the majority, and the South with the North, the true consistency and complexity of the American economic consciousness comes into greater light. Furthermore, although the Twenties presents a unique historical and literary moment for American writers, the decade ultimately showcases a phenomenon of economic obsession and discomfort that has only expanded and become more defined in contemporary American culture. The primary argument within “The Troubled Economic Consciousness” is that concerns over fiscal identity, labor, and materialism are so overwhelming in the American fiction of the Twenties that even many texts that seemingly share little with the subject of economy are actually engulfed by this overarching discussion.

The chapters are organized along geographic delineations that highlight critical examples of the fiction arising in particular regions. The first chapter presents Nineteenth Century

precursors to Modernism that evince a vague but perceptible awareness of the developing importance of labor to personal identity. Following this look back at the previous century, the next four chapters each involve a different physical region of Twenties fiction and include the South, the Midwest, the Harlem Renaissance, and expatriate writings. These disparate regions serve to collectively prove the assertion that a common thread of economic anxiety overwhelms literary discourse and cannot be removed from Twenties fiction. Finally, the conclusion asserts a context for the Modernist fiction of the Twenties that is ultimately consistent with the economic consciousness of contemporary American culture. Economic trepidations are ubiquitous in Twenties fiction, but in contemporary American culture, discussions and displays of wealth have become audacious and explicit.