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## "It's No Life Being a Steer": Violence, Masculinity, and Gender Performance in The Sun Also Rises and In Our Time

Brock J. Thibodaux  
bthiboda@uno.edu

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“It’s No Life Being a Steer”: Violence, Masculinity, and Gender Performance in *The Sun Also Rises* and *In Our Time*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
English  
American Literature

by

Brock Thibodaux

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## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Abstract .....   | iii |
| 1. Introduction .....  | 1   |
| 2. <i>In Our Time</i> : The Education of Nick Adams .....              | 9   |
| 3. <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> : Violence and Masculinity Converge ..... | 23  |
| 4. Conclusion .....  | 000 |
| Works Cited .....  | 000 |
| Vita.....  | 000 |

## Abstract

Nearly all discussions of Hemingway and his work touch on the theme of masculinity, a recurrent theme in all of his works. Examinations of Hemingway and his relationship to masculinity have almost unanimously treated the author as a misogynist and a champion of violent masculinity. However, since the posthumous publication of *The Garden of Eden* in 1986, there has been much discussion of Hemingway's uncharacteristic use of androgynous characters in the novel. Critics have taken this as a clue that Hemingway possessed a complex attitude regarding gender fluidity, but have failed to examine the constructions of gender and identity in his earlier fiction. By examining two of his earliest works, *In Our Time* (1925) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), I argue that Hemingway's complex ideas about gender performance have been hidden just beneath the surface all along.

Ernest Hemingway, masculinity, *The Sun Also Rises*, gender, *In Our Time*, World War I, violence, Jake Barnes, manhood, Nick Adams

## 1. Introduction

Discussions of Hemingway inevitably touch on the subject of masculinity. After all, most of the author's oeuvre revolves around men engaging in manly activities, and his literary persona as a "man's man" is legendary. Despite the prevalence of masculinity in Hemingway's life and work, however, few critics have taken up this topic in order to show how the texts themselves problematize the gender binary that he is often seen as reinforcing. Josep Armengol, for example, uses Hemingway as a model of hegemonic masculinity against which he contrasts the same theme in the fiction of Richard Ford. For Armengol, Hemingway and his protagonists embody the red-blooded masculinity of the early twentieth century. Similarly, in *Manhood in America* (2006) Michael S. Kimmel comments on the peculiarity of Jake Barnes' loneliness and Nick Adams' questionable virility—characters who have long been seen as autobiographical—even as he finds Hemingway's ideas of manhood to be modeled after the masculinity of Theodore Roosevelt and noted American psychologist G. Stanley Hall—both of whom promoted fighting, hunting, and other "strenuous" activities for the development of rugged masculinity in men.

Critics like Kimmel and Armengol show that Hemingway's "he-man" public persona persists in defining the author and his place in American literature, despite evidence that suggests the author had a more complex relationship with masculinity. When Hemingway's most recently published posthumous work, *The Garden of Eden*, hit the shelves in 1986, critics were baffled to learn that Hemingway had experimented with characters that blurred gender lines. This exploration of androgyny unveiled, more than anything previously published by the author, a complex attitude regarding gender fluidity that no one had imagined Hemingway to possess. The heavy-drinking, stoic Hemingway of the public eye had proved to be only the tip of the iceberg

in regards to this iconic American author. Thus, *The Garden of Eden* functions as an artifact of the late author's complex attitude toward gender—suggesting that it is constructed and therefore transposable—an attitude which undoubtedly calls into question the construction of gender and identity in his other writings.

In fact, the themes of gender and identity play a large role in Hemingway's earliest fiction. I will show that Hemingway's two earliest works, *In Our Time* (1925) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), reveal evidence of the socially constructed nature of masculinity, as well as its dangers and its shortcomings. By analyzing Nick Adams and Jake Barnes, the roughly autobiographical protagonists of these two works, I hope to shed light on Hemingway's complex views of masculinity. More specifically, I argue that the rapidly changing notions of masculinity and manhood in the early twentieth century reveal the inherent instability of the masculine/feminine binary, and that Hemingway's depiction of masculine identity in his early fiction shows his understanding of gender as a social construct.

Masculinity has traditionally been seen as one side of a coin, opposite femininity, that defines the parameters of human gender identity. Seen from this perspective, human characteristics or behaviors are divided into masculine and feminine categories, the two always being opposites of each other. For example, if independence is considered a masculine trait, then it would follow that dependence is considered a feminine trait. The problem with this model is that there is no middle ground; the binary assumes that masculine behavior and feminine behavior are inherently polar opposites, and by extension, assumes that what it means to be male and what it means to be female are opposing ideas. In fact, the very notion that there exist such things as inherently masculine or inherently feminine traits suggests the larger fallacy of essentialism—the idea that there is an essential identity or irreducible “self” that each individual

is born with. One of the most influential opponents of essentialism regarding gender and sexuality, Judith Butler, applies a post-structural, particularly psychoanalytical, analysis to the gender binary in her seminal work on gender politics *Gender Trouble* (1990). Borrowing her critical approach from Foucault and Nietzsche, Butler's work is a "genealogical critique" designed to investigate "the political stakes in designating as *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (xxix, emphasis Butler's). Butler argues that the concept of gender itself is the offspring of a heteronormative society in which "[j]uridical power" is at once regulatory and productive, creating the very categories it "claims merely to represent" (5). Masculinity is thus not some mythical prediscursive reality, but constructed strategically by the culture in which it resides and functions.

To accept masculinity as nothing more than a set of socially constructed attributes might incorrectly lead one to assume that it is benign, and easily discarded. This assumption is incorrect because we are born into a patriarchal society dependent on the discursive function of masculinity as objective truth; seeing the *effects* of our social organization as the *cause*, we take masculinity to be an immutable fact of the world. This simplistic but influential view is one of the fallacies supporting hegemonic masculinity. First introduced by sociologist R. W. Connell in *Gender and Power* (1987), hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the patterns of thought and behavior that promote and enable men's dominance over women. Borrowing from Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Connell explains the cultural and socio-political nature of hegemony in regard to masculinity:

'hegemony' means . . . a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and

cultural processes. Ascendency of one group over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendency which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is. (Connell Ch.8)

By stressing the nature of hegemony as a cultural and social construct, Connell exposes the pervasive and almost unseen ways in which hegemonic masculinity functions. Much like the Marxist concept of ideology, hegemonic masculinity functions simultaneously in our subconscious and in the political organization of our society, a collective delusion that allows the inequality of the masculine/feminine binary to appear natural and inherent (Bertens 65-66).

One of the ways in which this delusion is allowed to persist is through the function of privilege. The privileged position of masculinity in a patriarchal society renders it nearly invisible. In *Manhood in America* (2006), Michael S. Kimmel describes the often overlooked position of the privileged members of a society by referring to himself: "I am universally generalizable. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I'm the generic person!" (3). Because post-structural analyses, by their very nature, tend to focus on the marginal and underprivileged, such privileged positions as maleness and masculinity have gone largely under examined. Ironically, it is because of this invisibility that even in a poststructuralist world where the myth of an essential identity has been debunked, the essentialist model of masculinity persists. Kimmel writes of this traditional, essentialist concept of masculinity: "Even when [men] do acknowledge gender, we often endow manhood with a transcendental, almost mythic set of properties that still keep it invisible. We think of manhood as eternal, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man" (3). In this way the invisibility of privilege keeps the socially constructed nature of masculinity hidden, especially from men, who in turn perpetuate



the myth of essentialist manhood and knowingly or unknowingly promote inequality and the patriarchal organization of society.

Because a patriarchal society depends on hegemonic masculinity for its survival, the continual resignification of masculinity as hegemonic is vital. One of the ways in which this resignification occurs is through the kind of myth-making that Kimmel mentions, the creation of idealized manhood through fictional characters in popular culture. Connell writes of this process:

[T]he cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men. Indeed the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures, such as the film characters played by Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, and Sylvester Stallone. (Ch. 8)

A very apt comparison can be made here to Hemingway's fascination with boxers, soldiers, and bullfighters. One might ask what it means that men take these largely unrealistic examples of manhood as models, and I would argue that the veneration of such unattainable ideals is damaging to both the men who uphold these standards and to society as a whole. Critical to destabilizing this mythical manhood is an overview of changing notions of masculinity throughout American history.

This overview is exactly what Kimmel's *Manhood in America* offers, and I will use this work and E. Anthony Rotundo's *American Manhood* (1993) as guides in examining the state of hegemonic masculinity in Hemingway's time—roughly from the turn of the twentieth century to the beginning of World War II. As both Rotundo and Kimmel show in their cultural histories, manhood and masculinity are not stable concepts, but rather change in response to cultural crises and generational consciousness. Though his study focuses primarily on the nineteenth century,

Rotundo's work is valuable for its discussions of manhood in the twentieth century because, as he explains in his conclusion, "many of the cultural forms which give shape to manhood in the twentieth century emerged in the late nineteenth" (222). The culture into which Hemingway was born in 1899 was one of swift cultural and social change. Transformations in cultural codes and social norms were especially rapid at the turn of the twentieth century, according to Thomas Strychacz, who speaks of masculinity at this time as being "under challenge, if not in crisis" (74).

The doctrine of separate spheres, which had grown out of the Industrial Revolution and functioned to keep middle-class women and men largely secluded from each other throughout the nineteenth century, was losing merit as the turn of the century offered fewer and fewer options for men to test their manhood in the crowded public sphere (Kimmel 105-106). As a result, the importance of "companionate marriages" was stressed by sociologists and cultural critics of the time, who argued that fatherhood and a male presence in the home were crucial elements of masculine identity and vital for the proper psychological development of young boys.<sup>1</sup> Two towering figures of hegemonic masculinity in this first decade of the twentieth century were G. Stanley Hall and Theodore Roosevelt, both of whom argued that virile men were forged out of violence and strife. Hall's hugely influential *Adolescence* (1904) opposed the coeducation of boys and girls, fearing that a mingling of the two sexes would result in softened, feminine boys and rough, masculine girls. Moreover, Hall and his contemporaries felt that adolescent boys were still in their savage state and should thus be encouraged to fight, that boys who did not engage in schoolyard scuffles were cowardly and unnatural (Kimmel 107). That Hall's views are explicitly supportive of the gender binary is clear, but Kimmel asserts that

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<sup>1</sup> Kimmel cites Catherine Beecher, her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martha and Robert Brueres, Margaret Marsh, and "the editor" of *American Homes and Gardens* circa 1905.

Roosevelt took this turn-of-the-century manhood to the extreme. In his 1899 speech “The Strenuous Life,” Roosevelt equated civilization with effeminacy, urging men to seek out the manly virtues instilled by the American frontier—strength, self-reliance, and determination (Kimmel 120). Ironically, the American frontier was by this time “closed” (Turner). Roosevelt’s solution was to expand the American empire in order to create a new frontier in which American masculinity could be tested; American interests in Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central America, and the Philippines required that American men meet the new frontier with “strenuous endeavor,” lest their country be overtaken by “bolder and stronger peoples” (Roosevelt). Along with the responsibility of American men, Roosevelt called for American women to be “the housewife, the helpmeet of the homemaker, the wise and fearless mother of many healthy children.” In this way, Roosevelt reframed the gender binary to be a matter of national security, considering soldiering and motherhood to be the vital patriotic roles of American men and women, respectively.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the call for militarism offered American men a new place to test their manhood: the battlefields of Europe. Ironically, this proving ground would be devastating to the hegemonic masculinity of the time, as trench warfare and new military technology rendered heroism obsolete, making this conflict one of the bloodiest in history—a much more “strenuous endeavor” than Roosevelt had imagined. The incredible death toll shook traditional ideas of morality, justice, and faith from their foundations. Of those soldiers who survived, hordes came home wounded, both physically and psychologically. Alex Vernon writes of the war’s effect on the men who fought:

One historical consensus about World War I is the unprecedented degree to which its soldiers were rendered passive by the new technology of machine guns,

indirect fire artillery, and mustard gas. Soldiers rarely had the opportunity to fight the enemy . . . Instead, bullets from great distance sprayed them, bombs dropped on them, and gas invaded their lungs, and they were powerless to prevent it. (45)

The tragic futility of trench warfare completely undermined traditional notions of masculinity; soldiers courageously charging the enemy's trench, or "going over the top," were certain to be mowed down by machine-gunners, while the men who remained in the trenches were vulnerable to gas and artillery. In the end, survival came down to sheer luck. It is no wonder that troops coming back from the front lines—lucky as they were not to be among the tens of millions killed—often suffered from Shell Shock (PTSD) and had difficulty integrating back into society.

It is not surprising that the chaos of war (a masculine activity) helped to accelerate the questioning and shifting of cultural norms, especially the conception of manhood. On the home front, the momentum of the women's suffrage movement and the appearance of the cultural figure of the New Woman, which Kimmel refers to as "that fast-talking, cigarette-smoking libertine known as the Flapper," caused many American men to feel threatened, their masculine public sphere having been "invaded" by women (131). Women in post-war Europe rallied for suffrage and upheld the New Woman ideal as well. Indeed, in a study of Hemingway's experiences in Paris in 1922, Patrick Blair Bonds writes of the atmosphere in Europe: "For many observers, the boundary between 'male' and 'female' was the most significant casualty of the war" (126). Women on both sides of the Atlantic began to cut their hair short like a boy's and openly express their sexuality, acts of gender nonconformity epitomized by Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* (Elliot 77). This atmosphere of social change and nonconformity was the one in which Hemingway lived, served his country, and wrote in the early twentieth century.

## 2. *In Our Time*: The Education of Nick Adams

The title of Hemingway's first collection of short fiction suggests a generational consciousness in need of definition. Published in 1925, the stories of *In Our Time* explore themes of isolation and the loss of nineteenth-century values such as love and faith (Monteiro 95). These stories also reflect the shift in gender performance and normative behavior escalated by the First World War. Having served on the Italian front, Hemingway had first-hand experience with the atrocities of the war and its effects on the consciousness of those who participated. In the wake of the destruction of the war, Hemingway sought to pick up the pieces of a shattered world and ask how it might be put back together, and a key feature of that world was gender identity. Especially in the stories featuring Nick Adams, Hemingway examined what it meant to be a man at a time when clear-cut distinctions between masculinity and femininity were being obscured. Taken together, these stories are reminiscent of the *Bildungsroman* in their characteristic depiction of growth and education (Monteiro 93). I will argue that, if read in the order in which they appear in the collection, the Nick Adams stories of *In Our Time* show how Nick adopts, and later *adapts*, hegemonic notions of manhood as he forges his own brand of masculinity in a war-torn world.

The first story in *In Our Time* "Indian Camp" sets the tone for the collection, examining the ethics of hegemonic masculinity and the detrimental effects of marriage and domesticity on manhood. It is also the story in which we are first introduced to Nick Adams, only a boy in this story, and the coming-of-age narrative that leads him to, as well as beyond, performances of hegemonic masculinity. In this story, Nick accompanies his father, a doctor, to a Native American camp where his father performs a Caesarian section on a Native American woman.

That the birth of the child in this story coincides with the death of the child's father is indicative of a cynical, fatalistic attitude regarding children and family life that resonates throughout the collection. As Debra Moddelmog writes, "[n]owhere in *In Our Time* are the joys of pregnancy and young children described. Whenever they are mentioned, children and having babies are associated with suffering, unhappiness, an end of freedom and innocence, even death" (605). Thus the literal death of the Native American father during his wife's agonizing delivery signifies a figurative death of masculinity. This motif becomes more poignant as Nick regards his father as a model of masculine behavior, as most boys do, and is taught the "proper" performance of masculinity through experiences like those in "Indian Camp."

One of the first lessons in manhood that Nick is taught is that knowledge is masculine because knowledge equals power and agency. This idea is exemplified by the fact that his father, whose status as a doctor links him to a special knowledge, must be called in by the Native Americans to help deliver one of their children. Furthermore, in a scene that aligns knowledge with masculinity and dominance, Nick's father tells him that the woman is going to have a baby. When the young Nick replies, "I know," his father swiftly corrects him: "You don't know . . . Listen to me. What she is going through is called being in labor. That is what is happening when she screams" (92). The fact that the doctor takes time to explain to Nick what is happening suggests the value he places on imparting knowledge to his son. By sternly correcting his son in this way, Nick's father teaches him that men *know* and those who are not men—i.e., women and children—*listen*.

Another lesson in manhood that Nick learns in "Indian Camp" is that empathy is not an important quality of manhood. When the Native American woman's screams begin to bother Nick, he pleads, childlike, "Oh, Daddy, can't you give her something to make her stop

screaming?” (92). His father’s response is coldly professional: “No. I haven’t any anæsthetic . . . her screams are not important. I don’t hear them because they are not important.” The phrasing of the father’s reply is key; instead of stopping at “I haven’t any anæsthetic,” he adds that the woman’s screams, and by implication, her pain, are *not important*. Elizabeth Kautz suggests that “[b]y portraying the doctor as a masculine performer and teacher, Hemingway presents masculinity as a social construct” (86). The fact that Nick’s father is performing the masculine possession of knowledge while also instructing Nick in the ways of manhood emphasize masculinity as a performance that is learned or inherited from a teacher. But Nick’s lessons in masculine conduct are tested shortly after the delivery, as it is revealed that the father of the newborn child has committed suicide. Dr. Adams tries to shield Nick from witnessing this failed masculinity, but it is too late. Nick holds strong, however; having just witnessed a childbirth and a suicide, Nick takes the cue from his father not to mourn or cry. As Kautz explains, “Nick’s initiation into this masculine realm turns out to be a troubling experience in which he learns the price for entrance into manhood—the suppression of human empathy” (86). This story establishes two themes that are very important to *In Our Time*: masculinity as performative and therefore learned, and—via the Native American father’s suicide— family/domesticity as the death of manhood.

The next story in the collection “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” reinforces the idea that marriage has a negative impact on masculinity, and also suggests what Kautz calls the “tenuousness” of hegemonic masculinity (86). In this story, Nick’s father gets into a verbal altercation with Dick Boulton, a “half-breed” he has hired to cut logs for him. When Dr. Adams threatens to turn the altercation physical, Dick calls his bluff. As the two men stare each other down, the narrator explains, “Dick was a big man. He knew how big he was. He liked to get into

fights. He was happy” (101). Dick is happy because he knows he can beat the doctor in a fight, so whether the doctor chooses to fight or back down in cowardice, Dick has him beat and has proved himself the dominant male in this altercation. The doctor returns home, noticeably upset. When he tells his wife he “had a row” with Dick Boulton, she reprimands him: “I hope you didn’t lose your temper, Henry. . . . Remember, that he who ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city.” The words of advice from the doctor’s wife are in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity; to suggest the doctor suppress the injury to his pride is to suggest that he admit defeat, that he accept the role of subordinate male. She is startled when he grabs his shotgun, clearly thinking of evening the score with Dick Boulton. Finally, he sits on the bed holding the gun: “The doctor wiped his gun carefully with a rag. He pushed the shells back in against the spring of the magazine. He sat with the gun on his knees. He was very fond of it” (102). As he places the shotgun back behind the dresser before he leaves, it is clear that his wife’s appeal for rationality has won, and he even apologizes to her, sheepishly, for accidentally slamming the door on his way out. That Nick does not witness this submissive behavior is an interesting detail, as his father only meets him further out past the gate. It allows for Nick’s idolization of his father as masculine role model to persist, while also suggesting to the reader the fragility of hegemonic masculinity and the unattainability of a pure masculine ideal.

This story also suggests that family life is threatening to masculinity in the way that it restricts independence and adds even more risk to defending one’s pride. The doctor could easily confront Dick Boulton with the shotgun, potentially repairing his injured pride by escalating the violence and ensuring his victory, but his wife stops him. The family man must think of others, he must *empathize*, and empathy has no place in hegemonic notions of masculinity. In the end, Nick’s father is shown to be an unreliable model of hegemonic masculinity himself, but Nick



neither witnesses the confrontation with Dick nor his father's resolution to "ruleth his spirit." Nonetheless, the intention is to show that, with an imperfect role model, more questions of what comprises masculinity are bound to plague Nick Adams in the following stories.

There is one aspect of masculinity, however, in which Dr. Adams is consistent: the possession of special knowledge. The privilege and esteem that the title of "Doctor" carries with it is his for life. The association of knowledge with manhood is especially poignant in the third story of the collection, "The End of Something." This story is short, only four and a half pages long, but important in its depiction of the lessons Nick has learned regarding manhood and knowledge. It is ten years since the previous story has taken place, and Nick is romantically involved with a girl named Marjorie. As the two are rowing on the lake, Nick, in charge of the rowing, speaks to Marjorie about fishing and nature. He informs her that "[t]here's going to be a moon tonight," and she replies, "I know it" (110). This starts a fight: "You know everything," Nick accuses. "That's the trouble. You know you do." When Marjorie fails to reply, Nick continues: "I've taught you everything. You know you do. What don't you know, anyway?" Finally, Nick spills what has been bothering him all along. "It isn't fun anymore," he tells her, afraid to look at her.

Nick's first foray into playing the male role in a romantic relationship has failed. He discovers that by teaching Marjorie so much, he has lost his power over her. Nick's desire, or need, to have knowledge to impart to Marjorie in order to feel superior is its own undoing. Relying strictly on knowledge to perform masculinity is a weak strategy; one can only know so much, and to prove it, one must share. More significant, perhaps, is the way in which Nick chooses to tell Marjorie that their relationship is over: "It isn't fun anymore." This is an indication that performing masculinity is more than just something Nick feels he ought to do

because he is a male; he also enjoys it. Making a sport out of performing masculinity is a theme that runs throughout much of Hemingway's work, from bullfighting to boxing, but drinking takes center-stage in the next Nick Adams story.

"The Three-Day Blow" is, on the surface, a story about men sharing manly conversation over drinks. In this story, Nick and his friend Bill drink whiskey in a cottage by a fire. As the conversation moves from professional baseball to books, and finally to women, a struggle takes place beneath the hard exteriors of the young men, a struggle to drink without appearing drunk. When the two friends get on the subject of their fathers, Nick mentions that Dr. Adams does not drink. "He claims he's never taken a drink in his life," Nick says, adding, "He's missed a lot" (120). Here we see Nick defying his father's model of masculinity and beginning to form his own conceptions of what it means to be manly. One conception is the idea that "holding your liquor" is a masculine quality; the joy of inebriation is of secondary importance to Nick's need to remain in control under the influence of alcohol. After this discussion of their fathers, Nick decides to get a chunk of firewood for the dying fire. "He wished to show he could hold his liquor and be practical," the narrator tells us. Then comes evidence of friendly competition, as we enter Nick's thoughts: "Even if his father had never touched a drop Bill was not going to get him drunk before he himself was drunk." And just then, Nick notices that Bill is making an effort to be thoroughly practical, too.

As the liquor begins to flow more freely, the topics of conversation turn from conventional manly talk about sports and weather and drift" into the territory of personal relationships. Bill brings up Nick's failed relationship with Marjorie:

You were very wise . . . to break off that Marge business . . . If you hadn't, by now you'd be back home working trying to get enough money to get married . . .

Once a man's married he's absolutely bitched . . . He hasn't got anything more.  
Nothing. Not a damn thing. He's done for. You've seen the guys that get married.  
(122)

Again marriage and domesticity are linked to death—"he's done for"—and Bill's misogynist term "bitched," akin to the older term "henpecked," shows a particular disdain for women in general, and women in power specifically. Nick does not respond immediately, but sits reflecting and finally says, "Let's have another drink" (123). At this point in the story it becomes apparent that Nick and Bill have a camaraderie that was threatened by Nick's relationship with Marjorie, and for this reason Bill is happy to have his friend back. The language of the story at this moment suggests a tranquility that exists in homosocial relationships, which is invaluable to the two friends: "If you'd gone on that way we wouldn't be here now," Bill says. Nick agrees, recalling that before the break-up his plans were to be with Marge at this time instead of Bill. In this way, the story reiterates the notion that marriage is the death of independence and, by implication, masculinity. Moreover, it also suggests that there is competition inherent in a meeting of two men performing hegemonic masculinity, which is constructed through domination, and that such competition can often turn violent, especially in the presence of an audience.

The next story in the collection, "The Battler," features an ex-prizefighter, whose pugilistic lifestyle, even outside of the boxing ring, has left him both physically and mentally damaged. Nick approaches Ad Francis in the woods after being kicked off of a train, and the ex-prizefighter immediately notices the black eye forming on Nick's face. This prompts Francis to ask Nick if he is "tough," eager to engage Nick in a contest of masculinity if he answers affirmatively (131). As the dialogue continues, it is clear that Francis has an unhealthy fetish for

violence, and he advises Nick to bust the brakeman “with a rock” the next time he comes through. The escalation of violence, of “getting even” through unfair advantage, recalls the bedroom scene of Dr. Adams and his shotgun in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife.” In the light of the fire, Nick notices that Francis’ face is severely damaged: “His nose was sunken, his eyes were slits, he had queer-shaped lips. Nick did not perceive this all at once, he only saw the man’s face was queerly formed and mutilated. It was like putty in color. Dead looking in the firelight.” Francis notices Nick looking, and shows Nick a stump where his ear used to be, saying proudly, “I could take it . . . Don’t you think I could take it kid?” Throughout the story, Francis is focused on the value of toughness, and especially on proving his toughness to Nick. “They all bust their hands on me,” he tells Nick, “They couldn’t hurt me” (132). Despite the suspicious behavior of Francis, and his claim that he is crazy, everything seems fine once Francis’s companion, Bugs, enters the scene and the three men share a meal. Nick uses his knife to cut a slice of bread, and when Francis asks to see it Bugs urges Nick to refuse: “Hang onto your knife, Mister Adams” (134). The language Bugs uses toward Francis—“No, you don’t”—implies that Bugs knows Francis is plotting something. Nick’s refusal upsets Francis, who seems to be looking for any reason to start a fight. “Who the hell do you think you are? You’re a snotty bastard,” Francis tells Nick. “Hit me,” he urges, “Try and hit me” (135). When Nick refuses to fight, Francis squares up anyway: “You won’t get out of it that way. You’re going to take a beating, see? Come on and lead at me.” Finally, Bugs saves Nick by knocking Francis out with his blackjack, a humiliating ending for the ex-prizefighter.

In the conversation that follows, we learn that Francis has a history of starting fights. It seems as if his sense of pride is so sensitive that he is unable withstand the smallest slights, real or imagined. His damaged face is a symbol of manly pride for Francis, but all Nick can see is a

grotesque and pitiable caricature of masculinity. Nick is not impressed by Francis's scarred and dented "pan," but "embarrassed," and Francis's battle wounds make Nick "a little sick" (131). In American culture of the early twentieth century, the prizefighter was emblematic of masculine domination, a function of the myth-making that upholds hegemonic masculinity, but Hemingway refutes this mythology in the second half of the story by turning Francis into a tragic and grotesque figure. It is significant that Hemingway chooses at times to call Francis "the little man" in this scene. The fact that he is "little" suggests either a physical state, implying a Napoleon complex, or subtle judgment by the narrator; the ambiguity works in favor of Nick, who witnesses this scene as a failure of pure physicality to define manhood. Moreover, it suggests that an uncompromising standard of masculinity is self-destructive, shameful, and ultimately ineffectual. Much in the way that Nick fails to define his masculinity by way of knowledge alone in "The End of Something," Francis' pugilistic efforts fail him, making him unfit for society and utterly under the control of Bugs.

The next Nick Adams story, "Cross-Country Snow," is one that has not generally received much attention. Hemingway critic Paul Smith, citing the story's lack of critical attention, argues that the story indeed seems amateurish and incomplete, worthy of its neglect (qtd. in Pfeiffer and Konig 97). On first reading, it does seem rather out of place in the collection, as it is the only Nick Adams story set in Europe, presumably after the war, in which Nick has taken part. Despite being arguably the weakest story of *In Our Time*, "Cross-Country Snow" has its merits in an analysis of masculine tropes; through its positive depiction of male camaraderie and its condemnation of family/domesticity as lethal to manhood, this story echoes "The Three-Day Blow" and helps emphasize Nick's negative feelings about marriage and children, as he approaches them in early manhood. At the beginning of the story, Nick and his friend George

enjoy a downhill run on a ski slope in Switzerland. The language Hemingway uses in his description of skiing emphasizes physicality, and is even reminiscent of the act of love-making, which Olivia Edenfield points out is “ironic” because this passage is usually “linked by critics to Nick’s love of freedom,” and love-making, as we find out later in the story, is what has ultimately put an end to his freedom (141). But Nick’s enjoyment of skiing is more than purely physical, it is therapeutic: “The rush and the sudden swoop as he dropped down a steep undulation in the mountain side plucked Nick’s mind out and left him only the wonderful flying, dropping sensation in his body” (183). Nick enjoys focusing on the task at hand in order to free his mind, but from what exactly he wishes to free his mind—the responsibilities of marriage and family—only becomes clear later on, when he and George arrive at an inn.

At the inn, the two men order a bottle of wine and make small talk. Nick brings up the freeing feelings of skiing, but George says only that it is “too swell to talk about” (185). George’s comment emphasizes the joy in the pure physicality of the sport, but also suggests that this is a private joy, an experience that belongs to the participant alone, and that is spoiled by conversation and analysis. In light of this, one cannot help but continue to draw parallels between skiing and the sexual act, which is also private and physical, and the consequences of which Nick wishes to avoid speaking of or analyzing in the next scene.

When “the girl” comes back with the wine they ordered from her, Nick notices that she is pregnant, an apron covering her belly. “I wonder why I didn’t see that when she first came in,” Nick thinks (185). After the bottle of wine is done, the atmosphere is calm and the two men enjoy each other’s company, until George reminds Nick that he will soon be a father. When George asks Nick if he is glad, Nick responds tellingly, “Yes. Now” (187). Apparently the answer was originally “No” and he has had to put some effort into seeing the pregnancy as a

positive event, but as the conversation continues he does not seem very convinced. He tells George that neither he nor his wife want to return to the States, and George says nothing, presumably mulling over the obligation associated with starting a family. The scene is tense:

George sat silent. He looked at the empty bottle and the empty glasses.

“It’s hell, isn’t it?” he said.

“No. Not exactly,” Nick said.

“Why not?”

“I don’t know,” Nick said.

“Will you ever go skiing together in the States?” George said.

“I don’t know,” said Nick.

The implications are clear: Nick is uncertain about his future because of the prospect of fatherhood and is thus feigning acceptance of it. The girl who serves them wine is a reminder of Nick’s impending obligation to family, an obligation that he is not sure he is ready for. So why does Nick fail to notice the girl was pregnant initially? He simply does not want to notice.

The Nick Adams in the collection’s final two stories, parts one and two of “Big Two-Hearted River,” is the culmination of his education in masculinity. While some critics, such as Stephen P. Clifford, have argued that reading Nick as the “hero” of the collection is simplistic, I assume that Hemingway ends the collection with “Big Two-Hearted River” for a reason, namely to show the results of Nick’s masculine development that we have been witnessing since he was first introduced in “Indian Camp” (13). This intensely pastoral two-part story shows Nick back from the war in Europe, in tune with nature, and far away from the burdens of society and its obligations. Part two especially presents Nick as a new man, and indeed, the opening lines suggest rebirth: “In the morning the sun was up and the tent was starting to get hot. Nick crawled

out under the mosquito netting stretched across the mouth of the tent, to look at the morning. The grass was wet on his hands as he came out” (221). Nick is reborn in the forests of northern Michigan. Here there is no one to impart knowledge to; knowledge is a means of survival. Moreover, Nick is well versed in his knowledge of the wilderness: “He did not need to get his map out. He knew where he was from the position of the river” (211). Throughout the story, Nick demonstrates incredible foresight and skill as a woodsman. Each action is expertly executed toward its purpose, and no energy is wasted.

In lieu of attempts to dominate other men, Nick asserts his power over nature. While a part of asserting this power is killing, he does not kill indiscriminately. He is a survivalist, and he does not think twice about killing animals if the killing is toward a purpose. He feels nothing for the mosquito in his tent that he exterminates with a match (218), the grasshoppers he stabs with his fishing hook (224), or the trout he knocks unconscious and cleans while still living (231). And yet, he is careful not to cause unnecessary harm: “He had wet his hand before he touched the trout, so he would not disturb the delicate mucus that covered him. If a trout was touched with a dry hand, a white fungus attacked the unprotected spot” (225). This respect for animals, the economy with which he kills, does not reflect masculine notions of domination at all costs, nor is it “sissified.” It is a tempered, ethical masculinity, wholly unlike that represented by Francis in “The Battler,” and Nick’s reverence for the trout in the river shows a rejection of his father’s lessons in stoic masculine indifference to suffering in “Indian Camp.” He is assertive, independent, and knowledgeable, but also cautious and empathetic. Nick respects nature, viewing it as his home (215).

Curiously absent in “Big Two-Hearted River” are the subjects of love and women. As Alex Vernon has noted, “No women in Nick’s life appear in the story . . . Even the two trout he



catches are both male” (37). The absence of women in the story, and in Nick’s consciousness, emphasize the wilderness as a rugged, masculine space. In light of this absence, it is interesting to note how Nick’s meticulously crafted campsite resembles domesticity and home-making. Additionally, it leaves the reader curious to know the whereabouts of Helen and the child, as mentioned in “Cross-Country Snow.” Whether Nick has left them and is making his way in the wilderness, or the two are safely back home awaiting his return, is never explicitly stated. Significantly, the only person to enter Nick’s consciousness is an old buddy, Hopkins. That male camaraderie is closer to Nick’s mind than women and family is no great surprise, given the trouble he has had with women and relationships in “The End of Something” and “Cross-Country Snow.” His relationships with men are certainly less complicated, revolving mostly around fishing, hunting, and drinking. Perhaps Nick’s experience in the war has affected his ability to be intimate with women—a common problem for Hemingway’s protagonists.

While no story in *In Our Time* explicitly tells of Nick’s time in the war, only a short vignette marking Chapter VI informs us that Nick had been a soldier and that he had been wounded (139). Perhaps he has adopted the attitude of Harold Krebs, the protagonist of “Soldier’s Home” and a veteran like Nick:

Vaguely he wanted a girl but he did not want to have to work to get her. . . . He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics. He did not want to have to do any courting. He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn’t worth it. He did not want any consequences. . . . He wanted to live along without consequences.

Besides he did not really need a girl. The army had taught him that. . . . You did not need a girl unless you thought about them. (147-148)

We know that Nick's new attitude wastes no energy, that his actions are direct and efficient, so why would he waste time courting? We also know how Nick feels about the "consequences" of love and courtship from "Cross-Country Snow." I am not the first to see a similarity between Nick Adams and Harold Krebs, nor am I the first to feel as if Krebs' feelings are representative of Nick's in some way. Debra Moddlemog's article "The Unifying Consciousness of a Divided Conscience" suggests that Nick Adams is actually the author of *In Our Time*, which implies that Krebs' feelings actually come from Nick's experiences. Regardless, considering that Krebs and Nick are both veterans who have difficulty integrating back into society, it is likely that their experiences have had similarly traumatic effects on the men. War is an exercise in survival that demands participants kill or be killed, whereas life in society requires compromise and coexistence. It is unsurprising then that they have similar problems reconciling their lives as soldiers with their lives as civilians.

By the end of the collection, we have witnessed the masculine education of Nick Adams through his early childhood and into adulthood. Through his various successes and failures to conform to the standards of hegemonic masculinity, he has learned valuable lessons about what it means, to him, to be a man. In the end, he chooses to be alone, self-sufficient and content, in a masculine space where knowledge is practical instead of manipulative, where the only beings he wishes to dominate will be his lunch, and where the ties of familial obligation are miles away. Nick serves as a model for a masculinity beyond the hegemonic definition. Imperfect as he may be, his decision to forge a unique masculinity that navigates between the extremes of the gender binary offers an alternative to hegemonic masculinity that Hemingway more fully explores in his next novel, *The Sun Also Rises*.

### 3. *The Sun Also Rises*: Violence and Masculinity Converge

Jake Barnes, the novel's protagonist, is an American expatriate living and working in Paris. Like Nick Adams, Jake is a veteran of the First World War, but with a more extreme masculine crisis: having been wounded in the war, Jake is impotent.<sup>2</sup> While some critics have focused on the physical consequences of such a wound—e.g., Jake's inability to have intercourse—my analysis will focus primarily on the psychological and emotional effects of Jake's wound, viewing it as a metaphor for Jake's anxieties over masculine performance and, ultimately, his recognition of hegemonic masculinity's failure to provide him with a usable model in the wake of the war. As a member of the "lost generation," Jake is unsure how to live in a world where masculine ideals such as heroism and the "strenuous life" have lost their value and life seems meaningless: "I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it" (152). Jake is uninterested in existential questions of faith and morality, but is simply looking for a place of his own now that the categories of "male" and "soldier" have not only failed to define him but have left him damaged both physically and psychologically.

What is most troubling to Jake at the beginning of the novel is that he is unable to consummate his love for Lady Brett Ashley, a British socialite in Jake's social circle. Brett, in love with Jake but unable to commit to him because it would mean giving up sex, responds by sleeping around. Jake looks on mournfully as Brett has affairs with Robert Cohn, a Jewish American expatriate writer, and later with Pedro Romero, a handsome nineteen-year-old Spanish bullfighter. Brett's promiscuity only heightens Jake's anxiety over his wounded masculinity and leads him to seek out new non-sexual ways of asserting his masculinity in the face of this sexual tension. Witnessing these two affairs, Jake attempts to identify with the masculine identities of

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<sup>2</sup> In a letter written in 1951, Hemingway specifies the nature of Jake's wound. Jake has lost his penis, but not his testicles, which implies that he still has sexual desire but is unable to act on it (*Selected Letters, 1917-1961* 745).

Cohn and Romero; specifically, Jake studies their respective masculine ideals as expressed through each man's participation in violence. Finding that neither Cohn's nor Romero's masculinities are good models for him, Jake is forced to forge a new masculine identity by developing a unique response to violence that is distinct from both Cohn's and Romero's. In Hemingway's novel, the characters of Jake Barnes, Robert Cohn, and Pedro Romero all occupy a place on the spectrum of masculinity as defined by their associations with, and participation in, violence. Through the novel's examination of these diverse masculinities, *The Sun Also Rises* advocates the development of a new post-war standard of masculinity as exemplified by the novel's protagonist.

Recent criticism from the field of masculinity studies has exposed a strong link between violence and masculinity in American fiction. In "Gendering Men: Re-Visions of Violence as a Test of Manhood in American Literature," Josep Armengol posits that the depiction of violent acts in American literature has traditionally served to define the masculinity of male characters. Armengol argues that "The image of violent adventure as a test of manhood has influenced American literature since at least the nineteenth century" (81). Indeed, the image of the male asserting his masculinity through violence is one of the most recurrent images in American literature, from Irving's *Tour* (1832), to Wright's *Native Son* (1940), to Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead* (2003). Focused on exposing a change in literary masculinities, Armengol's article is concerned with Hemingway's depiction of masculinity in comparison to Richard Ford's "subversive" depiction of masculinity through similar themes—hunting, fishing, etc. Armengol uses Hemingway's "An African Story" as an example of "the traditional conception of violence as a test of manhood in twentieth-century American literature," to show how this dependent relationship between masculinity and violence is "radically questioned" in Ford's fiction (81).

He goes on to assume that all of Hemingway's work reflects an "equation between virility and violence" (75). I argue, however, that this treatment of Hemingway's fiction is an oversimplification because various and complex masculinities can be found in both *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*.

Violence does indeed emerge as a prominent theme among Hemingway's short stories and novels. From the ritualistic killing of bullfights, fishing, and hunting, to the gratuitous violence of boxing and war, the performance and spectatorship of violence permeate Hemingway's short stories and novels. *The Sun Also Rises* is no exception; though much of the plot revolves around aimless wandering and shallow relationships, violent acts serve as major turning-points in the novel and expose its ideological underpinnings. Moreover, the relationship between violence and hegemonic masculinity is an intimate one, as violence and domination are the language through which hegemonic masculinity speaks. Thus, the acts of violence portrayed in the novel are inexorably tied to acts of masculine performance.

In order to observe how Hemingway's novel problematizes the traditional conception of masculinity, it is necessary to refer back to my earlier examples. What I mean by "traditional" masculinity is the hegemonic masculinity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as touted by such figures as Theodore Roosevelt and G. Stanley Hall. This standard of masculinity is, as Rotundo puts it, a masculinity that "values toughness as an end in itself" (291). This idea is reflected in the title of Armengol's article—"violence as a test of manhood"—which does not delve into the psychology behind the violence (75). The violent acts that define hegemonic masculinity are not solely about violence, but about dominance. Dominance must be gained, whatever the risk, because in the discourse of hegemonic masculinity submission is akin to

death.<sup>3</sup> Whether it is dominance over an animal, as in hunting, fishing, and bullfighting, or dominance over a fellow human, as in boxing or war, the ends (traditionally) justify the means, however bloody or violent. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is reactive rather than rational, and competitive rather than cooperative; it is an attempt to prove one's value by the devaluing of another—it is a performance of superiority. Such performances are given greater value by the presence of an audience, and some, such as bullfighting, are elevated even to the status of social ritual.

*The Sun Also Rises* is full of these performances of masculinity; the bullfighting, fist-fighting, and heavy drinking are all performances of hegemonic masculinity. In “Dramatizations of Masculinity in Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*,” Thomas Strychacz argues that “performance before an audience constitutes male identity” in Hemingway’s work (246-247). In *The Sun Also Rises*, this notion is most clearly expressed by Pedro Romero. A celebration of Romero’s masculinity can be seen as the cause for gathering at the fiesta in Pamplona, as people crowd the bull-fighting ring to witness the young matador’s graceful domination of a powerful and symbolically masculine opponent. Much like a ritual, Romero’s bullfighting is elaborate; Romero is an actor, and the bullfighting ring a stage. “It was all so slow and controlled,” Jake says of Romero’s performance, “it was as though he were rocking the bull to sleep. He made four veronicas like that, and finished with a half-veronica that turned his back on the bull and came away toward the applause, his hand on his hip, his cape on his arm, and the bull watching his back going away” (221). Clearly, Romero is conscious of being observed, and he theatricalizes his fights accordingly. What Jake respects most about Romero’s performance, though, is that his calm and focused demeanor suggests that he is performing for himself:

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<sup>3</sup> Kimmel cites Hall as stating in *Adolescence* that a non-combative boy is a “non-entity” (Kimmel 107).

Everything of which he could control the locality he did in front of [Brett] all that afternoon. Never once did he look up. He made it stronger that way, and did it for himself, too, as well as for her. Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her, too. But he did not do it for her at any loss to himself. He gained by it all through the afternoon. (220)

As a student of non-sexual methods of masculine self-assertion, Jake observes and admires Romero's performance. However, Jake contradicts himself: if Romero "did it *all* for himself inside," how did he also do it for Brett? Who is Romero truly performing for? Strychacz offers a clue: "an audience may comprise only one other person, or the protagonist watching himself" (246). Of course Romero is watching himself. As a talented performer, he is conscious of being watched by others and so watches himself, never directly engaging the audience, much as film actors are told never to look at the camera. If Romero acknowledges the audience the performance loses authenticity—it becomes self-conscious, less *real*. Yet Romero cannot but be aware of the spectators, because he needs them; even as he does not engage them with eye contact, he still moves "toward the applause." He does it all for himself in the end, as only his masculinity is credited by the performance, but the audience inevitably contributes to and amplifies the value of Romero's actions. In his idolization of Romero, Jake has fallen for the young matador's trick; his performance is enhanced by his affected nonchalance, though the performance itself is actually a plea for acceptance. Thus Romero performs for himself and for the audience.

More than just a student of Romero's performances, Jake is also a performer himself. Michael Leland argues that one of the ways Jake asserts his masculinity is by his accumulation

and careless spending of money in France. Examining Jake's spending habits, we indeed discover that Jake spends little of his money on material goods; most of his income is spent on food, alcohol, transportation, lodging, entertainment, etc. As Leland puts it, "Jake's expenditures point directly to his class; his tips and choices support a service economy. . . . He spends money not to get things but to establish his social position, to define his relationships with other people"—in other words, to assert a masculine *dominance* (41). At this point in the novel, Jake has yet to shake off entirely his (hegemonic masculine) desire to dominate others to prove his superiority: money equals power. Leland goes on to analyze Jake's monthly spending—citing Michael Reynold's *The Sun Also Rises: A Novel of the Twenties*, R.F. Wilson's 1925 guide for Americans in Paris, and the U.S. Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index—and concludes that Jake is far from frugal, having spent six-hundred dollars in the course of a month, which is over six thousand dollars today, adjusted for inflation (39). If this idea seems a stretch, consider the following restaurant scene, when Jake returns to France from the fiesta:

The waiter seemed a little offended . . . so I overtipped him. That made him happy. It felt comfortable to be in a country where it is so simple to make people happy. You can never tell whether a Spanish waiter will thank you. Everything is on such a clear financial basis in France. It is the simplest country to live in. . . . If you want people to like you you have only to spend a little money. (237)

Obviously, Jake feels more comfortable—more securely masculine—in a place where his money places him among the elite. Following this passage, Jake continues to over-tip, asserting his financial dominance over the employees of his hotel, relieved at how "simple" life is in France. In a subtler, and more misogynist passage, the link between masculinity and finance in Jake's



mind comes to light again. In this passage, Jake contemplates the “cost” of his non-sexual relationship with Brett:

I had been having Brett for a friend. I had not been thinking about her side of it. I had been getting something for nothing. That only delayed the presentation of the bill. The bill always came . . . I thought I had paid for everything. . . You paid some way for everything that was any good. I paid my way into enough things that I liked, so that I had a good time. . . . Enjoying living was learning to get your money’s worth and knowing when you had it. You could get your money’s worth. The world was a good place to buy in. (152)

By using financial language in describing his relationship with Brett, Jake has substituted money for sex as a means of asserting his masculine identity. He has even let this substitution shape his personal philosophy. Consider the aphoristic “You paid some way for everything that was any good,” or “Enjoying living was learning to get your money’s worth.” After her affair with Cohn, however, Jake begins to realize that his money is not enough for Brett—“I thought I had paid for everything”—and becomes resentful. Speaking of the “bill” that always came, Jake implies a cost—psychological, sexual, or financial—that invariably accompanies his relationships with women. In Jake’s mind, there is no mutual benefit in a relationship with a woman, no cooperation between the sexes; women are to be dominated. When this method of financial domination proves not enough, Jake is frustrated and begins to look for an alternative route.

As much as the traditional notion of masculinity is represented in the *The Sun Also Rises*, I submit that such a notion serves mainly as a foil for the emergence of a new, post-war masculinity in the novel. Jake’s new masculine identity, while not a complete rejection of traditional masculinity, is one of rationalization over reaction, resulting in a calculated navigation

between cooperative and competitive existence. For Hemingway, as well as for Jake, the post-war world is one where traditional masculine qualities such as courage and aggression have been proven to be futile, leading only to destruction, and a new definition of masculinity is needed in its place. I believe that Jake Barnes's quest for new ways of masculine expression reflect Hemingway's own views of masculinity in a world made impotent by war.

This navigation is the result of Jake's failed attempts to identify with the models of masculinity around him. Because Jake is unable to have a sexual relationship with Brett, he attempts to identify with the men who do, namely Cohn and Romero. These two characters function as opposite poles on the spectrum of masculinity: Cohn—the idealistic, sensitive, non-veteran—on the one side, and Romero—the macho, confident bull-fighter—on the other. Hemingway sets up these distinct masculinities in two ways—first, through their relationships with violence, and second, by associating each of them with an animal symbolic of their virility.

In the world of Hemingway's novel, Pedro Romero is the pinnacle of masculinity. Romero serves as another paradigm of myth-making masculinity for Hemingway to ultimately undermine. His profession is to participate in the ultimate ritualistic performance of masculinity that is bullfighting—Romero literally makes his living through violence. Also characteristic of Romero's masculinity is his unwavering confidence; in the café scene when Jake brings Brett to meet Romero, the bull-fighter declares boldly, "I'm never going to die" (189). This declaration is an allusion to the traditional violent masculinity that Romero represents; the animalistic lure of violence affects all of us, something Freud calls the Thanatos, or death drive, and compels us to violence and self-destruction. Jake's fascination with Romero's performances of masculinity, then, is natural—it's *human*. Hemingway's allusion to this suggests that he recognizes the permanence of such compulsions to violence in humans, as they come out in Romero, Jake, and

even in the continuously feminized Cohn. That Jake chooses to recognize and avoid this compulsion by the end of the novel is not entirely a condemnation of the über-masculine type represented by Romero, but a suggestion that such recognition is essential to human progress—or, more poignant in the wake of the First World War, that letting such compulsions go unchecked will result in the self-destruction of the human race. In this sense Romero's masculine identity is represented by the bull. The bull continues to charge, and wears himself out; his violent masculinity contributes to his demise. The bull's courage, knowing no bounds, becomes his fatal flaw.

On the other end of the spectrum is Robert Cohn, who is primarily an onlooker in the novel and consistently portrayed as an outsider looking in. His Jewishness, along with his non-veteran status, alienate him from Jake and his friends. Cohn did not experience the horrors of war and thus still clings to outdated romantic values. Because of his Jewish, non-veteran identity, Cohn is continuously feminized and demeaned by Jake and his social circle: he is called “childish” and “dull” by Brett, “pathetic” by Bill, and suggested by Jake to be sensitive and weak countless times throughout the narration. Furthermore, the women in Cohn's life, namely Brett and Frances (Cohn's fiancé), continually dominate him, which Jake sees as pathetic. At one point in the novel, Frances severely embarrasses Cohn in front of Jake:

Listen, Robert, dear. Let me tell you something. You won't mind, will you? Don't have scenes with your young ladies. Try not to. Because you can't have scenes without crying, and then you pity yourself so much you can't remember what the other person's said. You'll never be able to remember any conversations that way. Just try and be calm. I know it's awfully hard. But remember, it's for literature.

(57)

Frances's reproach of Cohn shocks Jake not only by its cruelty but also by Cohn's passivity. "Why did he sit there? Why did he keep taking it like that?" Jake wonders (58). We can see this as an inverse to the theatrical masculinity of Romero in the bull ring; Cohn's submissiveness is amplified by the presence of an audience. Cohn's single redeeming quality, in terms of traditional masculinity, is his boxing ability—however, Cohn only uses this ability as a last resort. Violence only comes to the surface in Cohn when it is forced, the necessity of which he has learned in order to survive among existing hegemonic standards of masculinity that praise such behavior: "he cared nothing for boxing, in fact *he disliked it*, but he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton" (11, emphasis added). So not only did Cohn learn violence solely as a defensive strategy, but he does not even enjoy his participation in it. Cohn's masculinity is represented by the steer—literally, a castrated bull. In Pamplona, a steer is gored in the ring during one of the bullfights and Jake explains, "The steer who had been gored had gotten to his feet and stood against the stone wall. None of the bulls came near him, and he did not attempt to join the herd" (145). This is symbolic of the steer's life as one of castration, submission, and alienation. Witnessing this, Cohn poignantly remarks, "It's no life being a steer," as if painfully familiar with the fate of the steer (145).

Jake's revelation about his own masculinity comes as a result of his starting and losing a fistfight with Robert Cohn. After being knocked out, Jake is unable to identify with either of the models of masculinity provided by Cohn (passionate, defensive) and Romero (prideful, über-masculine). Physically defeated by the feminized Cohn, Jake has been cured of his taste for confrontation. While he still romanticizes the courage of Romero, Jake has learned that he does not perform well in the world of violent masculinity. In her article "Diffusing Violence:

Maneuvering Confrontation in *The Sun Also Rises*,” Rachel Willis ambiguously refers to this realization as Jake’s “complex masculine identity” (47). Willis claims that Jake’s new masculine identity is formed when he learns to “defuse the destructive impulses of confrontation by addressing it directly and with a new manner, which, instead of changing the subject, acknowledges the violence inherent in confrontation and defuses it” (47). What Willis seems to be saying is that Jake learns to let things go, realizing that confrontation can lead to submission and possibly even death. Jake, much like Nick Adams in “The Battler,” has opted out of violence and confrontation after a considered cost-benefit analysis: it is simply not worth the trouble. Just as Nick would be a fool to fight Francis, Jake knows that whatever happens with Brett, he cannot “win,” so he will not continue to fight for the dominant role in their relationship.

This change in Jake’s handling of confrontation is most apparent when we compare his conversations with Brett early in the novel with those at end of the novel. In one of their earliest conversations, frustrated by Jake’s impotence, Brett feels that she is being punished. “Don’t we pay for all the things we do though?” she asks, “When I think of the hell I’ve put chaps through. I’m paying for it all now” (34). In response to her pain and frustration, Brett resents Jake and often chastises him in an attempt to return the pain. On their way to the Café Select in chapter four, Brett rebukes Jake after he kisses her in the taxi:

“Don’t touch me,” she said.

“Please don’t touch me.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I can’t stand it.”

“Oh, Brett.”

“You mustn’t. You must know. I can’t stand it, that’s all. Oh, darling, please understand!” (33-34)

Brett’s dramatic shrinking from Jake’s embrace is an attempt to punish him just as she feels she has been punished. Surely she can handle an innocent kiss without such a reaction, as she proves by asking him for another before she gets out of the taxi. However, she is insistent on sharing her pain, acting as if the temptation is too much to bear: “I don’t want to go through that hell again,” she says (34). The scene Brett makes in the taxi is meant to cause Jake pain, by reminding him of his impotence and, therefore, his inability to have a sexual relationship with Brett. Her reaction is effectively another attack on Jake’s pride, as she psychologically dominates him. Indeed, when they get out of the taxi at the Café Select, Jake decides to go home, citing “a rotten headache” (37).

Consider a similar scene, the closing scene of the novel, where we encounter another dialogue between Jake and Brett:

“You like to eat don’t you?” she said.

“Yes,” I said. “I like to do a lot of things.”

“What do you like to do?”

“Oh,” I said. “I like to do a lot of things. Don’t you want a dessert?”

“You asked me that once,” Brett said.

“Yes,” I said. “So I did. Let’s have another bottle of *rioja alta*.”

.....

“Don’t get drunk,” she said. “Jake, don’t get drunk.”

“Want to go for a ride?” I said. (250)

Here Jake answers vaguely and redirects the conversation when Brett is confrontational. Brett's snappy "you asked me that once" is brushed off by Jake's "let's have another bottle;" her demands that he not get drunk are answered only with, "want to go for a ride?" Jake has recognized the psychological hold that Brett has previously held over him and now avoids confrontation by changing the subject. The final lines of the novel offer even more evidence, as this time Brett alludes to Jake's impotence again, as in the earlier taxi scene: "Oh, Jake," she says, "we could have had such a damned good time together." "Yes," Jake responds, "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (251). With this last line, we can be certain that Jake's transformation is complete; like Nick Adams in "Big Two-Hearted River," Jake has recognized that uncompromising violence and confrontation lead to self-destruction, and he learns to calmly avoid it. No longer feeling the need to live up to traditional standards of masculinity, Jake has become immune to Brett's psychological attacks and forged a new masculine identity for himself, a calm and conscious masculinity that navigates between the hegemonic masculine need to dominate and the effeminate man who cowers and cries in the face of adversity.

#### 4. Conclusion

At this point it should be clear that both Nick Adams and Jake Barnes possess masculine identities that quite defy Armengol's classification of Hemingway's characters as champions of hegemonic masculinity. Ad Francis and Pedro Romero certainly fall in line with this type, but on closer examination are revealed to be simply caricatured images of masculine ideals that allow Hemingway to question traditional notions of what it means to be "masculine." Nick's alternative masculinity is the result of his observation of men, whereas Jake has been physically *and* mentally castrated by his experience in the war, and subsequently observes other men in his effort to construct a new form of masculinity for himself. Nick's solution to an ill-fitting socially constructed masculinity is to leave society behind to be at peace in the woods of Seney. Society has a similar effect on Jake's existence, characterized by anhedonia, as he wanders aimlessly from café to café, country to country, struggling to come to terms with, and define, his new post-war (post-wound) masculinity through a series of (what he presumes to be) masculine performances. Jake frivolously spends money, fishes, and observes the violent spectacles of Spanish bullfights, effectively practicing and studying performances of masculinity. Both characters' desire to study and perform masculine acts springs from an urge to prove themselves "normal"—i.e., masculine. Likewise, they idolize the graceful and fearless Pedro Romero and the famous prizefighter Ad Francis as pinnacles of masculinity, until confrontation undoes all the masculine image-building that Jake and Nick labors toward throughout the works. Both men are then forced to create their own masculine identities by forging their own brand of masculinity in between the extremes of Robert Cohn (violence as last resort) and Pedro Romero/Ad Francis (violence as lifestyle). This new masculinity is one characterized by calculation and compromise; they will be neither bull nor steer, but rational and human.



In light of these character analyses, it seems evident that Nick Adams and Jake Barnes have largely similar stories: both are veterans, both have been wounded by the war, physically and psychologically, and both men struggle to redefine their masculinity in a post-war world where hegemonic masculinity has been undermined. That Hemingway's earliest protagonists mirror each other in so many ways is important to note. Their tales of misguided masculinity are different facets of one story that Hemingway felt compelled to tell and re-tell: men's search for manhood. This questioning of the traditional, turn-of-the-century hegemonic masculinity reflects Hemingway's thoughts about the restrictions of the culturally constructed gender binary and the difficulties that attend moving beyond such strict categorization, especially in a such a hegemonic masculine society as America's. Indeed, this may be why the revealing and experimental *Garden of Eden* was never published in Hemingway's lifetime. Only now that queer theory and masculinity studies have turned a critical eye toward the legendary author of men and masculinity can we begin to grasp the complexity and innovation of Hemingway's thought.

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## Vita

The author was born and raised in Thibodaux, Louisiana, where he received his B.A. in English from Nicholls State University in 2013. His graduate career began at UNO in the fall of 2013, where he was awarded a graduate assistantship in 2014 and currently works as a Teaching Assistant. His special interests include gender and masculinity studies, film studies, and literary theory. He plans to continue researching and presenting on these topics before applying to doctoral programs in the near future.